

YOUTH SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE GIG ECONOMY AND DIGITAL PLATFORM WORK

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Abstract - This literature study examines youth social mobility within gig economy and platform work by focusing on the interplay of social, cultural, and digital capitals. It argues that young workers navigate a fluid labor landscape where income, recognition, and status are shaped by ratings, algorithms, and online networks rather than fixed positions. Upward mobility tends to emerge when strong social ties provide information, referrals, and emotional support, while cultural capital enables convincing communication, persuasive self presentation, and alignment with user expectations. Digital capital strengthens these advantages through skilled use of applications, data dashboards, and creative tools that open access to higher value tasks. At the same time, unequal access to devices, connectivity, and learning resources produces recurring downward moves, especially for youth who enter platform work without savings or supportive networks. Mobility trajectories therefore appear fragmented, reversible, and exposed to abrupt policy changes within platforms. The article proposes that any serious discussion of youth social mobility should treat platform labor as a central arena in which opportunities, constraints, and aspirations are continuously reconfigured.

Keywords: youth social mobility, gig economy, platform work, social capital, cultural capital, digital capital, young workers.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the structure of employment opportunities for young people has undergone significant changes with the development of the digital platform-based economy. Jobs that were previously dominated by formal employment relationships with fixed working hours and relatively clear career paths now coexist with various forms of freelance work, short-term contracts, and app-based tasks. These changes have also influenced how self-identity and social perceptions are formed through interactions in digital spaces, where online networks and images have become an important part of the professional reputation and social mobility of the younger generation (Costa et al., 2022). These changes are often perceived as providing young people with the flexibility to manage their time and choose from a variety of sources of income. However, behind this image of flexibility, questions arise about how these changes in work patterns relate to their opportunities for social advancement. Social mobility, which was once strongly linked to permanent professions, educational certificates, and formal organisational membership, now intersects with algorithms, user ratings, and networks formed in digital spaces. Young people are faced with demands to adapt quickly, manage their professional identities online, and cultivate various forms of capital that are not always recorded in conventional categories (Park et al., 2022).

In the gig economy and platform work, the relationship between individual effort and social outcomes appears increasingly complex. An app driver, freelance designer, content writer, or other micro-worker may perform similar tasks but receive different levels of recognition, income, and mobility. These differences cannot be explained solely by working hours or formal skill levels. One factor that contributes to these differences is access to technology and digital skills, which play an important role in opening up opportunities and reducing gaps in the world of work and education in the technological era (Arifin & Darmawan, 2021). These skills range from technical operational abilities to strategic expertise, such as utilising social media to build an image and promote services, which has been recognised as a significant potential in online business development (Infante & Mardikaningsih, 2022). Networks of relationships, proximity to certain communities, and the ability to manage one's image in the digital space also shape the social journey of young people. On the one hand, there is a narrative that anyone can succeed as long as they are diligent and agile in taking advantage of opportunities. On the other hand, new vulnerabilities arise when access to technological devices, algorithmic knowledge, and family support is uneven. Social mobility in this scheme becomes an arena of bargaining between the hope for individual freedom and the reality of structures that remain restrictive (Rolfe, 2017).

Young people involved in the gig economy and platform work are often positioned as the main drivers of innovation. They are considered more familiar with technology, more flexible in the face of uncertainty, and more open to fragmented forms of work. In an increasingly digital world, the importance of reputation management for freelancers and platform workers applies not only in a corporate context but also as a critical skill for individuals in maintaining credibility and trust in the digital space (Darmawan et al., 2022). However, behind this image lie layered experiences related to security, dignity of work, and future prospects. Many young workers feel that their income fluctuates sharply, making it difficult to make long-term plans, whether for further education, home ownership, or starting a family. They need to redefine their understanding of careers, achievements, and social success. Social mobility is no longer measured

solely by formal job promotions, but by the ability to maintain a decent income, build a stable online reputation, and maintain a network of trust across the various platforms used for work (Belova, 2023).

In this wave of change, social, cultural and digital capital have become important determinants in the journey of the younger generation (Lima & Pires, 2017). The changes occurring in work relationships in the era of digitalisation also confirm that literacy and digital capital are important components that influence work dynamics, not only in multinational corporations but also in the context of the gig economy and platform work (Darmawan et al., 2023). Social capital manifests itself in the form of support from family networks, friends, hobby communities, or work colleagues who can provide access to task information, customer recommendations, and protection when facing difficulties. Cultural capital is reflected in communication styles, habits, tastes, and ways of interpreting work that influence comfort in interacting with clients or service users. Understanding cultural capital is increasingly relevant given that cultural values and social practices themselves continue to transform in their interaction with the digital era, which ultimately shapes how the younger generation navigates the new world of work (Al Hakim et al., 2021). Meanwhile, digital capital includes technical skills in operating applications, understanding recommendation logic, managing personal data, and managing presence on various platforms. These three types of capital are not evenly distributed among the younger generation. Family background, educational history, place of residence, and organisational experience shape the composition of capital that benefits some and limits others. In this case, the role of educational institutions is crucial in closing this capital gap. However, evaluations of education that is expected to equip young people with entrepreneurial skills and flexible job market navigation show that curricula are often not fully capable of addressing the complexity and uncertainty inherent in the gig economy and platform work (Zahid et al., 2023).

Studies on the social mobility of the younger generation in the gig economy and platform work are important because they can reveal how expectations of fair opportunities intersect with the reality of layered structures. This reality cannot be separated from the broader spatial and social context, where the process of urbanisation has created a landscape of inequality and unique challenges in building social cohesion (Mardikaningsih, 2021). On the one hand, app-based work is often sold as a fast track to mobility for anyone willing to "work harder". On the other hand, various reports of low wages, long working hours, and dependence on technology company policies show that this path is not always wide open. The young generation entering this field brings with them aspirations, tastes, and values acquired from their families, schools, and digital media. They interpret their gig work experiences in personal narratives of independence, creativity, or economic necessity. An approach that focuses on subjective experiences and interpretations of everyday meanings allows this study to unravel how social mobility is understood, felt, and pursued by young actors in their daily lives.

The first issue that arises relates to the tension between the promise of flexibility and the reality of uncertainty experienced by young workers in the gig economy and platform work. They are often promoted as a generation that has the freedom to choose projects, determine working hours, and manage a combination of multiple sources of income. However, on a practical level, many of them depend on one or two platforms with policies that can change at any time, without a strong bargaining position. Income can drop dramatically due to rate adjustments, changes in incentives, or a decline in demand (Morgan et al., 2015). In such situations, upward social mobility becomes difficult to map out, as there are no clear career paths, adequate social protection, or guarantees of structured skills development. The big question arises as to how this younger generation negotiates its social status when it lives between the narrative of entrepreneurship and the reality of structural vulnerability.

The next issue concerns inequality in the ownership and management of various forms of capital that affect mobility. Some young people enter the gig economy with the support of the latest technology, stable internet connections, and families who are able to provide financial support when income declines (Maury, 2023). Others, however, work with basic equipment, live in areas with limited digital infrastructure, and bear family responsibilities from the outset. These differences affect their ability to access high-value tasks, build attractive portfolios, and take advantage of networking opportunities. In platform work, which is highly dependent on ratings and reviews, workers who are vulnerable from the outset can become trapped in a cycle of low income, long working hours, and a reputation that is difficult to repair. This is where the issue of social mobility for the younger generation becomes increasingly complex, as it depends on factors that go beyond personal will and effort.

It is important to study this topic at a time when the gig economy and platform work have become a regular part of the lives of young people in various regions. Many of them even start their first work experience through apps, whether as drivers, couriers, content creators, online tutors, or other micro-service providers. These early experiences shape how they view the world of work, interpret the relationship between education and income, and imagine their social future. If the dynamics of social mobility in this work pattern are not carefully examined, there is a risk of creating a generation of workers who feel they must always be ready to work without guarantees, while bearing the burden of the narrative that failure to improve one's standard of living is solely due to individual shortcomings. This literature study provides a conceptual basis for examining how structures of opportunity and personal agency intertwine in the working lives of young people.

At the same time, rapid changes in the technological landscape and platform policies create a need to revisit the concept of social mobility, which has largely been constructed based on formal work experience. Indicators such

as job level, length of service, and permanent employment status cannot be fully used to understand the ups and downs of social position in the gig economy. Young people can experience a rapid increase in income due to the success of managing an account on a platform, then face a sudden decline when the algorithm changes or the platform shifts its service priorities. Furthermore, the presence of digital capital adds a new dimension to the discussion of social and cultural capital. Therefore, a systematic review of existing literature is necessary to formulate an analytical framework that is sensitive to the experiences of the younger generation, while also providing a basis for discussions on employment and education policies.

The objective of this study is to develop a structured theoretical understanding of the social mobility of the younger generation in the gig economy and platform work by examining various recent scientific works that discuss the relationship between new forms of work, the experiences of the younger generation, and the various types of capital they possess. This study seeks to identify emerging patterns of social mobility, both upward and downward, and explain how social, cultural, and digital capital work together in this process. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the discourse on social mobility by including platform-based work as a legitimate arena for analysis. Practically, the results can serve as a reference for policy makers, educational institutions, and organisations supporting young workers in formulating programmes that are more sensitive to the realities of the younger generation's app-based work.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study utilises a qualitative literature review approach that focuses on conceptual and interpretative reasoning of scientific works discussing social mobility, the younger generation, the gig economy, platform work, and the concepts of social, cultural, and digital capital. The research was conducted by referring to a systematic literature review guide that emphasises clarity of research questions, transparency of the source selection process, and traceability of analytical steps (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). The literature search was conducted through international and national scientific databases using selected keywords that combined terms related to youth, gig economy, platform work, social mobility, social capital, cultural capital, and digital skills. Relevant journal articles, scientific books, and research reports were selected based on their thematic relevance to the research focus, availability of full texts, and adequate methodological quality. This approach enabled the development of a coherent conceptual mapping of how various studies interpret the social mobility of young people in the platform-based work landscape.

Thematic synthesis was used as the main analytical framework to organise findings from various sources. Referring to the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006), the analysis process began with repeated readings of selected texts, followed by the marking of units of meaning related to forms of social mobility, the experiences of the younger generation in platform work, and the role of social, cultural, and digital capital. These units of meaning were then coded openly before being grouped into initial themes that described recurring patterns and tensions between findings. The thematic synthesis approach as described by Thomas and Harden (2008) was used as a reference to elevate descriptive themes to more abstract analytical themes, so that this study does not merely summarise, but rather constructs conceptual relationships between various studies. This process was carried out iteratively, with the original sources being reread when there were doubts about the interpretation of the codes and themes that emerged.

To maintain scientific quality, inclusion and exclusion criteria were clearly defined before the review process began. The sources included were scientific publications that explicitly discussed platform-based work, the gig economy, or other forms of digital work involving the younger generation, as well as works that reviewed social, cultural, and digital capital in relation to social mobility. Literature that only discussed the digital workforce in general without the dimension of the younger generation was excluded, except when it made an important theoretical contribution regarding social mobility or capital frameworks. The principles of consistency and openness in qualitative analysis are referenced from Creswell (2013) and Miles et al. (2014), particularly in terms of recording analytical traces, compiling theme matrices, and researchers' critical reflections on their interpretive positions. The source triangulation strategy was carried out by comparing findings from journal articles, books, and policy research reports. In addition, the assessment of literature quality refers to the integrative review guidelines proposed by Whittemore and Knafl (2005), which emphasise consistency of argument, clarity of original methodology, and theoretical relevance to the research questions raised in this literature study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Patterns of Social Mobility Among Young People in the Gig Economy and Platform Work

The social mobility patterns of the younger generation in the gig economy and platform work are shaped by the convergence of personal aspirations, digital opportunity structures, and highly fluid work rhythms. Many young people enter app-based work with the hope of earning quick income, freedom to manage their time, and opportunities for self-development. In the early stages, they often find themselves in similar social positions, namely as beginners without a reputation or a strong portfolio. Over time, differences begin to emerge as some succeed in establishing their work

rhythms, identifying niche services, and understanding user demand patterns. Others remain stuck in low-value, routine work that is physically demanding. From this, it is apparent that social mobility does not move in a straight line, but rather in repeated upward or downward shifts, depending on the ability to read opportunities, resilience in the face of uncertainty, and the support available around them (Turpin & Van Belle, 2023).

The upward movement of the younger generation in the gig economy is often characterized by increased user trust and greater access to high-value tasks. Among platform-based creative workers, for example, upward social mobility is evident through increased rates, long-term work opportunities, and invitations to collaborate from more established clients (Johan et al., 2022). However, fundamental questions about worker welfare and labor market stability in the gig economy serve as a reminder that this mobility is not always linear and sustainable, as income fluctuations and minimal social protection can quickly alter workers' positions (Ishaq & Darmawan, 2021). For delivery or daily service workers, social position changes occur when income becomes more stable, instalments can be paid off, or they are able to support their family's economy. However, behind these success stories, there is a pattern of mobility that is easily fragile. Health problems, changes in platform policies, or a decline in demand in certain areas can shift them back to a vulnerable position. The mobility achieved often depends on factors beyond the individual's full control, so social security is rarely achieved in a stable manner.

At the same time, downward social mobility is quite prominent in platform work, especially for young workers who enter this field without other resources. They may experience an initial period with promising earnings, then face a decline in orders when the number of new workers surges or when the platform changes its incentive scheme. When income declines, workers are forced to extend their working hours, reduce their rest time, and postpone plans to improve their skills. In the long term, these conditions erode their opportunities to move to more stable jobs. Downward mobility also arises when they become trapped in debt for the purchase of vehicles, equipment, or data packages, while their income is no longer sufficient to cover instalments. Their social status, which had initially improved due to the acquisition of new assets, can become a burden when their ability to pay is disrupted (Park et al., 2022).

Social capital is one of the key determinants that guide the direction of mobility in this landscape. Young people who have extensive networks of friends, professional communities, or family connections tend to find it easier to obtain information about the most profitable platforms, ways to avoid detrimental policies, and strategies for maintaining ratings. They receive client referrals, recommendations from fellow workers, and emotional support when facing periods of low demand. These networks serve as a buffer when income uncertainty arises, as there are parties willing to lend funds, share accounts, or offer project collaborations (Portes et al., 2023). Conversely, young workers who operate almost entirely alone often experience isolation, are unaware of complaint channels, and find it difficult to access opportunities outside of the assignments offered by the application.

Strong social capital does not always come in the form of formal networks or large organizations. In the gig economy, small groups formed in neighborhoods, online communities, or informal social circles can support social mobility (Portes et al., 2023). In the same context, the ease of use and acceptance of technologies such as digital payment systems also plays a role in encouraging interaction and participation in gig economy networks, which in turn can expand access to new opportunities (Kemarauwana & Darmawan, 2020). For example, some courier workers form short communication groups to share busy areas, arrange shifts, or help each other when technical problems arise in the field. Creative workers form online forums to provide feedback on each other's portfolios, share contract templates where an understanding of the validity and effectiveness of electronic contracts is an important basis for legal protection in digital transactions (Sulaiman et al., 2023), and warn friends when there are clients who often delay payments. These activities strengthen mutual trust and reduce the risks that each individual has to bear. In many cases, upward mobility occurs when a young worker is introduced to a new circle of clients through informal recommendations from the networks they have diligently cultivated.

Cultural capital presents another dimension that greatly influences mobility patterns. The way of speaking, presentation style, aesthetic taste, and work habits acquired from family, education, and social environment influence the ability of the younger generation to adapt to the expectations of service users. Workers who are accustomed to using polite language, responding to complaints calmly, or compiling neat portfolios tend to receive more positive evaluations. Similarly, workers with a strong understanding of visual trends, content narrative styles, and quality standards valued among creative platform users have a greater chance of accessing high-value projects. This type of cultural capital is often rooted in long-term experiences, such as reading, participating in artistic activities, or interacting in spaces that encourage self-expression (Shaw et al., 2022).

However, cultural capital is not always in line with the demands of the platform. There are times when young people who have been educated with formal work norms feel awkward when they have to present themselves in an informal style that is popular in digital spaces. Some find it difficult when asked to be very personal, share their stories, or display snapshots of their daily lives in order to appear "close" to users. Conversely, those who are accustomed to digital popular culture can move nimbly, combining visual language and light narratives to attract attention. This disparity results in different paths of mobility. Some workers, whose cultural capital aligns with the interaction patterns on the platform, quickly gain followers and orders (Udema, 2022). Others require a long time to adjust their

communication style, or even choose to remain in work areas that demand minimal interaction because they feel uncomfortable standing out.

Digital literacy completes the picture of the social mobility patterns of the younger generation in platform work. Technical skills in operating various applications, recognizing hidden features, reading statistical dashboards, and utilizing productivity tools are key. Young workers with strong digital literacy can manage multiple platforms simultaneously, set up automated responses, utilize promotional features, and observe the most profitable hours to be active. They are able to interpret demand patterns from simple data provided by applications and then adjust their work strategies accordingly. In the creative realm, skills in mastering design software, video editing, and audio processing open up opportunities in higher-paying market segments. Digital capital accumulated through self-directed learning, online courses, or peer-to-peer learning is a major driver for some young people to exceed the income limits achieved by their peers.

The inequality of digital capital is evident when comparing young workers living in areas with adequate infrastructure and those living in areas with unstable connections. Device limitations, small storage capacity, or difficulty accessing application updates hinder the ability to respond to changes in platform rules. Furthermore, understanding of privacy and data security settings is often limited, even though privacy violations in the digital space can have a significant impact on interpersonal trust and maintaining reputation as a key asset for platform workers (Negara et al., 2023). In addition, not all young workers understand the implications of privacy settings, account security, and data management. Account leaks, unilateral blocking, or other technical errors can erase ratings, reviews, and work history that have been the basis of social reputation on the platform (Liu, 2023). In many cases, such incidents erase the traces of mobility that have been painstakingly built. They have to start over from scratch, with narrower opportunities due to increasingly fierce competition.

The interaction between social, cultural, and digital capital makes it difficult to summarize the patterns of social mobility among young people in the gig economy in a single typology. Some young workers are strong in digital capital but weak in social capital, so they excel technically but find it difficult to develop networks that can open up access to new clients. Others are rich in social and cultural capital but have limited digital tools and skills, so they can only access low-value routine work. Those who are relatively balanced in all three types of capital tend to have greater opportunities for repeated upward mobility, although they still face structural uncertainty. Thus, social mobility in platform work is better understood as the result of layered interactions between capital, rather than solely the result of individual hard work or the generosity of the platform.

From all of the above, it is clear that the patterns of social mobility among young people in the gig economy and platform work are dynamic, fragile, and highly dependent on the distribution of social, cultural, and digital capital. Upward mobility occurs when young people successfully combine a technical understanding of the platform, a communication style that aligns with user expectations, and a network that can provide support when income fluctuates. Downward mobility occurs when one or more of these forms of capital weaken, or when policy changes and new competition erode previously achieved positions. This pattern illustrates that app-based work opens up opportunities, but leaves significant uncertainty regarding the sustainability of social status.

The Dynamics of Social, Cultural, and Digital Capital as Drivers and Barriers to Social Mobility Among the Younger Generation

The dynamics of social capital in the gig economy and platform work are evident in the way young people manage relationships, trust, and support networks both offline and online. Strong social capital is built on recurring relationships, open communication, and a willingness to help each other overcome daily work obstacles. In app-based work, these networks can take the form of groups of courier colleagues who share information about busy locations, communities of graphic designers who share project opportunities, or online forums that discuss the latest policies of a particular platform. These relationships provide a sense of solidarity when income declines or when facing unfair treatment from service users. For young workers, these networks are often the first place to ask questions, seek advice, and gain moral support when work pressure increases. Thus, social capital has a multiplier effect, as every act of assistance has the potential to return in the form of new opportunities or emotional support in the future (Muntanyola Saura et al., 2019).

However, limited social capital means that many young people are left to navigate the complexities of platform work on their own (Ilsøe & Larsen, 2020). New workers without contacts in the field often rely entirely on app guides and promotional information disseminated by the company. They have nowhere to turn when they encounter confusing policies, disadvantageous strategies, or fraudulent practices in the field. The absence of a network means that small mistakes can have long-term consequences, such as not knowing how to respond to negative reviews or appeal against account blocking decisions. In such conditions, the available paths for social mobility become narrow. They tend to remain in monotonous, low-paying jobs because they have no reference points for moving to other platforms, combining multiple sources of income, or accessing clients who value their skills more fairly.

The cultural capital of the younger generation is manifested in the way they interpret work, communicate with clients, and present themselves in the digital space. Reading habits, organisational experience, exposure to art and media, and communication patterns within the family shape the style of speech and manners that are carried over into work interactions. Young workers who are accustomed to composing messages clearly, politely, and efficiently can easily adapt to the professional demands of various platforms. In the creative field, a refined aesthetic taste enables them to read the preferences of clients and audiences, allowing them to offer designs, writing, or content that feels relevant to users. This kind of cultural capital makes workers more confident in negotiating, explaining the value of their work, and maintaining quality standards that deserve higher appreciation.

On the other hand, there is a younger generation that brings cultural capital that is less in line with the patterns of interaction valued on the platform (Shaw et al., 2022). For example, those who grew up in an environment that emphasised extreme humility may be awkward about highlighting their achievements in their online profiles, so that their portfolios appear mediocre even though they are actually of high quality. Others are accustomed to a very informal style of speech, making it difficult for them to adjust when dealing with corporate clients who expect well-structured communication. These stylistic differences can influence user assessments, even though the worker's technical abilities are actually adequate. When negative reviews arise due to communication misunderstandings, their reputation declines and the chances of subsequent orders also drop (Rani & Furrer, 2019). At this point, cultural capital that is not in line with platform expectations becomes a significant barrier to social mobility.

Cultural capital is also related to how young people envision their future and plan their career strategies within the gig economy. Those who have diverse references regarding career paths tend to view platform work as one stage in a long journey, rather than as a fate that must be accepted forever. With this perspective, they are more likely to organise their daily work while still allocating time to study, expand their portfolio, or pioneer other fields of business (Lima & Pires, 2017). Conversely, young people who from the outset accept the view that app-based work is the only option may feel more trapped, and thus less motivated to seek paths to capacity building. This way of thinking does not arise spontaneously, but is influenced by conversations at home, school experiences, and the image of work they see in their surroundings. Here we see how cultural capital can shape the horizon of imagined mobility.

Digital capital is the technical foundation that connects young workers to platform infrastructure. Digital literacy includes the ability to operate work applications, understand available features, maintain account security, and utilise various productivity support tools. Young people who are accustomed to experimenting with new technologies are generally quicker to find efficient ways of working, for example by selectively setting notifications, synchronising order calendars, or utilising navigation applications that are more accurate than the platform's default ones. In the creative realm, mastery of design software, video editing, audio editing, and social media analytics allows them to operate in high value-added market segments. This kind of digital capital reduces technical barriers and opens up opportunities to expand their client base across regions (Martindale & Lehdonvirta, 2023).

However, digital literacy is not automatically possessed by all young people. Some workers only master the basic functions of applications and feel anxious when asked to tinker with security settings, update software, or utilise promotional features. This uncertainty makes them reluctant to try new platforms, limiting their opportunities to reach a wider market. Device limitations, expensive data packages, or unstable internet connections further exacerbate the situation. Workers who have to repeatedly log in, lose signal while delivering orders, or fail to upload high-resolution portfolios often fall behind in the competition. Ultimately, a lack of digital capital reduces their ability to turn their daily work into a stepping stone for a more solid social status.

The interaction between social, cultural, and digital capital does not always run smoothly. There is a younger generation that has extensive networks, is accustomed to socialising, and is able to communicate with various groups, but is less trained in utilising technical features on platforms (Tilleczek & Rimer, 2019). In this case, an understanding of adaptive justice approaches in the digital space, such as restorative justice applied in resolving cases related to online expression, can provide a framework for seeing how imbalances in digital and social competencies can create vulnerabilities as well as opportunities for restitution for young workers (Rianto et al., 2023). They often become preferred intermediaries for many people, but experience difficulties when managing order archives, organising schedules, or optimising their work profile display. Conversely, there are workers who are technically proficient and have strong portfolios, but have narrow social circles and low self-confidence when it comes to establishing new relationships. In the first case, social mobility is hindered by digital barriers, while in the second case, it is hindered by social and cultural barriers. Both cases show that excellence in one type of capital does not guarantee upward mobility if other types of capital are weak.

In addition to complementing each other, these three types of capital can also reinforce or diminish each other. Good social capital can be a gateway to expanding digital and cultural capital, for example when a friend introduces free online training or invites someone to join a design skills learning community. Conversely, the absence of a network can prevent someone from knowing about these learning resources, resulting in very slow growth of their digital capital. Cultural capital in the form of reading habits and a high level of curiosity encourages young workers to seek out new

literature and tutorials, which ultimately enriches their digital capital. However, if workers grow up in an environment that views technological exploration as risky, they may be hesitant to try new features and stick to narrow work patterns.

The dynamics that drive social mobility are clearly evident when these three types of capital support each other. A young worker who has a strong community network, a communication style that is in tune with users, and the ability to manage multiple platforms at once has the opportunity to achieve more stable income and a more secure reputation (Pham, 2022). They can receive early information about new platforms that promise better rates, assess their suitability based on their understanding of work culture, and then quickly learn how to use them. When there is a disruption on one platform, social networks provide a temporary buffer, while cultural and digital capital help them adapt without losing their professional identity. In the long term, this combination forms a trajectory of upward mobility, albeit one that is still marked by fluctuations.

Conversely, dynamics that inhibit mobility arise when inequalities in the distribution of capital accumulate vulnerabilities. Young people who are weak in social, cultural, and digital capital are at high risk of being trapped in low-paying jobs with no opportunities for skill development. They find it difficult to obtain alternative job information, have difficulty communicating effectively with clients, and lack confidence when trying new platforms (Bennett & Burnard, 2016). If their accounts are penalised or demand for their services declines, they lack networks to share experiences or provide temporary financial support. In such situations, their options are often limited to working longer hours to meet daily needs, leaving little time or energy for learning. This pattern increases the likelihood of repeated downward mobility.

These driving and inhibiting dynamics are also influenced by how platforms design their rules and interaction features. When technology companies provide official community spaces, training programmes, and responsive support channels, young workers with limited capital still have the opportunity to build capacity. However, if policies are designed on the assumption that all workers have high literacy, adequate equipment, and extensive support networks, those in vulnerable positions will fall further behind. At this point, it is clear that the social mobility of the younger generation is not merely the result of individual efforts, but is influenced by the powerful pull of platform structure design, which can either strengthen or weaken the influence of their social, cultural, and digital capital.

The dynamics of social, cultural, and digital capital form a broad spectrum of drivers and inhibitors of social mobility for the younger generation in the gig economy and platform work. These three types of capital are interrelated in determining young workers' ability to identify opportunities, maintain income continuity, build reputation, and take advantage of technological change. When these three types of capital are managed in a balanced manner, upward mobility is more likely to occur, even though it remains surrounded by uncertainty. However, when capital inequality is very sharp, individual efforts often collide with structural barriers that are difficult to overcome.

CONCLUSIONS

This literature review shows that the social mobility of young people in the gig economy and platform work moves along dynamic, fragile paths that are heavily influenced by the distribution of social, cultural and digital capital. App-based work does open up opportunities for young people to access new sources of income, build an online reputation and organise a more flexible work schedule. However, these opportunities are not evenly distributed because they depend on the support networks that young people have, their communication habits and attitudes towards work, and their ability to master digital devices and features. Upward mobility occurs when young people are able to combine reliable networks, interaction styles that are in line with user expectations, and the technical skills to manage various platforms. Conversely, downward mobility occurs when these three types of capital are weak or fragmented, making workers prone to low incomes, long working hours, and limited learning opportunities. Thus, the gig economy presents opportunities for upward mobility, but leaves young people vulnerable in terms of the sustainability of their social achievements.

The conceptual findings of this study have several implications for the development of science and policy design. Academically, it is necessary to enrich the framework of social mobility by including platform-based work as an important arena, because the patterns of status movement among the younger generation cannot be fully understood through the category of formal work. An approach that links social, cultural, and digital capital offers a more sensitive lens for reading how opportunities and limitations are formed in the daily working lives of young people. For labour and education policymakers, the results of this study suggest the need for programme design that recognises the gig economy as a primary reality for many young workers, so that training and social protection support does not only target permanent workers. Educational institutions, civil society organisations, and professional communities can use this understanding to develop programmes that strengthen networks, improve digital literacy, and foster communication habits that support more equitable social mobility.

Based on the above description, several suggestions can be made for the development of further practices and research. First, secondary and higher education institutions need to start incorporating insights about the gig economy and platform work into career guidance services, while integrating training in online portfolio management, simple contract literacy, and digital work ethics. Second, the government and other stakeholders need to develop mentoring schemes for young workers who are new to platforms, through service centres that help them understand the rules, develop basic

financial plans, and connect them with communities in the same field. Third, researchers are encouraged to develop field-based qualitative studies that explore the experiences of young people from various social backgrounds, so that the picture of the combination and imbalance of social, cultural, and digital capital can be enriched with the voices of the actors themselves. These efforts are expected to narrow the gap between the potential for renewal offered by platform work and the limitations that still plague the social lives of the younger generation.

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