

Will Price Discrimination Affect Customer Satisfaction in the Shared Transportation Market? -A Case Study of Didi

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Abstract. With the rapid growth of the digital economy, the frequency of shared transportation services, particularly through platforms like Didi, has significantly increased. While these services offer convenience by allowing passengers to book rides according to their needs, the practice of price discrimination has raised concerns about customer satisfaction. This study explores how price discrimination—where different consumers are charged varying prices based on their willingness to pay, usage patterns, or other factors—affects customer satisfaction in the shared transportation market, through a survey of 61 participants, we found that a significant portion of users (62.3%) were unaware of price discrimination when using Didi's services. Interestingly, those who were aware of price discrimination tended to have lower satisfaction with their ride-hailing experience. The study also highlighted the anchoring effect, showing that providing discounts can improve customer satisfaction even when prices are initially perceived as high. Our findings suggest that while price discrimination may enhance platform profitability, it risks eroding customer trust and satisfaction if perceived as unfair. Therefore, shared transportation platforms must strike a balance in their pricing strategies to ensure transparency and maintain customer loyalty.

Keywords: price discrimination, satisfaction, consumer data.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of the digital economy, the frequency of shared transportation is increasing. The rise and development of taxi-hailing software in my country, mainly taking Didi Taxi as an example, its advantage is that passengers can make reservations in advance according to their own needs, reduce waiting time, and increase the taxi-hailing rate; the disadvantage is that it may affect the rights and interests of passengers [1]. Taking a taxi is also a way of travel that many people have experienced, but few people have a lot of time, energy, and opportunities to compare the price of their taxis with others. This will lead to taxi companies using everyone's data to squeeze our consumer surplus. In many cases, people do not understand what price discrimination is, so even if they experience it, they do not know that they have encountered some problems. Through questionnaire surveys and our personal experiences, we have noticed that most people are not aware of price discrimination when taking Didi taxis, but in fact, price discrimination is everywhere. Price

discrimination refers to the situation where companies charge different prices to different consumers or consumer groups, and this differential pricing is not based on cost differences, but on consumers' willingness to pay, purchase volume, purchase timing or other characteristics. The purpose of price discrimination is usually to maximize the company's profits by fully tapping the payment ability and demand elasticity of different consumers [2]. (First-degree price discrimination (perfect price discrimination), second-degree price discrimination (quantity price discrimination), third-degree price discrimination (market segment price discrimination)) This article will explore how price discrimination affects customer satisfaction when taking a taxi and how to address this issue, including different pricing targeting different consumer groups, big data fraud against existing customers, and squeezing consumer surplus.

If drivers discriminate against passengers based on location, this discrimination should occur uniformly among passengers from the same location and result in similar wait times and cancellation rates across passengers. Although I did not explicitly test how service varies across spaces, it is possible that neighborhoods alone or in combination with individual characteristics affect service quality. Therefore, having stations with different characteristics could allow testing of how service varies across spaces, which could inform future research [3].

Therefore, statistics, analysis and research in this area are very important, and how to make customers aware of price discrimination and how to solve price discrimination is also an interesting question. In shared transportation, price discrimination has a multi-faceted impact on user experience.

2. Literature review

Through literature review, we have summarized and found many reasons that lead to price discrimination affecting customer experience, and the causes of the problem mainly focus on personalized pricing and consumer surplus.

When it comes to personalized pricing, price discrimination leads to a lower customer experience.

A customer recently reported that Didi Chuxing provided different price quotes for the same route to different users. Many others shared similar experiences, noting price discrepancies not only between new and old users but also between Apple and Android users. While price discrimination based on spending power is common in market economies, raising prices without consumers' knowledge infringes on their rights. A survey by China Youth Daily found that 63.4% of respondents believe this practice is widespread, and 51.3% have experienced it themselves [4].

Shared transportation platforms may charge different fees to different users based on data such as user usage habits and payment ability. For example, users who frequently use the platform may receive discounts, while users who use it occasionally may have to pay higher fees. This personalized pricing may cause users to feel treated differently and affect their trust in the platform. Users in different locations may experience different prices. For example, prices in the city center are generally higher than in the suburbs. This price discrimination based on location may make some users feel unfair, especially when they live in areas with higher prices. The matching degree between taxi market supply and demand at different times of the day and the popularity of taxi-hailing apps are the fundamental reasons that influence customers to use third-party taxi-hailing apps [5]. Chinese consumers have widely complained about price discrimination on major tech platforms, with over 1,300 reports on Sina's Black Cat platform by June. Complaints span companies like Alibaba, JD, Pinduoduo, Meituan, Didi, and more. Price discrimination is especially common in services like online travel and ride-hailing, where costs are less standardized. Despite denials from

companies, most consumers believe personalized pricing is widespread, with 88% suspecting platforms use data to maximize profits and 60% having experienced it themselves. Companies are reverting to a historical pricing model where prices vary for different customers, like pre-fixed price tag days. Today, data like birthdate, location, and online behavior influence personalized pricing strategies. The lack of transparency makes it hard for consumers to know if they're getting a deal or being overcharged. This issue is exacerbated by the easy availability of personal data on black markets in China, fueling mistrust and concerns over privacy [6].

In terms of Consumer surplus, price discrimination will lead to a decline in customer experience

While price discrimination may increase the profitability of the platform, research shows that users usually enjoy a certain consumer surplus, that is, they are willing to pay more than they pay. This consumer surplus can increase user satisfaction with the service, but if price discrimination is too obvious or frequent, it may reduce this surplus and affect the user experience. Moreover, in many cases, taxi companies blur the definition of dynamic pricing and price discrimination, which is undoubtedly a disaster for customers who do not understand the purpose and definition of price discrimination. The starting point of dynamic pricing is to increase prices to attract more suppliers in order to meet a large demand. Price discrimination is the company's desire to gain more profits and encroach on consumer surplus.

Dynamic pricing mechanisms that are based on negotiations or auctions in electronic commerce have largely avoided the customers' wrath that Amazon experienced in their dynamic pricing "experiment." As Dickson and Kalapurakal (1994) argue, price discrimination is typically considered fair as long as all buyers have the possibility to achieve all price levels. Thus, price discrimination can be achieved without fear of any customer retribution by exploiting different levels of search costs, quantity discounts, or time of transactions. This may not hold, however, when using an adaptive threshold price. While an adaptive threshold price will serve a higher percentage of consumers, dynamic pricing based on an individual's specific offer history may undermine the perceived fairness or satisfaction of participants in such markets [7]. The tension between price discrimination and dynamic pricing. While price discrimination can increase profitability by reducing consumer surplus, it risks damaging user satisfaction if perceived as unfair or frequent. Dynamic pricing, intended to balance supply and demand, generally avoids backlash if executed transparently. However, blurring the lines between these practices, especially with adaptive threshold pricing, can undermine consumer trust and satisfaction. Effective dynamic pricing must ensure perceived fairness to maintain customer loyalty and avoid the pitfalls seen in controversial pricing experiments.

In the described elastic price market environment, consumers tend to have extensive bargaining experience and tend to develop rules of thumb to guide their behavior and expectations in future bargaining situations. Most customers believe that charging different customers differently is unfair and often consider it illegal, especially in an online environment. Regardless of these consumer perceptions, price discrimination is legal in most cases, as long as the implementation is not centered on "suspect categories" such as race. Therefore, many companies still use price discrimination strategies despite the risk of causing adverse reactions from customers. Third-degree price discrimination is implemented in a revenue management policy, through which a company selectively assigns higher or lower prices to different groups of consumers [8].

3. Method

To study the dependent variable: "What impact does the price difference between you and others have on your online taxi experience?", it can be abbreviated as "The impact of price discrimination

on taxi experience". Assign values to the variable, from dissatisfied to satisfied, 1 to 5, the higher the value, the more satisfied.

Independent variable: Are customers aware of price discrimination: Assign values to the variable, 1 for not knowing, 2 for aware of discrimination. How often do you use online taxi services? Assign values to the variable, 1 to 4, the greater the frequency. Age: 1, under 18 years old; 2, 18-25 years old; 3, 25-40 years old; over 40 years old Gender: 0 female, 1 male.

4. Result

4.1. Frequency statistics

Based on the detailed analysis in Table 1, we can clearly observe that among the 61 respondents in this survey, as many as 38 individuals, or 62.3% of the total number of respondents, have not heard of the concept of "price discrimination" or are not aware that they are facing its effects. This phenomenon may be attributed to the fact that price discrimination is not widely visible in everyday life, or it may reflect the fact that even though some respondents are actually exposed to price discrimination, they are not aware of their situation due to a lack of awareness, which is something we need to explore further.

Table 1. Frequency statistics of perceived price discrimination

perception	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	23	37.7	37.7	37.7
No	38	62.3	62.3	100.0
Total	61	100.0	100.0	

As can be seen from Table 2, in this survey, most respondents said they were "somewhat dissatisfied" or "indifferent" or "somewhat satisfied" with their online car-hailing experience, and the overall satisfaction was at a medium level. The frequency distribution of various types of satisfaction was also relatively uniform. From a specific comparison, about 40% of the respondents said they were "relatively satisfied" and "very satisfied" with their online car-hailing experience, and slightly more than 30% of the respondents said they were "somewhat dissatisfied" and "very dissatisfied" with their online car-hailing experience, which was slightly higher overall. Therefore, overall, the respondents' satisfaction with their online car-hailing experience was at a medium-to-high level.

Table 2. Frequency statistics of satisfaction with online rental car experience

satisfaction	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very dissatisfied	5	8.2	8.2	8.2
Somewhat dissatisfied	13	21.3	21.3	29.5
Indifferent	19	31.1	31.1	60.7
Somewhat satisfied	16	26.2	26.2	86.9
Very satisfied	8	13.1	13.1	100.0
Total	61	100.0	100.0	

4.2. Cross-analysis

This study examined the correlation between price discrimination perception and satisfaction with online taxi services. Through cross-analysis, it was found that among those who knew or perceived that they had experienced price discrimination, the data showed that 17.4% of the respondents were extremely dissatisfied with online taxi services, and another 39.1% of the respondents were highly dissatisfied. The two groups accounted for 56.5% in total, indicating that more than half of these users had a negative evaluation of online taxi services. On the contrary, among those who had not heard of the concept of price discrimination or did not know that there was such treatment, the distribution of satisfaction was completely different. Among them, 15.8% of the respondents were very satisfied, and 34.2% were relatively satisfied. The sum of the two groups was equal to 50%, which means that among users who were not affected by the concept of price discrimination, about 20.4% of the users were not affected by the concept of price discrimination. The sum of the two groups was equal to 50%, which means that about half of the users who were not affected by the perception of price discrimination had a positive or relatively satisfied attitude towards online taxi services. Figure 1 further supports the above analysis in the form of a visual chart.

Table 3. Cross-tabulation of perceived price discrimination and satisfaction with online car rental experience

		perception * satisfaction Crosstabulation					
		satisfaction-Very dissatisfied	satisfaction-Somewhat dissatisfied	satisfaction-Indifferent	satisfaction-Somewhat satisfied	satisfaction-Very satisfied	Total
perception -Yes	Count	4	9	5	3	2	23
	Expected Count	1.9	4.9	7.2	6.0	3.0	23.0
	% within perception	17.4%	39.1%	21.7%	13.0%	8.7%	100.0%
perception -No	Count	1	4	14	13	6	38
	Expected Count	3.1	8.1	11.8	10.0	5.0	38.0
	% within perception	2.6%	10.5%	36.8%	34.2%	15.8%	100.0%
Total	Count	5	13	19	16	8	61
	Expected Count	5.0	13.0	19.0	16.0	8.0	61.0
	% within perception	8.2%	21.3%	31.1%	26.2%	13.1%	100.0%

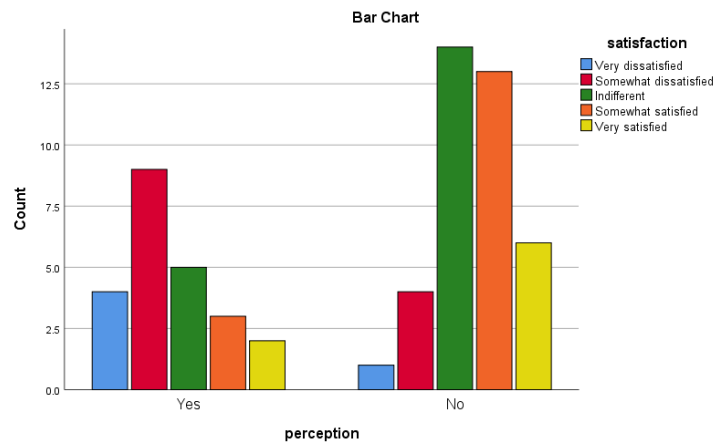


Figure 1. Cross-tabulation analysis of perceived price discrimination and satisfaction with online car rental experience

4.3. Chi-square tests

In order to further explore the potential relationship between perceived price discrimination and online car-hailing service satisfaction, we further implemented a chi-square test to verify whether the two are independent or significantly correlated. According to the results in Table 4, we can find that there are 5 cells (50% of the total number of cells) with an expected frequency lower than 5. This finding suggests that we need to turn our attention to the results of Fisher's exact test to assess its significance. We found that the exact Sig. (two-sided) is 0.010, which is less than 0.05, so we can say that the relationship between perceived price discrimination and online car-hailing experience satisfaction has passed the chi-square test at a significance level of 0.05, which means that perceived price discrimination and online car-hailing experience satisfaction are not independent of each other, but influence each other.

Table 4. Table of chi-square test for perception and satisfaction

Chi-Square Tests						
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	13.355 ^a	4	0.010	0.007		
Likelihood Ratio	13.444	4	0.009	0.015		
Fisher's Exact Test	12.505			0.010		
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.429 ^b	1	0.002	0.002	0.001	0.001
N of Valid Cases	61					

a. 5 cells (50.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.89.

b. The standardized statistic is 3.071.

The regression results show that people who are aware of price discrimination are less satisfied with their taxi experience. There is a negative correlation.

Overall, the main factors affecting user satisfaction are the frequency of using online taxi services and whether users are aware of price discrimination. Low frequency will reduce satisfaction, because not only people who often take the car are not familiar with price changes, but also have a

sharper perception of price changes, resulting in lower satisfaction. And price discrimination awareness will also reduce satisfaction.

We find an equation that can show the relationship between satisfaction and factors:

$$\text{satisfy} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{discrimination} + \alpha_2 \text{frequent} + \alpha_3 \text{gender} + \alpha_4 \text{age}$$

Table 5. Table of regration of satisfaction and other factors

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	m1	m2	m3	m4
VARIABLES	satisf	satisf	satisf	satisf
frequency		0.3421** (2.3146)		0.3118** (2.3146)
gender	-0.1337 (-0.4748)	-0.3188 (-1.1256)	0.0109 (0.0421)	-0.1633 (-0.6252)
age	-0.0081 (-0.0628)	-0.0260 (-0.2084)	-0.0151 (-0.1287)	-0.0312 (-0.2746)
discrimination			-0.9627*** (-3.6079)	-0.9253*** (-3.5908)
Constant	3.1219*** (7.7666)	2.3035*** (4.3904)	4.3924*** (8.6500)	3.5972*** (6.0158)
Observations	61	61	61	61
R-squared	0.004	0.089	0.189	0.260

Note: T- statistics in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

In the questionnaire, we provided a semi-open question, asking everyone if they encountered price discrimination, we would provide several solutions, and everyone would rate the satisfaction of the solutions. More people were very satisfied with the coupons, we found this to be an interesting phenomenon, and raised some doubts, for merchants, it would be a loss of profit, why don't we just lower the price. So, we started with customer psychology and found the anchoring effect, which is an important concept in behavioral economics, referring to the fact that people are affected by a certain initial information (anchor point) when making decisions, even if this information may be irrelevant. Whether online or in a physical store, shopping around for a good or service usually involves constant reference to the prices. However, it's the initial price a consumer is exposed to that becomes a consistent reference point when shopping around. The tendency for a person to rely heavily on the first piece of information they receive when making decisions is known as the anchoring effect. The anchoring effect is a type of cognitive bias—a systematic error in thinking that affects people's judgment and decision-making. Anchoring plays a role in decisions that involve numerical values such as prices. People often use heuristics, or mental shortcuts, to make decisions. The anchoring effect is a type of cognitive bias because people tend to rely on their first piece of information, and they can either decide too quickly and fail to shop for better prices or

overlook other information, such as the quality of the product [9]. This effect is also seen in taxi services, especially in pricing and passenger selection.

We found another 60 customers and provided them with a hypothetical experiment. Randomly divide the participants into two groups, one group sees a higher initial price (for example, \$20), and the other group sees a regular initial taxi price (for example, \$15). Give the user with the higher initial price a coupon to reduce the taxi price to 15. Do not give any discounts to the regular group, so that the taxi price remains at 15. Record the participants' acceptance and satisfaction with this price. As a result, we found that 63% of customers in the normal price group were satisfied with taxis, while 80% of customers in the discount group chose to be relatively satisfied. The anchoring effect shows that in the case of price discrimination, the solution of giving coupons will increase customer satisfaction, which is why giving coupons is a better solution than lowering prices. Encourage users to continue using services by providing coupons, reward programs, etc., and provide discounts during peak hours to reduce the negative impact of price fluctuations.

5. Discussion

Public pricing algorithm:

The platform can disclose the basic principles of its pricing algorithm to let users understand how the price is determined. This can increase users' understanding and acceptance of price changes. Among the ten major provisions on the processing of personal information, the one prohibiting the use of data to discriminate against existing customers on prices has attracted the most attention. Netizens also appreciated the requirement to obtain personal consent when online services collect personal information. The law states: "More and more companies use data analysis to evaluate consumer characteristics for commercial marketing, and some companies discriminate on prices based on the data obtained on consumers' financial status, consumption habits, and price sensitivity." [10] This shows that the Chinese government has found the problem of price discrimination in all walks of life, not just Didi. The phenomenon of squeezing consumer surplus also exists in other industries. Now relevant laws have been established to pay attention to and solve this problem. Chinese law regulates price control behaviors based on big data, especially the supervision of travel platforms such as Didi, to protect consumers from the impact of unfair pricing strategies.

However, Ride-hailing dynamic pricing algorithms learn AI bias through ride-hailing usage patterns in demographically diverse neighborhoods. Methods used to measure bias in ride-hailing AI can be adapted to examine bias in geo-based datasets of predictive AI models with continuous outcomes. If the differential impact of outcomes is not accounted for, it will remain in the data when it is reused for smart city development, and it may cause further differential impacts depending on how the data is used. From a policy perspective, the lack of appropriate transparency measures for data collection and AI decisions enforced on companies may result in differential impacts. Ultimately, without algorithmic transparency, algorithmic bias cannot be mitigated [11].

Provide price estimates:

Provide accurate price estimates before users place an order, so that users can clearly understand the expected costs before traveling and reduce dissatisfaction caused by price fluctuations.

The anchoring effect makes giving coupons a useful way to improve customer satisfaction.

Dynamic pricing cap:

Set a cap on dynamic pricing to prevent excessive price increases during peak demand periods and protect user interests.

Promotions and rewards:

Encourage users to continue using services by providing coupons, reward programs, etc., and provide discounts during peak hours to reduce the negative impact of price fluctuations. The anchoring effect makes giving coupons a useful way to improve customer satisfaction.

6. Research deficiency and prospect

In our experiment, the time was short, and we could not make perfect use of the information collection channels. Because of this, we were only able to gather 61 pieces of biased data that did not accurately reflect the state of society. Furthermore, several more grounded assumptions on price discrimination are absent from the anchoring experiment. Even though our research is not exhaustive, it nonetheless highlights the professional ignorance of economics that certain members of society suffer from, as well as the phenomenon of companies exploiting gaps in customer knowledge to squeeze out excess demand, among other phenomena devoid of any regard for business ethics and solely focused on profit. In the future, I think there will be more chances to spread awareness among the general public and assist everyone in recognizing the differences between price discrimination and dynamic pricing.

7. Conclusion

The application of price discrimination in shared transportation has complex effects on user experience and behavior. On the one hand, it can improve the availability and efficiency of services through dynamic pricing; on the other hand, if users feel that the prices are opaque or unfair, it may affect their trust and satisfaction with the platform. Thus, they choose other modes of travel, such as taxis, buses, and subways. Shared transportation platforms need to find a balance in pricing strategies and user communication to ensure fair and transparent services, thereby improving user experience.

The research shows that more than half of Didi users have not heard of the concept of price discrimination or unaware that they have experienced it. Passengers who were not affected by the awareness of price discrimination held a positive or relatively satisfactory attitude toward online ride-hailing services. It is mainly reflected in distinct treatment based on the user's smartphone brand and markup during extreme weather or peak periods. Moreover, our survey confirmed that the main factors affecting user satisfaction are using frequency of ride-hailing services and the awareness of price discrimination. Both the low frequency and awareness of price discrimination will reduce satisfaction.

The application of price discrimination in shared transportation has complex effects on consumer experience and behavior. On the one hand, it can improve the availability and efficiency of services through dynamic pricing. On the other hand, price discrimination will affect users' trust and satisfaction with the platform, prompting them to choose other travel modes, such as taxi, bus and subway. Sharing transportation platforms need to find a balance between pricing strategies and user satisfaction to ensure a fair and transparent service that enhances the user experience.

Author contributions

This paper was jointly completed by Ziming Ning and Yunrui Qiu. The two authors worked closely together during the research process, and each assumed different responsibilities. The specific division of labor is as follows:

Ziming Ning:

Data collection and experimental design: responsible for experimental design and data collection, ensuring that the experimental process meets the requirements of the research design, and ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the data.

Data visualization and result presentation: responsible for data organization and visualization, including drawing charts and displaying results.

Data analysis and processing: responsible for the preliminary processing of data, applying statistical software for data analysis, and interpreting and discussing the analysis results.

Paper writing: responsible for writing the results and conclusions of the paper, ensuring that the research findings and conclusions are accurately and clearly stated.

Yunrui Qiu:

Research design and program formulation: accountable for putting forth research questions, taking part in the process of designing and formulating the research program, and deciding on the general structure and course of the study.

Writing the literature review section, gathering, and arranging relevant material, and supplying a theoretical framework for the study are the responsibilities of the literature reviewer.

Writing a paper: in charge of composing the introduction, discussion, and research techniques sections, making sure that the paper's logic and structure are sound.

The person in charge of proofreading and editing a document is accountable for ensuring that all grammar, formatting, and citations are right and for making necessary improvements based on feedback from tutors or reviewers.

Jointly undertaken parts:

Research discussion and decision-making: The two authors jointly participate in the research discussion and negotiate and discuss key decisions in the research process.

Paper finalization: jointly review and revise the final draft of the paper to ensure the overall quality of the paper.

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