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Digital Platform Empowerment for Migrant Workers' Rights Protection: Evidence from Bozhou

Peng Li

Department of Chinese Language and Media, Bozhou University, Bozhou 236800, Anhui, hina
lwlipeng@126.com

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ABSTRACT

Protecting migrant workers' rights has become a key challenge in China's evolving digital governance landscape. This study examines how Bozhou's Manxin Manyi WeChat mini-program, with particular relevance for addressing challenges in labor-intensive sectors such as the textile and garment industry, reshapes labor governance processes by applying the Affordance–Power–Action (A–P–A) framework. Using a mixed set of data—including policy documents, platform records, and 23 semi-structured interviews—the analysis demonstrates how digital affordances interact with administrative enforcement to influence rights-protection outcomes. Findings show that the platform enhances transparency, accelerates dispute resolution, and strengthens interdepartmental coordination; however, these improvements are closely tied to Bozhou's strong policy alignment and regulatory commitment rather than technology alone. The A–P–A framework offers analytical leverage by revealing how digital affordances redistribute power relations and enable situated forms of worker action within governance systems. Specifically, the platform's mechanisms for digital traceability and real-time wage monitoring offer a model for strengthening compliance and supply-chain transparency in the highly fragmented textile sector. While the Bozhou case illustrates the potential of digitally mediated co-governance, its transferability is conditional on local institutional capacity and the long-term sustainability of funding and oversight mechanisms. This study contributes to platform-governance research by integrating communication theory with political-economic perspectives and by highlighting the contextual nature of digital empowerment in migrant workers' rights protection.

KEYWORDS

digital labor governance, migrant workers, Affordance–Power–Action framework, supply-chain transparency, textile industry

INTRODUCTION

In China's labor-intensive sectors—including construction, manufacturing, and particularly the textile and garment industry—millions of migrant workers form the core of industrial production[1]. Among these sectors, the textile and garment industry is a critical component of the manufacturing landscape, heavily dependent on this migrant workforce for its operations and global supply chains. Yet despite their essential contribution, many continue to face persistent challenges in safeguarding their labor rights, especially regarding timely and transparent wage payments. In fragmented production environments where subcontracting is common, problems such as proxy-signed contracts, irregular wage disbursements, and the absence of verifiable payment records frequently occur, among which wage arrears are the most prominent[2]. This problem is notoriously persistent in labor-intensive industries, including textile manufacturing, where complex subcontracting and demand volatility often place workers in vulnerable positions.

These issues not only undermine workers' livelihood security but also create substantial obstacles when they attempt to seek redress, often resulting in low efficiency and uncertain outcomes in rights-protection processes.

In the context of deepening digital governance, protecting migrant workers' rights, particularly in labor-intensive manufacturing sectors like the textile and garment industry, has become an essential concern in labor relations. Against this backdrop, digital media platforms have opened up new possibilities for protecting migrant workers' rights. As emerging communication tools, digital platforms possess inherent features such as cross-temporal dissemination, real-time interaction, and data accumulation, which make them well-suited to mediate among multiple actors in labor relations. This study takes Bozhou City's "Manxin Manyi" WeChat mini-program—selected as one of the "Top Ten Cases for Optimizing the Business Environment" in Anhui Province in 2023—as an example. It examines the role of digital platforms in labor governance and analyzes their influence on migrant workers' rights protection, aiming to provide new perspectives for addressing labor rights issues.

Scholarly discussions on digital platforms and migrant workers' rights protection have become increasingly diverse in recent years, generally clustering around three interrelated research orientations.

The first line of inquiry focuses on new media empowerment and social integration of migrant workers. Wang

Qianrui (2023) argues that the openness and interactivity of new media have expanded migrant workers' social connections, offering emotional support and identity recognition within urban contexts, thereby facilitating a psychological shift from "outsider" to "insider"[3]. Li Hong (2021), from the perspective of social integration pathways, divides the process of migrant workers' urban integration into several stages and points out that the social-support function of media provides a compensatory force in identity construction[4]. These studies primarily reveal how media technologies generate social meaning through individual experience.

The second strand of research turns to institutional frameworks, legal aid, and governance mechanisms. Dong Aifeng (2021) analyzes the judicial aid system through the interactions among government agencies, social organizations, and migrant workers, suggesting that a structured mechanism of social collaboration is essential to safeguarding labor rights[5]. Liu Ying (2022), from a digital governance perspective, highlights that information-based supervision and credit constraints can enhance both transparency and predictability in the mediation of labor disputes[6]. Collectively, this line of inquiry reflects a broader shift in labor governance from administrative intervention to platform-based coordination.

The third research approach combines communication studies and social psychology, emphasizing migrant workers' modes of expression and patterns of action. Yan Hang and Li Min (2020), based on data from the "Hundred Villages Observation" project, find that migrant workers often suffer from information asymmetry and expressive barriers, which lead to the marginalization of their claims. They call for equal communication mechanisms and supportive platforms to reconstruct channels of public expression[7]. Building on this, Xia Qiong and Zhao Yuqiao (2024) note that new media use not only enhances migrant workers' awareness of their rights but also subtly strengthens their willingness and efficacy in defending them[8]. This suggests that the social role of media is not fixed but continuously reshaped through user practice.

In the international academic field, discussions on digital platforms and labor rights are equally rich and critical in nature. Christian Fuchs (2014), drawing on Marx's labor theory, points out that digital labor embodies a paradoxical coexistence of "platform exploitation" and "technological empowerment"[9]. Nagy and Neff (2015) introduce the concept of imagined affordances, illustrating how workers on algorithmic platforms develop behavioral strategies shaped by subjective beliefs and social experience[10]. Likewise, Wood and colleagues (2019) argue in *Work, Employment and Society* that platform-based labor governance

exhibits a dual structure of “algorithmic control” and “discursive resistance”[11]. Collectively, these studies expose the complex tension between digital technology, power relations, and worker agency, providing valuable theoretical insight for understanding migrant workers’ rights protection in the Chinese context.

Overall, existing research has shed light on multiple dimensions of rights protection—ranging from social support and legal safeguards to communicative practices and technological governance—thus laying an essential theoretical foundation for this study. Yet, several gaps remain. First, most studies emphasize macro-level analyses of “media empowerment” and “policy guarantees,” while offering limited explanations of how digital platforms actually operate as communication systems and action networks. Second, comparative research across regions and platform types remains insufficient. Third, from a theoretical standpoint, there is still a lack of a systematic communication-centered framework to explain the digital governance of labor relations.

Bozhou was chosen not merely because its “Manxin Manyi” system received provincial recognition, but because it constitutes an information-rich case where digital governance, interdepartmental coordination, and regulatory enforcement operate with unusual intensity. This makes Bozhou an analytically valuable site for examining how digital platforms function when administrative capacity and policy alignment are both strong—conditions that allow the mechanisms of digital labor governance to be observed more clearly. At the same time, the case’s uniqueness highlights the importance of contextual dependence and prevents unwarranted generalization.

Moreover, the platform’s performance is inseparable from Bozhou’s strong administrative mandate and sustained governmental investment. The city has allocated dedicated funding, strengthened interdepartmental coordination, and implemented strict enforcement of wage-protection regulations, creating institutional conditions under which the platform can function effectively. These factors significantly shape the observed outcomes and help explain why similar digital tools may not yield comparable results in grassroots settings or commercially operated platforms where regulatory capacity and political commitment are weaker.

Despite substantial academic attention to digital labor governance, existing studies seldom explain how technological affordances interact with administrative power to generate governance outcomes. Most prior research treats digital platforms as either communication tools or regulatory instruments but rarely as socio-

technical systems where power, technology, and user action mutually shape each other. Furthermore, little work situates these dynamics within China's diverse local governance environments, leaving unclear the institutional conditions under which platform-based rights-protection systems become effective.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) How do digital affordances structure interactions among workers, firms, and government agencies?
- (2) How does administrative power shape the activation and implementation of these affordances?
- (3) Under what institutional conditions can digital platforms enhance the protection of migrant workers' rights?

To address these gaps, this paper takes Bozhou's "Manxin Manyi" WeChat mini-program as its focal case. By integrating the concepts of media affordance and labor theory, it constructs an analytical framework linking "digital platforms–labor relations–rights protection mechanisms." The study aims to uncover how digital technology, through information circulation, interactive coordination, and institutional integration, contributes to the rebalancing of labor relations and the empowerment of vulnerable groups. Such an approach not only broadens the theoretical boundaries of digital labor governance but also offers practical insights for local governments seeking to improve rights-protection systems for migrant workers. Given the textile industry's significant reliance on migrant labor and its well-documented governance challenges, understanding these digital models is also crucial for promoting ethical and sustainable supply chains within that sector.

Although the study focuses on Bozhou, its implications are particularly relevant to labor-intensive manufacturing sectors such as the textile and garment industry. These industries rely heavily on subcontracted labor and multi-tier production structures where wage arrears, opaque contracting, and weak oversight are common risks. The mechanisms examined in this paper—digital traceability, cross-department coordination, and real-time wage monitoring—are directly applicable to improving compliance and transparency in textile supply chains. By clarifying how digital platforms reshape labor governance, the findings provide actionable insights for factories, contractors, and regulators in the textile and garment sector.

THEORETICAL INTERPRETATION: DIGITAL PLATFORMS EMPOWERING MIGRANT WORKERS' RIGHTS PROTECTION

Media Affordance Theory

In 1978, American psychologist James J. Gibson introduced the concept of affordance to describe the range of possible actions that an individual can take within a physical environment—potential behaviors that the environment makes available to an actor. Affordance, as Gibson emphasized, is not an attribute of either the environment or the actor alone, but rather the outcome of their mutual interaction[12]. The concept was later adopted in sociology, communication, and media studies to explain how technological environments shape patterns of human behavior.

Building on this foundation, Nagy and Neff (2015) proposed the idea of imagined affordances, arguing that users' perceptions of what media technologies can do are grounded in social imagination and cultural experience, not merely in technical design. This extension shifted the theory from the physical domain of function toward the symbolic and social construction of meaning.

In the Chinese context, Pan Zhongdang (2017) incorporated affordance theory into media studies and suggested that media affordances can be categorized into three dimensions: informational, social, and mobile[13].

Informational affordances refer to features such as editability, shareability, and interlinking;

Social affordances involve the possibilities of greeting, coordination, and connection;

Mobile affordances emphasize portability, locatability, and compatibility.

Digital platforms embody all three of these affordance dimensions within the domain of labor relations.

For migrant workers, the affordances of digital platforms can be understood on three key levels:

Expressive affordance – providing a communicative space that enables the shift from silence to voice;

Collaborative affordance – facilitating online communication and organization to form communities of shared concern;

Institutional affordance – linking governments and enterprises, allowing technology to extend the reach of social governance.

Thus, the theory of media affordance offers a conceptual foundation for understanding how digital platforms

empower migrant workers in defending their rights. It highlights the dynamic interaction between technological structures and social action, emphasizing that actors are not passive users but active participants who reshape and reimagine technology within their lived contexts.

Marx's Labor Theory

Marx's theory of labor provides a fundamental foundation for understanding labor relations. In *Capital*, Karl Marx argues that labor power, as a unique form of commodity, is inevitably subject to exploitation and alienation within the capitalist mode of production[14]. This theoretical insight exposes the structural contradiction at the core of labor relations—the persistent conflict between capital and labor.

Contemporary scholar Christian Fuchs (2014) extends Marx's framework to the digital era, introducing the concept of digital labour. He contends that within the platform economy, workers gain employment opportunities through algorithmic systems while simultaneously being subjected to new forms of technological discipline and data control. This form of invisible exploitation reminds us that digitalization does not inherently equate to empowerment. The platform can function both as a site where power is reproduced and as a potential space for workers to articulate resistance and collective agency.

In this sense, the struggle for migrant workers' rights in the digital age is not merely a legal issue but also a process of restructuring the politics of labor relations. Digital platforms allow workers to transcend physical boundaries, using media technologies to achieve transparency, collective expression, and social mobilization—thereby enhancing their capacity for digital action. Wang Qianhan, Zhao Yong, and Xu Mengjie (2021) further note that challenges surrounding labor protection in flexible employment highlight the need for digital platforms to serve as crucial interfaces for collaborative governance among governments, social organizations, and workers[15].

The "Affordance–Power–Action" Framework of Digital Labor Relations

Bringing together media affordance theory and Marx's labor theory makes it possible to outline a new framework for interpreting digital labor relations—Affordance–Power–Action. This framework is not a mechanical combination of theories, but rather an attempt to find a conceptual bridge between technological logic and social logic. The operational mechanisms of digital platforms offer a concrete entry point for observing how these dimensions interact in practice.

From the perspective of affordance, digital platforms expand workers' space for action through algorithmic recommendation, data sharing, and information visualization. Information is no longer a one-way flow of resources but becomes something perceptible, usable, and even reconstructable. Workers can now participate in supervision and feedback within labor processes at much lower costs—a shift that is particularly evident in rights protection practices.

At the level of power, the dynamics are more intricate. On the one hand, digital platforms disrupt the traditional dualism in labor relations—where employers dominate and workers remain passive—by enabling a multi-actor system of co-governance. On the other hand, the disciplining force of technology itself cannot be ignored. Algorithmic control and data governance often redefine power boundaries in invisible ways, with roles of supervisor and supervised constantly shifting. As Couldry and Mejias (2019) argue in *The Costs of Connection*, datafication does not merely increase efficiency—it constitutes a hidden form of “connective capitalism,” where the reproduction of power occurs precisely through data collection and analysis[16]. This duality calls for ongoing critical attention.

At the action level, workers are not passive recipients nor mere nodes governed by algorithms. Through digital tools and social networks, they increasingly develop the capacity to transform individual appeals into collective action. By sharing information, initiating coordinated responses, and organizing online discussions, workers forge new forms of digital publicness. This bottom-up mobilization, empowered by platform technology, injects fresh momentum into social governance.

In sum, digital platforms represent a multidimensional arena in which technological empowerment coexists with disciplinary control, and institutional embedding interacts with individual agency. They function simultaneously as mediums of action and as mechanisms for redistributing power. The Affordance–Power–Action framework thus reveals the dynamic structure of digital labor relations: through processes of information correction, collaborative interaction, and institutional integration, platforms have facilitated a shift from reactive rights defense to proactive governance, fostering a more sustainable ecosystem for migrant workers' digital rights protection. This theoretical perspective provides an essential foundation for the subsequent case analysis.

The Added Analytical Value of the Affordance–Power–Action (A–P–A) Framework

While media affordance theory, power analysis, and action perspectives have each been widely applied in

digital governance research, none of them alone can adequately explain the dynamic interplay between technological design, administrative authority, and workers' situated practices. The value of the A–P–A framework lies not in mechanically combining existing concepts but in revealing the sequential mechanisms through which digital platforms reconfigure labor governance. Specifically, the framework uncovers how technological affordances structure the possibilities of interaction, how administrative power reshapes these possibilities through regulatory enforcement, and how workers transform affordances into concrete actions. First, the A–P–A framework provides a causal chain—from technological affordances to power redistribution to situated action—that existing governance or communication theories cannot fully capture. Traditional governance theory emphasizes institutional arrangements but pays limited attention to how specific technological features (e.g., real-time traceability, credit integration) shape actors' behavioral strategies. Similarly, affordance theory focuses on user perception but rarely explains how affordances become embedded within hierarchical administrative systems. The A–P–A framework integrates these dimensions and demonstrates how affordances become actionable within, rather than outside of, power structures. Second, the framework conceptualizes digital platforms as arenas of power negotiation, not merely tools or channels. By linking affordances with shifting power relations, the A–P–A model shows how platforms simultaneously empower workers and strengthen governmental oversight, thereby producing hybrid governance outcomes. This duality—coexistence of empowerment and discipline—is difficult to capture using either classical communication theory or Marxist critique alone. Third, the framework offers explanatory leverage for context-dependent variation. The Bozhou case demonstrates that the platform's positive outcomes are not driven by technology alone but by the interaction between affordances and strong administrative enforcement. The A–P–A model thus explains why technologically similar platforms may produce different results across regions with varying institutional capacity and political commitment. This conditional explanation extends the applicability of affordance theory to governance studies and highlights the structural contingencies of digital empowerment. Taken together, the A–P–A framework provides a theoretically grounded and empirically sensitive lens for understanding how digital platforms reshape labor governance. It moves beyond descriptive mapping to identify the mechanisms through which technology, power, and action become interdependent, thereby offering analytical depth beyond standard governance or communication frameworks.

RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

Building on the theoretical discussion above, this study adopts the Affordance–Power–Action analytical framework to conduct an empirical examination of Bozhou’s “Manxin Manyi” WeChat mini-program. The research aims to assess how digital platforms function within labor governance and rights protection for migrant workers, focusing on both communication mechanisms and practical outcomes through a representative case study.

Three primary research methods are employed: literature review, case study, and semi-structured interviews. First, the literature review systematically traces domestic and international scholarship on digital platform governance and labor relations management, clarifying the theoretical foundations and identifying existing research gaps.

Second, the case study centers on the “Manxin Manyi” platform, examining its operational logic, functional mechanisms, and communication features to explore the concrete ways in which digital tools empower workers’ rights protection.

Finally, semi-structured interviews are conducted with selected migrant workers, enterprise representatives, and government officials to collect first-hand data and validate analytical findings.

To strengthen methodological transparency and analytical rigor, we provide further details on the interview component. A total of 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted, including 12 migrant workers, 6 enterprise managers or subcontractors, and 5 government officials from relevant departments such as the Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, the Housing and Urban–Rural Development Bureau, and the Municipal Big Data Administration. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that all interviewees were directly involved in wage dispute resolution or platform governance. Interviews were conducted between April 2023 and January 2024, each lasting between 30 and 70 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, anonymized, and analyzed using NVivo 12 through open, axial, and thematic coding. Two researchers independently coded the data and reconciled discrepancies through iterative discussion to enhance reliability. (The data used in this study were collected with the consent of the participants. All participants provided written informed consent, and the study was approved by the ethics committee of Bozhou University.)

The data sources include official documents and open-access materials from the Bozhou Municipal Human

Resources and Social Security Bureau, the Housing and Urban-Rural Development Bureau, as well as field interviews, policy papers, and major media reports from 2023 to 2024.

CASE ANALYSIS: THE OPERATIONAL MECHANISM OF BOZHOU'S "MANXIN MANYI" WECHAT MINI-PROGRAM

The role of digital platforms in managing labor relations is not confined to theory; it has also been vividly demonstrated in local governance practice. Bozhou's "Manxin Manyi" WeChat mini-program offers a representative example. As an innovative initiative in digital labor governance, the platform has effectively alleviated long-standing challenges such as the difficulty of rights protection for migrant workers, the limited oversight of employers, and the high risk of wage arrears. It now stands as a model outcome of local digital governance.

Launched in June 2023, the "Manxin Manyi" platform rapidly achieved wide adoption. By the end of that year, it had registered 153,200 migrant workers and 2,950 enterprises, becoming the first system in Anhui Province to enable cross-bank salary payments for construction workers. The city's implementation rate of dedicated wage accounts and sub-account management reached 95.8%, while the wage deposit system was in place for 97.8% of projects. According to Bozhou's municipal development plan, the platform will continue to expand over the next three years, building the "Manxin Manyi" brand and creating a benchmark model for a "harmonious labor-relations city."

Field observations and in-depth interviews reveal that migrant workers show a high level of awareness and satisfaction with the platform. One construction worker, Mr. Li, reported a wage dispute through "Manxin Manyi." Upon receiving his complaint, the local Housing and Urban-Rural Development Department conducted an immediate on-site verification, issued a wage-arrears supervision notice and an abnormal payment alert to the contractor. The system simultaneously generated a credit-risk warning, which was linked to the industry's regulatory database. Under the dual pressure of public scrutiny and credit sanctions, the contractor eventually paid the ¥90,000 owed in back wages, fully resolving the issue.

This case clearly illustrates the platform's efficient response chain—from problem detection to inter-agency coordination and real-time feedback—demonstrating how digital governance can enhance transparency, accountability, and fairness in labor relations management.

Comprehensive Analysis: The Operating Mechanism of the “Manxin Manyi” WeChat Mini-Program

The operation of Bozhou’s “Manxin Manyi” platform can be summarized through four interrelated mechanisms that together illustrate how digital platforms reshape labor governance and rights protection in practice.

Information Flow Mechanism: Transparency and Traceability

The “Manxin Manyi” platform ensures full-process traceability of wage payments through data visualization and information sharing. Each stage—contract signing, attendance recording, and wage disbursement—is digitally documented and can be accessed across multiple departments in real time.

This transparency mechanism dismantles the traditional barrier of information asymmetry that often hindered migrant workers’ rights protection. Workers can monitor payment progress instantly, while regulatory authorities can detect anomalies promptly, creating an information chain where “data is traceable and accountability is enforceable.”

Moreover, the platform incorporates a wage early-warning system. When a company faces potential delays in payment, the system automatically generates a risk alert and forwards it to the relevant authorities, thereby linking preventive control before the incident with responsibility enforcement afterward.

Interaction Mechanism: Multi-Actor Collaboration and Real-Time Communication

The platform establishes an instant communication channel connecting workers, enterprises, and government agencies. Migrant workers can file complaints, leave messages, and upload evidence via mobile devices; enterprise managers can verify and report wage disbursement data through the backend; and government officials can receive, dispatch, and process cases in real time.

This two-way communication system has significantly improved dispute resolution efficiency—reducing processing time from several weeks in traditional offline procedures to within 24 hours of online response.

From a communication studies perspective, the platform’s interaction mechanism embodies the social affordance of digital media. It transforms hierarchical administrative communication into a horizontal, platform-based exchange, aligning the flows of information, power, and action into a unified interactive process.

Governance Mechanism: Credit Regulation and Coordinated Oversight

The “Manxin Manyi” platform integrates a credit archive and an abnormal payment list system, enabling dynamic monitoring and classification of enterprises’ labor credit. Companies involved in wage arrears or refusal to rectify violations are added to the “Abnormal Wage Payment Directory,” which is automatically synchronized with systems of construction management, market regulation, and public resource supervision.

This mechanism achieves a dual approach of deterrence and prevention: public credit exposure generates social pressure, while digital oversight enhances both precision and enforcement efficiency.

Simultaneously, interdepartmental data sharing and joint disciplinary measures have created a collaborative governance network, characterized by “shared information, shared responsibility, and shared outcomes.”

This reflects the core logic of digital co-governance in contemporary local administration.

Sustainability Mechanism: Institutional Integration and Brand Development

“Manxin Manyi” is not a temporary project but rather a policy experiment in institutionalized governance. Closely aligned with Bozhou’s broader digital government strategy, it has been incorporated into a three-year collaborative development plan, signaling an effort to transform technological innovation into a sustainable governance routine.

As the platform operates over time, data accumulation and experiential learning become intangible assets that feed back into policymaking. Government departments increasingly rely on the platform’s analytics to evaluate policy outcomes, assess risks, and monitor industries. In this sense, the platform functions not only as a technical tool but also as a mediator of policy feedback and social learning.

Notably, continuous media exposure and public recognition have gradually endowed “Manxin Manyi” with the characteristics of a public governance brand. This brand effect enhances government credibility and fosters positive public perception of “Bozhou-style governance.” Behind this branding process lies a deeper transformation—the reconstruction of institutional trust through digital governance.

In summary, the multiple mechanisms underlying the operation of the “Manxin Manyi” platform reveal the multi-layered nature of digital governance:

At the information flow level, it promotes transparency and traceability of labor data;

At the interaction level, it establishes real-time communication channels among multiple actors;

At the governance level, it builds a regulatory system based on credit constraints and interdepartmental coordination;

And at the sustainability level, it institutionalizes and brands governance as an ongoing practice.

Taken together, these mechanisms substantiate the previously proposed “Affordance–Power–Action” framework. Through the empowering logic of media affordances, the digital platform transforms labor relations from confrontation to collaboration, creating a resilient and evolving digital ecosystem for protecting the rights of migrant workers.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The experience of the “Manxin Manyi” platform shows that digital platforms represent more than a technical innovation in labor governance—they embody a reorganization of social governance itself. They restructure information flows and offer a clearer lens for understanding how labor governance operates within China’s ongoing digital transformation. Drawing on the previously proposed Affordance–Power–Action framework, this section reflects on four dimensions.

Technological Empowerment and the Expansion of Rights Channels

The “Manxin Manyi” platform has made rights protection far more accessible. Migrant workers can now check payment records, file complaints, and track cases directly on their mobile phones—something nearly impossible in the past. The integration of digital tools allows rights defense to transcend spatial and temporal limits, replacing dependency on intermediaries with self-directed action.

What is particularly significant is the platform’s combinatory functionality: policy consultation, evidence submission, legal aid, and process visualization all reduce the cost of realizing rights. The essence of technological empowerment lies not in replacing human effort, but in transforming information flow into a new form of social support. Governments can use such systems to build low-threshold, multi-channel rights-protection networks, while civil organizations can broaden their reach and improve response efficiency. In this way, a new model of governance—“data-driven fairness”—is gradually taking shape[17].

Information Disclosure and the Awakening of Rights Awareness

Information asymmetry has long been the most persistent obstacle in labor relations. By means of data visu

alization and transparency mechanisms, “Manxin Manyi” brings wage records, project progress, and corporate credit into public view. This heightened visibility not only strengthens supervision but also stimulates workers’ awareness of their rights.

When individuals can clearly see the status of their entitlements and understand the governing rules behind them, their behavioral logic changes—from passive reaction to active expression. This reflects the “cognitive empowerment” dimension of media affordance: technology provides new self-understanding and facilitates a shift from administrative control to participatory collaboration. Looking ahead, governments should continue advancing data-sharing and information disclosure frameworks to ensure greater accessibility and reliability of public information[18].

In labor-intensive industries such as textiles and garments, supply chains often involve multiple subcontractors and temporary labor teams, making labor conditions difficult to monitor. The platform’s real-time wage tracking and disclosure functions provide a model for supply-chain transparency by generating verifiable digital records of labor payments and construction progress. These mechanisms can help prevent wage arrears, reduce information asymmetry, and strengthen accountability among subcontracted suppliers—issues that are pervasive in textile production networks.

Distinguishing Technological Effects from Administrative Enforcement

While the Manxin Manyi platform demonstrates clear improvements in transparency, response speed, and coordination, these outcomes cannot be attributed to technological affordances alone. The platform’s effectiveness is fundamentally shaped by Bozhou’s strong administrative mandate, including continuous cross-department enforcement, binding credit sanctions, and a political commitment to wage-law compliance. In this sense, the platform’s digital functions operate not as independent drivers of governance improvement but as instruments embedded within a broader administrative strategy. The positive outcomes therefore arise from the interaction between digital affordances and intensive regulatory enforcement rather than from technology itself. Recognizing this interaction clarifies why similar platforms may not achieve comparable results in regions with weaker institutional capacity or lower enforcement intensity. This distinction is essential for understanding policy transferability and for evaluating the conditions under which digital platforms can truly enhance labor governance.

Credit-Risk Warning Mechanism and Sanction Procedures

The credit-risk warning mechanism operates through a structured workflow embedded in Bozhou's municipal credit governance system. When wage arrears or payment irregularities are verified through platform data, worker complaints, or cross-department inspections, the contractor is automatically flagged and entered into the city's credit-warning database. The Human Resources and Social Security Bureau and the Housing and Urban-Rural Development Bureau jointly review the evidence and determine the level of credit risk.

Once a contractor is placed under credit warning, several concrete sanctions follow. These include suspension of bidding eligibility for new public construction projects, mandatory rectification orders, heightened on-site inspections, and inclusion on a public "credit risk list" disclosed through the municipal government portal. In cases of repeated violations, the contractor may be transferred to the provincial credit blacklist, which triggers cross-departmental disciplinary measures such as financing restrictions and eligibility reviews for future projects. Public disclosure also functions as a reputational sanction, exerting pressure from both market actors and regulatory authorities.

These specific sanctions demonstrate that the platform's governance power does not arise from technology alone but from its integration with a mature administrative credit-supervision system that exerts material, institutional, and reputational consequences on non-compliant contractors.

Multi-Actor Collaboration and the Formation of Collective Governance

The sustained operation of "Manxin Manyi" rests on its collaborative governance logic. Government institutions provide regulatory frameworks and resources; enterprises assume primary responsibility; and social organizations act as intermediaries linking the two. Information circulates among these actors, creating a continuous feedback loop.

This configuration has gradually replaced fragmented governance models characterized by overlapping authorities and unclear accountability. The platform functions as an interactive social arena where diverse actors renegotiate power, responsibility, and trust. In this sense, such collaboration represents the institutional embodiment of media affordance: technology not only transmits information but also reshapes the connective tissue of social structure[19].

Institutional Credibility Affordance

Rather than constructing a "public governance brand," the platform's transparency and traceability operate

as an institutional credibility affordance. By making wage records, case progress, and regulatory actions publicly visible, the system strengthens governmental legitimacy and enhances workers' confidence in formal dispute-resolution channels. This trust arises not from symbolic promotion but from structural changes in accountability and information disclosure embedded in the platform's power configuration.

Long-Term Mechanisms and Institutionalized Development

The enduring value of the platform lies not in resolving individual cases but in creating a sustainable governance mechanism. Through continuous data accumulation and policy feedback, "Manxin Manyi" has become an integral part of the labor governance system.

Its vitality stems from institutional integration and dynamic adaptation: governments refine policy based on real-time data; enterprises engage in self-regulation through credit constraints; and the public participates in oversight via information disclosure. Consequently, digital governance shifts from reactive relief to preventive adjustment. Moving forward, key issues such as algorithmic transparency, data privacy, and standardization will determine the platform's long-term viability. Only with a strong legal foundation can digital platforms evolve into the core infrastructure of public service.

Financial Sustainability and Institutional Guarantees

A critical condition for understanding the long-term viability of the Manxin Manyi platform is the financial and institutional model that supports its continued operation. The platform was initially funded through a three-year policy experiment, but sustained maintenance requires dedicated resources for server operation, system upgrades, technical support, and regulatory personnel. In Bozhou, these costs have been incorporated into the municipal digital-government budget and distributed across the Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, the Housing and Urban-Rural Development Bureau, and the Finance Bureau through a cost-sharing mechanism. This arrangement reflects a gradual shift from project-based funding toward institutionalized budget allocation. The platform's continuity therefore depends not only on technological capacity but also on stable fiscal planning, interdepartmental coordination, and the legal embedding of wage-protection responsibilities into routine administrative mandates. By clarifying the funding structure and institutional commitments, the case demonstrates that digital labor-governance platforms require both political support and predictable financial resources to remain operational beyond initial pilot cycles.

Overall, the “Manxin Manyi” case validates the explanatory power of the Affordance–Power–Action framework. Technological affordances create possibilities for action; information transparency and coordination mechanisms recalibrate power relations; and institutional embedding transforms individual actions into sustained social momentum. Digital platforms, therefore, are not mere tools—they are engines of public value creation, offering an actionable model for building fairer, more transparent, and more sustainable labor relations in the digital era [20].

Contextual Constraints and Limits of Generalizability

Although the Manxin Manyi platform offers valuable insights into digitally mediated labor governance, its success is closely tied to Bozhou’s specific administrative environment. The platform benefited from strong policy alignment across multiple bureaus, consistent enforcement of wage-protection regulations, and a high level of institutional commitment from local authorities. These enabling conditions shaped how digital affordances were activated and translated into governance outcomes. As such, the Bozhou experience should not be interpreted as universally replicable across Chinese cities. Regions with weaker enforcement capacity, fragmented interdepartmental coordination, or insufficient political support may not achieve comparable results even when adopting similar technologies. Instead, the case illustrates a conditional model of platform-enabled governance whose effectiveness depends on institutional capacity, regulatory coherence, and sustained government commitment. Acknowledging these contextual boundaries helps prevent overgeneralization and provides a more realistic basis for assessing policy transferability.

Implications for the Textile and Garment Industry

The insights generated through the Manxin Manyi case extend beyond local governance and hold important relevance for the textile and garment industry. As a sector characterized by highly fragmented supply chains and heavy reliance on migrant labor, textile manufacturing faces recurring challenges such as wage arrears, delayed payments by subcontractors, and inadequate documentation of labor conditions. The platform’s integrated system—combining wage verification, credit-risk warnings, and interdepartmental oversight—offers a scalable model for improving labor compliance within multi-tiered textile supply chains. By strengthening traceability and formalizing communication between workers, contractors, and regulators, similar platforms could enhance both social responsibility and operational stability in the textile sector.

Moreover, the findings carry significant implications for global buyers and international compliance frameworks. As textile and garment supply chains increasingly fall under ESG reporting requirements, social auditing regimes, and responsible sourcing standards, the mechanisms demonstrated in the Manxin Manyi case—particularly digital traceability, transparent wage verification, and cross-department enforcement—provide a practical governance model for meeting international expectations regarding labor rights due diligence. Digital platforms capable of generating verifiable records of wage payments and contractor behavior can strengthen supplier compliance, support risk assessment, and enhance the credibility of social responsibility reporting across global textile production networks.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Research Findings

Using Bozhou's "Manxin Manyi" WeChat mini-program as a case study and drawing on the Affordance–Power–Action framework, this paper explores how digital platforms perform dual functions of governance and communication in labor relations. The study finds that the platform's layered mechanisms effectively reconstruct the flows of information, power, and action, transforming labor relations from passive management to proactive collaboration.

In terms of operational logic, information transparency and data traceability have reduced asymmetries between employers and workers; real-time communication has enabled more equitable interaction; credit archives and joint disciplinary systems have strengthened regulatory accountability; while data accumulation and institutional embedding have ensured long-term governance sustainability. Thus, the platform's value lies not merely in improving efficiency but in promoting the institutionalization and intelligence of labor governance. For interdisciplinary fields such as textile science and engineering, which are increasingly focused on supply chain transparency and ethical manufacturing, this model provides a tangible example of how digital governance can help secure labor rights.

Overall, the "Manxin Manyi" case demonstrates the dual nature of digital technology—it functions both as a tool of communication and as a mechanism for reconstructing social structures. Technology, in this sense, is no longer neutral; it becomes an active medium of public governance power.

Moreover, the findings hold particular relevance for labor-intensive sectors such as textiles and garments, w

here subcontracting, multi-tier supply chains, and wage opacity remain persistent challenges. The governance model demonstrated in this study—digital traceability, transparent wage verification, and coordinated enforcement—offers practical insights for improving labor compliance in complex production networks.

Digital platforms, therefore, are not mere tools—they are engines of public value creation, offering an actionable model for building fairer, more transparent, and more sustainable labor relations in the digital era, with high relevance for improving labor accountability in complex industrial supply chains.

In the context of increasing international pressure for ESG compliance, due-diligence regulation, and responsible sourcing requirements in global textile and garment supply chains, the mechanisms examined here provide a realistic pathway for strengthening labor-rights accountability and meeting international audit expectations.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes in three key ways:

Expanding the scope of media affordance theory by revealing the real-world operational logic of the information–social–institutional triad of affordances in digital platforms.

Reinterpreting Marx’s labor theory in the digital era, illustrating how “technological empowerment” and “re-distribution of power” coexist in structurally tense forms within digital labor systems.

Proposing and validating an analytical framework for digital labor governance that integrates perspectives from communication studies and political economy, thereby offering an interdisciplinary approach to the study of platform governance.

Future Directions

This research, while revealing important insights, has certain limitations. The empirical focus on Bozhou limits the generalizability of the findings; the data rely mainly on official sources and interviews, lacking dynamic behavioral observation; and the discussion of algorithms and power structures remains conceptual, without fully unpacking how algorithmic mechanisms intervene in labor governance.

Future studies should adopt a comparative and multi-level approach. Different regions exhibit unique institutional contexts, and identical technological logics may yield divergent social outcomes. Specifically, applying this “Affordance–Power–Action” framework to analyze digital platforms in key manufacturing hubs for th

e textile and apparel industry would be a valuable comparative extension.

Research methods should also diversify—beyond platform data—to include public discourse analysis, social interaction patterns, and workers' lived experiences, offering a micro-level understanding of how digital rights protection operates in practice.

Equally important are questions of algorithmic fairness and governance ethics. The supposed neutrality of platforms often conceals deeper redistributions of power—who is visible, who is silenced, and who holds interpretive authority. Technology is never a purely technical instrument; it embodies institutional power and social consequences.

In a broader sense, digital platforms empowering migrant workers' rights represent more than a policy experiment—they are part of an ongoing societal negotiation. Future research must preserve the tension between theory, institutions, and technology, ensuring that “governance” evolves beyond administrative management toward a practice grounded in public value and social justice.

Author Contributions

Peng Li has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Human Research Subjects

The data used in this study were collected with the consent of the participants. All participants provided written informed consent, and the study was approved by the ethics committee of Bozhou University.

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