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YOUTH ANXIETIES

Navigating the rapidly-changing job market

ZIBA MAHDI

The youth today are entering the workforce during a time of overwhelming technological, economic, and social change. The career guidance they received from their parents, teachers, and mentors is far removed from the reality they're facing as fresh grads.

On average, people can expect that two-fifths of their existing skill sets will be transformed or become outdated over the 2025-2030 period, according to the World Economic Forum. The list of fastest-growing skills includes AI and big data, followed by networks, cybersecurity, and technology literacy. In addition to being tech-savvy, resilience, creative thinking, lifelong learning, curiosity, along with flexibility and agility, will continue gaining prominence over the 2025-2030 period.

Half of all employers already plan to reorient their businesses after the emergence of AI. Two-thirds of all employers, on the other hand, plan to hire talent with specific AI skills, while 40 percent predict that their workforce will be reduced given AI's proficiency at automating tasks.

Unsurprisingly, the industry most affected by AI is the one where its genesis occurred. For years, the youth were pushed towards pursuing their studies and professions in Computer Science, as it was seen as a safe and lucrative option. This, in turn, saw the number of Computer Science majors mushroom across universities everywhere. However, recent layoffs and hiring freezes by tech companies indicate that "learn to code" will no longer be anyone's go-to advice.

"Oversaturation has made competition skyrocket in the last couple of years," explains Zubaida Zahid Runee, a Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) student of Korea

University in Seoul. "It's important to stand out. This is why I decided to make my major more interdisciplinary by pursuing Brain and Cognitive Sciences to complement my Computer Science degree."

Many experts argue that fluctuations in the labour market are common and that it is too soon for AI to be causing disruptions of this scale. With that said, it's not only young coders who should be wary of new technology; many entry-level jobs are at stake as well. Beginner roles often contain a lot of drudgery – the perfect candidate to be automated by AI systems. *The Guardian* reports that such roles have been reduced by a third over the past two and a half years. This is a significant development considering early work experiences act as crucial stepping stones for young people breaking into the workforce. They offer new workers exposure to the habits, norms and expectations of the professional world.

If we travel a bit further back, we can see ripple effects of the pandemic in the employment landscape. Covid-19 threw an unexpected wrench in young people's plans, changing market trends more quickly than anyone could have anticipated. The labour market disruptions during this time included the rise of remote work, unemployment, job changes, and substantial income loss. The onset of the pandemic also caused a large number of sectors of the economy to collapse.

Some are taking these transitions in stride, however. Sarah*, who has recently started her internship at a multinational company, states, "Jobs in the business world, which required little technical knowledge, now demand strong skills in tools like Microsoft Power BI, Tableau, Google Workspace, and various customer relationship management (CRM)

platforms. But there's also increased flexibility now, with more remote positions and hybrid offices allowing for a better work-life balance."

While technological advancements may be revolutionising the job market faster than ever, the demographic considered the first digital natives may be in an apt position to tackle it. Since Gen-Z has grown up in a completely digital age, their innate understanding of technology could be leveraged to their advantage in the employment scene. They also have unparalleled access to information, including career prospects, salary ranges, and potential risks in their fields of interest.

Nevertheless, adapting to these frequent changes means workers will have to learn to reinvent themselves constantly just to remain competitive. Agility and continuous education will be necessary to survive in a workforce that requires you to be on your toes.

**Name has been changed upon request for privacy*

The world is complicated and ever-changing. Usually, young people are the first to bear the brunt of unprecedented changes and shifts in the current world order. Be it the onset of climate change, the birth and acclimatisation of artificial intelligence (AI), or the consistently worsening state of geopolitics and declining global peace – young people are most vulnerable to the impacts of these changes, and they must deal with the consequences for the longest. Despite that, society still struggles to understand young people; their identities, their decisions, and the motivations behind their choices. This series will thus, bring forward one such issue every month, through articles and musings, written by young people navigating through life and its many challenges.

The job market has seen dramatic shifts throughout history. From the Industrial Revolution transforming economies to the digitalisation of jobs, new technology usually meant as much opportunity as displacement.

The illusion of parasocial relationships

TINATH ZAEBA

It is a strange thing to feel as though you know everything about someone who has never met you, stranger still when millions of people feel the same way. The phenomenon I am referring to is "parasocial relationship", a neat psychological phrase for the one-sided bonds people form with public figures. But it hardly feels like psychology when you are celebrating Taylor Swift's engagement as if she's someone you know.

In a similar vein, The Beatles were hounded by paparazzi all day, and Marilyn Monroe's face was sold like a brand logo – plastered on magazines and posters. But there was a barrier of distance. You had to buy the magazine, switch on the radio, or wait for the cinema screen to light up. Now, the smartphone in our hands makes the information accessible all the time. And it is normal that we form a bond with figures we look up to. However, we have to ask ourselves to what extent it should be accepted.

A pop star posts about her closet after her tour. Elsewhere, a beloved Hollywood actor livestreams from his kitchen in the middle of the night. The curtain never falls. You do not admire celebrities anymore; you "follow" them, which itself is a verb that suggests a certain type of stalking.

Children are especially vulnerable because their first interactions with fame often happen online. And when they scroll further into adolescence, the emotional attachment deepens. It is not just limited to liking a video anymore; it evolves into idolising, obsessing, and spending money to keep the fantasy alive. It feels personal, but the relationship is not real.

Platforms like Cameo exist for this reason: pay a large sum and your favourite actor or reality



ILLUSTRATION: AZRA HUMAYRA

star will record a birthday message, pretending for 30 seconds that you are genuinely special to them.

On platforms such as Patreon, TikTok, or OnlyFans, the entire economy thrives on the promise of closeness, marketed as exclusive access or one-on-one connection. Merch drops, VIP passes, subscription models: they are all built on the premise that the bond you think you have with a celebrity can be deepened, but only if you are willing to pay.

Another clever monetisation is album variants. Singers now release the same record multiple times, often at higher prices, with nothing changed but the photos. And thanks to obsessive fandom culture, these variants sell out every time.

The illusion hides the truth. No matter what their TikToks show, a celebrity's life is never like ours: it is full of publicists, management teams, and financial security. The gulf between fan and star is wider than ever, only now it is disguised by reliability. Fans think they are connecting across that gap, but in reality, they are consuming a packaged product marketed on the parasocial bond.

The influence does not stop at consumerism. When millions of people feel personally tied to a public figure, endorsements land differently. A product recommendation or political statement feels like advice from a friend. The danger is that fans, especially the younger demographic, absorb not only the content but also the ideologies attached to it.

Celebrities know this, and they use it – sometimes innocently, sometimes strategically.

For celebrities, this is an efficient business model. It requires no studio, no set, no middleman. Just a phone and the pretence of friendship. For fans, particularly young ones, it is a trap. They dedicate hours dissecting outfits, memorising interview lines, and watching the same music video over and over to feel closer to the celebrities.

What makes today's version more troubling is that the connection never switches off. A child can wake up at 3 AM and immediately be flooded with updates from influencers across the world. The intimacy is constant, the drip feed never-ending.

Parasocial relationships will not vanish. In fact, it is stitched into the fabric of the celebrity economy. The illusion works so well because it feels ordinary. That is the real trick of social media celebrity culture: convincing you that something hollow is instead full. We may all know, on some rational level, that the person on the screen has never thought about us. But knowing and feeling are different. And feeling, it seems, has become a business.

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Are first-year friendships truly doomed to fail?

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

The pain of not being able to attend university with your childhood friends lessens ever so slightly, and you feel a lot less lonely as you find yourself laughing among a relatively large group of people. That is, until you meet the derisive smiles of your seniors as they kindly inform you that the friends you make at university won't be there for long.

Against your better judgment, you start looking at your friends with some suspicion. Are they long-term friendship material? Is it naive of you to expect that the group of people with whom you seem to click superbly will manage to make it through the next four years?

As a student in her final semester of undergraduate life, I believe I possess some credentials to speak on this matter, having experienced both the quintessential university friend group breakup and managed to hold onto the people I truly care about.

University is uncharted territory to begin with, and it doesn't help that as you grow into yourself, the more difficult it is for you to find connection.



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

When you first meet your university friends, you may bond over your favourite music or film, shared experiences in class, or the first quiz that seemed to appear at the speed of light. Since you are just starting out, your focus should be to make the transition easier for yourself and observe the people around you to find a

circle that works for you.

The reason university friend groups formed during the early days fall apart is due to the fact that the connection is often forged at face value. Such friend groups are bound to drift away. It does not have to be an explosive melodrama as it is often painted to be, although you are very likely to witness a few fiascos as

well.

So, to answer the question we started with – yes, the odds are stacked against the friend group you forge during the first week of class. While this is not a hard and fast rule, we've established that the reason your friend group may scatter is a valid one.

A friendship is a connection that should happen naturally, and if you're not enjoying the company of those around you, it is pointless to care about how your social life is being perceived. You may distance yourself from the people you originally clicked with to become closer to a group you may fit into better. You may be among the unlucky ones who end up not making any lasting friendships, and that is fine as well.

At the end of the day, friends lend you a space of comfort to ease the burdens of your daily life. Human relationships are complicated, and change is inevitable. The shifting dynamics with others in your vicinity should not weigh on you at the early stages, regardless of the derisions and jokes. So, if you are a freshman, put yourself out there, and hopefully, you will finish strong with a social life that you are content with.