

# Career Nomadism as a New Social Identity: A Phenomenological Study of Generation Z in Denpasar and Badung

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## Abstract

This study examines how career nomadism is interpreted and experienced by Generation Z workers in Denpasar and Badung, Bali, with particular attention to its role in shaping identity within non-linear career trajectories. Employing a qualitative design, this research adopts Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore participant's lived experiences and subjective meaning-making. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten Generation Z workers who had undergone repeated cross-role or cross-sector career transitions. The findings reveal three interrelated themes: autonomy-seeking as career agency, uncertainty negotiation through competence formation, and relational validation in identity construction. Career mobility is not perceived as instability but as a reflective and adaptive strategy through which individuals maintain agency, develop competencies, and align work with personal values. Autonomy emerges as the primary motivational anchor, while competence and relatedness function as enabling and stabilizing forces that sustain professional legitimacy. Within the socio-cultural context of Denpasar and Badung, career nomadism is continuously negotiated against norms privileging stable employment, positioning it as an emerging form of social identity. By integrating Identity Work Theory and Self-Determination Theory, this study offers a nuanced understanding of how motivational and relational dynamics sustain non-linear career pathways.

**Keywords:** *Career Nomadism, Generation Z, Identity Construction, Non-Linear Careers, Self-Determination Theory.*



## A. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary labor markets are undergoing profound transformation driven by rapid digital expansion, shifting workforce values, and increasing economic uncertainty (Alshaikhmubarak, 2022). These dynamics challenge traditional assumptions of stable and linear career trajectories, particularly those emphasizing long-term organizational attachment and predictable advancement (Alshaikhmubarak, 2022). In response, more fluid and adaptive career patterns have emerged, characterized by cross-role mobility, project-based engagement, and flexible employment arrangements (Patro, 2023). One increasingly visible manifestation of this shift is career nomadism, defined as repeated movement across roles or sectors in pursuit of autonomy, continuous learning, and value alignment rather than permanent organizational attachment (Aroles et al., 2023). This phenomenon reflects a broader reconceptualization of careers not merely as institutional ladders, but as evolving personal and professional journeys shaped by individual agency (Alshaikhmubarak, 2022).

This transformation is particularly evident among Generation Z, a cohort shaped by digital connectivity, global exposure, and rapidly evolving labor expectations (Kim et al., 2025). For many young workers, career mobility is not interpreted as instability or lack of commitment, but rather as a deliberate and strategic approach to exploring competencies, pursuing meaningful work, and maintaining flexibility in uncertain environments (Ozturk & Yildirim, 2024). Instead of prioritizing long-term security within a single organization, Generation Z tends to value growth opportunities, autonomy in decision-making, and alignment between personal values and professional roles (Kim et al., 2025). Consequently, repeated career transitions can be understood as intentional processes of identity development rather than fragmented or inconsistent work behavior (Arifa et al., 2022)

In Indonesia, these dynamics intersect with structural labor conditions characterized by the coexistence of formal and informal employment (Stiles et al., 2025) The expansion of platform-based work and creative industries has further intensified flexible and project-oriented work arrangements, particularly among younger cohorts entering increasingly competitive and volatile labor markets (Kervola et al., 2024). Generation Z now constitutes a substantial proportion of the workforce, reinforcing the importance of understanding how young workers interpret career mobility and professional development (Ozturk & Yildirim, 2024). Importantly, flexible employment is not merely transitional but structurally embedded within the labor system, making career nomadism a relevant and necessary lens for examining contemporary youth career behavior (Stiles et al., 2025).

At the regional level, Bali represents a distinctive empirical context where tourism-driven economic structures intersect with creative industries and digital freelance ecosystems (Gürsoy, 2025). In Denpasar and Badung, young workers are frequently exposed to short-term contracts, multi-role engagement, and portfolio-based career trajectories (Patro, 2023). While such conditions create opportunities for skill diversification and autonomy, they also require continuous negotiation of professional legitimacy within socio-cultural norms that continue to privilege stable employment (Patro, 2023). This intersection between flexible economic structures and relational community expectations positions Denpasar and Badung as a theoretically relevant context for examining how career mobility is interpreted, negotiated, and justified by young workers (Gürsoy, 2025).

Although research on Generation Z has expanded significantly, existing studies predominantly focus on work preferences, turnover intentions, or motivational traits (Ozturk & Yildirim, 2024). Limited attention has been directed toward understanding how repeated career mobility is experienced as an identity construction process (Arifa et al., 2022). Moreover, qualitative investigations capturing the lived meaning of non-linear career trajectories within specific socio-cultural contexts remain relatively scarce (Kim et al., 2025). There is therefore a critical need to examine career nomadism not only as observable job movement, but

as a reflective and interpretative process through which individuals construct, negotiate, and legitimize their professional identity (Arifa et al., 2022).

Accordingly, this study aims to explore how Generation Z workers in Denpasar and Badung interpret and experience career nomadism, to identify the motivational needs underlying repeated mobility, and to analyze how such mobility shapes social and professional identity formation. Conceptually, this research positions career nomadism as an identity-driven process and integrates Identity Work Theory with Self-Determination Theory to explain how autonomy, competence, and relatedness operate across career transitions (Arifa et al., 2022). By adopting a qualitative interpretative phenomenological approach, this study seeks to provide contextually grounded and theoretically enriched insights into non-linear career patterns within a tourism digital local economy.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Career Nomadism in Contemporary Career Studies**

Recent career literature highlights a significant shift away from traditional, linear career models toward more flexible and non-linear trajectories (Lo Presti et al., 2025). In this context, career nomadism has emerged as a pattern characterized by repeated movement across roles, organizations, or sectors (Marx et al., 2025). Rather than being driven solely by instability or lack of commitment, career nomadism is increasingly understood as an adaptive career strategy shaped by evolving labor market structures, digitalization, and changing individual values (Mukherjee et al., 2025). Previous studies suggest that such mobility enables individuals to accumulate diverse experiences, expand skill portfolios, and explore alternative professional identities (Chikapa et al., 2024). Consequently, career nomadism should be understood not merely as a behavioral outcome, but as a meaningful career orientation through which individuals actively navigate uncertainty and opportunity in contemporary work environments (Lo Presti et al., 2025).

Research focusing on younger workforce cohorts indicates that career nomadism is particularly salient among Generation Z (Gürsoy, 2025). As a generation socialized in digitally mediated and rapidly evolving environments, Generation Z workers tend to demonstrate a higher tolerance for career experimentation and place greater emphasis on flexibility, learning opportunities, and value alignment (Myskiv, 2025). Prior empirical findings show that frequent role transitions among this cohort are often interpreted as intentional and strategic choices rather than involuntary turnover (Kervola et al., 2024). These insights highlight the importance of moving beyond purely economic or behavioral explanations and instead examining how repeated mobility is experienced, interpreted, and narrated by individuals themselves (Myskiv, 2025).

### **2. Career Nomadism and Identity Construction**

From an identity perspective, careers are increasingly conceptualized as ongoing projects of self-construction rather than fixed institutional pathways

(Reiche, 2023). Identity-oriented career research emphasizes that professional identity is continuously formed and reformed through experience, reflection, and social interaction (Öztürk & Yildirim, 2023). Repeated career transitions provide individuals with opportunities to test provisional selves, redefine professional meanings, and negotiate legitimacy across diverse work contexts (Tung & Qin, 2025). Within this framework, career nomadism can be interpreted as a process of identity work, in which individuals actively construct and maintain a coherent sense of self across changing roles and environments (Dias et al., 2024). Over time, these iterative processes may evolve into a socially recognizable identity form, rather than remaining solely an individual career strategy.

Previous qualitative studies further demonstrate that identity construction within non-linear careers involves both opportunity and tension (Chikapa et al., 2024). On the one hand, mobility enables individuals to align work with personal values and long-term aspirations (Marx et al., 2025). On the other hand, it requires continuous negotiation of social recognition, particularly in contexts where stable employment remains a dominant norm (Mukherjee et al., 2025). This duality suggests that career nomadism operates not only at the individual level but also within relational and socio-cultural structures that shape how mobile careers are evaluated and legitimized. In this sense, career nomadism may function as a shared interpretative framework through which professional meaning and legitimacy are collectively constructed and understood (Chikapa et al., 2024).

### **3. Self-Determination Theory as a Motivational Framework**

To further explain the motivational mechanisms underlying career nomadism, Self-Determination Theory offers a robust theoretical lens (Kumar et al., 2023). This theory posits that human behavior is guided by the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the experience of volition and self-direction in decision-making, competence reflects the need to develop and apply skills effectively, and relatedness concerns the desire for meaningful social connection and recognition (Adjaino & Adekunle, 2025).

When applied to career contexts, these needs help explain how individuals evaluate work arrangements and career decisions (Kumar et al., 2023). Flexible and non-standard career paths may become attractive when they support autonomy through control over time and role selection, enhance competence through continuous learning and diverse experiences, and sustain relatedness through professional networks and social validation (Adjaino & Adekunle, 2025). Within the context of career nomadism, Self-Determination Theory provides a coherent framework for understanding how repeated mobility can be experienced as intrinsically motivating rather than disruptive (Öztürk & Yildirim, 2023).

#### **4. Variables and Indicators in This Study**

Based on the reviewed literature, this study conceptualizes career nomadism as an identity-driven process shaped by motivational dynamics. Three core analytical dimensions are employed. First, autonomy is indicated by perceived control over career decisions, flexibility in role selection, and independence in managing work trajectories. Second, competence is reflected in skill development, learning through cross-role experience, and perceived preparedness for future work challenges. Third, relatedness is indicated by professional relationships, network support, social recognition, and the perceived legitimacy of career choices.

Identity construction functions as the interpretative outcome through which these dimensions are integrated. Key indicators include self-definition as a professional, coherence of career narratives, and the ability to justify non-linear career paths within social and organizational contexts. These dimensions not only guide the interpretation of participants' lived experiences but also serve as the analytical foundation for understanding how career nomadism evolves into a meaningful and socially situated identity process.

#### **5. Conceptual Framework and Analytical Propositions**

Drawing on career nomadism literature, Identity Work Theory, and Self-Determination Theory, this study proposes a conceptual framework in which career nomadism is understood as a dynamic process linking motivational fulfillment to identity construction. Autonomy drives career movement by enabling self-directed choices, competence strengthens confidence through continuous learning and skill accumulation, and relatedness provides social legitimacy that sustains professional identity across transitions. Through this process, repeated career mobility may evolve from an individual adaptive strategy into a socially interpretable and collectively recognized identity orientation within specific work ecosystems.

Rather than testing statistical hypotheses, this qualitative study advances the following analytical propositions:

- a. Career nomadism among Generation Z should be understood as an intentional and meaningful career strategy rather than as instability.
- b. The fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs shapes how repeated career mobility is interpreted and justified.
- c. Career nomadism functions as a process of identity construction through which professional meaning and social legitimacy are continuously negotiated.

These propositions guide the interpretative analysis of participants' narratives and provide a conceptual basis for examining how non-linear career trajectories are constructed within specific socio-cultural contexts.

### **C. METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative research design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore how Generation Z workers interpret

career nomadism as a lived and identity-relevant experience (Arifa et al., 2022). IPA was selected because it enables an in-depth examination of subjective meaning-making while allowing for both within-case interpretation and cross-case convergence (Chikapa et al., 2024). This approach is particularly appropriate for investigating non-linear career trajectories that involve reflection, negotiation, and identity construction.

The study was conducted in Denpasar and Badung, Bali, regions characterized by the intersection of tourism-based services, creative industries, and platform-mediated work (Myskiv, 2025). This context provides a relevant empirical setting to examine how young workers navigate flexible career arrangements amid dynamic labor opportunities and persistent social expectations regarding career stability.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews guided by concepts derived from Identity Work Theory and Self-Determination Theory (Arifa et al., 2022). The interview guide explored participants' career transitions, motivational drivers, perceptions of autonomy and competence development, social relationships, and identity narratives. Participants were recruited through online research announcements distributed via social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, to reach individuals with diverse work backgrounds across digital and non-digital sectors. Interested individuals contacted the researcher directly and completed a brief screening process to confirm eligibility.

Purposive sampling was applied using four criteria: (1) belonging to the Generation Z cohort, (2) domiciled or working in Denpasar or Badung, (3) having experienced at least two significant role or organizational transitions within the past five years, and (4) willingness to reflect on the motivations, challenges, and identity implications of career mobility (Chikapa et al., 2024). A total of ten participants were recruited. This sample size aligns with the idiographic orientation of IPA, which prioritizes analytical depth over statistical generalization. Recruitment concluded when thematic sufficiency was reached, indicated by recurring interpretative patterns and the absence of substantively new themes.

Interviews lasted approximately 45–90 minutes and were audio-recorded with participants' consent (Arifa et al., 2022). All recordings were transcribed verbatim. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the study's objectives, confidentiality procedures, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Written or verbal informed consent was obtained before each interview, and all identifying information was removed. Participants are reported using anonymized codes (P1–P10).

Data analysis followed established IPA procedures conducted in five iterative stages: repeated reading and exploratory noting, initial code development, clustering of codes into subordinate themes within each case, cross-case synthesis into superordinate themes, and theoretical integration using Identity Work Theory and Self-Determination Theory (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) (Arifa et

al., 2022; Chikapa et al., 2024). NVivo 14 software was used to support systematic data organization, coding consistency, and thematic mapping.

To enhance analytical transparency, an excerpt of the analytic audit trail is embedded below to illustrate how raw narrative data were transformed into theoretical interpretation (Marx et al., 2025). This table presents a representative example of the coding process rather than the full dataset.

**Table 1. Example of IPA Coding and Analytical Audit Trail**

<b>Participant Quote (Verbatim)</b>	<b>Initial Code</b>	<b>Subordinate Theme</b>	<b>Superordinate Theme</b>	<b>Theoretical Lens</b>
"I often feel unsure, but moving between jobs helps me learn and stay confident." (P3)	Fear of instability	Managing uncertainty	Identity negotiation	Competence / Relatedness
"Freelance work gives me control over my time and choices." (P6)	Career autonomy	Self-directed work	Career agency	Autonomy
"Connections matter because they help me get trusted again." (P9)	Network reliance	Relational support	Identity legitimacy	Relatedness

This analytic structure demonstrates the progression from participant's lived experiences to interpretative themes and theoretical integration, consistent with IPA's idiographic and interpretative logic.

To ensure methodological rigor, this study applied four trustworthiness criteria (Kervola et al., 2024; Myskiv, 2025). Credibility was enhanced through member checking by sharing concise interpretative summaries with selected participants. Dependability was supported by maintaining an audit trail documenting interview protocols, coding iterations, and theme refinement decisions. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive memo-writing to identify and bracket researcher assumptions throughout the analytic process. Transferability was addressed by providing rich descriptions of participant backgrounds and the local research context, allowing readers to assess analytical relevance to similar settings.

#### **D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The interpretative analysis generated three superordinate themes that explain how Generation Z workers understand and experience career nomadism: (1) autonomy-seeking as career agency, (2) uncertainty negotiation through competence formation, and (3) relational validation in identity construction. Together, these themes reveal that career mobility is not perceived merely as repeated job

movement, but as an ongoing identity project through which participants actively construct meaning, agency, and professional legitimacy.

Empirically, participants demonstrated diverse career trajectories across digital and non-digital sectors. Several informants transitioned from hospitality, event services, or retail into digital roles such as content creation and online marketing, while others moved in the opposite direction or combined both forms of work. These transitions were consistently described as intentional rather than incidental, reflecting deliberate efforts to explore personal strengths, test career fit, and expand skill portfolios. Cross-sector mobility enabled participants to develop practical competencies, strengthen social skills, and gain clearer insight into their own preferences, limits, and values in career decision-making. A summary of participant profiles, work classifications, and prior roles is presented in Table 2, which illustrates the breadth of role combinations and employment forms represented in this study.

**Table 2. Informant Profiles, Work Classification, and Prior Job Roles**

Code	Informant	Age	Domicile-Work	Classification	Jobs/Roles
P1	Fernando	27	Denpasar-Badung	Digital/Hybrid	Videographer, Photographer, Online Marketer
P2	Anindya	25	Denpasar-Badung	Digital	Online Tutor, Sales Associate
P3	Rita	23	Badung-Badung	Digital	Model, SPG, Influencer, Content Creator
P4	Afka	21	Denpasar-Badung	Digital/Hybrid	Translator, Tour Guide, Catering Staff
P5	Kiki	28	Denpasar-Badung	Digital/Hybrid	SPG, Live Host, Cashier, Visual Merchandiser
P6	Adi	25	Denpasar-Badung	Non-Digital	Barista, Runner, Event Consultant
P7	Panji	26	Denpasar-Badung	Non-Digital	Event Organizer, Liaison Officer
P8	Sastra	19	Badung-Badung	Non-Digital	Runner, Driver, Tour Guide
P9	Nunung	27	Badung-Badung	Non-Digital	SPG, Nanny, Housekeeping Staff
P10	Sari	24	Denpasar-Badung	Non-Digital	Administrator, Film Extra, Sales Associate

Source: Processed primary data, 2025

These mobility patterns function not only as responses to labor market opportunities but also as reflective processes of identity formation (Lo Presti et al., 2025). Transitions across digital and non-digital roles allowed participants to experiment with provisional professional selves and to refine their sense of career direction. In this sense, career nomadism reflects a non-linear but coherent career process in which identity is continuously shaped through experience, reflection, and adaptation. Flexibility emerges not as a lack of structure, but as a strategic resource enabling participants to manage uncertainty while maintaining personal agency and growth.

At the second-order level, three interrelated thematic dimensions autonomy and self-control, social-relational negotiation, and self-formation through development structured participants' interpretations of career nomadism (Diaa et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2023). Rather than viewing mobility as instability, informants framed it as an adaptive strategy for navigating flexible labor conditions in Denpasar and Badung, while simultaneously responding to social norms that continue to privilege stable employment. Autonomy was expressed through freedom in choosing roles, managing time, and directing career paths, while competence was developed through learning-oriented transitions across work contexts. Even temporary or freelance roles were experienced as psychologically meaningful when they contributed to skill growth and self-understanding.

This interpretation is reinforced by lexical patterns derived from cross-informant word frequency analysis. As summarized in Table 3, terms related to experience, freelance work, flexibility, and freedom appeared most frequently across interviews. When grouped thematically, autonomy-related expressions dominated, followed by social-relational negotiation and self-formation.

**Table 3. Word Frequency Patterns Across Informants**

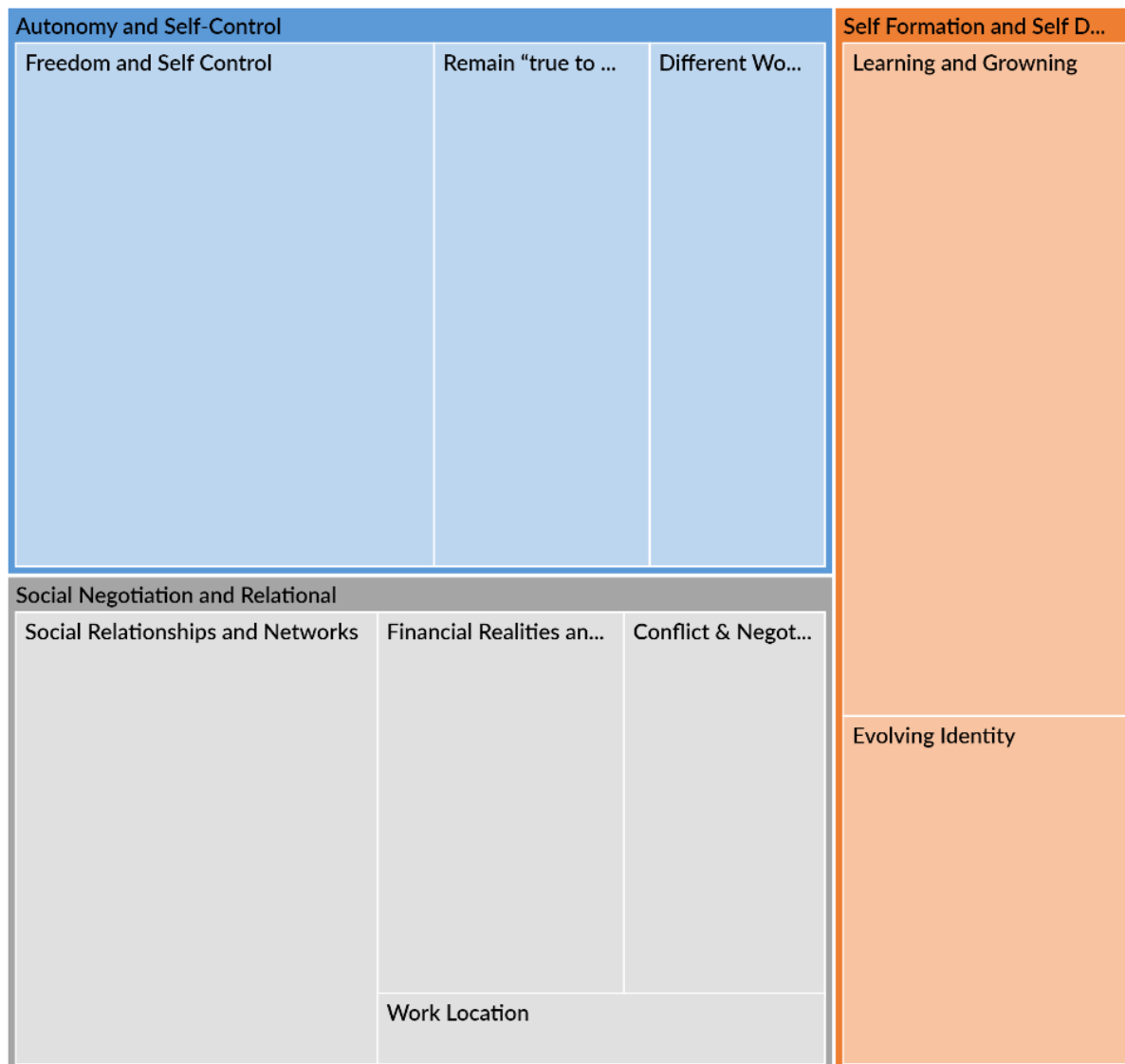
Theme Focus	Dominant Keywords
Autonomy & Self-Control	flexibility, freedom, time control
Social-Relational Negotiation	relations, trust, connections
Self-Formation & Development	learning, experience, growth

Source: Processed primary data, 2025

The prominence of this vocabulary indicates that participants interpret career nomadism primarily as a means of maintaining personal control and professional autonomy. While experience and relationships are also central, they are framed as enabling resources rather than constraints, supporting self-directed career movement.

The relative weight of these themes is further illustrated through NVivo-based visual analysis. The treemap visualization (Figure 1) shows that references associated with autonomy and self-control were most dominant, followed by social-relational negotiation and self-formation. This distribution suggests that autonomy functions as the core interpretative anchor of career nomadism, while relational

dynamics shape how mobility is enabled or constrained within specific social contexts.



**Figure 1. NVivo Treemap of Second-Order Themes**

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

Qualitative interpretation of interview narratives further reveals how autonomy, competence, and relatedness operate as interconnected motivational drivers. Autonomy was consistently articulated as control over work rhythm, decision-making, and life direction. Participants framed freelance and cross-role work not as insecurity but as freedom from rigid structures, allowing them to manage income sources and align work with personal values. Competence emerged through learning-oriented mobility, where role variation was viewed as an investment in future preparedness rather than disruption. Participants described accumulating experience across roles as a way to “level up” skills and confidence before entering more demanding professional environments (Diaa et al., 2024; Kumar et al., 2023).

Relatedness played a more complex but equally significant role (Kumar et al., 2023). Professional relationships, networks, and community ties functioned as both emotional support and practical capital for accessing new opportunities. At the same time, participants reported social tensions, including family or community skepticism toward non-permanent career paths. As a result, career nomadism required continuous negotiation of legitimacy, where professionalism was demonstrated through discipline, reliability, and portfolio strength rather than organizational tenure.

This relational dynamic is further supported by cluster analysis of coding similarity, visualized in the NVivo dendrogram (Figure 2). The dendrogram indicates that informants cluster based on shared value orientations and motivational narratives rather than digital versus non-digital job categories. This pattern suggests the presence of a shared identity script through which career nomadism is collectively understood as a legitimate professional pathway grounded in flexibility, learning, and relational credibility.



**Figure 2. Dendrogram of Coding Similarity**

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that career nomadism among Generation Z in Denpasar and Badung operates as an identity-construction process shaped by autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Diaa et al., 2024). Mobility is not merely an adaptive labor response but a meaningful strategy through which young workers negotiate professional identity, social recognition, and personal values within a flexible work ecosystem. Career nomadism thus emerges as a socially embedded form of professionalism, negotiated through continuous learning, relational validation, and alignment between work and life priorities.

Beyond functioning as an individual career strategy, the findings indicate that career nomadism among Generation Z in Denpasar and Badung has begun to operate as a socially recognizable identity form. Participants share common narratives of flexibility, continuous learning, and self-directed professionalism that extend beyond personal preference and become collectively understood markers of

“being professional” within flexible and project-based work environments. This shared interpretative pattern suggests that career nomadism is increasingly legitimized through recognizable criteria, such as demonstrated competence, reliability across short-term engagements, and relational credibility within professional networks. In this sense, career nomadism reflects not only identity construction at the individual level but also the emergence of a social identity that is negotiated, recognized, and validated through interaction with clients, peers, and community expectations (Moorhead et al., 2025). The Denpasar Badung context, characterized by tourism-driven project work and strong relational norms, provides an enabling socio-cultural ecosystem in which such identity claims can be sustained and socially acknowledged, reinforcing career nomadism as a meaningful and legitimate way of “being a worker” rather than merely an alternative employment arrangement (Wei et al., 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends contemporary career discourse by foregrounding identity negotiation as a central mechanism underlying non-linear career trajectories (Kumar et al., 2023). By integrating Identity Work Theory with Self-Determination Theory, the findings clarify how motivational fulfillment and relational legitimacy jointly sustain career nomadic paths. Practically, these insights highlight the need for universities, employers, and policymakers to move beyond linear career assumptions and to support portfolio-based, learning-oriented, and relationally grounded career development models for Generation Z.

## E. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that career nomadism among Generation Z in Denpasar and Badung is not experienced as career instability but as a reflective and adaptive career strategy oriented toward autonomy, competence development, and value alignment. Across participant narratives, autonomy consistently emerges as the central motivational anchor, shaping how young workers interpret mobility as a means of maintaining agency and control in uncertain labor conditions. Repeated career transitions are therefore understood not as fragmented movement, but as a meaningful process through which individuals construct, reassess, and sustain their professional and social identity.

Within the local socio-cultural context, career nomadism unfolds through ongoing negotiation between personal agency and enduring social expectations that continue to privilege stable employment. Participants actively manage this tension by redefining professionalism around work ethic, learning capacity, and relational credibility rather than organizational permanence. As such, career nomadism functions as an emerging form of social identity that is collectively recognized and legitimized through competence-based performance and relational validation, rather than merely as a flexible work arrangement.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings extend contemporary career and identity scholarship by demonstrating that non-linear career trajectories operate

as identity work processes supported by intrinsic motivational needs. The integration of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis with Identity Work Theory and Self-Determination Theory clarifies how autonomy motivates movement, competence is strengthened through adaptive transitions, and relatedness stabilizes identity claims within social space. This framework offers a nuanced understanding of how motivational and relational mechanisms jointly sustain career-nomadic pathways in a tourism–digital local economy.

Importantly, the findings carry explicit practical implications. For HR practitioners, career nomadism should not be interpreted solely as a retention risk, but as an indicator of value-driven and learning-oriented career orientations. Recruitment, performance evaluation, and career development systems can be strengthened by recognizing portfolio careers, transferable competencies, and non-linear career narratives as legitimate indicators of professional capability. For organizations, the results suggest the need to move beyond rigid career ladders toward flexible career architectures that support project-based learning, internal mobility, and relational engagement with early-career talent. Such approaches may enhance engagement and mutual commitment even in contexts of high mobility. At the level of labor and employment policy, the study highlights the importance of developing regulatory frameworks that acknowledge flexible and project-based careers, expand access to skill certification, and strengthen social protection mechanisms for workers navigating non-linear career paths, particularly within hybrid formal–informal labor markets.

This study is limited by its qualitative scope and focus on a specific regional context, and its findings are intended for analytical rather than statistical generalization. Future research is encouraged to employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs, extend analysis across different regional and institutional settings, and further examine how organizational practices and labor policies influence the long-term sustainability and social recognition of non-linear careers among younger generations.

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