

The Double-Edged Sword: Empowerment and Risks of Platform-Based Work for Women

Research Paper

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Abstract. Platform-based work, which offers home-based, part-time, and adaptable arrangements, has gained traction among women as it provides the freedom to manage current or future caregiving responsibilities. However, it also introduces risks such as job insecurity, lack of social protections, and the perpetuation of gendered power imbalances. This conceptual paper explores how platform-based work empowers women, as well as the risks that may arise from their engagement in such work. By examining cases like mum bloggers, OnlyFans creators, and crowd workers, we explore how platform-based work enables women's empowerment. Our findings contribute to information systems literature by highlighting the double-edged nature of platform-based work, demonstrating that while it enables women's empowerment, it also reinforces existing power structures.

Keywords: Women, platform-based work, empowerment, risks.

1 Introduction

In today's society, women still face unique challenges in balancing employment and care work, which typically involves the unpaid mental or physical effort to provide for the health, well-being, maintenance, and protection of someone or something (Ferrant et al., 2014). Traditional employment structures are often rigid, with long-established power dynamics, and present additional barriers such as the expectation of extensive work experience, uninterrupted career paths, and persistent discrimination based on gender, race, or age (International Labour Conference, 2021). Moreover, women continue to be the primary caregivers in most societies, contributing significantly to unpaid care work (Ferrant et al., 2014). The unequal distribution of care work remains significantly unequal between men and women. As of 2023, women globally spend an average of 2.8 more hours per day on unpaid care and domestic tasks than men (Hanna et al., 2023). These challenges, combined with the inflexibility of standard working hours and

the requirement for physical presence at the workplace, make traditional jobs unsustainable for many women with caregiving responsibilities (International Labour Conference, 2021).

As a result, there has been increasing demand for alternative work arrangements for women that offer greater temporal and spatial flexibility, part-time options, and the ability to work from home (Ameen et al., 2024; Deng & Joshi, 2016). Platform-based work, defined as engaging in work or offering services via technology-enabled digital platforms (Deng & Galliers, 2024), has gained growing interest, particularly from caregivers and parents seeking flexibility (Ameen et al., 2024). The concept of ‘mumpreneurs’ (Ameen et al., 2024) has emerged, referring to ‘individual[s] who discover[s] and exploit[s] new business opportunities within a social and geographical context that seek[s] to integrate the demands of motherhood and business-ownership’ (Ekinsmyth, 2011, p. 105). These mumpreneurs increasingly leverage digital platforms, taking advantage of home-based work flexibility and career mobility to meet both income generation and family caregiving responsibilities (Ameen et al., 2024).

Platform-based work appears to be an ideal solution to empower women who seek flexibility. Indeed, when asked why individuals engage in crowdsourcing work, many women cited the freedom it provides to earn money while staying home and raising their children (Deng & Joshi, 2016). However, platform-based work also carries risks, including employment, entrepreneurial, financial, mental health, physical health, and technological risks (Deng & Galliers, 2024).

Thus, we ask the following research questions (RQs):

- **RQs:** How does platform-based work empower women? What risks accompany this empowerment?

For this endeavour, we began our work by adopting a phenomenon-driven conceptual approach (Sohi et al., 2022), considering the fundamentals of conceptual papers (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015; Jaakkola, 2020; Sohi et al., 2022; Suddaby et al., 2023). Conceptual papers are often mistaken for theory papers (Suddaby et al., 2023). However, they ‘need not propose new theory at the construct level (Cropanzano, 2009), but rather they seek to bridge existing theories in interesting ways, link work across disciplines, provide multi-level insights, and broaden the scope of our thinking’ (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015, p. 128). We draw on the empowerment framework (Çetin et al., 2021; Kabeer, 1999; Mandal, 2013) and information systems literature, exploring the value of platform-based work (Ameen et al., 2024; Deng & Joshi, 2016) and research on gender-specific issues in entrepreneurship (Ameen et al., 2024; Lewis et al., 2022; Pfefferman et al., 2022). We conceptualise gender in the context of platform-based work and analyse how platform-based work meets the demands for flexibility and independence, while also considering the potential risks of perpetuating patriarchal structures. Altogether, our research contributes to information systems literature by examining the dichotomy between traditional employment and platform-based work for women.

The conceptual paper is organised as follows. In the next section, we elaborate on the challenges faced by women in today’s society and workforce. Afterwards, we summarise the aspects of empowerment through digital technology. Next, we introduce the key principles of empowerment in platform-based work, focusing on three types: mum

bloggers, OnlyFans creators, and crowd workers. We then highlight the value that platform-based work offers to women. In the subsequent section, we explore the risks associated with platform-based work for women. Finally, we reflect on whether and to what extent platform-based work addresses the obstacles they face.

2 Employment Challenges for Women in Unequal Power Structures

Traditional employment is typically defined by full-time positions, permanent contracts, fixed working hours, on-site work controlled by the employer, and protections provided by labour laws and social security systems (Ashford et al., 2007; Kalleberg, 2009; Mäntymäki et al., 2019). In contrast, deviations from these rigid structures in terms of time, location, and administrative attachment are referred to as nonstandard work (Mäntymäki et al., 2019). This category includes temporary and part-time work, remote work, freelancing, and entrepreneurial work (Mäntymäki et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial work, particularly platform-based work, is often seen as a flexible alternative to traditional employment, offering more autonomy over individual work arrangements (Ashford et al., 2007).

Although efforts to loosen rigid structures in traditional employment, such as the introduction of part-time and remote work, had already been adopted in some industries many decades ago, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has more broadly disrupted and reshaped traditional employment models (Ameen et al., 2023). Thereby, traditional work became more flexible, easing restrictions on fixed working hours and locations (Ameen et al., 2023).

Historically, traditional employment has been shaped by societal norms that prioritise profit maximisation, long working hours, and competitiveness (Ameen et al., 2024; Lewis et al., 2022). This model predominantly promotes traits and behaviours traditionally associated with masculinity (Lewis et al., 2022). Meanwhile, women globally perform 75% of unpaid care work (UN Women, 2022) and dedicate an average of 2.8 more hours per day to unpaid domestic and caregiving tasks compared to men (Hanna et al., 2023). This care work is largely confined to the domestic sphere and hence reinforces time scarcity (Ameen et al., 2024; Lewis et al., 2022; Pfefferman et al., 2022). Moreover, limited access to affordable, reliable childcare further compounds these difficulties. Formal childcare services are frequently unaffordable or unavailable, and informal support is often inconsistent, presenting additional barriers for women seeking paid work (Lewis et al., 2022). As a result, women with caregiving responsibilities frequently structure their work schedules around caregiving duties, working during school hours, while children are in childcare, or after they have gone to bed (Ekinsmyth, 2011).

Hence, women face significant challenges in meeting societal expectations and structural demands embedded in traditional employment, such as the need for extensive work experience and uninterrupted career paths (International Labour Conference, 2021). Despite recent efforts to introduce greater flexibility within traditional employment structures, these adjustments often fall short of addressing the specific needs of women with caregiving responsibilities. As a result, the barriers to balancing caregiving

responsibilities with career advancement persist, reinforcing unequal power structures that limit women's access to equal work opportunities (Ameen et al., 2024; Lewis et al., 2022). Consequently, many women may turn to entrepreneurial work, such as platform-based work, as a preferred alternative that offers better flexibility for balancing paid work with caregiving responsibilities (Ameen et al., 2024; Wu & Huang, 2024).

3 Women's Empowerment Through Digital Technology

Given the challenges that women face in traditional employment and their experience of unequal power structures, it is essential to first discuss power. In the literature, power is often portrayed negatively as 'the power over' (Kabeer, 2010), depicting 'powerless actors' coerced into actions contrary to their interests or inhibited from pursuing their desires (Hurni et al., 2022, p. 5), thus reflecting 'the ability to control others' (Çetin et al., 2021, p. 3). For a comprehensive exploration of the (negative) concept of power, we refer to Hurni et al. (2022).

Conversely, the positive expression of power is associated with empowerment, which is defined as 'to give power to' and 'enabling people to control their own lives and to take advantage of opportunities' (Çetin et al., 2021, p. 2). This view of power expands it to 'the ability to exercise choice and change external conditions' (*the power to*), 'the solidarity and strength from collective action' (*the power with*), and the 'self-respect and awareness of the socially constructed nature of human relations' (*the power within*) (Çetin et al., 2021, p. 3; Kabeer, 2010).

Empowerment is a 'multidimensional social process' (Mandal, 2013, p. 18) and a 'process of change' (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437) that enables individuals to gain control over their lives (Mandal, 2013). This view suggests that only those who are not already in positions of power can be empowered (Kabeer, 1999), which often applies to women and marginalised groups in patriarchal societies. There are five key areas to consider when assessing women's empowerment: social, educational, economic, political, and psychological. Social empowerment involves women's contributions not only to the home but across all levels of society. Educational empowerment refers to equal access to education for all genders. Economic empowerment ensures women have access to fair treatment, equal work opportunities, an equitable work environment, and organisational benefits. Political empowerment provides opportunities for participation at all levels of governance. Psychological empowerment focuses on the freedom to work, learn, and engage in society without constraints (Çetin et al., 2021; Mandal, 2013).

Digital technologies are a powerful tool, enabling people to surpass their limitations (Kenkarasseril Joseph, 2013). Numerous studies have explored the role of digital technologies in advancing women's empowerment, particularly in the Global South. For instance, information systems scholars investigated telecentre jobs as an important source of economic empowerment for women in rural regions of the Global South. In the 2000s, those telecentres were implemented to offer technology access in villages. As a result, the implementation of those telecentres and the employment opportunities they have generated has empowered women economically, enabling them to generate their own income and decrease their financial dependence on male partners as primary

earners (Oreglia & Srinivasan, 2016). An additional example is the ownership of smartphones, which enables young female rural-to-urban migrants to maintain communication with their relatives in rural areas while also demonstrating their information and communication technologies (ICT) skills. These skills empower them socially and educationally and earn them prestige in their communities, as ICT usage has traditionally been associated with male, urban, and educated users (Oreglia & Srinivasan, 2016). These examples demonstrate how technology can empower women economically, socially and educationally, particularly those who are constrained by traditional roles.

Other studies have examined women's empowerment through digital technologies in various contexts, including general use (Çetin et al., 2021), social media (Riquelme et al., 2018), and digital entrepreneurship (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013; Ameen et al., 2024; Dy et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2022). In this paper, we particularly focus on platform-based work, as it offers women the flexibility to balance paid work with caregiving responsibilities (Ameen et al., 2024; Wu & Huang, 2024). We define 'platform-based work' as work performed or services provided via technology-enabled digital platforms (Deng & Galliers, 2024). Digital platforms facilitate transactions and act as intermediaries between different user groups, such as buyers and sellers, or clients and workers (Deng & Galliers, 2024; Gawer, 2021). Users on these platforms can perform tasks and interact with other users, all mediated by technology (Bonina et al., 2021).

The evolution of platform-based work globally has reshaped employment opportunities (Deng & Galliers, 2024; Idowu & Elbanna, 2022). While income generation remains a key motivation for engaging with such platforms, factors such as an inability to find traditional work, flexibility, cultural or health constraints, and proximity to family are also significant drivers (Idowu & Elbanna, 2022). Additionally, platform-based work offers a wide range of opportunities, including occupational empowerment, self-determination, financial and cognitive fulfilment, a sense of purpose, and skill development (Deng et al., 2016; Deng & Joshi, 2016).

4 Women Engaging in Platform-Based Work

We examine how such platform-based work can empower women by enabling them to make strategic life choices, particularly in contexts where these choices were previously limited (Oreglia & Srinivasan, 2016). In addition, we explore the risks that may accompany this form of empowerment. To this end, we present three cases of platform-based work, discuss how it serves to empower women and highlight the inherent risks associated with this type of work.

4.1 Three Cases of Women Engaging in Platform-Based Work

Platform-based work is best known for gig workers using apps or websites to provide services such as deliveries, ride-sharing and crowdsourcing (Deng & Galliers, 2024; Duggan et al., 2020). However, social media platforms have also become popular places for work in recent years, with people working as influencers and content creators (Gagliese, 2022; Leung et al., 2022). While social media work is similar to gig work as

platforms act as intermediaries between users (such as content creators and their followers), it is distinct in that content creators produce content independently, and users do not pay for it directly (Hödl, 2024). Therefore, it is not a business transaction, as content creators are incentivised by advertising revenue and brand collaborations (Hödl & Myrach, 2023). Including this allows us to adopt a broader understanding of platform-based work, recognising that social media work exists alongside gig work on digital platforms (cf. Duggan et al., 2020).

We have selected three cases of platform-based work that can be performed by women, mothers, and individuals with or without future caregiving responsibilities, catering to their needs for additional income and flexible work structures (Idowu & Elbanna, 2022). All of these forms lack an employment relationship, classifying them as independent contractors (Deng et al., 2016; Duggan et al., 2020; Wu & Huang, 2024). The cases have been deliberately chosen to highlight the diversity within platform-based work carried out by women. First, we have mum bloggers who focus on their motherhood in their work, thereby integrating parenting with their professional activities. Next, we introduce OnlyFans creators, who primarily share explicit content and may not necessarily have caregiving responsibilities. However, they are viewed as an immediate and accessible option for earning money (Easterbrook-Smith, 2023). Finally, we examine crowd workers who complete micro-tasks online. This represents another accessible opportunity that requires little to no specific skills to get started.

Mum Bloggers. Mothers who share their experiences of motherhood online, whether through blogs or social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, are commonly known as mum bloggers. These women provide private insights into their everyday lives and parenting, reflecting on both their roles as mothers and the societal restrictions and expectations they face (Orton-Johnson, 2017). When these mothers use their platforms to explore business opportunities alongside motherhood, they are often referred to as mumpreneurs (Ameen et al., 2024). By sharing their activities and opinions, they create a safe space for like-minded individuals to connect, offer support, and show solidarity. However, they also open themselves up to criticism, as their practices may challenge conventional wisdom or raise concerns about the privacy of their children (Orton-Johnson, 2017).

Mum bloggers, like other content creators on social media, have the opportunity to monetise their content (Cutolo & Kenney, 2021). This can happen through revenue-sharing social media platforms such as YouTube, where their content is accompanied by advertisements, and a portion of the revenue is paid out to the mum bloggers who are eligible for the partner program (Tang et al., 2012). Additionally, once mum bloggers have built a community, they can collaborate directly with brands, which is often more lucrative than the advertising revenue generated by the platforms (Hödl & Myrach, 2023; Leung et al., 2022). Although the exact number of mum bloggers is unknown, many use social media platforms for their work. Instagram has 2 billion users (48.2% women), TikTok 1.7 billion users (49.2% women), and YouTube 2.5 billion users (45.6% women) (Zote, 2024).

OnlyFans Creators. OnlyFans is a subscription-based platform primarily known for its adult content. OnlyFans content creators offer exclusive material to their audience, referred to as fans, who pay a monthly fee for access. Those creators retain 80% of the subscription fee, while the platform takes the remaining 20% (Van Der Nagel, 2021). Among the 3 million creators, 70% are women and 30% are men, whereas the user base of 220 million users is overwhelmingly male, with 87% being men (Lowe Doescher, 2023). Many women joined the platform during the COVID-19 pandemic due to underemployment, unemployment, or the need to leave their jobs to take on caregiving responsibilities (Easterbrook-Smith, 2023). Even celebrities like Bella Thorne, Cardi B, and Iggy Azalea have become OnlyFans creators, sharing content that is not exclusively explicit, such as exclusive photos, behind-the-scenes videos, and personal updates (Williams, 2024).

OnlyFans creators have similar monetisation opportunities as mum bloggers. However, on social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, OnlyFans creators must comply with terms and conditions that prohibit explicit content (Easterbrook-Smith, 2023). As a result, OnlyFans creators primarily use these platforms for promotional purposes to expand their reach on OnlyFans (Van Der Nagel, 2021).

Crowd Workers. Crowd workers are individuals who complete micro-tasks on web-based, third-party platforms and receive micropayments for their efforts (Deng et al., 2016). They are sometimes equated with gig workers, as both operate on digital labour or online labour platforms (Deng & Galliers, 2024; Möhlmann et al., 2021). Crowd work has several essential characteristics: it enables on-demand virtual labour, provides open access to work, requires internet access for participation, and involves the completion of various human tasks (Deng & Joshi, 2016). While crowd work can take many forms, including bidding processes and competitions, this paper focuses specifically on the business model that aggregates numerous micro-tasks and assigns them to multiple crowd workers, such as Prolific, Clickworker, and Amazon Mechanical Turk (Deng & Joshi, 2016; Muldoon & Apostolidis, 2023). The user base of these platforms is 200,000 for Prolific (Prolific, 2024), 6 million for Clickworker (Clickworker, 2024), and 250,000 (51% women) for Amazon Mechanical Turk (Difallah et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2019).

Gender differences are notable in crowd work, with women more likely than men to undertake caring, cleaning, and creative tasks, while men are increasingly engaged in driving and ride-sharing tasks (Churchill & Craig, 2019). In contrast to mum bloggers, crowd workers typically earn from the first task completed and do not need to qualify for a partner program. Nevertheless, their access and the quality of their work are regularly reviewed (Cram et al., 2022).

4.2 Platform-Based Work Empowering Women

Economic empowerment continues to be a key outcome of platform-based work, as it provides access to opportunities for earning supplemental or regular income through open, equitable, and flexible structures (Deng et al., 2016; Idowu & Elbanna, 2022).

This type of work allows individuals to control when and how they work. Women benefit from this flexibility, as they can utilise idle time to complete small tasks, such as responding to messages from followers or performing micro-tasks, regardless of their location (Deng & Joshi, 2016). Additionally, the simplicity of the equipment required for platform-based work is advantageous; women located in different geographical regions can easily use familiar devices like smartphones, tablets, or computers, which are readily available and only require an internet connection to engage in their work (Deng & Joshi, 2016; Oreglia & Srinivasan, 2016). Women with caregiving responsibilities must integrate their care work into their work schedules, and platform-based work facilitates this (Deng & Joshi, 2016). It enables them to maintain a steady income, gain valuable work experience, and avoid gaps in their CVs. In the event of major life changes, such as divorce, a partner's unemployment, or accidents, women can rely on the income generated from platform-based work (Kelemen et al., 2025). For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many women turned to platforms like OnlyFans due to job loss (Easterbrook-Smith, 2023).

Open access to work opportunities fosters a sense of purpose by offering financial, cognitive, or experiential fulfilment while contributing to others and society, further reinforcing this sense of purpose (Deng et al., 2016; Deng & Joshi, 2016). Additionally, competence develops through diverse tasks, enhancing both skills and proficiency (Deng et al., 2016). Platform-based work enables women to earn supplemental or regular income while developing new skills, such as editing and community management. Furthermore, platform-based work offers enjoyment for mum bloggers (Deng et al., 2016), for instance, by allowing them to connect with like-minded individuals and build supportive communities (Orton-Johnson, 2017). By sharing knowledge, giving voice to their perspectives, and fostering these communities, they contribute to society and further fulfil their pro-social needs (Deng & Joshi, 2016). Pro-social needs might also positively impact their mental health, as they experience a sense of purpose and autonomy. Additionally, individuals dealing with mental or physical health challenges can take necessary breaks. With low entry barriers, platform-based work is accessible to many, including those with physical disabilities or chronic illnesses (Zyskowski et al., 2015). In this way, platform-based work extends beyond economic empowerment, enabling educational empowerment through skill development, political empowerment by giving women a voice, social empowerment through community connections, and psychological empowerment by fulfilling pro-social needs.

4.3 Risks of Platform-Based Work for Women

Although platform-based work provides various empowerment opportunities for women, it also poses several risks. In the following section, we outline the key risks identified in our investigation.

Employment Risks. Women engaging in platform-based work often face unsafe working conditions, such as a lack of social protection, health insurance, pension contributions, or reliable income streams (Behrendt et al., 2019; Gerber, 2022). Women face

similar employment risks in formal work settings, often referred to as the ‘motherhood penalty.’ However, these risks are intensified in blogging or crowd work, where income and working hours are more volatile, and conditions less regulated (Behrendt et al., 2019; Deng & Galliers, 2024; Gerber, 2022; Tubaro et al., 2022). Instead of providing greater opportunities, platform-based work confines women, especially those with care-giving responsibilities, further to the home environment, perpetuating traditional roles and limiting their access to broader labour market participation (Tubaro et al., 2022).

Financial Risks. Women conducting platform-based work are confronted with financial risks across five key dimensions, all of which contribute to a lack of predictable and stable income (Behrendt et al., 2019). First, alongside their platform-based work, many women continue to perform significant unpaid care work at home to supplement their income. This dual burden of care responsibilities and platform-based work exacerbates time scarcity, limiting their capacity to expand their digital work and making it challenging to attain financial stability (Behrendt et al., 2019). Second, the incomes of content creators, whether advertisement- or subscription-based, are heavily dependent on maintaining a positive public reputation. Establishing such a reputation is crucial in the early stages of a platform-based career, whereby these content creators often invest significant unpaid labour during this period, which additionally exacerbates their financial risks (Ameen et al., 2024). Also, crowd workers’ earnings depend on workers’ online reputation, such as customer review ratings (Deng & Galliers, 2024). This reliance on reputation increases their financial vulnerability and amplifies the uncertainty of their income streams (Venciute et al., 2023). Third, content creators’ success is further heavily influenced by opaque platform algorithms that govern the visibility and distribution of their content (Hödl & Myrach, 2023). The unpredictability of these algorithms adds another layer of vulnerability, making it difficult for mum bloggers or OnlyFans creators to reliably grow and sustain their income. This creates a dependency on technology that further limits their autonomy. Fourth, content creators who generate income through subscriptions depend on platforms that, in turn, rely on financial institutions and payment processors. These financial institutions may classify explicit content as ‘high-risk’, resulting in higher transaction fees and recent instances of banking discrimination that have impacted adult content websites (Easterbrook-Smith, 2023). Fifth, caregiving interruptions, such as attending to children, often prevent women engaged in crowd work from taking on longer, more complex tasks and meeting strict deadlines. This limitation further reduces their earning potential from micropayments (Gerber, 2022).

Mental Health Risks. Women engaging in platform-based work face significant mental and emotional challenges (Eckert, 2018; Gerber, 2022). Abusive behaviours such as threats of violence, stalking, and trolling are prevalent in this space, contributing to heightened stress and anxiety (Eckert, 2018). These challenges are further compounded by the pressure to meet platform algorithms’ demands, leading to increased stress (Hödl, 2024; Hödl & Myrach, 2023). Also, the pressure for metric success is closely

tied to their self-worth (Glatt, 2022). Especially female content creators struggle to balance authenticity, as they navigate a fine line between being perceived as ‘too real’ or ‘not real enough’, making them vulnerable to both visibility and criticism (Duffy & Hund, 2019).

For mum bloggers, sharing personal experiences creates supportive communities but also invites scrutiny, particularly when their content challenges societal norms or raises concerns about the privacy of their children (Orton-Johnson, 2017). In contrast, OnlyFans creators face a unique form of stigmatisation, where male consumers of their content simultaneously shame and stigmatise them, adding another layer of emotional burden (Van Der Nagel, 2021). Crowd workers similarly describe their work as ‘emotionally and mentally draining’ due to the competitive nature of the platform. The constant need to monitor for new tasks, along with the pressure to secure work, significantly increases the risk of burnout (Deng & Galliers, 2024).

Personal Rights Risks. Women engaging in platform-based work must accept the platforms’ terms and conditions and thus actively consent to their personal data being collected, used and processed (Custers et al., 2014; Hanlon & Jones, 2023), forfeiting their privacy, image rights, and security in the process. Additionally, the public nature of their work on these platforms exposes them to potential violations of these rights by third parties.

Mum bloggers who share images of their children online expose them to numerous privacy risks, including the creation of a digital identity without their consent and potential targeting by criminal activities, such as identity theft, kidnapping, or exploitation by paedophiles (Van Den Abeele et al., 2024). Given that half of the content shared on paedophile websites originates from social media, these concerns are well justified (Richards, 2015). Children’s vulnerability is further amplified in the age of deepfakes and artificial intelligence (AI). For instance, Meta recently announced plans to train its AI models using social media posts (Jiménez, 2024). While mum bloggers are concerned about their children’s privacy, they face a privacy paradox when balancing the desire to protect their children with the fear of losing authenticity, followers, and opportunities for commercial collaborations (Van Den Abeele et al., 2024). To ensure that children at least benefit financially, the U.S. states of Illinois, Minnesota, and California passed new laws requiring parents and caregivers to share the income from their social media activities with the children featured in the content (Kindelan, 2024). Moreover, female OnlyFans creators face serious data privacy and security challenges, particularly about stalking. Instances have been reported where perpetrators leaked creators’ private addresses, resulting in break-ins and increased physical security threats (Steinbuch, 2023). Crowd workers face significant cybersecurity risks, including data breaches, cyberattacks, and password theft, which can expose sensitive personal and financial information. These risks not only threaten their personal rights but also undermine the security of the platforms on which they depend for their income (Deng & Galliers, 2024).

5 Discussion and Conclusion

In this conceptual paper, we discuss the empowerment of women in platform-based work and the risks that accompany this. We put forward four propositions:

- **Proposition 1 (P1):** Existing power structures compel women to participate in platform-based work as a means of empowerment, providing them with opportunities to benefit from flexible work arrangements.

Traditional employment usually has fixed hours and places, which makes it hard for most women with care responsibilities. So, many women choose platform-based work to fit around childcare and care work (Ekinsmyth, 2011; Ferrant et al., 2014).

- **Proposition 2 (P2):** The benefits derived from platform-based work contribute to women's empowerment by providing financial independence and the compatibility of family and work.

Platform-based work most commonly provides economic empowerment for women, but it also extends to enabling educational empowerment through skill development, political empowerment by giving women a voice, social empowerment through community connections, and psychological empowerment by fulfilling their pro-social needs. Platform-based work allows women to combine care work more flexibly.

- **Proposition 3 (P3):** Women's increased empowerment through platform-based work exposes women to new risks such as reputational damage and digital harassment due to social resistance to change.

Platform-based work poses serious risks, including employment risks (lack of social protection, health insurance, and pension contributions) and financial risks (unpredictable and unstable income), which hinder economic empowerment. Mental health risks, driven by abusive online behaviour or pressure to meet algorithmic demands, obstruct psychological empowerment. Additionally, personal rights risks, such as the forfeiture of privacy, image rights, and security, undermine political empowerment. Some of these risks are not gender-specific, but in patriarchal systems, they are much more pronounced for women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities. Consequently, platform-based work can be seen as a double-edged sword for women, offering empowerment alongside significant risks.

- **Proposition 4 (P4):** The risks associated with platform-based work, such as a lack of social protection and reliable income streams, perpetuate existing power structures by maintaining women's financial dependency.

Platform-based work may inadvertently reinforce existing power structures and perpetuate women's disempowerment within patriarchal systems (Dy et al., 2017). For example, mum bloggers' online presence and the carefully curated or one-sided image they project to the public can create the impression that they are solely responsible for caregiving, even when they receive support from their partner and family. Similarly, in crowd work, women are more likely than men to take on caregiving or cleaning tasks

(Churchill & Craig, 2019), further reinforcing traditional gender roles. On platforms such as OnlyFans, men consume and enjoy content while simultaneously shaming its creators. This perpetuates misogynistic and patriarchal structures (Van Der Nagel, 2021). Stigmatisation is an additional risk that women face on OnlyFans (Easterbrook-Smith, 2023). This can result in limited access to social, economic, and political resources (Van Der Nagel, 2021). Risks may vary by platform, but all show that platform-based work cannot fully dismantle existing power structures.

Figure 1 illustrates the dynamics of these factors and the associated propositions.

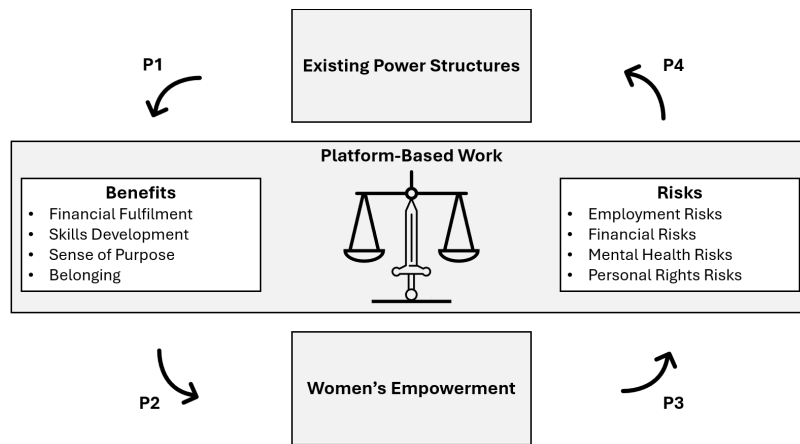


Figure 1. Double-Edged Sword of Platform-Based Work for Women

While recent studies have highlighted empowerment opportunities related to platform-based work, such as self-determination, flexibility financial and cognitive fulfilment, a sense of purpose, and skill development, these empowerment opportunities have largely been examined in a general context (Deng et al., 2016; Deng & Galliers, 2024; Deng & Joshi, 2016). A notable shortcoming remains in understanding how platform-based work supports the empowerment of women. Hence, this conceptual paper lays the groundwork for understanding how platform-based work empowers women and what risks accompany this empowerment. We find that in platform-based work, workplace flexibility, equipment simplicity, lifestyle integration, independence and security empower women. We also address the risks, including the lack of social protection, unstable income, opaque algorithms, exposure to abusive behaviour, and concerns over data privacy and security.

To this end, we highlight the critical need to address the structural precarity and patriarchal systems that exacerbate the challenges faced by women in platform-based work. To advance this conversation, we encourage future research to build upon these insights and our propositions, focusing on developing comprehensive strategies and interventions that mitigate the associated risks. Future studies may explore innovative solutions that promote stable and more equitable and sustainable working conditions for women in this evolving digital landscape.

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