Age Discrimination in Chinese Internet Workplace

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Abstract. Due to economic reforms, cultural biases, and rapid technological progress, age discrimination has become widespread in China's online business environment. China is making the transition from central planning to market economy, and measures such as "xiagang" have enabled state-owned companies in China to lay off elderly permanent staff and reduce permanent employee numbers. As the internet industry expands, younger workers who are dynamic are being favored over those perceived to be less adaptable such as older individuals. The "age 35 phenomenon" illustrates how prejudice has been deepened by cultural expectations around gender, family responsibilities, and age. This study investigates all of the elements that contribute to age discrimination and termination trends among Chinese internet businesses. This article covers topics like pertinent policies, shifting labor relations, gender roles and age discrimination - among many others. Research findings indicated that eliminating sociocultural prejudices was just as essential to meeting economic and regulatory challenges, both of which are equally essential. Countermeasures on a national, organizational, and individual level include antidiscrimination legislation, corporate social responsibility programs, retraining programmes, networking events, and skill development activities. Policies and practices that promote inclusiveness have the power to mitigate instability and inequality. This study sheds light on the multiple obstacles elder Chinese internet workers encounter while offering solutions.

Keywords: Age discrimination; Internet industry; China, Layoffs; Labor policy.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

During with the evolution of the world and the progress of society, Chinese Internet industry rose rapidly in the late 1990s and became one of the largest Internet markets in the world under the premise of sustained and rapid development. Therefore, the development of the Internet market has made great contributions to the transformation of Chinese economy. The technology and workplace talent people have become an important demand of the market. More and more companies are developing in the direction of the Internet, hiring more outstanding talent people in the Internet field. For this reason of the fierce competition, some problems began to emerge: the new generation of Internet professionals appears frequently. Young and high-quality talent people are recruited into the company, so lead to the middle-aged employees receiving the company's layoff policy or dismissal policy. Because younger employees are generally considered to be more adaptable to rapid changes in technology and more receptive to new work styles and cultures. In addition, many Internet companies emphasize creative, dynamic and high-intensity work, which leads to a preference for young candidates in the human recruitment process, as the end of the reason for middle-aged candidates even less job opportunities. This phenomenon of age discrimination is becoming more and more prominent or obvious in the field of Internet work in China.

1.2. Related research

Yang noted regarding Chinese employment anti-discrimination Law does not directly address age discrimination, suggesting it still exist within Chinese labor market. Furthermore, Yang explores the development stages of U.S. antidiscrimination legislation as an opportunity for China to learn from previous experiences to strengthen its own anti-discrimination regulations. China lacks the law to age discrimination in employment regulations [1]. Age and turnover intention in China seem to follow a

U-shaped curve; younger and older staffs are more likely to leave, while middle-aged employees remain stabler. Younger employees have more job options and flexibility which leads to greater turnover rates. Rapid growth in social services has created varied job opportunities for experienced older staffs, nonetheless those facing significant workloads or incapacity may also consider leaving. Results suggest age discrimination may play a part in encouraging turnover of older employees in China [2]. Bang explored how age moderates the relationship among volunteers of leader-member exchange (LMX), job satisfaction and intent to stay. Our findings indicated that younger volunteers exhibited stronger professional respect (an element of LMX) and job satisfaction relationships than their counterparts from older age cohorts. Job satisfaction had a greater effect on older volunteers' intention to remain than it did on younger ones, suggesting age differences exist in factors influencing job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Younger workers tend to place greater value on respect and recognition; job satisfaction itself is more essential for retention among older employees. If older workers feel less respected or valued in their position, this could lower job satisfaction and increase turnover intentions [3]. Chen & Chen noted that age discrimination may explain the lower share of elderly rehires in 2004 and 2006 compared to previous years. While not explicitly discussing layoffs or age discrimination, this document indicates that improving retiree reemployment rate is essential in maintaining sufficient labor supply [4]. Tian & Xu discovered high job mobility among migrant workers in eastern China due to their search for better income and working conditions. Migrant workers frequently utilize "try and error" methods when looking for employment; frequently switching jobs in search of better opportunities. Newer migrants typically lack access to labor market information and social integration resources, leading them to make more job changes than older migrants. Older migrant workers may face additional obstacles when searching for jobs due to perceived negative stereotypes about older workers being less capable or productive. Age discrimination could further exacerbate difficulties for older migrants looking to improve their income and conditions [5]. As Li mentioned, China has long been known for age discrimination during layoffs. Employer’s value youth over older workers in hiring processes; thus creating the so-called "age 35 phenomenon." People over 35 find it more challenging to secure non-managerial jobs; two thirds of people aged 35 or above laid off were still searching for jobs after six months. Social expectations surrounding marriage and family responsibilities compound this discrimination against middle-aged workers - especially women in their 30s due to assumptions regarding family obligations [6]. Gallagher discusses China's "xiagang" policy, which allows state-owned enterprises to lay off large numbers of permanent workers through state-owned enterprises. Xiagang specifically targets older permanent employees hired under China's previous lifetime employment system and recently transitioned into market economy with labor contracts; as part of this temporary measure xiagang targets older permanent workers specifically; however due to political status and contributions towards China's development; older permanent SOE workers have been treated differently than younger migrant workers with layoffs occurring differently due to age discrimination [7]. Layoffs were caused by China's economic reforms and privatization initiatives of the 1990s, which resulted in the dismantling of China's danwei system which had provided lifetime employment through state-owned enterprises. Discrimination and lack of respect is particularly prevalent for older domestic care workers (DCWs), particularly less educated laid-off female workers aged 40-60 who may have recently lost their job. Care workers attempt to uphold dignity and counter any disrespect by emphasizing their compassion; they describe their work as having "liangxin", meaning good heart/mind. Yet discrimination continues [8]. Li details China's 996.ICU movement, launched in March 2019 as a protest against overtime work culture within its tech sector. The movement received widespread international and domestic support, illustrating growing dissatisfaction among tech workers due to normalized overtime hours, flat wage growth and health risks imposed by demanding management. However, the movement was unable to inspire further solidarity among tech workers as it did not provide any structural critique of employment relationships [9]. Los, Timmer, & Vries studied the impact of exports on job growth in China from 2001-2006, Chinese exports generated 70 million new jobs during a booming period - mostly among less educated workers. After 2006 however,

domestic demand for non-tradables became more important for job creation than exports; although export-related employment steadily became more skilled as China moved up the value chain. As external demand decreases, older and less educated workers in export industries could become particularly susceptible to layoffs. Age discrimination play a part as employers stereotype older employees as being less productive and target them during layoffs [10].

1.3. Objective

This paper seeks to conduct a detailed examination of the complex factors contributing to age discrimination and layoff patterns within China's internet industry workforce, such as policies, changing economic conditions, cultural biases and stereotyping that contribute to these practices. The goal is to shed light on this increasingly prevalent issue.

The second section will outline the current situation by looking at empirical evidence of age discrimination and related trends, such as layoff policies aimed at older workers. We then explore some of the root causes behind such patterns, such as China's transition towards market economics with xiagang policies, antimonopoly regulations and sociocultural influences such as gender relations obligations or ageism.

The third section will outline comprehensive countermeasures at national, organizational and individual levels. National strategies could include strengthening antidiscrimination legislation and providing financial incentives for equitable hiring practices; organizational measures might include audits on corporate social responsibility issues like inclusive recruitment or employee retraining programs; while individual initiatives might focus on ongoing skills training, networking or mentorship initiatives.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Current Situation and Characteristics

China's employment landscape has undergone profound change over the years due to economic reforms and privatization initiatives from the 1990s through 2000s; these have created an infuriatingly complex environment for younger as well as older workers [8]. Furthermore, internet development has brought age discrimination issues even closer to home [8].

2.1.1. Age Discrimination

The "age 35 phenomenon" has become an all-too-clear example of age discrimination within the internet sector. People over 35 often face greater difficulty finding non-managerial jobs due to stereotypes that dismiss them as less capable or productive [6]. This trend is particularly evident for older migrant workers who face additional hurdles when searching for better income and working conditions [5].

The 996.ICU Movement, launched in March 2019, has shed light on China's tech sector's overtime work culture. Although receiving international and domestic support, this movement could not significantly challenge structural problems within employment relationships; its limited focus may explain why tech workers failed to rally behind it [9].

2.1.2. Layoff Patterns

In order to understand layoff patterns and numbers accurately, one must consider policies like "xiagang," which have enabled state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to target older permanent employees specifically [7]. Transitioning from SOEs into market economies with labor contracts has also altered layoff patterns differently between older permanent SOE workers and younger workers [7].

2.2. Reasons

2.2.1. Economic Factors

The economic factors shaping internet layoffs in China are manifold and have their origin in its transition from central planning to market economies. As a result, their effects have had a deep-seated effect on employment landscape, particularly among older workers.

(1)Xiagang Policy

China's economic reforms have created the "xiagang" policy, enabling state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to discharge large numbers of permanent employees hired under China's previous lifetime employment system. This policy sought to increase efficiency and competitiveness by decreasing labor force levels; specifically focusing on older permanent workers deemed less adaptable for market economies [7].

(2) Switch to Market Economy

The move away from traditional lifetime employment guarantees offered through SOEs to labor contracts has been rapid and profound, leading to greater job mobility as well as decreased job security for older workers who previously enjoyed lifelong job security guarantees [3]. Furthermore, changing labor relations has created unpredictability and instability for many workers.

2.2.2. Anti-Monepoly Factors

Examining anti-monopoly factors when discussing internet layoffs in China necessitates an examination of its wider economic and regulatory environment. As China undergoes its current transition towards marketization, competition and anti-monopoly laws have come to the fore, which has the potential to indirectly alter employment patterns within internet and tech sectors.

(1) China Has Strengthened Antimonopoly Regulations

China has taken steps to tighten antimonopoly and competition regulations in line with global standards and promote fair competition in its rapidly developing economy since 2007. China's tech giants have come under increasing scrutiny from regulatory authorities, who have taken measures to curb any monopolistic practices by the companies, including fines, investigations and new guidelines designed to foster competition and consumer protection [1]. Such actions may alter business strategies or operational models of large internet companies resulting in downsizing, resource reallocation or organizational changes that have an adverse impact on employment levels.

(2) Emphasis on Fair Competition

Anti-monopoly legislation can provide opportunities for smaller and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to flourish. By curbing the dominance of large corporations, regulatory authorities may create more equal playing conditions among SMEs, encouraging innovation and growth from within this group of firms.

(3) Implementation of Antimonopoly Regulations Brought Uncertainty and Challenges

Anti-monopoly regulations introduce both uncertainty and challenges into business environments. Companies may need to reassess their strategies, compliance measures, and organizational structures to conform to new regulations [1]. As they navigate this new landscape of regulation, they may find that temporary instability in employment exists with potential layoffs or hiring freezes while they adapt.

2.2.3. Social and Cultural Factors

Sociocultural factors impacting internet layoffs in China extend far beyond economic or legal considerations, encompassing cultural norms, expectations, and stereotyping which have profound impacts on employment practices and behaviors.

(1) Gender Roles and Family Obligations

Traditional gender roles and family obligations have an enormous influence on employment for middle-aged Chinese women. Employers frequently value youth over experience, leading to what has come to be known as the "age 35 phenomenon", where individuals aged 35+ struggle to secure non-managerial jobs [6]. Women over 35 face further discrimination as social expectations related to

marriage, child rearing, caregiving responsibilities can create additional hurdles to securing internet sector positions [6].

(2) Age Discrimination and Turnover

Age discrimination is an endemic issue in China's labor market, impacting workers of both older and younger ages. Research suggests a U-shaped relationship between age and turnover intention; younger employees drawn by more job options or flexible scheduling tend to have higher turnover rates while older ones may leave due to heavy workloads or perceived incapacity [2]. Middle-aged employees generally remain more secure. This pattern suggests age discrimination may play an integral role in encouraging turnover.

The cultural and societal influences on internet layoffs in China are numerous, reflecting an intricate web of tradition norms, social expectations and contemporary workplace dynamics. Age groups - particularly middle-aged people - face unique challenges that expose underlying biases and stereotypes which contribute to employment disparities. Addressing these issues requires not only legal and economic interventions but also a broader cultural shift toward more inclusive and equitable employment practices.

3. Countermeasures

Throughout this paper, the complex nature and challenges surrounding internet layoffs in China have been examined in depth, emphasizing economic, social, and legal dimensions. This section will address potential countermeasures at various levels - national, organizational and individual - in order to provide a comprehensive set of solutions that might ease current difficulties within China's internet industry.

3.1. National Countermeasures

The Chinese government plays an indispensable role in shaping its employment environment. Through legislation and policy implementation, government interventions have the power to significantly affect organizational behavior and create more equitable working environments [11].

3.1.1. Regulatory Frameworks

At the core of any systemic change lies legal parameters which establish organizational behavior. Current labor laws provide some protection yet may fail to address all of the unique challenges brought on by an evolving internet sector [12]. Anti-discrimination laws could be expanded to provide greater protection from age-based discrimination, an issue highlighted by the "age 35 phenomena." Additionally, more stringent regulations could be implemented against companies adopting the "996.ICU" working culture to ensure employees do not overwork themselves and boost both productivity and job satisfaction [13].

3.1.2. Financial Incentives

In addition to regulation, financial incentives can also serve as an effective tool of change. Government can implement subsidies or tax benefits for organizations that demonstrate equitable employment practices such as inclusive hiring and retention policies that do not discriminate based on age [14]. This combination--imposing stricter regulations while offering financial incentives--can create a more equitable employment ecosystem.

3.2. Organizational Countermeasures

While governments provide organizations with a broader framework within which to operate, organizations themselves bear responsibility for upholding ethical and equitable practices. Corporate structures possess considerable freedom in shaping employment outcomes for their workforce [15]. This section will discuss some practical steps organizations can take towards cultivating an equitable and inclusive workplace environment.

3.2.1. Corporate Social Responsibility

In modern business settings, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has come to encompass much more than simply charitable giving - it now also involves employee welfare, customer relationships and serving society at large [16]. Employers must enact equitable employment practices as an integral component of their Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives. Organizations may conduct internal reviews and third-party audits to assess whether existing policies meet CSR benchmarks regarding employment equity [17].

3.2.2. Inclusive Hiring

One of the first steps organizations can take to combat age discrimination and promote diversity is inclusive hiring practices. To overcome the limitations of traditional hiring models that inadvertently favor younger candidates, organizations can implement age-neutral recruitment strategies like anonymizing initial application reviews and employing age-diverse interview panels [18]. Likewise, companies may extend their recruitment outreach on platforms frequented by more diverse job seekers from various ages in order to offer equal opportunities to all.

3.2.3. Employee Retraining Programs

Employee retraining serves two key functions for organizations and their workforces alike. Training offers opportunities for personal growth while increasing productivity and adaptability within an organization. Due to the fast pace of technological innovation in the internet sector, skills obsolescence poses a real and present risk for older workers [19]. By investing in ongoing training programs, however, one can mitigate this risk and keep themselves relevant in today's job market. Organizations can partner with educational institutions or utilize in-house resources to develop targeted training programs that address specific skill gaps. Retraining initiatives may reduce layoffs by maintaining a highly skilled, versatile workforce capable of adapting quickly to an ever-evolving sector [20].

At the end of the day, companies and organizations wield tremendous power over their internal working environment. By adopting proactive strategies focusing on Corporate Social Responsibility, inclusive hiring practices, and employee retraining programs, they can contribute to creating more stable and equitable employment conditions within their own workplaces.

3.3. Individual Countermeasures

While macro-level interventions from national and organizational entities are crucial in the quest for equitable and secure employment, individual agency should not be ignored in the pursuit of equitable employment conditions [21]. Employees in volatile sectors such as internet need to take proactive steps in order to boost employability and lessen risks such as layoffs and age discrimination.

3.3.1. Skill Development

As the internet sector experiences rapid technological development, employees must embrace an environment of lifelong learning to ensure employability over the long haul. Skill development should not be seen as a luxury but as essential in order to stay employable indefinitely [22]. As it pertains to this particular industry, employees must adopt a culture of lifelong learning in order to keep up with new tools, languages, and methodologies.

3.3.2. Networking and Mentorship

Alongside technical competencies, professional networking and mentoring provide invaluable assets for career advancement and security. Networking can open doors to new opportunities, give insights into industry trends, and provide safety during periods of employment instability. Platforms such as industry conferences provide ample networking opportunities [23]. Mentorship provides an alternative, structured path to career development. By seeking guidance from industry veterans, individuals can gain insights into navigating workplace issues like age discrimination.

Individual measures aimed at skill development and networking are vital complements to institutional efforts aimed at creating equitable employment conditions [24]. Employees should develop a multi-pronged strategy combining hard skills with social acumen in order to effectively navigate today's internet sector.

National strategies such as strong regulatory frameworks and financial incentives can lay a solid foundation for equitable employment practices. Organizational measures, particularly corporate social responsibility and retraining programs, offer more localized solutions to curb layoffs and promote inclusivity. Individual initiatives focusing on skill development and networking strengthen employee resilience during volatile job markets. When combined together, these countermeasures form a comprehensive plan aimed at creating an equitable and stable employment landscape thereby mitigating challenges.

4. Conclusion

This paper conducted an in-depth investigation of the complex factors contributing to age discrimination and layoff patterns within China's internet industry workforce, such as relevant policies, changing economic conditions, cultural biases and stereotyping - an ever more pressing problem.

The analysis identified several key drivers of age discrimination and layoffs in this sector. Economically, policies like xiagang have allowed state-owned enterprises to target older permanent workers during China's shift towards market economies. Antimonopoly regulations have created uncertainty that could contribute to layoffs as companies restructure. Culturally, biases related to gender, family responsibilities and ageism create employment challenges for older workers. Rapid technological change has caused employers to prefer young workers as more adaptable. Empirically, age 35 phenomenon clearly displays discrimination while research proves higher turnover intentions for both younger and older employees than the more stable middle-aged workforce.

To address these multiple challenges, this paper proposed countermeasures at national, organizational and individual levels. Nationally, strengthening anti-discrimination legislation and providing financial incentives for equitable hiring may prove effective; organizations should focus on corporate social responsibility programs with inclusive recruitment as their priority while individuals should prioritize ongoing skills training, networking and mentorship programs as key areas. Although further research may be necessary, comprehensive interventions such as these are likely to promote more equitable employment conditions within China's internet sector - providing actionable yet nuanced policy guidance on mitigating age discrimination issues in China's internet sector while providing actionable and nuanced policy guidance on mitigating age discrimination issues.

In conclusion, this paper has provided insight into the complex motivations underlying age inequality in Chinese internet workplaces and detailed the problems prior to providing solutions. These insights may inform future efforts at creating inclusive environments.

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