

FREELANCING AS A FORM OF PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY OF THE YOUNG GENERATION IN THE DIGITAL SOCIETY

FREELANCING COMO UMA FORMA DE ATIVIDADE PROFISSIONAL DA JOVEM GERAÇÃO NA SOCIEDADE DIGITAL

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to analyze the role of freelancing as a socio-economic phenomenon in the digital society, focusing on its prevalence among the youth and its impact on the modern labor market.

Methods: The research utilized a mixed-method approach, incorporating online surveys and in-depth interviews with young freelancers in Russia to understand their perceptions and experiences.

Results: The findings reveal that freelancing is increasingly embraced by the youth due to its flexibility and the balance it offers between work and personal life. The digital environment significantly supports this work style, with freelancers valuing the independence and varied opportunities it provides.

Conclusion: Freelancing is becoming a pivotal part of the labor market for young professionals, driven by the digital transformation of society. It offers a dynamic and adaptable work option suited to the digital age, emphasizing the importance of self-management and adaptability.

Keywords: Freelancing; Digitalisation; Fifestyle; Free form of employment.



RESUMO

Objetivo: Este estudo visa analisar o papel do freelancing como um fenômeno socioeconômico na sociedade digital, concentrando-se em sua prevalência entre os jovens e seu impacto no mercado de trabalho moderno.

Métodos: A pesquisa utilizou uma abordagem de métodos mistos, incorporando pesquisas online e entrevistas em profundidade com freelancers jovens na Rússia para entender suas percepções e experiências.

Resultados: Os resultados revelam que o freelancing está sendo cada vez mais adotado pelos jovens devido à sua flexibilidade e ao equilíbrio que oferece entre o trabalho e a vida pessoal. O ambiente digital apoia significativamente esse estilo de trabalho, com freelancers valorizando a independência e as variadas oportunidades que ele proporciona.

Conclusão: O freelancing está se tornando uma parte crucial do mercado de trabalho para jovens profissionais, impulsionado pela transformação digital da sociedade. Ele oferece uma opção de trabalho dinâmica e adaptável adequada à era digital, enfatizando a importância da auto-gestão e adaptabilidade.

Palavras-chave: Freelancing; Sociedade digital; Mercado de trabalho; Emprego jovem, Flexibilidade profissional.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 20th century, the economy underwent profound changes that led to the de-standardisation of the labour market (Balova et al., 2022). With strong competition, employers seek maximum flexibility in the use of labour force (Rybakov, 2022). In order to provide and satisfy their needs, an individual offers his labour force. Today, it is the labour activity of young people that is becoming a key factor in the social and economic life of most countries (Gurinovich & Petrykina, 2021). The young generation, as an active part of society, faces various difficulties on the way to their professional realisation. The development of technology and changes in the labour market have a direct impact on the employment of young people (Degtev et al., 2022). The modern economy is rapidly transforming, and young people need to adapt to new aspects of the labour market. Changes in the labour market and the economy are the reason for the emergence of new forms of employment, one of which is freelancing.

Freelancing is a socio-economic phenomenon, a certain lifestyle that is characterised by the movements of the modern market economy, focused on the digital sector. Freelancing is distinguished by the fact that it is predominantly remote work,



without formalising permanent labour relations. Freelance services appeared in Russia at the beginning of the 21st century. This type of labour services is developing rapidly, and the number of freelancers is increasing every year. The rapid growth of the freelancing sphere is explained by the fact that employers seek to reduce the time of searching for qualified specialists. In addition, employers have the opportunity to save on social benefits, staff training, and workplace equipment. From the point of view of employees, freelancing offers freedom in the choice of working conditions, the possibility of remote work, combining professional activities with other activities and the absence of strict control from the manager. The image of an independent worker is a complex concept that encompasses many spheres of life (Karimova et al., 2022). Freelancing is becoming an increasingly attractive option for professionals in various fields due to its flexibility, independence and freedom. Moreover, freelancing provides opportunities to collaborate with clients and colleagues from all over the world, which helps to push the boundaries of global interaction. With the increasing complexity of tasks and the need for specialised knowledge, the demand for experienced freelancers is growing. Freelancing is not only changing the economic model, but also influencing societal and cultural norms.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of our research is based on modern concepts of digital society and labour in the digital economy. Thus, Z. Bauman in his works explores the impact of information technology on the formation of consumer society and individual identity. Globalisation, in turn, has an impact on culture, social ties and people's lifestyle (Bauman, 2001).

American sociologist D. Pink, when analysing freelancing, identified some values that influence the increase in the group of freelancers in society: independence from the employer, individualism and freedom of choice (Pink, 2001). Sociologists believe that freelancing can be considered as the main component of the future form of labour. Freelancing culture is characterised by poly-employment, i.e. a worker must be in constant search for orders. Consequently, a freelancer organises his/her own daily routine and chooses when it is convenient for him/her to work.

P. Florid sees freelancing as part of a growing economy that drives innovation. He presents freelancers as a "creative class" that contributes to the dynamics of urban



environments. Freelancing as a socio-cultural phenomenon shapes contemporary working practices and social relations. English researcher C. Handy presents freelancing as a platform for creativity, innovation and self-expression, it reflects a change in work and labour processes where individual initiative becomes a key success factor. Freelancing becomes an opportunity for self-expression, flexibility and entrepreneurial thinking, which contributes to the formation of labour relations (Handy, 1998).

The introduction of information technologies into all spheres of life radically changes the world picture. Modern society is characterised by the rapid development of science and technology, which leads to changes in the socio-economic sphere. The quality and conditions of human life are also undergoing transformation, forming new models of life. Special attention here should be paid to the concept of "network space". G. Bechmann defines it as a "network society" where people and social groups interact, forming their own social structure with micro-elements on the Internet (Bechmann, 2011). W. Beck analyses modern society, paying special attention to the problems associated with risk. He argues that risk is an integral part of working life, and many people realise that it is impossible to achieve success without it (Beck, 2010). Sociologist J. Schor in her works explores the transformation of modern labour relations. She analyses changes in working practices and attitudes towards work, including problems of recycling and work-life balance Schor pays special attention to the peculiarities and challenges faced by workers on flexible schedules, including freelancers (Schor, 2020).

In order to identify the peculiarities of the new form of freelance employment among the young generation of Russians, the authors conducted a study in a mass online survey (400 respondents) with students of the 1st-4th year of Kazan Federal University and a series of in-depth interviews (15 people) with young representatives of the freelance sector in 2024.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As the survey results have shown, many students work because they need financial support to cover the costs of study, accommodation, food and other important necessities of life. Working while studying helps students gain practical skills and experience, which is also important for future employment. One of the most significant



aspects for student youth in the profession is the opportunity to receive a high income (83%), as everyone wants to have financial stability, to provide for themselves, to create conditions for future life. In the second place is the creative, interesting nature of work (69%), also the possibility of career growth (59%) and the opportunity to benefit people (32%). Each of these aspects plays an important role in the life of the young generation, as many people are interested in the creative process, the opportunity to develop and self-realise, the financial part of the profession also plays an important role not only for young people, but also for many people.

Work promotes independence in young people, as they need to be able to plan their time and find a balance between work and study. Currently, successful employment depends on several factors. Respondents noted that the most important for employers is the ability to demonstrate skills and competences (81 per cent), the desire to find a job in the profession (65 per cent), the availability of personal contacts (51 per cent), and the demand for the profession in which training is underway or has already been completed (35 per cent). Employers assess not only professional knowledge and skills, but also personal qualities and communication skills. The ability to present oneself effectively can make a positive first impression on an employer and demonstrate interest in the profession. Most companies are looking for specialists in areas with a high demand for skilled labour, and it is these in-demand professions that offer the most employment opportunities.

For many students, working during their studies can act as a first step towards building their career. It helps to identify their skills and experience, gain an insight into the labour market and make useful contacts for future employment.

When assessing such a form of work as freelancing, respondents characterise it as "self-employment", "remote work", "work with a convenient schedule", "work on occasion", "freedom". As already mentioned, freelancing has its own characteristics: free schedule, the employee is not tied to a workplace, there is no permanent employer, fixed salary and paid holidays and sick leave. Freelancers independently seek customers, using various platforms for this purpose. Unlike office workers, freelancers have more freedom in organising their time and approach to work. Freelancing is characterised by a free attitude to work. However, it requires considerable effort to achieve a good income and success in this field. The main difference of freelancing is that the customer and the performer can be located anywhere in the world.



More than half of the respondents answered "yes" (72%) to the question "Does freelancing as a type of labour activity attract you?". Digitalisation is giving a strong push in many areas, including the labour market, so freelancing is becoming an increasingly popular phenomenon among student youth. The absolute majority (90%) of respondents have a positive attitude towards freelancing as a new form of employment. For students who are in full-time education, such a factor as a convenient schedule for combining work with studies plays an important role. Freelancing has a fair number of advantages, one of the key ones being the flexibility of the schedule. Consequently, many students choose a free form of employment in the labour market - freelancing.

Today there are different areas in the development of freelance services. According to students, one of the most in-demand areas is design and multimedia (56%), followed by PR and marketing (49%), content and word processing (39%), finance and management (23%). Freelancing provides opportunities to work in a variety of fields and industries. There is a demand for skilled professionals in each of these fields, and freelancing is becoming a job for those looking for a flexible and versatile form of work.

Also in the research we used the interview method to identify more in-depth opinions of freelancer respondents. This allowed us to get much more information and to reveal the opinion of freelancers themselves about their lifestyle and the impact of work on self-development and self-realisation of a modern person in the era of digital technologies. The interviews were conducted with freelancers from different fields, such as SMM specialists, copywriters, IT programmers, graphic designers, and event managers.

Freelancing, as a form of employment, has its psychological aspects that affect the behaviour, emotional state and self-actualisation of freelancers: "Psychological thinking too. Why? Because there are a huge number of SMM specialists who are very cool, but they are prevented from raising a cheque by impostor syndrome, other syndromes. So it all sits in the head. In short, a huge number of fears sit inside. It is elementary to even look for new cheques, to lie, even to say that you have experience, when in fact you do not have it, and somehow try to get out of the situation, it is a big step. In fact, but you tried and something you succeeded or failed, and so you did not go for it and did not try (male, 23 years old). That is, freelancers' success is influenced by his inner desire to achieve goals, because in the absence of guidance, an internal



individual stimulus is needed. Psychological aspects of freelancing play a significant role in people's work and life. They require good self-regulation, high motivation, flexible strategies and ideas.

The freelancer's lifestyle is inconstant, as it depends on the completed tasks, the availability of projects, which is also similar to the financial situation. However, many of the informants noted that at the beginning of their development in freelancing their working hours were much longer than they are now. Some labelled such a period as an "evolution of becoming in developing themselves as a professional": See, there were evolutions in my development. At first I was working on my own, just by myself and the way things were. I was on call 24 hours 7 days a week with all the clients and I did everything myself, all the edits, controlled everything in the world by myself, I didn't take more than 4 projects by myself (female, 25 years old). "I work all 7 days a week, but the workload depends on the day of the week. For example, on Sunday I can work literally an hour or two, on Monday - 5 hours (woman, 22 years old). "It depends on how many clients I have. 4-5 days a week, usually Saturday for sure, there is more time. The rest of the time I allocate depending on which days I have couples. I spend 3-4 hours a day working (male, 19 years old).

There are different kinds of motivations of the young generation to work in freelancing. One of them is the desire to earn enough money and have financial stability: "The first six months, when I was in the 1st year of study, my parents could give me 10 thousand roubles a month ... It was very hard to move that ... well, there was no such thing ... that I had burnout or something like that, because I needed to do it for myself so much" (female, 23 years old). In freelancing, a person can have a lot of control over their income, as the prices for their services can be set independently. Achieving financial goals and the possibility of increasing income can be important motivational factors. Freelancers can self-regulate their finances and invest them for self-development, for personal growth as a specialist. It is success in freelancing that can stimulate a person to increase prices for their services, which can also increase income.

Freelancing, as a new form of employment, has become popular in recent decades due to the development of information technologies, the Internet and changes in the labour market. One of the key factors in the development of freelancing in Russia, as well as worldwide, was the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic accelerated the trend towards remote work and showed that freelancing can be an



effective alternative to traditional office jobs: "During the pandemic, when many people were sitting at home and lost their jobs... And here is a way to work online, i.e. from home, without going anywhere. And if you lose your job, you can start working for yourself (male, 21 years old).

In the early 2000s, the Internet made freelancing accessible to a wide range of people, allowing them to work remotely and provide services all over the world: "When these social networks started to develop. That is, advertising in social networks began to develop, bloggers began to develop. That they no longer write texts themselves, but have texts written for them, they need new people. That is, some companies also need people who will follow their social networks. All companies began to keep pages in social networks, such as VK, Telegram. When online advertising started to develop and the pandemic period made a big push in the formation of freelancing (male, 25 years old). "Actually freelancing came to us not so long ago. I think it was about 3-4 years ago. But everyone has dreamed about it at all times (woman, 22 years old). "Previously, people did not trust remote professions and believed that it was possible to feed yourself and your family only with a strict schedule and working for someone. The first freelancers, I think, were photographers and videographers. They saw that it was possible to earn money not only with a schedule of 5 days in 2 from 9 am to 9 pm. That's how it went... (male, 19 years old).

Freelancing can also have a significant impact on personal development. There are various kinds of tasks and projects that help to broaden and deepen the professional skills of freelancers. Freelancing usually offers the opportunity to take part in a variety of projects and collaborate with people from different fields and countries. This helps to broaden one's horizons and develop interpersonal and intercultural communication skills. Many also improve their ability of entrepreneurial skills. They have to deal with issues of self-management, promoting their services and managing finances. "It develops risk-taking, initiative and problem-solving skills. You can try yourself in many fields, you meet many people online, it can be law firms and psychologist (female, 22 years old).

SUMMARY

The survey found out how the young generation of Russians perceives freelancing and its trends. Freelancing is associated with remote work, flexible



schedules and freedom of choice, which makes it attractive to students. It allows them to earn money without interrupting their studies. The younger generation chooses freelancing not only because of the need for finances, but also out of a desire to be creative and work for themselves. Psychological aspects also play an important role in freelancing. A person who is freelancing needs good self-regulation skills, high motivation, flexible adaptation strategies and the ability to manage their emotions. Income volatility, order instability and market volatility can cause stress and anxiety. To date, according to the student youth, 81% said that freelancing is not yet a widespread enough form of employment, but is gradually developing. It is with the development of digital technology and the availability of online platforms to find clients that the younger generation has the opportunity to start freelancing. Freelancing provides valuable opportunities for young people to realise their potential, gain experience and set the stage for building a future career. A large number of young people are turning to freelancing as a modern and promising way of employment.

The most in-demand employees in freelancing are IT specialists, designers and marketers. IT specialists are engaged in the development of websites, mobile applications. Internet marketer helps various companies to promote the firm and launch advertising. Designer works on the creation and design of visual materials, development of logos and corporate identity. Freelancing is becoming a popular phenomenon among student youth, it is this form of employment that helps the student to work, combining studies. And interest in this phenomenon is growing among the younger generation, as it is they who see the prospects for the development of this phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

Due to the freedom in work organisation, freelancers have to plan their work space and time independently. They develop these management skills at various trainings and courses, which also helps to increase their motivation. Freelancers are active in various communities that serve as a means of professional communication. This helps them overcome social isolation and form new cultural communities where people find like-minded people and develop professional ties. A freelancer's workspace is different from traditional offices. Most of his interactions with colleagues, customers and other participants take place in a virtual environment. In the urban space, it is



possible to identify various places that contribute to the comfortable work of freelancers. It is important for them to have access to co-working spaces and shared workspaces that provide opportunities for collaboration. The main aspect in the social space is the support and mutual assistance between freelancers, which helps to overcome difficulties, share experiences and exchange resources.

Self-employment is seen not only as a form of economic activity, but also as a special culture and lifestyle based on the values of autonomy and independence. The image of a self-employed person is often characterised as that of a loner who manages his human capital on his own.

The main elements of freelance culture include norms and rules of this social group, such as responsibility, independence and individualism. It is the emergence of a special social space, social communities, norms and rules, shared values in freelancing that confirm the formation of freelancing culture. It is becoming more and more popular and influences not only economic processes, but also socio-cultural aspects of society functioning. This phenomenon vividly demonstrates how modern technologies transform perceptions of labour and create new socio-cultural phenomena. Self-employment helps an individual to reveal his/her individuality, creativity and professional skills. Freelancers have the opportunity to express themselves and self-realise through their work activities. Interactions with clients and colleagues from all over the world, contribute to the expansion of cultural exchange and professional experience. It is worth noting that freelancing is bringing a change in work culture, emphasising the importance of results, quality and creativity. It reflects changes in the ways of employment and provides new opportunities for self-realisation and professional development.

The success of a freelancer largely depends on the inner drive to achieve goals, especially in the absence of management and external rewards, when individual motivation is required. Being aware of your own motivations helps you manage your work effectively and achieve your goals. Reading about other people's achievements inspires and encourages you to strive for your own goals, and their success stories and advice shapes the way you think about freelancing. Freelancing has many benefits, making it an attractive choice for those seeking flexibility, independence and variety in their professional life. This form of employment suits those who value freedom, creativity and fulfilment, providing opportunities for personal and professional growth, achieving economic self-sufficiency and managing one's career. There are



also disadvantages of freelancing that can be overcome by developing personal skills, building a disciplined work schedule and using special tools for time and project management.

Freelancing culture is a culture constituted by freelance employment practices, the core value of which is the desire for freedom and independence. Freelancers as a social community represent a unique community of independent professionals united by common values, interests and work experience. Interaction and mutual support within this community play an important role in shaping the culture and maintaining social ties. Freelancing culture has its own components, these include: freelance communities, norms and rules, social space, values, specific communication, training. Freelancing culture is about striving for freedom and independence.

Today, the phenomenon of freelancing is more popular among student youth, as the older generation does not take such activities seriously. People still think that traditional professions such as doctor, mechanic or teacher will bring more earnings. However, society is changing and there are new ways of becoming and expressing oneself as a person. Gradually, freelancing services are maturing and developing in the perception of the audience. And interest in free form of employment is growing among the younger generation, as they are the ones who see the prospect of development of this phenomenon.

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