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Perceived Factors of Job Search Anxiety among Postgraduate Final Year Students – A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: ***This qualitative study aims to explore the factors contributing to job search anxiety among final-year postgraduate students. The research objective is to understand the perspectives and factors related to job search anxiety in this specific group. A purposive sampling technique will be used to select 10 participants who are final-year postgraduate students actively seeking or planning to seek employment and experiencing job search anxiety. Data will be collected through face-to-face, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, which will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Thematic analysis will be employed to identify patterns and themes within the data. The findings of this study will provide insights into the factors influencing job search anxiety among final-year postgraduate students, contributing to the existing literature on this topic.***
Keywords: job search anxiety, final-year postgraduate students, qualitative study, factors, perspectives.

I. INTRODUCTION

Individuals undergo various transformative phases, commonly denoted as transitions (Schlossberg, Goodman & Anderson, 2006), throughout their lifespan. The salient feature of a life event metamorphosing into a transition lies in the inherent uncertainty and challenges it introduces, positioned between two phases of stability. In the initial stages of these transitions, individuals are compelled to disengage from elements of their former selves, incorporating previously assumed roles. Following this disengagement, individuals then navigate the process of transitioning into novel roles (Schlossberg, 2006). A widespread transition encountered by a substantial portion of the general populace at some point involves the endeavour to secure gainful employment (Boswell, Zimmerman & Swider, 2011).

The transition from an educational context to the realm of employment is acknowledged as a pivotal stage in an individual's life (Schoon & Silbereisen, 2015). To navigate this transition successfully, one must actively participate in the process of job searching. Job searching encompasses a series of activities, including the systematic collection of information about the job market, targeted exploration of available positions within the labour market, scrutiny of potential job openings, and the identification of distinct characteristics associated with each job (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio & Phillips, 1994). These activities are purposefully undertaken with the aim of securing gainful employment (Manroop & Richardson, 2015). The process of job searching has been characterized as both intimidating and challenging, particularly within the context of South Africa (Ismail, 2017).

Job search anxiety is the discomfort individuals encounter during the pursuit of employment. This phenomenon is not exclusive to individuals based on their experience or qualifications; rather, it is a natural reaction to the inherent challenges associated with seeking employment.

Saks and Ashforth (2000) have conceptualized job search anxiety as a specific form of anxiety tied to the context of how an individual perceives and feels about the entirety of the job search process. The process of job searching can be a profoundly stressful period. Judson Brewer, a psychiatrist and chief medical officer at wellness company Sharecare, notes, "Uncertainty is not favoured by our brains." The job search, in particular, is characterized by its inherent uncertainty (Rosen, 2022). Engaging in a job search has been depicted as a process that may induce distress (Barber et al., 1994; Bonaccio et al., 2013). Lin (2008) underscores that tasks associated with job searching can lead to the emotional arousal of anxiety in individuals. Various factors contribute to the characterization of this process as emotionally arousing. It has been proposed that the search for job openings, the necessity to market one's skills to potential employers, and the acquisition of pertinent information within the desired employment field all contribute to making the pursuit of employment an anxiety-inducing activity (Lin, 2008).

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Job search anxiety is the unease individuals feel during the pursuit of employment, a universal experience irrespective of one's qualifications or experience. It emerges as a natural response to the inherent challenges associated with seeking a job (Patton, L, 2023). Elements contributing to job search anxiety encompass Financial Pressures, Fear of Rejection, Lack of Control over Outcomes, and Social Comparisons (Patton, L, 2023). Job search anxiety often arises from specific triggers, and understanding these triggers is crucial for effective stress management. Identifying and addressing these stressors enables individuals to navigate challenges with greater confidence and composure (Patton, L, 2023). The attainment of employment holds significant importance for an individual's confidence and self-concept, turning job-seeking into an activity underscored by pressure (Barber et al., 1994; Manroop & Richardson, 2015). Job seekers often grapple with anxiety, recognizing that their willingness to find employment is just one aspect determining success. The job interview process serves as a prominent trigger due to its inherent scrutiny and evaluation. Fear of judgment or rejection can instigate self-doubt, while the pressure to make a favourable impression and articulate one's skills intensifies the stress. The unpredictable nature of facing difficult questions and the potential inclusion of skills tests or presentations during interviews contribute to heightened anxiety. Uncertainty is a pervasive trigger, generating a sense of instability and unpredictability. The lack of clarity regarding the timing and certainty of receiving a job offer becomes a stressor, especially for those undergoing transitions or financial challenges. The ambiguity surrounding job requirements or application processes, often exacerbated by vague job postings, adds to the stress. Economic factors, such as market conditions and industry changes, can further intensify the feeling of uncertainty. Individuals may experience anxiety in their job search due to uncertainties surrounding their ability to secure a desirable position or any job at all (Stumpf, Colarelli, & Hartman, 1983; Manroop & Richardson, 2015). The lack of clarity regarding employers' expectations is another source of anxiety, especially for inexperienced job seekers like university graduates (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio & Phillips, 1994). Comparison: The inclination to compare oneself with others during the job search can result in feelings of inadequacy, pressure to keep pace, and concerns about not doing enough. This comparison-induced stress can lead to overthinking about presenting oneself in the best light and adversely affect well-being and career planning(Patton, L , 2023). Additionally, financial pressures add to the distress of job searching, particularly among university graduates facing challenges such as repaying loans and addressing various financial responsibilities (Manroop & Richardson, 2015).

Numerous external factors contribute to the complexity of job search outcomes. Age, for instance, has been identified as a potential obstacle affecting the likelihood of securing employment (Fielden & Davidson, 1999; Lyons, Wessel, Chiew Tai, & Marie Ryan, 2014), which holds significance in the context of student graduates typically aged between 21 and 27 (Higher Education and Training Republic of South Africa, 2011). Individuals within this age range may perceive a lack of work experience as a potential barrier to obtaining a desirable job. Economic uncertainties add an additional layer of concern for job seekers, impacting their outlook on finding suitable opportunities. Moreover, adverse economic conditions prevalent during the job search can further undermine an individual's confidence in their ability to secure employment (Fielden & Davidson, 1999). Networking plays a pivotal role in job acquisition, with many positions not openly advertised. The necessity to establish and leverage professional connections can induce anxiety, particularly if individuals feel they lack access to networking channels or appraise their networking abilities as limited (Fielden & Davidson, 1999). Observing the struggles of friends or family in their job search endeavors can also contribute to anxiety for prospective job seekers, signalling that the activity is challenging and not easily navigable (Fielden & Davidson, 1999). These external factors compound the already intricate landscape of job searching, emphasizing the need for individuals to navigate not only their willingness but also external circumstances and perceptions that influence the journey toward securing employment.

Job search anxiety can be attributed to a variety of causes, encompassing both external and internal pressures. Externally, factors such as a fiercely competitive job market, economic instability, and challenges in identifying suitable job opportunities can impede a consistent job search (Patton, 2023). Moreover, the intricate nature of the job search process, involving tasks like crafting an impactful resume, composing a concise cover letter, conducting company research, networking efforts, and interview preparation, can contribute to feelings of overwhelm and anxiety (Patton, 2023). Internally, job search anxiety may be triggered by negative thoughts, self-doubt, and the fear of failure or rejection (Patton, 2023). The job search process necessitates an individual's ability to navigate the inherent uncertainty surrounding the success of their endeavors. This includes adeptly managing the ambiguity of not knowing whether their job search will yield positive outcomes. Additionally, individuals must possess the skill of identifying which specific skills to strategically market and how to effectively portray themselves to potential employers. This multifaceted approach to uncertainty management and skill presentation is integral to a successful job search journey.

The anxiety associated with job searching not only adversely impacts an individual's well-being but also extends its influence to other aspects of daily life. Research suggests that individuals experience heightened stress levels on days when they actively engage in job searches. This implies that job search anxiety may have spill-over effects onto various general activities, exerting an additional influence on individuals' overall well-being (Krueger & Mueller, 2011).

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The experience of rejection in the job search process is often accompanied by a heightened risk of individuals developing anxiety as they navigate this transitional phase in their lives. Research indicates that prolonged unemployment correlates with increased levels of worry, sadness, and stress, contributing to the potential onset of adjustment anxiety associated with this life stage. Notably, the likelihood of admission to a mental health hospital increases by 4% for unemployed individuals. Moreover, the impact of unemployment extends beyond psychological well-being, with a 1% rise in mortality and a 5-6% increase in cardiovascular disease (Rosen, 2022).

There have been multiple reasons put forward as to why unemployment and underemployment rates among university graduates are high. Obstacles and setbacks in the job-seeking process can lead to distraction, loss of motivation, and disruptive anxiety (Van Hooft et al., 2005). Notably, a recent report from the United Nations highlighted that India, despite its smaller population compared to China, boasts the world's largest youth demographic (Economic Times, 2014). Furthermore, the most recent data from the National Sample Survey Office reveals a significant decline in urban unemployment rates. These rates decreased from 7.6% in the previous year to 6.6% during the April to June period in 2023, attributed to the removal of COVID-19-related restrictions that had caused a surge in unemployment during the same period the previous year. Additionally, the labour force participation rate has shown a positive upturn, increasing from 47.5% during the corresponding period in the previous year to 48.8% in the second quarter of 2023 (Economic Times, 2023). As the economic recession continues to impact the job market, the challenge faced by college students in securing employment has become a prominent societal concern. Recently, there has been growing recognition of a shared challenge known as 'Job Search Anxiety.' Unemployment among individuals in their twenties is associated with a decline in mental well-being, resulting in heightened stress and anxiety, and hindering the development of self-identity and motivation to acquire job-related skills compared to their employed counterparts (Lee et al., 2011). These findings suggest that dysfunctional attitudes, particularly perfectionism, significantly contribute to job-seeking anxiety among college students. In this context, 27% of job-seeking anxiety can be attributed to one's psychological state, while situational factors contribute 18%, and parental expectations account for 10% of this anxiety. Furthermore, a correlation analysis underscores the direct relationship between these dysfunctional attitudes and the psychological state, situational factors, and parental expectations, emphasizing the pivotal role of perfectionism in amplifying job-seeking anxiety among college students (Choe et al., 2013). The task of finding employment presents a substantial challenge for young individuals, resulting in a growing trend of unemployment among both undergraduate and postgraduate students upon completing their courses (Ji et al., 2016). Approximately 47% of Indian graduates lack suitability for industry roles. Educated unemployment becomes more pronounced with higher education levels, with youth unemployment rates at 3.6% for primary education, 8% for graduates, and 9.3% for postgraduates (Panigrahi & M, 2022). Numerous studies reveal that many students invest a significant amount of time searching for jobs on online job portals and the internet, seeking advice and assistance regarding employment opportunities (Lee et al., 2004). Academic majors are gradually losing significance in terms of job preparation, with a shift towards job-related preparations, including obtaining qualifications, mastering the English language, specialized language training, personalized vocational training, and acquiring practical work experience (Kim et al., 2022). Job preparation behavior involves job exploration, gathering information, and developing the capability to participate in the desired job (Ji et al., 2016). The study, 'Perceived Factors of Job Search Anxiety among Postgraduate Final Year Students,' is well-positioned to bridge these research gaps. It offers the potential to yield valuable insights into the factors contributing to job search anxiety among students in their final year of study and how this anxiety is interconnected with their engagement in job preparation activities.

II. NEED FOR THE STUDY AND THE RATIONALE

Postgraduate final-year students experience significant job search anxiety, which can impact their mental well-being and job search outcomes. Despite its prevalence, there is a lack of focused research on the factors influencing this anxiety. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing targeted interventions to alleviate anxiety and enhance the job search experience. The increasing unemployment rates have raised concerns, coinciding with a troubling rise in suicide cases. Across various platforms, stories abound of individuals with education and qualifications turning to small businesses, such as tea shops, due to a scarcity of job opportunities.

Job Search Anxiety is often the initial stage of this distressing journey. As individuals face the pressure to secure suitable employment that aligns with their qualifications and aspirations, the fear of uncertainty and rejection can take a heavy toll on their mental well-being. Researcher Van et al. (2021) highlight the transition from academic life to the professional world as a pivotal moment for students in their final year of postgraduate studies. They emphasize that job searching is a significant activity that individuals engage in at various life stages, including transitions from school to the workforce, experiencing job loss, making career changes, and embarking on career transitions.

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This study aims to contribute to the existing literature on job search anxiety among postgraduate final-year students. Understanding these factors can enable to implementation of effective interventions to support students and enhance their job search experience.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The subsequent findings of the research study confirm that this study aimed to investigate and compare job-seeking anxiety and job preparation behavior among undergraduate students. A descriptive cross-sectional design was utilized, involving 360 participants (3rd and 4th-grade students) from K' University in G City. Data were collected through structured self-reported questionnaires between November 2020 and February 2021. The variables included general characteristics, job-seeking anxiety, and job preparation behavior, analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression analysis with SPSS/WIN 25.0. Within the total population, 70.8% were female, primarily in the health and social science group. The majority were in the 22–24 age group (55.2%), with 62% in the fourth grade. Job-seeking anxiety levels were higher in health science (4.45 ± 0.81) compared to social science (3.73 ± 0.55). Similarly, job preparation behavior showed similar results in health science (4.28 ± 0.76) and social science (4.06 ± 0.81). Job anxiety correlated positively with employment anxiety induction situations ($r = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$) and employment anxiety induction causes ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$). Social science students also exhibited positive correlations with employment anxiety induction situations ($r = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$) and employment anxiety induction causes ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.01$). Age, gender, and desired job position were identified as significantly associated with job-seeking anxiety and job preparation behavior. The study findings underscored higher job-seeking anxiety among undergraduate students, coupled with a high level of job preparation behavior. Addressing these issues necessitates intervention strategies, including career planning, to enhance a positive attitude towards desired job selection and alleviate job-seeking anxiety among undergraduate students (Kim et al., 2022).

This study, published in the Journal of Applied Psychology, explores the impact of COVID-induced job search anxiety and conspiracy beliefs on job search efforts among new labor market entrants. The research focuses on the adaptive and maladaptive reactions to job search anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study suggests that anxiety related to the job search process during the pandemic can lead to problem-solving pondering and affect-focused rumination. These experiences, in turn, influence the type of job search efforts individuals engage in the following week. The study distinguishes between dream job search effort, focused effort (towards carefully screened jobs), exploratory effort (towards a wide range of jobs in a broad manner), and haphazard effort (applying for any job without a clear plan). The research also considers how stable beliefs about the pandemic, such as belief in conspiracy theories and belief in COVID-19 as a public health crisis, impact these relationships. The findings, based on a weekly study of 162 new labor market entrants, reveal that COVID-induced job search anxiety is positively associated with both problem-solving pondering and affect-focused rumination. Problem-solving pondering is linked to increased dream, focused, and exploratory job search efforts in the subsequent week. However, affect-focused rumination hinders dream job search effort. The study further highlights that the detrimental effects of COVID-induced job search anxiety, specifically through affect-focused rumination, are more pronounced among individuals with higher levels of conspiracy theory beliefs.(Gabriel et al., 2021).

In the study titled "Job Search and Employment Success: A Quantitative Review and Future Research Agenda," The authors present a framework defining job search as a goal-directed, motivational, and self-regulatory process. They conduct a quantitative synthesis of the literature to examine the relationships between job-search self-regulation, job-search behavior, and employment success outcomes. The study also reviews key antecedents, including personality, attitudinal factors, and contextual variables, that influence job search self-regulation, behavior, and employment success. The meta-analysis includes 378 independent samples involving 165,933 participants, primarily from studies published in 2001 or later. The findings highlight the significance of job-search intensity in predicting quantitative employment success outcomes, such as the number of interviews, job offers, and employment status. However, job search intensity did not predict employment quality. The study identifies job-search self-regulation and job-search quality as promising areas for future research, as they predict both quantitative employment success outcomes and employment quality. The article concludes by outlining a research agenda based on the theoretical and quantitative synthesis (Van Hooft et al., 2021). In this study, a comparative analysis of four-year collegiate career preparation behavior across different grade levels was conducted at C University. This study aimed to assess and compare the employment preparation behavior of college students across different grade levels at C University, with the goal of formulating strategies to enhance the overall employment rate. The research involved data collection through frequency analysis and cross-analysis to identify variations in employment preparation behaviors among students of various grades. The results revealed significant differences across all aspects of employment preparation, including selecting a double major, gaining work experience during college, undergoing language training abroad, making career choices during college, setting employment goals, engaging in job searches during college, participating in employment-related activities, pursuing education/training relevant to the job, and obtaining official certifications.

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The study suggests several implications for boosting employment preparation among college students based on their grade levels. First, there is a need to actively encourage students to express their intent for employment. Second, institutional support is crucial for expanding language training opportunities and facilitating certification processes. Lastly, for local universities like C University, strengthening students' employment capabilities should involve promoting basic education initiatives. Overall, these findings offer guidance for developing targeted interventions to enhance the employment prospects of college students at different stages of their academic journey (Ji et al., 2016).

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. *Statement of the Problem*

To understand the factors behind Job Search Anxiety among final-year postgraduate students

B. *Research Objective*

1) To understand the perspectives of Job Search Anxiety among Final Year Postgraduate Students.
2) To understand the factors of Job Search Anxiety among Final year Postgraduate Students.

C. *Research Design*

This study will utilize a qualitative research technique to acquire a full understanding of the concepts and their relationship with each other.

D. *Sampling Procedure*

Sampling technique: Purposive Sampling
Sample size: 10 participants
Sample population: Final-Year Postgraduate Students.

E. *Data Collection*

Data collection was conducted through face-to-face, one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The interviews were audio-recorded and also took notes to ensure the accuracy of the data, which is crucial for interpreting the responses of the interviewees.

F. *Inclusive Criteria*

Postgraduate final year students actively seeking or planning to seek employment, those experiencing job search anxiety, students from various academic backgrounds. Additionally, participants must be willing to participate in one-on-one interviews.

G. *Exclusive Criteria*

Students not in their final year of postgraduate studies, those not seeking or intending to seek employment, individuals not experiencing job search anxiety.

H. *Data Analysis*

Thematic analysis: The transcripts of interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis. This qualitative analysis approach entails detecting and analysing patterns or themes within data to acquire insights into the research topics.

I. *Procedure*

Google Forms were utilized to solicit volunteers who met the study's inclusive and exclusive criteria and were willing to participate. After careful review of the criteria, eligible participants were contacted to schedule interviews. Consent forms were obtained, and interviews were conducted online. Subsequently, the interviews were transcribed manually, and thematic analysis was performed.

J. *Ethical Considerations*

1) Informed Consent: Participants will be asked to fill a consent form, ensuring they understand the purpose of the study, their role, and the potential risks and benefits. Emphasize their right to withdraw at any time without consequences.
2) Confidentiality: Participants will be assured that their identities and responses will be kept confidential and anonymized in any reports or publications.
3) Objectivity and Transparency will be assured throughout the research process.

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V. RESULTS

Table 1: Shows the theme of emotional challenges in job search and its subcategories, which include self-confidence and communication, fear of the future, and career-related anxiety.

Theme	Description	
Emotional Challenges in Job Search	Factors that contributing to the job search anxiety	
Subcategories	*Description*	*Significant Statement Example*
Self-Confidence and Communication	How self-confidence and communication influence job search anxiety.	"I had very little self-confidence and I was not much of a face-to-face person and I couldn't do that face-to-face conversation with people. I get anxiety and panic and I often tend to forget things later and once I remember what I'm supposed to say. So that it reduced my self-confidence and to prepare. I mean, finding the job that I like or the job role that I actually prefer was very difficult" (P1)
Fear of the Future	How the fear of the future contributes to job search anxiety.	"I feel very anxious and scared about my future because I don't know whether I will settle or find a perfect job which fits me" (P2).
Career-related Anxiety	How career-related anxiety impacts job search anxiety	"Because this is my final year, I have anxiety about finding a job related to my career. Sometimes, I feel negative about myself, wondering why I'm not getting a job and what is lacking in me. However, I also had confidence in my own artistic skill set. So, every time I got rejected from somewhere, I understood that it was probably not the right fit for me. This realization evoked two kinds of emotions" (P3).

Table 2: Shows the theme of economic climate in job search and its subcategories, which include general anxiety due to economic climate, and fear of unemployment.

Theme	Description	
Economic Climate	Factors that contributing to the job search anxiety	
Subcategories	*Description*	*Significant Statement Example*
General Anxiety Due to Economic Climate	How the General Anxiety Due to Economic Climate contributes to job search anxiety by influencing students' confidence and decision-making processes during their job search.	"Navigating the job search process can indeed be overwhelming and lead to feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. It's natural to have these emotions during such a significant life transition" (P1)
Fear of Unemployment	How the Fear of Unemployment impacts job search anxiety among students.	"Either you get in or you don't. The possibility of not getting a job makes me very anxious" (P6).

Table 3: Shows the theme of uncertainty in choosing organization and nervousness in job search and its subcategories, which include anxiety in reaching out, and Uncertainty in Choosing Organizations.

Theme	Description	
Uncertain in Choosing Organization and Nervousness in Job Search	Factors that contributing to the job search anxiety	
Subcategories	*Description*	*Significant Statement Example*
Anxiety in Reaching Out	How Anxiety in Reaching Out impacts students' job search anxiety, affecting their ability to connect with potential employers and navigate the job search process effectively.	"Yes, I'm scared, like, what they'll be like, you don't have a lot of experience and everything and majorly i feel nervous about reaching out to organization during job search" (P4)
Uncertain in Choosing Organizations	How Uncertainty in Choosing Organizations contributes to students' job search anxiety, influencing their decision-making process and overall job search experience.	"Yeah, because like, there's a lot of things out there. So, which will be the right one because I don't have an idea about what's going to happen until I go there and everything is uncertain about which organization to choose and whenever I'm thinking about that makes me feel very anxious" (P4).

Table 4: Shows the theme of external factors contributing to anxiety in job search and its subcategories, which include financial pressure, societal expectations, and family expectations.

Theme	Description	
External Factors Contributing to Anxiety	Factors that contributing to the job search anxiety	
Subcategories	*Description*	*Significant Statement Example*
Financial Pressure	How Financial Pressure influences job search anxiety among postgraduate final year students, impacting their financial decisions and overall job search process.	"Financial pressures, such as wanting to be independent and help my family, were linked to the tensions I felt while searching for a job. Since my father is retired, I wanted to take on the responsibility of supporting my family, mainly my family" (P1).
Societal Expectations	How Societal Expectations contribute to job search anxiety, affecting students' perceptions of success and self-worth.	"I'm already older, I've taken a break, and all my friends are already working. Because they have finished their studies, they have reached a stable position, and I'm not getting a job. So that is like societal pressure. People would obviously ask, and at 24, there's scarier than yeah" (P5).
Family Expectations	How Family Expectations add to students' job search anxiety, influencing their career choices and decision-making process.	"The main thing is I have to get a job, whether I'm successful or not, it will provide me with more stability. I also think about my future prospects. And, yeah, my family members are also expecting me to do something" (P7).

Table 5: Shows the theme of academic performance in job search and its subcategories, which include the importance of skills and the role of experience.

Theme	Description	
Academic Performance and Job Search	Factors that contributing to the job search anxiety	
Subcategories	*Description*	*Significant Statement Example*
Importance of Skills	How the Importance of Skills affects job search anxiety by influencing students' confidence in their abilities and their competitiveness in the job market.	"In academia I feel skills are very important. Your ability to apply what you've learned matters a lot" (P5).
Role of Experience	How the Role of Experience impacts job search anxiety by shaping students' perceptions of their qualifications and their ability to secure employment.	"I don't think academic performance is the only thing that matters. The experience and learning you gain apart from academics are mostly needed in the job search. From what I have learned in my few part-time jobs, the skill set required is" (P3)

Table 6: Shows the theme of impact of social media on job search anxiety and its subcategories, which include information overload and confusion, pressure to excel and compete.

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Theme	Description	
Impact of Social Media on Job Search Anxiety	Factors that contributing to the job search anxiety	
Subcategories	*Description*	*Significant Statement Example*
Information Overload and Confusion	How Information Overload and Confusion from social media contribute to job search anxiety by overwhelming students with excessive or conflicting information, leading to uncertainty and indecision.	"There are so many platforms that you can easily get confused, and it's not always clear what is authentic. This pressure exists for many people. We often feel the need to build something extraordinary when looking at other people's resumes and experiences" (P1).
Fear of Missing Out and Self-Presentation	How the Fear of Missing Out and Self-Presentation on social media platforms heighten job search anxiety by creating a fear of being left behind or not measuring up to perceived standards, leading to increased stress and pressure.	"Personally, I get a lot of contact when I open LinkedIn. I kind of feel like it doesn't help me much, but some people that you follow, you get information and insights that people are posting about your ideal days. I read that. I don't know, I kind of feel anxiety trying to just showcase, but then we tend to get really worked up problems rather than just using those fancy words. Yeah. But then you get that answer. No, I'm not doing anything. I get negative feelings from" (P5).

VI. DISCUSSION

The aim of the study is to understand the factors behind Job Search Anxiety among final-year postgraduate students. The study mainly focused on (a)Emotional Challenges in Job Search; (b)Economic climate; (c) Uncertain in Choosing Organization and Nervousness in Job Search; (d) External Factors Contributing to Anxiety; (e) Academic Performance and Job Search; (f)Impact of social media on Job Search Anxiety.

1) Theme 1: Emotional Challenges in Job Search

The theme explores the factors that contribute to job search anxiety. It focuses on three sub themes: Self-Confidence and Communication, Fear of the Future, and Career-related Anxiety.

Confidence plays a crucial role in presenting yourself as a competent and capable candidate (Teague, 1992). Successful communication at work can prevent tension and help people work as a team, which is important in any industry. Clear communication between team members or between your team and the client can lead to a successful project(McNally, 2016).From the interview, one candidate stated, "I had very little self-confidence and I was not much of a face-to-face person and I couldn't do that face-to-face conversation with people. I get anxiety and panic and I often tend to forget things later and once I remember what I'm supposed to say. So that it reduced my self-confidence and to prepare. I mean, finding the job that I like or the job role that I actually prefer was very difficult". This quote highlights the impact of low self-confidence and anxiety on job search challenges, echoing the sentiments found in the literature (Dimopoulos, 2020; Lenney, 1977). The confidence of a candidate during the job search significantly influences the outcome of the process (Dimopoulos, 2020). Self-confidence is a common term in job search effectiveness literature and plays a crucial role in influencing recruiters' decisions and hiring results. Bénabou & Tirole (2002) define self-confidence as simply believing in oneself, while another study describes it as an individual's expectations of performance and self-evaluations of abilities and prior performance (Lenney, 1977). A general definition holds that confidence reflects a degree of certainty about a perception, event, or outcome (e.g., Merkle & Zandt, 2006). Lack of self-confidence can hinder face-to-face interactions in a job interview, leading to anxiety and panic, and affecting the ability to express oneself effectively. Barnlund's transactional model of communication suggests that individuals simultaneously send and receive messages, and these messages may be filtered based on factors such as gender, beliefs, and culture, altering how they are received (Barnlund, 2017). The importance of English proficiency in the global economy is evident, emphasizing the need for effective communication skills. Stress and emotional distress can lead to misinterpretation of communication cues and reactive behavior.

Learning to manage stress can help avoid conflict (Morgenstern, 2016). Effective communication is essential in improving team dynamics, enhancing performance, and fostering a positive workplace culture (Morgenstern, 2016). Overall, effective communication of research findings requires tailoring messages to different audiences, simplifying language for accessibility, and using creative formats to engage and inform (Nethercot, 2017). Successful communication depends on various factors, including social skills and the ability to relate to others' beliefs and knowledge (Jang & Lee, 2011). Mental health, which includes high self-esteem and a positive self-concept, is crucial for healthy human development. Individuals with low self-esteem or a weak self-concept may experience emotional disorders and poor overall health, affecting their social interactions and communication (Rafiee, 2009).

Anxiety is one of the most common psychological disorders in recent times due to the complexity of individuals' roles and their diverse responsibilities, which can increase fears and anxiety about future life (Schmid, Phelps & Lerner, 2011). Muschalla, Linden & Olbrich (2010) point out that anxiety is an emotional state whose intensity is associated with thoughts about the future, categorized into state anxiety and chronic anxiety, often related to future job and work-related fears. One candidate in the interview expressed, “I feel very anxious and scared about my future because I don't know whether I will settle or find a perfect job which fits me”. Future anxiety, as described by Toffler's concept of Future Shock (1970) and discussed by Zaleski (1996), refers to a state of apprehension, fear, uncertainty, and anxiety about undesired changes expected in the future. This fear can include various anticipated threats, such as physical threats like illness or accidents, or emotional threats, such as the loss of a family member. These threats vary in severity, and future anxiety may include fear of failure in achieving goals and aspirations. Future anxiety often emerges in one's twenties, a period marked by the beginning of career and family life; hence, university students in their final years may experience higher levels of anxiety than others (Hammad, 2023).Understanding the underlying causes of anticipatory fear and anxiety is crucial in developing effective strategies to manage and overcome these challenges.

Career anxiety involves feeling stressed or uneasy about work-related issues, including job performance, job demands, interactions with co-workers or managers, and more. Starting a first job or a new job can be stressful and takes time to adjust to (Kusnacht Practice, n.d). The unemployment of youths in their twenties leads to weaker mental health status, including stress, anxiety, self-identity, and lack of job preparation tendencies compared to the employed group (Kim, H. S, 2012). Experiencing the unknown due to a perceived lack of information leads to uncertainty, which undermines an individual’s ability to prepare effectively and efficiently for the future, thereby increasing the vulnerability to anxiety-related symptoms (Carleton et al., 2007). From the interview, one candidate stated, “Because this is my final year, I have anxiety about finding a job related to my career. Sometimes, I feel negative about myself, wondering why I'm not getting a job and what is lacking in me. However, I also had confidence in my artistic skill set. So, every time I got rejected from somewhere, I understood that it was probably not the right fit for me. This realization evoked two kinds of emotions”. Understanding these factors can help individuals cope with career anxiety and develop strategies to manage stress and uncertainty in the workplace.

2) Theme 2: Economic Climate

The theme explores the factors that contribute to job search anxiety. It focuses on three sub themes: General Anxiety Due to Economic Climate, and Fear of Unemployment.

Economic recessions have been estimated to significantly affect the population's health and well-being, particularly vulnerable groups (Zivin et al., 2011). As one candidate stated in an interview, "Navigating the job search process can indeed be overwhelming and lead to feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. It's natural to have these emotions during such a significant life transition." The slowdown in global growth and the deterioration of labor markets have led to more precarious work and increased unemployment rates (Eurostat et al., 2013). People are more fearful about losing their employment since competition for jobs is rising, and finding work quickly is perceived as unlikely (Frasquilho et al., 2015). This economic uncertainty can contribute to anxiety, a psychological concept often described as an ambiguous fear, which can affect students' academic performances (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).The economic uncertainty stemming from recessions can significantly impact individuals' mental well-being, including increased anxiety about job security and finding employment. This underscores the importance of addressing these challenges and providing support to those affected by economic downturns.

"Unemployment," a term dreaded by many, carries a weight that transcends mere joblessness (Babar, 2021). It encompasses a complex web of sub-fears that amplify its impact, including the fear of being entirely without work, facing financial hardship, failing to meet family expectations and losing respect, living with constant tension and uncertainty, experiencing social stigma and humiliation, and viewing oneself as unsuccessful or inadequate. These sub-fears intertwine to form the overarching fear of unemployment, deeply affecting individuals' mental and emotional well-being (Babar, 2021).

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After completing their college education, graduates often anticipate securing higher-value jobs compared to high school graduates. However, the prolonged extension of unemployment can significantly impact individuals' well-being (Winkelmann, 2009). The unemployment rate for college graduates was reported at 13.4% in 2022-23, significantly higher than the overall national rate of 3.2% (Pasricha, 2024). In an interview, a candidate expressed, "Either you get in or you don't. The possibility of not getting a job makes me very anxious." The experience of unemployment can lead to feelings of betrayal, powerlessness, or self-blame, causing overwhelming stress and worry. Despite these challenges, it's important to remember that there is hope for a brighter future (Smith, 2024). By seeking support, developing resilience, and staying proactive in the job search, individuals can navigate through this challenging time and eventually find fulfilling employment.

Anxiety in reaching out to organizations during a job search is a common experience, particularly among newcomers or those with limited experience. This anxiety stems from uncertainty about the process and the fear of not fitting into the organizational culture (Miller, 1991; Bowen, 1991). Research on information seeking within organizations (Morrison, 2002) and employee job search behaviors (Boswell, 2011) supports this notion, highlighting the challenges individuals face when navigating the job market. In an interview, one candidate candidly stated, "Yes, I'm scared, like, what they'll be like, you don't have a lot of experience and everything, and majorly I feel nervous about reaching out to organizations during the job search." Despite having remarkable experience in their careers, many individuals still grapple with anxiety when crafting their resumes (Gilmour, 2019). These challenges underscore the need for support and guidance during the job search process. By acknowledging these fears and seeking assistance, individuals can navigate the job market with greater confidence and success.

Uncertainty, characterized by a lack of definitive knowledge, is a common challenge in organizational settings, particularly concerning daily operations (Grote, 2009). This deficit of information can hinder an organization's ability to fully grasp potential threats to its objectives (Pojasek, 2020). In adolescence, a period marked by role exploration and the refinement of educational and career choices, many individuals do not have clear occupational or educational aspirations (Staff et al., 2010). Career uncertainty is often defined as the inability to specify occupational choices or aspirations (Staff et al., 2010). Gutman et al. (2012) further described career-uncertain students as those who lack a clear vision of their future occupational plans. In an interview, one candidate expressed, "Yeah, because there's a lot of things out there. So, which will be the right one because I don't have an idea about what's going to happen until I go there and everything is uncertain about which organization to choose and whenever I'm thinking about that makes me feel very anxious." Uncertainty, when left unresolved, can develop into debilitating anxiety, hindering individuals' ability to make informed decisions about their careers and organizational choices. By acknowledging and addressing these uncertainties through exploration, guidance, and support, individuals can navigate their career paths with more confidence and clarity, ultimately leading to greater fulfilment and success.

3) Theme 4: External Factors Contributing to Anxiety

The theme explores the factors that contribute to job search anxiety. It focuses on three sub themes: Financial Pressure, Societal Expectations, and Family Expectations.

The transition from college to the workforce can be financially challenging, as graduates face new expenses and the pressure to secure a job (Boothe, 1987). This pressure is often compounded by external factors such as the global financial crisis, which can make the job market more competitive (Hong-yu, 2009). Graduates' employment intentions are influenced by various factors, including their own job concept, career guidance, and family support (Li-hua, 2009). In an interview, one candidate candidly expressed, "Financial pressures, such as wanting to be independent and help my family, were linked to the tensions I felt while searching for a job. Since my father is retired, I wanted to take on the responsibility of supporting my family, mainly my family." This highlights the significant impact that financial pressures can have on individuals as they navigate the transition from college to the workforce, underscoring the need for support and understanding during this challenging time.

Freshers graduating from college often enter the workforce with high ambitions and expectations for their first job. However, the attrition rate among freshers tends to be higher than among experienced workers, with many opting to switch roles, firms, locations, and domains within a year of starting work (Monika, 2023). The term "fresher" typically refers to individuals in their final year of college or recent graduates preparing for interviews and job opportunities to kickstart their professional growth. In today's era of social media and online convenience, securing a job has become more challenging for young people. While remote and hybrid work options have emerged as life saving opportunities, expectations about jobs, especially among freshers, have soared. Having expectations about the job is natural and can be a driving force, but it's equally important for candidates to be prepared and possess the required skills to meet employers' expectations.

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This is where many youths struggle today (Monika, 2023). Graduates often expect to be immediately employable after graduation, but employers typically seek candidates with experience (Stephen Betts, 2020). Furthermore, graduates' expectations regarding salary packages, health benefits, and vacations often differ from the reality they encounter in the job market (Doyle, 2020). This disparity between expectations and reality underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of the job market and the importance of acquiring relevant skills and experience to succeed in today's competitive workforce. In an interview, one candidate highlighted the societal pressure they felt, stating, "I'm already older, I've taken a break, and all my friends are already working. Because they have finished their studies, they have reached a stable position, and I'm not getting a job. So that is like societal pressure. People would obviously ask, and at 24, there's scarier than yeah." This sentiment reflects the significant societal expectations and pressures that many young people face, adding another layer of complexity to the job search process.

Careers are integral parts of modern society, and choosing one is a complex process that often begins during high school and university, leading to psycho-social stress (Jitse et al., 2021). Family expectations play a significant role in influencing students' career choices, with parents and family background strongly impacting occupational preferences and university expectations (Hussain, 2013; Özdemir, 2008). In an interview, a candidate expressed, "The main thing is I have to get a job, whether I'm successful or not, it will provide me with more stability. I also think about my future prospects. And, yeah, my family members are also expecting me to do something." This sentiment reflects the pressure many students feel to meet familial expectations and secure stable employment. Research has shown a negative relationship between family social support and professional indecision, indicating that individuals may be influenced by their families' recommendations (Jemini et al., 2019). Additionally, family support plays a crucial role in overcoming occupational barriers related to gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (Punch et al., 2005). Family expectations and support are significant factors that influence students' career decisions and can contribute to job search anxiety, highlighting the need for a supportive and understanding environment during this critical phase of life.

4) Theme 5: Academic Performance and Job Search

The theme explores the factors that contribute to job search anxiety. It focuses on two sub themes: Importance of Skills, Role of Experience.

In today's dynamic job market, employers prioritize candidates with specific skills over those with just a degree (Times of India, 2023). Skills are valued because they directly apply to the job, unlike a degree that may provide a general understanding without practical application (Times of India, 2023). As one candidate mentioned in an interview, 'In academia, I feel skills are very important. Your ability to apply what you've learned matters a lot.' This sentiment reflects the evolving nature of employment requirements, where organizations seek individuals with a diverse skill set. These include creative problem-solving, collaboration, and adaptability, enabling them to navigate the complexities and uncertainties of today's workforce (Sarkar, 2022) while academic qualifications are valuable, possessing practical skills tailored to today's job requirements is increasingly critical. Job seekers should focus on acquiring and honing these skills to enhance their employability and thrive in the competitive job market.

Obtaining a higher education demonstrates success in academia, but not necessarily in real-world job situations. While work experience can make you a good match for a specific job today, without higher education, you may lack the skills necessary for advancement tomorrow (Mueller, 2023). Work experience is crucial for entering any career (National Careers Service, n.d.). As one candidate mentioned in the interview, "I don't think academic performance is the only thing that matters. The experience and learning you gain apart from academics are mostly needed in the job search. From what I have learned in my few part-time jobs, the skill set required is." This highlights the importance of a balanced approach that combines both academic knowledge and practical experience for long-term career success.

5) Theme 6: Impact of Social Media on Job Search Anxiety

The theme explores the factors that contribute to job search anxiety. It focuses on three sub themes: Information Overload and Confusion, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Self-Presentation Beginning a new job is a thrilling experience, marked by the excitement of meeting new colleagues, taking on new projects, and acquiring fresh skills. However, this excitement is often accompanied by a significant pressure to succeed (Cazaly, 2023). This pressure is further exacerbated by the vast amount of information available on the internet, shared across various formats and social media platforms. People consume content through electronic and print media, including TV, newspapers, radio, and magazines, but social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and YouTube are at the forefront of this information explosion (Information Overload and How to Deal With It, 2021). In an interview, a candidate highlighted the challenges posed by this abundance of information, stating, "There are so many platforms that you can easily get confused, and it's not always clear what is authentic.

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This pressure exists for many people. We often feel the need to build something extraordinary when looking at other people's resumes and experiences." This discussion underscores the impact of information overload and the pressure to excel in today's digital age.

The relationship between Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and self-presentation among university students is complex, with studies showing varied outcomes. Zhu (2022) found that higher FoMO levels and expression willingness correlate with social media addiction, while Anastasya (2022) linked FoMO to internet addiction. Rozgonjuk (2019) associated FoMO with disrupted activities and surface learning, potentially affecting academic performance. In contrast, Lemay (2019) suggested a positive impact of FoMO on academic performance. FoMO, characterized by distress in social separation (Baumeister & Tice, 1990), has become prevalent in the cyber age due to social media's ubiquitous nature. Social media offers a platform for relationship building and information access but can lead to addiction when used excessively for self-presentation (Zhu & Xiong, 2022). Activities like posting photographs and managing impressions are crucial for relational development (Zhu & Xiong, 2022). An interviewee shared experiencing anxiety and pressure on LinkedIn, reflecting the broader FoMO theme and the pressure to curate an ideal online image. This highlights the need for a balanced approach to social media usage, acknowledging its benefits while being mindful of its potential negative impacts, especially concerning FoMO and self-presentation. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for individuals to navigate the digital landscape effectively and maintain well-being.

VII. SUMMARY

The study delves into the complex phenomenon of Job Search Anxiety among final-year postgraduate students. It examines various facets contributing to this anxiety, including Emotional Challenges, Economic Climate, Uncertainty in Choosing Organizations, External Factors, Academic Performance, and the Impact of Social Media. These themes illuminate the multifaceted nature of job search anxiety, highlighting the need for comprehensive support and strategies to navigate the challenges faced by students transitioning from academia to the professional realm.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the multifaceted nature of job search anxiety among final-year postgraduate students. It underscores the significance of emotional resilience, effective communication, and skill acquisition in navigating the job market. The findings suggest a need for targeted interventions and support systems to help students manage anxiety and improve their job search outcomes. Understanding these factors can enhance career guidance programs and mental health support services, ultimately benefiting postgraduate students as they transition into the workforce.

IX. LIMITATIONS

The study's focus on final-year postgraduate students may limit the generalizability of the findings to other student populations or individuals at different stages of their careers. Furthermore, the study did not explore potential interactions between different factors contributing to job search anxiety, which could be a valuable area for future research.

X. FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The study on job search anxiety among final-year postgraduate students suggests several key implications for future research and practice. Firstly, it underscores the need for interventions to address emotional challenges, such as self-confidence and communication skills, which are crucial for job search success. Secondly, the study highlights the importance of providing support for students during economic downturns, as job market uncertainties can exacerbate anxiety levels. Thirdly, the findings emphasize the role of social media in shaping job search experiences, suggesting the need for guidance on managing online presence. Lastly, the study emphasizes the value of holistic career guidance that considers both academic performance and practical skills. These implications can guide the development of more effective support programs for students transitioning from academia to the workforce.

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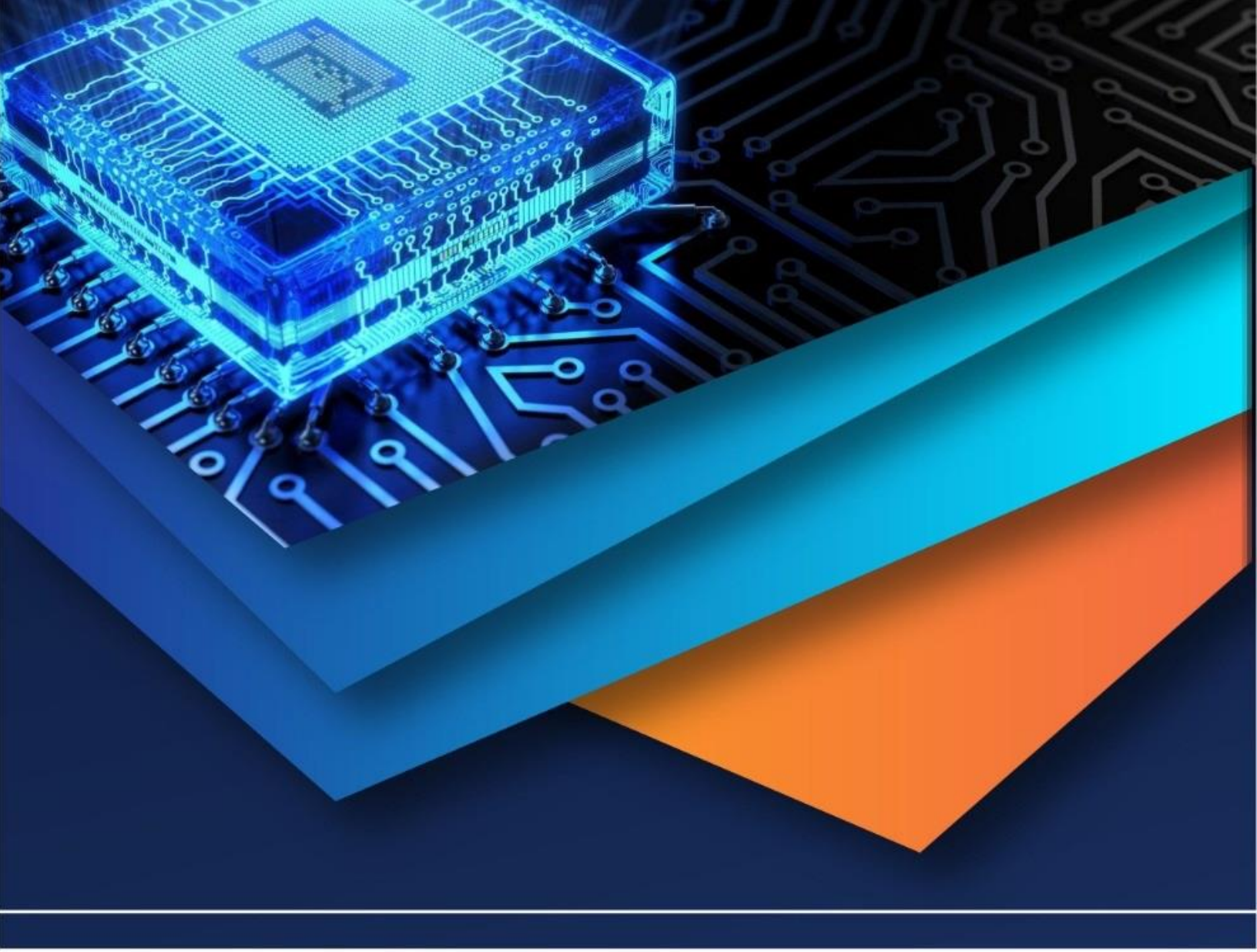
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