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Chairperson
Inquiry into the Victorian on-demand workforce
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Dear Ms Natalie James

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Submission to the Inquiry into the Victorian On-Demand Workforce

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry.

Introduction

1. The Centre of Work and Organisational Performance (CWOP)¹ at Edith Cowan University's (ECU) School of Business and Law conducts research relevant to the Future of Work and Workers. CWOP brings together a collective of multi-disciplinary researchers who have an on-going research agenda in various aspects of work (including human resource management and employee relations) and organisational studies (including change management, organisational behaviour, leadership, and industrial-organisational psychology).

2. This submission highlights a recently completed research project that members of CWOP have been involved in about whether disruptive innovation, via on-demand or peer-to-peer (P2P) platforms, can help overcome labour market failure that affects mothers impacted by domestic and reproductive work that constrains their paid work experiences. This study was conducted in collaboration between an Edith Cowan University research team and a rapidly growing mobile gig economy digital platform developer M3B Labs Pty Ltd (trading as Jugglr), both based in Perth, WA.

3. We believe that the findings of our research have broader implications beyond WA and is applicable in the Victorian (and broader Australian) context and addressing the following intent of the Inquiry i.e. to hear from the full range of people participating in the sector – in this case, from potential workers (specifically mothers who are potential users of on-demand or P2P platforms to help them in employability and entrepreneurship), P2P platform/ app developers, and academic researchers. In so doing, we hope our research is able to assist the Inquiry about understanding the application of on-demand/ P2P systems and trends beyond Victoria.

Background to research

4. In Australia, there is still significant evidence that a strong gender divide remains with regard to work–life pressures and demands, especially among managers and professionals (Chapman *et al.*, 2014). Women professionals who have taken a break for family responsibilities increasingly turn to entrepreneurship, according to Global Entrepreneurship Monitor research over the last 15 years. However, this is expected to be predominantly in

¹ <https://www.ecu.edu.au/schools/business-and-law/research-activity/centre-for-work-and-organisational-performance>

informal sectors (Kelley *et al.*, 2013). These “mumpreneurs” are mothers who “instead of returning to the formal workforce ... combine running a business enterprise with looking after her children,” (Richomme-Huet *et al.*, 2013) and create new businesses around their family environment and circumstances (Ekinsmyth, 2013). However, despite many mumpreneurs having significant skills and experience, given the individualistic nature of Australian society (Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars *et al.*, 1998), and their lack of resources, mumpreneurs have found it hard to promote themselves and access markets from their homes, resulting in a so-called labour market failure. Can changing business models and technological advances, especially P2P sharing platforms, help overcome this problem?

5. Mobile internet and cloud technology have been identified as the greatest source of potential disruptions out to 2025 according to the World Economic Forum (2016) and the global consulting firm McKinsey (Manyika *et al.*, 2013) and P2P platforms have been identified as particularly disruptive innovations (Kenney *et al.*, 2016). P2P platforms are the person-to-person marketplaces that facilitate the exchange of goods and services between peers. The entrepreneurs are the individuals or small businesses that supply goods and services in these marketplaces. The consumers are the individuals who demand: buy, rent, consume (both the entrepreneurs and the consumers are often referred to as ‘peers’). These platforms have been powering the rapidly growing sharing or collaborative economy phenomenon and businesses such as Airbnb and Uber, as well as individuals, such as Airtasker and Freelancer. Given that these innovations are new, much of the research has focused on the technology (Hafermalz *et al.*, 2016), on macro-level impacts (Horton *et al.*, 2016) or on large segments (e.g. consumers) (Stephany, 2015) and there is a dearth of research on whether these P2P platforms can provide for more opportunities for specific groups of people, like mumpreneurs.

Aim of Research and Research Questions

6. The collaborative research is between ECU and M3B Labs (developer of P2P mobile app, Jugglr², that acts as a secure platform to connect mothers to provide support and services, both paid and unpaid, between them and local businesses. It aims to understand how or whether the sharing economy can support mothers into entrepreneurship and employment activities, helping to overcome labour market failure and the time/space constraints associated with motherhood by addressing the following research questions:

- a. To what extent does the case study P2P platform and some other platforms support mumpreneurship and employability for mothers?
- b. What are some of the barriers for mothers to accessing these technologies?
- c. To what extent do users benefit from these P2P platforms?
- d. What are the additional features that need to be developed for P2P platforms to meet the needs of users?
- e. What strategies should niche P2P platforms adopt to grow and remain sustainable?

Research Method

7. The research utilised a semi-structured telephone survey to explore usage of a newly developed mobile app P2P platform, intended to support employability among mothers. Responses were received from 150 mothers living in Perth, WA, on their experiences of using the Jugglr app

² Details of the app, which is available on both the Apple App Store and Google Play store are available on the Jugglr website: <https://www.jugglrapp.com/>

Summary of Research Findings

8. This study's main findings are as follows:

- a. As it stood at the time of undertaking the project the Jugglr app did not appear to support mumpreneurship or enhance mothers' employability. Gathering mothers on an app with the ability to give and receive payment for services was not enough to spur entrepreneurship. The study therefore offered insights that informed the review of the Jugglr app value proposition and business model;
- b. The barriers for mothers using the Jugglr app were:
 - i. time poverty, which prevented mothers from downloading and using the app;
 - ii. concerns about safety and security of services offered by the platform which made some mothers uncomfortable to use it; and
 - iii. the mothers wanted more ability to connect to other mothers than was provided by the app;
- c. The benefits of the Jugglr platform are seen as being:
 - i. for a target market of mothers with young children; and
 - ii. for personal services rather than employability or start-up/ small business services.
- d. The respondents indicate a number of measures which would address safety and security concerns and give more opportunities to connect to other mothers.

Summary of Implications

9. Our research based on the potential users of P2P app, Jugglr, has the following 3 main implications:

- a. Time poverty suggests that a significant portion of mothers surveyed may not have had excess labour capacity, if they did not have time to download and/or use the app. The focus on personal services by those who did use it may also reflect time poverty.
- b. The open-ended responses offered a number of ways in which the platform could be improved, especially options to address safety and security and to narrow down the target market. This would enhance the Jugglr app and other niche market P2P apps to grow and remain sustainable.
- c. In terms of peer collaboration, the results suggest that a focus on mothers with young children and more ways for mothers on the platform to connect to each other would be helpful.

Conclusions

10. Our research aimed to explore whether a P2P app could help mothers improve employability and entrepreneurship. We find that while the social networking functions appear to be more easily adopted, there are significant hurdles that P2P app developers would need to overcome before the potential of such technology can be realised. The issue of labour market failure was found to be complex with the interplay of motherhood with digital disruption.

Moreover, not all of these barriers are technology related and innovative means to address the concerns and motivations of mothers would be needed. For example, this may involving P2P app developers working with employer groups in terms of app development and also providing career development services to enable self-assessment of unique talents and abilities and advice on how to gain flexible employment may go further in this regard.

11. Should you have any questions regarding the various aspects of this submission or would like access to the detailed research report³, please do not hesitate to contact us. If invited to make presentations at the Inquiry, we will endeavor to attend the consultations and will be happy to elaborate on some of these issues further.

<Submitted via e-mail>

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³ Seet, P-S., Jogulu, U., Cripps, H., Nejati, M., 2019. *Mums’ Little Helpers? Employability, Entrepreneurship, and What Mothers Want From Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Platforms*. Edith Cowan University, Joondalup, Western Australia.