Can a Pocket-Money App Increase the Pool of Opportunities for Young People? The Role of an Enabling Platform in Households and Businesses' Perceptions of Teen Employability.

Abstract

Although research already points to the positive impact provided to young people through earning pocket-money, this research sought to understand whether by having a bespoke app to connect young people to pocket-money-earning opportunities, it will be possible to widen the pool of opportunities and hence, expand the impact that pocket-money earning activities promote.

Our approach involved a survey methodology, targeting the "demand" side of pocket money type tasks; these were households and/or business owners, who might conceivably benefit from the skills of a young person. Our sample was recruited using social media marketing based on demography (age 35<>65), Location (Sussex, parts of London & Hertfordshire, where the app is currently in use). The sample (n=120) included a mix of gender (Female=42.5%, Male=47.5, Identifying differently/NA=10%) and most (71%) had no previous awareness of digital platforms to recruit young people for tasks.

We found that most respondents (n=91, 76%) had not engaged a young person for a task at any point within the last two years. However, over half (n=71, 59%) felt that young people were responsible enough to contribute to one-off tasks in the workplace and two-fifths (n=47, 39%) agreed that they would be more likely to hire a young person for a task if they can do it simply through an online platform (website or app). Moreover there appears to be a societal willingness to assist young people gain early experience, with two thirds (n=83, 69%) stating that they valued the importance of giving young people an early opportunity to acquire skills to help with their future employment or studies and the majority (n=71, 59%) being concerned that young people are often ignored by employers because they don't have the right skills or experience.

We conclude that online platforms can potentially offer a means of widening the pool of opportunities for young people to earn money and gain experience. Such platforms potentially satisfy the needs of households and businesses as well as delivering a societal benefit in providing enhanced financial capability and employability.

Introduction

Previous studies have already highlighted the beneficial impact to young people of earning money through working part-time during school years. Such activities have already been found to lead to two principal, interrelated benefits:

- Improving employability prospects – specifically through reducing time spent not in education, employment or training (NEET) after compulsory education (Percy,2010)
- Improving financial capability, demonstrated through savings behaviour (Brown & Taylor, 2015).

However, there is currently a societal conundrum wherein the opportunities in the UK for young people to start engaging in these activities is declining. Recent news and research reports (Mahy,

2017, Lister, 2018), have highlighted that part time work for teenagers has been declining rapidly; there has been a fall of up to 60% in the numbers of young people with weekend jobs.

This is not related to young peoples' appetite for money-earning work, which remains undiminished, but speaks more to the availability of opportunities for young people to earn money.   Initial focus groups with young people that we interviewed as part of the preparatory work for this research highlighted the following problems:

- Availability of opportunities - Over 90% of the young people that we surveyed reported that opportunities for young people to earn money are scarce and the mechanisms for young people to find flexible work are limited.
- Social mobility and democratisation of opportunity - Often opportunities to work are only there for those who have the connections to go and find them.
- Schools and colleges are good at getting young people through exams but employers consistently highlight a disconnect between qualifications and the skills they need.

In addition, although unemployment figures across Europe are currently falling, youth unemployment is more problematic and is running at over double the rate of general adult unemployment, with over 3.2 million young people currently unemployed across Europe (Eurostat,2019). A key contributory factor in youth unemployment relates to experience; research from the CBI, for example, highlights that half of young people do not feel prepared for world of work (CBI/Accenture/Hays, 2018).

Existing solutions are either archaic (putting an ad in a newsagent's window) or using websites, which are better suited for freelancers with more experience. None of these offers a safe, reliable and socially inclusive solution that has the required functionality to help young people find work from business and families in their local communities.

If young people earning money is positively correlated with improved employment prospects and financial capability, then it follows that widening the pool of opportunities for young people to earn money will create a greater impact, by engaging a wider cohort of young people.

We were therefore keen to understand whether, by introducing an app to connect young people with pocket-money-earning tasks, we would widen this pool of opportunities. To do this we also needed to understand whether there is a uniqueness with the ease and simplicity of a digital platform which meant that tasks that would not have been made available through any other means would be listed here (i.e. that the platform does not simply provide a substitution effect).

In particular the technology that we wanted to test through this research was MyPocketSkill. MyPocketSkill is a digital solution which connects young people, aged 13-19 who want to earn money and acquire skills, with families, businesses and charities that seek help with tasks.   The platform allows users on both supply-side (teens) and demand-side (households and businesses) to sign-up, create profiles and list/request tasks. MyPocketSkill's vision is "to become the go-to destination for everything related to teen tasks, skills development and youth entrepreneurship, by focusing on the social purpose to create an environment to help young people to explore what careers may interest them, discover what the world of work may be like, improve their employability and to connect to their local community". (MyPocketSkill, 2019).

Method

Research question: Our primary research question was: "What will be the effect of an online platform in increasing the pool of employer encounter opportunities for young people?". As secondary questions we also wanted to understand participants' broader attitudes to engaging with a platform as a means of recruiting young people for tasks, participants' awareness and utilisation of digital platforms as a means of satisfying the need for tasks, and also their views on the suitability and applicability of young people as credible assets in the workforce.

Participants: A hundred and twenty working-age employers from businesses and task-hiring households in Hertfordshire and Brighton; the current geographic reach of MyPocketSkill, (42.5% female, 47.5%, 10% Other/Prefer not to say). All participants potentially had hiring power and ability to recruit for the tasks/jobs they are offering. Participants were both existing users or non-existing users of MyPocketSkill's platform and were contacted through digital channels (social media groups and email newsletter, see below).

Materials: A questionnaire, with audience and teen-employment sections:

Audience - consisting of questions around gender and type of business (start-up, corporate, household, or charity). The audience sections also included questions about whether the participants ever hired a teen for a task or a job, and their satisfactory level from such recruitment.

Teen-Employment – questions to gain a better understanding of the drivers and motives of the different employer participants to hiring a teen for a task or a job, and the likelihood of them considering it further with a provided specialised enabling platform. The battery of questions was conducted online using the platform SurveyMonkey.

Procedure: Participants were recruited via non-random sampling by posting the questionnaire in various business and relevantly themed social-media groups (e.g. Facebook St.Alban's mums group) for non-existing users of MyPocketSkill, and in the MyPocketSkill online newsletter for existing users. Additionally, we used convenience sampling; where subjects were selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher, with the only criterion being that participants should be from the current geographic reach of MyPocketSkill (Hertfordshire, part of London and Brighton), and have a hiring power position in their household or workplace.

Potential candidate participants were distributed a link via a Facebook post, which then linked to our SurveyMonkey survey. Those who showed interest in taking part in the study and used the link, were then given further explanation about the study and the procedure on the first page of the questionnaire (participant information sheet) and participants provided their consent at this point to continue.

Participants then completed the Teen-Employment Sections of the Questionnaire (Sample question: "I would hire a suitable teen for a task or job if I had access to a reliable enabling platform that could help me find a relevant teen for the job". How much do you agree with this statement on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree)) and also provided further information about themselves through the Demographic Sections (Gender, employer type etc.).

Once they complete the battery of questionnaires, participants were thanked for their participation and provided with links for further information/resources.

Design: We used a between-subjects correlational design. Willingness to hire teens was the independent variable and the using the MyPocketSkill platform was the dependent variable (existing vs. non-existing users of MPS).

Results

Overall, we found that both engaging young people for tasks in the home and awareness of digital platforms to facilitate this was relatively low. Only a quarter of participants (n=29, 24%) had actually hired a teenager in the past two years and less than a third were aware of online solutions to accomplish this.

Table 1- Current Engagement of Young People for Tasks in Home or Business and Awareness of Online Solutions

	Yes	No
Have hired a young person (13-19) in the past 2 years to provide help with tasks in home or business	29 (24%)	91 (76%)
Are you aware of any platforms that help connect you with capable young people?	34 (29%)	86 (71%)

Participants did however appear to be willing to be engaged in hiring a young person. In particular, we found that having a suitable platform would make participants more able and likely to hire a young person for a task. Around a third of participants (n=40, 33%) also agreed that platform functionality such as being able to schedule and make payment through an online platform would make them more likely to hire a young person. Participants also tended to view the social impact aspect of teen employment highly, with over two thirds (n=83, 69%) caring about giving young people an opportunity to acquire skills. Participants were also consistently positive about the suitability of young people for tasks in the workplace, with half of participants agreeing on the suitability of teens to work in their workplace.

Table 2a- Availability of Technology and Employment of Teens

	Agreeing	Disagreeing	No Pref.
Would hire a young person if there was a suitable platform to connect employers with relevant, capable young people	64 (53%)	32 (27%)	24 (20%)
Would be more likely to hire a young person for a task if I can do it simply through an online platform (website or app)	47 (39%)	38 (32%)	35 (29%)
Being able to schedule tasks and make payment through a platform would make me more likely to hire a young person	40 (33%)	36 (30%)	44 (37%)

Table 2b- Suitability and Employment of Teens

	Agreeing	Disagreeing	N/A
My workplace has certain tasks that suitable young people would be able to do	59 (49%)	13 (11%)	48 (40%)
Young people can be responsible enough to contribute to one-off tasks in my workplace	71 (59%)	7 (6%)	42 (35%)

I would hire a young person if he/she has studied at school/college in relevant subject areas for my industry	59 (49%)	13 (11%)	48 (40%)
I would hire a young person if he/she doesn't have experience but is committed and enthusiastic	60 (50%)	12 (10%)	48 (40%)

Table 2c- Attitudes to Teen Tasks

	Agreeing	Disagreeing	No Pref.
I care about giving young people an early opportunity to acquire skills to help with their future employment or studies	83 (69%)	16 (13%)	21 (18%)
Young people are often ignored by employers because they don't have the right skills or experience	71 (59%)	29 (24%)	20 (17%)

We also questioned participants on the types of task for which they viewed young people as suitable. Most preferred categories of task reflected more traditional types of work such as garden work, car cleaning, dog walking and babysitting. However, even the lowest ranking category (IT assistance) was still a consideration for a third of participants (n=38, 32%).

Table 3- Perceptions of Tasks Which are Appropriate for Teens

Task Type	Responding Yes/Maybe	Responding No
Garden / Outdoor	100	20
Cleaning / Car Cleaning	80	40
Dogwalking	61	59
Babysitting	60	60
Social Media Accounts (e.g. Maintaining Twitter account)	59	61
Other Digital (e.g. Web Design, App Development)	58	62
Office/Customer Support Assistance (e.g. Maintaining Customer Databases)	54	66
Creative Design (e.g. Marketing, Design or Photography)	48	72
Homework Help / Tutoring (e.g. for a younger child)	46	74
Catering / Hospitality (e.g. Preparing Food & Drinks)	45	75
Music/Dance Coaching	45	75
Selling Things (e.g. eBaying unwanted items)	44	76
Sports Coaching	39	81
IT Assistance	38	82

Conclusion and Discussion

Overall, we found positive support in our respondents for teenage tasks. Although both the awareness and current utilisation of young people in the home or business were currently relatively low, there appears from our survey to be several important findings:

Digital Platform as Enabler

One of the key questions that we wanted to test through this research was to understand the effect of an online platform in increasing the pool of employer encounter opportunities for young people.

Here we found that an online platform was able to stimulate demand and hence increase the pool of opportunities open to young people, with 39% of our participants telling us that by being able to conduct the process simply through web or app it would increase the likelihood of them doing so.

Given that there is already evidence to support the role of early engagement in pocket money earning tasks to build financial capability and bolster the prospect of future education and employability, this is an important finding. It indicates, that such online platforms potentially have an impactful role in contributing to widening the future pool of opportunities for youth people to start earning money and gaining valuable experience.

Acceptance of Teenagers as Contributors to the workforce

Our survey participants were willing to consider teenagers for a range of tasks, both in the home and in their business. There was a wide range of tasks that were considered appropriate and this did not necessarily just reflect current practice.

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Notes and declarations of interest:

1. The authors of this report are directors of MyPocketSkill.
2. This research was compiled during MyPocketSkill's participation on the UCL EDUCATE programme. The UCL EDUCATE programme connects EdTech entrepreneurs, educators and researchers and uses research to inspire the design of high-quality learning products and services.