

Youth Rationality in the Digital Economy: Work Flexibility and Digital Skills of Jember University Students in Thrift and Skincare Businesses Through Social Media Platforms

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Abstract

This study examines the rationality of youth in responding to the development of the digital economy, particularly in the context of work flexibility and digital skills acquisition. Amid rapid digital transformation, young people are required to make rational decisions in choosing career paths, developing skills, and utilizing digital platforms to create job opportunities that align with their lifestyles and personal needs. Using a qualitative approach through ethnographic methods, this research explores how youth actively engage with technology—such as social media and digital marketing—in their daily work practices, including flexible job models like freelancing and the gig economy. The study employs Max Weber's theory of social action, particularly the concept of instrumental rational action, to understand how young people determine goals and select the means used in their digital economic activities. The findings reveal that youth leverage work flexibility and digital skills as strategies to achieve economic independence and build professional identities, while also facing dilemmas such as the trend of flexing, which emphasizes appearance over substance. This research concludes that the rationality of youth in the digital economy reflects a complex adaptation involving pragmatic values, personal needs, and social pressures in the digital era. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for policymakers in designing youth empowerment programs that are more responsive to the challenges and dynamics of the digital labor landscape.

Keywords: youth, digital economy, work flexibility, digital skills, rationality, social action

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization marked by rapid advances in information technology, the digital economy has become one of the main pillars in economic development in various countries. This transformation brings significant changes in the way individuals work, interact, and do business. Young people, as the next generation and agents of change, have a very important role in taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the digital economy. Therefore, it is important to understand the rationality of young people in responding to this phenomenon, especially in the context of work flexibility and digital skills.

Work flexibility is one of the main advantages of the digital economy. Unlike the traditional work model that is tied to the physical location of the office, the digital economy allows young people to work from anywhere and at any time. This provides greater freedom in arranging time and place of work, so that they can optimize productivity and develop creativity. However,

this flexibility also requires young people to have good discipline and time management in order to fulfill work responsibilities effectively.

In addition to work flexibility, digital skills are a key factor in determining the success of young people in the digital economy. These skills cover various aspects, from basic understanding of information technology, data analysis skills, to digital marketing. In an era where information moves rapidly, young people who have strong digital skills will be better able to adapt and compete in an increasingly competitive job market. Therefore, developing digital skills is a must for every individual, especially for those who want to take advantage of the opportunities available in the digital economy.

Rationality in decision-making related to skill development and career choices is very important to note. Young people who are able to evaluate available career options and identify the skills needed will be better prepared to face the

challenges that exist. They need to have a clear understanding of market trends, industry needs, and their own potential. Thus, young people who are rational in facing these changes can optimize their potential and contribute to overall economic development.

Today's youth need to equip themselves with digital literacy and analytical skills in order to determine market needs. In addition, being able to determine a career is an effort by young people to be adaptive in the development of the times. This not only reflects the adaptive ability of young people to market dynamics, but also contributes to the creation of an ecosystem that supports a decision-making process that is data-based, logical, and considers long-term impacts for personal success and the progress of society as a whole.

Moreover, skill development is not only limited to technical aspects, but also includes soft skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking skills. In this dynamic era, young people are required to continue learning and be able to adapt quickly to change. With a combination of rationality in decision making and readiness to continue learning, young people will not only be more resilient individually, but also be able to become the driving force of innovation and national economic development.

One form of youth effort in implementing career flexibility analysis is by becoming a live host on e-commerce. Either selling thrift products or selling skincare products. Not a few young people work as live hosts to meet their needs or even just to find additional income. This shows the adaptability of young people to adjust to the dynamics of the modern market and utilize the development of digital economic potential creatively.

One of them is the male and female students of Jember University who are also involved in making efforts to utilize work flexibility and digital skills through thrift and

skincare businesses, namely *byzoeskincare* And *loopypreloved* with the aim of being able to meet daily needs and increase income for snacks. Through the efforts undertaken, students can optimize the selection of businesses by adjusting to their desires and on the other hand get benefits from the efforts undertaken.

This study aims to explore more deeply how youth rationality in the digital economy can affect work flexibility and the development of their skills. In addition, this study will also discuss the implications of this phenomenon for economic development, both at the individual and wider community levels. It is hoped that the findings of this study can provide valuable insights for stakeholders in formulating policies that support youth development in the digital era.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method in which we use an ethnographic approach, in this ethnographic approach the researcher is directly involved and interacts with the group to be studied. This study focuses on how work flexibility and digital skills can be easily utilized by the creativity they have, of course by using the ideas and concepts they have. Thus, this ethnographic approach can provide a deep understanding of how they utilize digital platforms today for their own benefit.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results and discussions

- a. Social Action according to Weber
According to (Weber, 2009: 65) Weber's methodological reflection is related to the philosophy of enlightenment. The starting point and the main unit of analysis is the individual figure. Interpretive sociology sees individuals and actions taken as one unit, and this can be determined in comparison to then be accepted by all the core parts. Humans in society are creative actors and social reality is not a static tool rather than the coercion of social facts. The actions that humans take are not all determined by norms, habits, values,

and so on that exist in social facts (Weber, 2009: 66). The existence of types of social action is very important in social theory, Weber has the assumption that the social structure as a whole cannot be separated from the social actions of its society and the meaning given by society to those actions. Rationality is an awareness that is built on the collectivity that is present encompassing all institutions in it and then society also takes action rationally

.According to (Weber, 2009: 67) Weber chose various "types" of various motivated actions. All actions that are claimed as rationality include something that can be understood and economic humans who become something that can be used as the main mirror of the action. Actions that are less "rational" by Weber are classified, in relation to the search for goals based on the personal preferences of individuals. Because absolute goals are viewed by sociologists as "given" data, then an action can be rational with reference to the means used, but "irrational" if associated with the goals to be achieved.

b. Instrumental rational action

Instrumental rational action can be defined as a preference for consideration and conscious selection by individuals who have behavioral goals and the means used to obtain them. Individuals certainly have varying goals; therefore, individuals are required to be able to choose. Through the selection of each of these varying goals, they then give them the decision to participate in choosing the equipment that will support the chosen goal.

The action shows that there are other goals and tools or methods that are considered efficient and effective enough to achieve the goal. The core of instrumental action is everything that prioritizes all actions that produce benefits for the results achieved, and this also requires support that can determine the results achieved more specifically and structured.

Young people in taking action consciously that what they do must have an awareness of the goals they have. If

associated with this research, then the type of instrumental rational action is one type of social action that is appropriate to be able to analyze research related to the socio-economic life of young people in meeting their living needs and seeking income. Many young people now choose to become drop shippers for resellers in e-commerce because it is considered a rational way to start a business without large capital. They realize that with this system, they do not need to stock goods or rent a place, so the risk of loss can be reduced. This action is a form of instrumental rationality, because they calculate logically that becoming a drop shipper is the fastest and cheapest way to start making money from home, just with an internet connection and the right digital marketing strategy.

This action falls into the instrumental rational category because they have consciously considered that selling products or services online is more efficient, cheaper, and reaches a wider market. Young people can utilize market data, digital marketing strategies, and platform features such as Tokopedia, Shopee, or Tiktok Shop to increase sales and achieve their financial goals in a measurable and logical way.

In this modern era, not a few female students open businesses selling women's clothing through the marketplace because they have done research that the product is trending among teenagers. She chose the auction system on TikTok because it was considered more efficient in getting potential buyers and more effective in selling products. Every decision taken from product selection, marketing on digital platforms, to shipping methods is part of instrumental rational action because it is based on considerations of resource efficiency, time effectiveness, and the desired end result, namely making a profit.

DISCUSSION

- a. Utilization of technology and digital platforms (social media) to seek job opportunities and innovate Youth rationality in the digital economy reflects how young

people make decisions and act in an environment characterized by rapid change and technology. An important aspect is that young people tend to use various online sources of information to make career decisions. They use digital platforms for market research and to compare opportunities. Young people use websites such as LinkedIn, indeed, and Job street to find job vacancies that match their skills. Even now, many young people use social media such as TikTok which they can use as a side job to seek profit. From the use of digital technology, young people can work flexibly, independently, and innovatively according to their wishes and abilities.

"Digital marketing is one of the marketing media that is currently in great demand by the public to support various activities carried out." (Adi Putra, J., et al. 2022)

Digital marketing is a marketing medium that is now increasingly popular with the public to support various business activities. By using digital platforms that include social media, email, and websites, companies can reach a wider and more segmented audience. This can benefit from digital marketing where it can measure the effectiveness of the campaign in real-time, allowing companies to develop their strategies based on the data obtained. In addition, digital marketing also offers more efficient costs when compared to traditional marketing methods, so that it can allow small businesses to compete with large companies. With the increasing development of technology and the use of smartphones, digital marketing has become a very important tool for attracting customers, building brand awareness, and increasing sales.

Digital marketing is closely related to the use of technology and digital platforms, especially social media, to find job opportunities and innovate. In the context of job search, many companies now use social media as a means to recruit potential employees. Platforms such as LinkedIn not only allow job seekers to find vacancies, but also to build professional networks and

showcase their skills. In addition, digital marketing also facilitates innovation. Entrepreneurs can use digital platforms to test new ideas, gather direct customer feedback, and adapt quickly to market needs. With an effective marketing strategy, businesses can attract the attention of the right audience and build close relationships with customers. Overall, digital marketing not only functions as a promotional tool, but also as a bridge to create job opportunities and encourage innovation in the digital era.

"Digital transformation in the world of work was first built through a culture that supports digitalization in various business activities carried out in it". (Anwar, K., et al. 2023)

This explains that digital transformation in the workplace begins with a culture that supports digitalization in various business activities. This means that to implement digital technology effectively, companies need to create an environment that is open and ready to adapt to change. A culture that supports digitalization allows individuals to use social media to find job opportunities, build professional networks, and promote themselves. Companies that are open to digitalization also tend to be more transparent in their recruitment processes. In addition, a culture that supports digital transformation encourages innovation, where companies can experiment with new ideas and use technology to increase efficiency. This allows them to respond to market needs more quickly and innovate in the products or services they offer. Digital platforms also facilitate collaboration between employees, making the exchange of ideas more creative. Overall, the quote highlights the importance of a culture that supports digitalization as a foundation for using technology and social media to find job opportunities and drive innovation, underlining that digital transformation is not just about adopting technology, but also about creating an environment that supports change and growth.

- b. Flexibility and freedom to choose work, freelance or gig economy to fulfill lifestyle and personal interests

Flexibility and freedom in choosing work in the context of freelance and gig economy are very prominent as the main characteristics that can attract many people, one of which is the younger generation today. In this case, workers have full control over their work schedule so that it is able to allow them to arrange when and where they work without being bound by fixed working hours or the location where they work. This greatly supports the adjustment of work with a lifestyle or personal interests, such as being able to work at home, cafe, or the place they want so that from this it is able to create a good balance between personal life and work life. Not only that, freelance and gig economy provide the freedom to choose related to various types of work desired according to the interests, skills, and passions possessed by the individual.

"I think this job is very flexible, sis, because I can work anytime and anywhere, especially since my work utilizes digital media, one of which is live tik tok and shopee, so it really helps a lot, it just depends on how we manage it so that later many people will be interested in buying the products we sell." (Interview with Reo, May 28, 2025)

With the existence of digital media in today's era, it can be utilized well to find work, not only that, the existence of social media is also able to obtain many relationships and insights and broad knowledge so it is not surprising that later the ideas or creativity that we do can have a good impact and provide many benefits for us. The flexibility offered is very suitable for individuals who want to do traveling activities, or even build good personal branding in the digital world. In other words, it can also help to be easily known and recognized by many people.

Personal branding and work flexibility in the gig economy are closely related to the personal interests of a person, the gig economy offers flexibility in time and

location of work, so that workers can set their schedules according to their personal needs and lifestyle. This flexibility allows someone to balance work and personal life as desired. In the competitive world of the gig economy, personal branding is one way for freelancers to stand out and be attractive, In other words, with work flexibility, it gives freedom to set time and place of work, while personal branding ensures that work can attract maximum opportunities that are appropriate and can maintain career sustainability in a competitive and changing market.

However, there is also personal branding that is misused for flexing where it builds a self-image that emphasizes a luxurious lifestyle, material achievements, or social status as a way to attract attention and increase influence on social media or professional environments, which utilize digital platforms to show off personal achievements or assets as part of a self-marketing strategy, which can only focus on appearance rather than the substance of expertise or actual professional value.

"Flexing is also seen as an act of showing ownership or achievement in the media, where others would view it as something unpleasant" (Putri and Rossa, 2024)

flexing is a behavior that shows off ownership or achievements, especially on social media, where it aims to show someone's social status and abilities to others. This does not only happen in the upper class, but is also clear in the lower middle class who are trying to meet the demands of the lifestyle they want to have in order to get social recognition, but flexing will not fundamentally change the social structure, but rather to strengthen the existence of competition and competence in the environment.

"the benefits assessed through economic measures are mantras that are continuously repeated, disseminated and infused into public consciousness. More concretely, the standard measure of success continues to be seen in material achievements and convertibility, from the material to the abstract or symbolic".(Rossa, 2022).

“Economically valued benefits become a mantra that is continually repeated, disseminated, and embedded in the public consciousness. More concretely, the standard measure of success continues to be seen from material achievements and their conversion capabilities, both from material to abstract and symbolic forms.” (Rossa, 2022)

Achieving economic benefits is often used as the main benchmark in assessing the success of an individual or organization. The standard of success in today's society is closely related to material achievements such as income, wealth and assets. This abstract form can be a sense of security and a good quality of life, while the symbolic form includes a positive self-image in the eyes of others and social recognition. This flexibility allows them to be able to regulate the rhythm of work according to personal needs. In addition, there is freedom in determining ongoing projects with interests and expertise that can increase job satisfaction and the quality of the work done. This shows that the gig economy is not only to meet economic needs but also the psychological and social aspects of workers, where this can later provide more dominant control over work life and personal life.

CONCLUSION

Young people in the digital economy era show high rationality in utilizing technological advances to achieve work flexibility and digital skill development. Work flexibility through digital platforms allows them to work freely, independently, and in accordance with their personal lifestyle through freelance work. Digital skills are a key asset that not only allows adaptation to market changes but also encourages creativity and innovation in the world of work.

Everything that surrounds the phenomenon can be described by a perspective that is initiated and explained through an explanation. Young people are not only users of technology, but also producers of ideas and creative ideas that are realized through social media, digital marketing, and online work platforms. The rationality of their actions can be

explained through Max Weber's concept of instrumental rational action, where individuals consciously choose the most efficient goals and tools to achieve them.

However, phenomena such as flexing show that not all use of digital technology is directed at increasing the substance of skills or professionalism. Sometimes the image and symbolization of material success becomes a goal that shifts the essence of the work value itself. Therefore, it is important for young people to develop personal branding that is based on expertise and integrity, not just symbolic achievements.

Overall, the digital economy provides space for young people to play an active role in economic development through flexible work and digital skills. However, healthy and ethical rationality in decision-making is the main key so that this digital potential can have a positive impact, both individually and socially.

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