

[ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE]

Socioeconomic Outcomes as Determinants of Pathao Riders' Welfare in the Platform Economy

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ABSTRACT

The swift expansion of ride-sharing services has changed urban mobility and employment trends by providing commuters with convenience and riders with flexible earning options in Kathmandu. Pathao riders, however, deal with a number of difficulties, such as health hazards, erratic income, long workdays, and no social protection. This study looks into the socioeconomic factors that affect the welfare of Pathao passengers. A survey-based research design was used to gather data from 150 riders in 15 different sites using Likert-scale questionnaires. The results reveal that riders significantly improve urban mobility because the majority of respondents believe Pathao services are quicker and more convenient to use than traditional modes of transportation. Meanwhile, riders' physical and mental health suffers somewhat, and their income is frequently insufficient to pay for living needs. Many participants engage as part-time workers or have Pathao as an extra source of income, and they are moderately satisfied with whatever they earn, revealing the variety

of their individual experiences. So, the study brings out a relationship among financial circumstances, employment contracts, and riders' well-being, showing the need for policy measures to improve job stability, social safety, and common well-being in Nepal's developing platform economy.

Keywords: Pathao riders, platform economy, socioeconomic outcomes, urban mobility, rider welfare

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of ride-sharing services has changed urban transportation by providing ease, affordability, and job opportunities. The primary component of this service, the riders, however, suffer a number of difficulties, including safety issues, unclear regulations, and uneven economic circumstances. This study identifies the main problems faced by Pathao riders while examining their accountabilities in Kathmandu's transportation environment. Even in the United States, transportation network companies (TNCs), were uncertain about the efficiency, faster service and an extensive expansion (Han et al., 2019).

Entrepreneurs Hussain M. Elius, Fahim Saleh, and Adnan Shifat launched Pathao in 2015 with the intention of addressing commuters' and businesses' most urgent problems in transportation (Abdullah et al., 2020). Through its Pathao Fulfilment service, the company supports businesses with delivery and cash collection; through Pathao Rides, it offers a transportation service similar to Uber but with motorcycles. Serving several areas with the same foundational infrastructure, Pathao intends to grow its business to include additional delivery services like food delivery (Frieschlad, 2017). Because of shifting demand and commission reductions, drivers frequently have inconsistent revenue (Rogers, 2017).

Nepalese gig workers don't have health insurance, pensions, or stable employment (Amgain, 2025). Globally, ride-sharing services have transformed urban transportation by providing flexibility, cost, and convenience. With the diversification of its services to include ride-sharing, delivery, and logistics solutions, Pathao has become a major player in Nepal. Particularly in cities, services like Pathao are changing the way people move around as a result of the growing use of smartphones and digital technologies. In order to maintain growth and adjust to changing user needs, it is crucial to comprehend client behaviour and satisfaction (Bhat et al., 2024).

Pathao, a ride-sharing app that was introduced in Nepal in 2018, is a prime example of this change in South Asia. Pathao, which started in Bangladesh, moved to Kathmandu to satisfy the rising demand for accessible, reasonably priced, and technologically advanced transportation (Tasneem, 2020). Ridesourcing is said to be a more effective form of transportation than taxis since it can instantly link drivers and passengers. Nevertheless, it is still unclear if ridesourcing is always more efficient and how much more efficient "algorithm-based hailing" of ridesourcing is than the more conventional "sight-based street hailing" of taxis. The effectiveness of ridesourcing and taxis is assessed in this paper using the vehicle occupancy rate (VOR) (Kong et al., 2020). All over the world, digital platforms have transformed how people get around cities, changing both the way we work and how we commute. Ride-hailing services, usually accessed through mobile apps, have quickly become popular alternatives to traditional public transportation in many urban areas (Cramer & Krueger, 2016).

Nearly all respondents were familiar with the brand, and a sizable percentage had utilised Pathao's services, indicating a high level of awareness and adoption of the service. This broad use demonstrates Pathao's solid market penetration and recognition as a trustworthy service supplier. Pathao can, however, better target its efforts and cater to particular client wants by comprehending the subtleties of service utilisation, such as the

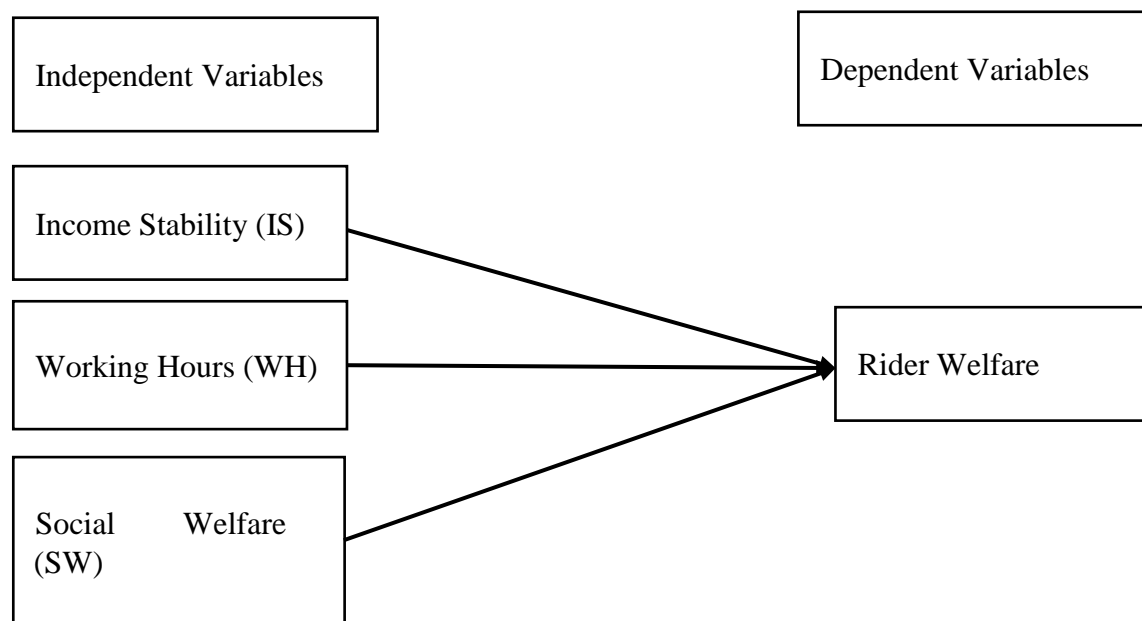
inclination for ride sharing over delivery (Chakraborty, 2024). The world's greatest cause of death for children and young adults aged 5 to 29 is road accidents. Deaths from car accidents are more likely to occur in low-income nations like Nepal (Atreya et al., 2021).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework mentioned below is developed based on the literature reviewed-identifies important factors and their connections, to support the research. Taking socioeconomic, legal, and environmental aspects into account, this framework is based on the accountabilities that Pathao riders play in Kathmandu's transportation system and the problems they encounter during service delivery.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Income Stability (IS)

Income stability is an individual's level of reliability and trustworthiness in their wages. Financial stress might result from two riders' earning the same average monthly salary, but one may receive it consistently while the other experiences substantial variations. This study measures riders' income steadiness by questioning them about variations in their daily salary, their level of confidence in forecasting future earnings, and their reliance on less dependable sources such as bonuses or tips. So, the financial planning, including obtaining loans, paying rent, and providing for a family are extremely challenging when income is unpredictable. Further, existing uncertainty also raises stress levels and adversely affects mental health, which lowers overall efficiency (Alam, 2022).

Working Hours (WH)

The variable "Working Hours" is defined as a combination of the amount, timing, and intensity of riders' work, rather than just the overall amount of time spent working. Due to low base pay, platform systems often require riders to work long shifts and encourage them to concentrate on peak-demand hours, which results in periods of high activity interspersed with inactive periods. Total hours and days worked, time spent during peak hours, riders' control over their schedules, delivery completion rate, and time pressure are all used to measure it. Long and demanding schedules promote fatigue and burnout, while high-pressure work and lack of control raise the chance of accidents, disrupt work-life balance, interfere with sleep, family, and education, and ultimately impact mental health and job satisfaction (Fiksenbaum et al., 2010).

Social Welfare (RSW)

China's largest online ride-sharing platform's impact on social welfare. We compute the implied wage rate of passengers under the tenable assumption that, when the marginal advantage of time savings surpasses the increased expense, customers will switch from traditional transportation to online ride-sharing. Next, we compute the social welfare that results from the ride-sharing platform's reduction of waiting times and waiting uncertainty using the passenger wage rate (Wang et al., 2022).

Rider's Welfare (RW)

The swift growth of the platform economy in Nepal, especially in major cities like Kathmandu, has drastically changed social mobility, income creation, and labour patterns. Because there aren't many official sector jobs available to young people, platforms like Pathao, Indrive, and Foodmandu have opened up new avenues for flexible employment. Although, individuality, and market access are promised by these platforms, the socioeconomic outcomes that riders serve as the backbone of these digital platforms experience are still incredibly unequal and poorly understood (Chakraborty, 2024).

The vast majority of platform riders in Kathmandu work in unstable environments with inconsistent pay, little social security, and no official labour laws. Although many riders rely on this labour as their only source of income, welfare consequences are inconsistent and unpredictable due to algorithmic management, commission-based payment systems, and a lack of collective bargaining procedures. Additionally, riders' experiences and judgments of well-being are significantly shaped by their socioeconomic features, including household dependency, asset ownership, income level, and education (Chakraborty, 2024; Alam, 2022). However, how these socioeconomic factors interact with platform-based job structures to affect overall rider welfare has not been sufficiently explored in Nepalese research yet.

Although the platform economy seems to offer economic prospects, concerns regarding its inclusivity and sustainability still exist. Do platform-based ridesharing jobs raise the standard of living for riders, or do they perpetuate cycles of financial insecurity while posing as flexible and entrepreneurial opportunities? In Kathmandu's platform economy, how do elements like education, income diversity, working hours, and access to digital technologies affect riders' well-being? Understanding the wider socioeconomic effects of digital labour in Nepal requires answering these concerns.

The study's main issue is the dearth of analytical knowledge and empirical data regarding how socioeconomic factors impact rider welfare in Kathmandu's platform economy. In order to create rules that guarantee fair and sustainable labour practices in the expanding digital economy, legislators, platform businesses, and labour organisations must first clearly evaluate these interactions. Therefore, a thorough examination of the socioeconomic factors influencing rider welfare is necessary to spot trends in resilience, inequality, and inclusion in Nepal's changing platform-based labour market.

The main objectives of this study are to investigate how Pathao riders help make urban mobility easier in the Kathmandu District, to determine the main problems in the personal and professional levels of those riders, and to examine how their economic situation and employment conditions relate to one another.

DATA AND METHODS

The survey study design was employed to gather information from Kathmandu's various regions. This study employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Only the Patho riders in the Kathmandu Valley participated in the study as responders. As a comment, a single statement was asked directly. In Kathmandu, fifteen distinct locations were chosen for the study. For the purpose of gathering data, 150 Pathao riders were given research Likert scale questionnaires, which ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree. Questionnaires that were filled out were used for the analysis. A questionnaire was given to the respondents in order to gather the data. There were ten statements on each questionnaire.

In general, the distribution of the surveys took place between 6.30 am and 6.30 pm. They completed all of the surveys in ten to fifteen minutes. The collected data were analysed using the SPSS software version 20.0 (Chaudhary, 2023). This software assisted the researchers in determining the study's goal by analysing the data using statistical techniques like mean and standard deviation. This study took into account the ethical considerations that were mentioned at the top of the questionnaires. Informed consent was taken from the respondents prior to the interview for their voluntary participation. Research goals and the modality of data use were informed for maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents in the research. Likewise, questions were designed to avoid harm to the respondents with respect to the respondents' cultural, ethnic and other sensitive issues. Confidentiality in data was maintained as per the Statistical Act 2079. The respondents who agreed and provided consent to participate filled in the questionnaires on their own.

RESULTS

The study's conclusions were derived by using statistical tools such as Mean and Standard deviation, with its objectives.

Table 1*Contribution of Pathao Riders in making Urban Mobility Convenient*

	N	Mean	S.D.
How often do you provide rides in a typical day within Kathmandu?	150	2.83	1.089
To what extent do you believe Pathao services make travel more convenient for city residents?	150	3.73	1.060
In your opinion, how do Pathao services compare with traditional public transport in terms of accessibility and speed?	150	3.67	1.184
Total	150		

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 1 highlights the 150 Pathao bike riders' survey results of three questions designed to establish their contribution to ensuring a more efficient mobility system for the citizens of the Kathmandu District. A mean of 2.83 with a standard deviation of 1.089 for the question 'How often do you deliver ride services on an average day in Kathmandu?' reveals that on average, they deliver a moderate number of ride services on any given day, but with variations among the groups. There are also some who are active on a frequent basis, but some ride on an occasional or part-time basis. A higher mean of 3.73 with a standard deviation of 1.060 for the question 'To what extent are you convinced that Pathao ride services improve the convenience for city dwellers?' reveals that nearly all of them are convinced that Pathao ride services are making a significant contribution to improving the convenience of travel for city dwellers by providing faster and more reliable ride mobility solutions than those currently available for transport between locations within Kathmandu. A mean of 3.67 with a standard deviation of 1.184 for the question 'In what manner are Pathao ride services comparatively more accessible and faster

Table 2*Problems encountered by the Pathao Riders*

	N	Mean	S.D.
To what extent do you feel that being a Pathao rider affects your physical or mental health?	150	3.18	1.254
What is your average monthly income from Pathao services?	150	3.89	1.154
Do you consider your current income from Pathao sufficient to meet your living expenses?	150	3.03	1.279
What type of employment arrangement do you have with Pathao?	150	2.06	.829
How satisfied are you with the earnings, incentives, and support provided by Pathao as a digital platform employer?	150	3.01	1.329
Total	150		

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 2 focuses on the health, income, employment status, and general well-being of Pathao riders in Kathmandu by summarising five important characteristics that represent their socioeconomic status. Consistency across all factors is ensured by data from 150 respondents. Riders face some degree of strain from their profession, as

indicated by the moderate effect indicated by the mean score of 3.18 for the impact on bodily or mental health. Although there are variances due to varying job intensity and schedules, the average monthly income of 3.89 indicates that the majority of riders make within the upper-middle and upper-income groups. Many riders believe their incomes to be insufficient to pay their living expenditures, as indicated by the income sufficiency mean of 3.03.

The majority of participants are part-time or occasional riders, according to the job type mean of 2.06, which is also in line with the flexible nature of platform-based labour. Last but not least, a mean score of 3.01 for satisfaction with earnings and incentives suggests a range of opinions about Pathao's support and pay structure, from neutral to mildly unhappy.

The findings reflect the complicated socioeconomic realities of gig employment in Kathmandu and demonstrate that, despite Pathao's moderate compensation and flexibility, riders still confront health, financial, and satisfaction-related issues.

Table 3

The Riders' Financial and Employment Condition

	N	Mean	S.D.
To what extent do you feel that being a Pathao rider affects your physical or mental health?	150	3.18	1.254
What is your average monthly income from Pathao services?	150	3.89	1.154
Do you consider your current income from Pathao sufficient to meet your living expenses?	150	3.03	1.279
What type of employment arrangement do you have with Pathao?	150	2.06	.829
How satisfied are you with the earnings, incentives, and support provided by Pathao as a digital platform employer?	150	3.01	1.329
Total	150		

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 3 presents a descriptive summary of the responses of Pathao riders in Kathmandu District on health, income, employment arrangement, and job satisfaction according to 150 rider respondents. In response to the item measuring the impact that being a Pathao rider has on either physical or mental health, the mean score of 3.18 (S.D. = 1.254) indicates that most riders experience a moderate impact with variations, suggesting health impacts are varied among respondents. For monthly income, a mean of 3.89 (S.D. = 1.154) showed that most riders earned middle to higher ranges of income, though earnings were not uniformly distributed. On the scale of income sufficiency, the mean score of 3.03 (S.D. = 1.279) reflects a more neutral view since many riders felt their income was only partly adequate for living expenses, creating financial uncertainty in platform-based work. The employment arrangement item had a mean of 2.06 (S.D. = 0.829), which suggested that most riders work part-time with Pathao or supplement their income with it. However, this pattern was relatively consistent across the riders. Lastly, satisfaction with earnings, incentives, and support had a mean score of 3.01 (S.D. = 1.329), reflecting a moderate level of satisfaction, though wide variations existed.

DISCUSSION

The emergence of digital platforms for workers in South Asia has changed the dynamics of work, earning, and commuting in cities. This research makes significant additions to the empirical body of research on platforms and their relation to the socioeconomic determinants of workers' welfare in South Asia by empirically studying how earning stability, working time, and social security provisions affect the Pathao workers in the context of Kathmandu. The results show that even as Pathao workers are important in improving commute services and income accessibility in cities, their welfare is impacted by informal employment, unstable income, and health-related stress. In relation to defining research gaps in broader debates in academia on the nature of gig economy jobs in South Asia, findings of empirical research enable more informed discussion of structural challenges in platform-related worker services in South Asia.

Findings reveal that Pathao riders view Pathao's service to be faster, more accessible, and convenient compared to traditional means of transport in Kathmandu. These findings are in line with vast literature worldwide and in the region, which confirms that ride-sharing reduces search time and distances, and hence Pathao fills the gaps in such cities where transport is not easily accessible (Shahi, 2025; Shabur & Ali, 2024).

Nevertheless, the literature points to the need to avoid the perception that increased efficiency only translates to technological success (South Asia studies and other LMICs: Rogers, 2017). In this regard, the implication of Pathao riders on urban mobility will form part of the overall political economy where the concept of delivery and its associated risks and costs are overseen by the individual (as found in the results of the current research undertaken where respondents confirm the positive impact on mobility and moderate levels of strain on health due to physical and mental exertion).

The most important findings from this research is that there seems to be a paradox between income levels and income sufficiency for the Pathao riders. This finding is important because while the average income reported by Pathao riders per month represents middle to upper-middle income, a large group of Pathao riders indicated a lack of income sufficiency. This finding agrees with a large body of findings that indicate income continuity, not income per se, is an important contributor to workers' well-being within the context of the gig economy (Alam, 2022; Sakib & Mia, 2019).

Earnings from the platforms are normally associated with daily and weekly fluctuations, depending on the level of demand and the pricing mechanism of the platforms. Studies conducted in India and Bangladesh show that even where the earnings are sufficient on average, the lack of predictability of the income affects the ability to plan financially and contributes to the stress associated with income insecurity (Alam, 2022). In the context of Kathmandu, which lacks social support systems and has a broader dependency ratio in most households, the lack of income predictability associated with platform income is expected to have a serious impact on the welfare of the motorcycle.

This contradicts the common perception of the platform that flexibility and the potential for earnings help to compensate for the lack of employment security for the participants of the gig economy. Rather, this supports the scholarship that believes that the nature of the gig economy represents forms of disguised informality in which the risks that were previously taken on by the employer or the state are instead taken on by the employee (Rogers, 2017, Sakib & Mia, 2019).

Moreover, the fact that most Pathao riders work part-time or occasionally underscores the fundamentally informal nature of employment in platforms in Nepal. The trend has similarly been recorded around South Asia, where gig work is often utilized as a

complementary income strategy when decent formal work is unavailable. While such flexibility may be beneficial to some riders, it also supports a labour regime considered by weak bargaining powers, limited legal recognition, and minimal access to social protection.

No health insurance, pension, paid leave, or injury compensation puts riders in a precarious position, especially considering the occupational risks associated with motorcycle-based transport. Comparative research from India and Indonesia demonstrates that gig workers are excluded from national labour laws and social security schemes due to their classification as independent contractors. Comparing Platform Work Regulations in South Asia, 2025, the regulatory landscape of Nepal remains underdeveloped, leaving platform workers in a legal norm (Shekhawat & Khare, 2025; Dwivedi & Deepak, 2024).

In addition, this informs the discussion on rider welfare in that it shows how welfare can be influenced by the combined effects of individual and platform-level factors. For example, riders with more stable sources of funds or with lower dependency ratios seem to be in a strong position compared to those who earn money from Pathao, since they would not be under so much financial and mental pressure. However, this finding supports studies emphasizing inequality, in particular, and finding that platforms worsen, rather than reduce, existing inequalities (Kumar et al., 2019).

In Kathmandu, given that youth unemployment and underemployment continue to be a problem, the opportunity and threat posed by platform work may coexist. For some, this could be a stepping stone, but for others, this may continue the cycle of insecurity without providing a way out or a means of skill upgrade. The results would indicate that, without any external effort, platform work could continue to be a new informality in the cities, rather than providing a viable alternative.

The results of this study are quite important in the context of policies for workers and the regulation of platforms in Nepal. First of all, it seems there is a need to transition away from the conventional framework of classifying workers as "employees" or "independent contractors." Second, an effort should be made for companies such as Pathao, operating on the platform business model, to improve transparency regarding algorithmic management. There is some evidence in the South Asian region that improving transparency can contribute to reducing worker stress as well as their perception of fairness in their work environment (Rao et al., 2025).

Ultimately, bringing platform workers within the national social security system through contributory or subsidized arrangements would help improve the lives of riders greatly. In view of the ever-increasing importance of the platform economy in Nepal, it has become both socially imperative and economically imperative to achieve an inclusive and sustainable urban labor market.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigates the socioeconomic factors influencing welfare among Pathao riders in Kathmandu, under the rapidly growing platform economy. Through income stability, worker hours, and welfare conditions, this study offers concrete proof regarding the double impact associated with platform-mediated employment, considering it enables mobility as well as labor precariousness in the particular context of the low-income city. The results indicate Pathao riders are highly crucial in improving access, speed, or ease in Kathmandu's transport network, but all under conditions involving income instability, informality, or health strain.

However, the research significance mentioned above is overshadowed by the hidden costs of the flexibility that the platforms bring to the table. Even though the work pattern set by Pathao offers the riders the option of selecting the working hours that they want to undertake, the incentive system and the demand system set by the algorithms encourage the riders to work for extended periods that appear to be irregular and are riddled with stress factors such as traffic jams and the possibility of accidents on the roads.

Regarding policy interventions, the implications of the above results are of prime importance. Firstly, the demand for policy intervention in the labour sector in Nepal emerges, which should consider platform workers as a distinct group that is accorded minimum rights related to accident insurance, health security, and remuneration security. Secondly, it is high time that the private sector, in this case the platform, is encouraged, if not forced, to improve the transparency of their algorithmic practices in terms of payment, reward, and performance. Thirdly, the inclusion of the aforementioned platform workers under the social security system in Nepal would help the riders hugely, as well as ensure the viability of the digital economy.

DECLARATIONS

Author contribution:

SP contributed to conceptualizing, and drafting the manuscript in the present form.

IB contributed to fieldwork, and literature review. Both authors revised the final version of the manuscript and agreed for publication.

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