

Research Article

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

Abstract

Online freelancing is small and simple jobs distributed through online platforms to workers for greater cost efficiencies across geographic boundaries. Online freelancing is growing rapidly and gaining popularity within the younger generation. This paper attempts to understand the contributing factors for such growth of online freelancing among younger age groups in Sri Lanka. From a representative survey conducted in 2015 among Sri Lankan population aged 16-40, 11% of the respondents expressed willingness to work on online freelancing jobs. This paper explores the demographic profile and characteristics of those who are willing to work on online freelancing and how they are different to those who are not willing. Using a binary logistic regression model, underlying factors that contribute to the willingness to work on online freelancing were identified while controlling for the differences in various mediating factors such as education, employment status, gender, skills levels and urban rural status etc.

The study reveals education, ownership of computer, access to internet, marital status aren't significantly influencing one's choice to opt for online work. However, their spontaneous awareness on online freelancing, skills level, gender, age, employment status are significant drivers in terms of determining ones willingness to work on micro-work platforms. After identifying influential factors, this article makes policy recommendations to improve the take-off of online freelancing in Sri Lanka.

KEYWORDS: Internet, Business models, Emerging Markets

Policy Relevance

Online freelancing is one of the powerful employment generators and has changed many lives in developing world. This paper provides insights to policy makers regarding the factors contributing to faster growth of online freelancers in Sri Lanka to develop concrete evidence based approach. The study will help the policy makers to develop interventions to create enabling environment for online freelancers. In addition, the study would contribute to the limited body of literature regarding Sri Lanka's ICT enabled inclusive employment generation within the context of shared economy.

1.0 Introduction

World development report (2016) was based on the theme digital dividends highlighting how internet transforms the world of work. According to a recent global study conducted by Manpower Group more than 50% of millennial are open to non-traditional forms of employment such as working through online platforms. Digital technologies promote inclusion by boosting employment and earnings within the ICT sector or ICT related occupations across the world (WDR, 2016). A rapid growth has been witnessed in the number of jobs and earnings within the sectors using ICT over the last two decades, particularly among firms & self-employed who adopted new technologies and ICT enabled outsourcing.

Online freelancing is one of the benefits to world of work enabled through internet. Online freelancing is small and simple jobs distributed through online platforms to workers for greater cost efficiencies across geographic boundaries (Kuek et al., 2014). Some of the typical jobs outsourced through the online platforms include data entry, graphic design, translation, proof reading etc. Internet and innovative platforms such as Upwork, Fiver and Freelancer have provided an avenue to access this opportunities globally.

Online job platforms have provided an increased access to a larger talent pool and opportunities for smaller enterprises and individuals to capitalize on the skills, which lacks sufficient demand within the local economy.

Online freelancing is growing rapidly and gaining popularity within the younger generation in Sri Lanka. Availability of multiple avenues to generate extra income using one's skills and knowledge along with the flexibility to work from home has been the main reasons for the momentum.

Based on nationally representative survey LIRNEasia estimates, there are 17,000 to 22,000 online freelancers in Sri Lanka registered with multiple platforms and selling their skills for buyers around the world (Helani,Suthahran and Senanayke, 2016) Fiverr, Freelancer and Upwork are the popular platforms used by Sri Lankan youth. Fiverr was identified as the platform with most number of registered workers. Survey also reveals 26% of Sri Lankans between the age group 16 to 40 are aware of online freelancing and among those who were aware, 11% expressed interest in working on online freelancing jobs. Based on the study conducted in Sri Lanka by LIRNEasia , it is quite evident that online freelancing is transforming Sri Lankan youth's lives with improvement in financial and social status of workers. Freelancing hype is prominent among the youth in Sri Lanka and growing exponentially at a rate of 45% per year (Helani et al., 2014).

Uptake of online freelancing has a significant positive socio-economic impact not only on the life of the urban upper- and middle-classes but also on that of the lower income classes in rural areas. Since Sri Lanka has the right digital infrastructure in place, online freelancing could be one of most lucrative employment generator for the country.

Benefits of online freelancing extend beyond employment creation and contribute towards the much required foreign income for the country. Online Study on freelancers by LIRNEasia reveals the estimated youth freelancers in Sri Lanka registered within multiple platforms are selling their skills to the world and generating revenue exceeding US\$ 18.7 million.(Dailynews, 2016)

Therefore, due to the numerous advantages gained through this new employment avenue, it is essential to nurture and grow online freelancing in Sri Lanka. Intensifying the growth of online freelancing could benefit job seekers, their dependents, government and even it will contribute towards the Balance of payment crisis currently faced by the country.

With that context, this paper attempts to provide solutions for the following research questions based on the comprehensive study conducted in Sri Lanka in 2016.

Principal Research Question

- 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?

2.0 Literature Review

Online outsourcing defines the use of internet-based platforms to contract third-party workers, usually from other countries to provide services or complete tasks. The channels mediated through technology offers clients the opportunity and access to outsource paid work to a large global pool of remote workers. The coordination, quality control, delivery and payments of these services are facilitated online (Kuek et al., 2014).

Online outsourcing provides a platform to match employers, including both the firms and individuals with workers to complete the work online. The process which includes, finding job, performing the job and being paid for the job are all being facilitated using the available online channels (Imaizumi, 2016).

Online freelancing and micro-work platforms are catering to two different groups of workers and employers. In Sri Lanka online freelancing work is conducted by skilled people who have some level of web developing, designing, Photoshop skills and have obtained training for such

skills. On the other hand, micro work is normally undertaken by those who are less skilled compared to freelancers. (Galpaya, Suthaharan and Senanayaka, 2016)

World Bank's report on "The global opportunity in online outsourcing" highlights, In today's digital era online freelancing has become a promising alternative to traditional employment. Thus, transforming the where, when, and how work is performed. Online outsourcing platforms provide economic benefits for both workers and employers. Through online freelancing employers have a broader access to specialized skills, flexibility, fast hiring process. Whereas, the workers have access to new opportunities, a space to compete in the global job market from anywhere and at any time as long as they have computer and internet accessibility. Workers can earn higher wages than the amount earned by performing the same job in their home countries (Kuek et al., 2014).

A survey conducted as part of the World Bank Development Report 2016 titled "Digital Dividends" amongst the online workers on microworkers.com states there are two advantages of working as micro-workers. One is the flexibility to work from home and the second is the ability to earn extra money in addition to their regular job. The flexibility in jobs was particularly important for women.(WDR,2016)

Online freelancing can create economic opportunities which is lacking in the local market. Online freelancing make the world flat and provide opportunities to access the global market. In other part of the world, targeting disadvantaged or vulnerable groups to undertake online outsourcing tasks is a form of impact sourcing. Low skilled and inexperienced young people, living in developing or emerging countries such as Kenya, South Africa, Haiti, India, or Romania, can become workers, especially if recruited, trained, and managed by impact sourcing service providers, such as Samasource, Digital Divide Data (DDD), Daproim, Impact Enterprises, or RuralShores. (Meyers, Minic, Raftree, Hurst, 2017)

According to Meyers et al 2017, Online outsourcing activities such as microwork and impact sourcing opens doors to digital jobs, market relevant skills development, work experience, and income to low-skilled youth and can have a positive ripple effect on their families and community. However, this new modality of work also brings the risks associated with a lack of continuous employment, low wages, and limited social benefits,

Online outsourcing is expected to bring two benefits, it provides the ability for workers to perform jobs that were not previously accessible locally, or for companies to get jobs done for which it was previously too expensive to hire someone. Through this new job creation is achieved . Secondly, online outsourcing leads to a redistribution of existing jobs, for example, moving software development jobs from the United States to Ukraine (Kuek et al., 2014)

Shevchuk & Strebkov, 2014 states freelancers in Russia represent a new generation of well-educated and motivated workers engaged in ICT and creative industries essential for modernizing transition economies. In Sri Lanka also, freelancers are mostly males, educated, belonging to higher socio-economic households from urban areas. Willingness to work on freelancing platform is significantly higher among those who own computer, have access to internet and possess marketable skills.

In Sri Lanka, Online freelancing is at the early adoption stage, It is getting popular among those who are currently working and those who are skilled. It is slowly catching the speed among those who are unemployed and underemployed. In a country where youth unemployment stands at 21% and female participation in labour force is significantly lower compared to regional peers Even though it currently picks up among those who employed and skilled, it will gradually transform those are unemployed and underemployed to pick these options of freelancing as full time commitment.

In terms of online freelancing, women are at a slightly disadvantageous position in Sri Lanka. This is mainly due to the significant gender gap existing between the men and women willing to work on online freelancing. The number of male online freelancers is 8.9 times higher than the female freelancers in Sri Lanka. It is clearly evident that women in Sri Lanka are generally less involved compared to the men in online freelancing.

3.0 Data & Analysis techniques

This paper constructed predominantly based on quantitative study conducted in Sri Lanka. Multiple surveys were conducted among general population and current freelancers in order to estimate the potential for online freelancing. Subsequently, findings were backed up by qualitative focus group discussions.

3.1 Quantitative Survey

3.1.1 Nationwide Survey

Quantitative findings of this paper are based on a nationally representative survey of Sri Lankans aged 16-40. The sample size was 5500 and as designed to represent the target population, covering both urban and rural areas in all provinces and districts of Sri Lanka with $\pm 2.5\%$ margin of error. The respondents were selected using a multi-stage stratified random sampling method using probability proportional to size (PPS). Fieldwork for the study was conducted during the period October - December 2015. The structured questionnaires were designed in English, translated to the local languages (Sinhala and Tamil) and tested in the field and implemented the same thereafter.

Target age group was the population between the ages of 16-40. The lower level 16 was used which is the minimum starting age for the labor force participation in Sri Lanka. Existing literature suggest majority of the online freelance workers are young and between the age

group of 18-28 (Kuek et al., 2014). But we wanted to understand the dynamics of such work among slightly older persons who might have the necessary skills to participate on platforms. Therefore our upper age cut-off was set at 40

3.1.2 Survey with Online Freelancer & Potential Worker

Another quantitative survey was conducted amongst online freelancers at a freelancer meet up organized by Dialog Ez cash. It is non-representative survey among freelancers; however the findings have been useful to validate the findings collected through the other sources of study. A total of 90 freelancer responses were obtained through a self-administered questionnaire.

3.2 Qualitative research protocols

The qualitative research was designed to understand people's perceptions and attitudes towards online Freelancing. Several Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and In-Depth Interview (IDI) were carried out in three (3) population centres: Colombo Jaffna and Matara. Six focus group discussions (FGDs) and one in-depth interview (IDI) were carried out in the three population centers: Colombo (4), Jaffna (1) and Galle (1)

FGDs were conducted among both potential workers and those who are currently engaged in online freelancing or micro-work. Potential worker discussion guide was centred on the key barriers in getting into online freelancing/ micro-work platforms and what the enabling factors which can motivate them to enter in to these online outsourcing platforms. On the other hand, aim of these discussions amongst the current workers was to probe and understand more about the work dynamics and behavioural aspects of being a freelancer or micro worker. Social acceptance and recognition related aspects were also some of the other areas deeply probed into. All participants were aged between 16- 40 years. Each FGD had between 3 to 6 respondents, and lasted 2.5 hours on average. The IDI was with a respondent who could not participate in a FGD, and lasted 2 hours. The protocols were conducted in the two local languages (Sinhala and English) by the authors between February - April 2016, using a semi-structured questionnaire. The conversations were recorded with participants' consent. The recordings were translated to English and transcribed.

4. Conceptual model for willingness to working on online freelancing

To study the influencing factor contributing to adopt online freelancing work, this paper adopts a binary logistic adoption model. There is a lack of studies focusing on the areas of online freelancing work adoption using binary logistic model. However, the model has been predominantly used for mobile phone and internet adoption. Studies by Chabossou et al.(2009) Deen-Swarray et al. (2011), de Silva et al (2011) as well as Lokanathan, Gamage and Senenayake (2014) also used binary logistic regression models to explore the factors contributing to the probability of mobile adoption.

Logistic regression is a kind of generalized linear model, used for equations with dichotomous dependent variables, i.e, where the dependent variable (willingness to work for online platform) takes one of two values: Willing (1) and unwilling (0). This kind of model uses a cumulative logistic distribution function and ensures that the predicted values of the dependent variable are bounded by one and zero.

The function for the model is as below:

$$\text{Probability (Y)} = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(\beta_1 + \sum_{i=2}^n \beta_i x_i)}}$$

Where Y is the dependent variable, in this case denotes willingness to work on online platform, with 1 denoting that the respondent willing to work and 0 otherwise. The explanatory variables (1 through n) that are denoted by x_i are the factors influencing willingness to work. The explanatory variables (x_i) includes both continuous (quantitative) and discrete (categorical or qualitative) variables. β_i denotes the logistic coefficients for the explanatory variables (2 through n) and β_1 is the regression constant..

The process leading to the willingness to work decision is unobservable, and the factors used to model the willingness to work are referred to as the determining and mediating factors. Logit models tie the determining and mediating factors to the latent variable through contributions to the probability of the latent variable taking a value above or below a threshold that would lead to the observable outcome: willingness to work or not. Therefore, the logit model assigns a probability of willingness to work on online platform based on the various determining and mediating factors postulated in the theoretical model.

In order to explore willingness to work on online platform further and to understand better the factors that influence the intention. This paper takes into consideration the most common mediating factors reported in the literature. In addition other variables such as education, skill level and marital status are included. Based on this framework, and the variables listed in Table 2 are pre-supposed to influence the probability of willingness to work on online freelancing in Sri Lanka, and the correlations of the same with willingness to work

on online platform were explored (given in Table 3) as a preliminary step before the logistic model was constructed.

Table 1 : Influential Variables for the willingness to work on online platform

Variable	Remarks
Urban-Rural	Mediating factor (Demographic) Urban = 1 & Rural = 0, Categorical variable
Gender	Mediating factor (Demographic) Male = 1 & Female = 0, Categorical variable
Age	Mediating factor (Demographic) Technology ownership is usually faster among younger generation, continuous variable
Marital Status	Mediating factor (Demographic), Male = 1 & Female = 0 , Categorical variable
Employment Status	Mediating factor (Demographic), Employed= 1 & Unemployed = 0, Categorical variable
Primary Education	Mediating factor (Demographic) Highest level attained in Primery Education = 1 & Highest level not attained = 0, Categorical variable
Secondary Education	Mediating factor (Demographic) Highest level attained in Primery Education = 1 & Highest level not attained = 0, Categorical
Tertiary Education	Mediating factor (Demographic) Highest level attained in Primery Education = 1 & Highest level not attained = 0, Categorical
Household having computer	Determining factor (facilitating condition) Yes = 1 & No = 0, Categorical variable
Household having laptop	Determining factor (facilitating condition) Yes = 1 & No = 0, Categorical variable
Frequent access to internet	Mediating factor (facilitating condition) Yes = 1 & No = 0, Categorical variable
Having basic or above English skills	Mediating factor (skills) Having basic or above English skills= 1 & Not having English skills = 0, Categorical
Having basic or above Computer operating skills	Mediating factor (skills) Having basic or above computer operating skills= 1 & Not having computer skills = 0, Categorical
Having basic or above data entry skills	Mediating factor (skills) Having basic or above data entry skills= 1 & Not having data entry skills = 0, Categorical
Awareness of Freelancing	Mediating factor (skills) Having awareness about online freelancing = 1 & Do not aware about online freelancing = 0, Categorical
Constant	

4.0 Results, Analysis and Discussion

Online freelancing's appeal amongst the general population aged between 16 to 40 years was studied. The enumerators explained what is meant by online-freelancing and gave examples of work available through online platforms. This was then followed by questions regarding whether the respondent is likely to get involved in such work. Only 24% within this age group were aware about online freelancing.

At a national level only 11% of population was willing to engage in online freelancing, but significant gap existed between males and females. 14% of males aged 16-40 are willing to online freelancing work, versus only 8% of females in same age category. Online freelancing is highly inclined towards males since the proportion of actual male female split among those who are engaged in freelancing stood at 9:1.

Appeal from freelancing was equally imminent among the people from the rural areas as well. There wasn't a big difference between those who are opting to work online freelancing from urban and rural households. As expected those from the richest households (SEC A and B) were more willing than those from households from lower SECs. This could be due to the better access to internet and digital skills amongst the rich households.

Youngest age groups was the most interested to engage in online freelancing. Even at a global level, online freelancing was popular amongst 18-26 years old. This segment was engaging in online freelancing while involving in studies.

Table 2 illustrates that, those willing to work on online platforms are more inclined towards belonging to the following categories such as being, young males, employed and possess adequate skills by obtaining training.

We considered the results of the logistic model to assign probabilities for willingness to work on online freelancing to correspond to the mediating and determining factors proposed in the theoretical models discussed. Table 3 below highlights on the (1) the regression coefficient, which is the log-form value used in predicting the dependent variable; (2) the p-value which is the probability of obtaining a test statistic at least as extreme as the one that was actually observed assuming that the null hypothesis is true; the null hypothesis is rejected at the 0.05 significance level; (3) the odds ratio, which is the probability of an event occurring versus not occurring and helps to interpret the size of the impact on the dependent variable; and (4) the % change in odds, which indicates the change in the dependent variable (odds of willingness to work) due to a one-unit change in the explanatory variable when the value of the other explanatory variables are held constant.

Table 2: Willingness to do online freelancing

	Willingness to work on Micro work/online freelancing jobs		Base (all respondents) N*
	Wiling to do micro work	Not Ready to do micro work	
All Sri Lanka	11%	89%	5377
By Gender			
Males	14%	86%	2227
Females	8%	92%	3150
By Area			
Urban	10%	90%	2633
Rural	11%	89%	2326
By SEC			
SEC A&B	16%	84%	1465
SEC C	11%	89%	1626
SEC D & E	8%	92%	2025
By Age group			
16 to 23 years	19%	81%	1199
24 to 31 years	10%	90%	1661
31 to 40 years	5%	95%	2517
By Employment Status			
Employed	10%	90%	2167
Unemployed	12%	88%	3210
By Skills Level			
I do not have any skills	4%	94%	3967
My skills are basic and I did not get any training	18%	82%	685
My skills are basic and I got Some training	31%	69%	556
My skills are excellent and I got advance training	53%	47%	170

Source: Authors, based on data from nationally representative sample survey.

All of the variables listed in Table 3 were tested in the model to see the level of influence on dependent variable. Some of the variables had significant influence on dependent variable while some mediating variable chosen are not influencing the dependent variable. In this regard, primary being highest level attained in education, secondary being highest level attained in education, having a computer at home, marital status, internet usage etc. do not significantly influence the willingness to work on online platform.

Table 3 – Logistic Model for Willingness to work on online freelancing

Explanatory Variables	Coefficient (B)	Odds Ratio	Percentage Change in Odds due to 1 unit increase in explanatory variable	P.Value
Age of respondent (no. of years)	-0.276	0.759	-24.1	0.003
Primary education being the highest obtained (0=no, 1=yes)	-0.272	0.762	-23.8	0.581
Secondary education being the highest obtained (0=no, 1=yes)	0.044	1.045	4.5	0.804
Married (0=no, 1=yes)	-0.155	0.857	-14.3	0.283
Having computer at home (0=no, 1=yes)	-0.051	0.951	-4.9	0.697
Having a laptop (0=no, 1=yes)	-0.31	0.734	-26.6	0.074
Frequent internet user (0=no, 1=yes)	0.138	1.148	14.8	0.286
Having Basic or above English Skills (0=no, 1=yes)h	0.716	2.047	104.7	0.001
Having Basic or above Computer operating Skills (0=no, 1=yes)	0.439	1.551	55.1	0.009
Having Basic or above data entry Skills (0=no, 1=yes)	0.252	1.287	28.7	0.042
Aware of Microwork/Freelancing	1.937	6.94	594.0	0.001
Working Status (0=no, 1=yes)	-0.261	0.77	-23	0.039
Rural Urban Status (0=Urban, 1=Rural)	-0.338	0.713	-28.7	0.004
Gender (0=Female; 1= Male)	0.348	1.416	41.6	0.003
Constant	-3.103	0.045	-95.5	0.001

Variables that are highlighted in bold and colored are the ones are significantly influencing the willingness to work on freelancing platforms. 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.

Mediating factors in the order of Importance

- 1. Awareness of online freelancing or micro-work:** Awareness plays an important role when opting to work on online freelancing sites. Spontaneous awareness about freelancing has the highest odd ratio of 6.94. This can be interpreted that the likelihood of a respondent’s willingness to opt for online freelancing work increases by 604% with each additional 10% increase in the level of awareness on online freelancing.
- 2. Skills level:** Skills are one of the essential factors with a higher odd ratio according to the model. It was found English skills, computer operating skills and data entry skills are some of the mediating variables that significantly influenced willingness to working on online platform. English skill is the most important one with the odd ration of 2.047. This means that the likelihood of a respondent’s willingness increases by 104% with each additional 10% in the level of English skills.
- 3. Gender:** The model indicates that being a woman in Sri Lanka reduces odds of willing to work for freelancing even after taking gender differences in education and employment status into account. Willingness to work on online freelancing is 41% higher among the

males. It should be noted; freelancers emphasized the benefits of flexible working hours as a major advantage of online freelancing. Having control over time (having the options of working at night from home/ working during office hours/ staying at home and working), ability to avoid rush hour traffic, scheduling work among the available free time were a few of the benefits that freelancers mentioned. So freelancing gives better benefits to woman, but lower number of woman opting to work on online freelancing shows there could be perception issues.

4. **Age:** Age of the respondent significantly influences on willingness to work on freelancing. Variable has negative correlation. Higher the age, respondents show lack of interest. Online freelancing is more associated with younger age group respondents. Mediating factor age has odds ratio of 0.79. This means that the likelihood of a respondent's adoption online freelancing decrease by 29% for every 10% increase in age bracket.
5. **Employment Status:** Based on survey with freelancers, majority of them are already working for a full time job but they are engaged in online freelancing also. Sri Lanka is a country where job security have significant place. But when it comes to willingness to work on online platform, respondents those who are unemployed are opted more than people who are employed. Unemployed are willing and anxious to find any form of work. Online freelancing can complement their expectation. Odd ratio for employment status is 0.77, which means unemployed have a higher chance of choosing online freelancing jobs.
6. **Urban / Rural Status:** Online freelancing is still mostly associated with urban areas especially within households with higher social and economic status. As per the model, being in rural area reduces the changes of willingness to work on online freelancing by 28%. It should be noted that establishing connection with peer groups are important for online freelancing work. Based on survey with freelancer, we found those with better network or those working in groups have established themselves as a successful freelancer.

Based on above model, it is evident that awareness and skill levels play a very important role in dependent variable willingness to work on online freelancing. These factors could be influenced greatly for a wider take off of online freelancing industry. On the other hand demographic factors like gender, age, urban rural status, employment status also have an influence on freelancing. These mediating variables need to be tackled effectively using specific strategies.

Online freelancing and Gender in Sri Lanka

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. In Sri Lanka this industry is dominated by Males, according to the survey among freelancers male female ratio in online freelancing industry is 9:1 among current freelancers. Due to the large number, males are in an advantages position within the industry due to their connection, peer groups and ideas shared.

As freelancing is popular amongst younger age groups, cultural dimension play a significant role. In Sri Lanka, most schools are not co-educated. Therefore, the interaction between the males and females are limited. In addition to that, parents don't encourage teenagers and those in early twenties to interact with their male counterparts.

Therefore, sharing of knowledge, ideas, work culture isn't very visible within the online freelancing. As a result, online freelancing hasn't benefited the females in Sri Lanka to a larger extent. Those who benefited include the women from universities and private education, where they have access to their peers for clarification.

"Most of the time I work at night. When I get an order, I should deliver it within 2 days. So when I get an order, if today is a working day [in my regular job], I go home and finish it today itself. I don't have a specific time per say. I work whenever I can"

"I go to university and come and do this work during evenings"

The choice of different types of jobs on these platforms meant workers can select the jobs that fit their time availability – working intermittently or at a stretch.

"If I do a brochure or leaflet, I can only do one job during this time. The time it consumes is high, it takes about 2,3, hours. But we can do 2, 3 visiting cards within an hour. So, I apply more for these type of small tasks"

Respondents also select how much they want to work based on their income needs.

"I don't run after this. I earn like 10,000 LKR per month. I try to cover my basic expenses. If I think that I want more money I work or else I will just stay [without working]"

(Age 34, Female Worker, Colombo)

In a country where labor force participation rate is only 36% (Census & Statistics, 2016), options like online freelancing needs to be encouraged and promoted among females. Flexible working hours is a major advantage of online freelancing. Having control over time (having the options of working at night from home/ working during office hours/ staying at home and working), ability to avoid rush hour traffic, scheduling work among the available free time were some of the few benefits that appeal to females looking for independent careers with appropriate work life balance.

5.0 Policy Recommendation

This paper has attempted to understand the factors contributing to the uptake of online freelancing in Sri Lanka. Primarily, creating awareness about online freelancing is essential for its take-off. Focusing on awareness would help to build a product or service for a wider reach. Lower awareness for online freelancing in Sri Lanka could be attributed to lower penetration of internet and computer / laptop ownership particularly rural areas. However, in order to capitalize on the opportunities for online freelancing, policy implications need to focus on creating greater awareness on freelancing.

Generating Awareness

Governments or APEX bodies responsible for IT / ITES need to organize workshops and run online advertising campaigns to raise awareness among potential workers. Training events can be organized targeting the potential workers by communicating on how to navigate the complex online freelancing system. Potential workers need to be informed on how to register on different platforms, how to get paid, and how to market themselves to find work. In addition to that awareness should be created among general public to build the public perception on online freelancing workers who work from home. School curriculum especially the Advance level technology stream student's needs to be informed inform students about various earning opportunities.

Enhancing Skills

Long term strategy on digital skills/literacy development needs to be focused. Skills can be enhanced by incorporating basic digital skills (Internet safety and privacy awareness) into the national ICT curriculum. Additionally, support the efforts of other stakeholders to develop digital skills content (e.g. short tutorial-style videos), which can be disseminated via social media or other channels. Skills can also be fine-tuned through a finishing school. Finishing schools need to be established and rural workforce with basic skills can be encouraged to apply at a subsidized cost. Training need assessment should be conducted periodically to inform various stakeholders and beneficiaries regarding the most demanded skills (e.g.: Photoshop, Wordpress, Java, programming, sound editing etc.)

Government needs to take on responsibility to support the development of in-country talent and to encourage participation of people in online freelancing industry by setting up a national-level accredited training and certification program to prepare workers for online outsourcing, including basic IT and English skills, and developing short-term training to target specific skills gaps

Expanding access to rural areas: In a developing country like Sri Lanka, infrastructure remains a major bottleneck to engage in online freelancing, especially within rural areas.

Policy makers should ensure expanding access to fast, affordable, and reliable electricity and Internet, as they are the key drivers of online freelancing industry. Further policy initiatives should focus on creating enabling environment for investments to create the availability of co-working spaces. Potential workers can be provided with access to computers, Internet by non-governmental or governmental organizations. Co working spaces can benefit online freelancing industry since there is value in working together, sharing strategies and techniques to acquire freelancing jobs.

Addressing gender gap: We find that even after controlling for differences in education, employment status and skills amongst Sri Lankan women. They are less likely to work on online freelancing jobs. The females from the developed countries are actively participating and capitalizing on online platforms. Women's labor force participation is just 36%. Government and policy makers need to develop a special road map to increase participation on online freelancing amongst the females.

8.0 Reference

Chabossou, A., Strok, C., Stork, M., & Zahonogo, Z. (2009). Mobile telephony access and usage in Africa. 3rd Annual Conference on Information and Communication Technologies and Development: 2009 Proceedings. Doha: Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, Doha, Qatar.

Dailynews. (2016 Youth freelancers generate US\$ 18.7 mn from work platforms. Retrieved May 25, 2017 from: <http://dailynews.lk/2016/12/07/business/101295>

De Silva, H., Ratnadiwakara, D., & Zainudeen, A. (2011). Social Influence in Mobile Phone Ownership: Evidence from the Bottom of the Pyramid in Emerging Asia. 7, pp. 1-18. USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism. .

Department of census and statistics. (2015b). Computer Literacy Statistics – 2015 (First six months). Retrieved May 13, 2016, from <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/samplesurvey/ComputerLiteracy-2015Q1-Q2-final.pdf>

Department of Census and Statistics (2015). Retrieved July 2, 2016, from Department of Census and Statistics- Sri Lanka, <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/pocket%20book/chap13.pdf>

Gandia, E. (2012), Freelance Industry Report: Data and Analysis of Freelancer Demographics, Earnings, Habits and Attitudes.

Galpaya,H., Suthaharan,P., & Senanayake,L. (2016). "Online Freelancing:Emerging new employment opportunity", LIRNEasia. Retrieved May 25, 2017 from http://lirneasia.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Online-Freelancing_6th_Dec_Final.pdf

Imaizumi,S., Santos,I., Online outsourcing: A global job opportunity for everyone? Retrieved May 25, 2017 from <http://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/online-outsourcing-global-job-opportunity-everyone>

Kuek, Siou Chew; Paradi-Guilford, Cecilia Maria; Fayomi, Toks; Imaizumi, Saori; Ipeirotis, Panos. 2015. *The global opportunity in online outsourcing*. Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2015/06/24702763/global-opportunity-online-outsourcing>

Lis Meyers et al ,The nexus of microwork and impact sourcing Implications For Youth Employment,2017, Global Centre for Youth Employment, Retrieved 28/04/17 from http://gcyerti.com/wpcontent/uploads/2017/02/The-Nexus-of-Microwork-and-ImpactSourcing_Final_ONLINE_02.28.17_v2.pdf

Shevchuk,S., Strebkov,D. The rise of freelance contracting on the Russian-language Internet Pages 146-158 , Published online: 07 Jul 2015

Thomas, H. K. (2004). *Training strategies for improving listeners' comprehension of foreign-*

accented speech (Doctoral dissertation). University of Colorado, Boulder.

World Bank Group. 2016. World Development Report 2016 : Digital Dividends. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/23347> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.