





# Freelancers in Creative Industries: An In-Depth Analysis of Flexibility and Uncertainty

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## Abstract

The growth of the creative industry and the rise of freelancing as a flexible work model highlight the need to understand whether flexibility truly offers freedom or introduces new challenges, and how freelancers navigate the uncertainties of their careers. This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of work flexibility in the freelance world—whether it offers greater freedom or creates challenges—and to explore the strategies freelancers use to navigate uncertainty. Using a qualitative approach through interviews with 15 freelancers from various sectors within the creative industry and thematic data analysis, this study shows that flexibility in freelancing offers freedom in choosing projects, organizing work time, and working methods. This leads to benefits such as the ability to choose the type and number of projects, positive mental stimulation, better work-life balance, easier access to professional networks, and enhanced creativity. However, flexibility also brings challenges, including lack of protection for projects, dealing with diverse client characteristics, blurred boundaries between personal and professional life and the risk of working late nights and weekends. In addition, freelancers face uncertainties related to project stability, income, and long-term career prospects. To cope with these, they employ various strategies, such as good time management, seeking alternative opportunities, implementing effective marketing strategies, sound financial management, developing skills beyond their primary field, and moonlighting. This research provides insights into the work dynamics of freelancers and its implications for human resource management in the creative industry.

**Keywords:** *Freelance, Creative Industry, Flexibility, Uncertainty*

## INTRODUCTION

Creative industries have been widely recognized as an important channel for economic growth and development (Landoni et al., 2020). Over the past decade, the creative industry has also become an important sector of the global economy (Li, 2020). This development is supported by rapid digitization, easy access to technology, and increasing demand for creativity-based products and services.

In the creative industry ecosystem, freelancers play an important role in creating economic value and strengthening the industry's competitiveness through their work (Dewanta et al., 2023). As part of the creative economy, freelancers contribute to innovation and opening new business opportunities that can increase the sector's growth.

In line with the growth of the creative industry, the freelancer industry is also growing rapidly and is emerging as a new market for service professionals (Nawaz et al., 2020). The development of this freelance work model indicates a shift from a conventional work system to a more flexible and project-based work system. Freelance work is considered an important part of the future workforce, with an increasing number of people turning to this form of work as a primary or side job (Munoz et al., 2022). This phenomenon reflects a new trend in the world of work, where workers are increasingly seeking a balance between personal and professional life and opportunities to manage their work independently. Some freelancers in the creative industry



consider freelancing synonymous with self-employment, and they can hire others as micro-businesses, such as innovative and digital designers, marketing professionals, and visual artists (Ashton, 2024). This shows that freelancing is a career choice and an opportunity to create new jobs.

Freelancing allows workers to set their schedules, avoid the pressure of fixed working hours, and work from anywhere they wish (Donina, 2022; Joo & Shawl, 2021). This flexibility allows individuals to tailor work rhythms to their personal preferences. Flexibility is recognized as one of the significant shifts in the future of work, where emerging forms and structures of work challenge the rethinking of how work is organized (Dunn et al., 2023). This suggests that the concept of work is constantly evolving, with increasingly companies adopting project-based work systems and independent workers. However, while flexibility is often perceived as family-friendly, flexible work offers greater freedom while demanding higher responsibilities (Mas & Pallais, 2020). Freelancers must balance their freedom with high self-discipline, ensuring productivity is maintained without the rigid work structure of conventional employment.

Freelancers are self-employed individuals with a short-term attachment to an employer who are not bound by standard working conditions, such as fixed working hours or physical presence, and are not expected to make a long-term commitment to a single company (Gupta et al., 2020). They work flexibly and face erratic shifts between work and unemployment as they enter and exit short-term work projects (Ramadhiani & Adnan, 2023). This reflects the uncertainty inherent in freelance work, where income stability depends on an individual's ability to secure new projects.

Most freelancers rely on various short-term contracts lasting from a few hours to 11 months (Ashton, 2021). The absence of long-term work contracts requires companies to constantly look for new clients and adjust to changing market demands (McKeown & Leighton, 2016). Thus, freelancers must have good negotiation skills, build a broad professional network, and keep abreast of industry trends to maintain competitiveness. During busy work, freelancers are responsible for continuously improving their skills and seeking and securing future contracts and employment opportunities (Ashton, 2024). Therefore, adaptability and innovation are key factors for successful freelancing.

Based on the description above, the researchers are interested in understanding more deeply how work flexibility affects the freelancer experience by reviewing whether the flexibility provides more freedom or creates challenges for freelancers. This study also explores freelancers' experience in dealing with uncertainty, including their strategies to manage risk and maintain job stability.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Freelancer

Freelancers are individuals who work independently without long-term commitments to a single employer or office (Sunardi & Suharjito, 2019). They typically work from home and serve multiple clients, choosing projects that align with their skills and interests (Burrough-Boenisch & Matarese, 2013). The rise of digitalization has contributed to the growth of freelance work, offering flexibility and access to global clients (Faizin et al., 2024). While this flexibility supports work-life balance, it also brings challenges such as tight deadlines and high client expectations (Arief, 2020). In some cases, the pressure of many projects that must be completed at the same time can cause high work stress.

In the gig economy, flexibility and remote work are key attractions, especially for individuals seeking autonomy over their schedules (Lubis, 2024). Freelancers can align work with personal responsibilities, like childcare, to enhance their work-life balance (Assad, 2024; Gaskell, 2022). However, this balance is most effectively achieved through structured time management

(Tams & Loughlin, 2022). Therefore, effective time management is an important skill for freelancers to achieve an optimal balance between their personal and professional lives.

Despite its benefits, freelance work is marked by uncertainty, particularly regarding income and job stability, due to the project-based model. (Hikmawati, 2024; Sirkaya, 2024). Variations in payment and market dependency further complicate financial stability, making financial planning and continuous skill development essential for freelancers.

### Creative Industry

Creative industries are sectors based on individual creativity, skills, and talents with the potential to generate employment and economic value through innovation and intellectual property. The creation, production, and distribution of goods and services are driven by creativity and intellectual capital (Islam & Sadhukhan, 2025). Their unique characteristics promote innovative interactions across diverse activities, supporting regional innovation and enabling strong sectors to lead in offering creative goods and services while collaborating with others for innovative outcomes (Goya, 2024).

They play a key role in sustainable, innovation-driven growth, with culture being central to economic sustainability (Pyykkönen & De Beukelaer, 2025). Strategic capabilities provide a competitive edge, and creativity enhances resilience during crises (Fahmi et al., 2023; Mahrinasari et al., 2024). Four main segments are identified: symbolic value creation (e.g., arts, heritage), media and information, cultural value application (e.g., design, fashion), and digital/software activities (Błaszczuk & Krysiński, 2023).

### Work Flexibility

Flexible work arrangements allow employees to deviate from conventional work times and places (Groen et al., 2018), encompassing practices like work-life balance, family-friendly policies, and flexible working hours. These include part-time jobs, flexible hours, compressed weeks, overtime accumulation, and remote work (De Menezes & Kelliher, 2016), telecommuting (Allen et al., 2015), coworking spaces (Lippe & Lippényi, 2020), and on-call work (Marica, 2019). Work flexibility supports work-life balance and boosts job satisfaction and performance, especially as digital technology enables remote work across many sectors (Davidescu et al., 2020).

### Uncertainty

The lack of long-term contracts creates uncertainty, requiring constant efforts to build new client relationships and adapt to market changes (McKeown & Leighton, 2016). They also demand high discipline and effective time management (Assad, 2024). This uncertainty makes task prioritization challenging, requiring adaptive scheduling and careful planning (Pramanik, 2021). Short-term contracts, ranging from a few hours to less than a year, increase the pressure to continuously upgrade skills and secure future opportunities (Ashton, 2021).

**Table 1.** Conceptual Framework

Concept A	Leads to/Enhances	Concept B
Creative Industry	Demand for independent roles is generated	Freelance
Freelance	Enables adaptable work structures	Work Flexibility
Work Flexibility	Support diverse creative practices	Creative Industry

Freelance	Introduces income and job unpredictability	Uncertainty
Uncertainty	Encourages the need for flexible work strategies	Work Flexibility
Creative Industry	Impact of shifting market conditions	Uncertainty

Source: Authors' elaboration

The table serves as a conceptual framework for illustrating the connections between the creative industry, freelance work, and work flexibility. This shows how the creative industry drives the demand for freelance roles, with freelancers offering flexible work structures (McRobbie, 2016) that promote innovation. This cycle strengthens the creative economy by emphasizing autonomy, adaptability, and creativity (Mould, 2018). Despite these advantages, uncertainty remains a core feature. Freelancers often face income instability and limited job protection, prompting the need for adaptive strategies that improve their schedules, project types, and skills. The creative industry's fast-paced and unpredictable nature further intensifies this condition, making flexibility essential for sustainability.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a phenomenological qualitative method as its research approach. In qualitative research, saturation is considered a cornerstone in determining sample size (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This study involved 15 Indonesian freelancers who were selected after observations showed that interviews with the 10th interviewee did not reveal new findings. As a verification step, the researchers added five more interviewees. The additional interviews did not provide any significant new information, so data collection was stopped at 15 interviewees.

Various approaches to assessing saturation suggest that saturation can be reached within a limited range of interviews (9-17) or focus group discussions (4-8), especially in studies involving homogeneous populations and focused objectives (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). A total of 15 interviewees were selected under the study objectives. The characteristics of the interviewees chosen are freelancers in the creative industry who are more than 17 years old and have experience working as freelancers for at least 1 year.

**Table 2.** Research Resource Persons

Respondent Initials	Age (Years)	Marital Status	Field	Years of Freelance Experience
DMR	21	Single	Photographer and videographer	2 years
DBR	24	Single	Photographer, videographer, and designer	3 years
DV	24	Single	Photographer, videographer, and designer	5 years
ASHR	23	Single	Photographer and videographer	1 year
RPHL	24	Single	Multimedia	5 years

<b>Respondent Initials</b>	<b>Age (Years)</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Field</b>	<b>Years of Freelance Experience</b>
BM	24	Single	Multimedia	4 years
LGG	21	Single	Influencer	2 years
RRS	21	Single	Influencer and model	5 years
RRN	39	Married	Writer, editor, social media, and digital literacy trainer	1 year
AJ	39	Married	Game developer, designer, video editor, and web developer	6 years
ADHS	21	Single	Illustrator and animator	1 year
KKH	44	Married	Journalist	8 years
UPT	38	Divorced	Illustrator	14 years
TGR	30	Single	Video editor, movie editor, animator, visual effects artist	7 years
SC	21	Single	Copywriter and voiceover	1 year

Source: Primary Data Processing

The data collection method used was an interview conducted between November and December 2024. This approach helps researchers gain an in-depth understanding of respondents' experiences, attitudes, and views relevant to the research objectives. [Creswell and Creswell \(2017\)](#) emphasized that the selection of appropriate data collection methods must be tailored to the research objectives and questions, and it is important for researchers to build strong relationships with respondents so that the data obtained is valid and reliable. In qualitative research, an interview is generally considered a purpose-directed dialogue involving a series of carefully constructed questions. The researchers used open-ended questions to explore the respondents' perspectives and experiences.

The researchers employed thematic data analysis, a qualitative method for identifying and analyzing patterns in the collected data ([Creswell & Creswell, 2017](#)). This technique helps categorize data for clearer understanding and deeper insight. According to [Creswell and Creswell \(2017\)](#), Thematic analysis involves steps such as preparing and reading the data, coding, identifying themes, compiling narratives, interpreting results, and comparing findings with prior research. This is a flexible process that allows for re-evaluation based on the research context. Through this approach, this study explores how work flexibility and uncertainty impact freelancers in the creative industry.

Data validity is a qualitative strategy that ensures that trustworthy results are aligned with actual findings by describing and clarifying data based on field facts ([Machmud, 2016](#)). Credibility is a key quality indicator assessed through procedures like peer debriefing, which must be detailed by the researchers and maintained throughout data collection, analysis, and interpretation ([Spall, 1998](#)). In this study, the researchers used peer debriefing to enhance credibility. This process not only strengthens findings but also offers added value during and beyond the dissertation ([Spall, 1998](#)). It involves a peer reviewer who critiques and questions the study to ensure it resonates beyond the researcher ([Creswell & Creswell, 2017](#)). To enhance the validity of the findings, this study employs source triangulation by comparing data from multiple respondents to capture

diverse perspectives (Denzin et al., 2006). The respondents were drawn from various sectors of the creative industry, with mixed genders and ages, to provide a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon studied.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Flexibility for Freelancers: Are Freedom and Challenge Possible?

Work flexibility is a topic that is often discussed in management studies in various contexts. For example, flexibility is studied in demographic contexts (Hidayat & Linando, 2024; Linando et al., 2022), specific job contexts (Putra & Linando, 2024; Tsagkanou et al., 2022) and different types of employment status (Bridges, 2018). In particular, for freelancers, a question that may arise is how flexibility can become a freedom or a challenge. Flexibility for freelancers can be a double-edged knife, on the one hand, providing the excitement to work as they wish, but on the other hand, exposing them to various vulnerabilities in the form of job uncertainty (Hikmawati, 2024). Based on the results of the interviews, freedom and challenge were both engaging experiences for each respondent in this study.

One of the main attractions of being a freelancer is the freedom to choose projects. Respondents revealed that they can work on projects that suit their interests.

*"We are free to take what projects." For example, I have an offer for video editing; then, there are other visual effects. Well, I just want to work on which one, just choose it. I want visual effects. Okay, I'll take the visual effect one like that." – TGR*

*"I often meet friends who have permanent jobs." If, for example, he works for a permanent position, he will not be able to take on other projects. Well, that's what I won't get, that freedom." – DV*

*"One thing, if, for example, we work in a company, we can't take other freelancers." That's what I was talking about earlier. So it's not very flexible to take the next job." – DV*

Being a freelancer makes it possible to take on projects with clients other than those that you worked on at the time. However, interestingly, this freedom can also lead to a backfire. With so many project options, freelancers must have good analytical skills to choose which projects to work on.

*"Then it's the same when we, for example, create projects that we can filter." We filter which ones are projects that will not make my life difficult. Not all projects are good. Sometimes, there are projects that we can resolve. So the flexibility to choose, to choose, oh, this seems like a potential project; that's also possible. But it is not necessarily if we are in a corporation; sometimes there is an appointment." – UPT*

With the freedom to choose projects and good analytical skills, freelancers can avoid destructive projects.

*"For example, in case one day other urgent things are not on the schedule, I can shift the to-do list, which I can number two first; for example, it can be adjusted to scalability, so the deadline can also be postponed first, so to manage the time based on what will be done because we also don't know the needs of freelance, sometimes suddenly tomorrow or not." Suddenly, tonight, we were told that tomorrow afternoon, there will be work, so that will include impromptu*

*work. We will first see whether tomorrow has an agenda. However, it can be shifted first, meaning it can be done."* – RPHL

Flexibility allows freelancers to adjust the time between their work life and personal life according to the situations and conditions they face. It can be easier to adjust the schedule if there is a sudden agenda item that is possible to do. Sometimes, freelancers take advantage of this freedom by completing work on their own time.

*"Yes, I often do that, for example, while dating, but while doing work together." We often, for example, are dating and opening the laptop; he is with his work, and I am with my work. Yes, it's not far from that. You can chat but still do the work."* – DBR

*"Because, for example, like this, for example, Saturday, at most, I'm like working on it, for example, the work is right, if it's for editing, sometimes it's remote, so, for example, I'm working on this, together for example at a coffee shop, so I invite my son, so I work, he can, the important thing is that we can, quality time together, even though I'm working, he's in front of me, watching Netflix or whatever the important thing is that we can be together." So, there are no obstacles."* – RRN

With freedom in time and place, freelancers can do their work while also doing their things, including spending time with family. Thus, it creates a boundary between personal and work life. In addition to choosing projects and organizing between personal and work life, freelancers in the creative industry feel that there is room for creativity.

*"From the field that I work in, because the more flexible I work, the more inspiration I might get, the more time I can have to explore something that I can learn with what I'm doing now." For example, before I worked, I found a lot of inspiration on social media, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Before that, I would conduct some research. How can people take photos like this? What color is it? So yes, flexible time can help."* – ASHR

*"You see, we need imagination." Imagination can come from anywhere. From food, like from the atmosphere, like when you see dust under the table, sometimes it can be an illusion. Therefore, if we can have flexible working hours, the workplace will be affected. We can manage our mood. Ah, I'm going to the cafe. Ah, I'm working on this. Furthermore, that mood."* – ADHS

Flexible time allows respondents to better explore their creativity. In addition to time, location flexibility influences freelancers' creativity, as inspiration often comes from the places they visit and the moods those places evoke. Some respondents feel they have more freedom to express creativity than office workers because they can experiment with new ideas without being limited by company rules.

*"Yes, because if you are in a company, it's like they have their provisions, you must follow what they want." If I am freelance, I am free to learn many things that I can learn, and yes, it gives me enough space to innovate."* – DBR

*"Then you can still watch the video." If it is a video, it can still be designed. It can still be weird if it's flexible."* – DV



*"Yes. Very, what yes, very much gives room for innovation. Because I always, I always work with different studios and different people. Furthermore, different, what's the name, different challenges, different fields of work. If, for example, today, at this time this month, I'm working on a horror movie. That's a different challenge. Then the next month, I'm working on a comedy movie with a different studio and different people. This gives me new knowledge, and then new knowledge from others. Colleagues whom I haven't met. So, for example, it turns out that using this software can be similar to this. Therefore, that increases my innovation in work." – TGR*

With this flexibility, freelancers can feel enough space to innovate their ideas and apply the potential (uniqueness) they have. According to respondent TGR, the flexibility of freelancers provides space and increases innovation in work because freelancers can work in different studios, so they face different people, challenges, and work fields.

*"Maybe those challenges are what make us not bored." So sometimes I see, for example, if there are challenges or difficulties, if we have finished going through them, well, sometimes I think it makes me realize, oh, this is probably what makes us not bored, these challenges. If there were no challenges, I would have felt bored with my work or my activities in 2018; I forgot, and from 2017 to 2019, I forgot. I was stuck with my work, with the content of it just being at home, getting angry and stressed, and going to a psychologist. Is it called depression? Well, after that time, I didn't realize it because it turned out that there were no challenges at that time. That was the work. It's boring to keep raising and doing something already every day, and there is no more like this in my daily work. You know, there are no more difficulties. Well, that's why it keeps getting stressful like that. Now, because of the many challenges, maybe that makes it not boring." – AJ*

The flexibility that allows employees to face different people, challenges, and work fields positively impacts freelancers' mental health because they do not engage in repetitive work.

*"Well, so when I finally freelanced, I could finally follow; for example, there were several workshops I could join." As I said earlier, there was an FGD; I could finally join. Then, there were events that I thought would add insight; I could finally join them. Therefore, I think that in terms of self-actualization or development, it adds to self-value, where there are mostly more opportunities like that. For example, yesterday, I was in Bantul and was already there. Right, this is the regional election, so I was finally able to discuss the regional election, which aligns with my interests. I was too curious about the regional election, so I decided to come. There was a discussion, and then I came. So, I think it's more about what it's like to be a solo person. Like someone who has nothing to do, has nothing to do coming to this one event, to another event, well, that's what a person who has nothing to do is like. Furthermore, it's like I can meet some friends who, for example, are freelancers. For example, today, I met one of my friends who is also a freelancer, but he is more interested in SEO analysis. Then I think I met journalists' friends this afternoon. So yeah, for what kind of thing, like gossiping a little bit, but at least I get some insights, for example." – RRN*

*"What I like is being able to meet random people who maybe never imagined before, meeting like networks or connections that we wouldn't get if we didn't freelance." Then experiences that we never thought of before, such as going to a place or getting an opportunity somewhere,*



*are what I like about freelancing."* – RPHL

Flexibility enables freelancers to network more easily, giving them time to engage with the community, attend events, and connect with professionals. Moreover, it offers opportunities for self-actualization and increasing personal value. Through flexible work, freelancers gain new experiences and visit new places via networks. However, this flexibility can blur the line between work and personal time, often extending work beyond normal hours.

*"That happens very often." This is especially true when there is a busy project because working hours are usually overtime. In particular, when chasing deadlines, for example, when the deadlines are the same. Then, suppose it is to work at night. In that case, that is my preference because if it is for creativity or innovation, I usually appear more often at night."* – BM

Respondents stated that they often worked overtime in the evening, especially when chasing deadlines. In addition to working late at night, flexible work allows freelancers to work on weekends.

*"Very often. For example, one is a Photoshop model. That is usually the case if the appointment has been made. Typically, I am booking from 7 to 10. It's just that the activity is not on time. It could be delayed for the photos and makeup, so there will be overtime there."* – RRS

*"Oh, often. Weekends and nights. Because people usually get married on Saturdays and Sundays. So most jobs come in on that day. It's very rare. Yes, it's not rare. But most of them are on vacation. Because if it's a holiday, people usually use it to get married. If it is at night, it is usually for a proposal. Or after getting married, or before getting married, or at night. Midodareni is usually called at night. Well, that's usually at night. Then, the proposal is usually given at night. It's like that at night."* – DMR

*"Because I just take what I get; for example, if they ask me to visit on the weekend, I'll take it if I can." Or, if they visit on weekdays, I'll take them. However, for editing, I do this over time if they request a certain hour, and it must be done like that."* – LGG

The respondent's statements show that, in addition to working late at night, the challenge of working flexibly includes projects on the weekend. Based on the explanation above, we conclude that flexibility provides freedom and challenges for freelancers in the creative industry.

**Table 3.** Freedom of Work Flexibility

Flexibility Aspect	Benefits of Freedom
Choosing a project	Determine the project type
	Determine the number of projects
	Positive mental stimulation
Time	Reconciling work and personal life
	Ease of reaching professional networks
Working method	Stimulation of creativity

Source: Primary Data Processing

**Table 4.** Work Flexibility System Challenges

Flexibility Aspect	Challenges
Choosing a project	No protection for projects
	Dealing with different clients
Time	The boundaries between personal and work life are not firmly defined.
	Work overtime (late nights and weekends)

Source: Primary Data Processing

Based on the analysis of available data, the researchers found that flexibility for freelancers in the creative industry not only provides freedom but also challenges. The positive impacts of flexibility in terms of project selection, time, and place are freedom in determining the type of project, freedom in determining the number of projects, positive mental stimulation, freedom in adjusting the time between work life and personal life, ease of reaching professional networks, and stimulation of creativity. Meanwhile, the challenges faced are the absence of protection for the projects worked on, facing different clients (challenges), the boundaries between personal life and work life are not firm, and working overtime (late nights and weekends).

Freelancing is often chosen due to the freedom it offers in setting schedules and selecting projects (Hikmawati, 2024). Freelancers can work from anywhere and avoid rigid hours (Donina, 2022; Joo & Shawl, 2021). Project suitability—such as the alignment of ideas and values with clients—greatly influences project selection (Gonzalez-Cristiano & Grand, 2023), while the freedom to choose enables portfolio diversification and skill growth (Oleshko & Mukhina, 2022). Freelancers are not tied to a single company, allowing them to work with multiple clients at once (Mustofa, 2018; Pamady, 2019). They generally work on a per-project basis, so when the project is completed, their working relationship ends (Hikmawati, 2024).

One of freelancing's key appeals is its flexibility, which promotes a better work-life balance (Assad, 2024). Freelancers can manage their own time to suit productivity or personal needs, such as childcare (Adiyanti & Sari, 2024; Gaskell, 2022). This flexibility supports innovation, motivating freelancers to develop creative solutions (Aziz-Ur-Rehman & Siddiqui, 2019). In the creative industry, flexible work policies are crucial for fostering innovation (Wijayati & Pusparini, 2024). Freelancers also seek a variety of work locations to prevent boredom and stimulate creativity (Hikmawati, 2024). The ability to work from different locations provides various environments that stimulate creativity and maintain mental freshness. In addition, the freedom to take on diverse projects allows freelancers to continue to be challenged and avoid the monotony of work.

Building professional networks is vital for career growth, and it often happens through intentional efforts or chance encounters (Debora et al., 2023; Hikmawati, 2024). However, the lack of legal protection remains a challenge. Freelancers rely on service agreements, leaving them vulnerable to poor conditions (Amanda, 2024; Pamady, 2019). This requires strong analytical skills in project selection. Freelancers work on short-term contracts and must adapt to different client expectations (Ferguson, 2018; Hikmawati, 2024), which, while enriching, can also be challenging.

Although flexible work gives autonomy over time, many freelancers struggle with blurred work-life boundaries (Dewi & Sari, 2024; Hikmawati, 2024). Managing workload and selecting suitable projects are essential to reducing conflict. While freelancers can choose when to work (Oleshko & Mukhina, 2022) Deadlines often push freelancers to work long hours, sacrificing personal time (Izzati et al., 2021). This situation often results in freelancers working late into the night and even on weekends, sacrificing rest and recreation time that is crucial for their physical and mental health.

### Uncertainty in Freelancer Risk

Based on the results of the interviews, it was found that the experience of facing uncertainty in each individual showed different responses, depending on the situation. The profession of a freelancer is characterized by high levels of uncertainty, especially in terms of income stability, project sustainability, and long-term career prospects.

*"Freelancing is uncertain." Because this is almost the same as having an art business. The only difference is that we are in the service sector. The same applies to business people. Business people have products and have what they call them, like maybe a shop. Therefore, if our product is a skill. If you say it's not, it's not certain." – UPT*

*"If it's freelance, it's not certain." – DV*

*"In my opinion, yes, it's called freelance; yes, freelance work means uncertain." – ASHR*

This statement highlights that uncertainty is inherent in freelancing because work sustainability depends on market demand and project availability. Freelancers must adapt to fluctuations in workload and income, requiring strong adaptability and effective management to maintain their careers.

*"For me, if there is work, I do it; if not, I don't." Because I follow the direction of my superiors. So I don't bother thinking about new projects." – SC*

Although being a freelancer in an agency is often considered more stable in reality, project instability can still occur. This shows that even in an agency environment, the flow of projects is not always consistent, so similar challenges can also be felt by freelancers reliant on agency projects as their main source of projects.

*"At the moment, I still see it as something uncertain." Yes, as I said at the beginning, my news will only be paid when the news is broadcast. So, yes, nothing is certain" – KKH*

One of the biggest challenges in the freelance world is unstable income. In the freelance journalist profession, even if the freelancer has worked on a project, it is not certain that the project will produce results. This is a challenge if you rely on this job as your main source of income.

*"Then the sadness is maybe when there is no work, it is quiet, but when there is a lot of work, it is overwhelming, wanting to take care of this and that, confused." – RPHL*

Uncertainty in freelancing involves not only project availability but also workload imbalance. A lack of projects can lead to financial strain, whereas an overload can cause burnout and time management challenges. Thus, freelancers must manage income fluctuations and workload effectively to avoid fatigue and missed opportunities.

*"It's more about this, the first is time management." For example, freelancers may still use SPK or MOU. My MOU will be from this month to this month. For example, I am an editor at Joglo, and my last one is in January. In these 2 months, I have to look for prey in quotation marks. Which one do I want to enter? So, just be smart in managing and seeing opportunities." – RRN*

The respondent emphasized that success in freelance work depends on the ability to manage time. He actively plans to switch from one job to another to ensure the continuity of his income.

*"Although being a freelancer does have a high season and a low season, you know. Usually, the high season is at the end of the year; it's just busy, you know." So, entering at the beginning of the year to the middle can be a break, let's say that."* – TGR

*"But sometimes in photography, if we play in wedding photography, wedding documentation, it's uncertain." For example, if it is not the wedding season, it is usually quiet. But if it's busy, there are also some. Usually, after Eid, in the month of Syawal, there are lots of weddings. Well, that's usually the busiest time. However, in regular months, it depends on who asks. It's not as busy as the wedding season. The most important thing when it's not the wedding season is pre-wedding. For example, at proposals, pre-weddings, or graduations."* – DMR

Being a freelancer requires recognizing and understanding high- and low-season patterns in the field. Things that can be done during the low season to still get projects are to expand your reach and look for alternative opportunities in related fields.

*"Well, finally, the strategy that I have is to cast a net." What I mean by casting a net is that we are casting bait. So, learn the skills that we have and then learn the pond. So it's almost like a business. There must be a market, right? Well, there must be a market for that skill. So we study our market, where the pond is. Then we put the bait there. So it's not just one. Maybe in the past, the clients were local, but it turns out that now we can be freelancers in several places like marketplaces but for services or skills like I've heard of, like design or artwork and so on. Well, that's where we cast our net. I mean, we will also join. Then, we promote ourselves and email them one by one. I also used to email publishers one by one. I offered to myself, and then I gave my portfolio. Furthermore, we have to realize that it's not like we can get it straight away. At least they accept that they know we exist, that's really good. Because of my casting emails, the time span was really long. Maybe I sent it 6 months or a year ago. However, in the end, they noticed. So there are some who have only contacted me after a year or 6 months. For example, the portfolio I sent might have just matched the project they were going to undertake at that time. Something like that. So actually, it takes a lot of effort for us to always get the project."* – UPT

The respondent emphasized that freelancers need active marketing strategies—using multiple platforms, expanding networks, and consistently promoting themselves and their portfolios—to secure projects. Effective financial management is also key to managing income uncertainty. Savings during peak seasons and investing in self-development and tools help maintain financial stability and long-term career sustainability.

*"The second is managing their finances." There are so many freelancers, for example, because freelancers, like this year, we have the peak season and the low season. It's the same as business. But when it's peak season, on average, they're like, wow, I got five projects, for example. I earned twice the income. The mistake is that they're going all out with their lifestyles, and spending what their expenses are, also the same. It should be called a lifestyle, and the expenses they make should be the same as before. So we cannot do it when we're in the peak season, get more income, and immediately assume that it's a profit or gain. No. But*

*it's savings for the low season. If from the peak season profit we can get savings to cover the low projects that we get in the low season, then the rest is profit. That's it. Now, this profit can be used again; for example, if we want to upgrade our tools or want to upgrade ourselves, then the rest can be used for ourselves. That's what I call it; now I'm learning like that." – UPT*

This underscores the need for sound financial management among freelancers to navigate project uncertainty, especially during income fluctuations between high and low seasons. Many fail to manage their earnings wisely, often increasing their lifestyle during peak periods, leading to financial strain when projects decline. A better strategy is to save during high seasons to cover low-season needs. The remaining profits should be directed toward investments, such as skill development or equipment upgrades, before personal spending. In addition to income instability, freelancers also face uncertain career prospects, lack long-term contracts, stable income, and employment benefits, which complicates future planning.

*"In my opinion, it's 50-50, depending on how we do it." Maybe if we only rely on freelancers in terms of our sustainability as freelancers, our prospects as freelancers are somewhat inadequate. So, for example, if we can deliver our projects or our abilities well with good marketing, the prospects are good. Moreover, now is the digital era, for digital freelancers, there are probably many projects that we can take on." – BM*

Freelance career prospects greatly depend on how individuals manage their work. Relying solely on projects without a clear strategy can hinder sustainability. However, strong marketing skills and effective work distribution can enhance opportunities. The digital era also offers greater potential for freelancers, especially in digital fields, to secure projects and grow their networks.

*"For me, I think it's less stable because, what, thank God, I always have it every month, but for me, sometimes there are ups and downs, and maybe someday in the future, for example, I'm currently focusing on TikTok." My followers on TikTok are already more than 90,000, but on my IG account, I only have 5,000 followers. Well, maybe someday TikTok won't sell any more or whatever, so maybe I have to find a way to expand to other social media like that." – LGG*

Successful freelancers are not only the most talented but also the most adaptable. Dealing with uncertainty requires a well-thought-out strategy.

*"For films, music, and others, they don't need that much." So, as long as I can work in the creative industry, it will be useless. But I also have to realize that there are times in this industry when I have time, when there might be few jobs. Well, usually, I deal with it that, with a job. That's first. The second one is with a financial plan. So, during the high season, income becomes more, what's the name, more than during the low season. How can we save this income if, for example, at the beginning of the year, the beginning of the month, January, February, or February to March, usually? That is, if, for example, we do not get a project, we can still live from our savings. I usually set aside that, like that." – TGR*

Due to its non-essential nature, creative industry work can be unsustainable. Thus, he recognized the need for a backup plan, such as developing skills in other fields. Financial planning is also crucial to managing income fluctuations—setting aside earnings during high seasons to endure low seasons.

*"If my prospects are still looking for permanent work, I will not stop freelancing 100%." So it's a side job. So there is a permanent job that I am pursuing, also freelance graphic design as a side job." – BM*

The uncertain career path in freelancing requires strategic future planning. While it offers flexibility and opportunities, permanent jobs provide more long-term stability. Thus, freelancing is often used as a side job to increase income or gain experience.

*"If it is still on this path, it seems to me that it is." But maybe tomorrow I will still have a permanent job. At first, I was in the field of civil engineering education; maybe tomorrow, I want to try it first to become an educator while running the business. Because if we are in this job, even though we don't have to, we can still go. We can hire other people for the job during the photo session. We'll be in the editing section when it's all done. Therefore, we process the resulting file and then give it to the client with the finished result. However, the work of an educator is still ongoing. Therefore, if the plan is like that. But yeah, we don't know tomorrow, even though it's just in line at night. The important thing is to try." - DMR*

This respondent revealed a strategy to balance a permanent job and a career as a freelancer. Having a permanent job does not mean you stop working as a freelancer. This demonstrates that flexibility in freelancing allows individuals to have multiple sources of income while maintaining career stability.

**Table 5.** Uncertainty among freelancers

Uncertainty	Strategies to manage uncertainty
Project	Good time management
	Seek alternative opportunities
	Implementing an active marketing strategy
Income	Good financial management
Long-term career prospects	Developing skills beyond primary midwifery education
	Making a side job (moonlighting)

Source: Primary Data Processing

Based on the analysis of available data, the researchers found that freelancers in the creative industry face challenges in the form of uncertainty. The profession as a freelancer entails high levels of uncertainty, especially in terms of project sustainability, income stability, and long-term career prospects. Based on the results of the interviews, it was found that the experience of facing uncertainty in each individual shows different responses, depending on the situation.

The lack of long-term contracts compels freelancers to constantly seek clients and adapt to market demands (McKeown & Leighton, 2016). Despite their busy schedules, they must continuously upgrade their skills and secure future opportunities (Ashton, 2024). Although freelancers enjoy flexible schedules that support work-life balance (Assad, 2024), this flexibility requires discipline and time management. Project uncertainty hinders task prioritization (Pramanik, 2021), prompting freelancers to adopt adaptive scheduling strategies and plan transitions between jobs.

To stay competitive during low seasons, freelancers diversify their services and explore specialized platforms to expand their client base (Khalid, 2023). Building networks also opens opportunities—for instance, wedding photographers branching into graduation or rewedding sessions—while boosting industry reputations (Debora et al., 2023). These strategies help

freelancers adapt to market shifts and maximize opportunities year-round.

To combat income uncertainty, freelancers use multiple platforms to broaden their reach (Fiona et al., 2022) and develop digital self-branding on social media (Scolere et al., 2018). Professional networks are crucial for gaining insights, enhancing skills, and finding projects (Debora et al., 2023; Hikmawati, 2024), while platforms like Instagram help build personal branding and showcase portfolios (Hikmawati, 2024).

Freelancers face uncertainty in earnings due to the project-based nature of their work (Hikmawati, 2024; Sirkaya, 2024), making emergency funds essential for financial resilience (Eugene & Pertiwi, 2023). Effective financial planning is vital for stability. Career growth in freelancing involves continuous skill development, exploring marketing, and leveraging digital tools (Yan et al., 2023). Expanding skills beyond one's field supports adaptability. Lifelong learning fosters competitiveness and sustainability (Tsoy et al., 2024). Freelancing is increasingly seen as a key part of the future workforce (Munoz et al., 2022). Moonlighting allows individuals to build experience and income while maintaining their primary job, acting as a strategic step toward long-term career stability (Fattah et al., 2020).

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research results, work flexibility for freelancers in the creative industry has two conflicting sides. On the one hand, flexibility provides freedom in determining projects, managing work time, and determining how to work, which has an impact on the freedom to be able to choose the type and number of projects, positive mental stimulation, adjusting work and personal life, ease of reaching professional networks, and stimulating creativity. However, on the other hand, flexibility also brings challenges, such as the lack of protection of the projects, dealing with clients with various characteristics, indistinct boundaries between personal and professional life, and the risk of working late into the night and weekends.

In addition, freelancers face significant challenges related to job uncertainty, such as project sustainability, income stability, and long-term career prospects. In the absence of a fixed employment contract, freelancers must have good time management, look for alternative opportunities, implement effective marketing strategies and sound financial management, develop skills outside their primary field, and make freelancing a side job (moonlighting). Thus, success in freelancing is highly dependent on an individual's ability to manage his/her freedom with high self-discipline, diversification of services, and mature financial strategies. Freelancing is not only an alternative employment model but also a lifestyle that demands self-management skills and awareness of personal boundaries.

This study contributes to the theoretical discourse on flexible employment by revealing the dual nature of work flexibility among freelancers in the creative industry. While autonomy fosters creativity, professional freedom, and work-life integration, it simultaneously exposes individuals to uncertainty, blurred personal boundaries, and client-related challenges. These findings enrich existing theories on autonomy, career sustainability, and precarious work, particularly within non-standard employment models. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the uncertainties that freelancers face, such as project sustainability and income stability, broadening academic discourse on career sustainability, risk management, and alternative work models in the digital economy.

Practically, the study provides insights for freelancers to enhance self-management, diversify income sources, and build cross-disciplinary skills to navigate career uncertainty. For clients and industry stakeholders, this underscores the importance of establishing fair, transparent collaborations with freelancers. Moreover, the results advocate policy interventions to support freelancer welfare, such as access to social protection, legal frameworks, and professional development, thereby fostering a more sustainable creative economy.



## LIMITATION and FURTHER RESEARCH

This study is limited by the number and diversity of the respondents, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future researchers could delve deeper into the impact of work flexibility on freelancers' welfare and explore how they manage project and income uncertainty. Additionally, increasing the number and diversity of the sample in future research is recommended because this would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges that freelancers face and the strategies that they use to address these challenges.

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