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EMPLOYABILITY AND LABOUR MARKET DISRUPTION: A CASE STUDY OF SOCIALLY PRIVILEGED YOUNG MOROCCAN MILLENNIALS

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ABSTRACT: *This study explores how young Moroccan Millennials experience employability in the context of profound socio-economic, technological, and political disruptions of the past two decades. While older generations offered guidance based on expectations of stable career pathways, Millennials in Morocco have come of age during a period marked by the global financial crisis, rapid digitalisation transformation, the COVID-19 pandemic, global postcolonial political instability, and the emergence of artificial intelligence. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with socially privileged young Moroccan men aged 27-33, the research examines three dimensions of their employability trajectories: the career expectations shaped by generational advice, the realities they encountered in disrupted labour markets, and the strategies they developed to adapt. The findings highlight a persistent mismatch between traditional expectations of secure employment and the fragmented, precarious, and competitive opportunities available. Successful stories illustrate adaptive strategies such as entrepreneurial activity, digital upskilling, and flexible career identities. The study contributes to debates on youth transitions and employability by situating Moroccan millennials within global shifts while emphasising their local specificities, thereby extending understanding of how young people in the Global South navigate disrupted worlds of work.*

KEYWORDS: Employability; Global shifts; Youth transitions; Global South.

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INTRODUCTION

The past decade has seen Moroccan youth navigate employability within contexts of profound global and local disruption. The subprime financial crisis of 2008, the accelerated digital transformation, recurrent political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic, and now the emergence of artificial intelligence have all reshaped what it means to be employable for late millennials. For Moroccan Millennials, these shifts have coincided with a generational inheritance of expectations rooted in more stable career pathways, with less turbulence, that no longer align with contemporary realities. In this context, the notion of a "linear" and "stable" career trajectory is increasingly contested, replaced instead by fragmented pathways marked by precarity, temporary work, and the need for continuous adaptation (Savage, 2021). While current literature highlights the impact of structural changes on employability, it is often grounded in Global North experiences, leaving less explored how youth in the Global South, and specifically the MENA region, encounter and navigate such disruptions. Addressing this gap requires situating global shifts within local realities, acknowledging that colonial legacies, weak labour protections, and informality shape employability differently in these contexts (Honwana, 2012).

Research on youth transitions has traditionally focused on the movement from education to employment, with stable, long-term jobs presented as the desired outcome (Furlong & Cartmel, 2008). However, the collapse of stable labour markets has shifted attention toward non-linear trajectories (Walther, 2006), where young people cycle between study, precarious work, unemployment, and informal activity. This literature underscores the growing mismatch between institutional promises of upward mobility through education and the realities of oversaturated or unstable labour markets.

The concept of employability has gained prominence in this context, reframing responsibility for securing work as residing with individuals rather than structural conditions. Critical scholarship (Tomlinson, 2017) highlights how employability discourse often obscures systemic inequalities, encouraging young people to continuously reskill, network, and brand themselves while structural barriers remain unresolved. For Moroccan Millennials, this discourse is complicated by postcolonial educational systems, entrenched patronage networks, and high youth unemployment rates, which constrain the value of individual adaptability. This study contributes by bridging global theories of risk and employability with local narratives of Moroccan Millennials, highlighting both the mismatch between expectations and realities and the strategies of adaptation that emerge in a disrupted environment.

Accordingly, the research aims to explore how young Moroccan Millennials experience employability in the context of major socio-economic, technological, and political disruptions of the past two decades and to examine how these global shifts reshape traditional pathways to stable and secure work.

To reach this research aim, the following questions are to be answered:

1- What career and employability outcomes did young Moroccan Millennials expect? (Expectation)

2- How do these expectations compare with the realities they encountered over the past two decades? (Realities)

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3- What strategies and practices adapt to ever-changing realities? (Adaptation)

Risk and Uncertainty

Theoretical perspectives on late modernity provide a useful lens for understanding disrupted youth transitions. Ulrich Beck's concept of the Risk Society (Jarvis, 2007; Sørensen & Christiansen, 2012) emphasises how systemic risks such as economic crises, environmental collapse, and technological change are central to contemporary life. Similarly, Zygmunt Bauman's Liquid Modernity (Bauman, 2013) characterises modern social life as marked by fluidity, instability, and a loss of long-term security. For young people, these frameworks illuminate how uncertainty is not merely incidental but constitutive of their labour market experiences.

Applied to the Moroccan context, these theories draw attention to how Millennials encounter not only global systemic risks but also region-specific uncertainties, including political unrest in neighbouring states, structural unemployment, and the fragility of social safety nets. While Beck and Bauman wrote primarily with European societies in mind, their insights have been extended to youth in the Global South (Jeffrey & Dyson, 2021), demonstrating that uncertainty is differently experienced but globally pervasive.

Global South Perspectives on Youth and employability

Youth studies in the Global South emphasise the interplay of aspiration and constraint. Alcinda Honwana's (2012) influential notion of *'waithood'* captures how young people in Africa are suspended between childhood and adulthood due to protracted unemployment and underemployment, producing a sense of delayed life transitions. This concept is particularly relevant in Morocco, where unemployment among educated youth is disproportionately high and social expectations around marriage, financial independence, and adulthood weigh heavily.

Other studies highlight resilience and innovation, showing how young people create livelihoods in informal economies, pursue entrepreneurship, and adopt digital tools to navigate constrained opportunities (Szymanski & Stanislawski, 2018). These strategies resonate with broader debates about "youth agency" under structural limitation, pointing to both creativity and precarity in Global South labour markets. Importantly, such scholarship resists deficit framings of Global South youth, instead emphasising how global disruptions intersect with local ingenuity, resilience, and vulnerability.

Digitalisation, AI, and New Skill Demands

Technological transformation, particularly digitalisation and artificial intelligence, has had dual effects on youth employability (Lissitsa, & Ben-Porat, 2024) On the one hand, digital technologies expand opportunities for flexible work, online entrepreneurship, and access to global markets. On the other hand, they create new divides, privileging those with digital literacy and leaving others excluded. In Morocco, digitalisation is uneven, with urban, educated youth more likely to benefit from digital upskilling than rural or working-class peers.

Recent debates on AI highlight both promise and risk: while automation may displace jobs, new industries and forms of work are also emerging (Pagani, de Sá, Corsi & de Souza, 2023). For millennials already shaped by the global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, AI

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represents both another layer of disruption and a potential opportunity to reframe employability through digital skills and adaptability.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design to capture the complex and situated experiences of Moroccan Millennials navigating employability in contexts of disruption. Qualitative inquiry is particularly appropriate for exploring meaning-making, lived realities, and adaptation strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary method of data collection because they enable participants to narrate their trajectories while allowing the researcher to probe emergent themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

A purposive sampling approach was employed to focus on a specific segment of Moroccan Millennials for whom educational attainment, skills acquisition, and language proficiency did not constitute primary constraints on employability. 20 participants were late Millennials, aged between 27 and 33, who had completed higher education and were either in employment or actively seeking work. Recruitment targeted urban contexts and deliberately included individuals from middle- to high-income, professional family backgrounds who had benefited from sustained familial support and educational privilege.

This sampling strategy was intentionally designed to examine a “best-case” or ideal-type scenario, in which access to quality education, linguistic capital, and skills development was not a limiting factor. All participants had achieved distinction in the baccalaureate, held at least a bachelor’s and a master’s degree, and were fluent in a minimum of three languages: Arabic, French, and English. By holding educational and skills-related variables relatively constant, the study sought to isolate the influence of broader structural conditions, such as labour market instability, economic disruption, and institutional constraints, on employability outcomes. This approach enabled a more focused analysis of how even highly advantaged young people navigate disrupted labour markets, thereby highlighting the extent to which employability challenges persist beyond deficits in education or human capital. Sampling continued until thematic saturation was reached, defined as the point at which no new analytical insights emerged from additional interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in a mixture of Arabic, French, and English depending on participant preference, with translation and transcription undertaken to ensure accuracy. The interview guide was designed to elicit narratives across three dimensions: (1) expectations of career and employability outcomes shaped by family and social advice, (2) the realities encountered in disrupted labour markets, and (3) the adaptive strategies developed in response. Interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes and were conducted face-to-face or via secure online platforms. All participants provided informed consent, and ethical approval was secured through York St John University’s research ethics process.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). This involved iterative phases: familiarisation with the

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data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, and producing analytic narratives.

To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation through diverse participant backgrounds, member reflections on preliminary findings, and peer debriefing with academic colleagues. A thick description of participants' contexts was provided to support transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and an audit trail of coding decisions was maintained to strengthen dependability.

RESULTS

The research examines three key dimensions: (1) expectations of career and employability outcomes shaped by family, education, and social advice (2) the realities encountered in disrupted labour markets and (3) strategies of adaptation, including entrepreneurship, digital upskilling, and flexible career identities.

Expectations of career employability

Participants' narratives reveal that expectations of employability were largely shaped by intergenerational advice, educational institutions, and dominant social narratives that framed employment as a linear and stable progression. Respondents described entering higher education with the expectation that academic achievement would translate into secure, long-term employment, often within the public sector. These expectations were strongly influenced by parents and older relatives whose own career trajectories unfolded during periods characterised by greater labour market stability and clearer pathways to social mobility.

Across interviews, participants reported being encouraged to pursue degrees perceived as "safe" or "respectable", with the implicit promise that education would guarantee professional security, financial independence, and upward mobility. Most respondents described sustained and significant familial sacrifice invested in their education from an early age. This investment spanned primary schooling, secondary, the baccalaureate, and higher education, and frequently included additional instruction in foreign languages and scientific subjects. Participants reported intensive educational routines extending beyond formal schooling, with extra lessons scheduled during evenings, weekends, and summer periods. These efforts were consistently framed within families as necessary and non-negotiable investments in future security.

Across interviews, participants emphasised that parents and the wider social environment repeatedly communicated a clear and enduring message from childhood onwards: rigorous education was the primary, if not the only, pathway to maintaining existing social privilege or achieving upward social mobility. Education was portrayed as the foundation for long-term social and economic stability, offering protection against uncertainty throughout one's working life and into retirement. As a result, academic success was constructed not merely as desirable but as essential to securing a stable and respectable future.

Educational institutions further reinforced these expectations by promoting employability through credential accumulation and formal qualifications. Participants recalled career guidance that emphasised degree attainment, grades, and formal internships as sufficient conditions for labour market success. The assumption underpinning this advice was that the

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labour market would reward merit and credentials in a relatively straightforward manner. As a result, employability was initially understood as an outcome rather than an ongoing process, with limited anticipation of prolonged job searching, underemployment, or career fragmentation.

For many respondents, this narrative was further intensified by aspirations of international mobility. Being sent abroad, mostly to France or Canada, was described as the ultimate validation of the educational investment and as a near-guarantee of rapid and sustained stability. Overseas education was perceived as conferring superior credentials, enhanced employability, and accelerated access to secure labour markets, reinforcing the belief that educational capital, particularly when internationally recognised, would decisively translate into professional and economic security.

Importantly, expectations were also shaped by social comparisons and symbolic markers of success. Participants described benchmarks such as securing a contract position, achieving financial autonomy, and meeting culturally embedded milestones related to adulthood, including marriage and home ownership. These expectations created a strong normative framework against which participants later evaluated their own career outcomes. When such benchmarks proved difficult to attain, feelings of disappointment, frustration, and self-doubt frequently emerged.

Overall, the findings suggest that Moroccan Millennials entered the labour market with expectations rooted in past economic conditions, shaped by generational narratives that no longer aligned with contemporary realities. This disjunction between inherited expectations and structural conditions set the stage for the subsequent experiences of mismatch, precarity, and adaptation explored in later sections.

The realities encountered

In contrast to the linear and secure trajectories anticipated by participants, the realities encountered upon entering and navigating the labour market were described as fragmented, uncertain, and persistently unstable. Despite high levels of educational attainment, linguistic capital, and family support, participants reported prolonged transitions into stable employment, frequent periods of unemployment or underemployment, and repeated encounters with precarious forms of work. These experiences fundamentally challenged the assumption that meritocratic achievement would translate smoothly into professional security even within the highly privileged and "best-case" sample.

A dominant theme across interviews was the experience of delayed entry into stable employment. Participants described lengthy job searches following graduation, often lasting several years, during which they cycled between internships, short-term contracts, freelance assignments, or unpaid and underpaid work. While such arrangements were initially accepted as temporary stepping stones, many respondents noted that these conditions became normalised rather than transitional. Fixed-term contracts were repeatedly renewed without progression, internships extended beyond their intended purpose, and informal work blurred boundaries between learning opportunities and labour exploitation. As one participant noted, "You keep being told this is just a phase, but the phase never ends."

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A recurrent starting point in participants' narratives was delayed entry into employment, often described as an almost inevitable phase following graduation. Respondents reported that, despite holding advanced degrees and multilingual competencies, securing an initial position was extremely difficult without parental intervention or personal connections. Several participants stated explicitly that "without your father" or a well-placed family member, obtaining a first job was nearly unimaginable. Recruitment was widely perceived as informal and network-driven, rendering formal applications largely symbolic. This experience generated an early rupture between expectations of meritocracy and the lived reality of patronage-based access to work.

The oversaturation of graduate labour markets emerged as a significant structural constraint. Participants consistently emphasised the mismatch between the volume of highly educated job seekers and the limited availability of secure, well-remunerated positions. Degrees that were once perceived as gateways to professional status were described as increasingly commonplace and insufficient for differentiation. This saturation intensified competition and contributed to downward pressure on wages and working conditions, even in sectors traditionally associated with prestige and stability. Several participants reflected that they were competing not only with peers of similar age but also with older, more experienced candidates willing to accept junior or insecure roles due to broader economic pressures.

For participants in regulated professions, labour market entry was further constrained by institutional and bureaucratic barriers. Psychologists, in particular, described severe difficulties translating qualifications into practice. Those who had obtained degrees from outside Morocco reported lengthy, opaque, and often lengthy processes of diploma equivalence, which effectively prevented them from practising their profession domestically. Even when equivalence was granted, opening a private practice required substantial financial capital, access to premises, and reputational visibility, all of which were again closely tied to family resources and social standing. As one participant noted, professional autonomy was theoretically possible but practically unattainable without parental financial support and active promotion.

In the private sector, participants' experiences were marked by pervasive precarity and informal employment practices. Many described entering organisations through probationary arrangements that were repeatedly extended without formal confirmation or legal protection. Probation was not experienced as a transitional phase leading to stability but as a permanent condition characterised by insecurity, limited rights, and vulnerability to exploitation. Participants reported excessive workloads, blurred job roles, and expectations of total availability, all without corresponding contracts or social protection. This situation was described as the norm rather than the exception, even among reputable firms.

Unpaid internships emerged as another dominant reality shaping employability trajectories in an exploitative system. Participants described cycles of internships presented as "opportunities" or "learning experiences", which rarely resulted in employment. Once internship periods ended, organisations frequently declined to hire interns, citing a lack of need, while continuing to rely on long-standing employees who were paid minimal wages. Participants observed that employers often preferred workers with years or decades of tenure, regardless of formal qualifications, because they accepted low pay and were perceived as compliant. In this context, academic credentials were not only devalued but sometimes viewed as liabilities that challenged existing hierarchies.

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These labour market conditions contributed to growing frustration and disillusionment, leading many participants to seek opportunities abroad. International mobility, once framed as an extension of educational success, increasingly became a strategy of escape rather than advancement. While France remained a traditional destination, participants reported that post-pandemic economic stagnation and labour market contraction made integration particularly difficult for new graduates. The anticipated "passport" provided by Western degrees, language proficiency, and elite educational backgrounds failed to materialise into concrete opportunities. Several participants described this as a profound shock, as they had graduated with confidence in their competitive advantage, only to encounter saturated and exclusionary labour markets.

China emerged in participants' accounts as an unconventional but increasingly common destination, reflecting both desperation and strategic recalibration. Respondents explained that China, once considered unusual, had become a "default" option for those exhausted by prolonged education and blocked professional pathways. Many turned to e-commerce and informal entrepreneurial activities in search of quick income rather than long-term careers. However, these experiences were often described negatively. Participants reported cultural dissonance, particularly for those educated in Western Europe, Canada, or the United States, as well as unstable working conditions. Delayed salary payments, non-payment of wages, and lack of contractual enforcement were frequently mentioned, rendering long-term stability impossible. While some participants initially succeeded financially, global trade disruptions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and international geopolitical tensions significantly undermined these ventures. According to participants, the COVID-19 pandemic was described as a profound rupture that exacerbated existing vulnerabilities. Participants reported job losses and hiring freezes, which had previously offered entry points for graduates. Even those who retained employment during the pandemic described heightened insecurity, increased workloads, and blurred boundaries between work and personal life.

Technological change further complicated employability trajectories. While participants recognised the growing importance of digital skills, they also expressed uncertainty regarding the pace and direction of change. Several noted that skills acquired during formal education rapidly became outdated, requiring continuous self-directed upskilling with limited institutional support. The emergence of artificial intelligence was frequently discussed with ambivalence: on the one hand, it was seen as opening new possibilities for innovation and efficiency. On the other, it intensified fears of job displacement and reinforced the sense that stability was increasingly unattainable. For many, technological disruption compounded rather than resolved labour market uncertainty.

Beyond economic and technological factors, participants highlighted the psychosocial consequences of prolonged precarity. The inability to achieve expected milestones of adulthood, such as financial independence, marriage, or home ownership, generated feelings of stagnation and frustration. Participants described a growing gap between their subjective sense of effort and the objective outcomes achieved, which often translated into self-doubt and emotional exhaustion. Importantly, these feelings were not confined to those experiencing unemployment; even participants in employment reported a persistent sense of vulnerability, driven by short-term contracts, limited progression, and the constant need to remain employable.

Across both domestic and international contexts, participants emphasised a shared sense of betrayal between effort and outcome. Years of academic excellence, continuous upskilling, and

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linguistic investment did not translate into the elite positioning they had been promised. Instead, employability was experienced as fragile, contingent, and constantly threatened by forces beyond individual control. This dissonance was particularly pronounced given that participants represented a highly advantaged group; many explicitly noted that if stability was unattainable for them, the situation for less privileged youth was likely far worse.

The realities encountered also reshaped participants' perceptions of education itself. While none dismissed the intrinsic value of learning, many questioned the instrumental promise attached to higher education. Degrees were increasingly understood as necessary but insufficient conditions for labour market success. Several participants reflected critically on the disconnect between university curricula and labour market demands, noting that formal qualifications had not adequately prepared them for the flexibility, self-promotion, and uncertainty that characterised their working lives. This reassessment did not lead to wholesale rejection of education but contributed to a more sceptical and pragmatic understanding of its role.

Collectively, these findings illustrate a profound mismatch between inherited expectations of stable, merit-based employment and the realities of disrupted labour markets. Even within a highly privileged sample, structural constraints, economic volatility, and institutional shortcomings significantly shaped employability outcomes. Rather than representing individual failure, participants' experiences point to systemic conditions in which insecurity has become normalised, and long-term stability is increasingly elusive. This context of persistent uncertainty forms the backdrop against which participants developed adaptive strategies, explored in the following section, as they sought to reconfigure employability not as a guaranteed outcome but as an ongoing and fragile process.

These findings underscore a profound mismatch between inherited expectations and contemporary labour market conditions, setting the foundation for the adaptive strategies discussed in the following section, where employability is no longer imagined as stability but as continuous survival within uncertainty.

Adaptation strategies

Beyond practical strategies of diversification, mobility, and upskilling, participants articulated deeper moral and identity-based adaptations shaped by profound frustration with what they perceived as the inversion of value within contemporary labour and visibility economies. A recurring source of tension across interviews was participants' observation that individuals with limited education, minimal skills, and no linguistic or professional capital were achieving rapid financial stability and social recognition, often through social media visibility, informal economies, or entertainment-orientated platforms. This experience generated strong emotional responses, including anger, disbelief, and existential questioning of merit, effort, and self-worth.

Participants frequently contrasted their own prolonged educational investment, discipline, and perceived intellectual labour with the apparent success of those they described as "unqualified", "unskilled", or "unserious". What was most destabilising was not simply the economic disparity but the symbolic message it conveyed: that visibility, spectacle, and immediacy were increasingly rewarded over expertise, competence, or sustained effort. Several respondents described this as a shift towards what they framed as *tafaha, a colloquial* term used to denote

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superficiality, triviality, or performative stupidity, arguing that contemporary labour markets and digital platforms appeared to monetise excess, provocation, and ignorance rather than substance.

This perception intensified participants' sense of moral dissonance. While many recognised social media as a potential pathway to income and stability, they simultaneously rejected it as incompatible with their values and identities. Participants emphasised that they "could not become" what they critically observed, framing participation in such economies as a form of self-betrayal. For these respondents, employability was not only an economic issue but an ethical one; stability achieved through means they perceived as degrading, dishonest, or linked to illicit practices, such as money laundering or exploitative digital economies, was explicitly rejected. This refusal functioned as a form of resistance, albeit one that often came at significant personal cost.

At the same time, participants' narratives revealed ambivalence rather than moral certainty. While condemning these alternative routes to success, several respondents simultaneously expressed admiration for what they described as the "boldness" or "courage" of individuals who had acted decisively despite lacking conventional capital. This produced a painful reflexivity, particularly among those from privileged backgrounds. Some questioned whether their own adherence to discipline, respectability, and delayed gratification had become a constraint rather than an asset. As one participant reflected, others "had nothing and dared", whereas they themselves, despite education and support, felt paralysed by expectations, fear of failure, or moral hesitation. In this sense, frustration was often redirected inward, manifesting as self-critique and doubt rather than simple resentment.

These tensions gave rise to divergent adaptive responses. For some participants, prolonged exposure to instability and perceived injustice led to a form of strategic surrender. Rather than continuing to pursue idealised careers or moral coherence, these respondents prioritised stability above all else. This shift was described as an aggressive rejection of generational myths surrounding prestige, vocation, and delayed reward. Statements such as "All I want now is stability" reflected not resignation but defiance—a conscious refusal to continue sacrificing wellbeing for promises that had repeatedly failed to materialise. In these cases, adaptation involved lowering symbolic expectations in order to regain psychological and material control.

Others, however, articulated a stance of resistance and temporal reframing. These participants rejected both the visibility economy and immediate financial shortcuts, interpreting current trends as temporary distortions rather than permanent transformations. They framed the rise of superficial success as "a wave" that would eventually recede, expressing commitment to slower, skill-based trajectories despite ongoing hardship. This position was often underpinned by strong moral boundaries and a desire to remain "clean" within what they perceived as a corrupted system. While this stance preserved a sense of integrity and identity continuity, it also entailed prolonged exposure to uncertainty and marginalisation.

Importantly, these responses should not be interpreted as purely individual choices. Rather, they reflect how structural disruption forces young people to negotiate not only economic survival but also moral positioning within rapidly shifting value regimes. Participants' frustration with the apparent success of less privileged but more visible actors reveals a broader crisis of legitimacy surrounding education, expertise, and effort. Employability, in this context,

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becomes entangled with questions of deservingness, dignity, and social recognition, extending far beyond income generation.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that adaptation among Moroccan Millennials is not limited to pragmatic labour market tactics but involves complex moral negotiations and identity work. Participants are compelled to choose, often repeatedly, between stability and self-concept, visibility and dignity, and pragmatism and resistance. These tensions underscore that adaptation in disrupted labour markets is not simply about becoming more flexible or entrepreneurial but about navigating deeply unsettling shifts in what is valued, rewarded, and respected. In doing so, Moroccan Millennials are not merely responding to disruption; they are actively grappling with the redefinition of success itself.

A further and particularly striking adaptation strategy articulated by participants involved the deliberate revision of intergenerational advice transmitted to younger siblings and relatives. Having experienced the erosion of educational returns firsthand, many respondents described actively discouraging younger family members from replicating their own academic trajectories. This reversal marked a significant departure from the dominant generational narrative that had shaped participants' upbringing, in which sustained academic excellence and heavy financial investment in education were presented as the primary routes to security and social mobility.

Participants reported advising younger siblings not to "study hard in the same way" and explicitly cautioned against prolonged engagement in traditional degree pathways that required substantial financial sacrifice without clear labour market payoff. This advice was not framed as anti-education per se but as a pragmatic response to what participants perceived as a fundamentally altered value structure in the labour market. Several respondents emphasised that they did not regret learning itself but regretted the assumption that academic distinction alone would be rewarded. As such, the guidance offered to younger siblings reflected a shift from credential accumulation towards strategic skill acquisition.

Central to this recalibrated advice was a strong emphasis on digital and technological competencies. Participants consistently encouraged younger family members to prioritise fields such as information technology, coding, programming, artificial intelligence, and digital transformation. These areas were perceived as offering greater portability, faster entry into income-generating activity, and relative insulation from local labour market constraints. Unlike traditional professions that were tied to national regulation, diploma equivalence, or institutional gatekeeping, digital skills were understood as globally legible and more easily monetised across borders and platforms.

This generational redirection also reflected participants' own retrospective reassessment of opportunity cost. Several respondents explicitly contrasted their own extended periods of study with the faster, more flexible pathways available through digital skill development. The advice to younger siblings thus functioned as both protective intervention and symbolic rupture: a means of shielding the next generation from the frustrations they themselves endured, while simultaneously rejecting the educational myths inherited from parents. In this sense, adaptation extended beyond individual strategy to become a form of intergenerational correction.

Importantly, participants framed this guidance as an ethical responsibility rather than defeatism. Advising siblings to pursue coding, AI, or digital transformation was described as

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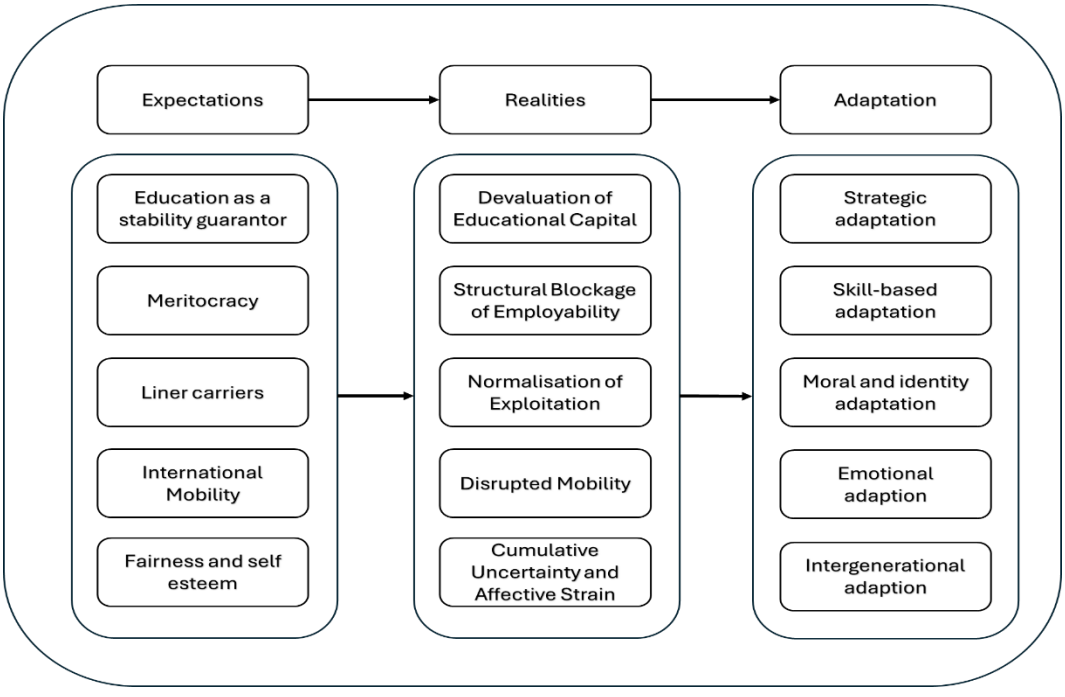
an attempt to restore agency within constrained conditions, not as surrender to superficiality or visibility economies they otherwise criticised. Digital skills were distinguished from forms of online fame or spectacle; they were valued precisely because they aligned competence with employability, offering a compromise between pragmatism and merit.

This transmission of counter-advice illustrates how Moroccan Millennials, positioned between older generations' promises and younger generations' futures, act as mediators of disrupted knowledge. Their lived experience of labour market instability informs not only their own adaptive strategies but also reshapes family-level expectations regarding education, work, and success. As such, adaptation emerges as a collective and forward-looking process, through which Millennials seek to prevent the reproduction of disillusionment and to recalibrate aspiration in line with evolving economic realities.

For Moroccan millennials in this study, adaptation does not take the form of successful integration into disrupted labour markets, nor can it be equated with resilience or upward mobility. Instead, adaptation emerges as a process of continuous recalibration under structural constraint, in which individuals come to accept uncertainty as permanent rather than transitional. Faced with blocked entry points, precarious employment, and the erosion of educational returns, participants adapt by shortening temporal horizons, diversifying income sources, treating mobility as a tactical rather than transformative solution, and redefining what constitutes acceptable work and success. Crucially, adaptation extends beyond economic behaviour to include moral positioning, as participants actively resist visibility-based or ethically compromised forms of success, even when these offer financial stability. This process also operates intergenerationally, with Millennials revising and transmitting counter-advice to younger siblings to prevent the reproduction of disillusionment. Taken together, these findings suggest that adaptation among Moroccan Millennials reflects not empowerment or choice, but a structurally forced mode of survival in which employability itself becomes a form of ongoing labour rather than a guaranteed outcome of education.

Figure 1: Findings map



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DISCUSSION

The findings from this study align with and extend key themes in the existing literature on youth transitions, employability, and adaptation in the context of global disruptions. One notable comparison is with the work of Honwana (2012), who introduced the concept of "waithood" to describe the prolonged period of transition between adolescence and adulthood, marked by uncertainty and delayed access to stable employment. The respondents in this study echo this experience of "waithood", where despite their privileged educational backgrounds, they struggle to enter stable employment, frequently cycling through precarious work. This is compounded by the overwhelming influence of informal, patronage-based systems, where access to work often depends more on familial connections than merit or qualifications, mirroring Honwana's observations on the restricted agency of youth in the Global South.

In line with Bauman's (2013) concept of "Liquid Modernity", the findings reveal how the respondents' career trajectories have become fragmented, fluid, and unstable. The desire for long-term stability is contrasted with the reality of short-term contracts, unpaid internships, and an over-saturated graduate labour market, where even advanced degrees fail to secure employment. This fluidity and instability are critical aspects of the respondents' lived experience, where traditional pathways to stability are now less accessible, and success has become unpredictable. Beck's (2007) notion of the "Risk Society" also resonates here, where systemic risks, economic crises, political instability, and technological disruption are experienced as deeply embedded in the fabric of young people's careers. The respondents' accounts of navigating these risks reflect the realities Beck describes, particularly the sense that modern life is increasingly governed by uncertainty, making long-term planning and security elusive.

Further, the study extends Tomlinson's (2017) critique of the discourse of employability, which places the responsibility for career success on the individual rather than structural conditions. The Moroccan Millennials interviewed here are caught in a paradox: while they possess the education, skills, and multilingual abilities that are traditionally seen as key to employability, they encounter an environment where systemic barriers, such as limited job opportunities, underemployment, and informal hiring practices, undermine their potential. Their frustrations with this contradiction mirror Szymanski and Stanislawski's (2018) findings on how youth in the Global South demonstrate resilience in the face of structural limitations, resorting to entrepreneurship or digital platforms in response to limited traditional job opportunities. The increasing trend towards digital upskilling and IT-focused careers in this study aligns with global trends identified in Lissitsa & Ben-Porat (2024), who found that digital skills are becoming a necessary adaptation to the changing nature of work, particularly for youth in precarious job markets.

However, the respondents' rejection of traditional educational pathways and their emphasis on digital skills reflect a distinctive shift in attitudes, echoing Walther's (2006) assertion that youth transitions are no longer linear or stable. The respondents' advice to their younger siblings to avoid the conventional path of intense academic study in favour of digital and technological skills is a response to the growing disillusionment with the educational system's failure to deliver on its promises of upward mobility. This contrasts with the traditional expectations of education as a clear path to stable employment, as illustrated in the educational narratives of Furlong and Cartmel (2008). Instead, it reflects a more adaptive and pragmatic approach to

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career development, where technical skills and entrepreneurial activities are increasingly valued over formal credentials.

The respondents' reactions to the success of less privileged individuals on social media also tap into a critique of contemporary cultural values, which mirrors Savage's (2021) discussion of how social media has disrupted traditional notions of career success and merit. The respondents' frustration with the visibility and financial success of people they deem less deserving illustrates the widening gap between perceived worth and actual outcomes, and their subsequent adaptation strategies reflect a recalibration of values in the face of these discrepancies. This phenomenon further highlights the growing disconnect between individual effort and the socio-economic rewards typically associated with educational achievement, underscoring the need for a more nuanced understanding of employability in the Global South, where structural barriers shape outcomes far beyond personal resilience and initiative.

Against this background, the findings from this study both align with and expand upon key themes in the literature, demonstrating how Moroccan millennials navigate a disrupted labour market shaped by global and local shifts and how their adaptation strategies reflect broader trends in youth employability within the Global South. The respondents' adaptation strategies, including entrepreneurship, digital upskilling, and a redefinition of success, resonate with global scholarship on resilience, innovation, and shifting career pathways, while also highlighting the specific socio-cultural and economic challenges faced by youth in Morocco.

This study extends generational and employability theories by demonstrating how inherited intergenerational advice, rooted in assumptions of linear careers, educational meritocracy, and institutional stability, becomes increasingly untenable under conditions of accelerated socio-economic, technological, and political disruption. By foregrounding the collapse of inherited guidance rather than generational attitudes alone, the study shifts analytical attention from static generational traits to dynamic processes of expectation breakdown, recalibration, and moral negotiation. In doing so, it advances existing theorisation of youth transitions by showing how adaptation emerges not as choice or resilience, but as a structurally forced response to permanent uncertainty, thereby enriching debates within risk society, liquid modernity, and critical employability scholarship.

Empirically, the research contributes nuanced qualitative evidence from Morocco, a context that remains under-represented in generational and employability studies largely dominated by Global North perspectives. By focusing on a highly educated and socio-economically privileged segment of Moroccan Millennials, the study reveals that labour market disruption and blocked transitions persist even in "best-case" scenarios. This challenges deficit-orientated explanations that attribute employability difficulties in the Global South to educational or skills gaps and instead foregrounds structural conditions such as informality, patronage, regulatory barriers, and global volatility. The findings thus broaden empirical understanding of how global disruptions are locally experienced and negotiated in postcolonial labour markets.

From a practical perspective, the study offers critical insight into how young people actively adapt to disrupted labour markets and how existing forms of guidance and support have become misaligned with contemporary realities. The findings suggest that traditional career advice centred on academic accumulation and delayed reward is no longer sufficient and may even reproduce frustration and disillusionment. By highlighting Millennials' recalibrated advice to younger generations, particularly the prioritisation of digital skills, technological literacy, and

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flexible pathways, the study informs educators, policymakers, and careers practitioners about emerging needs for more realistic, skills-orientated, and ethically grounded forms of employability support. This has implications for education systems, career guidance frameworks, and youth employment policies seeking to respond effectively to conditions of permanent uncertainty.

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