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Reimagining Careers: Society's Perspective on Non-traditional Career Paths

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Abstract

This research examines evolving perceptions of non-traditional career paths among recent graduates and working professionals, with a focus on freelancing, dropshipping, and social media influencing. As traditional careers emphasizing job stability and hierarchical growth become less appealing, flexible and passion-driven opportunities within the digital economy are gaining prominence. A mixed-methods approach, incorporating survey data from 150 respondents and in-depth interviews, explores generational differences between individuals aged 20-30 and 31 and above. Findings reveal that 68% of participants favor non-traditional careers, driven by motivations such as work-life balance (70%), autonomy (65%), and creative freedom (60%). However, challenges persist, with income volatility (55%) and the absence of formal benefits (50%) cited as major concerns. The study highlights significant generational contrasts: younger respondents prioritize autonomy and creative freedom, while older participants weigh financial stability more heavily. Statistical analysis shows a strong correlation between autonomy-seeking behaviors and non-traditional career choices, particularly in creative fields where freelancing and influencing dominate. Conversely, business and technology graduates favor entrepreneurial models like dropshipping. Income unpredictability remains a key predictor of career dissatisfaction, underscoring the need for policy frameworks that address financial security and benefits for non-traditional workers. This research concludes that while non-traditional careers offer flexibility and personal fulfillment, long-term viability depends on sustainable support systems, including education, access to financial protections, and societal recognition. Insights from this study contribute to a broader understanding of the evolving labor market and inform strategies to better support modern career trajectories.

Keywords: Non-traditional careers, Autonomy in careers, Career perceptions, flexibility and fulfillment in careers.

I. INTRODUCTION

The traditional career path, often characterized by stable employment within structured corporate, governmental, or institutional frameworks, has long been viewed as the hallmark of professional success. Historically, these roles provided a clear trajectory for career advancement, financial stability, comprehensive benefits, and a secure retirement plan. Individuals embarking on this path typically followed a linear progression—from entry-level positions to mid-level management, culminating in senior leadership roles—guided by predefined hierarchies and established workplace norms. This model, deeply rooted in societal expectations, has been reinforced by cultural narratives that equate long-term job security and a steady income with professional achievement and personal fulfillment.

However, rapid technological advancements, shifting economic landscapes, and evolving social values have fundamentally transformed the modern labor market. In recent years, there has been a noticeable and growing trend among recent graduates who increasingly favor non-traditional career paths over conventional employment. These alternative career options, including freelancing, dropshipping, entrepreneurship, and social media influencing, offer greater flexibility, autonomy, and creative freedom. Unlike traditional roles, which often prioritize routine and stability, non-traditional careers appeal to individuals seeking dynamic, passion-driven work environments that allow them to align their professional endeavors with personal interests and lifestyle preferences.

Freelancing platforms like Upwork, Fiverr, and Freelancer.com have revolutionized the accessibility of contract-based work, connecting independent professionals with a global client base. Drop shipping, a business model that requires minimal upfront investment and eliminates the need for inventory management, has enabled entrepreneurs to start scalable e-commerce ventures with reduced financial risk. Simultaneously, social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and emerging networks have given rise to a new breed of content creators and influencers who monetize their creativity by partnering with brands, engaging in affiliate marketing, and leveraging ad revenue streams. These developments reflect the increasing influence of the gig economy and digital platforms in shaping contemporary career opportunities.

While these non-traditional pathways offer compelling benefits, including flexible schedules, location independence, and potential for unlimited earnings, they also present significant challenges. Income instability, the absence of traditional employee benefits like health insurance and retirement plans, and the relentless pressure for continuous online visibility are common hurdles faced by those pursuing unconventional careers. The psychological impact of navigating unpredictable income streams, maintaining a competitive edge in saturated markets, and coping with the blurred boundaries between personal and professional life further complicates the pursuit of such careers.

This research aims to delve deeply into the evolving landscape of non-traditional career paths by adopting a generational perspective that contrasts the attitudes of older generations with those of recent graduates. Traditionalist viewpoints, which emphasize job stability, predictable income, and structured career advancement, are juxtaposed with the younger generation's preference for flexibility, independence, and purpose-driven work. By examining these contrasting perspectives, the study seeks to illuminate the broader societal and economic forces driving the shift away from traditional employment paradigms.

The rise of non-traditional careers raises critical questions about personal fulfillment, financial security, and long-term professional development. Through a combination of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, this study explores the motivations, perceptions, and challenges experienced by recent graduates who are either engaged in or considering non-traditional career paths. The research also investigates generational differences in attitudes and expectations toward these roles, offering insights into how technological innovation, social dynamics, and economic uncertainty shape career preferences across age groups.

The findings of this study have practical implications for multiple stakeholders. Educational institutions can use the insights to better align curricula and career guidance services with the realities of the modern job market. Policymakers can develop supportive frameworks that address the unique needs of gig workers and entrepreneurs, ensuring they have access to social safety nets and financial protections. Employers and industry leaders can adapt their talent acquisition strategies to accommodate the preferences of a workforce increasingly drawn to non-traditional roles. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the shifting career landscape and to promote strategies that empower individuals to navigate their professional journeys with confidence, resilience, and purpose.

Literature Review

The evolving nature of career choices among recent graduates, particularly the rise of non-traditional career paths, has generated significant interest in both academic and professional discourse. Unlike previous generations, millennials and Generation Z are increasingly drawn to careers that prioritize flexibility, creativity, and autonomy over traditional job security and hierarchical progression. This shift is influenced by various factors, including technological advancements, changing economic models, and evolving societal values.

Social Media as a Student Career Selection Preference (Zamroni et al., 2019):

In recent years, the shift from traditional to non-traditional career paths has been significantly influenced by technological advancements and the widespread use of social media. Zamroni et al. (2019), in their study on student career selection preferences, highlight the profound impact of social media on shaping career decisions. The research reveals that 61% of students use social media as a primary tool for gathering information about higher education and job opportunities, while smaller percentages rely on personal talents, family influence, or peer opinions. This finding underscores the growing reliance on digital platforms for career exploration and decision-making. The study by Zamroni et al. draws attention to the role of *social media as a source of direct and indirect career-related information*. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube not only provide access to job market trends and career guidance but also influence students' self-efficacy in making career choices. The

availability of diverse, easily accessible information empowers students to explore non-traditional careers that prioritize creativity, flexibility, and independence over the stability traditionally associated with corporate roles. Moreover, the research situates social media within the broader context of *Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)*, which emphasizes the influence of environmental factors, social interactions, and self-efficacy on career decision-making. Zamroni et al. argue that social media integrates these dimensions by creating a dynamic space where students can interact with professionals, explore non-linear career paths, and develop a broader understanding of available opportunities. However, the study also cautions about the potential for misinformation and the need for *structured career guidance*. While social media broadens career horizons, it requires critical evaluation skills to distinguish credible advice from misleading content. The authors advocate for enhanced technological literacy among counselors to support students in navigating digital career resources effectively. The increasing role of social media aligns with broader trends observed in the literature on *non-traditional careers*. As Abraham et al. (2019) highlight in *The Rise of the Gig Economy*, the growing prevalence of freelance and platform-based work reflects a societal shift towards autonomy and passion-driven employment. Together, these studies illuminate the changing landscape of career choices, driven by digital innovation and evolving societal values. The integration of these perspectives into career planning frameworks can help educational institutions and policymakers design supportive systems that address the unique needs of a technology-driven generation. This research builds on these foundational insights by examining how recent graduates perceive and navigate non-traditional career paths, offering recommendations for enhancing career readiness in a rapidly evolving labor market.

The role of social media for career growth among postgraduate students in India (Ahmad and Pawar,2021)

In recent years, the shift from traditional to non-traditional career paths has been profoundly influenced by advancements in technology and the rising use of social media. Ahmad and Pawar (2021), in their study on the role of social media for career growth among postgraduate students in India, highlight the transformative impact of digital platforms like LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook on career decisions. Their research reveals that 94.5% of postgraduate students use LinkedIn for career opportunities, such as internships and jobs, while other platforms like Instagram and Facebook also contribute to connecting with professionals and exploring non-traditional career paths. The study underscores how social media platforms have become a crucial source of career-related information. They provide real-time updates about job opportunities and industry trends, helping students and professionals expand their networks and acquire insights directly from experts. The COVID-19 pandemic further amplified the reliance on these platforms, as traditional job-seeking

methods became less accessible due to lockdowns and social distancing measures. Ahmad and Pawar emphasize that the adaptability of social media has made it a preferred choice for career exploration, especially in challenging times. Ahmad and Pawar's research situates social media's role within the broader framework of career decision-making theories. Platforms like LinkedIn act as both networking hubs and knowledge-sharing spaces, aligning with Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which emphasizes the influence of self-efficacy, environmental factors, and social interactions on career choices. Social media integrates these dimensions, enabling users to explore non-linear career trajectories, gain confidence, and expand their understanding of diverse opportunities. However, the study also highlights the challenges associated with using social media for career growth. The vast amount of information available can sometimes lead to misinformation or overwhelm users, necessitating critical evaluation skills. Ahmad and Pawar advocate for enhanced technological literacy and structured career guidance to help students navigate these platforms effectively and identify credible resources. The findings align with broader literature on non-traditional careers, which emphasizes the growing societal acceptance of freelance, gig work, and entrepreneurial ventures. As Al Hashimi et al. (2019) note, digital tools have reshaped professional landscapes, offering unprecedented opportunities for creativity and flexibility. Similarly, Baruffaldi et al. (2017) highlight the utility of platforms like LinkedIn for professionals transitioning to new industries or roles, illustrating how digital ecosystems support non-traditional career paths by bridging geographic and informational gaps. The increasing reliance on social media platforms reflects a broader societal shift toward valuing autonomy, innovation, and adaptability in careers. This research builds on these insights by examining how digital platforms influence the perceptions and behaviors of postgraduate students in their career journeys. By integrating these findings into career planning frameworks, educational institutions, employers, and policymakers can better support the evolving needs of a digitally driven workforce.

Career Choice: A Case Study of College Students Shifting Career paths (2023)

In recent years, career decision-making has increasingly drawn attention due to the dynamic interplay of personal interests, socio-economic factors, and external influences. Lao et al. (2023), in their study on college students shifting career paths, explore how students navigate career choices that often diverge from their initial academic plans. The research highlights that interest and passion are pivotal in career selection, yet practicality, financial constraints, and family expectations frequently override these factors, pushing students toward non-traditional or unexpected career paths. The study emphasizes the role of educational systems and pre-coaching strategies in preparing students for career decisions. Lao et al. argue that inadequate career guidance during high school, coupled with the challenges of transitioning from

Senior High School (SHS) to college courses under the K-12 curriculum, often leaves students unprepared to align their education with their aspirations. This misalignment underscores the need for structured career counseling to help students better understand their strengths, weaknesses, and long-term goals. Additionally, family influence emerges as a recurring theme in career decision-making. The study finds that parents significantly shape their children's perceptions of career success and professional identity. While parental expectations aim to ensure stability and practicality, they sometimes conflict with the individual's personal interests and passions. This tension can lead to dissatisfaction or the eventual rediscovery of one's true calling, as noted in the participants' reflections on their career shifts. Socio-economic factors further complicate career choices. Lao et al. identify financial limitations as a key determinant, compelling students to prioritize cost-effective educational paths or courses with immediate employment prospects over those aligned with their interests. This finding resonates with broader literature emphasizing the role of economic considerations in career planning. The research also highlights the psychological and motivational aspects of career choice. Interests and passions, while often secondary to practicality, play a critical role in fostering persistence and satisfaction. As Ainley et al. (2002) suggest, emotional and cognitive engagement with a chosen field enhances learning and boosts confidence, reinforcing the importance of aligning career choices with personal inclinations. Lao et al.'s findings align with global trends in career planning, particularly the shift toward non-traditional careers driven by changing societal norms and technological advancements. By focusing on the factors influencing career shifts, this study underscores the importance of holistic career counseling that integrates personal, social, and economic considerations. Such insights can inform policies and programs aimed at supporting students in navigating the complexities of career decision-making in an increasingly fluid professional landscape. This research builds on these foundations by exploring the societal and individual factors that drive career shifts, offering actionable insights into how education systems and families can better support non-traditional career paths.

The Rise of the Gig Economy: Fact or Fiction by Abraham et al. (2019)

The rise of non-traditional career paths, particularly in the gig economy, has significantly reshaped modern employment landscapes. Abraham et al. (2019), in their pivotal study *The Rise of the Gig Economy: Fact or Fiction*, delve into the structural changes facilitated by technological innovation and the growing prevalence of alternative work arrangements. They emphasize that the gig economy, defined by flexible, short-term engagements often mediated through digital platforms, has become a critical component of contemporary labor markets. A notable finding from their research is the exponential growth in self-employment within the transportation sector. Data from ride-sharing platforms such as Uber and Lyft illustrate how

technology can rapidly transform an industry, with passenger driving emerging as one of the fastest-growing gig sectors since 2013. This surge underscores the transformative potential of digital platforms in connecting workers with demand for services, enabling flexible income generation. However, Abraham et al. (2019) also highlight key challenges in measuring the true scale of gig economy participation. Traditional data sources, like the Current Population Survey (CPS), often fail to capture supplementary gig work, leading to underestimation. Conversely, administrative data, such as tax filings, provide more comprehensive insights but still have limitations, particularly in identifying informal or under-the-table gig work. This measurement gap complicates policy formulation and workforce planning. The literature reveals contrasting perspectives on the gig economy's implications for workers. On one hand, gig work offers autonomy, flexibility, and opportunities for entrepreneurial engagement, aligning with younger generations' preferences for non-traditional careers. On the other hand, it presents challenges related to income instability, lack of benefits, and uncertain career progression. Abraham et al. (2019) note that sectors outside transportation, such as professional services, have seen modest increases in gig activity, although it is harder to distinguish gig roles from traditional self-employment in these domains. The study by Abraham et al. serves as a foundational reference for understanding the dynamic interplay between technological change, economic pressures, and evolving labor preferences. Their findings inform this research on societal perspectives toward non-traditional careers, highlighting the broader context in which recent graduates navigate alternative career paths. By integrating insights from both quantitative and qualitative data, this paper builds on their work to explore generational differences, motivations, and the perceived impact of non-traditional career choices on financial stability and personal fulfilment

Entrepreneurship as a career choice: intentions, attitudes, and outcome expectations (E. Liguori, C. Winkler, J. Vanevenhoven, D. Winkel & M. James, 2019)

The reimagining of careers, especially toward non-traditional paths, is a growing phenomenon shaped by evolving societal norms and individual priorities. Entrepreneurship, as a prominent non-traditional career choice, has been a focal point of recent studies exploring the interplay of personal, social, and contextual factors in career decision-making. Liguori et al. (2019), in their study on entrepreneurial intentions, emphasize the role of self-efficacy, attitudes, and social support mechanisms in influencing the decision to pursue non-traditional careers. Their research highlights that prior exposure to entrepreneurial activities and robust support systems significantly enhance an individual's entrepreneurial self-efficacy, shaping their career trajectory. The study situates its findings within the framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which explains how environmental factors,

individual attributes, and motivational processes interact to influence career choices. Liguori et al. argue that entrepreneurial attitudes serve as a critical mediator between motivation and career intentions, reflecting the societal shift toward valuing autonomy, creativity, and flexibility over traditional employment structures. By viewing entrepreneurship through the SCCT lens, the research underscores the importance of vicarious learning, role models, and access to resources in shaping positive outcome expectations for non-traditional careers. The growing reliance on non-traditional career paths is further supported by the work of Kautonen et al. (2015), who explore the alignment of personal values with entrepreneurial goals. Their findings suggest that individuals increasingly prioritize intrinsic rewards, such as personal fulfillment and independence, over the extrinsic rewards typically associated with traditional careers. This shift is particularly evident among younger generations, who seek to redefine success on their own terms. Entrepreneurial education and exposure to creative ecosystems play a pivotal role in fostering these non-traditional career aspirations. However, while the allure of non-traditional careers continues to grow, challenges remain. Studies caution that societal norms, lack of structural support, and fear of failure often deter individuals from fully embracing these paths. According to Lent et al. (2000), these barriers can be mitigated by fostering self-efficacy and offering tailored support systems that address the unique challenges of non-traditional careers. This insight is especially relevant in the context of developing economies, where entrepreneurial ecosystems are still in their nascent stages. The literature also highlights the role of technology in enabling non-traditional careers. Digital platforms, from e-commerce to gig economy apps, have created new avenues for individuals to monetize their skills and passions. As emphasized by Fayolle and Liñán (2014), the integration of digital tools into entrepreneurial frameworks is essential for equipping individuals with the resources and networks needed to thrive in non-traditional careers. This research builds on these insights by examining societal perceptions of non-traditional careers, particularly among recent graduates. By exploring how attitudes, resources, and education intersect to shape career choices, this study offers practical recommendations for fostering career readiness in a rapidly changing professional landscape.

Methodology

Objectives

- To explore the influence of demographic factors on attitude towards non-traditional careers.
- To assess the perceptions and attitude towards non-traditional career paths.
- To identify the key resources and support systems required for transitioning to non-traditional careers.

Research Question

This study investigates the evolving perceptions of recent graduates and working individuals toward non-traditional career paths such as freelancing, dropshipping, and social media influencing. The primary research questions addressed are:

- What motivates individuals to pursue non-traditional careers?
- What challenges do they face, and how do these factors differ between generations?
- How do the perceptions of career satisfaction, stability, and social acceptance vary between individuals aged 20–30 and those aged 31 and above?

Participants

The study surveyed 150 participants, comprising recent graduates and working professionals from diverse disciplines. The participants were divided into two age-based cohorts:

- Group A: 20 to 30 years old
- Group B: 31 years old and above

The demographic distribution ensured a balanced representation of individuals across various fields such as business, technology, creative arts, and marketing. Participants were selected using convenience and snowball sampling methods to maximize diversity while targeting those with direct experiences or strong opinions on non-traditional careers.

Data Collection and Analysis

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection to comprehensively explore participants' views. Data were gathered using an online survey consisting of multiple-choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions designed to assess motivations, challenges, and perceived societal acceptance of non-traditional career choices.

Examples of key survey questions include:

- What factors would most likely influence your decision to pursue a non-traditional career?
- What concerns would you have about pursuing a non-traditional career path?
- What factors contribute to your job satisfaction (e.g., autonomy, income stability, creative freedom)?
- What resources or support systems would you need to consider a non-traditional career path?
- How do you think the shift towards non-traditional careers will impact future workforce dynamics and job security?
- How do societal perceptions of your career choice affect your job satisfaction?

Survey responses were categorized and analyzed to identify patterns, correlations, and differences between generational groups. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize quantitative data, highlighting percentages and trends. A thematic analysis was applied to open-ended responses, allowing for the coding of recurring themes, such as motivations (autonomy, creative freedom) and challenges (income volatility, lack of formal benefits).

Data Interpretation

The analysis explored the relationship between generational differences and career preferences. A comparative study was conducted to examine how participants' age influences their perception of career fulfillment, societal acceptance, and stability. Statistical correlations were identified between factors such as income volatility and career dissatisfaction, highlighting key predictors of long-term success and sustainability in non-traditional careers.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study, analyzing the data collected to explore the factors influencing perceptions of non-traditional career paths. The results are organized to address the research objectives, focusing on the impact of demographic variables, the role of income stability, financial rewards, and education, as well as the significance of social status in shaping career preferences. Statistical analyses, including chi-square tests and t-tests, are used to interpret the relationships between these variables and respondents' familiarity with non-traditional careers.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.627	10

Interpretation:

The table no. 1 shows the reliability test for the actual study for a total 150 respondents, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for 10 variables with 0.627, which means the data is consistent and is reliable and the questionnaire reliability is acceptable.

Table 2: Chi square Analysis

Test Statistics	
	Familiar with Non-traditional career paths
Chi-Square	103.200 ^a
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 30.0.	

Interpretation

Table 2 shows that the significance value is less than 0.05, leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H1). This indicates that respondents exhibit a certain level of familiarity with non-traditional career paths. The result suggests that a meaningful proportion of the participants are aware of or have some knowledge about alternative career options beyond conventional employment structures, highlighting the growing recognition of these emerging career choices.

Table 3: Chi square Analysis

Familiar with Non-traditional career paths with respect to demographic factors

Chi-Square Tests			
	Pearson Chi-Square Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Age of the respondents	40.748 ^a	16	.001
Qualification of the respondents	24.617 ^a	20	.216
Gender of the respondents	16.701	4	.002
N of Valid Cases	150		

Interpretation

Table 3 indicates that the significance values for demographic factors such as age and gender are below 0.05, demonstrating that these factors significantly influence respondents' familiarity with non-traditional career paths. However, the significance value for qualification is greater than 0.05, suggesting that qualification does not have a significant impact on their familiarity with non-traditional careers.

Table 4: One Sample T Test

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Income Stability deciding career option	150	2.74	1.102	.090
Non-traditional careers as financially rewarding as main stream careers	150	2.36	.971	.079
Social status of individual affected by non-traditional career	150	2.85	1.083	.088
Education equipped with skills needed for non-traditional career	150	3.44	1.212	.099

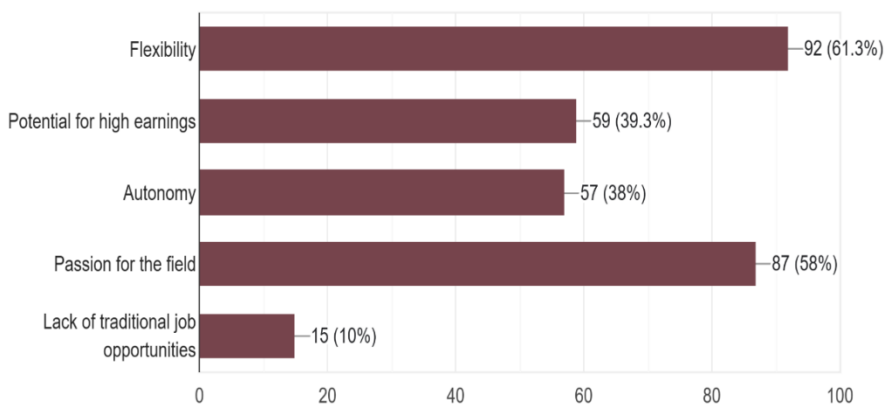
One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Income Stability deciding career option	-2.890	149	.004	-.260	-.44	-.08
Non-traditional careers as financially rewarding as main stream careers	-8.070	149	.000	-.640	-.80	-.48
Social status of individual affected by non-traditional career	-1.659	149	.099	-.147	-.32	.03
Education equipped with skills needed for non-traditional career	4.445	149	.000	.440	.24	.64

The table above shows that the significance values for income stability, financial reward, and education are below 0.05 at a 5% level of significance, indicating that these factors have a significant impact on non-traditional career choices. In contrast, the significance value for social status is greater than 0.05, suggesting that social status does not significantly influence the preference for non-traditional career options.

Discussion

This section interprets the key findings of the study, providing insights into the factors influencing respondents' decisions to pursue non-traditional career paths, the support systems identified as crucial for career transitions, and the concerns associated with choosing unconventional professions. Visual representations, including graphs and charts, are used to illustrate the responses collected, highlighting patterns, relationships, and significant trends. The discussion connects these results to existing literature, draws comparisons, and explores the implications for educational institutions, policymakers, and individuals navigating evolving career landscapes.

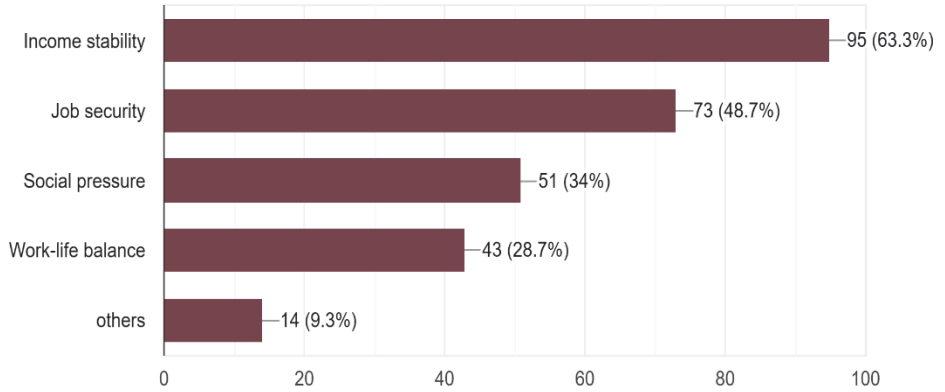
Figure 1- Factors influencing non-traditional career paths



Interpretation

The graph illustrates the primary factors that influence individuals' decisions to pursue non-traditional career paths. Flexibility emerges as the most significant motivator, with 61.3% (92 respondents) indicating its importance. This preference reflects a growing trend toward careers that offer adaptable work schedules, allowing individuals to balance personal and professional commitments. The second most significant factor is passion for the field, with 58% (87 respondents) selecting it, highlighting the desire for personal fulfillment and alignment with individual interests. Autonomy is valued by 38% (57 respondents), emphasizing the appeal of self-direction in career choices. Potential for high earnings influences 39.3% (59 respondents), suggesting that while financial incentives are considered, they are less dominant compared to other motivations. Lastly, only 10% (15 respondents) cited the lack of traditional job opportunities as a determining factor, indicating that non-traditional careers are pursued primarily by choice rather than necessity.

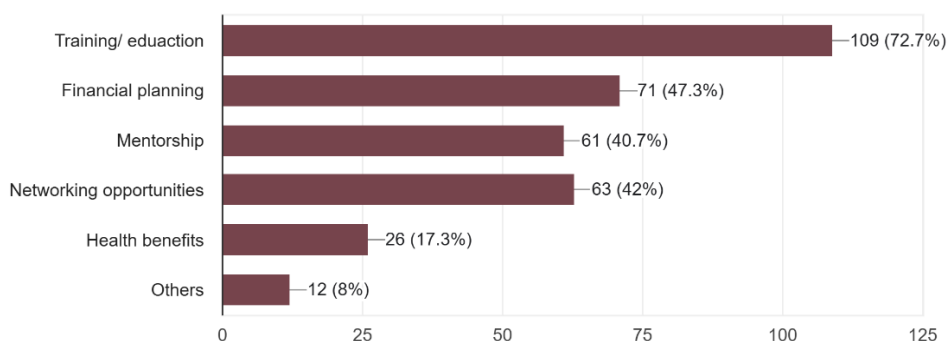
Figure 2- Resources or Support Systems Needed to Consider a Non-traditional Career Path



Interpretation

This graph identifies key resources that respondents believe would support their transition to non-traditional careers. Training and education are prioritized by 72.7% (109 respondents), underscoring the need for skill development and specialized knowledge. Financial planning ranks second, with 47.3% (71 respondents) acknowledging its importance in managing income volatility inherent in many non-traditional roles. Mentorship, cited by 40.7% (61 respondents), reflects the value placed on guidance from experienced professionals. Networking opportunities, selected by 42% (63 respondents), indicate the importance of building professional relationships for career advancement. Only 17.3% (26 respondents) chose health benefits, suggesting a lower priority on employer-sponsored healthcare compared to other resources. The ‘Others’ category, with 8% (12 respondents), may encompass additional needs such as access to legal support or business management tools.

Figure 3- Concerns About Pursuing a Non-traditional Career Path



Interpretation

The third graph highlights the concerns associated with non-traditional careers. Income stability is the predominant concern, cited by 63.3% (95 respondents), reflecting fears about inconsistent earnings and financial uncertainty. Job security, a related concern, is noted by 48.7% (73 respondents), further emphasizing the perceived precariousness of non-traditional roles. Social pressure, identified by 34% (51 respondents), indicates societal influence and potential stigma attached to non-traditional career paths. Interestingly, 28.7% (43 respondents) express concerns about maintaining work-life balance, despite flexibility being a key motivator. The 'Others' category, chosen by 9.3% (14 respondents), likely includes additional challenges such as access to retirement savings or difficulties navigating regulatory frameworks. Together, these findings highlight significant barriers to broader adoption of non-traditional career paths.

Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the perceptions, motivations, and challenges faced by recent graduates pursuing non-traditional career paths, it opens several avenues for further exploration. Expanding research in these areas will enhance understanding and provide a more comprehensive foundation for supporting diverse career choices in an evolving job market. Future research could consider the following directions:

- **Longitudinal Studies on Career Progression**
One of the critical gaps in understanding non-traditional careers is the lack of long-term data on career trajectories. Future research should conduct longitudinal studies that follow individuals over extended periods to examine how non-traditional careers impact income stability, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and professional growth.

Such studies could compare these outcomes with those of individuals in traditional careers, providing valuable insights into the sustainability, growth potential, and risks associated with unconventional roles. This research would help identify patterns of career success and the factors contributing to long-term satisfaction and stability, offering practical guidance for new graduates considering similar paths.

- **Demographic and Geographic Variations**

Further research should explore how cultural, economic, and regional factors shape career preferences and perceptions of non-traditional roles. Comparative studies between urban and rural graduates could reveal differences in access to opportunities, support systems, and societal attitudes. Additionally, cross-country analyses in regions with varying economic and social structures could illuminate how local contexts influence career decisions. This line of research would highlight global patterns and localized challenges, providing a nuanced understanding of how economic conditions, cultural norms, and societal expectations impact the acceptance and success of non-traditional careers in different demographics.

- **Policy and Institutional Support**

A significant area for future research involves investigating effective policy frameworks and institutional support mechanisms that enable individuals to thrive in non-traditional careers. Studies could examine the role of government interventions, financial protections, healthcare benefits, and retirement plans tailored to the needs of freelance workers, entrepreneurs, and gig economy participants. Additionally, research could focus on educational programs and career counseling services that better prepare students for diverse career paths, emphasizing entrepreneurial skills, digital literacy, and adaptability. Understanding how policy innovations and institutional support systems influence career sustainability and worker well-being will be critical for shaping inclusive and equitable labor markets.

- **Impact of Technology on Career Adaptability**

Technological advancements are rapidly transforming the nature of work. Future research should investigate how emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and the metaverse, create new non-traditional career opportunities while introducing unique challenges. Studies could explore the adaptability required to thrive in technology-driven careers, examining how digital platforms reshape professional landscapes, the need for continuous learning, and the development of future-proof skills. Furthermore, research on the automation of gig work and the rise of platform-based employment could provide insights into how technology will redefine flexibility, autonomy, and the potential for income generation in the future job market.

II. CONCLUSION

The rapid transformation of the modern workforce, driven by technological advancements and shifting societal values, has significantly impacted perceptions of non-traditional career paths. This research has demonstrated that an increasing number of individuals, particularly from younger generations, are gravitating toward flexible and passion-driven careers in fields such as freelancing, dropshipping, and social media influencing. The appeal of these non-traditional careers lies in their potential for autonomy, creative freedom, and the ability to align professional endeavors with personal interests. The research findings show that 68% of respondents favor non-traditional career paths, motivated by factors such as work-life balance, independence, and the desire for a more purpose-driven career.

A key insight from this study is the generational divide in career priorities. While younger individuals (aged 20-30) emphasize autonomy and creative expression, older professionals (31 and above) tend to prioritize financial security and job stability. This contrast highlights the evolving nature of career aspirations in a digital economy that values flexibility over the structured hierarchies of traditional employment. Freelancing platforms and e-commerce opportunities like dropshipping have made it easier for individuals to pursue entrepreneurial ventures, while social media has provided a platform for creativity to thrive. However, the study also uncovers significant challenges associated with these non-traditional paths, particularly regarding income volatility and the lack of formal employment benefits.

The study reveals that concerns over financial instability remain a critical barrier to broader adoption of non-traditional careers. Income unpredictability, cited by 55% of participants, and the absence of benefits such as health insurance and retirement plans (noted by 50%) present significant obstacles to those considering these career paths. These findings suggest that while non-traditional careers offer substantial rewards in terms of personal fulfillment and flexibility, they also come with risks that can lead to long-term dissatisfaction if left unaddressed.

Furthermore, the research underscores the need for more structured support systems to make non-traditional career paths more sustainable in the long run. The findings suggest that, in order to ensure the viability of these careers, several measures must be taken. First, educational institutions must play a critical role in equipping students with the skills necessary to thrive in these evolving job markets. This includes fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and offering specialized training programs for digital careers. Second, policymakers must develop frameworks that extend financial protections and social safety nets to gig workers and freelancers, addressing the vulnerabilities that come with non-traditional employment. This could involve extending health insurance and retirement benefits to self-employed individuals and creating policies that provide more financial security to those pursuing alternative careers.

Additionally, societal recognition and acceptance of non-traditional careers will be key in ensuring that individuals can pursue their desired career paths without facing social stigmas. The study demonstrates that societal perceptions, particularly among older generations, still hold on to traditional notions of career success, often associating stability and linear growth with professional achievement. However, as non-traditional careers continue to grow in popularity and visibility, it is likely that societal acceptance will increase, making these career choices more mainstream in the future.

The study also points to the importance of networking, mentorship, and access to financial planning resources as crucial support systems for those entering non-traditional careers. With 72.7% of respondents citing education and training as necessary for career transitions, it is clear that individuals pursuing alternative paths require access to ongoing learning opportunities to stay competitive in rapidly changing industries. Moreover, the significance of mentorship and networking opportunities reflects the need for guidance from experienced professionals who can help navigate the complexities of non-traditional careers.

In conclusion, this research highlights the growing relevance of non-traditional career paths in a rapidly changing labor market. While these careers offer significant benefits, such as autonomy and creative fulfillment, they also present notable challenges, particularly in terms of financial instability and lack of formal protections. As the workforce continues to evolve, it is essential that stakeholders—educators, policymakers, employers, and society at large—collaborate to create supportive environments that address these challenges. By fostering education, extending financial protections, and increasing societal recognition, we can ensure that non-traditional career paths are not only viable but also empowering for individuals in the long term. This research contributes valuable insights into the ongoing reimagining of careers and offers practical recommendations for adapting to the future of work.

III. REFERENCES

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