

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SKILL REQUIREMENTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Dr. Sohail Riaz¹, Syed Ali Sultan², Dr. Asim Manzoor³, Muhammad Usman Siddique^{*4}

¹Assistant Professor (In charge Media and Communication Studies/Advertising), Comsats University Islamabad Lahore Campus

²Assistant Professor, School of Digital and Cinematic Arts, Institute for Art & Culture

³Associate DEAN, School of Digital and Cinematic Arts, Institute for Art & Culture

^{*4}Assistant Professor, Institute for Art and Culture Lahore

¹sohailriaz@cuilahore.edu.pk, ²syedalisultan@iac.edu.pk, ³asim.manzoor@iac.edu.pk,

^{*4}muhammadusmansiddiq@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: *

Muhammad Usman Siddique

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate how social media can help close the gap between university and corporate skill requirements by performing a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) of business professionals and university professors. This despite a continued disconnect between the skills acquired in school and the skills required in today's businesses. Employers are now seeking graduates who have developed their abilities to communicate, solve problems, use information technologies, be flexible and able to work in a team; and universities are blamed for teaching theory to their students rather than giving them the practical application. In this context, social media has become a possible solution to improve students' employability skills that can be obtained from informal learning, professional networking, and industry-related knowledge. The type of research design used for the study is qualitative and the approach used is comparative case study. The data were gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews with 20 respondents comprising 10 business people from various fields and 10 university professors from various disciplines. Thematic analysis was employed in the data analysis to uncover patterns and views about the industry-academic divide as well as the use of social media to bridge the divide. The results indicate four key themes which are persistent skill mismatch, social media as a learning resource for skills, curriculum-industry disconnect and industry-academy disconnect in terms of perception of employability. The findings also show that social media sites like LinkedIn and YouTube provide students with an important supportive platform, but do not take the place of formal education or formal training to prepare them for a career. The findings of the study indicate that there is a gap between the University educational system and corporate requirements, however, social media can act as a complementary link, strengthening the employability if used in conjunction with formal education and collaboration with the industry. The results have valuable implications for universities, policymakers, employers and students in the redesign of curricula and the use of digital platforms as a way to build skills in the modern economy.

Keywords: Social media, employability, gap between industry and academia, digital learning, skill mismatch, qualitative research, graduate skills, higher education, company expectations, thematic analysis.

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of digital technologies and social media platforms, learning, communication, and career preparation have been greatly affected. Universities are no longer the only source of knowledge as students today are turning to digital platforms and social media apps for skills and knowledge that are practical, industry based and job oriented. Meanwhile the corporate world has turned into a fiercely competitive and dynamic environment and demands that graduates not only be academically qualified but also have practical, digital, interpersonal and problem-solving skills. There remains, however, a wide divide between the output of universities and the needs of the organizations that are recruiting new university graduates. The disconnect between university education and corporate skills has increasingly become a worry for educational institutes, employers and policymakers globally (Ahmed et al., 2023).

In recent years, the term employability has received significant attention as a result of the high technological development, globalization, and employment changes. The need for graduates to cope with new business environments, work in teams, communicate professionally and operate efficiently with digital technologies is growing in importance. Employers are no longer content with graduates having only theoretical knowledge and are seeking graduates to have practical exposure, to be ready for the workplace, and to have competencies in creativity, critical thinking, and leadership (Iqbal et al., 2022). However, many universities still have the same teaching methods as before, that is, emphasizing the theoretical teaching, with little opportunity for practical teaching and industry contact. As a result, a large number of graduates have difficulty in adapting to the requirements of the corporate world and find it hard to get a job.

The disparity between academic education and job requirements is sometimes called the “industry-academic gap” or “skill gap.” In developing

countries like Pakistan, despite the rising number of universities in the country, unemployment among university graduates has grown to be a major issue in recent years. Employers in Pakistan are often displeased with the communication skills, teamwork skills, technological skills and hands-on knowledge of the graduates (Ahmed et al., 2023). Numerous organizations feel that graduates are not ready for the workplace and need extra training to be productive employees. This deficiency has adverse impacts on graduates' employability as well as organizational performance and economic growth.

An important factor contributing to this gap is the continually changing nature of work needs. As digitalization, automation, artificial intelligence and technology innovations are a part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, required competencies in the modern organization have been changed. With workplaces becoming more technologically driven, employers now value digital literacy, adaptability, innovation, emotional intelligence, and continuous learning skills in their workers (Hughes & Davis, 2024). Unfortunately, many universities are not able to fully keep up with the pace of change in industry requirements for curriculum and methods of instruction. This disconnect threatens to exacerbate the gap between school and business.

To meet these challenges, social media is becoming an increasingly viable solution to help close the skills gap between university education and the corporate world. Social media is not just for socializing and entertainment anymore, but it's also a valuable educational tool, work environment, and networking opportunity for career advancement and skill learning. Students can benefit from professional training, career advice, industry knowledge, webinars, tutorials, and networking, all available on platforms like LinkedIn, YouTube, Coursera, and Udemy. For these students, self-directed learning is possible

and the skills they have developed are useful in the business world.

Social media has been especially relevant to professional development since the COVID-19 pandemic, which gathered momentum to the use of online learning and remote working practices globally. In the pandemic, Universities moved online to teaching, and the organizations introduced virtual communication and hybrid workplaces. The changes made the importance of digital competency and virtual collaboration skills among graduates entering the labor market greater. Today's workplaces demand job candidates who can adapt to digital environments, communicate virtually, and self-educate online continually. The modern workplace increasingly calls for employees who can effectively operate within digital environments, communicate virtually, and continually upgrade themselves through the use of online platforms. So social media and digital technologies become an indispensable asset for learning, networking and employability development.

But recent studies have shown that social media can positively affect graduate employability in ways such as providing access to information, building professional networks and opportunities. Murire et al. (2023) claimed that graduates use social media for informational and personal branding purposes for gaining employment opportunities. Graduates have the opportunity to share their abilities, connect with industry professionals, stay updated with market trends, and discover career opportunities through social media platforms. LinkedIn is one such social network that has emerged as a key platform for networking among professionals, allowing students and graduates to establish their online professional profiles and meet directly with the employers.

Moreover, social media has played a huge role in developing soft skills which is one of the concern areas for employers. In today's world, soft skills like communication, interpersonal skills, adaptability, creativity, leadership and emotional intelligence are becoming a crucial part of the recruitment process in modern organizations. Bedoya-Guerrero et al. (2024) highlighted that the workplace, including a digital and hybrid work environment, has a strong link between soft skills

and employability. These skills can be developed through discussions, collaborative work, communicating with a variety of people and involvement in professional communities on social media.

Also, the use of digital learning platforms, through social media and mobile applications, has provided opportunities for informal and self-directed learning. Professional certifications, online courses, tutorials and webinars from experts around the world can now be accessed by students, allowing them to study beyond the classroom. Students can learn technical and professional skills through online platforms like Coursera and Udemy that are not taught in the university setting. This has become indicative of the new learning environment where lifelong learning and flexibility are vital for employment.

Studies on the employability of graduates and mismatch issues have been conducted, but most studies are quantitative and concentrate on statistical relationships between variables. Few qualitative studies have examined students' and graduates' views, employers' perspectives and educators' perceptions of the effect of social media on the industry-academy divide. While quantitative studies might find patterns and relationships, they may not be able to reflect the deeper experiences, perspectives, and meaning of the social media use and employability development. Thus, a qualitative study is needed to explore the experience and use of social media as a means of skill learning, networking, and career preparation among the learners.

In this study a qualitative approach is especially suitable since it allows for gaining insights into the perceptions, experiences and viewpoints of the participants about social media and employability in a deeper understanding. Participants will be able to discuss and share their experiences of using social media to learn, of facing challenges when moving from the university environment to the workplace, and of how digital platforms shape their working lives. The wealth of such insights can help to clarify the intricate threads of social media, education and employability.

This study is very relevant in Pakistan where graduate unemployment and skill mismatch remain the serious socio-economic problems. In

Pakistan, the number of universities and their students has risen significantly in the last 20 years. But questions about the quality of education and employment after graduation still are very much on the agenda. Employers often complain about graduates' lack of practical skills, communication ability or preparedness for work (Ahmed et al., 2023). Meanwhile, youth in Pakistan have also witnessed a significant rise in social media use, which has the potential to serve as a valuable tool for career preparation and professional development.

This study aims to explore the role of social media in bridging the gap between University education and corporate skill requirement, hence the qualitative approach of the study. More specifically, the study seeks to investigate the perceptions of students and graduates, employers and educators towards the usefulness of social media in improving employability, professional networking, skill development, and the workplace readiness. The study also aims to understand how social media can facilitate the process of self-directed learning and professional identity development of university students and graduates. The results of this research could have significant consequences for universities, policy makers, employers and students. The results could be applied to incorporate social media learning approaches, competency building programs, and industry-focused training into university courses. Employers can learn about the perspectives and expectations of graduates on how digital platforms are used for professional development and employability. Policymakers should also be aware of the potential contributions of digital technologies to tackling graduate unemployment and skills mismatches. In the end, the research intends to help build a better partnership between Universities and the corporate world for the creation of a more well-prepared workforce for the modern workplace.

To summarise, the gap between what is taught in the university and what skills are needed in the corporate world is a serious problem in the modern world. Employers are increasingly looking for skills that are transferable, related to digital, and personal interactions, which promote effectiveness in the workplace, while Universities

are still focusing on knowledge. Social media has become an emerging phenomenon with potential to fill the gap through enabling learning, network, communication and professional development among students and graduates. However, limited qualitative understandings currently exist about the role of social media in regard to enhancing employability and becoming ready for the workplace. Hence this study investigates the social media's role in closing the gap between university education and the job skills required at the workplace using a qualitative approach focusing on the perception and experiences of the relevant stakeholders.

Literature Review

There has been much written on the link between HE and the corporate world, especially around employability and skill mismatch of graduates. Traditionally, the universities are tasked to create human capital and industries need job ready graduates with technical and soft skills. There is a persistent mismatch between what universities deliver and what workplaces need, however, as to the readiness of graduates for the modern workplaces (Ahmed et al. 2023). In an era of digital transformation, the gap is now more apparent as digital skills and adaptability are crucial for thriving in the professional world (Hughes & Davis, 2024).

Social media are emerging as an important player in the field of education, learning behavior and employability in recent years. Whether it's on a platform like LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram or online learning systems, knowledge, skills and professional interactions are now changing. Social media can serve as a link between academia and industry due to its ability to offer informal learning opportunities, networking opportunities, and access to real-world practices (Murire et al., 2023). This literature review investigates the current literature around the industry-academia gap, employability skills and how to use social media to overcome the gap.

Industry Academia Skill Gap

Skill gap is the difference between the skills that graduates have and the skills that employers need. Employers have repeatedly indicated that

graduates lack these key employability skills: communication, team working, problem solving and critical thinking (Iqbal et al., 2022). The graduates might have good theoretical knowledge, and yet they may not be able to apply them in practical aspects. A significant part of this gap is apparent in developing nations with education systems that are not as industry driven.

According to Ahmed et al. (2023), employers in Pakistan often complain about the lack of job readiness among graduates, especially in regards to soft skills and job experience. Likewise, Malokani et al. (2023) emphasized that communication, leadership and team work were found to be very important in determining one's employability but a few of the graduates lacked adequate capabilities to adapt them effectively.

Causes of the Skill Gap

The industry-academic gap is due to several reasons. Traditional curricula in Universities are one of the main reasons for this, as the focus in many cases is on theoretical learning rather than practical (Jackson & Lib, 2024). In many institutions, industrial collaboration is limited, leading to lesser exposure of students to real business world.

The other reason is the fast pace of technological changes in the workplace. In the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, workplaces are changing dramatically, and workers must be adept at using digital technologies, automation, and artificial intelligence systems (Hughes & Davis, 2024). But it is hard for universities to keep up with the rate of technology advancements.

Furthermore, there are not enough opportunities for internships, and poor industry relations further exacerbate this imbalance. Students frequently leave school with not enough practical experience, which can be challenging for them to fulfill expectations of employers when they enter the workforce.

Graduate Employability and Required Skills

Concept of Employability

The term employability is used to describe the profile of skills, knowledge and personal qualities which help a person to get and keep a job. It is no longer restricted to academic achievements, but it

also amounts to many transferable skills. Communication, teamwork, flexibility, and problem-solving skills are critical for employability in today's work environment, as noted by Iqbal et al., 2022.

Importance of Soft Skills

The importance of soft skills to graduate employment success has risen over the years. Employers now look for interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, leadership and creativity as well as technical skills (Mwita et al., 2024). Bedoya-Guerrero et al. (2024) highlight that soft skills play a critical role in the success of professionals in the workplace and their career advancement, especially within a digital and hybrid working environment.

Communication skills are particularly important in that they impact on collaboration, leadership and customer interaction. Likewise, working cooperatively and adapting oneself to new situations and tasks is critical in dynamic organizations where staff members are expected to collaborate across departments and to face evolving work demands.

The following year, the subject was revised as part of a new 3.3 Digital Skills and Modern Workplaces unit.

Digital literacy is now a key skill to secure a job in the 21st century and is also included as a soft skill. Hughes and Davis (2024) state that hybrid workplaces require employees to be proficient in digital communication tools, online collaboration platforms, and remote technologies. This change has brought a demand for digital skills to be incorporated into the academic programs at universities.

How Social Media works in Education and Skill Development

Social media are proving to be an effective learning tool. Social media is gaining the reputation of a learning space that can provide students with information outside of the classroom. Tutorials, lectures, and professional conversations are available on platforms like YouTube, LinkedIn, and Coursera, enriching learning experiences.

Instructional videos, academic lectures, and professional training videos are widely used on

YouTube to learn a skill. The same goes for LinkedIn, where students can interact with industry professionals, find industry groups, and find information related to jobs.

Active involvement in social media learning has been shown to enhance students' digital skills and industry knowledge (Murire et al., 2023). Such independent learning supports the formal learning process and can assist in making the theoretical and practical aspects of learning more interconnected.

Social Media and Informal Learning

Students can learn flexible, self-paced skills via informal learning (social media). Social media platforms offer real-time access to new information and industry trends, which is different from formal education where learning is structured.

Structured online courses to improve technical and professional skills are available on platforms like Coursera and Udemy. These platforms are part of the process of lifelong learning and ensure students remain competitive in the fast-evolving world of work.

Social Media and Professional Identity

Another significant way social media influences professional identity is through the use of hashtags. Another important way social media is impacting professional identity is the use of hashtags. Students and graduates leverage digital platforms to develop online profiles, share accomplishments and establish personal brands. One of the key sites for career building and professional identity formation is LinkedIn.

Murire et al. (2023) discusses how social media gives graduates the opportunity to brag to employers which makes them accessible and more likely to be hired. This online profile allows individuals to showcase skills that may not be on their academic record.

Social Media and Bridging the Industry-Academia Gap

A 5.1 rating is given to networking and industry exposure. Networking and industry exposure are rated at 5.1. Social media has been one of the largest benefits to students in opening up a

relationship between them and industry professionals. The Internet can offer students information about what is expected in the workplace, trends in the industry and career opportunities. This is exposure that helps to decrease the gap between what is learned in school and what is experienced in the workplace.

LinkedIn is another great networking site where users can connect directly with employers and recruiters. These interactions give students authentic knowledge that is not experienced in the classroom.

The Digital Platforms are crucial for Skill Enhancement.

Social media is also helping to improve skills by making it easier to acquire practical information and industry training. Students can learn coding, digital marketing, communication skills and project management via online tutorials and webinars, for instance.

Students acquire and build skills and competencies relevant to industry with continuous exposure to professional content. Mwita et al. (2024) states that technical and soft skills are important for enhancing employability outcomes in addition to academic credentials.

Describe the career awareness and job opportunities for 5.3. Explain the career awareness and employment in 5.3.

Social media also raises awareness of job opportunities and career paths. A number of organisations advertise for jobs and internships online, and students can begin to look into future career paths soon after starting college.

This early exposure enables students to connect their learning to industry needs, minimizing education to-work mismatch.

Problems faced by Social Media in the context of 'Employability Development'

Although social media has its advantages, there are some disadvantages. Information overload is one of the challenges that students face, as they are presented with a lot of information, which might not always be reliable or relevant. This can cause misunderstanding and confusion.

One of the difficulties is that on some platforms there are no structured learning pathways. Social

media networks are not always disciplined enough to offer guidance on the next steps for users to take, and this can create challenges in terms of the learning outcomes.

Also, an over-engagement with social media for entertainment rather than learning can diminish the educational value of the social media. So, it is important to practice self-discipline and digital literacy to reap the maximum benefits from it.

Research Gap

While previous studies have emphasized the need for employability skills and the benefits of social media in the learning process, existing qualitative research has yet to examine how these platforms actually connect the gap between University and corporate requirements. Most of the studies are quantitative in nature, and it is about statistical relationships instead of life experiences. An understanding of where students, graduates and employers view social media fit into skill development and workplace readiness and professional identity formation is needed. To fill this gap, a qualitative study was conducted and examined the real world experiences and perceptions.

There's been a consistent disconnect between university instruction and corporate skills, according to the literature. Although employers are looking for soft skills as well as technical skills, many universities are still focusing on the theoretical aspects. Social media is now a possible bridging tool that offers informal learning, networking and exposure for careers.

YouTube, LinkedIn, Coursera and Udemy are examples of platforms that facilitate skill development and employability enhancement. But challenges like misinformation, lack of structured learning exist. Thus, there is a need for additional qualitative research to gain a deeper insight into the role of social media in bridging industry-academy divide in real life scenarios.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design to gain a better understanding of the social media's role in bridging the gap between skill needs in corporations and university education. Qualitative

research is deemed suitable when one wants to capture the meanings, perceptions and experiences of people in relation to a social phenomenon, rather than measuring variables statistically. Qualitative inquiry is especially appropriate for examining complex, social issues in which human experiences and contextual knowledge are important (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The complexity of the industry-academy skill gap and the effect of social media calls for a detailed investigation of stakeholders' perspectives, which in turn justifies a qualitative research approach.

Research Strategy

The study adopts comparative case study approach which consists of two groups namely (1) Business Professionals from diversified Industrial Sector and (2) University Professors from different academic disciplines. Case study research is used to study a phenomenon in its real-world setting in detail (Yin, 2018). This study attempts to find the similarities and differences between the industry and academic perception about the gap in skill development and employability, and the role of social media in skill development. This comparative design helps to support the study by offering more than one viewpoint on the same question, adding depth and richness to the study.

Population and Sample

The subjects in this study are corporate professionals or university professors, who have direct experience in graduate employability and skill development. Twenty participants, comprising 10 from the business community from various sectors including banking, manufacturing, IT, education and services, and 10 university professors from various disciplines, will be selected.

Purposive sampling technique is widely employed in qualitative research to select information rich participants who can provide in-depth information related to the research problem (Palinkas et al., 2015) will be used. The participants will be selected for their professional background, relevance to the study and familiarity with the requirements of graduate skills and employability.

Data Collection Method

The data will be gathered using semi-structured interviewing which will enable the flexibility of being able to probe the views expressed by the participants while keeping the focus on the research aims. Semi-structured interviews are frequently used in qualitative research because they offer a way for researchers to obtain detailed information, while also giving participants a freedom of expression in which they can express their views and words (Kallio et al., 2016).

Two interview guides will be built - one for business professionals and another for university professors. Themes to be explored include the skill needs in the corporate world, views on graduates' readiness for employment, the relevance of the curriculum and the impact of social media on learning and professional development. Time for each interview is 30 to 60 minutes, either in person or online, depending on availability.

All interviews will be recorded, transcribed verbatim, with the participants' permission, and then transcribed for analysis. Interviews will also be recorded using field notes to elicit non-verbal cues and context in the interview.

Data Analysis Technique

Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the collected data, which is a highly popular qualitative analysis technique for discovering, analysing and reporting themes or patterns in qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a flexible approach to analysing meaning in a data set, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The analysis process will be conducted in six steps: (1) familiarization with data, (2) initial coding, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, (6) writing the final report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Organizing and managing qualitative data can be done effectively using NVivo or manual coding.

Thematic analysis will be used to uncover themes within the study, including skill mismatch, relevance of curriculum, industry expectations of employability, and role of social media in industry-academy bridging. Comparative thematic analysis will be also employed to explore the differences between business practitioners and professors at universities.

The study's credibility. The credibility of the study. The framework of trustworthiness as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability is followed in ensuring the quality and rigor of the qualitative findings.

Data triangulation will be achieved by gathering views from industry and academic experts, assuring credibility. Transferability will be done by offering thick descriptions of the context and participants of the research. The dependability will be achieved through the documentation of the research process, and confirmability will be achieved by using the participant's own words and remaining neutral in interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be considered prior to data collection. Participants will be fully informed of the purpose of the study, and their participation will be voluntary, with informed consent. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants will be carefully observed and no personal identifying information will be shared in the final report.

Participants will also be told that they can opt out of the study at any time, without facing any repercussions. Ethical research guidelines emphasize protection of participants' privacy and the principle of non-maleficence as key principles in qualitative research (Israel & Hay, 2006).

Data Analysis and Findings (Thematic Analysis)

The results of the qualitative data analysis conducted with 10 business professionals and 10 university professors are discussed in this section. Thematic analysis method was used to analyse the data in the study, based on the six steps of Braun and Clarke (2006). The goal was to identify patterns in regards to the industry-academy skill gap and the role of social media in filling that gap. The findings yielded four broad themes: (1) lack of skills in the workforce, (2) use of social media in skill development, (3) misalignment of skills between the curriculum and industry, and (4) perceived mismatch between academia and industry.

Theme 1: Skill mismatch for graduates in the industry.

One theme that emerged throughout both groups was that there was a significant difference between the skills that graduates had and what employers were looking for. Regrettably, the shortcomings of fresh graduates in these areas – communication, problem solving, critical thinking, adaptability – were consistently mentioned by business professionals. A large number of the participants pointed out the theoretical knowledge of graduates is not sufficient to be applied to the real workplace.

Some of the business participants said that students need more training before they fit into the mainstream of the business, especially in the areas of decision making and communication skills. This means that even in universities, the number of students who graduated with academic qualifications but finding their jobs less competent than their educational qualifications. The same issues were noted in the previous studies about the perceived lack of soft and practical skills by employers among graduates (Iqbal et al., 2022; Ahmed et al., 2023).

In the academics arena, professors recognized the gap but blamed it on some limitations of the higher education system such as large class sizes, obsolete curricula and the lack of industry cooperation. This indicates that there is a gap in skills, but both groups are aware there is a gap and that they must use different methods to determine the causes for this.

Theme 2: Role of Social Media in Skill Development and Employability

One of the recurring issues was growing significance of social media as a medium of learning, skill development and promotion of employability. All business professionals and professors agreed that social media platforms have become an important environment for informal learning for students.

Students often engage in technical and soft skills development on digital platforms outside of class, participants noted. For instance, some respondents reported that students are taught various professional skills through videos, online learning, and professional networking sites.

Particularly, YouTube was often cited as a key source for skill development, particularly technical skills, communication training, and career development advice.

Likewise, business professionals were very aware of LinkedIn as an important site for establishing their professional identity, networking and finding work. It also revealed that candidates with active and updated profiles on LinkedIn are seen as more professional and aware of industry expectations when seeking jobs.

Professors also admitted that students make use of social media more and more for self-directed learning. But, they stressed that this was not structured learning and requires a lot of individual motivation. Both groups acknowledged the positive role social media can play for improving employability skills in addition to formal education, although this was limited.

Theme 3: Curriculum-Industry misalignment and limited exposure in practicals.

Misalignment of University curriculum and industry requirements was also a key theme. The theoretical orientation of university education was consistently found to be troublesome to business professionals. They said that academic programs are centred on memorisation and testing of facts instead of the development of skills and application in the real world.

Employers mentioned inadequate internships, project-based learning, and involvement in industry courses in academic programs. This means that graduates often lack experience of workplace situations. This corresponds with Jackson and Lib (2024), who contend that the traditional higher education framework is not always able to keep up with the changing demands in the workplace.

The university professors, however, recognized this but identified institutional challenges like limited funding, inflexibility of curricula and lack of industry collaboration. They also stressed the long process of the curriculum changes, and how that affects the implementation of new skills that are relevant to industry.

This gap, however, implies that both stakeholders understand the problem of misalignment but have

different understandings of who is responsible for the gap.

Theme 4 explores the differences between views of employability within academia and in industry.

One of the major conclusions of the study is that there are differences of opinion between business and university about what it means to be employable. Practical skills, adaptability, communication and digital competence were highlighted as the most significant employability skills by business professionals. They said that the marks students get in academic classes are not enough to represent their job readiness.

By contrast, the academics emphasized academic achievement, theory and discipline knowledge. They agreed on the significance of soft skills but felt that universities are most of the time meant to provide knowledge and skill development is a responsibility of students and employers to a certain extent.

This mismatch in expectation is a basic issue between the academia and industry. Employers are looking for “work-ready” graduates and universities are focused on “knowledge-ready” graduates. This gap is observed as one of the employability mismatch issues that have been identified in the previous studies (Mwita et al., 2024; Hughes & Davis, 2024).

Theme 5: Social Media as a Bridge between Theory and Practice

The last, but not least important point, was the possibility of social media as a medium connecting academic learning and working needs. Both groups agreed that social media can help bridge the gap by offering access to the real world, industry trends and professional communities.

Someone in the business world pointed out that social media aids students in their knowledge of what is expected in the workplace when they start working. Students can get insights into industry talk and case studies, as well as professionally written material, which helps prepare them for the corporate world.

As for the digital platform, too, Professors saw how potentially it could contribute to improving experiential learning. They proposed to use the

social network as a teaching tool to improve the learning experience to be more practical and industry-oriented. They also pointed to the importance of the controlled utilization of these platforms for educational purposes.

In spite of this positivity, both groups pointed out that this skill gap cannot be completely bridged through social media. It needs to be accompanied by reform of the curriculum structure and by more internships and collaboration between universities and industry.

Cross-Case Comparison Summary

There are convergences and divergences in the views of both groups of stakeholders:

Both groups agree there is a significant gap in skills and agree that social media has a positive role to play in supporting skill development.

Divergence: Employers talk about skills for the job; professors talk about academic knowledge and institutions.

Shared view: Both groups agree that digital tools and social media should be used in education to improve employability.

This comparison underscores the need to have academic programs more in line with industry trends and to take advantage of technology such as digital platforms for skill development.

Thematic analysis shows that the industry-academic gap is a result of several interconnected reasons, such as limitations in curriculum, limited industry exposure, and the evolving needs of industry. Meanwhile, social media has proven to be a very effective adjunct to the traditional classroom in improving students' employability skills through informal learning, networking and skill acquisition.

The results also show that social media can not only be a substitute for formal education, but can also be used as a complement between the academic and corporate worlds. The study highlights the importance of deeper cooperation in the academia-industry partnership and the creation of a framework for digital learning tools to be embedded into higher education systems.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how social media can help bridge the gap between

University education and Corporate skill requirement and achieve this, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) between business professionals and University professors was used. Through the findings, four main themes emerged: skill mismatch remains a struggle, the relevance of social media in skill formation, lacks of alignment between curriculum and industry, and gross misperceptions of employability between academia vs industry. This section explains the interpretation of these findings in the light of the literature and the implications for theory and practice.

The findings validate the sense that there is a persistent mismatch in skills generation from universities and the Corporate world. Poor communication skills, lack of problem-solving skills, inability to adapt and lack of practical skills were among the learning skills that were stressed by business professionals. This is in line with previous research, which has also reported a high gap between students' academic results and employers' expectations (Iqbal et al., 2022, Ahmed et al., 2023). In this study, employers have been finding that graduates are generally not ready for the workplace, as they generally need a further training.

This result corroborates the Human Capital Theory which states that education should be a source of improving productive capacities relevant to the labor market. The latest findings, however, show that the extent to which higher education institutions deliver this is rather limited. The focus on theory/hypothesis over skills continues to reduce the employability of graduates and reiterates findings from previous studies (Jackson & Lib, 2024). Thus the study validates that the skill gap continues to be a structural problem in higher education systems, especially in the developing economies.

One crucial aspect of this research has been the discovery of the potential of social media as a learning and employability development tool in an informal setting. Students are more likely to learn skills outside of school that aren't taught in class, and both business professionals and professors recognized this trend. YouTube and LinkedIn were noted as significant learning, networking and professional identity platforms.

These results align with Murire et al. (2023), who contend that social media plays information and professional development roles for graduates. Likewise, online education websites like Udemy and Coursera offer students the opportunity to learn industry-related skills, making them more employable and better equipped to compete in the digital world.

Theory based on these findings, there is a strong correlation with Social Learning Theory, where individuals learn through observation, interaction and imitation in social environments. Experiential and observational learning is possible on social media platforms, where the user can find experts, professional content, and communities of peers. But whilst social media can facilitate access to knowledge, it does not ensure structured skill development; this relies on the learning motivation and discipline of the learner.

Another key finding of the study is that there is a significant disconnect between the academic course structure and industry needs. Success in business was seen as being highly practical and lacking in theory in the academic programs. This corroborates Hughes and Davis (2024) findings that some universities are lagging in curriculum development due to the rapid transformation of the technology.

University professors recognized these drawbacks but explained them as institutional issues including inflexible university structures, insufficient funding and sluggish curricular approval procedures. This difference indicates a systemic problem on which both stakeholders are aware of the problem but differ in the sense of who is responsible.

Employability Theory takes a different view, and argues that this lack of fit hinders the ability of graduates to adapt to the world of work. The lack of effective cooperation between the industry and fewer internship opportunities also worsen the situation. Thus, it is clear that there is a clear need for the curriculum to be reviewed and for more university-industry collaboration in order to align curriculum with the needs of the labor market.

One of the important theoretical findings of this study is that there are opposing perceptions between academia and industry on employability. While professors focus on the theoretical aspects,

employers focus on practical skills, adaptability and workplace readiness.

Such distance illustrates a basic lack of understanding between “knowledge based education” and “skill based job”. The present study corroborates other research which has consistently identified the importance of soft skills and hands-on skills for employers above grades or academic performance (Mwita et al., 2024). The gap is indicative of how universities are not communicating with the corporate world, which contributes to the ongoing problem of employability.

This finding can be viewed from a theoretical perspective on the basis of Expectation Gap theory which explains the gap between the expectations of the stakeholders and the outputs of institutions. The findings indicate that there is a level of misalignment between the definitions of graduate success that exist in the university and in the workplace, and the outcomes and expectations that follow.

The study gave one of the most important insights is the ability of social media as a medium in bridging academic learning and the needs of work. All agree that social media improves access to industry information, skill building and networking.

LinkedIn especially, was found to be a great opportunity for preparing oneself for a professional identity and job search, and YouTube for learning content through skills in an easy and accessible manner. They provide students opportunities to acquire skills that are not adequately taught in the conventional school setting.

This discovery reinforces the Connectivism Theory which has a focus on learning through networks and digital connections, not just from formal institutions. Social media extends learning walls to the outside and enables ongoing access to the newest knowledge and industry practices.

Participants also noted, however, that while social media could be used as a tool to supplement formal education, it was not an alternative to it. Students might get overwhelmed with information or have unproductive use of platforms if they are not guided. So, institutional support should be

provided to realize the educative power of social media.

In general, the results of this study are in line with other studies and provide qualitative insights that have not been found in the literature. This research is more in-depth than previous studies, which have largely concentrated on quantifying the employability gap, with a focus on stakeholder perceptions and lived experiences.

The study also indicates that skill mismatch is still a problem (Iqbal et al., 2022; Ahmed et al., 2023) and extends literature that shows how social media can be used to fill the skill mismatch. It also reinforces evidence indicating that digital platforms are increasingly vital for learning and professional development in today's economy (Hughes & Davis, 2024; Murire et al., 2023).

This study importantly also introduces a comparative aspect that brings to light the differences between industry and academic views on employability and what it entails. This contribution is important in showing the need for increased cooperation and common frameworks between universities and employers.

The results of this research have some significant implications. In universities, the need is to incorporate digital learning tools and activities on social media into curricula in order to improve the engagement and employability of students. There is a need for industry to be more engaged in curriculum development and provision of internships to ensure the alignment of curriculum with industry needs.

The findings underscore the need to foster digital literacy and university-industry cooperation mechanisms for the benefit of policy makers. Finally, students are encouraged to be proactive in using social media to develop their skills, make professional connections and optimize their employability.

Finally, this study shows that there is a large difference between the skills required in the universities and the skills required by a company, but social media is a great tool, albeit not a complete one. It promotes knowledge sharing, skill building, and professional connections. But it's not a substitute for proper education or industry involvement. To close the employability gap in a digital economy, a package is required that

encompasses curriculum change, industry engagement and the strategic exploitation of a digital platform.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature on employability in several important ways related to theories on digital learning and the industry-academic gap. First, it builds upon the concept of Human Capital Theory, which has been outmoded by showing that formal education is no longer the only way to create employable graduates. The results indicated that informal and self-directed learning through social media is becoming more influential in human capital development that can be used to complement formal learning systems. This means that human capital formation in the digital era is not a process that is exclusively one or the other but is rather a mixed process.

Second, the study provides a contribution to Connectivism Theory where learning is seen as a process that occurs throughout a network or via digital connections, rather than in isolation within a specific institutional space. The findings indicate that platforms like LinkedIn and YouTube serve as knowledge networks that offer a dynamic environment in which students engage in ongoing learning from both professionals and peers, as well as industry content. This will broaden the scope of learning ecosystems from classroom to digital connectivity, which is vital in the development of skills.

Third, the study contributes to Employability Theory by demonstrating that in addition to academic performance, digital engagement behaviors, networking behaviors, and ongoing learning behaviors are important factors in developing employability. The results indicated that employability needs to be viewed as a process of learning that is gained through formal education and informal digital exposure. This defies traditional models that mainly emphasize curriculum-focussed skills development.

Lastly, the study adds a comparative stakeholder perspective (industry vs academia) deepening the theoretical understanding on the expectation gap. It reveals the disconnect between what employers and educators value as being employable, and this

misalignment is a factor in structural misalignment in graduate outcomes. This comparative insight strengthens the theoretical understanding of the industry-academia disconnect.

Practical Implications

Based on the results, universities urgently need to update their educational programs and incorporate digital literacy, hands-on learning, and social media learning approaches. Career development should be facilitated by the use of professional websites like LinkedIn by students and project based learning should be included, with a focus on industry problems. There should also be faculty development programmes to encourage faculty to use digital tools in teaching. The study emphasizes the need for strong relationship building with universities for the business community. Organizations should be involved in course design, internships, and mentorship programs to help connect the dots between theory and practice. Employers can be more strategic about using social media to recruit and develop talent as well.

The findings highlight the importance of creating national policies focusing on partnerships between universities and industry, and on skills in digital. Graduates' employability will be further bolstered by investment in digital infrastructure and online learning platforms. Additionally, policies should be made to support universities to match their academic policies with new industry demands.

It encourages pupils to be proactive in engaging with digital learning tools. YouTube is the place to learn skills and LinkedIn is the place to build professional connections and increase visibility for your career. If utilized strategically and purposefully, self-directed learning from social media can help enhance the employability profile.

Future Research Directions

The study offers important insights, but there are a number of areas for future research.

Firstly, future research needs to use mixed methods approaches, incorporating qualitative analyses and quantitative data so that the effects of social media use on employment outcomes can be better measured. This would enable more

generalisation and statistical substantiation of results.

Second, future studies should be conducted on a larger geographic area than the one or nation covered in this study. Comparative cross-country research might be useful to uncover the cultural and institutional variation of impact of social media on employability and industry-academic relationships.

Thirdly, future studies should employ larger and more diverse samples of HR managers, recruiters, students from various academic disciplines, and other policy makers. This would give a more holistic view of the employability environment.

Fourth, researchers should investigate specific social media platforms individually, including LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok, and online learning platforms, to determine how each of these platforms can contribute to skill development, and professional growth.

Fifth, future research can examine the long-term effects of social learning in the workplace on career advancement, performance at work, and professional development. This would assist to identify if there is ongoing employability benefits from digital learning.

Last but not least, future studies should look into the potential harmful side of the social media (misinformation, distraction, etc.) in order to get a well-rounded picture of how social media affects learning and employability.

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