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SPECIFICS OF FORMING FREELANCER'S SELF-BRAND ON UPWORK AND LINKEDIN. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

СПЕЦИФІКА ФОРМУВАННЯ ОСОБИСТОГО БРЕНДУ ФРИЛАНСЕРА НА ПЛАТФОРМІ «UPWORK» ТА В СОЦМЕРЕЖІ «LINKEDIN»: КОМПАРАТИВНИЙ АНАЛІЗ

This article discusses the specifics of forming a freelancer's personal brand on two popular platforms — Upwork and LinkedIn. Comparing approaches to creating and maintaining a personal brand on these platforms allows you to understand their uniqueness and potential for developing a professional image. The article examines the main steps needed to successfully build a freelancer brand on each of the platforms, taking into account their differences in audience and functionality. Strategies for building a profile, studying and attracting the target audience, as well as tools for Building Authority and effective communication with customers are analyzed. Creating profiles on freelance platforms is the first step in building a personal brand. On Upwork, it is important to fill out your profile with information about your skills, work experience, and project portfolio. You should also add detailed information about your professional activities, education, skills, and experience to LinkedIn.

A successful freelancer needs to understand their target audience — who they are, what problems they have, and how you can help them solve those problems. Based on this information, you can customize your profiles and job offers to attract the attention of this particular audience.

On Upwork, personal brand building is more focused on completing projects and getting positive feedback, while LinkedIn focuses on a professional profile and a network of contacts that helps attract new customers and potential partners.

Building a personal brand on freelance platforms is a complex yet very important process for any freelancer. With the right strategy, a unique approach to presenting your skills and services, and responsibility for getting the job done, you can become a recognizable and successful specialist in your field on platforms like Upwork and LinkedIn.

This article will be a useful source of information for freelancers who want to stand out on these platforms and build a successful career in online work.

Keywords: personal brand, freelancer brand, freelancer professional and personal traits, Upwork platform and LinkedIn social network

У статті розглянуто специфічні можливості для формування особистого бренду фрилансера на платформі з пошуку роботи «Upwork» та в соцмережі з налагодження професійних контактів «LinkedIn». Мета роботи полягає в порівняльному аналізі специфіки формування селф-бренду віддаленого фахівця на вказаних інтернет-ресурсах.

У роботі з'ясовано, що персональний бренд фрилансера є важливим засобом його позиціонування в сучасному конкурентному середовищі. Під селф-брендингом віддаленого фахівця розуміємо унікальну комбінацію професійної придатності, особистих цінностей та іміджу, що вирізняє фрилансера з-поміж конкурентів та робить його образ привабливим для потенційних клієнтів. Серед особистих та професійних рис, які впливають на формування позитивного іміджу, виокремлено: самодисципліну, організованість, комунікабельність, креативність, високий рівень мотивації, відповідальність, наявність управлінських навичок тощо. Акцентовано також на тому, що в еру цифрових технологій найбільш доцільно просувати власний бренд на онлайн-майданчиках. У дослідженні здійснено компаративний аналіз можливостей для створення й просування особистого бренду фрилансера на платформі «Upwork» та в соцмережі «LinkedIn». З'ясовано, що на «Upwork» формування особистого бренду більше зосереджене на виконанні проектів та отриманні позитивних відгуків, тоді як на «LinkedIn» акцент зроблений на професійному профілі та мережі контактів. Кожен із цих ресурсів має свої особливості, а тому розуміння їхньої унікальності допоможе віддаленим фахівцям ефективніше просувати власний бренд для пошуку клієнтів. Перспективи подальшого вивчення вбачаємо в докладному вивченні PR-інструментів для формування та просування особистого бренду фахівця на різних офлайн- та онлайн-платформах з пошуку роботи.

Ключові слова: особистий бренд, професійний бренд, бренд фрилансера, професійні та особисті риси фрилансера, платформа «Upwork» та соцмережа «LinkedIn».

Introduction. In the modern world, freelancing is becoming an increasingly popular type of employment. Nowadays, there are plenty of different online platforms for searching remote work. Particularly noteworthy are such popular resources as Upwork and LinkedIn, which provide ample opportunities for freelancers to demonstrate their professional skills, since a strong presentation of oneself as a specialist plays a key role in attracting clients, and therefore building your personal brand through a variety of tools becomes a key element for success. «Promotion of a person who creates a personal brand, in the general context, is a purposeful activity aimed at shaping the individual brand's own values and experience and effectively and fully communicating them to the target audience through strategic planning and the use of psychological, communication and marketing tools in order to establish loyal and active relations between the personal brand and its audience, as well as to increase the awareness of the personal brand in society» [9, p. 125].

As digitalization is on the rise, many professionals are developing a personal brand to promote their services using modern digital technologies. Various websites create favorable conditions for this (they do not require significant financial costs, neither any special intermediaries, needed to promote the content, have high conversion rates, etc.) Among the differences between online and offline communication for brand building, V. Stradiuk mentioned: «the absence of geographical barriers and obstacles for the growth of the target audience, time limitations for interaction with it, the tendency for a constant increase in the number of people who are loyal to the brand, etc» [9, p. 125].

Study of the particulars of building a remote specialist's brand on such Internet resources as Upwork and LinkedIn in today's competitive environment is of utmost relevance. Firstly, the freelance market has expanded significantly in recent years, especially the growing popularity of job search platforms, and therefore the potential for effective promotion of one's own brand among competitors remains high. Secondly, there have been significant changes in consumer behavior. Thanks to the development of global social media, consumers are now actively searching for goods and services online, and therefore an attractive personal brand of a freelancer can be a key factor when it comes to engaging clients. Thirdly, the uniqueness of the freelancer's brand, which makes them stand out from the competition, will help them to stand out from the crowd. Fourthly, in a highly competitive environment, there is a growing demand for narrowing

one's field of expertise and increasing one's expertise in it, which is why an effective brand strategy can be of great use in this process. Fifthly, there has been a recent trend towards an increased focus on the self-specialist. In many cases, clients are looking not only for skills, but also for individuals with whom they can establish meaningful working contact.

The analysis of scientific literature on the subject showed that the concept of brand identity was suggested in 1986 by J.-N. Kapferer. In 1995, it became the main topic of D. Aaker's second book «Creating Strong Brands» (in D. Aaker's first book *Managing brand equity* (1991), the term «brand identity» was missing) [8, p. 338]. Specifically, D. Aaker suggested a model according to which brand characteristics are studied at 2 levels with 12 items grouped into 4 areas: brand as a product, brand as an organization, brand as a personality, and brand as a symbol [8, p. 338]. A. Wheeler outlined the key requirements for a well-designed system and brand characteristics [8, p. 338–339], and J.-N. Kapferer defined the main questions for defining brand identity [8, p. 338–340].

Different branding models were also analyzed by: T. Ged «4D-branding,» A. Ellwood «Brand DNA,» L. de Cernatoni «Brand Triangle. Particularly, brand marketing professor L. de Cernatoni suggested a model of brand identity consisting of five elements: 1) brand attributes; 2) benefits; 3) emotional reward; 4) values; 5) personal qualities [8, p. 340].

Most researchers study the brand from the perspective of creating a positive image and its presentation. Marketing experts admit that self-branding within the knowledge domain is a self-selling tool for achieving self-fulfillment in a context where entrepreneurship is the primary ideological position, yet this thesis is criticized by S. Öberg, who considers it «a clear form of labor in post-Fordist capitalism» («Clear form of labor in post-Fordist capitalism») [14]. Ukrainian scientists O. Amosov, N. Didenko and K. Lebedeva characterized branding as a basic tool of marketing communications, which is one of the ways to increase competitiveness, allowing a company to express its individuality» [1, p.11].

The phenomenon of self-branding in its various forms has also been the subject of scientific research. Thus, N. Ilyashenko considered self-brand «as one of effective tools for business promotion» [4]. T. Hyrina and V. Khlyust analyzed the self-branding of a modern media specialist in the framework of digital reality. O. Fedorenko and E. Kapitan studied self-branding as a means of positioning a TV journalist [11], and V. Stratyuk investigated models of creating a personal brand of the company's HR director on the

Internet [8; 9]. However, self-branding in the context of job search is not adequately studied in the context of modern socialization processes. The specifics of forming a freelancer's personal brand on the job search platform Upwork and LinkedIn have not yet been the subject of in-depth scientific study. Therefore, there is a need to determine the peculiarities of creating a freelancer's personal brand using a variety of tools for online platforms. The objective of our study is to make a comparative analysis of the specifics of forming a remote specialist's self-brand on the above-mentioned Internet resources.

Methods of research. A complex approach to the selection of research methods (monitoring, description, comparison, generalization and systematization, etc.) was determined by the nature of study. The monitoring method as a regular observation allowed us to track the characteristics, functionality, and possible applications of Upwork and LinkedIn, while the descriptive method made it possible to characterize them. The comparative method helped us to find out the similarities and differences between these job search resources in terms of creating a freelancer's personal brand. Systematization and generalization methods were applied at the final stage.

Results of the study. In the modern digital world, where Internet provides endless opportunities for self-realization and professional growth, building a personal brand is becoming a key component for freelancers' success. Such networking resources as Upwork and LinkedIn provide unique opportunities for professionals to build up their self-image and attract clients. Building a freelancer's personal brand requires consistent work and commitment, as the path to a successful career is about showing off your expertise, adhering to high standards of professional conduct, and actively engaging with your audience.

Thus, before analyzing the potential opportunities of Upwork and LinkedIn for creating freelancer's personal brand, it is worth to briefly outline the essence of the concept of «personal brand». According to A. Hrytsenko, «it's not just a recognizable name, a unique style and a million subscribers on social media, but first and foremost, these are the associations and emotions that a person evokes in people — in virtual and real life» [3]. The authors of monograph «The Development of E-Logistics in the Global Information Economy» define a personal brand as «a comprehensive answer to the question of self-realization. Anything can become a brand: political views, reputation, social connections. In order to exert influence online or offline, you don't have to appear on dubious

TV shows or sacrifice your reputation by being involved in scandals. What we know for sure is that not only SMM specialists and bloggers need a personal brand» [5]. According to O. Fedorenko and E. Kapitan, self-branding is the creation of one's own unique image, self-image, and presentation of oneself [11, p. 81].

The most accurate definition of a personal brand, in our opinion, belongs to Amazon founder D. Bezos: «A personal brand is what people say about you when you are not in the room.» The most important thing about personal branding is the ability to make an impact on these conversations. When publishing your next post on social media or communicating with people at an offline event, ask yourself more often: «What do I want people to say about me when I go out?» [13]. We use the above interpretation of self-brand as a base for our research.

In the realm of freelancing, we believe that a personal brand is a unique combination of your professional credentials, personal values, and image that distinguishes you from other professionals and makes you attractive to potential clients. The following characteristic plays a crucial role in creating a personal brand for a remote specialist: self-discipline (freelancers have to work without direct supervision of a manager, thus it is essential to be able to plan a working day independently and stick to the schedule); efficiency (a successful freelancer should be able to manage their time, projects and documentation effectively); communication skills (the ability to communicate effectively with clients, understand their requirements and take into account their wishes is an important part of success in freelancing); creativity (freelancers often have to solve non-trivial problems and find creative ways to solve them); self-motivation (without constant inspiration and self-motivation, freelancers may find it challenging to perform at a high level); responsibility (freelancers have to be responsible for their actions and fulfill obligations to clients); management skills (the ability to manage finances, project management and other aspects of self-employment are crucial for a successful freelancer). etc. Furthermore, it is essential for a remote specialist to be able to work remotely, communicate via social media, email, chats, or video conferencing; to arrange a cozy and productive workplace at home or in the office; to independently manage working time and separate it from leisure time, setting priorities correctly; to keep a clear schedule and meet deadlines; despite the absence of physical supervision; be able to effectively collaborate with other remote team members, collaborating on projects, distributing tasks, scheduling and

executing them step by step without reminders. The above characteristics will help you achieve success in your career, but in order for a freelancer to be competitive in today's challenging environment, he or she must build up an impressive self-image and successfully position themselves on the modern information market.

In the digital era, personal brand management is becoming more relevant than ever thanks to the growth of social media, you can find information about each specialist just in a few clicks. You can also publish a story about yourself, share photos of your work or the results of cooperation with companies. It is very important to choose where, how, and what to communicate to potential customers. Online job search platforms help to do this. Creating profiles on these resources is the first step in building up your personal brand. Promoting your self-brand on work platforms not only allows you to find a new job or successfully sell your services, but also helps you to distinguish yourself from competitors and attract the attention of potential clients. Such self-promotion is especially effective when you are only starting your career.

According to *Freelance Exchange 2023*, one of the most popular freelance platforms in the world is Upwork [10], which offers a wide range of job search services and is easy to use for beginners. It has a database of approximately one and a half million customers, which allows a remote specialist from almost any industry to find an order for themselves. Freelancers on Upwork can set their own rates for their services, although the pricing control depends on a specific project. The platform recently launched a premium account for top-tier freelancers. One of the drawbacks of this marketplace is the large number of specialists from India offering cheap and low-quality services, which generally affects the outflow of serious clients and, obviously, freelance professionals.

Apart from work-platforms, there are also social networks for professional communication and work. LinkedIn, a social network created in early 2000s aimed at bringing together potential employees and good jobs in one place, stands out as the most popular one. It is the world's largest online network of professional contacts, available in 20 languages and having around 850 million registered users representing 150 industries and 200 countries. Its primary goal is to promote professional communication, create a professional brand, and help people find jobs. This social network allows users to create their profile in such a way that they can build up professional relationships with employers and experts in their respective

industries. These opportunities will soon become available to freelancers as well, since the advantage in hiring a specialist will be determined not solely based on the candidates' experience, but on their profiles. Therefore, it is essential to understand the job search opportunities on LinkedIn right now, and further expand networking activities, accept requests from users and update one's profile [12].

Although the above-mentioned resources are of different types (Upwork is a job search platform, while LinkedIn is a social network for establishing professional contacts), they share a common goal: help professionals sell their services and let clients choose them. Therefore, we carried out a comparative analysis of these resources in terms of potential opportunities for building up a freelancer's personal brand according to 14 criteria we set (as of April 1, 2024). Its results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Comparative characteristics of opportunities for building up a personal brand on Upwork and LinkedIn (as of April 1, 2024)

Criteria	«Upwork»	«LinkedIn»
Type of platform	Online freelancing and job search marketplace	Social network for professional communication and work
Established	2013	2002
Number of users	5 million clients, 18 million freelancers	850 million users
Main goal	Connecting freelancers and employers to complete projects	Supporting professional communication, creating a professional brand, job search
Geographical focus	Global reach, focus on English-speaking countries	Global platform with a focus on regional markets and languages
Job categories	a wide range of jobs (programming, design, writing, marketing, etc.)	various industries, ranging from IT and business to arts
Type of contracts	Freelance, short-term and long-term work	Full-time, temporary work, consultations, internships
Way of earnings	Per hour/project	Salary, consultations, paid services for job search
Evaluation system	Ranking and feedback from customers, skills testing	Recommendations, feedback, training, skills validation

User profile	Freelancers and employers	Individual professionals, companies, educational institutions
Communication	Internal messaging system, video conferencing	Mail, chat, comments, feedback, video communication
Job/cooperation search	Active project search, filters, recommendations	Job search, networking, recommendations
Presence of business	More targeted at independent freelancers and small companies	Large corporations, small and medium-sized enterprises, freelancers
Pricing policy	Transaction fees (10% at the initial stage) and paid plans	Free basic plan, paid options (LinkedIn Premium) for advanced access and recruiting

A comparative analysis based on the criteria presented in the table showed that the development of a freelancer's personal brand on these resources varies due to the specific nature of these services and the audience that interacts with them. Thus, freelancers create a profile on Upwork where they demonstrate their skills, experience, education, and other relevant data (which is why it is essential to have a high-quality portfolio with projects and client feedback. The best way to build up your reputation on this resource is to complete projects on time and efficiently, in other words, to meet deadlines. Positive reviews and high ratings will help you attract more clients. It is also essential to communicate professionally with potential and current clients to create a positive impression of your work and personality. So, it's important to take care of your reputation, do a good job, and be active on the platform.

Instead, a freelancer creates a professional profile on LinkedIn, where he/she details their experience, skills, education, and publishes content showcasing their expertise. This resource allows you to build up a network of contacts with experts in your field, which may lead to new opportunities and projects. Freelancers can share their experience, advice, success, etc. This helps to increase its credibility and expertise. Additionally, active participation in groups and discussions may help increase visibility and reputation.

While it is important to fill out an Upwork profile with information about your skills, work experience, and project portfolio, LinkedIn requires detailed information about your education, professional activities, skills, and experience. Upwork brings together freelancers and companies looking

for services in various fields (web development, design, translation, marketing, administrative support, etc.). Users can create profiles here as freelancers or clients, post jobs, bid on projects, and manage communication and payment through the platform [6]. Upwork offers various payment options, including fixed-price and hourly rates for completing a specific job. It also provides security and protection tools for both parties: payment security systems, rating systems, reviews, etc. and allows users to search for work opportunities remotely, extending the geography of searching for specialists or customers outside their location [6].

«LinkedIn, as a professional social network, connects professionals in various industries, businesses and recruiters, and allows users to create profiles where they can post their resumes, work experience, education, skills and achievements» [12]. Users can create a detailed profile which serves as a virtual resume, and later add information about their education, work experience, skills, and achievements. LinkedIn also allows users to establish connections with colleagues, former colleagues, job candidates, company representatives and other professionals, as LinkedIn is mainly a network that can be used for job search, recruitment, networking and professional information exchange. Users can read news related to their industry, articles and publications posted by other users, as well as publish their own content for professional discussion and distribution. In terms of recruiting, many companies use LinkedIn to search for and recruit talented candidates to fill their positions, and recruiters can use the platform to post job openings, find potential candidates, and connect with them. LinkedIn also provides ample educational opportunities (links to various online courses and training materials), which is an incredibly important argument in terms of professional development, expanding business connections and finding career opportunities [14].

Freelancers working on both of these resources should have a clear understanding of profile and needs of their target audience and, based on this information, customize their profiles and job offers. Another important aspect is not only to attract the attention of clients and establish sustainable relationships with them, but also to maintain this communication at a high professional level. This can be either problem-solving advice or the provision of quality services pursuant to the terms of the contract. Style and image also play a key role in creating a personal brand. An appropriate professional photo on social media, a clear presentation of one's expertise and profile, also adds to the competitive edge.

Thus, building up a personal brand on Upwork is more oriented towards completing projects and receiving a positive feedback, while on LinkedIn, the focus is on a professional profile and a network of contacts which helps to bring new clients and potential partners. Analysis of UpWork platform demonstrates its trustworthiness, proven by many years of system development, although it should be noted that the platform itself is intended for experienced freelancers with extensive experience in this field. For an inexperienced user, it will be rather difficult to navigate all the intricacies and specifications of the system.

Summary. The study found that the personal brand of a freelancer is one of the key tools for positioning him/her in the modern competitive environment. Self-branding of a remote specialist is interpreted as a unique combination of professional aptitude, personal values and self-image which distinguishes a freelancer from competitors and makes his or her image attractive to potential clients. Among personal and professional traits contributing to the formation of a positive self-image we highlighted: self-discipline, organization, communication skills, creativity, high level of motivation, responsibility and management skills. A comparative analysis of the opportunities for creating and promoting a freelancer's personal brand on Upwork and LinkedIn showed that building up a self-brand on Upwork is more about completing projects and receiving a positive feedback, while on LinkedIn the focus is on a professional profile and establishing a network of contacts. Each of these resources have their own unique features, so understanding their distinctiveness will help remote professionals promote their brand more efficiently to find clients.

Thus, building up a personal brand is a complex yet important process for any professional, especially a freelancer. Having the right strategy, a unique approach to presenting your skills and services, and being responsible in your work, you can become a well-known and successful specialist in your field. We see the perspectives for further research in a detailed study of PR tools for the formation and promotion of a specialist's personal brand on various offline and online job search platforms.

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