Understanding the factors influencing the take-off of online freelancing in Sri Lanka

Online freelancing small and simple jobs distributed through online platforms to workers for greater cost efficiencies across geographic boundaries. Typical "jobs" that are outsourced through platforms include graphic design, data entry, proofreading, translation, copyediting, market research, programming, data verification etc. Online freelancing is one of the powerful employment generators and has changed many lives in developing world. It is growing rapidly and gaining popularity within younger generation in Sri Lanka as it providing avenues to make extra income with ones skills and knowledge while being at home.

This policy paper provides insights to regarding the factors contributing to faster growth of online freelancers in Sri Lanka to develop concrete evidence based approach. It will help the policy makers to develop interventions to create enabling environment for online freelancers. The study attempt to find answers for the following.

- What are the difference between those who are willing to work on online freelancing and who don't
- For those who opt for online freelancing, what factors contributing to their choice
- After controlling for the differences in education, socio economic class, age, skills and gender, what are most influencing factors?
- Is there a gap exist between men and woman in terms of willingness to work, what could be the possible reasons?

THE SUMMARY OF FINDING / KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The key highlights of the study are summarized below.

1. **Online freelancing growing in Sri Lanka**

   According survey 26% of the Sri Lankans between the age group 16 to 40 are aware of online freelancing and among those who aware 9% expressed interest in working on online freelancing jobs. Study estimates, there could be 17000 to 22,000 freelancers in Sri Lanka and the number is growing significantly

2. **Factor Influencing freelancing take off**

   Age of the respondents, having a laptop, having basic or above level skills in English, Computer operating, data entry skills, whether respondent is employed or not, gender etc. has influence on one's willingness to work on online freelancing.

3. **Non influencing factors**

   Primary, Secondary education, having a computer at home, marital status, internet usage etc. do not significantly influence the willingness to work on online platform

4. **Gender influence on Freelancing jobs**
   Based on model above, there is a gender impact within the online freelancing industry. Even other factors such as awareness, skills, ownership of computers/laptops, SEC are controlled. As being a woman in Sri Lanka reduces the chances of becoming an online freelancer.

THE RESEARCH

About the Methodology

- **Nationwide Survey :**LIRNEasia conducted baseline survey among 16-40 years old Sri Lankans to understand the incidence of online freelancing and their willing to work on such jobs. It included 5377 respondents covering all 25 districts of the country and fieldwork was carried out in November 2015 - January 2016. In addition surveys were conducted with current and potential freelancers.
- **Focus Group Discussions with Online Freelancers:** The qualitative research was designed to understand people's perceptions and attitudes towards online Freelancing. Six focus group discussions (FGD) and one in-depth interview (IDI) were carried out in the three population centers: Colombo Jaffna and Matara. A total of 28 respondents were interviewed using both methods.

Instrumental factors for online freelancing

Following factors significantly influencing the willingness to work on freelancing platforms. Improving variables such as awareness on microwork, having English and computer operating skills can influence faster growth of online freelancing in Sri Lanka.

Figure 1 – Odds ratio calculated based on Logistic
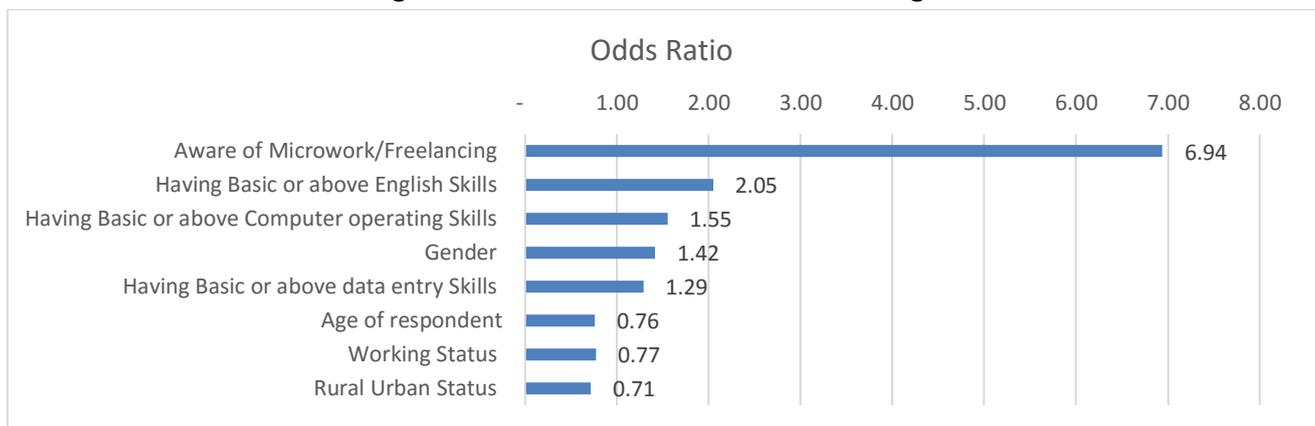
Odds ratio: Probability of an event occurring versus not occurring and helps to interpret the size of the impact on the dependent variable.

Improve instrumental factors

Creating awareness about online freelancing is essential for its take-off, Governments or APEX bodies responsible for IT / ITES need to organize workshops and run online advertising campaigns to raise awareness among potential workers. Long term strategy on digital skills/literacy development should be activated every level. Skills can be enhanced by incorporating basic digital skills (Internet safety and privacy awareness) into the national ICT curriculum. In addition, Policy makers should ensure expanding access to fast, affordable, and reliable electricity and Internet, as they are the key enabling factors to take online freelancing to all levels of population.

AUTHOR

Suthaharan Perampalam |Researcher|haran5555@gmail.com