



Navigating Career Preferences: Why Gen Z Favors Start-up Opportunities Over Corporations

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Abstract

With Generation Z joining the workforce, there have been clear differences in the outlook that this generation has on careers and work environment. This could be because many members of Generation Z have begun to see themselves as having more opportunities in working for start-up firms as opposed to just working with more established organizations. Firms with a start-up nature tend to offer young people a vibrant work environment, faster learning opportunities and prospects to take up responsibilities sooner, when compared to corporations. The current research aims at exploring the factors influencing Gen Z's choice in favour of startups compared to corporations. Three major aspects of interest have been identified and are going to be investigated in terms of this research: professional advancement and skills development; corporate culture and flexibility; compensation, stability and organization's value system as motivational factors. The research methodology includes quantitative analysis with primary data collection through a structured questionnaire distributed among the representatives of Generation Z.

Keywords: Generation Z, Start-ups, Corporations, Career Preferences, Workplace Culture, Career Growth, Talent Attraction.

1. Introduction

The Indian job market is witnessing a transformational change as the population of Generation Z in the work force rises. In contrast to previous generations, whose career goal was always a stable job in an organization, Generation Z workers have shown a marked preference for start-ups over organizations. Studies within the industry show that a number of Generation Z workers are ready to earn comparatively less at the start in order to learn faster and take on varied roles, with skills development being much more important than salary increments in their careers. On the contrary, start-ups attract such talents by offering freedom, fast responsibility, and goal-oriented organizational culture even though they do not provide any form of job security or have any structured HR system[1].

1.1. Research Problem

The Generation Z is beginning to become a significant part of the global labour force and,

therefore, have their own expectations concerning career advancement, corporate culture, flexibility, innovation, and job satisfaction. Start-ups are often viewed as innovative, autonomous, and offering quick learning possibilities, while established companies can offer better job security and organized career paths. The research problem that is being tackled through this research is what specific factors of career development, organizational culture, and motivation drive Gen Z's preference for start-up jobs rather than corporate jobs[2].

1.2. Significance of the Study

The study has several practical implications for different groups of stakeholders. Firstly, for the corporate HR departments, the research provides insights into which aspects of the classical employer value proposition have to be reconsidered to attract Generation Z employees. Second, for the entrepreneurs, who are creating their startups,



knowing which aspects of the job will have more weight helps them compete with other companies without having comparable salary levels because it gives them information about what to highlight when searching for new talents. Finally, for educational institutions and policymakers who want to make young people more prepared to work for startup companies, this research contributes to the discussion about India's start-up ecosystem[3].

1.3.Objectives of the Study

- To examine the influence of career growth opportunities, learning exposure, and skill development on Gen Z's preference for start-ups over corporations[4].
- To analyse the impact of workplace characteristics such as flexibility, culture, innovation, and autonomy on Gen Z's employment preferences.
- To evaluate the role of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors such as compensation, job security, organizational values, and purpose in shaping Gen Z's career decisions[5].

1.4.Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design, utilizing primary data. Data was gathered by means of a structured questionnaire. A total of 200 respondents, comprising of Gen-Z population, were acquired using the convenience sampling method. The gathered data was then analysed using statistical tools[6].

1.5.Limitations to the Study

The limitation of this study is that the sample size consists of 200 respondents and the use of convenient sampling that can make generalization difficult. Also, individual perceptions are used in responses and can be biased as they may be affected by personal experiences or preferences. The limitation of this study is that it only focuses on Generation Z, and there is no comparison among different generations[7].

2. Literature Review

Generation Z typically considered as people born from 1997 to 2012, are slowly emerging as one of

the key players in the workforce. This generation of workers differs from the previous generations in that they value flexibility, learning, and personal development, in addition to remuneration. Career development, work-life balance, and purposeful employment are some of the key determinants of Gen Z employment, as indicated by Deloitte's 2025 Gen Z and Millennial Survey. As reported by IRJEMS (2025), Gen Z considers employment as not only a means of earning money but also as a means of developing skills and self-development. Career choice determinants among young professionals have been investigated in numerous studies. Classically, monetary benefits, security, and reputation of an organization were seen as primary factors driving the decision-making process. Nevertheless, research shows that there has been a change in preferences. According to Lingayas Vidyapeeth (2026), 57% of Indian Generation Z would prefer skill development to financial gain. Likewise, Jenkins (2025) suggests that career advancement, professional growth, corporate culture, and meaningfulness of work play an important role when determining attractiveness of the organization for Generation Z employees. The entrance of Gen Z in the workforce has brought about considerable changes in terms of job expectations. Flexibility, autonomy, and work-life balance remain the key concerns in the workplace. As a recent survey in the Journal of Applied Research Studies (2025) indicates, those who enjoy greater autonomy and decision-making have higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Likewise, a recent article in the Dinasti International Journal of Economics, Finance, and Accounting (2025) confirms that there is a positive association between flexible work practices and employee retention among the young generation. Start-ups have become more popular workplaces for young professionals. As per IJAEM (2025) study about Indian career aspiration, start-ups are linked with innovation, fast learning, increased responsibility, and entrepreneurial experience. Astravise Services (2026) found an

increasing trend of joining start-ups by Gen Z professionals despite the risk of unstable job security. The reason is the belief of young professionals in start-ups as places that offer quick learning, participation in decision-making processes, and development of a variety of skills. Although start-ups provide flexibility and innovations, corporations have still succeeded in luring Gen Z workers with their reputation, structured career path, and job security. Deloitte (2025) found out that financial security is one of the major considerations for the majority of Gen Z workers. The Hans India (2026) mentioned that corporations have a good reputation as employers because they provide job security, structured training program, and well-defined career promotion system. The studies of work-life preferences of Gen Z workers further confirm that reputation of an organization is a determining factor in the employment choice of a person. Previous literature on Gen Z has widely focused on their workplace expectations, motivation, work-life balance, and organizational preferences. Most of the literature has either concentrated on the general behaviours of employees at workplaces or on start-ups and corporations separately. There are limited studies available which have made an explicit comparison of the perceptions of Gen Z about start-ups and established corporations in the same study. Also, the significance of various factors like salary, career opportunities, flexibility, job security, workplace culture, and innovations in determining career preferences has not been properly empirically studied yet in case of young job seekers. This study aims to fill this gap[8 – 10].

3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

3.1.Introduction

This study analyses and interprets data obtained from 200 respondents belonging to Gen Z through a structured questionnaire. This research intends to explore the factors that impact the career choices of Gen Z for start-up firms and corporate firms. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability test, correlation analysis, and

chi-square test. The results of the analysis have been discussed in accordance with the research objectives of the study,As shown in Table 1 Source: Primary Data,As shown in Figure 1 Age Distribution.

3.2.Data Analysis

3.2.1. Age Distribution

Table 1 Source: Primary Data

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 21	58	29%
22 – 25	76	38%
26 – 29	66	33%

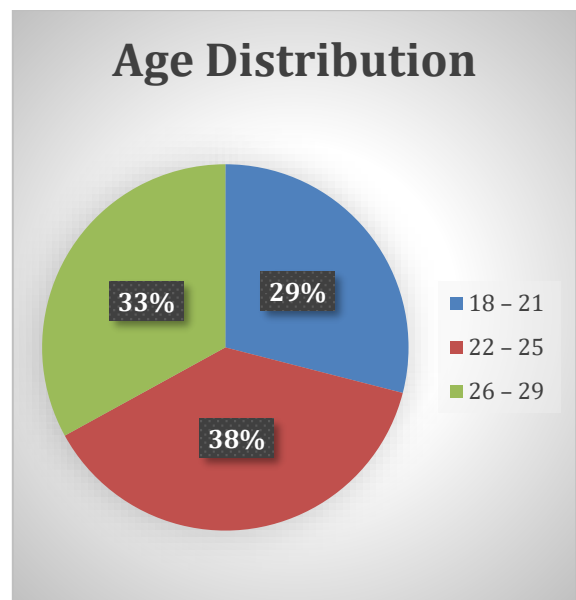


Figure 1 Age Distribution

3.2.2. Interpretation

The majority of the respondents were in the age group of 22 – 25, meaning the study mostly reflects

the opinions of people who are either about to join the workforce or are at the start of their careers. As shown in Table 2 Source: Primary Data, Figure 2 Gender Distribution As shown in Figure 2 Gender Distribution [11 – 20].

3.3. Gender Distribution

Table 2 Source: Primary Data

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	120	60%
Male	67	33%
Prefer not to say	13	7%

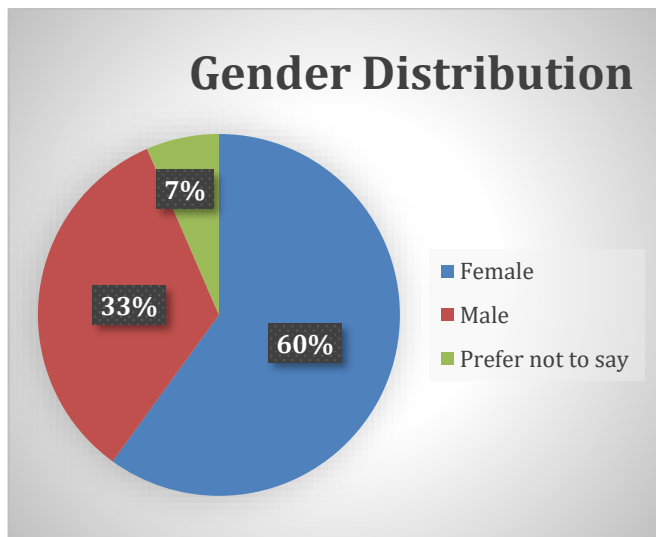


Figure 2 Gender Distribution

3.3.1. Interpretation

The higher participation of female respondents reflects the strong engagement of women within the Gen Z workforce and student population. The sample includes both genders; thus, the study displays diverse views concerning career

preferences, workplace expectations, and organisational choices Figure 3 Employment Status [21].

3.4. Employment Status

Table 3 Percentage

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Undergraduate Student	43	21%
Post – graduate Student	43	21%
Intern	6	3%
Employed	87	44%
Self – Employed	21	11%

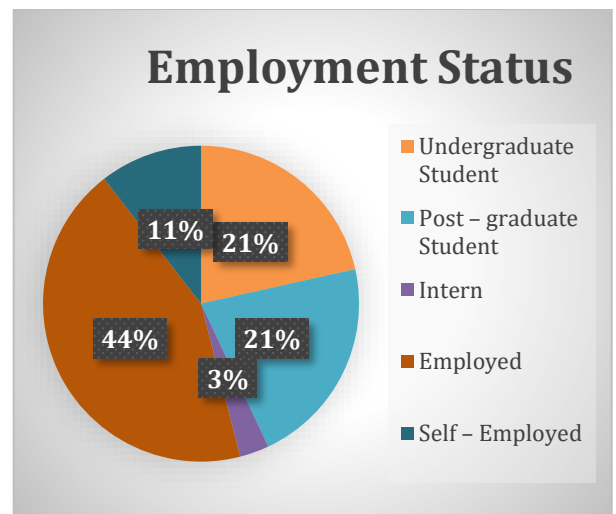


Figure 3 Employment Status

3.4.1. Interpretation

The work status of respondents is a varied group of individuals at various junctures of their academic and professional careers. The largest category was comprised of employed respondents, representing 43.5% of the sample. This means that the participants have some work experience. 21.5% of the respondents were undergraduate and 21.5%

were postgraduate. This meant that there were people who were either ready to enter the labour or who were considering future occupations. In addition, 10.5% of the sample were self-employed, indicating that respondents had some working experience and exposure to entrepreneurship. Interns made up 3% of the respondents, giving a peek into the transition from college to full-time work As shown in Figure 4 Preferred Workplace [22].

3.5. Preferred Workplace

Table 4 Preferred workplace

Preference	Frequency	Percentage
Start - Up	67	33%
Corporate	79	40%
No Preference	54	27%

Figure 4 Preferred Workplace



3.5.1. Interpretation

Findings indicated that corporate organisations were the most preferred employment option accounting for 40% of the sample as perceived by respondents. This is because they are known for having more job stability, clear career paths, established systems and long-term stability. A third of respondents chose start-ups, suggesting that a high percentage of Gen Z are attracted to dynamic working environments that offer opportunities for

innovation and learning. Also, 27% of respondents had no preference for start-ups or corporations, indicating that organisational features (culture, opportunity for advancement, flexibility, meaningful work) may be more important than type of organisation[23].

3.6. Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha was used to measure reliability, as it is one of the most frequently employed measures in assessing whether multiple items within a construct are measuring the same underlying concept. Cronbach's Alpha of 0.70 or more is considered acceptable and indicates good reliability of the measurement scale [24].

Table 5 Construct

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Career Factors	0.78
Workplace Characteristics	0.77
Organisational Perceptions	0.69

3.6.1. Interpretation

The Career Factors construct had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.783 which indicates an appropriate level of reliability for measuring expectations associated with salaries, career growth, job security, organisational culture and learning opportunities. The Workplace Characteristics construct received a score of 0.779 and the items related to the type of flexibility in workplace, work-life balance, participation in decision making, variety of responsibilities and level of innovation were closely related and are considered reliable measures of participants' expectations of their workplaces overall. The questionnaire achieved an acceptable level of reliability (as indicated by the reliability coefficients), which supports its continued use as a measurement tool in the form of subsequent statistical analysis. Given that the measurement scales used in this study will provide



consistent results, we are confident that these scales accurately measure the corresponding attitudes and perceptions of Gen Z respondents toward their employment preferences[25].

3.7. Objective Wise Analysis

3.7.1. Objective 1

To examine the influence of career growth opportunities, learning exposure, and skill development on Gen Z's preference for start-ups over corporations. Hypothesis.

H₀: Career growth opportunities, learning exposure, and skill development do not significantly influence Gen Z employment preferences.

H₁: Career growth opportunities, learning exposure, and skill development significantly influence Gen Z employment preferences.

Table 6 Statement

Statement	Mean
Salary and compensation are important factors	3.80
Opportunities for career growth influence my choice of organization	4.01
Job security plays an important role in my employment decisions	4.07
Organizational culture affects my career preference	3.98
Learning and skill-development opportunities influence my	3.92

choice of employer	
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3.7.1.1. Interpretation

Gen Z's number one priority when it comes to making decisions regarding employment was job security (4.07). Just behind it was career growth opportunities (4.01), which together signify that Gen Z's desire for long-term development and stability is fundamentally important. The same can be said about learning opportunities and organizational culture, as they received a high level of agreement from participants in this survey.

3.7.1.2. Correlation Analysis

$$r = 0.169$$

The correlation coefficient of 0.169 implies the presence of a weak positive relationship between career-related aspects and organizational preference. It means that respondents whose values related to career development, education, skills improvement, and job security matter more show slightly more preference to some organizations. Nonetheless, the low value of the correlation coefficient implies that career-related factors cannot be considered the only factor explaining workplace preference in Genz. It can be concluded that despite the relevance of career development and other aspects to respondents, they consider other aspects of organizations' work when evaluating them, including flexibility, organization culture, innovation, and their own values. Thus, career-related factors influence employment preferences but cannot be considered the only influential factor. It can be seen that there is a positive association between career-related elements and employment preference. The elements of career development, learning, and skill enhancement help develop workplace preferences among Gen Z participants.

3.7.2. Objective 2

To analyse the impact of workplace characteristics such as flexibility, culture, innovation, and autonomy on Gen Z employment preferences. Hypothesis.

H₀: Workplace characteristics do not significantly



influence Gen Z employment preferences.
H₁: Workplace characteristics significantly influence Gen Z employment preferences.

Table 7 Statement

Statement	Mean
Flexibility in work performance	4.07
Work – life Balance	4.08
Decision – making	4.04
Diverse responsibilities	3.96
Innovation and adaptability	4.08

3.7.2.1. Interpretation

The results showed that Gen Z placed the greatest value on work-life balance and innovation, as reflected by the average ratings. Participation in decision making and flexibility at work earned very high ratings, indicating continued strong preferences for workplaces that encourage collaboration and provide options for adjusting the environment.

3.7.2.2. Correlation Analysis

$$r = 0.215$$

The value of correlation coefficient of 0.215 shows a positive association between workplace elements and employment preference. Despite being of moderate strength, this association is much higher in comparison to associations with the other constructs tested. This means that the workplace elements have a more significant impact on the choices of Gen Z participants. From the findings, it is clear that elements such as flexibility, work-life balance, involvement in decision-making, innovation, and adaptability play a major role in making the organization attractive.

3.7.3. Objective 3

To evaluate the role of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors such as compensation, job security, organizational values, and purpose in

shaping Gen Z's career decisions. Hypothesis
H₀: Motivational factors do not significantly influence Gen Z employment preferences.
H₁: Motivational factors significantly influence Gen Z employment preferences.

Table 8 Statement

Statement	Mean
Corporations offer greater job stability	4.02
Start – ups offer faster learning opportunities	4.05
Corporations provide clear career progression	3.94
Start – ups encourage innovation and creativity	4.11
Organisational reputation influences job applications	3.89

3.7.3.1. Interpretation

The results show that interviewees are aware of varied advantages ascribed to new versus existing businesses. For example, there was a high level of agreement among respondents that new businesses afford quicker learning experiences; this is indicative of the notion that workers in new business environments commonly perform multiple functions and subsequently increase their skill sets at an accelerated rate. On the other hand, interviewees also agreed that existing businesses provide a higher level of job security and more defined job progression paths than do newer businesses, as reflected in the respondents' belief that there are advantages to working for an organization that has an established structure and is able to use established career paths.

3.7.3.2. Correlation Analysis

$$r = 0.061$$

Correlation coefficient value of 0.061 implies the existence of a very weak positive correlation between motivational factors and preference for



employment. It implies that while motivational factors like remuneration, job security, organizational reputation, and promotion are still valid and relevant factors, they have not been seen to affect workplace preference significantly. This weak correlation could imply a change in priorities among Generation Z. While previous generations had considered salary and organization reputation as the primary criteria, Gen Z seems to consider employment decisions on the basis of wider factors like organizational culture, adaptability, innovation, significance of work, and continuous learning. There exists weak positive correlation between motivational factors and employment preference. While motivational factors are important in organizational decisions, they seem to carry comparatively less weight among Generation Z population.

3.8. Chi-Square Analysis Between Start-up Experience and Workplace Preference

To understand if working in start-ups before affects what kind of job Generation Z wants, a Chi – Square test was done to see if there is a connection between people who worked in start-ups before and what type of workplace they prefer. The test checked if start-up experience and preferred workplace type are related. Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant association between previous start-up experience and workplace preference among Gen Z respondents.

H₁: There is a significant association between previous start-up experience and workplace preference among Gen Z respondents.

Table 9 Statement

Start – Up Experience	Corporate	No Preference	Start – Up	Total
No	41	35	36	112
Yes	38	19	31	88
Total	79	54	67	200

3.8.1. Interpretation

As shown in the cross tabulation, both respondents

with and those without any previous start-up experience have chosen all the various preferences of workplaces. In the case of those respondents who had previous start-up experience, there were many people who favoured corporate work places, but some of them favoured start-ups or did not have any preference. This shows that choice of workplace does not depend only on the previous experience of the person. Instead, the respondents seem to consider many factors while choosing jobs, factors include: career growth, working culture, learning opportunities, etc. In order to check whether these differences were statistically significant, Chi-square test for independence was performed.

Table 10 Particular value

Particulars	Value
Chi – square p – value	0.237
Level of significance	0.05
Decision	Accept H ₀

3.8.2. Interpretation

From the Chi-Square test, the p-value was 0.237, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. This shows that there is no statistically significant association between previous start-up experience and workplace preference among the respondents. Even though there were slight variations between those who had previous start-up experience and those who had none, the differences were not significant enough to show any relationships. It is evident from the results that Generation Z judges their potential employers based on several aspects apart from the past experience of the workplace. As the p-value is greater than the significance level of 0.05 (i.e., 0.237), the null hypothesis is accepted. From the results, it is evident that there is no statistically significant association between previous start-up experience and workplace preference among Generation Z respondents.

4. Findings and Conclusion

4.1. Objective 1

To examine the influence of career growth opportunities, learning exposure, and skill



development on Gen Z's preference for start-ups over corporations. Job security proved to be the most significant determinant of career choice as it had the highest mean among all variables. Career development was seen as an important criterion in choosing an employer since employees prefer organizations where they can grow professionally. Learning and developing skills were agreed to be one of the key criteria by Gen Z workers, which shows that people of this generation still consider learning as an essential thing. Workplace culture was also determined to affect employees' choices. Correlation analysis showed that there is a positive connection between career criteria and employment preference.

4.2.Objective 2

To analyse the impact of workplace characteristics such as flexibility, culture, innovation, and autonomy on Gen Z employment preferences. The highest mean score was given to work-life balance and innovation in comparison to other workplace variables, indicating that there is a high level of preference on behalf of the respondents to have a flexible working environment. The ability to make decisions in the organization had a positive impact on the perception of the respondents, thus, it can be said that Gen Z employees value participation and collaboration in organizations. It should also be noted that diverse activities and having the possibility of performing various roles was also positively valued.

4.3.Objective 3

To evaluate the role of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors such as compensation, job security, organizational values, and purpose in shaping Gen Z's career decisions. Participants viewed start-up organizations as having more opportunities for innovation, creativity, and learning. Participants viewed established organizations as having greater job security and career growth opportunities. Organizational image had an impact on the decision to apply for a job but was not considered the primary factor in determining their preference for employment.

Motivation factors exhibited the weakest correlation to employment preference among the factors under consideration. It can be concluded from the results that Generation Z assesses organizations using a variety of criteria.

Conclusion

The current research investigated the influence of different factors on Generation Z career choices towards start-ups and large corporations. According to the answers provided by 200 respondents, the research has revealed that the choice of Gen Z employees depends on several interrelated factors. Career development prospects, educational possibilities, and job security remain one of the key factors in the employment choice of the generation. Respondents showed great willingness to join companies that promote professional growth and development and allow their employees to acquire new skills for further successful work. Among all analysed factors, work characteristics became the major factor determining the employment choice of respondents. Flexibility, work-life balance, innovative environment, and possibility to take part in decision-making process are crucial for respondents. The study also identified different perceptions about start-ups and corporations. The perceptions about start-ups included innovation, creativity, adaptability, and fast learning, while the perceptions about corporations included stability, structured career paths, and systems within an organization. Instead of showing a clear bias towards one organizational form, the participants seemed to rate the employers on the basis of the opportunities provided by each particular employer.

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