




Social media role in addressing employability challenges of graduates: An expert opinion analysis

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Dates:

Received: 14 July 2022
 Accepted: 01 Dec. 2022
 Published: 28 Apr. 2023

How to cite this article:

Murire, O., Cilliers, L. & Chinyamurindi, W.T., (2023). Social media role in addressing employability challenges of graduates: An expert opinion analysis. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 21(0), a2047. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v21i0.2047>

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Orientation: South Africa is currently going through a graduate unemployment challenge. Calls exist for research that addresses this challenge.

Research purpose: This research study aimed to establish social media tools' role in addressing employability challenges faced by graduates after completing their tertiary education.

Motivation for the study: Calls exist in the literature for nuanced ways of addressing challenges youths face after completing their studies. The role of social media in this remains an area of inquiry with noted importance.

Research approach/design and method: The study utilised an interpretivist philosophy relying on a qualitative research approach using interview data with a sample of 15 experts within the human resources field. Thematic analysis was used as a means of data analysis.

Main findings: Two primary outcomes emerged from the research study. Firstly, a need exists for unemployed graduates to use social media as a marketing utility for their skills and abilities. Secondly, social media can also be used as an information utility to enhance awareness about labour market issues.

Practical/managerial implications: The findings offer insights into addressing the employability challenges faced by graduates when seeking employment opportunities. The role of social media in mitigating graduate challenges is proposed. Through the findings, graduates have the potential to enhance their portfolios to improve their integration into the labour market.

Contribution/value add: The study proffers insights into how social media helps increase the employability prospects of graduates entering the job market.

Keywords: Social media; graduates; youth; human resource management; higher education; youth unemployment.

Introduction

The global youth unemployment rate is 14.9%, whereas in Africa, the rate is 12.7% (Statistics South Africa, 2022). South Africa is currently facing a challenge, especially youth unemployment. Despite a drop of 34.5% in the first quarter of 2022 from 35.3%, challenges still exist (Statistics South Africa, 2021b). Statistics reveal that 31% of graduates under the age of 24 are not working in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2021a). The majority of these are graduates (Bangani, 2019). Studies reveal some reasons for this high state of unemployment. Saliiently, these can be reduced to (1) a lack of skills that enhance employability; (2) the qualification type attained, including the field of study; (3) the superiority of the tertiary education acquired based on the institution; (4) higher prospects from graduates; (5) a lack of knowledge about the employment hunt and limited work experience (Chiwara et al., 2017; Harry et al., 2018; Mseleku, 2019).

Proviso graduate joblessness rates continue growing, resulting in continued idleness, poverty and frustration among the graduates (Graham & De Lannoy, 2016). This is exacerbated by the growing number of graduates exiting the tertiary sector (Harry & Chinyamurindi, 2020; Rogan & Reynolds, 2016). There is a need for strategies that enhance the integration of the unemployed, especially graduates, into the labour market (Harry & Chinyamurindi, 2019). This can be in the form of tools

such as technology that remain popular, especially among young people in countries like South Africa.

There is a noted growing popularity of smartphone usage amongst students (Shava et al., 2016). Popular sites amongst students include Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, all for communication purposes (Cilliers et al., 2017; Shava et al., 2016). Changqing et al. (2016) pointed out that graduates are the most active mobile phone operators as they utilise text messaging and the Internet. Robinson (2011) proclaimed that with the receipt of mobile communication among young adults, there is a perception of social media use to increase youth employability in South Africa. Technology is a practical tool to help youth to search for employment and thereby increase the employability of graduates from tertiary education in South Africa (Albal, 2018; Benson et al., 2014). Technology plays a pivotal role in displaying skills required by employers and thus has the potential to increase graduate transition into the labour markets (Benson et al., 2014; Tanser, 2017).

Social media has been identified as a solution to employment challenges faced by graduates. Students actively use social media for personal reasons (Beavon, 2019; Garcia, 2011). Joosten (2012, p. 4) defined social media as 'different methods of electronic communication employed by (employers; recruitment companies as well as graduates) to build online communities so that information, ideas as well as other content can be shared'. Changqing et al. (2016, p. 3) described social media as 'websites and applications that allow end-users (graduates, managers and people) to make a profile, facilitating collaboration and sharing of information in the virtual social world'. Tess (2013) added that social media transforms how youth converse and cooperate. Conversely, there are concerns associated with social media use by graduates. These take in online security concerns, the cost of data and the social media experience. Therefore, graduates have scant knowledge necessary to effectively use social media as an employability tool (Albal, 2018). This study aimed to establish the role of social media in addressing the employability challenges graduates face.

The article discusses the literature review and is then followed by a discussion of the methodology applied in the study. This is followed by a section which presents the study results and after that, a discussion of the findings. Lastly, the paper presents the study's limitations and the conclusion. The following section presents the underpinning literature.

Literature review

Theoretical lens

The study has employed two theoretical frameworks. Firstly, the CareerEDGE framework defines the concepts that influence the employability of the youth cohort. The power of CareerEDGE rests on its effortlessness because it can be explained to graduates with ease (Dacre Pool & Qualter, 2013). On the other hand, this strength could also be observed as a flaw in that it does not help in clarifying to nonexperts in the field, mainly the youth themselves and their parents,

precisely what employability means. The CareerEDGE model offers information on what should be considered when developing programmes and interventions on employability. Moreover, the CareerEDGE model is critical in knowledge transfer activities among the youth cohort (Dacre Pool, 2020). The CareerEDGE model has been used in several articles on employability within a South African context (Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010; Harry et al., 2018).

A second theoretical model is the social media integration model (SMIM). Garcia (2011) alluded that social media integration is an interactive process. It facilitates information exchange among employees and graduates. It creates long-lasting communication and enhances graduate-employer interaction. The SMIM has been used in various studies (Roučkova, 2015; Valos et al., 2016; Webb & Roberts, 2016). The SMIM was used in the business setting to examine how small organisations are communicating externally with their customers and clients, using social media to connect with their stakeholders and updating their social media platforms to ensure connectivity, sharing and exchange, exposure and feedback through activities such as blogging, social networking, social bookmarking and social recommendations and reviews. The following section discusses the empirical literature.

Empirical literature

Graduate challenges

Today's graduates lack job-search skills. This lack of knowledge about the job search among graduates may hinder employment opportunities (Nassiriyar et al., 2015). Molek (2010, p. 93) defines job search as a 'normal occurrence which Job seekers use as a form of investment to enhance their position in the labour market'. The job search needs time and determination to achieve an objective, which in this case is being successful in attaining employment. The advent of technology has affected every sector of society, together with the process of looking for employment (Piveca & Maček, 2019). Graduates can now use social media and job sites to look for job opportunities (Becton et al., 2019). Social media has also made it easier for youth seeking jobs to put themselves out there, displaying their Curriculum vitae and skills. With Internet connectivity and a mobile device, youths can look for employment wherever in the world, from anywhere in the world (Ibrahim et al., 2016).

New graduates seeking employment opportunities need to gain the competence in skills, capabilities and experience needed to find job opportunities and settle themselves in the workplace (Lord et al., 2019). In most cases, graduates still need to make it past the interview stage. Many graduates need to gain interview and technical skills necessary to get employment (Krishnan et al., 2017). Steyn et al. (2014) add that communication skill is critical for a graduate to pass the interview stage. Similarly, Krishnan et al. (2017) found that many youths lack a good command of English and find it challenging to converse effectually with potential employers

in interviews. Graduates could use webinars to help them prepare for the interviews, increasing their chances of being hired (Abdu & Siudikiene, 2016; Albal, 2018).

Graduates today also find it challenging to be employed; they need to gain knowledge of applying principles of what they have learned at tertiary institutions. Hooley (2017) stated that university youth find it challenging to convert the theoretical knowledge they have learnt into practical ones while in the workplace. Another factor is unrealistic expectations from graduates. Graduates think obtaining the top qualifications will guarantee high incomes and management positions (Shyju & Chandra, 2018). In the same way, Kalufya and Mwakajinga (2016) stated that graduates assume they begin with high incomes; conversely, some do not have any experience and are never exposed to experiential learning by their programmes. Graduates find it challenging to commence from a lower position with such expectations. Consequently, some decide to stay unemployed, awaiting their dream occupation (Krishnan et al., 2017). If unrealistic expectations among youth persevere, it will additionally escalate youth joblessness.

Graduates must have an employability aptitude and must cope with emerging challenges arising every time to endure their work environment after attaining their employment opportunities (Ismail, 2017). Kalufya and Mwakajinga (2016) pointed out that the youth should show their graduate employability capacities, including combining personal qualities, understanding and practices and applying these skills at their workplaces.

Social media and employment

Emerging technologies for employment are novel in South Africa (Maltby, 2011). Social media started being used around early 2000. Initially, it was used to carry out a background check of employees. A growing number of independent companies are emerging to assist graduates in connecting to employers (Maltby, 2011). Through such connections, young people are often trained in how they can acquire the necessary employability skills. This can also include using emerging technologies to increase employability (Careerbuilder, 2011).

The labour market is evolving, demanding that graduates be technologically literate in industry environments (Abdu & Siudikiene, 2016). The learning and teaching methodologies at tertiary institutions should evolve and adapt to offer learners technical and social media skills. Social media is evolving how individuals, as well as firms, collaborate and function. Graduates must know how to use social media to find employment opportunities and shape their online presence (Koch et al., 2018). Through social media, graduates can express the skills they have mastered in tertiary education with ease.

Social media has progressively changed from a tool for individual activities to a tool for professional activities.

Benson and Morgan (2013) stated that emerging technologies are part of daily life for everyone. Further, social media provides a plinth for self-presentation and self-disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Research studies by Benson et al. (2013) and Albal (2018) found that young graduates use social media for employability.

Additionally, Albal (2018) stated that social media tools provide a platform for graduates to effectively access extensive information about organisations of their interest. Social media allows graduates to find helpful information about their potential employers (Benson et al., 2014). Social media (for example, a blog) permits graduates to contribute to an online discussion (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Graduates could display their critical thinking and decision-making skills by participating in the debate. Employers could use social media to respond to graduate students who have displayed their skills and talents in the company and discussion forums (Ibrahim et al., 2016). For that reason, social media offers structures that stimulate graduate-employer interaction.

Fletcher (2016) stated that social media has to become prominent, with employers utilising social media to carry out background checks of potential personnel and conduct talent searches. Suen (2018) stated that graduates must behave well when using social media, as it could affect their online presence. In developed states, more than 75% of employers do background checks on the social profiles of potential employees during the recruitment process. However, graduates' profanity and poor selling on social media decrease their probability of being hired (Salm, 2017). Krishnan et al. (2017) revealed similar results. Therefore, graduates should make use of social media to sell their talents.

Koch et al. (2018) look at the present state of the hiring processes in South Africa. The study established that employment agencies in South Africa are following their global counterparts. LinkedIn was found to be the primary platform for their recruitment processes. Some higher education institutions have started designing special modules and training to assist learners in developing a professional online identity (Rienties et al., 2012). The University of Central Lancashire in the United Kingdom developed a social media initiative called 'Twitter Critters', used by the learner to engage with employers by sharing their work sketches and receiving expert feedback and advice (Swan, 2012).

Emerging technologies such as LinkedIn and Facebook have been recognised for their valuable role in assisting graduates in obtaining employment. Nevertheless, the youth residing in parts of the country with low Internet access rates and those from rural backgrounds sometimes need to be aware of these priceless resources. Thus, it becomes an obligation for policymakers in the education sector to spread awareness about these resources. Awareness could be achieved by

including enough information about social media in their curriculum and teaching to educate students on the best practices to successfully use social media to acquire the skills needed to get their first job (Mashigo, 2014).

Research methodology

This article adopted an interpretivist research philosophy. A qualitative research method was employed (Brynard & Hanekom, 2006) to establish social media tools' role in addressing employability challenges faced by graduates. This technique was selected because it allows gathering data directly linked to subjective experiences; thus, it is investigative in its application (Flick, 2011). A qualitative method was considered suitable as it provides valuable insights into gaining an in-depth understanding of employability challenges faced by graduates.

The study employed online interviews that fall under interviews. The study was conducted during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) period when the authors needed to practise social distancing.

Sampling and research participants

The article used a nonprobability sample method and a purposive sampling procedure. The research respondents were considered 'information-rich' and could offer helpful information regarding the problem under investigation. The objective was to select participants with characteristics required in the sample, that is, professionals within the human resources (HR) field. Participants were identified through known contacts and the following roles in the organisation: (1) deputy director of human resources, (2) HR officer or administrator and (3) HR practitioner. Fifteen HR practitioners participated in this study. These HR practitioners were from the Eastern Cape region of South Africa. The justification for selecting the populace in the Eastern Cape was to reduce the study cost. Seven were male, and six participants had more than 8 years of experience in the HR field. The data were collected over 2 months.

The study applied inclusion criteria to select its participants: a participant should have at least 3 years of practice in their discipline area to take part in the study and also had to be an expert in any field of HR. This ensured dependability in the information collected from well-experienced participants.

Data collection and data recording

The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic; the authors used any convenient method to gather the data. The researchers were required to observe social distancing and could not see participants in person. Therefore, the researchers contacted participants via telephone and e-mail with a link to a qualitative survey on Google Forms (Alphabet, Inc., Mountain View, California, United States). The study objectives and research question made using a qualitative research approach possible. The study used

TABLE 1: Demographic characteristics of participants.

Interviewee	Gender	Age group	Job skills	Years of experience in HRM function?
1	Male	36–45	Deputy director of human resources	15
2	Male	36–45	IT manager	12
3	Male	26–35	HRM	3
4	Male	26–35	Recruiting and line manager to lecturers	3
5	Male	26–35	Specialist in remuneration and employee benefits	7
6	Female	36–45	HR officer and administrator	13
7	Male	36–45	HR experience specialising in employee relations	17
8	Female	26–35	HR practitioner	3
9	Female	25–35	HR practitioner	6
10	Female	25–35	HR practitioner	5
11	Female	26–35	HR practitioner	12
12	Female	26–35	Specialist in recruitment	4
13	Female	36–45	HR practitioner	3
14	Female	36–45	HR practitioner	8
15	Male	26–35	HR practitioner	3

HRM, human resource management.

structured interviews, which require that all the research participants answer predetermined questions in the same order.

Strategies to ensure data integrity

The researchers paid attention to confirmability, transferability, credibility and dependability to ensure the quality of qualitative data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Research participants participated online; their responses were recorded over Google Forms and enabled each participant's recording (with permission). Human resource practitioners who participated in the study were involved to ensure the study's credibility. Credibility was achieved as the data were collected through the actual HR practitioners. The trust was built based on the professionalism between the parties. The study focused on understanding labour market behaviours and ascertaining the role that social media plays, which allowed the researchers to gather opinions of the HR practitioners concerning the study.

Data analysis

The data were analysed through a thematic narrative analysis (Long, 2014). Thematic narrative analysis was employed to understand HR practitioners' opinions on the social media role in addressing employability challenges graduates face. The thematic analysis allowed the researchers to identify and examine shared patterns within the data. The researchers extracted themes and subthemes from the collected data. Gibbs (2007) pointed out that extracting themes and subthemes from the participant's responses is essential as it refines interpretations of the interviews and then encapsulates and integrates the gathered data. Through thematic analysis, the scholars understood participants' understandings through individual analysis, followed by evaluations of the participants' experiences to generate themes (Neuendorf, 2019). The themes were generated using the six steps advocated by Braun et al.

(2019), as illustrated in Table 2, by returning to the original data and comparing individual journeys.

Ethical considerations

This study guaranteed participants' confidentiality, anonymity and privacy (Ferreira, 2018). The researchers observed all ethical considerations, including informed consent (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). In this study, participants had the right to pull out from participating at any time (Neuman, 2014).

The study observed ethical guidelines. Ethical clearance was obtained from the participating university (ref. no. CIL021SMUR01).

Findings

This study aimed to establish a social media role in addressing employability challenges graduates face after completing their tertiary education. Two primary outcomes emerged from the research study. Firstly, a need exists for unemployed graduates to use social media as a marketing utility for their skills and abilities. Secondly, social media tool usefulness as an information utility to enhance awareness about labour market issues. Table 3 illustrates themes and subthemes. These results are presented next.

Theme 1: Social media playing a utility role in marketing the prospective candidate

The participating HR practitioners expressed that social media plays a utility role in marketing the prospective

candidate. Two subthemes emerged: firstly, social media is helpful in applicant screening, and secondly, it increases and broadens the number of applicants. Emerging technologies and media have transformed the way companies connect with graduates. Companies investigate prospective employees' social media accounts before they hire them.

A participant pointed out that social media can be used to identify 'red flags' as they disclose the nature and personality of potential personnel. Youth seeking job opportunities must behave in this digital industry when using social media, as it influences their online profile and employability. Participant 3 noted the following:

'Social networks should not be a qualifying factor. They should be handy in picking out possible red flags (such as racism and extremist behaviour).' (Male)

Additionally, Participant 11 also noted that:

'Information on social media is not always accurate; some graduates forget to update their profile. Therefore, employers do not need to depend on the information found on a graduate's profile. Graduates must be careful about what they post and comment on social media as it affects their employability.' (Female)

Participant 14 cautions especially the younger generation regarding the content they post on Facebook and Twitter, as this can affect their probabilities in a competitive labour market:

'Some people can lie about their information, and some do not update it. HR cannot rely on that information. People need to be careful of what they post and comment on.' (Female)

Social media helps spread information between youth concerning job opportunities or internships available. Consequently, Subtheme 2 (social media usefulness as an information utility to enhance awareness about labour market issues) is convenient for attracting new talents through sharing information about employment opportunities available transversely over geographic borders and broadening the pool of applicants. Participant 1 had this to say:

'Social media platforms are only relevant for attraction purposes only. However, other administrative requirements of the

TABLE 2: Phases of thematic analysis.

Phase	Description
1. Familiarising yourself with your data	Actively reading and rereading data to obtain an overall understanding.
2. General initial codes	Noting important aspects of data.
3. Searching for themes	Identify codes and form codes into themes.
4. Reviewing themes	Relating the themes to codes and the entire data set.
5. Defining and naming themes	Producing clear definitions and names for themes.
6. Producing the report	Final analysis of themes relating to the initial research question.

Source: Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., & Terry, G. (2019). *Thematic analysis*. Springer, New York

TABLE 3: Social media playing a utility role of marketing the prospective candidate: Illustrating quotes.

Social media is helpful in candidate selection	Social media enhances and widens the pool of applicants
'Social media is public, so private thoughts shouldn't be aired on it. If it is, then it is fair to use this in verifying the candidate.' (Participant 2, male)	'It is important in that nowadays, graduates need to understand the importance of using online resources including social media platforms for recruitment and selection purposes as these are becoming more and more popular and relevant today.' (Participant 1, male)
'It is fair as we are living in technology infested world.' (Participant 5, male)	'I think social media can be used to post available posts. One can also teach the graduates how to prepare for field work.' (Participant 8, female)
'Social media is a platform to winddown for a number of people and so it may indeed be unfair to use comments therein to pass judgment on individual character.' (Participant 7, male)	'Yes, social media can also be used as a platform of advertising as it can attract pool of applicants.' (Participant 13, female)
'Social media should be explored to a certain degree as this reveals a lot about the nature and character of the individual which they are happy to display to the public. Their consent is having posted it on a public platform, so anything they post there, they should be comfortable with knowing that a prospective or current employer will be able to view it.' (Participant 4, male)	'It creates good networking such that graduates are able to share experiences knowledge better. Information is shared among and it can reach a wide scope.' (Participant 6, female)
'I believe people write to entertain the reader and basically to start a healthy argument with others or the personal audience in social media. To use then that to assess my ability to work in your team is a little bit unfair because you really do not know how far i have evolved from the day of the post.' (Participant 9, female)	
'Social media should be used for its advantages in the employment and recruitment industry. Graduates should be warned about the kind of stuff they should and should not post on social media and to ensure that their online media presence is closely monitored and updated so that they are aware of what "others" can see about them. Social media allows for quick and easy judgement-making, so it would be wise for graduates to ensure that it (their social media presence, profile and image) is a favourable one, as far as possible.' (Participant 10, female)	
'It is fair because wherever you should conduct yourself in an acceptable behaviour.' (Participant 13, female)	

recruitment and selection must always be undertaken once applications have been received from a potential candidate.' (Male)

When using social media, individuals can associate universally in the world if they have access to the Internet. Through social media, information reaches the graduates promptly and at a very inexpensive cost. Participant 5 narrated as follows:

'Information can reach the globe on time as there will be no geographical boundaries.' (Male)

Table 4 illustrates additional quotes from the interviews supporting Theme 1 of the study.

This leads to the study's second finding, and social media was noted (in addition to the marketing utility identified) as playing a related information utility role in enhancing awareness about labour market issues. These results are presented next.

Theme 2: Social media's information role in enhancing graduate employability through enhancing information awareness

A finding of the study reviewed that social media helps increase youth employability through enhancing information awareness. The subthemes that emerged were that social media imparts youth with employment opportunity information, inspires social connectedness on matters of mutual interest and helps with graduate skills development.

Participant 4 pointed out:

'It would be important for the graduate to learn how to use social media for their benefit in their employability journey – how to search for job opportunities, advertise their skills and profiles on social media for prospective employers to view etc. Social media allows for several technological innovations to help graduates get their "name" out in the world to a larger scope of prospective employers and to help showcase their portfolio if they have developed something like this.' (Male)

Emerging technologies, for instance, social media, could assist youth in creating relations with companies and others with whom they share a related interest. Youth ought to use

LinkedIn, to generate strong networks with employers. Participant 15 had to say the following:

'Very useful to highlight relevant skills and network to possible employers. Makes young applicants more accountable for what is posted, if possible employers are watching.' (Male)

Social media provides an opportunity for graduates to learn. Graduate skills may be established if graduates go through stories posted on social media related to their line of interest. These stories might elucidate how an individual develops his or her skills and becomes prosperous in obtaining a job opportunity. Participant 9 said the following:

'We all need social media for relevance; we need to learn online. The employability may improve with social media, especially if you read the stories on links related to your field of interest.' (Female)

Furthermore, social media assists in creating social communities for graduates that enhance information access and provide an opportunity for youth to create networks with employers. Participant 6 had to say:

'It can be a good platform for good networks, and others become entrepreneurs and open businesses through experiences shared via social media.' (Female)

A social media platform allows an individual to post employment opportunities and share them with youth seeking employment. Corporations may utilise emerging technologies to broadcast employment prospects available. Additionally, Participant 2 expressed the following:

'The best use is to ensure that jobs are posted and shared on the platform to potential graduates to search and apply for them. With that, a campaign to educate and advise graduates on the skills that are lacking both in graduates and in the job market could mitigate some unemployment and possibly drive graduates to further skills themselves on what is highlighted by the campaign.' (Male)

Social media is a communication medium used by numerous businesses to share information regarding their prospects from potential employees. As a result, graduates must follow businesses' social media platforms to receive updates from future employers concerning employment. Participant 3 noted this view:

TABLE 4: Social media's role in enhancing graduate employability through enhancing information awareness: Illustrating quotes.

Empowered graduates with the world of work information	Encouraging social connectedness on matters of mutual interest	Helps on graduate skills development
'I think social media can be used to post available posts. One can also teach the graduates how to prepare for field work.' (Participant 8, female)	'We all need Social Media for relevance, we need to learn on line, the employability may improve with social media especially if you read the stories on LinkedIn, related to your field of interest.' (Participant 9, female)	'Learning skills via YouTube videos could be useful, but platforms such as Facebook and twitter are not useful. LinkedIn can be useful to participate in a formal sharing environment, but use of it has become like Facebook i.e. sharing of memes that do not contribute to learning.' (Participant 2, male)
'Graduate employment training opportunities can be advertised through social media.' (Participant 13, female)	'It can be good platform for good networks, others become entrepreneurs and open businesses through experiences shared via social media.' (Participant 6, female)	'Social media is a very powerful tool nowadays and can be used as a platform to project the positive, more constructive side of individuals.' (Participant 7, male)
'Social media gives graduates a platform to see recruiters as they advertise internships and employment in different media forms.' (Participant 11, female)	-	'Very useful to highlight relevant skills and network to possible employers. Makes young applicants more accountable for what is posted, if possible employers are watching.' (Participant 15, male)
'I would say there are opportunities that can be posted by employers on social media, for instance LinkedIn has different companies that advertise there.' (Participant 14, female)	-	-

TABLE 5: Social media's role in enhancing graduate employability through enhancing information awareness: Illustrating quotes.

Empowers graduates with the world of work information	Encourages social connectedness on matters of mutual interest	Helps with graduate skills development
'I think social media can be used to post available posts. One can also teach the graduates how to prepare for field work.' (Participant 8, Female)	'We all need Social Media for relevance, we need to learn on line, the employability may improve with social media especially if you read the stories on linked related to your field of interest.' (Participant 9, Female)	'Leaning skills via YouTube videos could be useful, but platforms such as Facebook and twitter are not useful. LinkedIn can be useful to participate in a formal sharing environment, but use of it has become like Facebook i.e. sharing of memes that do not contribute to learning.' (Participant 2, Male)
'Graduate employment training opportunities can be advertised through social media.' (Participant 13, Female)	'It can be good platform for good networks, others become entrepreneurs and open businesses through experiences shared via social media.' (Participant 6, Female)	'Social media is a very powerful tool nowadays and can be used as a platform to project the positive, more constructive side of individuals.' (Participant 7, Male)
'Social media gives graduates a platform to see recruiters as they advertise internships and employment in different media forms.' (Participant 11, Female)	-	'Very useful to highlight relevant skills and network to possible employers. Makes young applicants more accountable for what is posted, if possible employers are watching.' (Participant 15, Male)
'I would say there are opportunities that can be posted by employers on social media, for instance LinkedIn has different companies that advertise there.' (Participant 14, Female)	-	-

'The industry can use social media to give information about their expectation for the consumption of willing graduates.' (Male)

Table 5 presents additional quotes from the interviews to the supporting Theme 2 of the study.

Discussion of results

This research study intended to establish social media's role in addressing employability challenges graduates face after completing their tertiary education. Social media transformed the way companies connect with potential employees. The study revealed that social media has become prominent, and HR departments within organisations utilise social media to carry out personnel background checks before they invite the individual for an interview and to conduct talent searches. Graduates must behave well when using social media because it could influence their online identity. Graduates' profanity on social media decreases their employment probability (Salm, 2017). Krishnan et al. (2017) revealed similar results. Therefore, graduates must utilise social media for their benefit, such as selling skills and talents, because employers are searching for them online.

The results replicate comparable findings from the studies carried out by Hussain et al. (2017). Their findings pointed out the need to educate graduates on how to behave in the digital world. Furthermore, the results pointed out that policies ought to be available and govern how recruitment companies may integrate social media into recruitment as well as the selection of potential employees (Wirthman, 2016).

Through social media, job information is available to graduates. These findings are comparable to the current study from Becton et al. (2019), who point out that organisations' HR departments use social media tools to attract or lure new talents because job opportunity information can reach the audience (graduates) in no time. Therefore, this study proposes that youth ought to acquire employment-hunting skills when using social media and market their graduate skills on social media (Sangeeta & Ahlawat, 2018).

The use of social media enhances social connectedness among individuals with a common interest. The study's results support emerging technologies; for instance, social media could assist youth in creating relations with companies and others with whom they share a related interest. Youths should use available technologies to generate good networks with prospective employers (Albal, 2018). Social media enables graduates to create a social community that youth may use for sharing available employment opportunities (Benson et al., 2013). The study's findings corroborate previous studies that presented ways social media could help increase youth's employability (Albal, 2018; Piveca & Ma ek, 2019; Shyju & Chandra, 2018). In addition, the study's results reveal similar findings from several researchers (Abdu & Siudikiene, 2016; Garcia, 2011; Hussain et al., 2017). Emerging technologies are a critical tool that could project individuals' positive, more constructive side. Graduates should use social media to develop employer-employee relations, construct their online identities and display their skills.

Implications

Some implications can be drawn from this study. The findings offer insights into social media roles in addressing graduates' employability challenges. This study adds to the discussion of social media's role in employability in modern societies. The study has revealed social media's potential to enhance the employability of graduates. Further, the study adds to existing knowledge on social media for employability enhancement. Higher education institutions have to present knowledge regarding the prominence of social media to graduates. This could be through sharing stories on how youth must shape their online identity, as most employers conduct a background check on the applicant on social media sites. From a law-making perspective, policymakers (legislators) in the Department of Education must find ways to implant social media in higher education programmes and teaching to teach graduates best practices to employ social media for employment purposes effectively. The finding that social media aids the employability of graduates has significant implications for HR practitioner practices. From a HR perspective, policies that underline HR practitioners'

restrictions when selecting new talent should be in place. Finally, this study sheds more light on the role social media plays towards the employability of exiting students. Overall, graduates must utilise social media for their professional development.

Limitations of the study and directions for future research

The purpose of the study was to establish social media's role in addressing employability challenges graduates face. Human resource practitioners in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa were used as a sample; therefore, the results generally relate to this setting. Nevertheless, research may use a quantitative approach and examine all the HR practitioners in South Africa. Moreover, the study should be extended to Southern African Development Community (SADC) universities in the future.

Conclusion

The receipt of smartphones among the youth has led to the use of social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to gain access to job opportunity information on these platforms in South Africa. The study's purpose was to examine the social media tools' role in addressing employability challenges graduates face after completing their tertiary education in South Africa. Two primary outcomes emerged from the research study informed by the thematic analysis conducted where a need exists for unemployed graduates to use social media as a marketing utility of their skills and abilities. Social media can also be used as an information utility to enhance awareness about labour market issues. The contribution of the study is a framework with theory-practitioner and policy ramifications. The study establishes an insight into youth employability challenges and provides reasons for what causes them.

Acknowledgements

O.M. was a PhD student supervised by L.C. and W.C. The article is based on the PhD work of O.M.

Competing interests

The author(s) declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

O.M. was a PhD student supervised by L.C. and W.C. The article is based on the PhD work of O.M.

Funding information

The research received funding from the Research Niche Area of the Faculty of Management and Commerce at the University of Fort Hare. This funding assisted in paying for language editing services.

Data availability

The data used were obtained via interviews; the data are represented in the manuscript in the presented tables.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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