

Cracking the Job Platform Code

ASSESSING CANDIDATES' SKILLS FOR
ONLINE JOB SEARCH

Understanding and Addressing Digital Inequalities
(November 20-21, 2025)

Ellen Helsper, London School of Economics and Political Science
Stefano De Marco, Universidad de Salamanca
Guillaume Dumont, EMLYON Business School
Mirko Antino, Universidad Complutense de Madrid

ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET HAS CHANGED

Digital platforms have transformed employer-applicant relationships, increasing job offer visibility and candidate volumes while limiting direct contact (McDonald et al., 2019).

Lower-qualified job seekers:

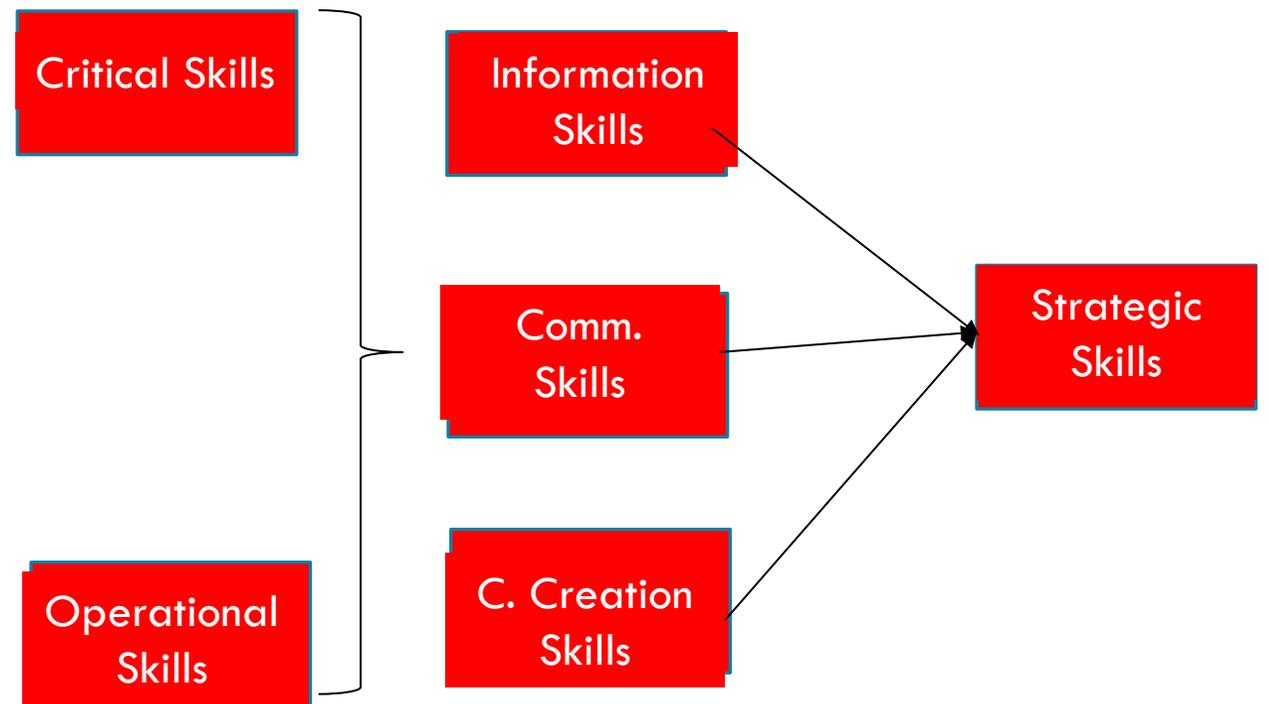
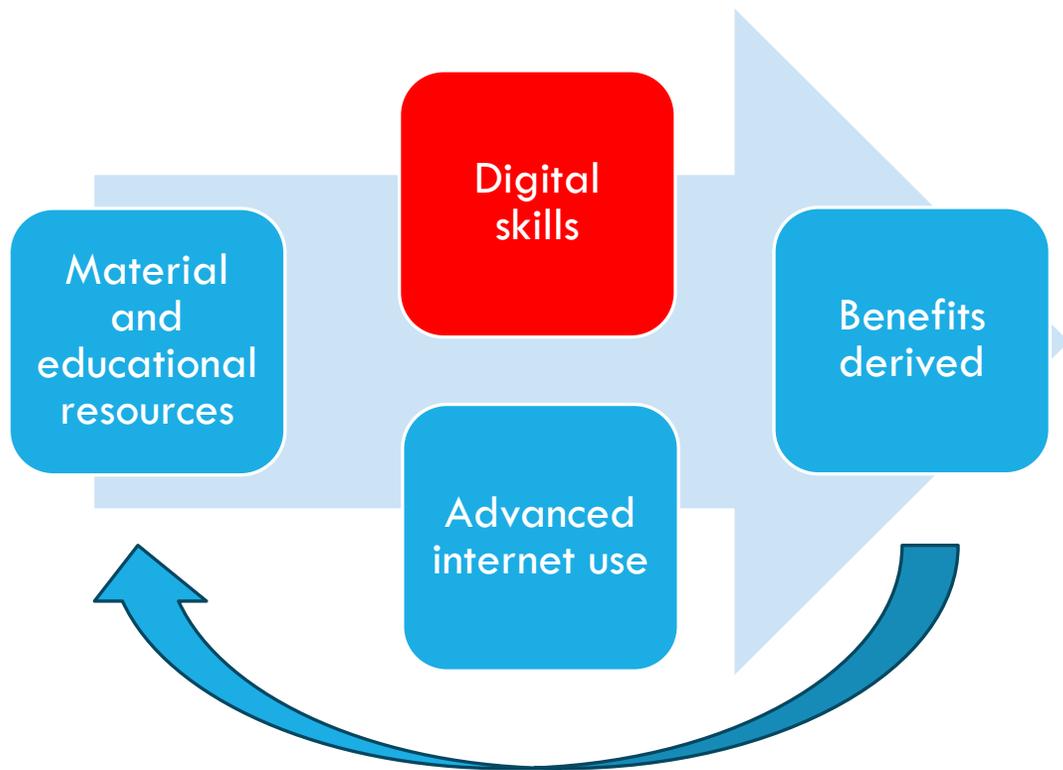
- face not only fierce **competition**,
- **lack understanding** of how these platforms work and get **frustrated** with opacity in recruitment processes (Dumont et al., 2023; Dillahunt et al., 2018).
- **struggle** to make their **applications visible** and suffer job search **burnout** (De Marco et al., 2023; Wheeler and Dillahunt, 2018).

Candidates with better **online job search skills seem to have advantages** in securing employment (Coverdell and Finlay, 2017; Karaoglu, Hargittai, and Nguyen, 2021; Dumont et al., 2023; De Marco et al., 2023).

How to **identify and measure these skills** is unclear, limiting our understanding of digital inequalities in labour markets (Smythe, Grotlüschen & Buddeberg, 2021).

THEORETICAL FRAMING

Digital inequality → digital skills are unequally distributed amongst the population and have an effect on tangible outcomes of internet use (i.e. benefits)

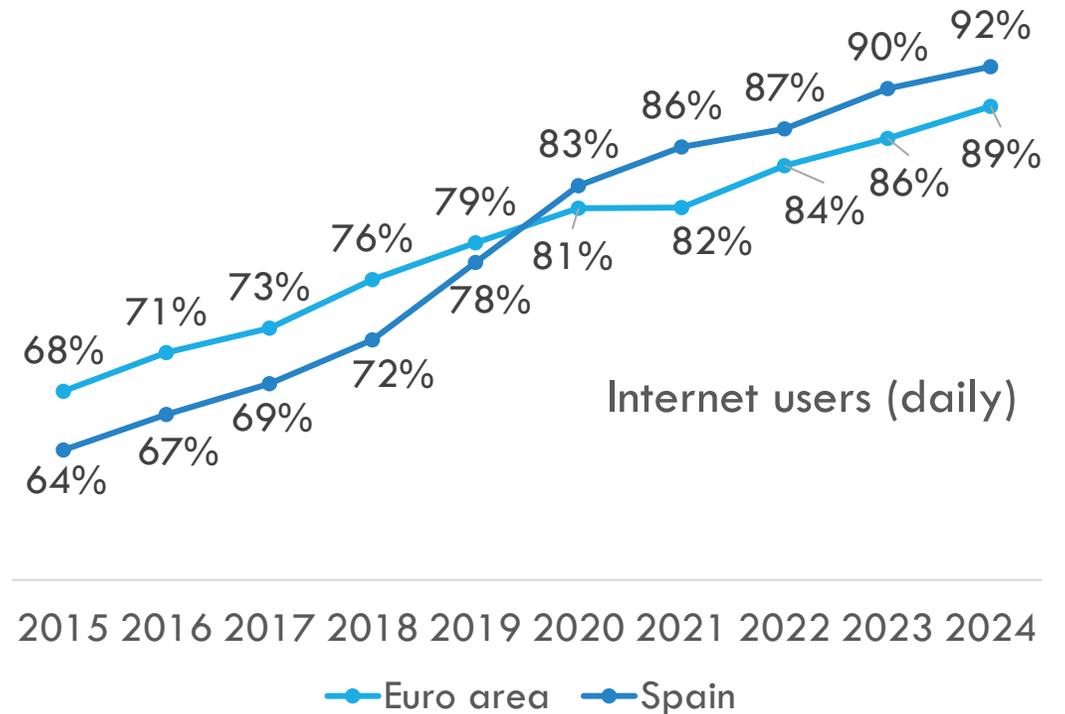
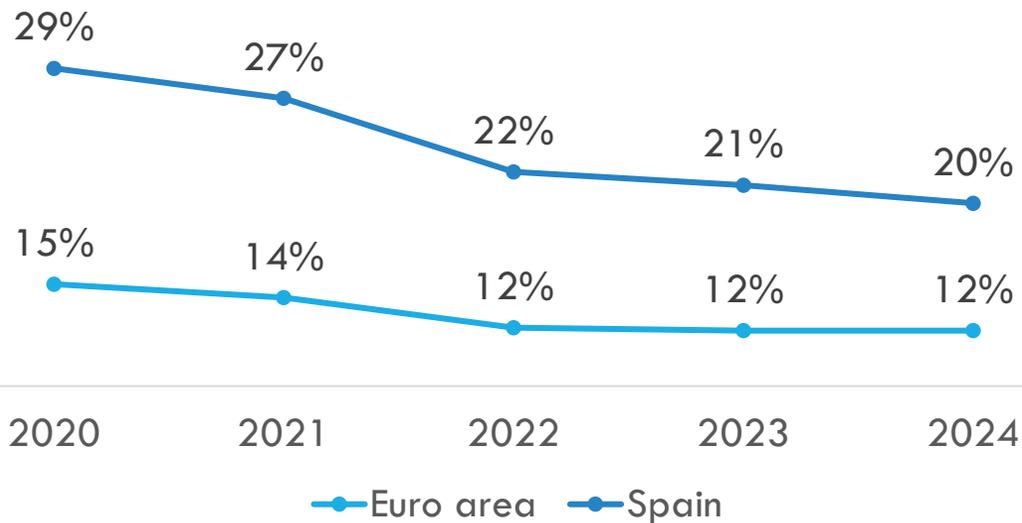


(Van Dijk, 2020, Helsper, et al 2021)

RESEARCH SETTING: THE SPANISH LABOR MARKET

1. High youth unemployment rate
2. Recent narrowing of first level digital divide
3. High popularity of SNS labor intermediary (e.g., InfoJobs, LinkedIn).

Youth unemployment



METHODS AND DATA

86 semi-structured interviews with **recruiters** and **job seekers** (high skilled/low skilled)

RECRUITERS			
Profile 1	n	Profile 2	n
Target: highly qualified	15	Target: middle or low-qualified workers.	20

What helps candidates gain visibility in SNS market intermediaries?

How do candidates use these skills?

JOB SEEKERS							
Profile 1	n	Profile 2	n	Profile 3	n	Profile 4	n
Middle/high educational attainment and limited work experience.	13	Middle/high educational attainment and extensive work experience	18	Low educational attainment and limited work experience	13	Low educational attainment and extensive work experience	7

Use of SNS market intermediaries and experience of searching and securing jobs?

RESULTS: INTERNAL VALIDITY

After semi-structured interviews (11 items)		After pilot survey and cognitive interviews (7 items)
Item 1	Ask friends and family for recommendations.	(factor loading)
Item 2	Ask people who can judge my employment potential for recommendations.	0.71
Item 3	Send an application late in the morning	
Item 4	Send an application early in the morning	0.61
Item 5	Check that I use the same terms or key words that companies use when announcing job vacancies that I am interested in a work search. How often have you done these things in the last six months?	0.76
Item 6	Include/change how I explain what my skills are in my profile. * Explain what my skills are in my profile. [Reply options: 1 Never, 2 A couple of times, 3 Every month, 4 Weekly, 5 Daily, 66 I don't remember, 99 I don't understand the question]	0.84
Item 7	Update/change how I describe the jobs that I have had.	
Item 8	Update/change the way I describe the duties I have carried out. * Describe the duties I have carried out.	0.87
Item 9	Include the most used keywords from job adverts to describe my profile/CV. * Use the same keywords that are used in the job announcements to describe my profile/CV.	0.85
Item 10	Upload information to my public profile about events or items of professional relevance to show my experience.	0.85
Item 11	Publish updates (news, blog entries, comments, etc.) on my public profile on the online job search platforms.	

RESULTS: EXTERNAL VALIDITY

Correlation between job search scale and validated “Internet Skills Scale” (Van Deursen, et al 2016; Helsper et al, 2021).

12 items from the ISS to measure operational skills, content creation, information, and interaction skills ($M=49.38$; $DT=7.04$) .

A **significant positive correlation** between the two types of skills ($r^2=0.30$), providing evidence for validity but also distinctiveness of the online job search skills scale.



KEY INSIGHTS:

- **Online Job Search skills** (measured on a seven-item scale with a single-factor structure and high internal and external validity) are **related to but distinct from other types of digital skills**
- Online job search skills are related to higher levels of educational attainment and general digital competence.
- Online job search skills more prevalent among younger individuals
- More efficient and strategic online job search practices
 - > greater visibility for job applications
 - > more likely to secure a job
- Amplification of third-level digital inequalities
 - > most advantaged are most successful online job seekers

