

Exploring Potential Technologies for Online Freelancers

Thank you for your interest in this research study. Before you decide whether you want to take part voluntarily, please read the following information carefully. Email **carlos.alvarez@northumbria.ac.uk** if anything is unclear or if you would like more information about the study. This study has been approved by Northumbria University Ethics Committee as Project ID Number: 35707. This study has *no* relation or association with any freelancing company or platform.

Purpose of the study

This research study explores online freelancers' views of fictional technology concepts designed to improve the online freelancing work experience. In addition, we are interested in exploring how these fictional concepts might impact online freelancers' work and identify directions for future technology and policy development. As part of the study, we will ask you to engage with our fictional concepts and participate in an online focus group to discuss your views of these technologies with other online freelancers.

Participant profile

We are recruiting professionals who use online freelancing platforms regularly to deliver freelance services, including but not limited to Upwork, Fiverr, Workana, Jovoto, Freelancer, and 99designs. We particularly welcome freelancers who have also used these platforms as clients.

To take part, you must fulfil the following requirements:

- Be 18 years or older.
- Have been an online freelancer (i.e., working independently through platforms) for at least three months.

Participation

Participation is entirely voluntary. If you take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason. If you withdraw, we will delete any data you would have provided.

Study stages

In detail, the study will consist of the following three stages:

Recruitment survey. In this survey, you will share details about yourself, your experience freelancing online, and the types of tools you use as part of your work. In

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addition, this survey will determine if you are a suitable candidate for participating in this study. All this information will be kept confidential. You will only be asked your name to pair your answers with subsequent activities related to this study. This survey should take between 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

Focus group. After completing the recruitment survey, the lead researcher will send you an email with the focus group details and a PDF file with the fictional technology concepts to be discussed at the focus group. Focus groups will host up to five participants and one researcher facilitating the discussion, and will last between up to two hours. We will begin by presenting the fictional technology concepts. Then, the group will share their individual and collective views of the fictional technologies, how they might be used in everyday work and the implications for the work experience. Finally, the discussion will conclude with reflections on the considerations that technology designers and policymakers should have when supporting the online freelancing work experience.

The focus groups will be through Zoom.us and will be audio-recorded and transcribed for qualitative analysis (see data below for more details). We will host various focus groups throughout November and early December 2021, considering multiple time zones and days of the week. On our study website [link], you will choose from our list of available dates.

Follow-up survey. One week after the focus group, you will receive a follow-up survey. This survey will ask for further thoughts you might have about our fictional technologies. In addition, this survey allows you to share additional reflections that were not discussed at the focus group.

Compensation

Upon attending the online focus group, you will receive an Amazon voucher worth £30 as compensation for your time.

Data collection and storage

We will collect data from the recruitment survey, focus group, and follow-up survey. All data will be stored following University guidelines and the Data Protection Act (2018).

We will have access to the data you provide in the recruitment survey. This data will be anonymised, and your name will not appear in any form of analysis. If you are not a suitable candidate to participate in this study, the principal researcher will notify you via email, and all the information you might have provided in the recruitment survey will be permanently deleted.

We will audio record and transcribe the focus group on a local computer, meaning that this recording is secure. The audio recording will be transcribed for later analysis. The anonymised transcript will be retained and might be used in future research projects.

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If you withdraw from the study, we will delete any data we have collected from you. If you withdraw after the follow-up survey and our data analysis has begun, it may be difficult to identify your data and remove it from the dataset.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Your name will not be written on any of the data we collect; the written information you provide will have an ID number – not your name. Also, your name will not be written on the recorded focus group transcripts will not appear in any reports or documents resulting from this study. All the data collected from you in this study will be confidential. The only exception to this confidentiality is if the researcher feels that you or others may be harmed if the information is not shared.

Study results

The data will be used for our research study, meaning we store and analyse the anonymised data and use excerpts and summaries in research publications.

The general findings might be reported in a scientific journal or presented at a research conference and be part of teaching materials; however, the data will be anonymised. The data you have provided (including information related to your work) will not be personally identifiable in any form. We can provide you with a summary of the findings from the study if you email the researcher at the address listed below.

We would like to make the anonymised transcripts available in a research repository for use by other researchers and in teaching. You do not have to agree to open publication of the full transcript and data if you do not want this to happen.

Who is Organising and Funding the Study?

This study is organised and funded by Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. This study has no relation to any freelancing platform.

Time requirements

Recruitment survey: 5-10 minutes approx.

Focus group: up to 2 hours.

Follow-up survey: 15 minutes approx.

Participant rights

The [GDPR provides the following rights for individuals](#):

1. The right to be informed
2. The right of access
3. The right to rectification
4. The right to erasure
5. The right to restrict processing
6. The right to data portability
7. The right to object
8. Rights in relation to automated decision making and profiling

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Name and contact details of the Records and Information Officer at
Northumbria University: Duncan James (dp.officer@northumbria.ac.uk).

You can find out more about how we use your information at:
[www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/leadership-governance/vice-chancellors-
office/legal-services-team/gdpr/gdpr---privacy-notices/](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/leadership-governance/vice-chancellors-office/legal-services-team/gdpr/gdpr---privacy-notices/)
or by contacting a member of the research team