Testing a graduateness and employability skills model through the use of social media: findings from South Africa

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examined the influence of social media use on graduateness and the employability of exit students in South Africa.

Design/methodology/approach – The study used quantitative and descriptive research designs to test the proposed hypotheses. An online survey was used to collect the data from a study sample. A sample of 411 respondents was received, with structural equation modelling (SEM) being used to assess the model fit.

Findings – The study found that the direct effect of social media use on graduateness skills is significant. Secondly, the direct effect of graduateness skills on perceived employability is also significant. The results also showed existence of support for the mediation of graduateness skills on the relationship between social media use and perceived employability.

Research limitations/implications – The study provides empirical evidence to the proposed model and infers the potential role of social media in addressing issues related to graduateness and the employability of exit students.

Practical implications – In addressing the challenge of unemployment, the use of social media can potentially aid in matters of skills acquisition.

Originality/value – The results demonstrate how technology through the use of social media potentially fits within enhancing graduateness and employability skills.

Keywords Social media, Access to higher education, Youth unemployment

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

There is a noted increase in youth unemployment globally (OECD, 2024). South Africa is not spared from the youth unemployment challenge. As a result, calls exist for research that addresses this challenge (Harry and Chinyamurindi, 2022). The unemployment rate in South Africa is noted to be on an increase (Statistics South Africa, 2023). This growing unemployment is noted to affect mostly young people. Most affected by this are graduates and especially those youth below the age of 24. The reasons for the high rate of graduate unemployment in South Africa are associated with a range of aspects that may include the youth’s lack of graduateness...
skills and employability attributes (Coetzee et al., 2012; Benson et al., 2014; Harry et al., 2018). There is also a misalignment between the skills of the students graduating from university and the needs of the labour market (Walker and Fongwa, 2017; Williamson et al., 2020).

The transition from a graduate to an employee is stressful and is exacerbated by a lack of graduateness skills as part of the transition (Walker et al., 2015). Jackson (2013) described graduateness skills as the degree to which an exit student has the characteristics and attributes that prepare them for triumph in the workplace. Similarly, Coetzee (2012) described graduates’ skills as the attributes that make final-year students capable of attaining and continuing to fulfill work. Thus, graduates must equip themselves with all employers’ required skills (Walker and Fongwa, 2017).

Social media has been identified as a solution to the presented challenges. The literature reveals that 97% of young adults enrolled at tertiary institutions in South Africa are using mobile technology (Shava et al., 2016; Cilliers et al., 2017). Albal (2018) asserted that with the acceptance of mobile technology amongst youth in South Africa, there is a perspective of social media use to enhance graduate employability in the country. Technology is a practical tool to increase graduateness skills and employability (Albal, 2018; Benson et al., 2014; Healy et al., 2023). Technology is seen as a transformative tool influencing labour markets characterized by inequality (Tanser, 2017; Blayone et al., 2020).

The study adopted the CareerEDGE model as its theoretical framework (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007). Within the CareerEDGE model five distinct components are proposed as influencing how employability unfolds. The focus being on (1) career development learning, (2) experience (work and life), (3) degree subject knowledge (an understanding of skills), (4) generic skills development and (5) emotional intelligence (Dacre Pool and Qualter, 2013). In essence, the interaction of these five components informs how student and potentially youth employability unfolds (Dacre Pool, 2020). Informed by previous research in South Africa (Coetzee and Esterhuizen, 2010; Harry et al., 2018), three salient gaps can be proposed considering also the underlying assumptions from the CareerEDGE model.

First, a need exists to explore how the cumulative experience of youths from a higher education experience can inform aspects related to employability (Rothwell et al., 2009; He et al., 2016; Coetzee et al., 2014). Second, a need also exists to understand how context features in influencing student and youth employability (Chinyamurindi, 2023a; Healy et al., 2023). Finally, there is also need to explore how aspects related to tools such as technology can also influence employability (Murire et al., 2023; Mahlasela and Chinyamurindi, 2020). This study potentially exists to fill these identified gaps especially considering exit students based at a historically disadvantaged institution in South Africa. The historically disadvantaged institution context becomes important especially considering efforts of redress in South Africa and the importance of such institutions (Chinyamurindi, 2023b).

The rest of the paper discusses the study’s theoretical foundation, followed by the methodology employed, analysis of the findings and discussion of these findings. Lastly, the paper concludes with a limitation and future research section. The following section discusses the theoretical framework and hypotheses of the study.

**Study context and hypotheses**

South Africa is witnessing many graduates coming from the university system. The pattern also shows that more students are graduating from universities especially those classified as historically disadvantaged institutions (Harry and Chinyamurindi, 2022). Historically disadvantaged institutions in their nature, are not financially well off due to historical injustices (Bengu, 2021). Further, historically disadvantaged institutions do not have adequate reserves to ensure that they sustain themselves fully. Additionally, historically disadvantaged institutions do not have sufficient resources to produce quality graduates; instead, they depend enormously on government funding for survival (Bengu, 2021).
This influences the quality of graduates they produce, affecting their employability. This study examined the influence of social media use on graduateness skills and employability of exit students at historically disadvantaged institutions.

**Social media definitions and perspectives**

Technology is a practical tool to increase the graduateness skills and employability of youth in South Africa (Benson et al., 2014; Blayone et al., 2020; Habets et al., 2021). Social media has become essential to many young adults’ lives (Melao and Reis, 2020; Sangeeta and Ahlawat, 2018; Benson et al., 2014). He et al. (2016, p. 2) defined social media as “websites and applications which allow end-users (graduates, managers and people) to make a profile, facilitates collaboration and sharing of information in the virtual social world”. In developing countries like South Africa, social media use has been noted to be popular especially amongst young people (Cilliers et al., 2019; Murire et al., 2023).

Social media allows graduates to participate in an online discussion (Healy et al., 2023). As a result of participating on social media can assist to improve graduateness skills. Therefore, social media provides features that promote graduate-employer interaction. Such interaction is argued as crucial for skills development within society (Harry and Chinyamurindi, 2019).

However, students face hurdles using social media to enhance their graduateness skills and employability (Melao and Reis, 2020; Sutherland and Ho, 2017). These barriers include graduate attitudes toward social media, online security issues, data cost and social media experience to employ social media as an employability tool in this digital world (Busines, Murire et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2017). As a result, it can be problematic for students to use social media to enhance their graduateness skills and employability (Healy et al., 2023; Hu and Zhang, 2016). Based on this discussion, the following relationships were hypothesized:

- **H1.** Social media significantly influences employability amongst exit students at historically disadvantaged institutions.
- **H2.** Social media significantly influences graduateness skills amongst exit students at historically disadvantaged institutions.

**Graduateness skills, employability definitions and perspectives**

The concept of employability can be defined in many ways (Lowden et al., 2011). On end employability is argued as a product of vocational and professional education (Harry and Chinyamurindi, 2022). The focus here is on readiness for the job market through a process of skills acquisition (Harwood, 2010). Others take employability to consist of personality traits and learned behaviours (Murire et al., 2023). In essence, employability skills and their development become important during a transition period from higher education to the labour market (Cheng et al., 2022).

Conversely, graduateness refers to involve individual growth and transformation (Pitan and Muller, 2020). The skills and traits that contribute to the graduateness of students who complete their studies at higher education institutions are a significant outcome of their tertiary-level scholarship experiences (Blayone et al., 2020). These graduateness skills are distinct from their degree-specific knowledge and technical skills and refer to the transferable skills and personal traits that demonstrate graduates’ employability and readiness for work (Yamada and Otchia, 2020). Bridging the issues of the skills deficit potentially could enhance not just employability skills but also enhance graduateness (Mseleku, 2022). Based on the above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **H3.** Graduateness skills significantly influence employability amongst exit students at a historically disadvantaged institutions.
Graduateness skills significantly mediate the relationship between social media use and employability amongst exit students at historically disadvantaged institutions. All hypotheses outlined above are visually represented in Figure 1.

Methodology

Respondents

The attributes of the sample used in this study make it particularly relevant for graduates interested in gaining employment in the ever-changing labour environment. Therefore, this study provides insights into the challenges young people face when transitioning from being a graduate to an employee. Ethical clearance to the research was applied for and granted by the University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Committee (Ref: CIL021SMUR01).

An online survey was sent to all exit students at the historically disadvantaged institutions in November 2019, and 411 students responded. No incentives were provided to respondents. The total number of students from the two institutions that could form a part of the sample was 720 students. A response rate of 57% was attained for this study.

From the respondents, 58.9% were females. Regarding the level of study 68.6% were undergraduates from the historically disadvantaged institutions. Regarding ethnicity, most respondents (94.4%, n = 388) were Black African students, followed by Coloured students who constituted 4.9% (n = 20) of the sample. White students constituted only 0.5% (n = 2) of the sample. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the sample.

Instrument

The following variable was assessed in the instrument. The social media use for employment was measured using a 4-item scale developed internationally (He et al., 2016). Respondents rated their agreement with the items on a scale of 1 (never) to 4 (very often). The scale demonstrated good reliability with a Cronbach Alpha Coefficient (CAC) of 0.839 and above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978).

Graduateness skills were measured using a 47-item scale developed in South Africa (Coetzee, 2014) that included eight dimensions: goal-directed behaviour (8), problem-solving and decision-making skills (8), continuous learning orientation (7), interactive skills (6), presenting and applying skills (5), enterprising skills (4), analytical thinking (4), ethical and responsible behaviour (5). Participants rated their agreement with items on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The scale demonstrated high reliability with a CAC of 0.963 and above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978).

Perceived employability was measured using a scale developed from previous research (Rothwell et al., 2009) consisting of 16 items on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The scale demonstrated good reliability with a CAC of 0.827 and above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978).

Reliability, descriptive and correlation analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25. To estimate the structural model, both exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were conducted to ensure the fit of the measurement model. The model

![Figure 1](image_url)

An illustration of the hypothesised relationships (H, hypotheses)

Source(s): Figure by authors
fit was evaluated using the chi-squared test, the comparative fit index (CFI), the goodness of fit (GFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the parsimony goodness-of-fit index (PGFI) to assess the parsimonious fit. MacCallum et al. (1996) stated that an acceptable fit has an RMSEA below 0.08. GFI and CFI values should be > 0.9 (Hu and Bentler, 1999), and PGFI recommends parsimony fit indices within the 0.50 region (Mulaik et al., 1989). CFAs and SEM were conducted using Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) version 24.

Results
Before testing the study hypotheses, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFAs) were conducted for the independent variable (social media), dependent variable (perceived employability) and mediating variable (graduateness skills) to ensure that the measurement model fitted the data. Table 2 presents the comparison of factor models.

The CFA of social media showed a good fit with a chi-square of 720.142, degrees of freedom of 6 and a p-value of 0.001, indicating levels of significance. The RMSEA of 0.058 reported for this study was below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating a good fit; and the CFI was 0.951, above the recommended CFI value of 0.9. Further, the PGFI of 0.317 reported for this study was within the recommended parsimony fit indices of 0.50, which aligns with established joint fit criteria (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005).

The CFA of perceived employability also showed a good fit, with a chi-square of 1841.098, degrees of freedom of 120 and a p-value of 0.001, indicating the model’s significance. The RMSEA of 0.072 reported for this study was below the recommended threshold of 0.08; the GFI of 0.923 was above the recommended GFI value of 0.90; the CFI was 0.987, above the
Testing study hypotheses

The CFA of graduateness skills showed a good fit with a chi-square of 11364.987, a degree of freedom of 1,081 and a \( p \)-value of 0.0001, indicating the model’s significance. The RMSEA of 0.059 reported for this study was below the recommended threshold 0.08; the GFI of 0.949 was above the recommended GFI value of 0.90; the CFI was 0.967 and the PGFI of 0.709 exceeded the recommended parsimony fit indices of 0.50.

The structural model examining the relationship between social media use and perceived employability showed a good fit, with standardised fit indices indicating RMSEA = 0.062 and CFI = 0.950. The unstandardised and standardised regression coefficients were estimated, and the regression weight for social media use in predicting perceived employability (\( \beta = 0.078; p = 0.108 \)) was found to be insignificant at the 0.001 level (two-tailed). The intercept for the prediction model of perceived employability by social media use was highly significant (\( \beta = 4.084; p < 0.0001 \)). These results suggest that there is not a significant direct effect of social media use on perceived employability. However, after considering the indirect effect of social media use on perceived employability, the standardised indirect effect was found to be 0.144 (\( \beta = 0.002 \)), indicating that a one-standard-deviation increase in social media use is associated with a 0.144 standard deviation increase in perceived employability, in addition to any direct effect. This finding supports hypothesis H4, which posited a significant indirect effect of social media use on perceived employability.

The structural model examining the relationship between graduateness skills and perceived employability also showed a good fit, with fit indices indicating RMSEA = 0.065 and CFI = 0.985. The regression weight for graduateness skills in the prediction of perceived employability (\( \beta = 0.456; p < 0.0001 \)) was highly significant at the 0.001 level (two-tailed), with a standardised regression weight of 0.496. The intercept for the prediction model of perceived employability by graduateness skills was highly significant (\( \beta = 2.322; p < 0.0001 \)). These results provide evidence that graduateness skills have a significant direct and positive effect on perceived employability.

The structural model examining the relationship between social media use and graduateness skills showed a good fit, with fit indices indicating RMSEA = 0.058 and CFI = 0.951. The regression weight for social media in the prediction of graduateness skills is significantly different from zero at the 0.001 level (two-tailed) with highly significant

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Table 2. Comparisons of factor models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>( X^2 )</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>( P )-value</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>GFI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>PGFI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothised (social media)</td>
<td>720.142</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>0.951</td>
<td>0.317</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothised (perceived employability)</td>
<td>1841.098</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.923</td>
<td>0.987</td>
<td>0.638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothised (Graduateness Skills)</td>
<td>11364.987</td>
<td>1,081</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>0.949</td>
<td>0.967</td>
<td>0.709</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): \( N = 411 \); CFI, comparative and fit index; GFI, goodness fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; PGFI, parsimony goodness-of-fit index

Source(s): Table by authors

recommended CFI value of 0.9 and the PGFI of 0.638 reported for the study was above the recommended parsimony fit indices of 0.50, which aligns with established joint fit criteria.
parameter estimates ($\beta = 0.301, p < 0.0001$). The standardised regression weights for the prediction model of graduateness skills by social media use has an estimate of 0.280. The intercept for the prediction model of social media by graduateness skills is highly significant ($\beta = 3.456; p < 0.0001$). The unstandardised and standardised direct effects are statistically significant. Therefore, a one-unit increase in social media use results in a 0.301 unit increase in graduateness. In conclusion, social media significantly directly and positively affect graduateness skills. Table 3 illustrates the results of the SEM analyses, including fit indices based on standardised maximum likelihood.

Given its good fit across all tests, a model was retained (see Figure 2). In this model, the endogenous variables are perceived employability and graduateness skills, while the exogenous variable is social media use. Unobserved exogenous variables are denoted by e1 and e2. The standardised parameter estimates are shown in the diagram. The rectangles represent the observed variables, and the circles represent the error terms as shown in Figure 2.

Estimation
The study used the maximum likelihood estimation method to estimate the path coefficients of the structural model, which indicated the strength of the correlation between variables. The results showed that graduateness skill had the highest path coefficient value ($\beta = 0.473, p < 0.0001$) in explaining the relationship with employability, supporting H3. The correlation between social media use and graduateness skills also showed a significant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>$P$ value</th>
<th>R E</th>
<th>SRE</th>
<th>Intercepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesised</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media use and perceived employability structural model</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>0.950</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>4.084</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduateness skill and perceived employability structural model</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>0.985</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.456</td>
<td>0.496</td>
<td>2,322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media and graduateness skill structural model</td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td>0.951</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.301</td>
<td>0.280</td>
<td>3,456</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): ***$p < 0.001$ $N = 411$; SEM, structural equation modelling CFI, comparative and fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; RE, Regression Estimate; RSE, Standard Regression Estimate. Standardised maximum likelihood estimates
Source(s): Table by authors

Table 3. The results of the SEM analyses; fit indices

![GESM model](Figure 2)
positive relationship (path coefficient value of 0.30, $\beta = 0.301$, $p < 0.0001$), supporting H3. Additionally, graduateness skills were found to mediate the relationship between social media use and perceived employability, with a path coefficient value of 0.14 ($\beta = 0.142$, $p < 0.0001$), supporting H4. However, the path coefficient value between social media use and employability was weak and negative ($-0.064$, $\beta = -0.064$, $p < 0.144$), not supporting H1. A summary of the accepted and rejected hypotheses is presented in Table 4.

### Discussion

The study aim was to examine the influence of social media use on graduateness skills and employability of exit students at historically disadvantaged institutions in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Consistent with previous studies (Mseleku, 2022; Pitan and Muller, 2020), our results showed that graduateness skills significantly influence the perceived employability of exit students. They highlight the importance of emphasizing graduateness skills in higher education institutions (Shyju and Chandra, 2018; Yamada and Otchia, 2020), as most employers require graduates to be competent for work (Pitan and Muller, 2020; Williamson et al., 2020; Yamada and Otchia, 2020). This study identified the strong influence of graduateness skills because it is evident that most employers need graduates to be competent for work. Additionally, we found that social media positively influences graduateness skills, which is consistent with findings from other studies (Healy et al., 2023; Medrano et al., 2023). Therefore, the study concludes that the use of social media plays a crucial role in enhancing the graduate skills of exit students at historically disadvantaged institutions in South Africa (Habets et al., 2021).

However, contrary to our expectations, the current study’s results indicate no significant relationship between social media and perceived employability among exit students. We believe this may be because the scales used in our study, which focused only on the information-searching capability of social media, did not fully capture the information-sharing and interactive nature of social networking platforms concerning employability (Murire et al., 2023; Sanchez-Rivas et al., 2023) as highlighted by studies confirming that young graduates are using social media for employability (He et al., 2016; Piveca and Maček, 2019; Healy et al., 2023). Although the path coefficient score between social media and perceived employability was the lowest in our model, graduates use social media to look for employment information. It is considered a practical tool to enhance the employability of youth in South Africa (Benson et al., 2014; Healy et al., 2023). Social media was found to be an enabler for graduates to share information about job openings and internships. Thus, social media provides features that promote graduate-employer interaction (Habets et al., 2021; Melao and Reis, 2020). Furthermore, social media can facilitate graduate-employer interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Path coefficient</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1: Social media significantly influence employability amongst exit students at historically disadvantaged institutions</td>
<td>$-0.064$</td>
<td>0.144</td>
<td>Reject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: Social media significantly influence graduateness skills amongst exit students at historically disadvantaged institutions</td>
<td>$0.301$</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: Graduateness skills significantly influence employability amongst exit students at historically disadvantaged institutions</td>
<td>$0.473$</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4: Graduateness skills significantly mediate the relationship between social media use and employability amongst exit students at historically disadvantaged institutions</td>
<td>$0.142$</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.** Summary of accepted and rejected hypotheses

**Source(s):** Table by authors
by providing features that enable graduates to share information about job openings and internships (Benson et al., 2014; Healy et al., 2023).

Implications
Some implications can be drawn from this study. The findings proffer insights into addressing the challenges young people face regarding their employability (Healy et al., 2023). This study contributes to the debate on the influence of social media on graduates’ skills and employability in modern societies (Healy et al., 2023). Specifically, the study has revealed the potential of social media to enhance graduateness skills, wherein exit students are more responsible for their skills and employability (Pitan and Muller, 2020). In this context, higher education institutions play a crucial role in providing competent graduates that meet the demands of modern economies. Furthermore, the study adds to the existing knowledge on using social media for employability enhancement.

From a political perspective, policymakers in the education sector should find ways of integrating social media in university curriculums and teaching to educate graduates about the best practices for using social media to acquire graduateness skills successfully. Institutions of higher learning should focus on offering programmes containing skills demanded by the labour market to increase the employability of final-year students. To increase final-year students’ employability, higher learning institutions should focus on offering programmes that teach skills in demand in the labour market. Universities should collaborate with organisations to meet the new requirements of the labour market.

The finding that social media impacts graduates’ skills and employability has significant implications for HR practitioners. From a human resource perspective, policies should be in place to guide HR practitioners in using these emerging technologies. Finally, this study sheds light on the role of social media in the employability of exit students (although no significant results were found in this regard). In conclusion, graduates must utilise social media for their professional development.

Contribution
The study contributes through a model of social media use within the context of quests for improving graduateness and employability as shown in Figure 2. The model informs the design of programmes and interventions that focus on employability. Primarily, models of employability ought to inform the preparation of academic programmes and planned interventions intending to focus on the area. This model provides clarity on the skills that exit students should possess to increase their chances of employability. Additionally, graduates, HR practitioners, policymakers and academics should easily understand the model.

The Graduateness Employability Social Media (GESM) model as shown in Figure 2 enables academics, career advisors, policymakers and all individuals involved in promoting employability within higher education to address the issue without adding complexity. It is a valuable tool for youth as it highlights the significance of graduateness skills and social media concerning employability. It can also demonstrate to employers how graduateness skills and social media can contribute to graduate employability. Moreover, the GESM model could be adapted for groups other than exit students from historically disadvantaged institutions and new graduates. Moreover, GESM model can also be adapted for others, for instance, mid-life career changers.

The GESM model is proposed as a guide for the higher education sector in South Africa to enhance graduateness skills and employability among youth. To demonstrate a significant contribution to the body of knowledge in a field of inquiry, the evidence must be substantiated. Holweg and van Donk (2009) noted that conceptual models serve different
purposes depending on the context of the study. In this study, the GESM model was aligned with Rugg and Petre’s definition of implementing a theoretical principle to show how it can be applied in practice. Secondly, making the concept tangible and demonstrating through empirical inquiry is relatable to stakeholders in its context and can lead to process improvement in its chosen field. The contribution of the GESM model is theory-driven, and the theories have been supported and validated by intense empirical findings from exit students at historically disadvantaged institutions and HR practitioners. The following section provides the limitations of the study.

**Study limitations**

This study has limitations and future research should improve on this. Concerns exist around the social media aspect of the study. The social media scale used in this study was not comprehensive. A more comprehensive scale could have been used. Social media is also incorporating the use of blogs and professional networking sites. Future research could also include these. The other limitation concerns the sample, as the study is restricted to two institutions. Future research should expand beyond the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa to include other universities in the country and beyond. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study have important implications for higher education institutions, policymakers and HR practitioners who should seek to incorporate social media in their curriculum and policies to enhance the employability of exit students.

**Conclusion**

The widespread use of mobile technology among youth has highlighted the potential of social media to enhance graduate employability in South Africa. The study aimed to develop a model to enhance graduateness skills and employability through social media amongst exit students at historically disadvantaged institutions in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This study aimed to develop a model that leverages social media to improve graduateness skills and employability among exit students from historically disadvantaged institutions in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The study’s findings showed that social media use has a significant direct effect on graduateness skills, and graduateness skills have a significant direct effect on perceived employability. Moreover, the results indicated that the direct effect of social media use on perceived employability is not significant unless the mediating variable (i.e. graduateness skills) is included. The study’s main contribution is the GESM model, a valuable tool that transfers information about the significance of graduateness skills and social media to enhance graduate employability. It can demonstrate to employers how graduateness and social media roles can contribute to graduate employability. The model can also showcase to employers how graduateness and social media can work together to boost graduate employability.

**References**


Further reading


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