

A-R-T: The Way of Life of the Ilocano Creative-Arts Based Freelancers

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ABSTRACT

Freelancing is an excellent option to augment income. It is appealing and popular among Filipinos, both professionals and non-professionals. The Province of Ilocos Sur offers a plethora of creative arts-based capacities that may be leveraged as creative business objects. The prospects for arts, crafts, and creative enterprise as a component of the creative economy in Ilocos Sur are depicted. The research defined what freelancing in the creative arts is all about and what it includes. The study investigated the difficulties they face in their personal lives, professions, and day-to-day lives as part-time workers and freelancers. To stand out, freelancers must adhere to the right ideals, regardless of the presence of barriers. ART is one of the rising values of freelancers that drives them to persevere in creating their identities in the industry. Further, certain recommendations were also articulated.

Keywords: Creative arts, freelance, Ilocano, experiences, profession

INTRODUCTION

There are limitless options in the creative world – one may go broad or narrow, and moving from one project to another can provide a completely new experience. In the Philippines, freelancing is a thriving sector. There is a large pool of world-class talent in the area. The only issue is that there are not enough decent chances to use or compensate them (Tudy, 2021). The shortage of local job options, however, is not the only reason why Filipinos choose to work as freelancers.

The Philippines is the world's number six freelance sector in terms of sales growth (Gilchrist, 2019). Freelance work is appealing and is gaining popularity among Filipinos, both professionals and non-professionals. Professionals who have previously worked with a firm or organization would find that transitioning to freelancing is a whole new environment (Tudy, 2021).

Duermyer (2021) stated that becoming a freelancer is a quick and inexpensive method to start making money outside of the office. One may start selling services at any time, especially if he/she already has the freelance talent to start making money outside of the office. Others may start selling their services at any time, especially if they already have freelance talent. A creative art freelancer is someone who gives their talents for a fee and normally does not anticipate working with a single customer on a long-term basis; however, the working relationship might continue. It is a type of self-employment akin to running a home company as opposed to telecommuting. Having said that, a freelancer, as opposed to a home company, can function as a contractor.

Freelancers help to support the economy. Burke and Cowling (2019) proposed that freelancers play a vital role in agile economies. For people who want more independence and versatility, freelancing is an option. Many artists choose self-employment for a variety of reasons, many of which have to do with the characteristics of artwork and becoming an artist.

Freelancing is a second or even sole source of income for many Filipinos. It is important to remember, though, that this mode of work has both benefits and drawbacks. As a result, when deciding whether to leave a traditional job and pursue freelancing, one should keep in mind that personal qualities, experiences, and credentials are insufficient. It can take many years for an informed investment to yield a return on investment (Bandwagon, 2020).

Despite the fact that the number of freelancers has grown as the market has evolved, entrepreneurial analysts have paid less attention to the importance of freelancers. They are often relegated to the position of oppressed workers or underachieving entrepreneurs but not discussed in their own right (Burke, 2011).

There is a dearth of data on freelancers in the Philippines. In a 2018 survey, Paypal found that freelancers accounted for about 2% of the country's population, and statistics have shown the number had probably grown during the pandemic. Many creative specialists had lost their income, leading them to shift from formal creative or non-creative fields. More Filipinos turned to freelance work when they lost salaried jobs in the creative industry, but freelancers have a lot of vulnerabilities.

The Province of Ilocos Sur has a wealth of creative arts-based capacities that can be used as creative business artifacts, including for foreign markets. This research is focused on the form of self-employment known as freelancing. In this study, the opportunities for arts, crafts, and creative entrepreneurship as a sector of the creative economy in the Province of Ilocos Sur will be specifically illustrated.

The rise of freelancers has changed the workplace forever. According to the literature, they are part of a modern generation of workforce that provides agile human capital (Tench, Fawkes, & Palihawadana, 2002). There are some advantages to freelancing. It is both a source of revenue and an incentive for jobs (Baitenizov et al., 2019; Sinicki, 2019). Freelancers can be described as anyone who works as an artist, painter, actor, or similar person who sells work or services by the hour, day, or week rather than working for one employer on a fixed salary basis (2020 Dictionary). As a result, the freelancers in this sample will be referred to as part-time workers in the various fields of expertise in the creative arts industry: performing arts, fine arts, and local craft.

The results of this analysis contribute to the discussion over whether creative freelancing is good and beneficial. Ilocano freelancers' experiences paint a picture of this reality.

This qualitative research was designed to recognize and realize the meaning of the Ilocano Creative Arts-Based Freelancers' living experiences.

Objectives of the study

The research aimed to provide insight on the ideas of the respondents in the world of freelancing, which is focused on the creative arts. The research sought to describe what

freelancing is all about based on the creative arts and what it entails. The research looked into the challenges of their personal lives, careers, and everyday lives as part-time workers and freelancers.

Theoretical Underpinnings and Literature Review

Freelancing and the economy

Freelancers help to support the economy. In 2018, the number of freelancers in the UK surpassed 2 million, adding £119 billion to the national economy (Consultancy United Kingdom, 2018). In the United States, 57.3 million people work as freelancers, adding \$1.4 trillion to the economy (Lesonsky, 2019). According to the findings of the report "Freelancing in America: 2019," freelancing is seen as a long-term career option that employs the unemployed and is dominated by qualified professionals (Upwork, 2019). In Southeast Asia, freelancers or gig jobs are on the rise, with Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam leading the way (Hasnan, 2019). Indeed, a growing number of people are pursuing freelancing careers.

For people who want more independence and versatility, freelancing is an option. While there are some disadvantages, such as the negative impact on freelancers' well-being due to job pressures and late hours (Shevchuk et al., 2018), many people find online freelancing to be more advantageous. Job satisfaction among freelancers has been recorded in the literature (Bridges, 2017; Mathisen, 2017). They discovered economic worth and a source of income (Nawaz et al., 2020).

Artists and Self-Employment Determinants

Many artists choose self-employment for a variety of reasons, many of which have to do with the characteristics of artwork and becoming an artist. First, the project-based nature of artwork lends itself to contingent and contracted jobs, which many self-employed employees depend on (Markusen, 2006). Actors, for example, are usually employed on a short-term basis for stage or film performances, and photographers and musicians work on a one-time basis. Artists who work for themselves can work on several tasks at the same time.

Second, many artists need consistency in their work schedules to juggle several tasks, which self-employment provides. "The high level of personal choice in using one's initiative, like the opportunities to use a wide variety of skills and to feel self-actualized at work, an idiosyncratic style of living, a low level of repetition, and a high degree of social acceptance" are all workplace determinants for artists (Menger, 2006).

Third, self-employment encourages musicians to live a nomadic lifestyle in which they can travel from place to place. Artists are frequently required to relocate temporarily or to be mobile due to project-based work (Markusen, 2006). For example, musicians often perform to support new songs, and most likely, actors can be involved in a traveling production.

Scholars have found that locational benefit has to do with the concentration of related jobs and sectors when it comes to where self-employed artists want to locate (Markusen & Schrock, 2006). Artists also moonlight, which means they work part-time in

addition to their normal full-time careers. This makes self-employment for artists a viable option (Alper & Wassall, 2000).

In terms of how artists divide their time, there are three distinct labor markets in which they operate: (a) the demand for an artist's creative output; (b) the market for other arts-related employment; and (c) the non-arts labor market (Throsby, 2010). These three labor markets (creative work) have been identified as the most prevalent among artists (Throsby & Hollister, 2003). Nonetheless, artists transfer markets to supplement income from arts-related occupations or to acquire career alternatives not available through creative employment. This artist is to be self-employed, with his income from arts-related occupations surpassing his income from non-arts labor duties.

Filipino freelancers

The Philippines is one of the top six freelancing marketplaces in the world in terms of revenue growth (Gilchrist, 2019). In 2018, there were over a million Filipino freelancers (Llamas, 2018). Some resourceful Filipinos acquired a position in telecommuting, a work-from-home program (Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), 2014). According to the research, Filipinos worked as encoders and transcriptionists, online teachers, internet entrepreneurs and sellers, customer care assistants, virtual assistants, web developers and programmers, online writers and editors, online traders and stock market participants, and online gamers.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. The researchers used a phenomenological method to obtain the provided responses to explain the lives and experiences of Ilocano creative-arts-focused freelancers in Ilocos Sur. "Phenomenology is an analysis of systems of consciousness as viewed from the first-person point of view," according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (n.d.), which encourages the interviewer to view the interviewee's perceptions. According to Sokolowski (2000), it studies human perception, and the way objects show themselves to us through and around the experience. The researchers used phenomenological inquiry to investigate the relative effects that freelance workers have encountered on their path to freelancing on their personal lives, careers, and everyday lives as part-time workers. The findings try to reveal that there are also certain advantages to working as a freelancer. Qualitative research involves gathering and evaluating non-numerical data to better comprehend ideas, views, or experiences. It can be utilized to get detailed insights into a topic or to develop fresh research topics (Bersamina et al., 2022).

It also lowers the contact distance between the two parties by doing a systematic search of the skills learned. According to Van Manen and Adams (2010), phenomenology is a method of qualitative analysis that is based on some philosophical and humanistic traditions and seeks to draw on pre-reflective individual existence. Furthermore, the researchers used a series of criteria to gather qualitative data, which they then used to form a distinction between the interactions. Qualitative interviews were utilized to generate a thick description of student leaders' retrospective sense of their ethical decision-making. Furthermore, in a semi-structured interview, the researchers asked probing follow-up

questions to make participants think deeply about their answers. This reflective discussion enabled this study to draw out detailed, nuanced descriptions of student leaders' ethical decision-making processes (Abarquez et al., 2022).

Population and Sampling. The selection of the respondents was based on the following criteria: (a) they must be of legal age and must be Ilocano; (b) they must have at least obtained a bachelor's degree; and (c) they must have mostly worked or engaged in creative work. There were six respondents equally represented by different creative art components. Two from the music industry (vocal and instrumental), another two from the performing arts industry (dance and theater), and lastly, two from the art industry (craft and design).

Data Collection Methods. An interview was used to gather the data. The interview guide questionnaire was validated by experts in industry and academia. The participants were limited to gathering information brought about by the pandemic. However, access was administered through telephone and online terminals. The researchers also conducted a face-to-face interview. The appropriate technique was an interview because the participants represented the kind of people directly related to the phenomenon.

Data Collection Procedure. Consent was secured from the informants before the start of the interview. The researchers explained the study's objectives, nature, methodology, and expected participation from the informants. The informant abstained from the survey without reciprocal action at any time, whether before the interview started or while it was ongoing.

The research utilized purposive sampling, particularly snowball sampling. The researchers found it fitting for this study since it is not easy to determine who the freelancers are that will satisfy the selection criteria. After each interview, the participants were asked to recommend someone they knew who met the criteria.

Analysis of Data. The researchers read the transcripts multiple times after transcribing the interviews to explain what the participants meant by their answers to the interviews. The key-informant interview was used to gather pertinent data from the respondents (BetterEvaluation, 2014). After gathering the data, the responses of the respondents were manually transcribed and put into a repertory grid (Terrill Bernard & Andrew Flitman, 2002). Similar statements were grouped to pave the way to answering the objectives of the study. The researchers formulated the definition for each meaningful statement after they identified them. The aim of this move is to ensure that there is no bias and instead write the truth from the viewpoint of the participants.

Ethical Considerations. Respect for the dignity of respondents was prioritized. Complete consent was obtained from the participants prior to the research. The protection of the privacy of study participants was guaranteed. Ensuring an acceptable degree of confidentiality for study findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research provided an insight into identifying the ideals of the respondents in the world of freelancing focused on creative arts. The research sought to describe what freelancing based on the creative arts is and what it entails. It also looked into the challenges

in their personal lives, careers, and everyday lives as part-time workers. In this vein, the emerging themes were presented: *Affability, Resourcefulness, and Tolerance (ART)*.

Affability refers to the techniques of the participants as to how they foster relationships with their clients. Providing quality service and products to the clients should not be the only business of the freelancers. It should include maintaining communication because this could pave the way to referring them to other possible clients. The respondents also show camaraderie with other freelancers who are in the same line of business. This is evident in the referral strategy of the freelancers because if they cannot accommodate the demands of their customers or clients, they tend to give them to other freelancers who can freely accommodate the demands.

Modesty aside, I have already established my business. There are times when I can no longer accommodate all my customers. What I'm doing is giving it to other service providers just like mine. (Respondent 1)

Ang ginagawa ko ay palaging may freebies, lalo na sa bago kong clients. My business with my clients does not end with payment. Meron pa ring negosyo after rendering your service. I re-refer ka nila sa mga friends ng customers mo na kailangan ng serbisyo. (Respondent 2)

In this vein, it can be seen from the responses of respondents that, in delivering quality output, one should establish a strong relationship with clients and also establish professional linkages with other freelancers. Moreover, it is evident that despite competition, there is collaboration among the service providers, and this implies that referral could be a strategy if they are unable to accommodate the demands of the clients due to a conflict of schedules.

The results affirm the study conducted by Lockamy and McCormack (2004) that in competition there is a mutual relationship. However, it contradicts the study of Nash (Riggins, 2017) that recommending another service provider may also lead to customer dissatisfaction because competitors cannot duplicate what competitors have (Ferguson, 2021).

Resourcefulness refers to the ingenuity of the participants in capturing, expressing, recording, showcasing, and archiving cultural music, dances, and crafts. With or without the support of other organizations, the respondents have the willingness to be the brainchild of preserving the cultures in which they excel. Earning profit from their business activities is not just their primordial purpose for engaging in this kind of endeavor. Wherein, aside from earning a profit, they also have the enthusiasm to take the lead in preserving dying cultures.

In my ten years of operation, wala pa akong nakitang non-governmental organization na nacreate para supportahan ang mga kapwa namin who are in the same line of business. And one thing more: gusto ko rin na i-document ang leksyo. If you are going to search on YouTube, iilan lang ang ilokano version ng leksyo ngayon. Not just in how to perform the leksyo but also in how they write the lyrics. At gusto ko rin na i-document ang zarzuela, if ever

sana na mayroong barangay na magzarzuela during fiesta nila, I will volunteer myself na i-document. (Respondent 1)

Actually, we have an organization of craft artists. Isa sa mga objectives ng aming organization ay I-showcase ang mga cultural dresses natin at gusto naming din i-push through yong may policy sana na if ever na mag-conduct ng kahit anong pageant ay i-include palagi ang cultural attires para ma orient ang mga nanonood. (Respondent 3)

Karamihan ng raketista ay ito palagi sinasabi "Kung may raket may kita," but as I go older in this industry, I am now looking for a deeper meaning of the business that I am engaged with. (Respondent 4)

The respondent's responses imply that they have the willingness to take the initiative in preserving art-based cultures in the locality. Aside from earning a profit, they also look for ways to help the organizations, specifically the government, educate the people about the cultures that they have.

Reflecting on the implications, it conforms to the study of Zaman (2015) that entrepreneurs are not just profit-minded but rather a driver of cultural preservation. This was brought about by their motivation, and it is supported by the government by providing economic assistance (Bandwagon, 2020).

Tolerance refers to how the respondents overcame the challenges that they faced during the pandemic. In the parlance of business, there is no space for mediocrity. The participants have been very vigilant in looking for opportunities during difficult times. The pandemic has never been a hindrance for them, but it certainly affects the flow of business as it slows down the mobility of business transactions. However, their entrepreneurial skills were a huge help because they maximized the resources that they had at their disposal to cope with the challenges of the pandemic. Moreover, the respondents used the power of technology in marketing their products to get a wider range of promotions within the ambit of their capacity to deliver.

I've never been complacent with my savings when a pandemic arrives... Umm, that is why nagshift ako from my original raket nagbenta ako ng makakain para kahit papano meron pa rin income. (Respondent 3)

Malaking tulong ang social media sa pagbebenta ko ng aking mga produkto, though may limitations nga lang at ang kagandahan nito ay hindi sya costly, you don't need to pay for advertisements. Just load your phone, upload a photo, caption it, and that's it. (Respondent 4)

The responses illustrate how adoptive the respondents are in countering the challenges of the pandemic from which they find ways to continue the flow of income. They also took advantage of social media as their medium for displaying and promoting their products; this has been a great help on their part because there is a wider range of marketing

than before. Nevertheless, all of the available resources and opportunities that the respondents have will be maximized through entrepreneurial competencies.

This conforms to the classification of entrepreneurs by Clarence Danhof (2021), which states that entrepreneurs tend to seek opportunities rather than being stagnant with what they have at the moment. It affirms Review's findings (2022) that it is advantageous to an entrepreneur to use social media because it attracts more customers by posting photos or videos (Adler, 2020), and that the content is comprehensive and real (Fusco, 2015).

As a summary of all the emerging themes, it can be gleaned that **affability, resourcefulness, and tolerance (ART)** are highly interdependent. Combining the three themes will have a worthwhile impact on the operation of a business. The values that the freelancers have shown are the common needs of any entrepreneur in today's new normal. Being affable creates a good flow of income in the business, and if this value could be strengthened, it would have an amazing impact on the operation of the business. Whereas, being affable would require strong tolerance, which will create a splendid business idea in developing innovative products and services that will create a competitive advantage in the market. Therefore, having a business with a purpose will have a massive impact on other people's minds. Because upon developing a robust network with the partners and clients and being skilled in maximizing the opportunities available, this could be a good ingredient in establishing the purpose of the business, regardless of the profit, and it also supports specific advocacy, which is to preserve the putrefying cultures. In a nutshell, these intermingling themes (**ART**) should go with each other to make a freelancer more resilient in this challenging world today.

CONCLUSIONS

Businesses should not be complacent about the status that they have right now. There are emerging challenges along the way that would destroy the tranquility of the operation and transaction of the business and eventually challenge the entrepreneurial skills of these freelancers. The right values should be properly met by the freelancers to stand out regardless of the presence of obstacles. ART are emerging values of the freelancers that make them remain steadfast in establishing their names in the market.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is therefore recommended in future studies that there is a need to widen the scope in terms of the participants to get a wider perspective on the study being conducted. The findings may help the government understand these new phenomena, which can lead to the development of new policies and methods to support and promote them. Knowledge and skill development programs may be initiated by the government to boost the morale and competencies of freelancers. Additional support, like linking them to development partners and agencies, may play a big role in widening their income-generating activities as well. Such programs to be initiated may embrace gender-friendly practices to encourage acceptance and openness for everyone. This recommendation is supported by the findings of Cadorna et al. (2021), who claimed that the selected government agencies successfully

put into practice gender policy strategies and techniques in their programs, projects, and activities. This practice was done to provide equal access to services and opportunities for both men and women in the organization.

The passing of legislation will undoubtedly benefit creative freelancers not only in the locality but throughout the country. Freelancing is a powerful tool for socioeconomic growth. Moreover, to prove the claims of the participants, triangulation is advisable only in our area but throughout the country. Freelancing is a powerful tool for socioeconomic growth. Moreover, to prove the claims of the participants, triangulation is advisable. It is also recommended that **ART (affability, resourcefulness, and tolerance)** as an emerging value of freelancers be introduced in higher educational institutions (HEIs), specifically to those courses under business-allied fields.

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