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A comparative study of algorithmic management and control mechanisms.
A platform-centric review, comparing food delivery platforms in the UK and Sweden.

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Abstract

This thesis conducts a comparative analysis of algorithmic management in the food delivery platform sector, focusing on platforms operating in the United Kingdom and Sweden. Drawing upon Institutional Theory, Labour Process Theory and Discourse Analysis, the study investigates how platforms such as Uber Eats, Deliveroo, Foodora and Wolt implement, regulate and communicate algorithmic control in distinct institutional environments. By analysing corporate communications, legal frameworks, union documents and media source, the research identifies key similarities in the technological use of algorithmic management, particularly in task allocation and performance monitoring. However, significant differences emerge in employment models, regulations and contestation shaped by national labour regimes. Sweden's coordinate market economy fosters greater institutional negotiation and worker protections, whilst the UK's liberal market economy permits more precarious, unregulated platform practices. The findings highlight how platform governance is embedded within broader socio-economic structures and demonstrate that algorithmic management cannot be disentangled from the institutional contexts in which it operates.

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Background

As food delivery platforms have become increasingly present within the global economy, approaches to the organisation of labour have differed between countries due to macroeconomic factors. This research examined the communication and application of algorithmic management in food delivery platforms within the UK and Sweden. The decision to compare these two countries stemmed from their contrasting capitalist models, encompassing aspects of their economies and welfare systems. Institutional theory indicates that companies operating internationally need to adjust their management practices to correspond with the distinct national institutional contexts, such as welfare systems and economic structures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Whitley, 1999). In the context of this thesis, it means that food delivery platforms have to implement different management techniques or business approaches in accordance with the context of the country. The UK's liberal, market-driven market economy represents a flexible labour market, usually with a weak collective bargaining coverage and high tolerance for non-standard employment, such as platform work (Hall and Soskice, 2001). Whilst Sweden has a coordinated market economy, a strong welfare state, and centralised bargaining power with high union density (Hall and Soskice, 2001). This institutional contrast provided a rationale for examining how the same platform model, including companies operating in the same market or utilising similar business models, frames and communicates their practices differently depending on their macro environments.

The legal and regulatory approach to platform work differs between the UK and Sweden. In the UK, legal battles have characterised platform work, however minimal legislative intervention has occurred as platforms negotiate informally, rather than being regulated. Whilst Sweden, platforms operate in a context of strong pro-existing labour institutions and unions. Foodora singed a sectoral collective agreement showing formal integration of platform work into national labour norms. The regulatory architecture

differs both in how it is formulated (case law vs collective bargaining) and how it is practiced (minimum standards vs full employment relationships). Many platform organisations operate in both countries, such as Uber Eats and Wolt, but their employment models and how much control their algorithmic systems exert, will differ between the UK and Sweden. Forms of transparency, accountability and dispute resolution, are also dependent upon country context.

1.2 Problem formulation and research questions

As platform-based food delivery platforms become increasingly normalised, algorithmic management has emerged as a mechanism for organising and controlling labour (Griesbach et al., 2019). Platforms like Uber Eats, Deliveroo, Foodora and Wolt use algorithms not only to assign work and evaluate performance, but also to control worker autonomy and regulate access to work and income levels (Griesbach et al., 2019; Tuomi et al., 2023). However, how these algorithmic systems are implemented and justified varies depending on national macro-contexts (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Whitley, 1999). This thesis sought to understand how differences in labour market regulation, union influence, corporate communication and platform strategy in the UK and Sweden, shape the design, application and legitimacy of algorithmic management in the food delivery sector. We have based this thesis on the following research questions:

- How do food delivery platform companies in the UK and Sweden use algorithmic management?

- In what ways do collective bargaining agreements, labour laws, and regulatory frameworks influence the design and constraints of algorithmic management systems used by food delivery platforms in the UK and Sweden?

- What key differences and similarities can be found in how algorithmic management is practised, regulated and contested in the UK and Sweden?

1.3 Purpose of the thesis

This study aimed to analyse the differences and similarities of food delivery platforms between macro-structural environments within legal frameworks and business operations in Sweden and the UK. Whilst analysis exists for each country, this thesis aimed to provide insights into the comparison of these two nations, which have significant differences despite similar companies operating in both territories.

2. Methodology

2.1 Methodology

We approached this thesis with a comparative case study design to analyse how algorithmic management practices are implemented, regulated and practised in the UK and Sweden. These two nations were selected as institutionally contrasting cases, within the varieties of capitalism framework as suggested by Hall & Soskice (2001, p. 74). The UK represents a liberal market economy and Sweden a coordinated market economy (Hall & Soskice, 2001). This contrast provided an analytical lens to explore how different macro-environments shape the practices of algorithmic management. We based our approach on Bell et al. (2022), who argue that a comparative study is effective in understanding contextual factors and how they shape organisations and institutions across different countries.

Initially, our focus was to investigate the lived experience of algorithmic control for food delivery workers by using surveys and interviews. Unfortunately, after trying several methods of collection, both in-person and via online forums and groups, we determined that this approach was not feasible. Most online forums did not allow us to post surveys, as we crossed community guidelines; in other cases, moderators rejected us. Many workers did not want to participate in our survey; therefore, we could not collect a meaningful amount of data. Moreover, most of the interactions we had with the couriers were challenging, as none of us (thesis authors) spoke Swedish fluently, and in the cases where the couriers did not speak Swedish, their level of English was not competent enough to complete the survey or give elaborate contextual answers. Therefore, we had to pivot our thesis and develop new research questions focusing on algorithmic control in food delivery platforms from a national and organisational perspective. Thus, whilst our approach to collecting primary data was not successful, it was useful in highlighting the need to pivot our thesis to focus on a broader perspective, where data were more accessible and where we could draw more meaningful conclusions.

2.2 Research design

Our methodology is based on Bell et al. (2022), who advocate for rigorous document analysis and cross-case comparison to understand regulatory impacts and organisational practice. The selection of case studies was developed from literature on algorithmic control in the food delivery platform industry, in both the UK and Sweden. We gathered the secondary data from company reports, regulatory filings, government labour statistics, industry publications and other relevant documents. This secondary data research built a case for each of the companies that operate in each nation, and allowed comparative analysis between the cases.

To analyse these case studies, following Strauss (1990) approach, a systematic coding scheme was developed to evaluate the collected secondary data. This scheme was directly informed by the research questions, and codes were designed to capture regulatory frameworks, union responses, and company practices. Findings will be compared across cases using thematic charts and matrices to showcase both commonalities and differences in how labour frameworks and corporate policies shape workers' experiences of precarity the UK versus Sweden.

2.3 Data collection

The data used in this study was strictly secondary data. The collection process consisted of gathering data from publicly available secondary sources. Which included documents related to or directly from:

- Legal & institutional documents
- National court rulings
- Government and EU policy documents
- Labour market regulations and laws

- Union & collective agreements
- Company partnership agreements with trade unions
    - General trade union (GMB in the UK)
    - Sweden Transport Workers Union
- Corporate communication
- Academic and grey literature
    - Peer-reviewed journal articles

To categorise the data, we used the qualitative data software tool NVivo. Within NVivo, we separated the Swedish and UK companies, namely Foodora and Wolt, UberEats, and Deliveroo. Then, we entered our codes as presented in the tables in the next chapter to organise our data. In total, we coded 60 documents through the software and extracted the codes, presented in Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4, all shown in the introduction to the analysis chapter.

2.4 Data analysis

The data was sorted in accordance with Strauss (1990), guided by thematic coding and discursive comparison across companies and countries. This process involves three key steps:

- *Document coding*: identifying recurring themes related to our three research questions.

- *Comparative mapping*: Contrasting platform practices in the UK and Sweden along dimensions such as:
    - Type of employment relationship
    - Union involvement and collective bargaining
    - Legal restrictions or protections around algorithmic decision-making

  - How platforms communicate around flexibility, efficiency and fairness

- *Institutional framing*: Understanding how national institutions shape platform narrative and behaviour, using institutional & labour process theory concepts.

To analyse and interpret the data collected, we utilised a discourse analysis approach, grounded in the framework proposed by Alvesson and Karreman (2000), which emphasises that organisational practices are not only materially but also discursively constructed. In the context of this thesis, this means that organisations do not only manage employees through systems, machines or policies, as they use language and symbols to both legitimate and justify what they do. Following Alvesson and Karreman's (2000) distinction between micro-discourse, meso-discourse, and mega-discourse, this thesis focused primarily on the meso-level (organisational discourses in corporate communication and union agreements) and mega-, also called macro-level (societal discourses about platform work, precarity, and flexibility), rather than a micro-level conversational analysis. We considered this the most sensible approach, as we analysed secondary data. In contrast, if you were to have had primary data from interviews or conversations, a micro-level conversational approach would have been more suitable. Alvesson and Karreman describe throughout the research article that discourses shapes and influences how meaning, power and identity are procured and reproduced within organisations (Alvesson & Karreman 2000, p. 1127-1130), which made it particularly valuable for studying how food delivery platforms legitimate algorithmic management practices and how unions, media and regulators contest these. Therefore, the analysis in this thesis treated corporate statements/reports, policy documents, and union communication not only as sites of informative communication but also as sites of meaning-making and contestation. This allowed the study to explore how actors frame key themes such as flexibility, fairness, control and efficiency, and how these framings have shaped regulatory debates and organisational behaviour/communication. By utilising this discursive perspective, the thesis aimed to explore not just the actions of platforms and institutions but also the ways in which they

framed these actions as legitimate, essential, or unavoidable within public and institutional discourse.

Below, we have presented the two tables we created to perform our data analysis. We created eight codes for each *Research Question 1* and *Research Question 2*. The codes aimed at highlighting key themes and discourses that were relevant for the two research questions. While the third research question would be answered through the findings of the first two.

Table 1.1 - Research question 1 coding framework for algorithmic management - focus on internal

Code	Definition
Task allocation	How the algorithm assigns tasks/order to couriers
Performance management	How couriers work is evaluated, ranked, and rated
Earnings models	How pay is structured or incentivised
Flexibility framing	How the company emphasises autonomy, freedom and self-scheduling
Fairness framing	How the company claims fairness, impartiality and equal treatment and benefits
Risk transfer	Responsibilities placed on couriers, e.g. insurance, permits, equipment
Technology framing	How the company's algorithms are described/documented
Worker voice/feedback	How listening to or engaging with couriers is described/discussed

Table 1.2 - Research question 2 coding framework for law, regulations and unions - external view

Code	Definition
Employment classification	Legal definitions of courier status (employee vs contractor)
Collective bargaining	Union efforts to negotiate/regulate conditions for food delivery platform couriers
Legal constraints	National/EU laws, limiting or shaping platform practices
Regulatory compliance	How platforms are required to meet public policy standards
Algorithmic transparency	Demands for algorithmic accountability
Social protection	Access to benefits, insurance, pensions, etc
Courier representation	Efforts to include courier voices in regulation/negotiation
Policy advocacy	How companies/unions lobby for or against laws. Lobbying: being efforts to shape or change laws.

2.4.1 Discourse analysis

For our discourse analysis, we found that several codes overlap. Therefore, we conducted this discourse analysis based on the key themes we found across both research questions. This grouping of codes prevents repetition and tries to keep the discourse analysis concise.

In Table 1.1, the eight codes that relate to *Research Question 1* have been sorted into two main discursive themes, which are:

- *Algorithmic control and management* - which groups the codes: Task allocation, performance management and technology framing
- *Courier experience* - which groups the codes: Earning models, flexibility framing, fairness framing and risk transfer

We have chosen *algorithmic control and managemen*t as it incorporates discourses surrounding how algorithms are used by the platforms, while *courier experience* discusses how couriers supposedly experience this. We have excluded worker voice/feedback from these themes as our coding proved not to bring meaningful content.

In Table 1.2, the eight codes that relate to *Research Question 2* have been sorted into two main discursive themes, which are:

- *Institutional embedding and regulatory governance* - which groups the codes*:* Employment classification, social protection, regulatory compliance, policy advocacy and legal constraints
- *Accountability and worker representation* - which groups the codes: Algorithmic transparency and collective bargaining

We have chosen *Institutional embedding and regulatory governance* as it incorporates discourses surrounding legislative framework which are fundamental to the operation of our chosen platforms. While *Accountability and worker representation* discusses discourses around openness and change.

This discourse analysis breaks the the main discursive themes listed above into meso- and macro-discursive levels, drawing upon Alvesson and Karreman (2000) as previously mentioned.

2.5 Data validity & Reliability

As this thesis strictly analysed secondary data sourced publicly online, considerations around validity and authenticity should be addressed. When analysing company produced content and ‘’*organizational documents that are in the public domain, such as company annual reports, are intended to represent the official view of senior management and promote a favorable view of the organization to outsiders, including shareholders.*’’ (Bell et al., 2022, p. 505), certain awareness of biases must be taken into account. The four companies that we analysed content of in this thesis, want to represent themselves as best as possible in their corporate communication ‘’*Hence, they are likely to contain limited information about the company’s problems or failings.”* (Bellt et al., 2022, p. 505). While we recognise this positive framing scenario, we do not regard it as something that hurts the data validity. The purpose of this thesis is to analyse and investigate the narratives produced through discourses that exist and are produced through the company's corporate communication.

The same perspective applies when it comes to the media documents that have been analysed ‘’*Authenticity issues are sometimes difficult to assess in the case of mass-media outputs.*’’ (Bell et al., 2022, p. 506). While a newspaper might not benefit from using a positive framing approach in the same way as companies, political agendas and other factors make mass media subject to a great deal of authenticity questioning. However, this authenticity question is again not a concern for the data validity of this thesis, as the intention and aim were to analyse the produced narratives and communication, whether biased or not. Hence, we do not take positions towards

whether the circumstances or narratives the companies or media produce are factually correct. However, in a thesis that aims to examine discourses and differences in corporate, media and policy communication, there is an inherent need to analyse the texts/secondary produced data, in which those discourses and differences are produced and embodied.

2.6 Limitations and Delimitations

A comparative study like this had several limitations. Firstly, it did not include primary data from the companies we chose to analyse or from their employees. Time limitation also limited the scale of the document analysis, which inevitably impacted the conclusions drawn. The study's initial methodological approach of collecting primary data from couriers and analysing their lived experiences also proved to be a limitation, as we had to pivot from it rather far into the process of the thesis writing period. The last limitation of this thesis approach was companies' unwillingness to cooperate. We contacted several people in our network and through general searches on LinkedIn, who work for the companies we selected. While we did get responses from them, they refused/declined to comment on anything related to our topic. This includes the option of fully anonymised interviews or statements. The scope is a delimitation of the study, which should be mentioned. While we argue that comparing two different national contexts, it also directly meant that we could only focus on Sweden and the UK, even when we discovered interesting aspects or cases related to other countries in our research.

This study did not employ artificial intelligence (AI) tools for data analysis or synthesis. While we acknowledge that AI can be a powerful aid in large-scale textual analysis, we deemed its use inappropriate for this projects qualitative focus. Discourse analysis requires intricate contextual reading and researcher reflexivity, which would not be adequately support by current AI tools. The exclusion of AI was therefore a methodological choice.

3. Literature review

3.1 Introduction

Work in platform-based food delivery, as seen with couriers for companies like Uber Eats, Deliveroo, and Wolt, has emerged as a key example of precarious employment within the digital economy (Popan & Anaya-Boig, 2022). Precarious work is generally characterised by insecurity, lack of protection, and unstable incomes (Mendonça, Kougiannou & Clark, 2023). Platforms often classify riders as independent contractors or “partners” a decision that can undermine traditional labour protections and ultimately deny the workers formal employee status in the UK (Parwez, 2023; Defossez, 2021). Consequently, these employees frequently encounter low wages, erratic schedules, and limited social benefits—characteristics that define precarious work (Deffosez, 2021). This review explores the literature concerned with precarious work in the food delivery industry, the labour market institution and its role, as well as foundational management perspectives related to this sort of employment. Our focus is on literature produced in the past 5 to 10 years, particularly on academic studies related to platform labour and precarious work. We incorporate theoretical frameworks from labour studies, such as precarious employment, worker classification, and algorithmic management, alongside concepts from comparative political economy, including Varieties of Capitalism, institutional complementarity, and collective bargaining systems. Additionally, we draw upon the foundational work of Braverman and Foucault, whose insights into labour control and power dynamics remain highly relevant for evaluating how digital platforms govern work through surveillance, automation and structural asymmetries.

The choice of literature has been selected based on the empirical evidence surrounding food delivery platforms, algorithmic management and the gig economy, which serves to anchor our discussion. A focus initially on the critical issue of worker classification is necessary to understand how workers on food delivery platforms are perceived legally in each national context. This is fundamental to our understanding as it is the gateway into our comparison and research. We have embedded this research in labour-studies

frameworks, alongside comparative-political-economy theories, which signals that our thesis will research how algorithmic management is a product of both platform design and of its embedding within national labour regimes. This integrated lens ensures our subsequent analysis can interrogate how the macro-institutions and algorithmic management intersect on food delivery platforms in the UK and Sweden.

3.2 - Understanding precarity

It is important to outline our understanding of precarity and its relationship with the labour market. Precarious employment refers to the characteristics of the employment relationship and contracts. This often combines insecurity, low wages and high risk (Gauffin 2020 & Kalleberg 2009). Precarious work refers to the actual work performed and focuses on the worker taking on all the risks associated with the activity (Hewlson & Kalleberg, 2013). This group of workers is sometimes referred to as the precariat, who Standing (2011) argues, is developing a distinct structural position in the current economic system. The precariat as a new class of worker, is subject to precarious conditions of vulnerability, instability and low pay (Standing, 2011). It is important to understand however, that the consequences of precarious work are not homogenous, and are dependent upon various social and economic factors, that could worsen or better the lived experience of workers. For example Sidoti (2015) speaks of precarious work being normalised for young people, as a beginning towards stable employment. Therefore, Kalleberg (2009) argues that precarity as a state of being, is something that can only be understood by individual workers themselves. The process of reinforcing and establishing precarious employment is known as precarisation, where precarious work becomes a central component within a given labour market (Lorey et al., 2015).

The precarisation of global labour markets can be associated with economic, cultural and technological change. As Millar (2017) notes, precarious work is inherently neoliberal, as firms offload risk onto workers. The rise of neoliberal logics emerged out of the global capitalist crisis of the 1970s (Harvey, 2005). This reworked employer-worker relations, where layoffs, outsourcing and subcontracting, which previously were only parts of the ‘bust’ stage of the business cycle, have become normalised and key

strategies (Kalleberg, 2009). Here, neoliberalism is not purely economic policy but changes the behaviour of workers from homo economicus to human capital (Brown, 2003). The change to human capital, takes an individual who is rational and self-interested and forces them to act in accordance to market logic (Brown, 2003). Therefore, precarious work emerges when labour is reduced to its most basic commodity form (Graham, 2020). The neoliberal turn also signalled a labour market transfer from welfare to workfare, where precarious work is seen as a preferable choice to unemployment. This has been worsened with the rise of platform-based businesses, which Srnicek (2017) argues, have emerged out of the 1970s and 2008 economic crises. The rise of platforms out of pivotal economic moments, which reshaped the capitalist landscape, can be understood as platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017).

The rise of the platform economy is influenced by neoclassical assumptions around market exchange, as they are driven by rational exchanges between customer and supplier (Langley & Leyshon, 2017). This has been successful as it capitalises on the distance-shrinking capabilities of the internet boom and globalisation (Langley & Leyshon, 2017). The notion of time-space compression, as coined by Harvey (1990), suggests that distances become less significant due to greater connectivity. This has given platforms the opportunity to access wide worker pools, that has gradually led to supply exceeding demand, further eroding worker welfare benefits (Healy et al., 2017). We understand digital platforms as '…virtual locations through which various users communicate and transact.' (Kenney and Zysman, 2019). The nature of these companies is often monopolistic, with the winner taking all, due to the reliance on network and scale, which concentrates power to a few dominant platforms (Srnicek, 2016). Therefore, workers have low bargaining power and increased precarity.

Wider changes in society, such as new modes of consumption, have further facilitated the expansion of platform capitalism as a new economic system and business model (Srnicek, 2016). This business model is not just the technology, but the ease of participation and registration of workers for largely unqualified tasks (Brandl et al., 2022). The greater the network of a platform, the greater their value, therefore it is

within the interests of platforms to encourage precarious work (Brandl et al., 2022). Due to the nature of platforms, regulation is highly contested, with platforms displaying power over firms, customers and labour (Davies et al., 2023). Whilst there have been numerous calls for regulation, Neibler et al. (2023) notes that delivery platforms often respond to new legal responsibilities for their employees, with alternative employment arrangements. This allows them to avoid regulation and continue to deny workers greater rights, as it is within their interest to keep a large supply of workers (Neibler et al., 2023).

3.3 - Working Conditions and Algorithmic Management

A central focus in the literature is the harsh working conditions faced by food delivery couriers and how algorithmic management shapes these conditions. Research frequently shows that while there are some advantages to being a courier, like flexible hours and autonomy compared to similar qualifications employment, these workers often deal with unstable, low-paid jobs and limited support (Griesbach et al., 2019; Cant, 2023). In the UK context, the literature is on par; food delivery workers often experience a lack of ‘’protection’’ and ‘’recognition’’ (Defossez, 2021). The general theme painted in the literature related to precarious work is how important the type of contract the employees receive is. A qualitative study, performed in Belgium, highlights how the workers classified as contractors fall outside the welfare provisions of standard employment (Vandevenne & Vanroelen, 2023), indicating that the status of employment is a concurrent theme within precarious employment inside and outside the European Union.

Another commonly debated issue is the way digital platforms use algorithms to exert control over their workers (Woodcock, 2020). Food delivery platforms leverage smartphone apps and automated systems to expertly dispatch orders, track performance, and manage couriers, often with minimal need for human supervision. This presents a paradox: while riders are technically considered “independent” and able to choose their own schedules, in reality, they are heavily influenced by algorithmic

incentives, ratings, and penalties. Algorithmic management can dictate when and where couriers should be available to maximise earnings, effectively pressuring them to work at times of high demand (even if that means enduring bad weather or dangerous traffic) and to accept as many orders as possible. Griesbach et al. (2019) analysed multiple delivery platforms and uncovered that all relied on algorithmic systems to assign and evaluate work, though with significant cross-platform variation in how strictly they constrained workers (Griesbach et al., 2019).

The literature on the algorithmic and technological aspects of precarious work and its increasing role has also been approached from an organisational psychology perspective, where the focus is often on micro-level factors like worker engagement, motivation and job satisfaction. Nura Jabagi et al. (2019) article *Gig-workers' motivation: thinking beyond carrots and sticks* presented in the *Journal of Managerial Psychology* recognises that gig economy workers function within an "algocratic" environment—one that is controlled by algorithms instead of human managers—leading to new challenges in motivating and managing remote workers. This approach to precarious work is similar to Kalleberg (2009) in that its focus is on the worker and their experience of employment, in contrast to the literature concerned with the management aspect.

3.4 - Labour Process Theory: Work Degradation and Control

Harry Braverman's book *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1998), presents a fundamental view concerning labour process theory (LPT). Braverman (1988) examines how management attempts to deskill and regulate labour through what he refers to as scientific management or *Taylorism*. Braverman summarises Taylorism in terms of three core aspects: the'' ''*dissociation of the labor process from the skills of the workers",* ''*separation of conception from execution"* and ''*use of this monopoly over knowledge to control each step of the labor process and its mode of execution" ''* (Braverman, 1998, p .xvii). By distinguishing between thinking and doing (execution), employers can restructure work processes to ensure that tasks demand less skill from workers, ultimately making labour more interchangeable and cost-effective (Braverman, 1998). Braverman sees this reorganisation as a fundamental "degradation of work" affecting

the majority of workers (Braverman, 1998). Taylor's innovations enabled a ''*full-scale managerial imperative for increased job control, to be implemented primarily through deskilling."* (Braverman, 1998, p.xvii) essentially explains the reasoning behind the capitalist mode of production (Braverman, 1998).

Braverman documents how seemingly benign "efficiency" measures lead to greater management power and diminished worker autonomy and creativity (Braverman, 1998). Braverman even notes that later workplace reforms (e.g. ''quality work circles'' or minor worker participation schemes) most often do not fundamentally change the workers' position, serving only as new "styles" of management while core decision-making remains centralised (Braverman, 1998, p.xx-xxi).

Although developed long before app/platform-based gig work, Braverman's labour process framework provides a critical lens for examining platform labour. Gig platforms like food delivery companies (apps) can be seen as extensions of these management tendencies – using algorithms and data to closely track, direct and monitor work tasks while fragmenting work into simple, low-skill units. The labour process perspective indicates that the precarious situations faced by platform workers, such as low job security, monotonous tasks, and intensive monitoring through ratings and GPS tracking, are not isolated incidents but rather modern expressions of the ongoing capitalist tendency to enhance control, reduce labour expenses and maximise profit. This traditional perspective has significantly shaped the critical analyses of gig labour, with Braverman focusing on how emerging technologies persistently "diminish the worker" in relation to management's power (Braverman, 1998, p.146 and xviii). The labour process theory highlights the inherent power imbalances and risks of exploitation present in work arrangements facilitated by platforms.

3.5 - Critical Management Studies

Although Braverman's *"Labor and Monopoly Capital"* does not explicitly mention the term "Critical Management Studies" (as it was formed later), it shares multiple views on management. Critical management studies (CMS) emerged in the 1980s from labour process theory, examining processes of exploitation and control, inspired by Marx (Thompson, 1983). This developed again in the 1990s, shifting from a material to cultural focus, inspired by French post-structuralism and Frankfurt school critical theory (Alvesson & Spicer, 2025), By 2008, the scope of CMS widened, moving away from a strict focus on management, to understand the deeper processes and structural dynamics of organisations (Alvesson & Spicer, 2025). The general consensus from CMS is concerns about managerialism and that too much management can be anti-productive (Parker, 2002). Whilst there are not many widely agreed upon definitions, there is agreement over the characteristics of CMS. These include ‘non-performativity intent…denaturalization…and reflexivity’ (Fournier and Grey, 2000). Therefore, CMS seeks to debunk the assumption that Bloom et al. (2016) argue, that good management drives productivity, which has led to the spread of management practices.

This critical perspective has increasingly been applied to algorithmic management, where control is not enact through traditional, human, managerial oversight, but through digital infrastructures. Foucault’s concepts of disciplinary power and biopower have been adopted by CMS scholars to understand how platform technologies regulate labour (Fleming, 2013). Disciplinary power, as highlighted by Foucault (2008), focuses on controlling individual behaviour through surveillance and standardisation, which is reflected in how food delivery platforms use performance metrics, order acceptance rates and behavioural data to monitor couriers. These practices also exhibit characteristics of biopower, which is defined by Foucault as the optimisation and management of populations, where algorithms manage the flow of labour to meet consumer demand in real time (Foucault, 2008; Berti et al., 2021). Here, platform governance operates by offloading responsibility to workers for their efficiency, availability and compliance, embedding market logic into everyday decisions. Thus,

CMS, in conjunction with Foucauldian thought, provides a power lens to examine how algorithmic management both reproduces and conceals contemporary forms of labour control and inequality.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon three theoretical perspectives: Laber Process Theory (LPT), Comparative Institutional Theory (Varieties of Capitalism), and Discourse Theory. These perspectives provide complementary lenses for analysing how algorithmic management is practised, regulated, and contested within the food delivery platform economy in Sweden and the UK. Collectively, they enable us to research and investigate (1) the technological and managerial rationale embedded in the algorithmic systems; (2) the institutional environments that shape, influence or constrain these systems; and (3) the discursive strategies through which legitimacy, resistance, and reform are articulated.

4.1 Labour Process Theory

We utilise LPT, particularly in relation to digital and platform work, which provides an understanding of how algorithmic management operates as a mode of labour control. Drawing on insights from Braverman (1998), we understand how to interpret algorithmic systems, not as neutral tools but as socio-technical artefacts designed to extract value under conditions of precarity, and how technological systems deskill labour.

Drawing on contemporary examples of LPT in platform food delivery, Griesbach et al. (2019) argue that platforms exercise indirect control over couriers through performance monitoring, task allocation, and rating systems. These algorithms automate managerial oversight and shift operational risk onto couriers (Griesbach et al,. 2019). We use this understanding to analyse how food delivery platforms in the UK and Sweden design and justify their systems of algorithmic management. This understanding incorporates

the technological focus and how these algorithms are embedded in discussions of employment classification and pay structures.

This theoretical framework primarily informs our research questions 1 and 2, in analysing the use of algorithmic management and its relationship with employment classification and collective bargaining agreements.

4.2 Institutional Theory and Varieties of Capitalism

To address the differences in algorithmic management between the UK and Sweden, we used comparative institutional theory within our analysis. We primarily focus on the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) developed by Hall and Soskice (2001). This framework highlights the differences between the UK's Liberal Market Economy (LME) and Sweden's Coordinated Market Economy (CME). A key difference between the countries' economies is the strength of regulation and collective bargaining, which is much lower in the UK compared to Sweden.

Sweden and the UK serve as comparative case studies for how different varieties of capitalism impact or influence the regulation and emergence of algorithmic management. The most notable difference between the two cases is the influence of collective bargaining agreements, which do not exist in the UK but are strong institutions in Sweden, something which will be further discussed in our analysis. This primarily focuses on research questions 2 and 3, looking at the governance of food delivery platforms and the comparison between the two case studies.

4.3 Discourse Theory

The third theoretical component of our framework is Discourse Analysis, particularly drawn from the work of Alvesson and karreman (2000), who argue that organisational practices are not just technical or material, but are also discursively constructed. Food

delivery platforms may use language strategically to define and legitimise their employment models, management approaches and algorithms.

Through the discursive lens, we treat corporate communication, public policy and media documents not just as sites of information but also as sources of meaning-making. Following Alvesson and Karreman's understanding, we primarily focus on the meso-discursive level (corporate communication) and macro-discursive level (societal discourses about platform work, precarity and flexibility. For example, we analyse how Wolt, Deliveroo and Uber Eats invoke the discourse of ''flexible work and flexibility'' to justify independent contractor status and self-employed classification.

Discourse analysis supports our interpretation of both research questions 1 and 2 by analysing how algorithmic management is presented and contested through language and strategic communication. Furthermore, discourse analysis is also useful for answering our third research question by highlighting the differences between the UK and Sweden.

5. Analysis

5.1 - Introduction to analysis

This chapter will analyse how algorithmic management in food delivery platforms is practised, regulated and contested within the UK and Sweden. Based upon our secondary data, as outlined above, we examine four platforms: Deliveroo, Uber Eats, Wolt and Foodora. This will give us an understanding of how macro-environments shape the implementation and governance of algorithmic management. Our research questions focus on how algorithmic management is embedded in the everyday operations of platform companies, how they are constrained or supported by national labour institutions and unions, and how different actors contest or negotiate their legitimacy.

Our analytical framework is structured around the three research questions:

- How do food delivery platform companies in the UK and Sweden use algorithmic management?

- In what ways do collective bargaining agreements, labour laws, and regulatory frameworks influence the design and constraints of algorithmic management systems used by food delivery platforms in the UK and Sweden?

- What key differences and similarities can be found in how algorithmic management is practised, regulated and contested in the UK and Sweden?

We have based our analysis on a set of codes as outlined in the methodology (Tables 1.1 & 1.2). These coded documents have guided our findings and discourse analysis for

all three research questions. Below is a summary of our code books for Research Questions one and two. The *name* column refers to the code name, the *Sources* column counts the number of documents wherein the code has been detected, and the *References* column displays how many times the code appeared within the documents.

Fig 2.1: Research question 1 Sweden - Algorithmic management

Name	Description	Sources	References
Background information		2	11
Earnings model	How pay is structured or incentivised	7	26
Fairness framing	How the company claims fairness, impartiality and equal treatment	10	38
Flexibility framing	How the company emphasis autonomy, freedom and self-scheduling	5	19
Performance management	How couriers work is evaluated, ranked, rated	2	21
Risk transfer	Responsibilities placed on couriers, e.g. insurance, permits, equipment	3	4
Task allocation	How the algorithm assigns tasks/order to couriers	4	21
Technology framing	How the companies algorithms are described/documented	7	46
Worker voice-feedback	How listening to or engaging with couriers is described/discussed	5	10

Fig 2.2: Research question 1 UK - Algorithmic management

Name	Description	Sources	References
Background information	-	7	9
Earings models	How pay is structured or incentivised	5	5
Fairness framing	How the company claims fairness, impartiality and equal treatment	11	14
Flexibility framing	How the company emphasis autonomy, freedom and self-scheduling	6	7
Performance management	How couriers work is evaluated, ranked, rated	1	1
Risk transfer	Responsibilities placed on couriers, e.g. insurance, permits, equipment	0	0
Task allocation	How the algorithm assigns tasks/order to couriers	1	2
Technology framing	How the companies algorithms are described/documented	21	39
Worker voice and feedback	How listening to or engaging with couriers is described/discussed	11	21

Fig 2.3: Research question 2 Sweden - Laws, regulation and union

Name	Description	Sources	References
Algorithmic transparency	*Demands for algorithmic accountability*	*11*	*40*
Collective bargaining	*Union efforts to negotiate/regulate conditions for food delivery platform couriers*	*3*	*43*
Courier representation	*Efforts to include courier voices in regulation/negotiation*	*3*	*5*
Employment classification	*Legal definitions of courier status (employee vs contractor)*	*3*	*16*
Legal constraints	*National/EU laws, limiting or shaping platform practices*	*4*	*56*
Policy advocacy	*How companies/unions lobby for or against laws. Lobbying being efforts to shape or change laws.*	*3*	*7*
Regulatory compliance	*How platforms are required to meet public policy standards*	*5*	*24*
Social protection	*Access to benefits, insurance, pensions etc*	*6*	*34*

Fig 2.4: Research question 2 UK - Laws, regulation and union

Name	Description	Sources	References
Algorithmic transparency	*Demands for algorithmic accountability*	*10*	*21*
Collective bargaining	*Union efforts to negotiate/regulate conditions for food delivery platform couriers*	*22*	*43*
Courier representation	*Efforts to include courier voices in regulation/negotiation*	*4*	*4*
Employment classification	*Legal definitions of courier status (employee vs contractor)*	*20*	*48*
Legal constraints	*National/EU laws, limiting or shaping platform practices*	*8*	*12*
Policy advocacy	*How companies/unions lobby for or against laws. Lobbying being efforts to shape or change laws.*	*1*	*1*
Regulatory compliance	*How platforms are required to meet public policy standards*	*9*	*18*
Social protection	*Access to benefits, insurance, pensions etc*	*7*	*14*

This comparative approach allows us to identify both cross-national similarities in platform technologies and context-specific adaptation driven by legal, political and institutional policy.

5.2 - Findings

5.2.1 Foodora

Foodora was established in 2015 and operates in the Scandinavian region *and is a part of the global operating company Delivery Hero with headquarters in Berlin.*'' (Foodora AB, n.d.1). Foodora stands out from the other platform companies, namely Wolt, Uber Eats, and Deliveroo, primarily because of its approach to employment classification and collective agreements for employees. Foodora does not view itself as a gig company, and unlike the aforementioned companies, it hires couriers as employees with scheduled hours and shifts (Foodora AB, n.d.1). Due to this organisational approach of hiring employees rather than offering purely performance-based salaries, Foodora can be rather transparent with their average hourly wage, which sits at 180 SEK an hour (Foodora AB, n.d.2). The working schedule functions through a system where the courier either opts for a monthly or weekly schedule, that is provided to them in advance of the initiation of said period, which has been formulated as a result of the collective bargaining agreement Foodora (Selberg, 2023). Through these observations and using the understanding of Hall & Soskice (2001), Foodora showcases how Sweden's CME encourages platforms to focus upon the rights of workers, through strong union representation and regulation.

At this point, it is worthwhile to mention or reiterate the significant difference between Foodora's organisational approach compared to the other companies included in this thesis. Foodora is the only entity out of the selected companies to employ full-time riders, thus not as freelancers or self-employed gig workers. Additionally, Foodora also stands alone when it comes to its collective bargaining agreement. However, one thing that Foodora has in common with the other platform companies is its intense focus on flexibility. This can be seen throughout their general external communication, for example ''*We offer flexible work hours so you decide when you want to work!"* (Foodora AB, n.d.2), ''*At foodora we believe in the power of freedom… the ability for everyone to do what makes them feel good."*(Delivery Hero SE, n.d.) and ''*Working with foodora*

over the last 5 years has not just given me financial stability but also enough time to spend with my family.'' (Foodora AB, n.d.2). While foodora does diverge from traditional gig companies' employment form and approach to collective agreements, it does, however, maintain the same language and branding when it comes to the perks of the job, which consists of highlighting the flexibility.

Data monitoring and performance tracking/management are also essential. Foodora's Swedish ''rider policy'' (rider in this case being an employed food courier) states several times that aspects of the job, such as working time and ''*the actual exercise of deliveries"* are recorded, stored and collected and that ''*The purpose of the processing is to collect and monitor the hours worked and create the necessary work records."* (Delivery Hero Finland Logsitics Oy, 2022). In and of itself, this is not unusual, or unlike anything that can happen in other companies, in order to register worked hours and calculate wages or anything similar. However, shortly after, in the same policy document, in the ''*Performance evaluation*'' column, foodora states that ''*Evaluation of driver performance based on the quality (restaurant and customer complaints), quantity of orders delivered. It also includes reliability before, during and after the shift.*'' (Delivery Hero Finland Logsitics Oy, 2022) and that in connection with that, the following data is processed: identification, contact, performance, geolocation and technical (Delivery Hero Finland Logsitics Oy, 2022). Therefore, while foodora does emphasise communication related to flexibility and freedom, there are also clear signs that extensive data monitoring and performance tracking/management are being performed by the company, not only in relation to recording working hours and paying salaries, but also to the actual execution of the job. According to Griesbach et al. (2019) such extensive performance monitoring and tracking can be viewed as a form of indirect control, where Foodora uses algorithmic management rather than human management.

Foodora's task allocation also presents an important aspect to cover, as the delivery tasks a courier has to perform throughout a working day are the core function of the job. Foodora presents multiple descriptions of how the task/delivery allocation functions, such as ''*To ensure a prompt delivery of the products ordered by our customers, the*

coordination data of our riders is collected and the order is assigned to those riders who are in an optimal region." (Delivery Hero Finland Logsitics Oy, 2022), as well as

''*When You start Your session for receiving orders, Your personal contact & account, contract data such as Your vehicle type, as well as location and device data will be used to calculate Your proximity to the pick-up and drop-off locations, estimate the delivery time, and offer You a delivery based on this information while taking into account the delivery volume and weight.*'' (Foodora AB, n.d.3)

which foodora justifies by stating that ''*Offering You the most suitable delivery in real time is only possible when We use algorithmic decision making processes that take into account all relevant factors mentioned above*.'' (Foodora AB, n.d.3). In summary, this means that foodora's delivery/task allocation system is based on an algorithmic decision/calculation that provides the task to the courier who presumably is the most eligible on a number of criteria. The use of technological systems, as argued by Braverman (1998), results in a deskilling of labour, where the courier's responsibilities are gradually replaced by Foodora's algorithm, in the pursuit of greater efficiency. This also, as argued by Griesbach et al. (2019), gives Foodora greater control of its couriers, as more parts of the job are being automated. Lastly, regarding the interactions a foodora courier has throughout the day, we have, through our researc,h interpreted that an ideal working day for an employee does not involve human interaction. Rather, as foodora writes ''*If You have any inquiries regarding the delivery offers, You can always contact Our support agents and request a human review of the process.*''(Foodora AB, n.d.3) human contact seems to only be necessary if the courier experiences any problems or issues during their working hours.

5.2.2 Wolt

In 2014, Wolt was founded in Helsinki and according to their own information now has more than 14.000 employees, over a hundred nationalities and operates in 30 countries (Wolt Enterprises Oy, n.d.). Unlike foodora's employment structure of hiring full time couriers and providing them with monthly/weekly schedules, Wolt utilises a more classical gig company approach ‘’*In Wolt's self-employed courier model, couriers can freely decide when, where, and how they want to perform delivery service for us. This flexibility is highly important for the couriers and guides our thinking on platform work.*’’(Torvelainen, 2022). This is an interesting approach considering Wolt is operating within Sweden's CME, which Hall and Soskice (2001) notes, comes with greater employer responsibility and collective bargaining power. Wolt's communication in relation to the main perk of the courier job, is, like foodora's highly focused on flexibility and freedom, so much that Wolt publicly states that their employees are allowed to work for competitors, as long as it does not coincide with a current Wolt delivery: ‘’*They can work for other companies (even when being logged in our platform) – including for our our competitors*’’ (Torvelainen, 2022). Wolt describes their approach to allow them to ‘’*offer earnings opportunities to a lot of people with very few entry barriers - our courier partners don't have bosses or probation periods, and we don't set strict language or educational requirements.*’’ (Torvelainen, 2022).

While this employment strategy is not vastly different from the one of foodora, it can be viewed as even more intensely focused on autonomy, flexibility and freedom. Having low barriers to entry, Wolt is facilitating the deskilling of labour, which is made possible by the adoption of algorithmic management, which is responsible for the key decision making in the food delivery process (Braverman 1998, Griesbach et al., 2019).

Wolt does not display or communicate any fixed hourly wage, presumably due to the nature of their wage scheme, which is based on deliveries performed rather than a fixed

hourly rate. Rather, Wolt communicates that they have a competitive pay where couriers ‘’*get paid for the deliveries they choose to accept and subsequently complete, and on average, the couriers earn 50% more than national minimum wages/market standards*’’ (Torvelainen, 2022). Unfortunately, our research could not confirm nor disprove Wolt’s claim of the couriers earning substantially more than the minimum wage. However, the nature of such a pay structure will inevitably depend on the individual courier's ability or motivation to perform x amount of deliveries in a day, and as nothing is fixed in such a pay structure, it is only Wolt’s access to internal data that can be used as verification for the claim. This pay structure benefits from asymmetric knowledge, which increases Wolt’s indirect control, as couriers have less agency than workers in traditional employment relationships, which is argued by Griesbach et al. (2019).

The general philosophy behind Wolt’s platform is to provide their couriers with the highest level of autonomy; this interpretation is based on their communication in their public feedback related to the *European Commission’s proposal for a Directive on improving working conditions in platform work.* In this document, Wolt compares their working model to a regular barista job, stating that ‘’*Whereas an employee - say a barista in a café - can’t just walk into the coffee shop unancouncaed and expect to start to work (or get paid), a courier can log on the app and start working whenever they like.”* (Torvelainen, 2022). While Wolt’s argument might be objectively correct, when considering that a regular barista job does not come with freelance job autonomy, it fails, or perhaps purposely neglects the subsequent benefits that full-time employment typically grants employees, such as sick leave. Wolt continues its barista reference, and states that ‘’*The same goes also for deciding not to work. Continuing the example, a barista couldn’t refuse to make certain types of coffee. A courier is free to decline any tasks they like without any repercussions.*’’(Torvelainen, 2022). Naturally, we have not included Wolt’s barista analogy to frame or portray them negatively; rather, it is included to display their belief in the autonomy of their platform and employment approach.

With Wolt’s payment per delivery structure and self-employed classification, task allocation becomes even more critical for couriers than with, for example, foodora,

where the courier is guaranteed an horly wage. Wolt describes its ‘’Task Algorithm’’ as being structured on ‘’four main parameters’’ namely: availability, location, delivery vehicle and special capabilities (Wolt Enterprises Oy, 2024). Availability, naturally refers to the availability of the courier, location is needed for the algorithm to calculate distances linked to pick-up and drop-off, delivery vehicle is taken into consideration regarding speed and volume of the order and lastly special capabilities is a sort of specific classification some riders can attain that allows them to do more specific jobs (Wolt Enterprises Oy, 2024).

5.2.3 UK - Uber Eats & Deliveroo

Within the UK, food delivery platforms have become increasingly established with the value of the market being ‘£13.4 billion in 2022, expected to rise to £17 billion by 2026’ (Desplats, 2024). The market leaders in this industry include Uber Eats and Deliveroo who both hold 27% of market share (Zego, 2025) and will be the focus of this study. We have chosen to focus on these two platforms due to their position in the market and the breadth of available literature. We will consider Uber Eats and Deliveroo together to provide an overview of how food delivery platforms use algorithmic management within the UK, as they operate identical employment classifications and business models. The role of platforms in the food delivery industry has been described by Uber Eats as ‘a payment agent and lead generator between deliverers, customers and restaurants’ (Sprintlaw, 2025). These platforms utilise algorithmic management, which has been described by academics as ‘the use of software by gig economy firms…to assign work, monitor, evaluate and control the behaviour of their drivers’ (James, 2024). Therefore, the discourse analysis on literature associated with Uber Eats and Deliveroo will provide insights into how food delivery platforms use algorithmic management in the UK.

A key point of contention between the platforms and couriers is their employment classification and subsequently the earnings model. Couriers are classified on both platforms as “self-employed independent contractors” (Woodcock, 2020), meaning that they lack entitlements like minimum wage or sick pay. A 2023 Supreme Court ruling

confirmed that Deliveroo riders do not mee the criteria work worker, citing their right to appoint substitutes (Pitt, 2024; Stephenson Harwood LLP, 2024. This legal classification permits platforms to avoid collective bargaining and reinforces the control they hold. As riders can decline jobs, work for competitors and use substitutes, they are seen as incompatible with traditional forms of employment. As a consequence of this, couriers are only paid per delivery, including a variable distance fee, without any guarantee of job availability (Deliveroo, n.d.). This offloads the financial risk from the platform to the courier, despite both platforms advertising their high earning potentials (Stewart, 2024). There is a lack of transparency here from both platforms in regards to pay calculations, which reduces courier agency, reinforcing Griesbach et al's (2019) idea of indirect control, whereby algorithmic structures nudge behavioural compliance without overt directives.

Both platforms associate this employment classification with flexibility and earnings potential (Deliveroo plc, 2025; Uber Technologies Inc., 2025) although many couriers express dissatisfaction. With no human oversight, all decisions and communications are automated (Woodcock, 2020), limiting couriers' ability to question or challenge outcomes. The working standards offered by these platforms has repeatedly been questioned, with Uber Eats being ranked among the worst platforms for gig work, according to a University of Oxford study, due tot ehir failure to meet basic fair work standards (Breese, 2023). These standards included transparency, pay fairness and contract accessibility, all of which are heavily influenced by algorithmic oversight.

Uber Eats and Deliveroo can operate in this manner, primarily due to the UK's liberal market economy, as discussed by Hall & Soskice (2001). Both platforms benefit from limited regulation and high worker flexibility. Although Deliveroo credits its own success to "sophisticated logistics technology" enabling seamless interactions between restaurants, couriers and customers (Deliveroo plc 2025), the benefits of the UK's market economy helps to facilitate parts of their business model. As Braverman (1998) warned, the integration of such technology for automation, tends to favour firms more

than workers, contributing to the deskilling of labour and loss of worker autonomy, which is becoming evident in the UK's liberal market economy.

As demands for change from couriers grow, there has been a focus on increasing the transparency around how the algorithms on platforms work. Organisations such as Amnesty International, call for clearer explanations on how algorithms impacts work and how decisions over pay are made. This concern is echoed by the Competition and Markets authority (CMA) but they also acknowledge that algorithms drive efficiencies (Uber Technologies Inc,. 2021). Uber maintains that existing laws, including GDPR and consumer protections are sufficient, which reflects the LME model's emphasis on innovation over regulation (Hall & Soskice, 2001). However, such law does not explicitly govern algorithmic management and therefore some proposed legislation may seek to address this gap. (Rawlinson, 2024). Some of the calls for these changes come from the GMB union, who have partnerships with both Uber Eats and Deliveroo. Whilst this is not formal collective bargaining, the voluntary agreements serve to offer a voice for couriers. Despite this, membership continues to decline, which suggests there is a lack of perceived value from couriers, and the partnerships serve more as PR tools for the platforms and as recruitment avenues for the union. Therefore, although there are calls for change, couriers have no collective bargaining power to demand this and the platforms are operating within the confines of legal regulation.

Therefore, algorithmic management has enabled Uber Eats and Deliveroo to streamline operations and expand their market presence. However, this is suggested to have come at the cost of worker autonomy and security. The platforms ability to maintain this model in supported by the UK's liberal regulatory environment, which privilege employer flexibility and innovation over employee protection.

5.3 Discourse analysis

This discourse analysis, across four key themes, reflects both meso- and maco-discursive levels, drawing upon Alvesson & Kärreman's (2000) framework of discourse. This allows us to compare how platfrom practices and representations differ across the UK and Sweden**.** The summary table below integrates short illustrative quotes to preserve textual grounding, whilst maintaining clarity.

Theme	**Level**	**UK (Uber Eats & Deliveroo)**	**Sweden (Foodora & Wolt)**	**Theoretical insight**
Algorithmic control & management	Meso	Algorithms frames as neutral tool for optimisation. *"Our sophisticated logistics technology underpins all we do" (Deliveroo plc, 2025)* *"Algorithms are at the centre of Uber's*	Foodora: framed as part of rational HR systems. *"We collect, process and store personal data…" (Delivery Hero Finland Logistics Oy, 2022).* Wolt: presented as empowering. *"Couriers can freely decide when, where and how…" (Torvelainen, 2022*)	*Griesbach et al. (2019)* on digital Taylorism

		activities…" (Uber Technologies Inc., 2021)		
	Macro	Portrayed as opaque and alienating. *"There's nobody you can talk to. Everything is automated" (Booth, 2025)*	Seen as manageable within legal structures. *"This historic agreement…introduces groundbreaking rule" (Westerlund, 2024)*	*Braverman (1998)* on labour degradation
Courier experience	Meso	Focus on autonomy and income. *"Deliver when you want, make what you need" (Uber Technologies Inc., 2025)*	Foodora: emphasises are and stability *"You're covered by accident insurance…" (Foodora AB, n.d.2)* Wolt: promotes entrepreneurial flexibility. *"Couriers earn 50% more than national wages…" (Torvelainen, 2022)*	*Hall & Soskice (2001)* on labour coordination; *Braverman (1998)* on deskilling and control.

	Macro	Work portrayed as precarious and psychologicall y stressful *“Working conditions are ‘soul destroying’” (Booth, 2025)*	Focus on legal protections and parity. *“Treated equally to other blue-collar professions…” (Selberg, 2023)*	*Griesbach et al. (2019)* on asymmetrical knowledge
Instituional embedding & regulation	Meso	Platforms assert legal adequacy. *“A strong legislative and regulatory framework already applies…” (Uber Technologies Inc., 2021)*	Foodora: aligns with formal employment models. *“We are not a gig company…” (Foodora AB, n.d.1)* Wolt: supports regulation but avoids internal reform. *“Wolt has always supported…regulati on” (Torvelainen, 2022*)	*Hall & Soskice* on institutional coordination; *Alvesson & Kärreman* on symbolic engagement

	Macro	Emphasis on legal loopholes and lack of regulation. "*No explicit UK laws governing the use of AI…" (Cant, 2023)*	Legal cases used to clarify not resist, regulation. *"Regulated by collective agreements" (Westerlund, 2024)*	*Discursive closure* through legal abstraction (Alvesson & Kärreman).
Accountability & representation	Meso	Union links portrayed as progressive partnerships. *"Consults with GMB on benefits and safety…" (Deliveroo, n.d.)*	Clear appeal mechanisms and performance criteria. "*You can always request a human evaluation…" (Foodora AB, n.d.3)* *"The dispatch algorithm…does not use any kind of ranking…" (Kayser-Bril and Montali, 2022)*	*Alvesson & Kärreman* on symbolic compliance; *Hall & Soskice* on coordinated contestation.

	Macro	Public critiques of algorithmic opacity and tokenistic representation. "*Sweetheart deal…a useful PR line"* *(Cant, 2023)*	Collective bargaining seen as constructive. *"Yet more proof that we are leading progressive change" (Selberg, 2023)*	*Institutional evasion* vs. *democratic embeddedness* (Hall & Soskice, 2001).

This summary table demonstrates that although there are similarities between the use of algorithmic management in the UK and Sweden, the discursive framing differs sharply between them. The UK discursive framing focuses on flexibility and legal adequacy, whilst Swedish discourse integrates algorithmic practices within existing norms and emphasises transparency, negotiation and worker protection. These differences reflect the broader divergences between liberal and coordinated market economies (Hall & Soskice, 2001) and support Alvesson & Kärreman's (2000) view that discourse not only reflects reality but actively shapes legitimacy and power within organisations.

6. Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This discussion brings together our empirical findings to inform our third research question: *What key differences and similarities can be found in how algorithmic management is practised, regulated and contested in the UK and Sweden?* Building upon our analysis of platform discourse and governance frameworks, which inform our first and second research questions, we identify the key differences and similarities between food delivery platforms in the UK and Sweden. We first highlight the core ways in which Foodora, Wolt, Uber Eats and Deliveroo use algorithmic management on their platforms, which is very similar. We then turn to the divergent national contexts, showcasing the differences and this relationship to the market economies of each nation. Through this synthesis, this chapter will showcase how the same technological architecture produces both similarities and differences.

6.2 Similarities

Based on the analysis we conducted, there are some key and important similarities between food delivery platforms in the UK and Sweden. The use of algorithmic management by Foodora, Wolt, Uber Eats and Deliveroo, is used for task allocation. This utilises a real-time, data-driven dispatch system that dictates which couriers get which orders, when they get orders and to where they will delivery. The use of algorithms here, is suggested by Griesbach et al. (2019) to be a form of digital taylorism, where software assumes the managerial role of breaking down work into discrete and optimised tasks. This function of algorithmic management is similar in both the UK and Sweden, where food delivery platforms prefer to automate decision making processes with minimal human oversight.

The use of algorithmic management further extends to the collection of data for monitoring and performance metrics. Each platform, although having individual metrics, track courier performance, acceptance rate, on-time deliveries and customer ratings, to evaluate the performance of their couriers. This means that couriers are evaluated based on the data they produce, rather than the evaluation by a fellow human. These performance metrics are also linked to incentive or the risk of account deactivation. The notion of the surveillance and degradation of work is something initially introduced by Braverman (1998) who anticipated the deskilling of workers through embedding them in control, rather than human oversight. This control limits courier agency across all platforms and the deskilling of workers makes the hiring of staff much easier, which is advantageous for all food delivery platforms.

Despite the greater control that algorithmic management has over couriers compared to traditional management practices, the food delivery platforms in the UK and Sweden portray the use of algorithms as neutral tools of optimisation. There is a focus on the necessity of algorithms for the success of the established platforms we are studying, due to the benefits of greater efficiency, reliability and user satisfaction. This discourse can be understood as institutionalized discourse, as suggested by Alvesson and Karreman (2000), where managerial control is neutralized and portrayed as an inevitable technological innovation, rather than a contested power structure. It is within all the platforms interest to portray this discourse in order to maintain their image of flexible work, which is central to the recruitment process for all food delivery platforms we have studied.

This narrative of flexibility is promoted by Foodora, Wolt, Uber Eats and Devlieroo as a core benefit of working as a courier for a food delivery platform. There is a lack of discussion by the platforms of their use of algorithmic management in both the UK and Sweden. This is despite, as Giresbach et al (2019) highlights, the tension between platforms and couriers due to the coercive control of surge pricing that is used by Wolt, Uber Eats and Deliveroo and the asymmetric knowledge that all the studied platforms hold, regarding how their algorithms work. Across both the UK and Sweden, there is a

lack of understanding by couriers regarding how the algorithms of their platforms work, especially in regards to how orders are assigned. This is an example of stripping the couriers of their agency, as notion discussed by Braverman (1998), as couriers are unable to contest or understand managerial decisions. This empowers the platforms as couriers may act in an irregular manner to try to maximise their performance on the platforms, even if it is not rational or optimal for the individual. Therefore, it is clear that the use of algorithmic management on food delivery platforms is very similar across the UK and Sweden. The language the platforms use surrounding the discourse of algorithmic management is also very similar, the focus being on the benefits of the courier and the necessity of its use for success in the market. Thus, the use of algorithmic management for performance monitoring and task allocation is very similar across the UK and Sweden, as well as the discourses the platforms produce around their use.

6.3 Differences

Despite algorithmic control being deployed in similar ways across Foodora, Wolt, Uber Eats and Deliveroo, there are vast differences in relationships between platform and courier. Within the UK, both Uber Eats and Deliveroo employ couriers on a self-employed basis, meaning that they do not provide any right to minimum wage or social protection. This is necessary for the business models of Uber Eats and Deliveroo, where they want to keep costs as low as possible and pass on risk to the individual courier. As a result, the control of algorithmic management in these contexts is heightened as they have a greater impact on the couriers livelihood. In contrast, food delivery platforms in Sweden have a variety of employment models. Foodora operates a model where couriers are employees and get a guaranteed minimum wage, whilst Wolt pays couriers based on the deliveries they make. Whilst there is a difference here, both Foodora and Wolt couriers are protected by having a collective bargaining agreement and employer responsibility. Conversely, due to the employment classification of couriers within the UK, they are not protected by collective bargaining or employer responsibility. Therefore, the control of algorithmic management is greater within the UK

as couriers do not have the protection to contest this control, or be protected against it, as is seen in Sweden. This difference may be a consequence of the different economic models in the UK and Sweden. As Hall & Soskice (2001) note, a liberal market economy of the UK will have very flexible labour markets and a primarily coordinate via market mechanisms. Whilst a coordinate market economy in Sweden, is coordinated through non-market relationship, with greater collective bargaining and collaborative labour-management relations. Therefore, algorithmic management holds greater control and influence over couriers working on UK platforms than Swedish platforms due to the the differing employment classifications.

The differences between the economic models of the UK and Sweden further extends to the regulatory environment. The differences between how platforms in the UK and Sweden can implement new innovations and changes to their algorithms, is a perfect example of the differences between LMEs and CMEs, as noted by Hall and Soskice (2001). Within the UK, relaxed regulation means Uber Eats and Deliveroo are regulated by existing laws that commentators suggest aren't effective for dealing with algorithmic management. Therefore, Uber Eats and Devlieroo are able to implement new innovations seamlessly and quickly, even if it as the expense of their couriers. However, Sweden has much stronger governance which means Foodora and Wolt will have to introduce innovations within accordance to social protections and labour rights, which mean changes may be slower, but also seek to keep couriers protected. This difference in regulation maybe why there are different models of employment between Foodora and Wolt in Sweden but not between Uber Eats and Deliveroo in the UK. This is because a lack of regulation in the UK means Uber Eats and Deliveroo both offset all risk to couriers and therefore do not need to differentiate on this to be competitive. Whilst, Foodra and Wolt having to offer more responsibility means that they compete over their employment models. Thus, the different economic models of the UK and Sweden result in different regulatory environments which dictates the use and speed at which platforms can introduce innovations.

Focusing again upon how the differences between LMEs and CMEs manifest in differences within the food delivery platforms of the UK and Sweden, we look towards modes of contestation. Due to the benefits of collective bargaining and tighter regulation in Sweden, disputes are often channeled through formal institutional channels, which reflects a CMEs emphasis on collaborative problem solving, as highlighted by Hall and Soskice (2001). Therefore, discontent amongst couriers towards platforms in Sweden is more likely to bring actionable change than in the UK, meaning that Foodora and Wolt must be more careful in how they use algorithmic management. In contrast, within the UK there are no formal channels for couriers to contest decision making or practices of Uber Eats and Deliveroo. Therefore, most forms of contestation are largely public and via media in the UK. This form of activism is largely very loud and in contrast to the discourse that Uber Eats and Deliveroo portray about their business practices. However, as seen in couriers taking Deliveroo to the supreme court and conducting strikes, their activism has no formal legitimacy and thereofre doesn't lead to change. This idea has also been theorized by Braverman (1998) who suggested the deskilling and dispersion of workers, requires collective public pressure when formal mechanisms are weak. Thus, Uber Eats and Deliveroo can use algorithmic management in a way that continues to offload risk and responsibility to couriers as there is no formal means of contestation. Whilst, Foordoa and Wolt must be moire contious of their use of alogirthmic control due to the ability of couriers to contest changes or business practices. Thus, when considering how the practices of food delivery platforms can be contested by couriers, it is clear that is is dependent upon the economic model of the country in which they operate.

This difference in contestation due to the liberal market economy of the UK and the coordinated market economy of Sweden, shapes how algorithmic management in food delivery platforms is discussed. The discourses in the UK are portrayed within the media such as newspapers, activist campaigns and social media. This is a result of weak formal channels for collective bargaining, as discourses seek to invoke public and reputational pressure on organisations. This may be why, discourses surrounding algorithmic management on Uber Eats and Deliveroo in the UK is of a much more

negative and accusatory nature. Therefore, public discourses between the UK and Sweden are going to vary, as within the UK the public discourse is used as a key site of contestation due to the lack of formal channels. Constrasly, within Swede the tone of the public discourse is much more formal and neutral. This is a consequence of strong collective-bargaining agreements, where the public discourse is used to inform rather than contest. Thus, how the use of algorithmic management by food delivery platforms is portrayed in public discourse varies significantly between the UK and Sweden due to their market economies. Within the UK the public discourse is the primary site of contestation, whereas in Sweden there a more channels for this, meaning the representation of algorithmic management is different, even if it is implemented in the same way by Foodora, Wolt, Uber Eats and Deliveroo

6.4 Concluding remarks

Based upon our empirical analysis, it is clear that all 4 food delivery platforms use algorithmic management in a similar manner, however these manifest within two very different institutional ecosystems. Within the UK, liberal market norms amplify platform control by offloading risk onto couriers and does not provide any formal channels for contestation. Whilst, the Swedish coordinated market, absorbs algorithmic management into collective agreements serving the interest of couriers. These findings emphasis that platform technologies can not be understood in isolation from the contexts in which they operate.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has compared how algorithmic management is practiced, regulated and contested by leading food-delivery platforms in the United Kingdom and Sweden. Drawing upon our comparative case-study study, we analysed secondary data sources, including corporate communications, policy texts and media coverage; for our four platforms (Uber Eats, Deliveroo, Foodora and Wolt). Our analytical framework combined a thematic coding scheme, with discourse analysis at the meso- and macro-levels, organised into four core themes: Algorithmic control & management, courier experience, institutional embedding & regulatory governance, and accountability & worker representation.

7.1 Key findings

All four platforms use similar algorithmic systems to allocate tasks and monitor couriers, which reflects a broader trend of technological control over labour. However, these systems manifest differently in the UK and Sweden, mirroring contrasting institutional contexts. In the UK's liberal market economy, minimal regulation allows platforms to operate with considerable autonomy, leaving couriers as self-employed contractors, engulfing the financial risk. In Sweden's coordinate market economy, stronger collective-bargaining frameworks and legal protections moderate algorithmic power, resulting in more stable employment models and formal avenue for dispute and contestation. In both contexts, corporate messaging seeks to normalise algorithmic control, but public and regulatory discourse diverges, with voices in the UK emphasising precarity and opacity, whilst Swedish discourse focusing on integration into existing labour norms. These findings illustrate that algorithmic management cannot be understood in isolation from its political-economic environment.

7.2 limitations and future research

There are several limitations to this study that warrant attention. First, the reliance on secondary data means our insights lack the depth that primary interviews would offer. Secondly, focusing on the UK and Sweden limits generalisability to other contexts,. Such as Southern European CMEs or emerging-market LMEs. Thirdly, the rapidly evolving regulatory landscape, especially ongoing EU directives, means our findings capture the now and the specific moment. Future research could employ longitudinal methods to track how legal reforms reshape algorithmic practices and labour relations over time.

7.3 Final reflections

In conclusion, this thesis illustrates that while Uber Eats, Deliveroo, Foodora and Wolt share similar technological infrastructures for algorithmic management, the institutional contexts of the UK and Sweden produce markedly different practices, discourses and outcomes. In the UK, Uber Eats and Deliveroo benefit from minimal oversight, allowing algorithmic control to operate largely unregulated, benefiting the platform. In Sweden's coordinated market economy, Foodora and Wolt have algorithms embedded within collective bargaining frameworks and stronger social protections, limiting their impact on workers. These findings underscore that algorithmic systems must be understood within their contexts, considering regulation, discourse and organisational practice.

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9. Appendix

9.1 Secondary data sources

9.1.1 UK secondary data sources

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