

Graduates' Rational Choices in Seeking Job Opportunities via Digital Platforms in Buahbatu Village, Bandung Regency

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Abstract

The transformation of the digital economy has changed employment patterns in peri-urban areas, including Buahbatu Village, Bandung Regency, Indonesia. This study aims to analyze how secondary and higher education graduates make employment decisions through digital platforms amid limited access to formal employment opportunities. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation involving ten graduate informants working in the informal digital sector. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman within the framework of James S. Coleman's Rational Choice Theory. The findings show that graduates choose platform-based jobs such as freelancers, online resellers, content creators, and ride-hailing drivers as a form of adaptive rationality driven by economic needs, work flexibility, and limited access to formal labor markets. Social capital derived from family, peer networks, and digital communities plays an important role in providing job information, reducing uncertainty, and supporting adaptation to the digital economy. The study also finds that platform-based work has undergone a process of social normalization and legitimacy at the local level, where it is increasingly recognized as a valid form of employment. The novelty of this study lies in explaining graduate adaptive rationality in a peri-urban village context shaped by structural constraints in the formal labor market, strengthened digital social capital, and a gradual social legitimation process that transforms platform work from informal activity into socially recognized employment. Overall, digital employment decisions reflect not only economic considerations but also interactions between social structures, relational networks, and evolving work values in the digital era.

Keywords: Digital economy; Digital platforms; Gig economy; Rational choice; Social capital.

How to Cite: Alam, F., Sekarningrum, B. & Yunita, D. (2026). Graduates' Rational Choices in Seeking Job Opportunities via Digital Platforms in Buahbatu Village, Bandung Regency. *Jurnal Socius: Journal of Sociology Research and Education*, 13(1), 43-51.



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Introduction

In recent years, the transformation of the digital economy has become one of the key factors reshaping the structure of employment in Indonesia. The development of the internet, digital technologies, and application-based platforms has created new patterns of work that differ from conventional employment systems. These changes not only affect the industrial and trade sectors but also transform how people, especially young individuals and university graduates perceive and choose their careers. The emergence of digital platforms such as Gojek, Grab, Shopee, TikTok Shop, and various freelance marketplaces has opened up new employment opportunities that are considered more flexible and accessible compared to increasingly competitive formal jobs (OECD, 2023). On the other hand, the growth of the digital economy coincides with an increasing number of educated workers in Indonesia. However, the rise in university graduates is not always matched by the availability of adequate formal employment opportunities (Kenney & Zysman, 2016). Data from Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik) indicate that the open unemployment rate among the productive-age population remains relatively high, including in Bandung Regency. This condition suggests that some university graduates face limited access to formal employment and therefore begin seeking alternative work through digital platforms and the informal digital economy (Haryanto & Prasetyo, 2023).

This phenomenon is also evident in Buahbatu Village, Bandung Regency. The increasing use of the internet and digital platforms has begun to influence employment patterns within the rural community, including among university graduates ([Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika Republik Indonesia, 2023](#)). Some graduates choose to work through digital platforms as online resellers, freelancers, content creators, social media administrators, or ride-hailing drivers. These choices are made because digital platforms are perceived to offer faster income opportunities, greater flexibility, and easier access compared to waiting for uncertain formal employment ([Santoso & Lestari, 2023](#)).

Research on the gig economy, digital labor, and youth employment has been widely conducted. Several studies highlight changes in work patterns due to the development of the digital economy, the flexibility offered by gig work, and the vulnerabilities faced by digital workers due to limited labor protection and income uncertainty ([Graham et al., 2017](#)). Other studies examine how young people utilize digital platforms as alternative employment amid limited formal job opportunities ([Vallas & Schor, 2020](#)). However, most of these studies focus on urban populations, platform workers in major cities, or view digital labor primarily as a consequence of macroeconomic changes ([De Stefano, 2016](#); [Schor, 2020](#)).

Meanwhile, research that specifically examines the rational choices of university graduates in peri-urban rural areas in seeking employment through digital platforms remains limited ([Weber, 2019](#)). Previous studies tend to emphasize work flexibility, worker vulnerability, and the broader development of the digital economy, but they rarely explain how individuals, as social actors, make rational considerations when choosing their occupations ([Van Doorn, 2020](#)). Furthermore, studies on the changing meaning of work in rural communities due to digital platform development are still scarce. In fact, the growth of the digital economy not only alters employment structures but also influences how people perceive formal and informal work ([Stanford, 2017](#)). Based on these conditions, this study seeks to fill the research gap by positioning university graduates as rational actors who actively determine their career choices amid the development of the digital economy ([Wood et al., 2019](#)). This research does not merely view digital workers as a consequence of economic transformation but also as the result of individuals' rational actions in selecting jobs that are considered most beneficial and suitable to their circumstances ([Sun & Chen, 2021](#)). In this context, the study employs James S. Coleman's Rational Choice Theory to understand how graduates evaluate job opportunities, economic benefits, work flexibility, and access to employment before making specific career decisions ([Stewart & Stanford, 2017](#)).

The novelty of this research lies in three main aspects. First, it focuses on peri-urban rural communities, which remain underexplored in studies of the gig economy and digital platforms ([Rohimah & Hidayat, 2021](#)). Second, it applies Coleman's rational choice perspective to explain the decision-making processes of university graduates in choosing platform-based work. Third, it seeks to demonstrate a shift in the meaning of work within rural communities, where formal employment is no longer the sole indicator of social and economic success. Digital platforms are increasingly viewed as rational, flexible alternatives that can provide economic opportunities for university graduates amid limited formal employment ([Andini & Yuliani, 2023](#)). Therefore, this study not only discusses the development of digital platforms as an economic phenomenon but also explains how these changes influence how university graduates determine their career choices. Through a rational choice perspective, this research is expected to contribute academically to the study of economic sociology and labor, particularly in understanding the relationship between digital economic development, limited formal employment opportunities, and individual rational actions in choosing platform-based work in Buahbatu Village, Bandung Regency ([Yuliana & Handayani, 2023](#)).

Methods

The findings of this study indicate that the labor environment in Bandung Regency, including Buahbatu Village, has undergone significant changes due to the development of the digital economy and the transformation of employment structures. Based on data from the Bandung Regency Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2024, the service sector has become the dominant sector, accounting for 55.61% of total employment, followed by the manufacturing sector at 37.59%, while the agricultural sector accounts for only 6.8% ([Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Bandung, 2024](#)). This condition reflects a shift in the economic orientation of the community from an agrarian sector toward a service-based and digital economy. Furthermore, the proportion of informal workers, which reaches 48.9%, indicates that nearly half of the workforce is engaged in flexible, non-permanent jobs that are vulnerable to labor market fluctuations. This situation creates opportunities for the expansion of the gig economy as an alternative form of employment for young people, particularly higher education graduates ([Healy et al., 2017](#)).

This transformation suggests that platform-based digital work is no longer outside the formal economic structure but is increasingly integrated into a broader employment system. This phenomenon

aligns with the findings of [Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta \(2017\)](#), who argue that digital labor has grown rapidly in developing countries because work flexibility is seen as a solution to the limitations of formal employment opportunities. In this context, digital platforms function not only as work intermediaries but also as new mechanisms for distributing economic opportunities by directly connecting workers to markets through algorithmic systems.

However, this study finds that in peri-urban rural contexts such as Buahbatu Village, these dynamics are not driven solely by technological factors but are also shaped by local socio-economic conditions. The increasing number of graduates, limited formal employment opportunities, and family economic pressures are the main driving forces behind the adoption of platform-based work. This indicates that employment choices cannot be understood merely as individual decisions but must be seen as the result of interactions between social structures, local economic conditions, and the opportunities provided by digital systems. Furthermore, the findings show that graduates' entry into the digital economy does not occur instantly but rather through stages of social adaptation. In the initial stage, digital work is often perceived as a temporary or side job. However, as individuals gain experience, earn income, and receive social recognition from their surroundings, such work gradually comes to be viewed as stable and reliable. This process demonstrates a gradual shift in societal perceptions of platform-based work.

From the perspective of James S. Coleman's Rational Choice Theory, this phenomenon can be explained through the relationship between individual actions and social structures (micro-macro linkage). Individuals make rational calculations based on limited formal job opportunities, economic needs, and access to information obtained through social networks. However, when these decisions are made collectively by many individuals in similar situations, new social patterns emerge that transform the meaning of work at the societal level. Thus, platform-based employment is not merely an individual decision but also part of a broader process of social change. In addition, the study finds that the legitimacy of digital work in Buahbatu Village is derived not only from economic factors but also from repeated social experiences. As communities observe the success of individuals working through digital platforms, perceptions begin to shift from viewing such work as uncertain to recognizing it as having both economic and social value. This process shows that social legitimacy is formed through a combination of empirical evidence, direct experience, and the influence of social networks within the community.

The novelty of this study lies in its explanation of how graduates in peri-urban rural areas construct adaptive rationality in choosing digital work through the interaction between structural limitations in the formal labor market, the utilization of social capital within digital communities, and the gradual process of social legitimacy formation at the family and community levels. In contrast to previous studies that primarily focus on the gig economy as a form of work flexibility in urban areas ([Rohimah & Hidayat, 2021](#)), this research demonstrates that in Buahbatu Village, digital work has undergone a transformation in meaning from merely an alternative form of employment to a socially recognized and locally relevant occupation ([Wood et al., 2019](#)). Overall, these findings affirm that the transformation of the digital economy not only affects changes in employment structures but also reshapes how society defines work itself. Work is no longer understood solely as formal employment status but also as an individual's ability to leverage digital opportunities to achieve economic independence. Thus, the digital economy has become a new space for the emergence of adaptive, contextual, and socially networked forms of work rationality at the local level.

Results and Discussion

Work Environment and Digital Economic Transformation in Bandung Regency

The findings of this study indicate that the work environment in Bandung Regency, including Buahbatu Village, has undergone significant changes due to the development of the digital economy and the transformation of employment structures. Based on data from the Bandung Regency Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2024, the service sector has become the dominant sector, accounting for 55.61% of total employment, followed by the manufacturing sector at 37.59%, while the agricultural sector accounts for only 6.8% (Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Bandung, 2024). This condition reflects a shift in the economic orientation of the community from an agrarian sector toward a service-based and digital economy. In addition, the proportion of informal workers, which reaches 48.9%, indicates that nearly half of the workforce is engaged in flexible and non-permanent forms of employment. This situation creates opportunities for the expansion of the gig economy as an alternative source of employment for young people, particularly higher education graduates ([Healy et al., 2017](#)).

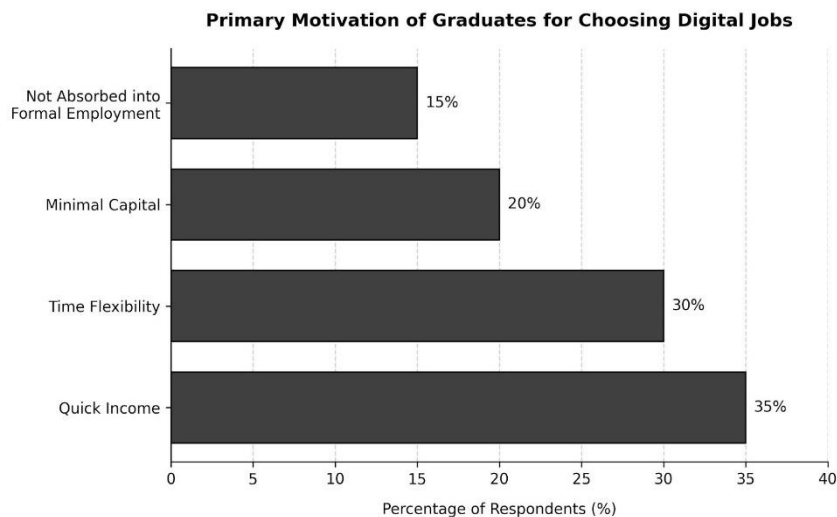
This transformation demonstrates that platform-based digital work is increasingly becoming part of the broader local economic structure. This phenomenon aligns with the findings of [Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta \(2017\)](#), who explain that digital labor is growing rapidly in developing countries because work

flexibility is considered capable of addressing the limitations of formal employment opportunities. In this context, digital platforms function not only as work intermediaries but also as new economic spaces that directly connect labor supply with market demand through application-based systems. However, this study identifies a more specific context in peri-urban rural areas such as Buahbatu Village. The choice to engage in digital work is not solely driven by technological developments but is also influenced by local socio-economic pressures, such as the increasing number of graduates, intense competition for formal jobs, and family economic demands. This condition indicates that employment decisions are not purely individual in nature but are shaped by social structures and the limited availability of job opportunities at the local level.

Furthermore, the findings show that digital work is no longer perceived as temporary employment but is increasingly viewed as a rational and sustainable work strategy. From Coleman's (1990) perspective, individual actions in choosing digital work can be understood as the result of interaction between individual rationality and the surrounding social structure. Thus, platform-based employment represents a form of adaptation to structural economic constraints, as well as the utilization of social capital embedded within the social environment. The novelty of this study lies in its explanation of how graduates in peri-urban rural areas interpret digital work as a form of adaptive rationality that is shaped not only by economic factors but also by gradual social processes. In contrast to the study by Rohimah & Hidayat (2021), which emphasizes the gig economy as a form of work flexibility in urban areas, this research shows that in Buahbatu Village, digital work has undergone processes of normalization and social legitimation at the community level, leading to its acceptance as a legitimate component of the employment structure (Wood et al., 2019).

Adaptive Rationality in Situations of Limited Access to Formal Employment

The research findings indicate that the majority of graduates in Buahbatu Village enter digital-based jobs due to limited access to formal employment (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2019). Many informants reported experiencing difficulties in securing jobs despite having higher education qualifications. This condition encourages them to engage in rational calculations regarding the available employment opportunities (Coleman, 1990). Based on in-depth interviews with informants, several key factors were identified as driving graduates to choose platform-based digital work. These factors include quick income generation, time flexibility, minimal capital requirements, and limited access to formal employment.



Source: Primary research data, processed by the researcher (2026)

The findings indicate that the factor of immediate income is the most dominant motivation. This suggests that graduates' decisions to work through digital platforms are based on rational considerations related to economic efficiency and daily livelihood needs. From Coleman's perspective, such actions reflect *rational action*, namely individual actions undertaken to maximize benefits in situations where access to formal employment opportunities is limited.

Diva (27 years old), an economics graduate working as an online reseller, explained:

"I have participated in several job selection processes in various places, but I have not been successful in passing them. After some time searching for formal employment without clear results, I eventually tried another alternative, which was selling online through Shopee. Initially, I did it just as an experiment or to fill my spare time, but over time, the income turned

out to be quite stable and helped meet my daily needs while reducing my dependence on formal employment.” (Interview with Informant 1, March 12, 2025).

This statement shows that the decision to work through digital platforms emerges from a process of rational calculation between opportunities and constraints. In Coleman’s (1990) perspective, this can be understood as *rational action*, in which individuals act to achieve specific goals based on the resources and opportunities available to them. Diva did not initially choose digital work out of preference; rather, she considered it the most realistic option given her circumstances.

A similar view was expressed by Setyo (25 years old), a freelance graphic designer:

“If I wait for a formal office job, I will most likely remain unemployed for quite a long time because the recruitment process does not always provide certainty. This condition made me start thinking about finding other, more realistic alternatives so that I could still earn an income. Therefore, I decided to learn design independently through YouTube as an accessible learning resource. After gaining basic skills, I began taking small online projects to gain experience while also earning additional income from the skills I developed.” (Interview with Informant 2, April 18, 2025).

These findings demonstrate that graduates’ rationality is not ideal but adaptive. They make decisions based on limited information and resources. In this context, Herbert Simon’s concept of *bounded rationality* becomes relevant. The decision to work in the digital sector is not the result of perfect information, but rather the most feasible strategy for surviving within an uncertain labor market (Kusuma & Sari, 2020).

The study by Wood et al (2019) shows that gig economy workers often face income uncertainty and limited social protection. However, this study finds that graduates in Buahbatu Village still choose digital-based work because it provides faster access to income compared to waiting for formal employment. Thus, their rationality tends to be pragmatic and contextual.

In addition, this study finds that graduates’ rationality is not solely economically oriented, but also related to self-esteem and social status. Many informants feel that prolonged unemployment generates social pressure from family and the surrounding community. Therefore, digital work is chosen as a way to maintain social standing amid limited formal employment opportunities.

Social Capital and Collective Rationality in the Digital Economy

The findings indicate that the success of graduates in adapting to the digital economy is strongly influenced by the social capital they possess. This social capital is not limited to friendship ties, but also includes digital community networks, relationships among platform workers, and family support that directly or indirectly shape work-related decision-making processes. In many cases, informants stated that their decision to enter digital work did not originate from personal knowledge, but from social interactions within their environment.

Briva (24 years old), a freelance content creator, explained that her initial experience entering digital work was largely determined by her existing social relationships. She stated that she first became aware of freelance work not through independent searching, but through a university friend who had already been involved in the field. Her friend not only provided information but also offered direct guidance, ranging from how to find clients, build a portfolio, to understanding the standards typically required by clients. Briva added that without such assistance, she would have found it difficult to start due to a lack of initial understanding of workflows in the digital sector.

“At first, I learned about freelance work from a university friend who had already been involved in that field. At that time, I did not yet have a clear understanding of how freelance work operates or how to obtain jobs on digital platforms. My friend then helped me step by step, from explaining how to find clients, preparing a portfolio suited to market needs, to providing practical examples of how to accept and complete projects. This mentoring process made it much easier for me to understand freelance workflows, as I previously had no experience at all in this field. Without guidance from my friend, I believe I would have struggled to begin, as I would not have known where or how to start finding my first job independently.” (Interview with Informant 3, May 14, 2025).

This statement shows that entry into the digital economy does not occur individually, but is highly dependent on knowledge transfer within social networks. In this context, social capital functions as an initial bridge connecting individuals to job opportunities that were previously difficult to access (Simon, 1955).

Furthermore, the role of community is also strongly evident in platform-based work activities. Satri (26 years old), an online motorcycle taxi driver, explained that although his work is carried out individually in the field, he greatly benefits from communication within driver communities. Information shared in group

chats becomes an important resource for determining daily work strategies, such as selecting optimal working hours, identifying high-demand locations, and accessing information about platform incentives.

“Within driver groups, we frequently share information about daily field conditions. This information usually includes peak hours with high passenger demand, specific locations where orders frequently appear, as well as experiences related to bonuses or incentives provided by the platform at certain times. In addition, we often remind each other about work strategies to secure more orders in a more efficient way. Although we work individually on the road and do not always meet in person, the communication within these groups is very helpful for making daily work decisions so that the outcomes can be more optimal and profitable.” (Interview with Informant 4, May 20, 2025)

These findings indicate that digital work, which appears individualistic, in fact retains a strong collective dimension. Interactions within communities function not only as a communication space, but also as a medium for exchanging economic strategies that directly affect income. Furthermore, the results show that social capital functions not only as access to information but also as a mechanism for reducing risk in work-related decision-making. Many informants stated that they felt more confident trying digital work after observing the success of others who had entered the field earlier. Thus, employment decisions are not based solely on individual economic calculations, but are also shaped by trust developed within social networks.

The interpretation of these findings suggests that social capital plays a structural role in shaping graduates' patterns of rationality. The rationality that emerges is not purely individual, but is formed through continuous processes of social interaction. In this context, the decision to engage in platform-based digital work can be understood as the outcome of social processes that bring together information, experience, and mutual support among individuals within the same network. In addition, these findings demonstrate that digital communities have evolved into informal learning spaces that partially replace the functions of formal education. Many digital work skills are not acquired through formal institutions, but through hands-on practice and interaction with fellow digital workers. This indicates that the transformation of the digital economy not only changes the types of work available, but also reshapes how work-related knowledge is produced and disseminated at the local level.

Redefining the Meaning of Work and Emerging Social Order

The findings of this study indicate a significant shift in how people in Buahbatu Village interpret the meaning of work. Previously, work was largely understood as formal employment with stable status, such as office jobs or industrial sector occupations. However, this meaning has begun to shift with the emergence of the digital economy and platform-based work. Some graduates now perceive success not solely in terms of formal employment status, but also in the ability to generate income independently through digital means. This transformation is not limited to the individual level, but is also increasingly visible within families and the broader social environment.

Diva (27 years old) explained that this shift in perception did not occur instantly, but rather through a gradual social process. Initially, her family held negative views toward online work, considering it unstable and lacking long-term security. It was also seen as a side job with lower social value compared to formal employment. However, as the economic outcomes of her work became more tangible in the form of stable income, her family's perception began to change:

“In the past, my parents often said that online work was not a proper job and had no clear future. They encouraged me to look for an office job because it was considered safer, more stable, and had higher social status. However, after I consistently worked through digital platforms and began earning my own income, their views gradually changed. They started to see that online work could produce real results and, in some cases, even help meet the family's daily needs. After that, they began to support the work I am doing now.” (Interview with Informant 5, June 2, 2025)

This statement shows that changes in the meaning of work are not purely individual, but also involve processes of social legitimization at the family level. Empirical experience becomes a key factor in reshaping initial judgments toward digital work. When the economic benefits become evident, negative stigma gradually diminishes and is replaced by social acceptance (Elster, 1989).

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the changing meaning of work in Buahbatu Village cannot be separated from the accumulation of collective experiences with the digital economy. As more graduates engage in platform-based work such as online resellers, freelancers, content creators, and ride-hailing drivers, social acceptance of these occupations becomes stronger. This suggests that social change does not occur

abruptly, but is formed through repeated social interactions and shared lived experiences within the community. From the perspective of James S. Coleman's Rational Choice Theory, this phenomenon can be explained through the concept of *micro-macro linkage*, which refers to the relationship between individual actions and broader structural changes. Initially, individuals' decisions to enter digital work are rational responses to limited formal employment opportunities and economic needs. However, when these decisions are repeated by many individuals, they collectively form new social patterns at the community level. Digital work, once perceived as uncertain, gradually becomes part of a socially accepted employment structure.

The findings also reveal a shift in values regarding the concept of work success among younger generations. Many informants stated that permanent employment is no longer the sole primary goal. Instead, they emphasize time flexibility, autonomy, and the ability to generate income independently without being tied to rigid formal work systems. This shift reflects the emergence of new work values aligned with the characteristics of the digital economy, where stability is measured not only by job status but also by income sustainability and individual independence. Moreover, the study finds that this transformation in the meaning of work also affects the structure of social relations at the local level. Digital work is increasingly viewed as an alternative equivalent to formal employment, particularly when individuals can demonstrate economic success through such activities. This indicates that social legitimacy of work is not determined solely by formal institutions, but also by lived experience and recognition within the community. Thus, the digital economy not only transforms the nature of work, but also reshapes how society constructs meanings of work, success, and social status.

Theoretical and Policy Implications

The findings of this study show that the transformation of the digital economy has reshaped graduates' work-related decision-making patterns in Buahbatu Village. From the perspective of James S. Coleman's Rational Choice Theory, individual actions cannot be understood solely as outcomes of economic calculations, but are also influenced by social structures, relational networks, and the limitations of resources available to actors (Coleman, 1990; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2019). This study finds that graduates choose platform-based digital work by considering broader access to opportunities, time flexibility, and pressing economic needs. This phenomenon aligns with Graham et al. (2017), who argue that the development of the gig economy creates new forms of flexible yet unstable work. In the context of Buahbatu Village, such flexibility becomes the main factor encouraging graduates to engage in digital work, including freelancing, online reselling, content creation, and ride-hailing services. However, in contrast to Vallas and Schor (2020), who emphasize platform dominance in shaping worker dependency, this study highlights the adaptive capacity of local actors in utilizing platforms as survival strategies.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce Coleman's concept of social capital, which posits that social relations function as resources that facilitate individual actions (Coleman, 1990). This is evident in the role of digital communities, friendship networks, and family support in providing job information and reducing uncertainty. These findings are consistent with Kusuma & Sari (2020), who emphasize the importance of social capital in economic decision-making within the informal digital sector. Similarly, Rahardjo & Susanti (2022) show that digital social networks foster new forms of solidarity within platform-based work ecosystems.

From a social change perspective, this study supports Healy et al. (2017), who argue that the gig economy has transformed global labor structures by creating flexible forms of work. However, this research adds a local dimension by demonstrating that in a peri-urban village context, digital work is not merely economic but also undergoes processes of social legitimization. This is reflected in changing family and community perceptions toward platform-based work, which was previously viewed as uncertain but is now increasingly socially accepted. The findings are also relevant to Srnicek's (2017) concept of platform capitalism, which explains how digital platforms mediate economic interactions between workers and users. However, in Buahbatu Village, workers are not entirely passive; rather, they retain agency to negotiate opportunities through adaptive strategies based on experience and social networks. This highlights the dynamic interplay between platform structures and individual action. Moreover, this study reinforces Wood et al. (2019), who argue that gig economy workers face income uncertainty and limited social protection. However, in this context, such uncertainty becomes a rational reason for graduates to choose digital work, as it is perceived as more realistic than waiting for limited formal employment opportunities. This reflects a form of adaptive rationality shaped by local socio-economic conditions. In terms of changing work values, the findings align with Vink & Kossek (2020) and Stanford (2017), who suggest that younger generations prioritize flexibility and autonomy over job stability. This is further supported by Yuliana & Handayani (2023), who show that work identity among youth is increasingly shaped by digital experiences rather than formal educational institutions.

Overall, this study emphasizes that graduates' rationality in Buahbatu Village is adaptive and contextual. Decisions to engage in platform-based digital work result from the interaction between economic needs, limited formal job opportunities, and social network support. Thus, this research extends Coleman's theoretical framework by demonstrating that rational action is not purely individual, but also collective and shaped by evolving digital social structures. The implications are that the transformation of the digital economy not only alters employment structures, but also reshapes social values and interaction patterns. Graduates are no longer positioned merely as objects of change, but as active agents who rationally negotiate opportunities within new economic structures (Sun & Chen, 2021; Andini & Yuliani, 2023). Therefore, policies related to digital capacity development, platform work literacy, and social protection are essential to address the evolving dynamics of labor in the digital era.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the transformation of the digital economy has reshaped how graduates in Buahbatu Village perceive and choose employment. Amid limited formal job opportunities, graduates demonstrate adaptive rationality through their engagement in digital work such as freelancing, online reselling, and ride-hailing services. These decisions are the result of rational calculations regarding income opportunities, work flexibility, and economic needs. From the perspective of James S. Coleman's Rational Choice Theory, these actions indicate that individuals remain capable of acting rationally even within the constraints of social and economic structures. The findings also reveal that social capital plays a crucial role in supporting graduates' adaptation to the digital economy. Social networks, digital communities, and family support help graduates access information, job opportunities, and a sense of security in navigating the uncertainties of digital work. Furthermore, the accumulation of individual actions contributes to the emergence of a new social order, in which platform-based digital work is increasingly perceived as equivalent to formal employment. This represents the novelty of the study, highlighting how graduates' rationality in peri-urban village contexts contributes to the redefinition of the meaning of work in the digital economy era. Practically, this study underscores the need for more targeted policies, such as village-based digital skills training, expanded access to social protection for platform workers, and the strengthening of digital literacy and infrastructure at the local level. However, this study is limited by its focus on a single location with a relatively small number of informants, meaning that the findings cannot yet be broadly generalized. Future research is therefore recommended to conduct comparative studies across regions and to employ mixed-method approaches in order to deepen the analysis of the long-term impacts of the gig economy on graduate welfare.

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