

Digital Marketing as a Tool for Inclusive Employment

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Abstract: Persons with disabilities (PWDs) represent the largest minority in the world who are still not adequately represented in the labour market and are therefore at higher risk of poverty and material deprivation. Digital marketing has the potential to close this gap by enabling PWDs to work remotely and access a wider range of employment opportunities. With the right support and accessibility measures, PWDs can use their skills and talents in digital marketing to contribute to their economic empowerment and inclusion in society. Considering that participation in digital labour platforms is an accepted labour practice in Serbia, this paper represents a pilot study aimed at gaining insights into the requirements of the digital labour market with a focus on digital marketing. To this end, the requirements of entry-level marketing positions on one of the most popular platforms for freelancers – Upwork – were investigated. The main objective of this analysis is to provide sound suggestions for the development of training programmes and mentoring initiatives tailored to enable PWDs in Serbia to become self-employed and increase their chances of earning additional income.

Keywords: *digital marketing, digital marketing competencies, digital labour platforms, inclusive employment, persons with disabilities*

JEL classification: J21, J24, M31, J71

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of disability is complicated, dynamic and encompasses several dimensions that have a significant impact on different aspects of people's lives (Eurostat, 2021). According to official statistics (CSR Europe, 2023), more than one billion people worldwide are affected by some form of disability, including 100 million in the EU. Although persons with disabilities (PWDs) represent the world's largest minority (UN, n.d.), this population group is far from adequately represented in the labour market (ILO, 2020). In contrast to persons without disabilities (PWoDs), who make up 75% of the EU labour force, only 50% of PWDs in the EU of working age are employed (European Council, 2022). The higher number of unemployed PWDs is implicitly indicative of their lower socio-economic status, rising poverty rates and greater risk of material deprivation.

The estimated number of PWDs in Serbia is around 700,000, of whom only 13% are in some form of paid full-time employment (Mamula-Nikolić et al., 2019). As in the EU, PWDs in Serbia represent a vulnerable population group, both in terms of poverty rates and the associated risk of material deprivation. This population group continues to face a lack of recognition and under-utilisation of their potential in the traditional labour market. In some cases, employers lack the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively hire and manage PWDs. More often, however, employers are simply unaware of the valuable attributes of this highly neglected population segment.

The potential of digital labour platforms for the engagement of PWDs in the labour market has only recently been recognised (Lazić et al., 2023). The ability to work remotely is beneficial for everyone, but especially for PWDs, as it facilitates access to jobs, reduces the likelihood of sensory overload and makes it easier to commute to and from work (Howard, 2022). Furthermore, it is not necessary for individuals to have prior work

Table 1. PWDs in Serbia by their economic activity, 2011 Census

	Total (N)	Share (%)
Republic of Serbia	571,780	100.0
Economically active	71,107	12.4
Employed	51,714	9.0
Marginally attached workers	14,411	2.5
New labour market entrants	4,982	0.9
Economically inactive	500,673	87.6
Under the age of 15	6,924	1.2
Retired	359,687	62.9
Persons with income from house property	2,900	0.5
Pupils and students	2,649	0.5
Looking after family or home	51,012	8.9
Other*	77,501	13.6

* This category includes persons who are unable to pursue employment, young people aged 14 years and older who are neither enrolled in educational institutions nor actively seeking employment, etc.

Source: Marković 2016, p. 71.

experience to successfully perform tasks on digital labour platforms (Lazić et al., 2022a).

Considering that participation in digital labour platforms is an accepted labour practice in Serbia (Lazić & Vukmirović, 2023), this paper represents a pilot study aimed at gaining insights into the requirements of the digital labour market with a focus on digital marketing. For this purpose, the requirements of entry-level marketing positions on one of the most popular digital labour platforms – Upwork – were analysed. The main objective of this analysis is to provide sound suggestions for the development of training programmes and mentoring initiatives tailored to enable persons with disabilities in Serbia to become self-employed and increase their chances of earning additional income.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. After introductory remarks and a brief context of the research, Section 2 gives a brief overview of the main labour market indicators for PWDs in Serbia. The methodology and results are explained in more detail in Section 3 and Section 4, respectively. Section 5 concludes the paper and provides policy recommendations and directions for future research in this area.

2. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF KEY LABOUR MARKET INDICATORS OF PWDS IN SERBIA

In the Republic of Serbia, there is no systematic and comprehensive monitoring system for tracking indicators related to the employment status of PWDs. A

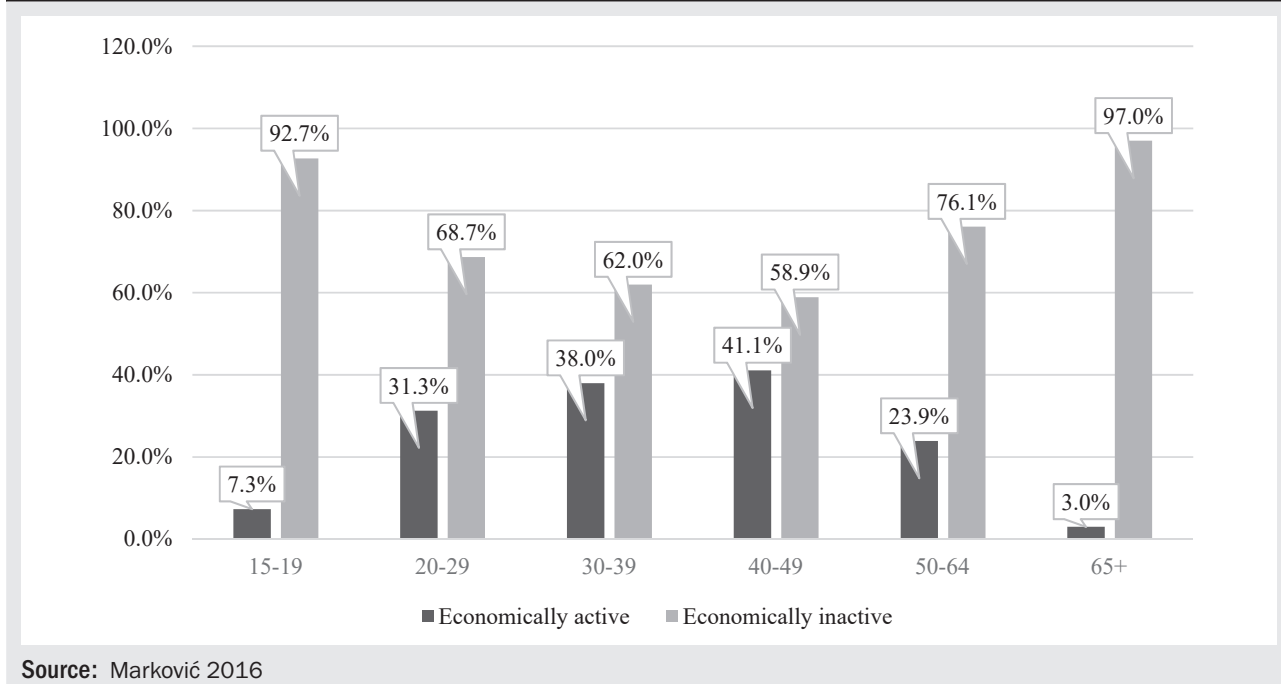
number of disability-related surveys were first introduced as part of the 2011 National Population and Housing Census (Marković, 2016).

Based on the results of the 2011 Census¹, it was found that of the overall population with disabilities, a total of 71,107 persons (12.4%) were economically active, as shown in Table 1. Census data show that only 9.0% of PWDs were actually employed during the indicated period. The data for Serbia show remarkable differences with the data of EU Member States, where the recorded employment rate of PWDs during the same period was about 50.0% (Official Gazette RS 44/2020).

Data on the economic activity of PWDs in Serbia by age (Figure 1) show that in the most active age group (30-49 years), the percentage of PWDs who are working, have worked or are looking for their first job is about 40.0%, which is significantly lower than the activity rate of the general population of 80.3% in the same age group.

The latest official statistics (Marković, 2016) show that persons with visual impairments have the highest level of economic activity (14.4%), followed by persons with hearing impairments (11.2%). Conversely, persons unable to perform activities of daily living/personal self-care (2.3%) and persons struggling with communication/understanding problems (4.7%) represent the least economically active segment of PWDs in Serbia.

¹ The analysis in this study is based on data from the 2011 Census in the Republic of Serbia, as the results of the latest Census, conducted in October 2022, are still pending.

Figure 1. PWDs in Serbia by economic activity and age groups, 2011 Census

A brief overview of key labour market indicators shows that PWDs in Serbia face significant challenges, namely a remarkable level of inactivity and a considerable unemployment rate. These circumstances result in their social exclusion and exposure to poverty and discrimination. In this context, and in recognition of the importance of digital technologies as the foundation of the digital society, the Serbian government, in cooperation with the civil sector, has taken steps to promote the digital skills and competencies of PWDs. Although unprecedented events such as the Covid-19 pandemic could cause large-scale economic imbalances with long-term consequences (Bodroža & Lazić, 2021), greater reliance on innovation and digital technologies could promote long-term economic growth and resilience (Lazić et al., 2022). A society based on advanced digital solutions puts people at the centre, creating new business opportunities while increasing productivity. Digital technologies are perceived as a driver of the evolving employment structure, not only in terms of existing jobs and roles, but also in creating new markets and types of employment. Moreover, advanced digital solutions have significantly changed labour market placement processes for both traditional and „new“ jobs.

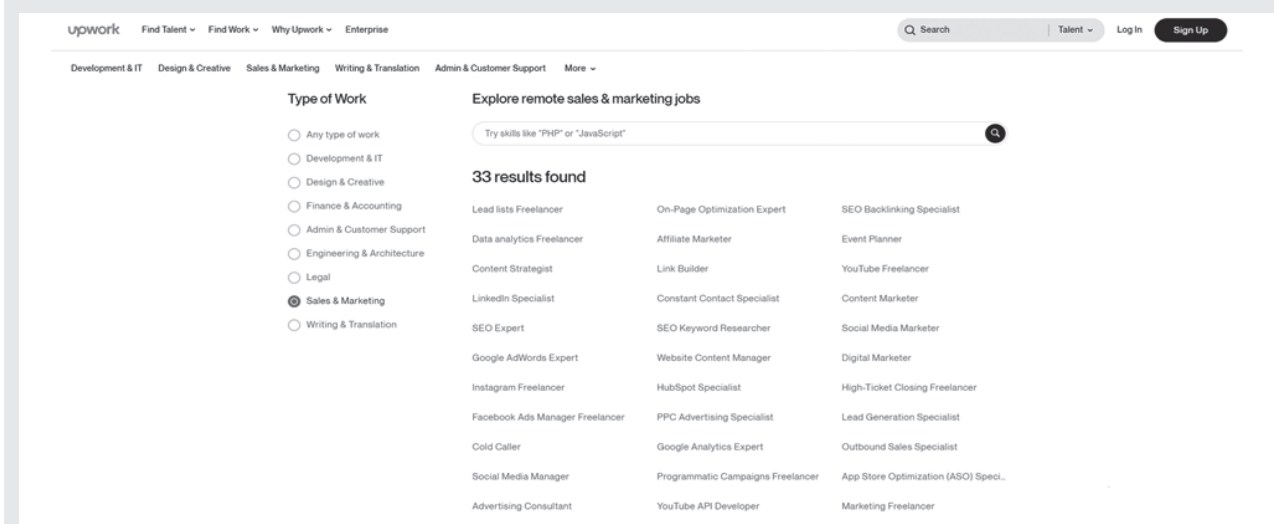
Engagement on digital labour platforms and digital entrepreneurship, as an embodiment of digital transformation, represent newly created employment op-

portunities that offer all social groups nearly equal opportunities to enter the labour market and find sustainable employment. Finally, digital platforms enable entrepreneurs to reach a global customer base and expand their market reach beyond traditional brick-and-mortar shops. This opens up new avenues for growth and revenue generation and creates more opportunities for individuals to thrive in the digital economy.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the requirements of the online labour market and to propose appropriate training and mentoring initiatives for PWDs in Serbia seeking self-employment, a survey of available employment opportunities in the field of digital marketing was conducted on Upwork, one of the most popular freelancing platform. According to Startit (2019), Upwork is the leading platform for freelancers in terms of the daily volume of published job ads, making it the second-largest platform by number of users. From the pool of digital entrepreneurial ventures, digital marketing jobs were singled out as the demand for professionals in this field is increasing with a recorded growth of 29.0% between 2015 and 2020 and a further projected growth of 10.0% by 2025 (General Assembly & Emsi Burning

Figure 2. The classification of marketing and sales job ads on the Upwork platform



Source: <https://www.upwork.com/>

Glass, 2021). Finally, based on the results of previous research (Lazić et al., 2023), it was found that PWDs in Serbia generally consider that they have a satisfactory level of general digital competencies. However, they seem to lack advanced knowledge specifically in the field of digital entrepreneurship. In this context, we analysed job advertisements for positions that require a basic level of competence in digital marketing (i.e. entry-level positions).

For the purposes of this analysis, the methodology employed in the study conducted by McArthur et al. (2017) was applied. Using a search filter, we approached the analysis of job advertisements that were classified into 33 distinct categories (Figure 2).

The content of the available job ads was analysed twice, in April and in May 2022, by accessing the selected freelance platform Upwork. The systematization of required skills for performing tasks in the field of digital marketing was done using keyword groupings based on the frequency of their occurrence. Systematisation of the skills required to perform digital marketing tasks was carried out based on the frequency at which keywords appear. based on the frequency of occurrence of keywords. Jobs for which no positions with an entry-level skill were available and jobs that did not allow work from home were excluded from the classification.

4. RESULTS

In examining 258 digital marketing job postings on the Upwork platform specifically targeting individuals with entry-level digital marketing skills and competencies, several categories of high-demand positions were identified². These categories include lead list freelancers, lead generation specialists, data analysis freelancers, LinkedIn specialists, SEO specialists, Instagram freelancers, Facebook Ads manager freelancers, cold calling professionals, social media managers, advertising consultants, on-page optimization experts, affiliate marketers, link builders, SEO keyword researchers, website content managers, experts in Google analytics, YouTube API developers, digital marketers, sales professionals specializing in premium products and services, and specialists in App Store optimization.

The skills and competencies required for the successful implementation of the vacancies, which were mapped based on the systematisation of available digital marketing jobs on the Upwork platform and the employers' requirements, are as follows:

- Advanced level of work in business computer applications (MS Office, Google Suite);
- Basics of data analysis;

² More detailed information on this may be found in: Lazić, M., Vukmirović, V. & Banović, J. (2022c). Digitalne kompetencije osoba sa invaliditetom u Srbiji i uključivanje u rad na onlajn platformama - DigKompOSI. Beograd: Institut ekonomskih nauka. Available at: https://ien.bg.ac.rs/cms_upload/files/src/digitalne_komptencije_osoba_sa_invaliditetom.pdf.

- Virtual assistant;
- Digital marketing;
- Telemarketing;
- Creation and implementation of marketing strategies;
- SEO basics;
- Writing for the web;
- Entry-level Adobe package for graphic design;
- Development of mobile applications.

PWDs would acquire the digital skills and knowledge needed to perform specific work tasks within specific work profiles and occupations by tailoring the program's content to employers' needs in the online labour market, i.e., by creating customised training. For example, training in business computer applications should be tailored to the job description of an administrative-technical person or a virtual assistant. This would avoid creating staff who have acquired specific skills but do not match them to the job description and cannot apply them in their work.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper highlights the challenges faced by PWDs in terms of their underrepresentation in the labour market, which puts them at a higher risk of poverty and material deprivation. It also emphasizes the potential of digital marketing to bridge this gap by offering opportunities for remote work and broader employment prospects for PWDs.

This paper delves into the implications and significance of these findings:

- **Labor Market Disparities for PWDs:** Persons with disabilities constitute a substantial minority globally, yet they face considerable obstacles in securing meaningful employment. This group often encounters discrimination, lack of accessibility, and limited opportunities in the traditional labour market. The data provided underscores the urgent need for addressing these disparities and promoting equal access to employment.
- **Digital Marketing as a Solution:** The text rightly suggests that digital marketing can be a viable avenue for empowering PWDs in the workforce. The flexibility of remote work and the diverse nature of digital marketing roles allow PWDs to leverage their skills and talents effectively. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this potential can only be fully realized by implementing the proper support and accessibility measures.

- **The Role of Training and Mentorship:** To harness the potential of digital marketing for PWDs, the text highlights the importance of tailored training programs and mentoring initiatives. These initiatives must align with the specific demands of the online labour market, as identified by examining job postings on platforms like Upwork. By offering customized training that matches the skills needed for particular job profiles, PWDs can acquire the necessary expertise to excel in their chosen fields.
- **Skill Customization for Job Relevance:** An essential aspect of adequate training for PWDs is customizing skills to match job descriptions accurately. The text aptly points out that simply acquiring skills is insufficient; they must be applied within specific work contexts. Customized training ensures that PWDs have skills and understand how to use them effectively in digital marketing.

In conclusion, this paper sheds light on the pressing issue of the underrepresentation of persons with disabilities in the labour market and their increased vulnerability to poverty. It highlights digital marketing as a promising avenue for improving their economic empowerment and social inclusion. However, realizing this potential requires the development of tailored training programs and mentorship initiatives that align with the demands of the digital labour market.

The identification of high-demand positions in digital marketing, as well as the delineation of essential skills and competencies, serves as a valuable resource for guiding the design of training programs. By customizing these programs to specific job profiles and occupations within digital marketing, PWDs can acquire the skills necessary to thrive in this sector.

Ultimately, the findings presented in this paper offer a pathway toward reducing employment disparities for PWDs in Serbia and serve as a model for promoting inclusivity and economic empowerment in the broader context. By fostering an environment that values diversity and provides equal opportunities, society can ensure that PWDs are not left behind in the rapidly evolving digital economy.

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Apstrakt

Digitalni marketing kao alat za inkluzivno zapošljavanje

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Osobe sa invaliditetom predstavljaju najveću svetsku manjinu koja je i dalje neadekvatno zastupljena na tržištu rada, usled čega je izložena većem riziku od siromaštva i materijalne deprivacije. Digitalni marketing ima potencijal da smanji ovaj jaz time što omogućava osobama sa invaliditetom da se uključe u rad na daljinu čime se povećava broj raspoloživih mogućnosti za njihovo zaposlenje. Uz odgovarajuće mere podrške, osobe sa invaliditetom mogu da se podstaknu da razviju veštine i talente iz oblasti digitalnog marketinga čija bi upotreba doprinela njihovom ekonomskom osnaživanju i socijalnoj inkluziji. Polazeći od činjenice da platformski rad predstavlja prihvaćenu radnu praksu u Srbiji, ovaj rad predstavlja pilot studiju usmerenu na sticanje uvida u zahteve digitalnog tržišta rada sa

fokusom na digitalni marketing. U tu svrhu, analizirani su zahtevi marketinških pozicija sa početnim nivoom kompetencija koje su oglašene na jednoj od najpopularnijih *freelance* platformi – *Upwork*. Osnovni cilj analize je da pruži preporuke za razvoj programa obuke i mentorskih inicijativa prilagođenih osobama sa invaliditetom u Srbiji, a dizajniranih sa namerom da podstaknu njihovo samozaposlenje i doprinesu rastu mogućnosti za generisanje dodatnih prihoda.

Ključne reči: *digitalni marketing, digitalne marketinške kompetencije, onlajn platforme za rad, inkluzivno zaposlenje, osobe sa invaliditetom*

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