

**Social Media Literacy for Raising Employability in Today's
Competitive Labour Market: Meeting Stakeholders'
Expectations and Market Needs**

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Declaration

I, Ibtisam Al Kharusi, hereby declare that this thesis titled “Social Media Literacy for Raising Employability in Today’s Competitive Labour Market: Meeting Stakeholders’ Expectations and Market Needs” is my work. It has not been offered for the award of any other degrees at Lancaster University or any other educational institution.

The word length of this thesis is 43,640 words and does not exceed the permitted maximum of 45,000 words.

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Abstract

Higher education systems in different countries worldwide have undergone important changes and transformations in response to the economic structures of their respective societies, indicating that there is a need to prepare future graduates to meet the market's demands and employers' requirements. Thus, the importance attached to the concept of 'employability' has been widely explored in higher education contexts. This concern can be justified by the great demand for highly qualified workers who can contribute to the labour market by boosting innovation and productivity, particularly in the light of the profound technological advances that have affected every facet of life. In this context, a considerable amount of interdisciplinary literature highlights the role played by digital media in enhancing employability attributes.

This thesis examines how social media (SM) may help business graduates become more employable. It seeks to determine how social media literacy (SML) improves job searchers' competitiveness in the contemporary cut-throat digital economy. The abilities and qualities the business sector seeks were investigated by examining job advertisements for business roles found on the Internet. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with employers and business graduates to explore their views on the possible effects of SM on employment.

The findings confirmed that there is indeed a link between SM and employability. The study emphasised the value of SML in developing job searchers' employability skills (human capital) and providing them with job opportunities (social capital). Furthermore, it confirmed that social media platforms give learners opportunities for self-directed learning and support the growth of their self-efficacy and autonomy. Social media can, therefore, enhance aspects of the curriculum and establish industry partnerships to improve higher education institution (HEI) practices, bridging the gap between academic practices and industry demands and ensuring that graduates are well-prepared for future workplaces.

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List of Abbreviations

GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
HEIs	Higher education institutions
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OAAAQA	Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance
SM	Social media
SML	Social media literacy
SMNs	Social media networks
WIL	Work-integrated learning

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This thesis examines the effect of social media literacy (SML) on improving business graduates' employability skills. It aims to ascertain how SML enhances the competitive advantage of job seekers in the current competitive digital marketplace, particularly in relation to advertised vacancies. An analysis of Internet job advertisements for business positions was conducted to examine the skills and attributes sought by the business sector. Furthermore, business graduates and employers were interviewed to explore their views on the potential impact of social media (SM) on employment. The findings of this study will offer a comprehensive understanding of how SM can be best used in institutional contexts to enhance graduates' employability skills.

Over the past few decades, higher education (HE) systems in different countries have undergone an important transformation in response to the economic structures of their respective societies, suggesting that it is necessary to prepare future graduates to meet the market's needs and employers' requirements. As a result, the importance attached to the concept of 'employability' has been widely discussed in higher education contexts (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Tight, 2023; Tomlinson, 2017; Yorke, 2006). This concern can be justified by the high demand for a highly skilled workforce that can contribute to the labour market by fostering creativity and productivity, particularly in the context of considerable technological changes in all facets of life.

Additionally, the problem of the growing number of job seekers has been recognised as an increasing concern within the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, namely Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE (Belwal et al., 2017). Research on GCC nationals has revealed that the percentage of individuals under the age of 30 who are unemployed is in double figures, and private-sector businesses are hesitant to support GCC employment programmes because of the skill mismatch (Belwal et al., 2017; Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010; Matherly & Hodgson, 2014). The private sector's reluctance to employ national graduates (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010) has indicated that HE practises have not been effectively designed to prepare fresh graduates for

the private labour market. Narrowing the gap between labour market demand and the skills applicants have developed through their education and experience remains a challenge for businesses, higher education providers, graduates, and the government (Matherly & Hodgson, 2014).

Furthermore, unemployment poses an important policy challenge for the GCC countries (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010; Harry, 2007). Improving higher education policies and practices could play a pivotal role in solving the challenge. Higher education institutions (HEIs) can ensure that graduates are well-prepared for the labour market by offering up-to-date relevant academic curricula and specialised training. Thus, the role of HE extends beyond simply awarding degrees; it has a key role in fostering self-directed learning and facilitating continuous learning throughout an individual's life. It is as important, if not more important, in enhancing graduates' employability throughout their careers. Therefore, establishing and nurturing strong connections with industries is a crucial initiative that should be considered.

These challenges are what initially motivated the present investigation, prompting an examination of the impact of SM on individuals and the possibility of establishing a connection between this and the improvement of graduates' employability. The extensive use of SM platforms for communication, connectivity and information sharing has attracted considerable attention in academic discourse. Ensuring that an appropriate amount of time is spent on SM platforms can effectively enhance graduates' skills and attributes. Moreover, there has been a growing trend among employers to use social media networks (SMNs) for the purpose of advertising job openings and conducting recruitment activities. Similarly, recent graduates have been leveraging these platforms to establish a professional online presence, showcasing their educational backgrounds, work experiences and skill sets. Additionally, they use SM to broaden their network of professional contacts within their respective industries and establish communication with potential recruiters. These developments highlight the potential impact of SM on helping graduates present themselves effectively and smartly to employers in today's digitalised market.

Developing the ability to manage the potential positive impact of SM on the employability skills of their students could alleviate the pressure on HEIs to

produce highly skilled graduates capable of competing in the global market and raising the employment rate. The key point is that, rather than using SM purely for entertainment, it can serve as a valuable instrument for enhancing an individual's lifelong learning abilities and ensuring that its users remain informed about essential proficiencies as they emerge in the marketplace. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the impact of SM on improving employability in order to determine how these platforms can be used effectively by graduates and how they can be integrated into the institutional practises of HEIs.

This research may, therefore, provide insights into how market demands for a qualified workforce with excellent employability skills can be addressed. Moreover, it opens opportunities for Omani HEIs to actively incorporate emerging SM platforms in their operational strategies. The meaningful and effective use of SM in HEIs might help polish graduates' employability competencies and increase their competitiveness in global markets. Like many individuals across the globe, these students derive pleasure from engaging with SM platforms for various purposes such as entertainment, pursuing their interests, communicating with peers, acquiring knowledge and numerous other endeavours. Thus, graduates can be motivated to use SM to improve their employability.

1.2. Employability and Social Media

The issue of employability is a complex and multifaceted subject that is challenging to define and explore in depth due to its susceptibility to various contextual and temporal influences. Hillage and Pollard (1998) provide a frequently referenced definition which characterises employability as the aptitude of individuals to secure and sustain employment or pursue alternative career opportunities. However, reaching a consensus on a definition of employability proves challenging due to the ever-evolving nature of labour market demands and educational paradigms. Therefore, within the context of this study, I define employability as the personal qualities and skills which make individuals attractive candidates for employment in the contemporary digital age. Graduates' employability skills and attributes should include all the essential functional and empowering areas of knowledge, skills, and attributes required in a workplace. Given the rapid pace of technological progress, it is imperative for individuals to

be proactive and adopt appropriate strategies in order to effectively navigate the evolving landscape. It can, therefore, be argued that SM has the potential to enhance graduates' employability.

The rapid advance of technology has increased the reliance on digital platforms, thereby transforming the modes of communication and collaboration involved in managing industry-related tasks. Accordingly, achieving success in the labour market makes it necessary for individuals to possess high-level digital and SM skills, improving their employment prospects. Possessing such skills has several benefits. Firstly, these skills enable individuals to communicate effectively, which opens up lucrative employment prospects. Moreover, having strong SM skills helps job seekers navigate online job board sites such as LinkedIn to find suitable job opportunities. Social media networks (SMNs) enable candidates to maintain a positive online presence and enhance their credibility and visibility so that they attract potential employers. It is also important to note that digital and SML skills facilitate lifelong learning in a world where job markets constantly evolve, enabling individuals to adapt quickly to new digital tools and platforms. Leveraging such skills will enable individuals to increase their competitiveness.

Empirical studies have also been conducted to examine the impact of SM literacies on enhancing graduates' employability. The integration of SML has been found to have a positive impact on the academic accomplishments of students as well as their technical proficiency in subjects relevant to their chosen fields of study (Benson et al., 2014; Benson & Morgan, 2016; Greenhow & Gleason, 2014; Kimmel, 2021; Olowo et al., 2021). The interactive learning environment, which is accessed through digital media literacies, has been shown to help English language learners improve their English language competencies (Yuan et al., 2019) and writing abilities (Kim & Freberg, 2016). Furthermore, SML has a positive impact on an individual's critical identity in areas such as time management (Griffin & Coelho, 2019) and flexibility (Hill et al., 2016). Moreover, empirical evidence supports the claim that the acquisition of critical media literacy skills fosters the development of analytical and evaluative proficiency (Chen et al., 2018; Khodeir & Nessim, 2019) and critical thinking skills (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014), which are in high demand in today's digitally competitive workplaces. Benson et al. (2014) and Glover et al. (2002) also posit

that SML has contributed to the improvement of skills related to communication, technology, networking, and problem-solving. In the contemporary job market, individuals across various professions are expected to use digital or online platforms to create professional profiles, share work-related documents, and manage social communication with clients (He et al., 2017; Kimmel, 2021; Robards & Graf, 2022; Selwyn, 2012). Consequently, these platforms have become highly attractive to employers in today's digitally dominated work environment.

Therefore, integrating SML into academic curricula is necessary for enhancing employability within the current digitalised labour market. It will promote the development of a more connected and involved academic community to meet the changing demands of the workplace.

1.3. The National Context: Employability and HE in Oman

Higher education is considered one of the most influential factors in forming and developing the basis of a nation at the social, educational and economic levels. In the Omani context, the impact of HE on the labour market can be assessed by the extent to which it equips graduates with the necessary skills and attributes demanded by employers (Al-Harhi, 2011; Al-Hinai, 2011; Hinai et al., 2020). Labour organisations link the rapid growth in the unemployment rate in Oman and the Gulf states to the mismatch between graduates' attributes and market demands (Al-Harhi, 2011; Belwal et al., 2017; Hinai et al., 2020; Taderera, 2018). Unfortunately, in Oman, a considerable proportion of graduates face prolonged unemployment, with employers frequently complaining that graduates from national universities often exhibit deficiencies in job-specific skills and fail to meet performance expectations. For instance, Taderera (2018) felt that many Omani graduates did not possess sufficient soft skills and other attributes which employers sought in their employees, such as reliability, problem-solving and critical thinking skills. The development of this skills gap can be attributed to the evolving demands of the labour market in response to changes in the dynamic economy.

If current trends persist, it is anticipated that the labour market will face challenges in accommodating local graduates due to heightened competition and the need

to consider the bottom line. It is imperative to build long-term sustainability and develop better values and productivity to satisfy employers' requirements on the basis of a deeper understanding of graduates' attributes and employability skills. Thus, improving the flexibility and adaptability of the HE and training system to accommodate evolving needs is more likely to make a difference and contribute to addressing the challenges and meeting the demands of business, particularly in the context of technological advances and rapid globalisation.

Accordingly, in the last few decades, many HEIs in Oman have become more responsive to the labour market's ongoing demands in the education they provide to enhance graduates' employability skills and competencies (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010; Hinai et al., 2020). This may explain why HEIs in Oman are increasingly concerned with graduate employability attributes, and there are three main reasons (Belwal et al., 2017):

First, the increased pressure on educational institutions to produce graduates with good employability skills; second, the increase in the supply of graduates and competition amongst students and institutions for their employment; and third, the recent drive of the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), the authority charged with regulating the quality of higher education in Oman. (p.820)

In line with the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) standards, Omani HEIs are expected to shift their goals to quality accreditation and recognition by providing high-quality teaching to produce employable graduates who can compete in today's labour market. This means that the processes and procedures followed in educational institutions should enhance graduates' skills and attributes since accreditation is one of the main requirements (Oman Academic Accreditation Authority, 2016).

Furthermore, Al-Nabhani et al. (2015) claim that enriching academic debates and embracing reality can be achieved through targeted recruitment and consulting top industrial managers, technologists, engineers and designers. This suggestion appears feasible in the Omani context because

who knows industrial requirements better than someone who has been there? A galaxy of pure academics only for any institution is now considered a dangerous liability and a mismatch with industrial expectations. Is this not one of the reasons why the Oman industry is

complaining about graduate non-compliance with labour market requirements and expectations? (ibid, 2015: 93).

Omani HEIs are expected to be innovative in dealing with the challenge of enhancing graduates' employability and ensuring their readiness for employment. Graduates are also expected to be equipped with the skills which are most in demand to eliminate the skills gap. However, the capacity of HEIs to improve employability attributes is constrained, as their impact is not sufficient to modify employers' attitudes and behaviours, the demands made by employers or overall labour market conditions. Collaboration is thus recommended between stakeholders, including employers, academics and graduates, to match graduates' employability attributes with workplace demands, ensuring that their capabilities are well-suited to their chosen occupations.

1.4. The Significance of this Thesis

The integration of digital media has become increasingly necessary due to its pervasive presence in various aspects of life, resulting from widespread technological exposure. The use of SM, as an essential component of digital literacy, has attracted notable attention from HEIs, and some of them have started incorporating emerging digital media literacy into their curricula for pedagogical purposes (Benson et al., 2014; Sutherland & Ho, 2017). The results of these investigations suggest that SM platforms have proved their effectiveness as teaching/learning tools in pedagogical contexts. Nevertheless, there are many reasons why it is important to conduct a more comprehensive examination of the influence of SM on enhancing employability attributes. First of all, the intensive daily use of SMNs among individuals for communication and collaboration makes it an ideal way to foster employability attributes. Social media serves as a platform for facilitating communication with students, enabling the dissemination of news, announcements and information about events in a timely manner, thereby fostering active engagement with followers. In addition, SML provides valuable opportunities and resources to develop individuals' employability. The resources available on SM platforms might expand an individual's professional network, enhance their personal branding and provide meaningful training and career guidance resources (Crossan, 2022; Higdon, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017). For

instance, graduates use LinkedIn to create professional profiles, highlighting their education, experience and skills. They also use it to connect with recruiters or other professionals in their field.

On the other hand, employers use SM to post job openings and evaluate candidates' digital skills. All this highlights the impact of SM in recruitment. The use of SM platforms demonstrates the need to examine the efficacy of the tools and practices these platforms provide, a subject that is further explored in this research. This analysis also identifies the factors that could impact employability, such as privacy concerns, recruitment bias and reputation management.

At the national level, this thesis aligns with the vision of Oman 2040, which aims to cultivate highly qualified graduates with competitive qualifications and employability skills to meet the needs of the labour market effectively by using modern and effective teaching and learning techniques (*Oman Vision 2040*, n.d.). Since technology improves productivity and efficiency in education, using digital and SM literacies to enhance employability attributes is beneficial. The thesis study investigates the impact of SM on enhancing employability attributes as perceived by stakeholders, i.e. graduates and employers. Exploring the perspectives of direct users will provide valuable insights by shedding light on the strengths, weaknesses and challenges, as well as proposing solutions which have practical implications. Moreover, investigating the beneficial impact of SML on employability provides valuable insights that help individuals, industries and HEIs maximise the potential of SM to enhance employment and career prospects.

1.5. Research Aims and Questions

The present study examines the influence of SM on the development of employability attributes among business students in HEIs in Oman. To be specific, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: What are the employability skills or attributes most sought by employers in today's labour market in Oman?

RQ2: How do stakeholders (graduates and employers) view social media literacy in relation to graduate employability?

RQ3: What challenges do graduates or employers experience in using social media for employment purposes?

RQ4: What practical implications do the findings of this study have for enhancing graduate employability attributes in Oman's HEIs?

1.6. The Structure of this Thesis

This thesis comprises six chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion. The first chapter introduces the thesis, provides contextual information regarding the research and its aims and objectives, and outlines the structure of the thesis. It also provides definitions of key terms such as employability and SM, which will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2.

Chapter Two examines and critically analyses the literature on SM and its impact on graduates' employability attributes. It examines the conceptualisation of employability and how it has evolved and continues to evolve in response to the rapid development of technology and market demands. The chapter also discusses the concept of digital literacy and SML and their role in enhancing employability.

Chapter Three outlines the methods, methodology and research approach used to answer the research questions. It discusses the importance of this thesis and the theoretical framework. It also presents and explains the research questions, the data collection process, and the methods used for data analysis. Furthermore, it outlines the ethical considerations that were considered prior to and during the research.

Chapter Four presents a comprehensive examination of the findings. It presents the analysis of job advertisements and semi-structured interviews with employers and graduates. Also, the chapter outlines the most in-demand employability skills in today's competitive labour market, which are derived from the analysis of web-based job advertisements. Additionally, it discusses the graduates' and academics' perspectives regarding the impact of SM on enhancing employability.

Chapter Five discusses and synthesises the data collected with the existing body of knowledge to outline the implications of the study's findings. This discussion revolves around the research objectives, and identifies the contribution which this investigation makes to the existing body of knowledge. Further implications of the study are also examined, and recommendations are provided for improving

employability in higher education contexts through the meaningful incorporation of SM.

Chapter Six concludes the study. It summarises the main findings of the study against the background of its initial premise and the aim of the research. It also evaluates the thesis' theoretical contribution and limitations, and suggests potential avenues for further research. Finally, the personal reflections and limitations of the research are discussed.

1.7. Conclusion

This introduction gives the reader a brief overview of the aim of the thesis, namely to investigate whether and how SM enhances students' employability skills and attributes. The findings of this research will have an impact on the use of SML as a means of enhancing employability. Moreover, the findings will illuminate potential strategies for integrating SM into HE to enhance students' development and educational experiences.

The next chapter outlines and discusses the concept of employability and its implications. It also explores the perspectives of graduates, academics, and employers on the use of SM to improve employability. Finally, the chapter analyses the impact of SML on enhancing graduates' employability.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In the current dynamic landscape, there is a compelling need for higher education institutions (HEIs), employers and graduates to respond effectively to the evolving requirements of the labour market. This requires the development of a workforce equipped with the knowledge and attributes which are essential to confront the emerging challenges within today's fiercely competitive professional environments. Employers commonly prefer to recruit entry-level employees who already understand and can deal effectively with the demands of businesses which operate in a technology-oriented market (Belwal et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2018; Griffin & Coelho, 2019; Suarta & Suwintana, 2021). In recent decades, there has been rapid growth in the demand for qualified business graduates in Oman (Belwal et al., 2017; Shah & Baporikar, 2012; Taderera, 2018). However, in today's digital world, there are important concerns about the increasing gap between the skills which new graduates offer and the demands of the job market, with the result that employers have expressed dissatisfaction about being able to recruit only graduates who are deficient in essential soft skills and non-cognitive attributes (Artess et al., 2017; Barhem et al., 2008). Therefore, job seekers must be aware of essential employability skills and attributes if they are to secure suitable employment.

This chapter critically analyses and discusses the literature which is relevant to this thesis. A comprehensive review of relevant scholarly articles on social media literacy (SML) and employability attributes was conducted. This thesis used Google Scholar and e-journals as primary sources for finding pertinent scholarly articles and references. The present study reviewed 98 relevant articles published between 1998 and 2023, nine of which related specifically to Oman and the Gulf states. In this review, only English full-text articles were searched using keywords such as 'social media literacy', 'critical social media', 'digital literacy', 'employability', 'employment', 'attributes', 'competencies', 'technical skills', 'soft skills', 'recruitment', 'business graduates', 'employers' perceptions', 'graduates' perceptions', 'labour market needs' and 'job advertisements'.

The review starts in the next section, 2.2, which defines employability and graduate employability, along with their impact on enhancing employment prospects. Subsequently, section 2.3 explores the perspectives of the three directly involved stakeholder groups: students, academics and employers. Students' engagement can be assessed by their endeavours to equip themselves for future employment, while academics' concerns can be seen in their efforts to produce employable graduates. Employers can, finally, evaluate students' and academics' efforts from students' performance in the workplace. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the perspectives of these three interest groups to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the subject under investigation. Section 2.4 explores and compares employability frameworks to acquire an in-depth understanding of the skills which are highly sought after. Section 2.5 critically examines the discourse surrounding employability attributes and graduates' identities. Section 2.6 focuses on the impact of digital literacy, mainly SML, and its role in enhancing graduates' employability. Finally, Section 2.7 concludes the chapter by summarising essential points.

2.2. The Concept of Employability

Before exploring the concept of employability, it is necessary to clarify the conceptual difference between 'employment' and 'employability'. Although these two concepts are related, they are not identical, and it is important to differentiate between them. 'Employment' refers to an individual's ability to earn a living through paid work or self-employment. On the other hand, 'employability' means an individual's capacity and readiness to gain employment by being equipped with the required skills and attributes. It encompasses whatever knowledge, skills, attributes and attitudes which make them an attractive choice to potential employers. The relationship between the two concepts can be explained as follows: employability represents the skills and attributes which individuals are expected to possess to succeed in gaining employment. In other words, enhancing graduates' employability is the starting point for increasing individuals' chances of securing employment.

The concept of employability has been debated as it undergoes continuous evolution in response to the ever-increasing pace and scope of industry and

market demands. According to Belwal et al. (2017), the concept of employability has been described from various perspectives and levels, encompassing social, industrial or individual dimensions. However, despite the various definitions of employability found in the literature, the underlying connotations ultimately align with the notion of securing employment and performing at a satisfactory level within one's chosen profession (ibid, 2017).

A widely cited definition is that of Hillage and Pollard (1998), who defined employability as the capability of individuals to gain employment, maintain employment or obtain a new career. The acquisition of sustainable employment depends on having the essential capacities and the ability to function independently in the workplace, thereby facilitating the comprehension and acquisition of requisite skills. The researchers put forward a model of employability consisting of four primary components, namely:

- a) Assets (which include skills, qualifications and attitudes);
- b) Deployment (which includes job search techniques, strategies and skills);
- c) Presentation (which includes listing one's assets in a CV or job interview);
and
- d) The personal and labour market context (which includes job vacancies and the employer's personality or behaviour).

According to Harvey (2001: 98), an alternative approach to conceptualising employability is to define it as the state of "being equipped for a job," which might be viewed with reference to any or all of the following five suggested dimensions:

1. Job type: the ability to get work requiring graduate-level skills and abilities
2. Timing: the ability to get a job within a certain period after graduation
3. Attributes in recruitment: the ability to validate specific needed attributes for the hired job
4. Further learning: the ability to keep learning and updating one's knowledge after graduation
5. Employability skills: the ability to acquire the basic and primary skills that are required in various jobs

The first three dimensions outlined in Harvey's definition emphasise the importance of being specific and limited in relation to the time factor, the attributes required or the type of job. However, the last two dimensions do not focus on a

specific period or a specific set of necessary skills and attributes. These dimensions address the core factors which contribute effectively to obtaining employment, taking into account the importance of autonomy and learning to adjust to the changing needs of the labour market.

According to McQuaid and Lindsay (2005), employability is made up of a person's ability to get and keep a job or change a job in the light of the knowledge determined by individual characteristics and circumstances, considering broader external factors such as social, institutional and economic issues. Similarly, Rothwell and Arnold (2007) describe employability as the ability to attain a job by finding the job one wants or by keeping the position one has. Another common definition is proposed by Yorke (2006: 8), who states that employability is "a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy." Also, Heijde and Van Der Heijden (2006: 453) define employability as "the continuous fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of competencies". The concept can be further elaborated and elucidated as the capacity to adjust to shifts in the labour market and high-speed technological advances. Adaptability is thus of utmost importance in order to exhibit flexibility in acquiring or retaining employment.

A more recent definition was proposed by Effiong and Mary (2014: 1245), who state that employability means attaining and keeping satisfying work through having the "capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment". Likewise, Galeotti et al. (2022) define employability as relevant knowledge, including skills and personal attributes, that supports individuals in securing employment in today's competitive labour market. Römgens et al. (2020) suggest a comprehensive framework outlining the various detailed dimensions of employability. According to their definition, employability is an individual's subjective assessment of their capability to secure and sustain employment throughout their professional trajectory. For them to accomplish this, the authors identify five distinct dimensions of employability within the organisational context:

- a) Human capital (which includes knowledge, skills and attitudes)

- b) Reflection on self and organisation (which includes awareness of the individual's position in the work context and personal goals, values, interests, expectations and motivations).
- c) Lifelong learning and flexibility (which includes the willingness and ability to develop oneself and adaptability to changing situations and environments)
- d) Social capital (which includes social recognition, teamwork skills and the ability to develop relevant work-related relationships)
- e) A healthy work-life balance (which includes resilience and stress management)

Consistent with the proposition that a complex mix of factors could be used to explain one's employability (Brown, 2003; Harvey, 2001; Hillage & Pollard, 1998; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Yorke, 2006), building substantial employment should not be the responsibility of a particular body or institution. Brown (2003: 31) argues that "it is possible to be employable, but not in employment". The concept of employability refers to the capacity of a graduate to secure employment and effectively perform in their chosen occupation. Conversely, employment refers to the tangible outcome of obtaining a job position. For instance, the endeavours of HEIs to shape their graduates' employability may prove insufficient to help them secure employment opportunities. Also, external factors such as employers' subjective opinions and economic circumstances might influence students' employability in securing employment.

As can be seen from the above definitions, employability is a multifaceted concept, so it is difficult to provide a precise definition. The discussion of employability in the literature focuses primarily on individuals' attributes and preparedness to secure employment, sustain their current positions, or to pursue improved opportunities for advancement. Some conceptualisations view employability as an individual ability and responsibility (Heijde & Van Der Heijden, 2006; Hillage & Pollard, 1998). On the other hand, in addition to individuals' skills and dispositions, employability is determined by external factors and personal circumstances (Brown et al., 2003; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). While acknowledging the importance of these facts, it is important to avoid viewing employability narrowly as a limited set of skills that are prone to frequent and

substantial fluctuations in response to ongoing changes and market demands. Because employability cannot be limited, recent efforts have been made to emphasise the need to consider the interaction between individuals' attitudes and external factors that affect job seekers' ability to operate effectively in the market (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005).

2.2.1. The Concept of Employability in this Thesis

The diverse range of perspectives and definitions surrounding employability discussed above makes it necessary to identify a practical definition for the purposes of this thesis. Blaxter et al. (2006) argue that research choices should consider the personal needs of the researcher and the requirements of the topic being researched. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that each research study has distinct contexts and objectives. In this study, employability refers to the essential competencies and qualities that recent graduates should possess to be considered employable in the digital age. These skills and attributes include the fundamental, empowering and functional knowledge, abilities and attributes needed in the workplace.

This thesis investigates the influence of SM on improving graduates' employability attributes in a business context. Therefore, it examines the concept of employability, and the competencies and attributes fresh business graduates should have to obtain a promising future career. Furthermore, this thesis explores the possibility of enhancing these skills through digital literacy, mainly SML. The impact of SML in enhancing employability is of the utmost importance due to the pervasive nature of digitalisation in various aspects of life, including the labour market. Researching the impact of SM on improving employability can, therefore, contribute to a better understanding of the subject matter. This will help to develop employable graduates with the necessary skills and attributes to keep pace with market demands in this age of acceleration.

The perception of employability issues varies among stakeholders at the national level. On the one hand, Omani graduates believe it is the government's responsibility to provide a high-quality educational system that produces qualified, employable graduates (Al-Harthi, 2011). On the other hand, due to students' inadequate educational backgrounds and unfavourable attitudes

towards learning, Omani HEIs have not been able to accomplish much in this area (Shah & Baporikar, 2012). For employers, Omani graduates' performance in the workforce is below expectations, and they lack the initiative to develop themselves professionally (Hinai et al., 2020; Taderera, 2018). It is also observed that many fresh Omani graduates failed to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge at a fundamental level in numerous technical areas because of a weak educational background, low motivation for hard work and a lack of critical thinking and an independent mindset (Taderera, 2018). Employers have expressed dissatisfaction that many of the graduates they have hired are deficient in job-specific skills and general employability skills and attributes such as problem-solving, critical thinking, analytics, communication and flexibility (ibid, 2018). It has been observed that there is a lack of clarity regarding the responsibilities and duties of stakeholders for addressing the disparity between the graduate's attributes and the graduate's employability to effectively meet the demands of the market and the expectations of employers. Belwal et al. (2017: 823) emphasise that "it is high time for Oman to enhance the employability of its graduates in an integrated manner and close collaboration with stakeholders". Therefore, the current thesis investigates SM's possible impact on enhancing graduates' employability by exploring the perspectives of stakeholders, i.e. employers and students. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the issue from diverse viewpoints and facilitates the identification of practical solutions.

2.3. Employability Frameworks

There is a consensus that success in the pursuit of an occupation is based on a wide range of factors. Thus, there have been numerous attempts to develop conceptual frameworks to delineate fundamental employability attributes within a specific business domain, taking into consideration the perspectives of education and labour market demands.

The employability framework of McQuaid-Lindsay (2005) suggests that there are three main interrelated sets of factors that might influence an individual's employability, namely individual, personal and external factors. Individual factors include employability skills and attitudes, demographic characteristics, health and

well-being, job-seeking skills and adaptability. The second set, personal circumstances, has to do with household circumstances, work culture and access to resources. Thirdly, external factors relate to labour demand and the enabling support of employment-related public services. The framework discusses an individual's employability in relation to personal circumstances, focusing on likely interventions in terms of labour policy. The interaction of these main factors should be considered in any attempt to maximise the participation of job seekers in the labour market.

Jackson and Chapman (2012) propose an alternative framework consisting of four primary categories of employability attributes: cognitive processes, social skills, self-management skills and technical/administrative skills. This framework was proposed to investigate the most important non-technical skills among business graduates. Two hundred eleven supervisors of business graduates and 156 business academics assessed the individual performance levels of business graduates against a comprehensive framework of 20 skills and 45 associated workplace behaviours, which were grouped conceptually into 20 skills based on prior theoretical and empirical suggestions. The framework is based on measurable behaviours. Abstract skills are omitted from consideration due to their inherent ambiguity and susceptibility to misinterpretation, and "behaviours are defined as a process or activity which more clearly indicates the required outcome and the capabilities required to achieve it" (ibid, 2012: 6).

Smith et al. (2016) surveyed a sample of more than 3,000 students to explore the measures that could be employed to define the construct of 'employment readiness'. The aim was to utilise these indicators in the design of curricula for work-integrated learning. A framework of six main employability dimensions was applied: professional practices, collaboration, decision-making, lifelong learning, integrated theory, practice and readiness. Items indicative of each of these six dimensions were selected to assess various skills, including cognitive abilities, professional practices and the preparedness of graduates to enter the workforce in their respective fields of study. The findings indicated consistent and moderately strong associations between the six employability dimensions and curriculum factors. Therefore, academics or curriculum developers will be able to

design and evaluate effective work-integrated learning (WIL) curricula, positively contributing to the development of graduates' employability.

Griffin and Coelho's (2019) study used a qualitative instrument to investigate the reflections of business students on their internship experience to identify the fundamental skills required in the professional environment. The essential employability skills were identified on the basis of the work placement experiences of learners, encompassing ten distinct skills and attributes. The findings revealed that students emphasised the importance of almost all the listed employability skills; nine of the ten skills received a mean rating above 3.00 on a four-point Likert scale.

Given today's digital world of work, Suarta and Suwintana (2021) proposed a new conceptual employability framework that combines generic digital skills and personal attributes. Generic digital skills are the competencies required for different occupations in several different situations to succeed in work, education and life. These skills include digital business communication, teamwork, problem-solving, creativity and innovation, self-management and business digital skills. Personal values include "the individual potential of a graduate, including honesty and integrity, working carefully and accurately, self-confidence and ability to work independently, having a pleasant personality, broad-minded and adaptability, and strong work ethics." (ibid: 6)

The employability dimensions used to measure and assess graduates' employability in the frameworks described here are listed in Table 2.1 below.

Brief Description	Employability Skills/Attributes/Dimensions	Reference
Three main interrelated components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual factors - Personal circumstances - External factors 	McQuaid-Lindsay (2005)
A framework of 4 main categories of employability attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cognitive processes - Social skills - Self-management skills - Technical/administrative skills 	Jackson & Chapman (2012)
A framework of 6 employability dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional practices - Collaboration - Decision making - Lifelong learning - Integration of theory - Practice and readiness 	Smith et al. (2016)
A framework of 10 employability attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teamwork - Verbal communication - Critical thinking - Problem-solving - Taking the initiative and being proactive - Interpersonal skills - Project management - Intercultural skills - Time management - Self-management 	Griffin & Coelho (2019)
A framework of 2 main competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Digital generic skills - Personal attributes 	Suerta & Suwintana (2021)

Table 2.1: Examples of some employability attribute frameworks developed over the past twenty years

Table 2.1 presents a comprehensive consensus on the majority of skills and attributes. It should be noted that there is remarkable agreement in the emphasis placed on soft skills, which are consistently prioritised across these frameworks. Although there is a consensus, it should be acknowledged that these skills are not limited to a fixed set and are subject to adaptation depending on the demands of the job market. Despite the substantial similarities of the core employability attributes identified, there are some discrepancies. One plausible explanation may be the influence of occupations, market needs and technological improvements, which prioritise certain skills over others. It is undeniable that technological progress has changed how information is produced, processed, evaluated and interpreted, and this is likely to affect market demands.

2.4. Stakeholders' Perspectives

Employability attributes are the essential functional competencies and abilities that enable a graduate to find a satisfying occupation (Griffin & Coelho, 2019). Employers and academics are expected to help graduates build their employability skills to compete in today's market (Clarke, 2018). Many terms are used in the literature to denote employability attributes, including 'qualities', 'skills', 'values', 'characteristics' and 'competencies'. These terms are often used interchangeably to describe the same attributes with no attempt to distinguish the meaning of each term or why they can be used for the same thing. It is clear that there has been no concerted effort to establish a universally accepted definition for each term within the academic and industry domains. Thus, this thesis does not use a single term but instead uses the predominant terms 'employability' and 'graduate attributes'.

2.4.1. Employers' Perspectives

Employers exhibit a notable preoccupation with employability, as evidenced by their inclination to recruit individuals who have the requisite skills and competencies for available positions, particularly those who have completed a college education. As a result, the labour market has emphasised the importance of employability skills, especially with the increasing skills gaps and demands for labour productivity (Suarta & Suwintana, 2021). However, it is challenging to meet market needs due to growing uncertainties in the labour market, where demand fluctuates because of either supply- or demand-side factors. This is also due to the rapid social and technological changes in the past few decades, where employers' demands and interests reflect the shift from an industry-based to an information-based economy (Rios et al., 2020). For this reason, many careers now require specific employability skills to deal professionally with a globalised workforce and technological developments. To enable HEIs and students respond appropriately, studies have investigated employers' views on the most commonly needed skills and attributes (Abelha et al., 2020; Kaplan, 2014; Rios et al., 2020; Saunders & Zuzel, 2010; Tejan & Sabil, 2019).

Numerous studies indicate that employers tend to place a higher value on soft skills than on technical skills. Employers typically consider basic employability

skills and attributes to be just as important as job-specific skills when selecting prospective employees. For instance, Saunders and Zuzel (2010) and Succi and Canovi (2020) investigated employability skills from employers' perspectives, concluding that personal attributes and soft skills were prioritised over technical and subject-related skills. In addition, enthusiasm and willingness to learn were valued the most in industrial contexts (Saunders & Zuzel, 2010). Similarly, Abelha et al. (2020) also concluded that adapting to evolving labour market requirements involves integrating digital and non-cognitive skills, such as communication and teamwork. In addition, communication skills and graduates' attitudes are the essential competencies employers look for at the recruitment stage (Abelha et al., 2020; Rios et al., 2020; Tejan & Sabil, 2019). It should be noted that the dynamism of labour market requirements makes soft skills necessary, and occasionally, these competencies take precedence over technical skills.

Adopting a qualitative research method, Low et al. (2016) conducted semi-structured interviews with accountancy employers to investigate the most required skills for accounting graduates. From a technical standpoint, employers prefer employees who possess essential technical accounting skills. In addition, most participants preferred graduates with strong interpersonal skills, an ability to fit into the organisational culture, and oral communication skills. Significant importance was also attached to listening skills, teamwork abilities, an aptitude for problem-solving, and emotional intelligence (ibid, 2016).

Similarly, Tejan and Sabil (2019) examined employability skills from employers' perspectives. They found that employers expected their employees to possess good communication, analytical, teamwork, organisation and leadership skills. In addition, when recruiting new personnel, employers sought graduates who were sufficiently adaptable and flexible to effectively navigate the ever-evolving dynamics of the modern workplace. Other essential skills were reading, listening, problem-solving, creativity and accountability. These skills are substantial because critical thinking, analytical prowess, and the ability to make comprehensive decisions are essential for coping with changing global and competitive business environments.

In a recent study, Rios et al. (2020) examined employers' direct communication with potential future employees to ascertain what they viewed as the most crucial

skills for achieving success in the contemporary workplace. This investigation involved the meticulous analysis of a substantial sample of 142,000 job advertisements across various disciplines, including business, STEM, social science, education, art and humanities. It was found that the important skills for employment in all the fields investigated, including business, were oral and written communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. In addition, it can be noted that analysing job advertisements helps identify individual-specific personal attributes with special consideration of socioeconomic aspects.

The collective results of recent studies indicate that employers value non-technical skills over technical skills. However, employers' preference for generic skills and personal attributes does not reduce the importance of subject-related knowledge; rather, it emphasises the added value of core skills and unique personal qualities. Dynamic shifts in market conditions may influence employers' views, which are more likely to suit employees with good personal attributes, which will help them adapt to the expected changes in the labour market. However, in-depth studies to identify employers' views on raising the employability levels of graduates would be beneficial and are strongly advised in this context.

2.4.2. Academics' Perspectives

While there has been limited research on the acceptance and perceptions of the employability agenda in HE among academics (Sin & Amaral, 2017), several studies have been conducted to investigate this issue. Recently, HEIs have faced pressure from prospective employers and other stakeholders to prepare graduates with desirable employability skills (Abelha et al., 2020; Bennett, 2006; Paterson, 2017; Pereira et al., 2020; Sin et al., 2019; Tejan & Sabil, 2019). The recent relationship between employability and HE has been explained by Tight (2023:1), who argues that HE is “effectively re-positioned as a means to an end (worthwhile employment) rather than an end in itself (the development of intellectually well-rounded individuals)”, with the vocational purposes of HE being emphasised to enhance employability initiatives. Therefore, integrating employability competencies into courses may reduce the perceived shortfalls in the ability of graduates to perform tasks needed in the workplace (Paterson,

2017). As acknowledged in various contexts, HEIs play an important role in helping graduates develop the employability skills they need, although this is still insufficient to address the issue. It is imperative to comprehensively explore and comprehend academics' perspectives on employability skills to address the issue adequately. Although such responsibility may “create additional short-term challenges [for HEIs], it could offer long-term solutions” (Tejan & Sabil, 2019: 138).

In 2006, Cranmer conducted semi-structured interviews with 60 academic staff and ten employability unit staff in five subjects: biological sciences, business studies, computer science, design studies and history. The aim of the study was to assess how academics perceive and engage in the teaching and learning of employability skills. However, the findings raise questions regarding the efficacy of cultivating employability skills in educational settings. As a result, Cranmer suggested a set of categories to teach employability in HEIs by embedding employability skills in the academic curriculum. In addition, parallel stand-alone tasks for developing study skills (e.g., writing skills) or generic skills (e.g., CV writing) might have positive effects. This is based on the argument that “resources would be better utilised to increase employment-based training and experience, and employer involvement in courses, which were found to affect immediate graduate prospects in the labour market positively and, therefore, support graduates in the transitional stage into employment” (ibid: 169).

Furthermore, a survey was conducted on the perceptions of 684 Portuguese academics and 64 employers about the role of HEIs (Sin & Amaral, 2017). The findings confirmed that HE is a leading agent in the development of student employability and preparation for the labour market. The researchers also showed that academics had expressed their intention to enhance student employability through the involvement of employers in curricular review, and of professional bodies in curriculum development, with explicit identification of learning outcomes and competencies, attention to employability skills, and the inclusion of work internships (ibid, 2017).

In a similar study, Sin et al. (2019) collected data from 70 academics working in three disciplines: management, computer engineering and art. Again, the findings

revealed no consistency in how academics approach employability. The researchers stated that

Despite the difference in perceptions of employability as a purpose of higher education, all academics engaged in teaching practices associated with the development of employability. Such practices seemed to serve different ends, consistent with their attitudes towards employability. While the Computer Engineering and Management academics aimed to train professionals who could fit into specific niches of the labour market, the Arts academics aimed at educating artists rather than employable artists. Employability was not, for them, a prime concern. Their intention was students' socialisation into artistic practice with all that this entailed, irrespective of whether or not their graduates would find employment. (ibid, 2019: 929)

It is evident that technical majors such as management, business and engineering prioritise the acquisition of skills and attributes needed to prepare graduates to assume roles within particular labour market contexts. However, art majors focus more on knowledge-based than skills-based learning.

A recent study by Pereira et al. (2020) found that academics regarded practical tasks and assignments in academic curricula, post-graduate support, and ongoing collaboration with the labour market as paramount factors in enhancing graduate employability. In addition, they see collaboration as a way to improve graduates' social networks, which may aid graduates in identifying different companies and potential job offers, allowing them to secure employment much faster and more efficiently.

Scholars have commonly proposed the development of a meticulously designed curriculum through active engagement with key stakeholders in the labour market, potentially leading to improved graduate employability (Cranmer, 2006; Pereira et al., 2020). However, the burden of equipping graduates with essential employment skills and attributes should not be the sole responsibility of academics. Rather, this responsibility should be shared among all stakeholders, given the increasing need for lifelong learning skills to secure and retain employment.

2.4.3. Students' Perspectives

In today's world, which is characterised by rapid technological advancements, there is a growing consensus on the impact of employability skills for college

business graduates in their pursuit of graduate-level employment (Rios et al., 2020; Suarta & Suwintana, 2021; Tejan & Sabil, 2019). Graduates are expected to take a proactive role in addressing and understanding the requirements of employers in today's business workplaces. However, students' awareness of employability is an issue that is often overlooked, and their perspectives have not been explored thoroughly. Investigating their perceptions regarding their overall employability and the opportunities available in the labour market could provide valuable insights into the potential obstacles they may encounter while pursuing employment. If they adopt this approach, individuals will be more inclined to implement the theoretical knowledge they have acquired and translate it into practical applications, thereby enhancing their agility.

The investigation of students' perceptions regarding the concept of employability has revealed that a significant percentage perceive it as the attainment of a prosperous professional trajectory, and they also feel that the university has a role in facilitating the realisation of this objective (Sin et al., 2019; Tymon, 2013). Nevertheless, most students argue that there is a notable gap between what they have learned in college and the skills they require to function successfully in the labour market. As a result, they do not seem to be confident that their college education will equip them for future workplaces. Moreover, their perceptions vary depending on the discipline they have studied. For instance, Yorke (2006) reported that business and computer science students had better awareness and knowledge in terms of what is needed from them in the workplace than history and biology graduates.

Further investigation has been undertaken to identify the specific skills and business attributes which students perceive as advantageous for enhancing their employability. Paterson (2017) argued that business students struggled to transfer employability knowledge from the college environment to the workplace. Students "need to be aware of their responsibility in developing soft skills and adopting a pro-active role to increase their employability" (Succi & Canovi, 2020: 1845). In another study, 1,204 students answered an online structured questionnaire on how to foster graduates' employability skills (Pereira et al., 2020). The participants believed universities were responsible for providing practical tasks and assignments in their academic courses, providing post-

graduation support, integrating sector-specific work placements and designing courses relevant to the labour market. Their responses identified the importance of knowing more about the labour market and its needs by connecting directly with key stakeholders.

According to the qualitative case study conducted by Paterson (2017), undergraduates have identified the essential employability skills, which are predominantly non-technical competencies, namely critical thinking, communication, leadership, research, time management, giving presentations and teamwork skills. Similarly, Belwal et al. (2017) investigated students' perspectives on the most required employability skills and employers' selection criteria in Oman. The findings revealed that English language proficiency, computer skills, teamwork skills, prior training and the graduate's personality are the most important employability skills and attributes.

Griffin and Coelho (2019) also explored business students' perceptions of essential employability skills based on their placement experience. The participants stated that communication, self-management, time management, and teamwork skills are essential in the workplace. Similarly, Succi and Canovi (2020) considered soft skills more important than technical skills, mainly communication, commitment, teamwork, analytical abilities and stress tolerance.

The findings of these empirical studies indicate that participants valued soft skills more than technical skills. They also confirm that there is a need to increase students' employability awareness and build their self-assurance to develop the skills and attributes that make them employable and enable them to function confidently as successful employees in today's competitive labour market. Therefore, students should focus primarily on building the abilities and attributes needed in workplaces to gain employment.

2.4.4. Comparison of Perspectives on Employability

It can be seen from stakeholders' perspectives on employability that there is a consensus that soft skills and personal attributes hold greater importance than technical and subject-related knowledge. As identified in the empirical research, each group's view of the skills and attributes required to make them employable are presented in Table 2.2.

Employers' Perceptions	Academics' Perceptions	Graduates' Perceptions
Soft skills Digital skills Communication skills Teamwork skills Interpersonal skills Fundamental technical skills Listening skills Problem-solving skills Emotional intelligence skills Analytical skills Organisation skills Enthusiasm and willingness to learn Leadership skills Creativity Accountability Collaboration skills	Study skills Generic skills	Soft skills Critical thinking skills Communication skills Leadership skills Commitment skills Teamwork skills Analysis skills Research skills Time management skills Transferable skills Presentation skills English proficiency Computer skills Tolerance of stress

Table 2.2: Common employability skills and attributes from stakeholders' perspectives

Table 2.2 illustrates employers', academics' and students' understanding of employability from the way they identify and prioritise essential employability skills and attributes. As noted, employers and graduates are able to name many employability skills required in the market, which might indicate that they may have some understanding and knowledge about the matter. However, although academics acknowledge the need to prepare students for their future careers by sharpening their employability skills, they lack a full grasp of employability, which reflects their limited awareness of the topic being investigated. Furthermore, it can be seen that there is a lack of consensus among stakeholders regarding which employability attributes are most important. For example, Harvey (2001) argues that the agreement between employers and academia is a real challenge, as they disagree on a standard definition of employability, which can be noted in business graduates' ideas of the most important employability attributes (Table 2.1). This may elucidate the divergent perspectives of employers, graduates and academics on the most critical employability attributes, especially in the light of the diversity of employers in the industry context (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011). Nevertheless, academia is expected to overcome these shortcomings and rectify them by involving employers in academic boards for active consultative meetings to address market needs (Taderera, 2018).

Consequently, collaboration between the three stakeholder groups is crucial since academics are the intermediary between students and employers. Therefore, the potential exists to effectively meet employers' expectations and labour market demands by adjusting the learning objectives of academic curricula. In essence, there is a need for curriculum enhancements that incorporate tasks and activities to develop these desirable attributes, especially when academics know their role but cannot clearly define the attributes which need to be enhanced.

Another prevailing perception of what constitutes employability, which all three groups share, is the ability to secure a suitable job upon completion of one's education rather than merely excelling in the study. Unfortunately, most academics have not duly recognised the importance of cultivating aptitudes that enhance long-term employability (Artess et al., 2017). Focusing on securing employment without developing lifelong employability skills is only a short-term solution. If no serious steps are taken to improve graduates' career performance, the number of unemployed graduates will keep increasing. In addition, the task of requalifying and preparing the collective pool of unemployed graduates will present important challenges in terms of time and effort. Consequently, it is anticipated that graduates will be afforded full opportunities in terms of education, training and employment prospects, thereby equipping them with the necessary skills to successfully integrate into the contemporary workforce.

2.5. Employability and Graduates' Identity

In the light of the extensive body of literature concerning employability and the perspectives of various stakeholders on the matter, a range of different attributes are identified as contributing to the employability of graduates. These include soft skills and non-cognitive skills such as communication skills (Abelha et al., 2020; Griffin & Coelhoso, 2019; Low et al., 2016; Paterson, 2017; Rios et al., 2020; Tejan & Sabil, 2019), teamwork skills (Abelha et al., 2020; Belwal et al., 2017; Griffin & Coelhoso, 2019; Tejan & Sabil, 2019), digital skills (Abelha et al., 2020; Belwal et al., 2017), and analytical skills (Paterson, 2017; Succi & Canovi, 2020; Tejan & Sabil, 2019). However, focusing only on specific attributes to determine employability has a limited value. The concept of 'transferable skills' has been

scrutinised by certain scholars (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Paterson, 2017) as they pertain to distinct qualities which are applicable across various job roles. This means that flexibility in framing graduates' value and performance concerning the job role they apply for is more likely to enhance their employability.

However, graduate identity has been the subject of considerable debate, and in particular, there have been arguments among stakeholders concerned with HEIs' policies and procedures. Graduate employability skills should be explored and identified within a specific context, taking into account the factors of the social and work environment that impact graduates (Collet et al., 2015; Holmes, 2001). For instance, Holmes (2001) claims that an appropriate performance involves

interpretative construction of activity as performance-of-a-kind, which depends on two conditions. First, there must be a set of social practices appropriate to the social arena in which the activity is being carried out, such that the activity is taken to be an instantiation of one of such practices. Second, there must be a set of identities or positions appropriate to that social arena, whereby the individual whose activity is under interpretation in the current situation is deemed to occupy one such identity. (p. 114)

This successful interpretation of appropriate performance can be developed into a practice-identity performance model (Figure 2.1). Thus, the concept of graduate identity should be explained as an interactionist activity. This can be tentatively explained as “what is socially salient is not so much the formal award of a degree, but the extent to which an individual who has graduated is successful in gaining affirmation of their identity as a graduate in relation to the social settings for which this is deemed relevant” (ibid, 2001: 115).

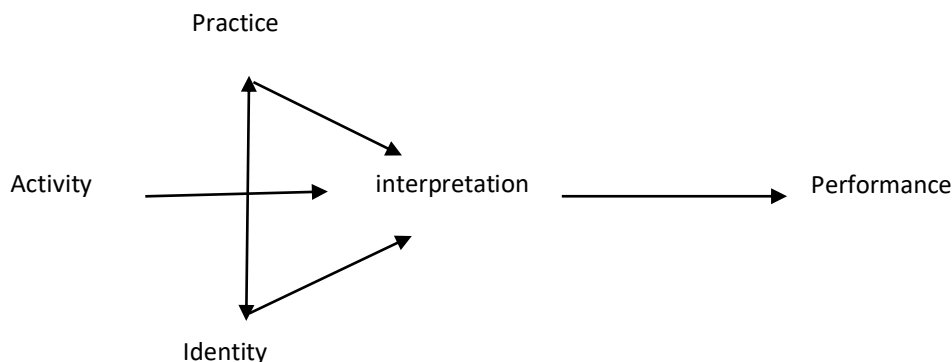


Figure 2.1: Practice-identity model of the interpretation of performance (Holmes, 2001)

Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011) raise a similar concern as they question whether graduate identity is well-articulated when discussing employability attributes. This issue is explored by Lackovic (2019: 194), who interrogated the extent to which the term 'graduate employability' "is obsolete and redundant in a critical dialogue". Similarly, Peters et al. (2019) have engaged in a scholarly discourse regarding the tendency to overlook the involvement of academics in the teaching process and the role of students in actively learning and receiving guidance in their employment when employability attributes are disputed. Therefore, to acknowledge human engagement in constructing graduates' attributes, the versions of 'techno-fixes' and 'edu-fixes' of HE policies and procedures should be re-articulated (Lackovic, 2019).

Lackovic (2019) proposed a conceptual framework or 'graduate employability model', which consists of three meta-layers of relationality, aiming to contribute to the resolution of the ongoing debate. The model starts with a small basic layer, 'employability as relational recruitability', which can be extended to 'employability as socio-emotional relationality', which in turn can be extended to a larger one, 'employability as eco-technological relationality'. The three-layered model effectively mitigates any "separation of individual, social, ecological and technological factors in education and graduate employability policy within higher education" (ibid, 2019:195). Additionally, the active engagement of technology in the final layer is constructive and valued as it reflects the fact that technology is outlining labour market demands.

The multifaceted nature of employability is illustrated through the suggested set of employability skills and several proposed frameworks outlining graduates' attributes. Furthermore, the complexity of employability is evident in the ongoing discourse surrounding the potential detachment of graduates' and academics' identities in relation to discussions on employability attributes. Thus, it is no surprise that employability attributes are identified as a matter of international academic concern directly affected by global technological changes. However, the influence of digital media literacies on enhancing employability from stakeholders' perspectives has not been fully explored. Therefore, conducting additional research to examine the problem from various perspectives and analysing it in the context of contemporary technological advancements would

help to address market demands, which is the primary objective of the present study.

2.6. Digital Literacy

Several definitions of digital literacy have been developed. Digital literacy is a person's ability to perform tasks effectively in a digital environment where they can read, use, evaluate, and interpret different media, including images, audio, and video, to produce digitised materials (Jones-Kavalier & Flannigan, 2008). Digital literacies are "socially situated practices supported by skills, strategies and stances that enable the representation and understanding of ideas using a range of modalities enabled by digital tools" (O'Brien & Scharber, 2008: 66-67). Due to the massive amount of media available in digital environments, the term 'digital media' has been widely used to refer to computers or any electronic devices that create, use, process or share digitised media with others using the internet or memory sticks (Demuyakor, 2020). The term 'digital media literacy' means the technical skills, competencies, techniques and strategies required to process information through digital tools, such as reading and interpreting digital media, producing texts or images using digital manipulation and evaluating knowledge in digital settings.

As a result, the present generation is considered to possess the ability to comprehend and use digital skills and advances to navigate a rapidly evolving digital landscape efficiently. It is, therefore, incumbent upon individuals to engage in a rigorous examination and assessment of the vast amounts of data available on digital platforms, which are readily accessible. Such awareness has been understood as critical media literacy, and it enables individuals to be 'selective' in choosing the most suitable media, reflecting on the content derived from mass media and popular culture practices or the ability to produce multimedia texts (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000). Furthermore, the diversity of critical media literacies results in an authentic learning setting that empowers individuals to be autonomous learners (Yuan et al., 2019) and develops critical and analytical qualities (Kellner & Share, 2005). The cultivation of autonomy can lead to the development of individuals who possess independent critical thinking skills,

thereby reducing their susceptibility to the pervasive influence of misleading media within a multimedia-oriented digital environment.

In a global technological society, social media (SM) is an essential component of digital literacy and has become a part of individuals' daily lives worldwide. Due to the absence of a standard definition of SM, various definitions have been put forth in the scholarly literature. These definitions define SM as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007: 211)

A form of electronic communication that allows user-generated interaction between the media's creator and the user. (Hudson & Roberts, 2012: 769)

Social media is more than a program, computer application and the technology behind them. It is about transformation. At its core, it is a pool of ideas about openness, communities, collaborations, flexibility, and transformation. It is user-centred. (Amin & Rajadurai, 2018: 499-500)

The broader definition of social media indicates that any website or application that allows you to provide feedback through likes or comments, share pictures or text, create a profile page, or have a username all indicate the presence of social media, which significantly expands the scope. (Kimmel, 2021: 290)

Online avenues where users can interact so as to get information which allows them to get informed and acquire ideas that would improve their employability competences. (Busuyi Francis Olowo et al., 2021: 67)

These definitions emphasise two fundamental features of SM: creating information and communicating the information with others, which can positively enhance the socio-cultural, economic, political, and technological aspects. There are different SM sites or platforms, yet these applications have not been systematically categorised. Developing a classification scheme for SM is challenging since new sites and platforms are constantly being built. Moreover, different social media networks (SMNs) are used for different purposes and functions: social networking platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram), blogging sites (Blogger), microblogging (Twitter), image sharing (Pinterest), video sharing (YouTube) and professional networking platforms (LinkedIn). Although

certain platforms are typically associated with specific purposes, it is conceivable that these platforms could be used for alternative purposes.

The wide variety of perspectives and definitions of the digital terms mentioned earlier necessitates identifying practical definitions for this thesis. Since each research has unique goals and settings, the technical terms used should be clearly defined, taking into account the distinct contexts and objectives of the topic being researched (Blaxter et al., 2006). Therefore, Table 2.3 below presents a glossary of the technical terms used in this thesis.

Terms	Definitions
Digital literacy	Digital literacy is the capacity to access, manage, integrate, generate, and assess information using digital technologies, communication tools, and networks to participate in a knowledge-based society. Examples include the ability to send and receive emails and browse the internet.
Social media	Social media refers to web-based programs and platforms that allow users to engage and interact with online communities and networks to produce and share information. Examples include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.
Social media literacy	The ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create content across various social media platforms. This includes recognising false information and utilising social media ethically and responsibly. Examples are identifying sponsored content, fact-checking claims on social media, and managing one's online profile.
Critical media literacy	The skill of critically analysing media messages, understanding the contexts in which they are produced, and evaluating their purpose, credibility, and potential impacts. Examples include evaluating the credibility of news reports and spotting biases in advertisements.
Social media network	The interconnected group of individuals and organisations that interact and share information via social media platforms. Examples are the networks of friends, family, and communities that users build on sites like Facebook and Twitter.
Platforms	Online systems and technologies allow users to interact, share information, and conduct activities in the digital world. Examples include social apps (Facebook and Twitter), online marketplaces (Amazon), and App stores (Google Play Store).

Table 2.3: Glossary of technical terms used to identify digital and social media literacy in this thesis

Engaging in active interactions on SM platforms entails developing essential skills and competencies necessary for achieving success in contemporary professional environments, thereby enhancing an individual’s social media literacy (SML). Against the background of a technology-driven world and with extensive exposure to social media platforms, Kimmel (2021) argues that media literacy is a dynamically developing concept that warrants investigation within educational contexts. Therefore, mapping the core competencies proposed in the definitions of SM literacies with those outlined in frameworks of employability attributes helps identify important similarities, as depicted in Table 2.4.

Examples of Employability Attribute Frameworks		Elements of the Definitions of SM
Employability Skills/Attributes/Dimensions	Reference	
-Individual factors -Personal circumstances -External factors	McQuaid-Lindsay (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using computers - Accessing data - Processing information - Editing data - Sharing data - Understanding relations - Evaluation - Problem-solving - Adaptability - Flexibility - Critical thinking - Analytical qualities - Communication - Collaboration -Transformation - Interaction - Interpretation
- Cognitive processes - Social skills - Self-management skills - Technical/administrative skills	Jackson & Chapman (2012)	
-Professional practices -Collaboration -Decision making -Lifelong learning -Integration of theory -Practice and readiness.	Smith et al. (2016)	
-Teamwork -Verbal communication -Critical thinking -Problem-solving -Taking the initiative and being proactive -Interpersonal skills -Project management -Intercultural skills -Time management -Self-management	Griffin & Coelho (2019)	
-Generic digital generic skills -Personal attributes	Suerta & Suwintana (2021)	

Table 2.4: Mapping employability attributes frameworks against core elements of the definitions of SM

Table 2.4 compares a number of employability frameworks and the components of certain definitions of SM literacies. It is important to note that the analysis is limited to specific frameworks. However, a broader observation suggests that digital skills can be considered a subset of employability skills. Furthermore, it has been noted that the ability to deal with information and media in digital environments is more important than technical tasks related to computer activities, such as working with file formats. Thus, in contemporary labour markets, the ability to effectively manage knowledge and possess a high level of skills in navigating SM platforms is imperative for maintaining professional standards. This underlines the strong relationship between employability attributes and the critical role of SM in shaping these requirements in today's workplaces.

2.6.1. Social Media Literacies for Enhancing Employability Attributes

The empirical research conducted to investigate the impact of SM literacies on enhancing graduates' employability attributes has given positive and promising findings (Benson et al., 2014; Chai, 2020; Livingstone, 2004; Mason, 2016; Olowo et al., 2021; Selwyn, 2012; Sutherland et al., 2020; Sutherland & Ho, 2017; Valentine et al., 2019). Social media literacy has proven to be a catalyst for enhancing learners' pedagogical achievements and improving their technical skills in relation to their respective majors (Benson et al., 2014; Benson & Morgan, 2016; Greenhow & Gleason, 2014; Kimmel, 2021; Olowo et al., 2021). Moreover, due to the genuine and engaging educational setting facilitated by digital media literacies, students learning English as a second language have experienced improvements in their English language proficiency (Yuan et al., 2019). The exposure to diverse and genuine language styles on various English-medium SM platforms helps improve users' language skills. Moreover, Kim and Freberg (2016) claim that SML is crucial for future industries since the analytical capacities of media and writing abilities are derived from SM awareness.

Furthermore, SML has a positive impact on an individual's critical media literacy since improvements have been seen in traits related to time management (Griffin & Coelho, 2019), flexibility and technology safety (Hill et al., 2016). It is evidenced that critical media literacy fosters the development of analytical and

evaluative abilities (Chen et al., 2018; Khodeir & Nessim, 2019) and critical thinking skills (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014), which are in high demand in today's competitive workplaces. Benson et al. (2014) and Glover et al. (2002) also point out that skills related to communication, technology, networking and problem-solving have been enhanced through the professional use of SM. In today's labour market, employees in different occupations are expected to use digital or online platforms to create professional profiles, share work-related documents and manage social communication with customers (He et al., 2017; Kimmel, 2021; Robards & Graf, 2022; Selwyn, 2012). These findings reveal that graduates who use SM are an attractive option for employers in today's digitally-driven workplace.

Therefore, the acquisition of employability attributes is facilitated by specific factors and processes which help individuals secure employment, maintain employment, or pursue opportunities in more favourable work environments. Thus, graduates can remain relevant to the job market by maintaining updated digital media literacies to meet employers' expectations. In this context, it is anticipated that HEIs will play a crucial role in shaping students' marketability. Villar and Albertín (2010) point out that many researchers have highlighted the vital role HEIs should play in enhancing their graduates' employability skills and positive personality traits. This claim is supported by Donald et al. (2018), who explain that these skills are acquired through education since "many factors shape employability, but education is a major determinant of employability, particularly for graduates" (p.513). Additionally, students express a heightened interest in employability when they are aware of the potential for SM to enhance their prospects of securing promising career opportunities.

2.7. Conclusion

Investigating the impact of SML on enhancing graduates' employability from the perspectives of different stakeholders is an attractive subject to be studied. An in-depth understanding of the subject facilitates the adoption of innovative measures to enhance graduates' employability. Furthermore, in this era of technological advances, HEIs and the labour market are expected to cooperate to produce employable graduates with the skills and attributes necessary to cope

with the changing demands of the labour market. Therefore, SM platforms are essential in developing employability skills and attributes through meaningful communication and interactions.

This chapter started by exploring different definitions of employability in the literature. The reviewed definitions reached a consensus that employability refers to individuals' attributes and preparedness to secure employment, retain their current job, or pursue a more desirable alternative. Employability is determined mainly by individuals' competencies and characteristics, as well as by external factors and personal circumstances. Nevertheless, the concept of employability cannot be defined solely in terms of a fixed set of skills since it is subject to constant changes in market demands.

Furthermore, a comprehensive examination was conducted to investigate the perspectives of employers, academics, and business graduates. The insights of these stakeholder groups served as a basis for the articles reviewed to explore desirable and the most required employability competencies in business. Stakeholders prioritise soft skills over technical skills in today's highly globalised economy. This was noted in different frameworks proposed for business employability that value soft competencies over technology-related knowledge. Because of the increasing demand for the lifelong learning skills required to enter a profession, the responsibility for preparing graduates with the necessary competencies and attributes is a collective responsibility shared among graduates, academics and employers. Furthermore, technological progress has reformed how information is produced, processed, evaluated and interpreted, which makes it more likely to affect market demands and change stakeholders' roles in meeting these requirements.

However, focusing on specific attributes only to determine employability has a limited value if graduates' identities are ignored. In order to effectively assess the acquisition of employability skills among graduates, it is crucial to situate this evaluation within a particular context that takes into account the social and work environment factors which might impact these individuals. Similarly, acknowledging academics' engagement in teaching and students' learning is vital when employability attributes are disputed. Therefore, it is important to consider the identities and values of graduates in order to enhance their employability

prospects. When examining graduate employability, it is imperative to consider the interconnectedness of individual, social, ecological and technological factors, as they should not be analysed in isolation.

The multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks of employability show that today's generation is expected to be digitally literate for effective navigation in a fast-paced digital environment. Furthermore, because the contemporary labour market is heavily influenced by digitalisation, employment characteristics are subject to constant change. This necessitates a workforce with expertise and knowledge and the ability to effectively utilise information and communicate using technology. Additionally, SML and employability are directly related. As a result, the pedagogical achievements of learners are enhanced, and their critical evaluation of media on digital platforms is boosted. In contemporary digital-oriented workplaces, the proliferation of SM platforms and the cultivation of critical media literacies have led to the recognition of independent critical learners as a main choice among employers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This thesis uses primary research data to understand the impact of social media (SM) on employability attributes from the perspectives of stakeholders, graduates and employers. In addition, it aims to explore the current barriers that jobseekers and employers face in the Omani labour market and to propose practical strategies for bridging the skills gap through the use of social media literacy (SML) to enhance employability attributes. In the previous chapter, a comprehensive review of the literature was presented to establish a strong foundation for the study within the context of previous research.

This chapter presents a reflective explanation of the 'methods' and 'methodology' adopted in this study. Cohen et al. (2018) differentiate between the two terms. They refer to 'methods' as instruments and tools for collecting data and 'methodology' as the justifications and reasons for using specific instruments for collecting and analysing the collected data. This chapter discusses the techniques and tools used for investigating the research topic (methods) and provides a theoretical analysis of the methods used in the study (methodology).

The remaining part of this chapter is structured as follows. Section 3.2 outlines the significance of the study, explaining the impacts of SM on students' growth and development. Section 3.3 provides a detailed explanation of the study's theoretical and methodological framework. Section 3.4 then presents and explains the research questions in detail. Details of the data collection process and procedure are provided in Section 3.5, while information about the analysis of the data collected is presented in Section 3.6, Sections 3.7 and 3.8, respectively, present the pilot study and discuss ethical considerations. The limitations of the research methodology are discussed in Section 3.9. Lastly, Section 3.10 concludes the chapter.

3.2. The Significance of this Thesis

This thesis is highly important because of the growing influence of SM on students' academic lives. Social media literacy has proven to enhance learners'

pedagogical achievements (Benson et al., 2014; Benson & Morgan, 2016; Greenhow & Gleason, 2014; Kimmel, 2021; B. Olowo et al., 2021). Moreover, due to the genuine and engaging educational setting facilitated by their digital media literacy, students are exposed to diverse language styles on various English-based SM platforms, which helps to improve their English language proficiency (Yuan et al., 2019) as well as their analytical and writing abilities (Kim & Freberg, 2016). Overall, the time they spend on SM could be used effectively and responsibly to enhance graduates' employability skills.

Furthermore, SM has impacted higher education institutions (HEIs) in other ways. For instance, students use SM to share news, publicise announcements and events and collaborate with their followers in real-time. However, the literature review revealed a lack of genuine commitment among many HEIs to standardise the integration of SM, potentially leading to being used in a disorganised way in educational settings (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2015; Kimmel, 2021; Olowo et al., 2021). This limited incorporation of digital social literacy in students' academic curricula may not pose an important challenge in the early stage of integration. However, as the use of digital media platforms continues to grow in educational settings, its adoption is likely to raise moral, legal and ethical concerns that attract education practitioners' attention.

Another important factor in this thesis is the growing demand to investigate the use of SM in the recruiting process. Employers and graduates have increasingly used social media networks (SMNs) like LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. For example, graduates use LinkedIn to create a professional profile, highlighting their education, experiences and skills (He et al., 2017; Kimmel, 2021; Robards & Graf, 2022; Sutherland & Ho, 2017). At the same time, employers use this platform to post job vacancies and evaluate candidates before hiring (Davison et al., 2011; Kimmel, 2021). This practice reflects the importance of SM in recruiting candidates and evaluating their employability skills. Therefore, it is crucial to provide graduates with guidance on presenting themselves professionally and effectively to potential employers on SM.

Furthermore, the current thesis provides invaluable support for *Oman Vision 2040*. This long-term vision seeks to develop graduates with competitive qualifications and employability skills that align with local and international labour

market demands through modern and effective teaching and learning techniques (*Oman Vision 2040*, n.d.). The vast majority of local HEIs use technology for academic and administrative purposes to improve productivity and efficiency. This thesis can, therefore, provide insights into the significance of digital literacies and SM for enhancing employability attributes, given the limited literature exploring the matter in Arab contexts. In addition to identifying research gaps and exploring stakeholders' perspectives on the link between SM and employability skills, this thesis aims to identify the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of using SM for pedagogical purposes.

3.3. Theoretical Framework

The current thesis explores the impact of SM on employability attributes from stakeholders' perspectives. Hence, human, social and identity capital theories are relevant to this research. These theories are relevant to social media because the platform facilitates the acquisition, presentation, and use of these fundamental forms of capital, which are essential for personal and professional success in the digital era.

The human capital theory states that humans can increase their productivity by undergoing higher levels of skills training and education. Tomlinson (2017:341), for instance, argues that “the development of human capital in the form of formally acquired knowledge through higher levels of education and training empowers individuals in the labour market”. Graduates are expected to develop specific skills and attributes that employers believe are necessary for their workforce (Higdon, 2016). In other words, improving graduates' employability skills and attributes can increase employment opportunities in the labour market. Berntson et al. (2006: 226) support this view, arguing that "using the human capital theory as a theoretical frame of analysis, formal education, competence development and job tenure would be vital aspects for the individual's perceived employability". This theory is relevant as the study explores the knowledge, skills and attributes sought by employers in their workforce.

The social capital theory states that social relationships are crucial in developing and accumulating human capital. According to Fukuyama (2001), social capital refers to the shared norms and values that enable cooperation and interaction

between two or more individuals. Like other networks, social capital counts on shared norms for building trusted connections to achieve cooperative ends (ibid, 2001). Tomlinson (2017) provides an insight into the connection between graduates and social capital:

Social capital in relation to graduate employability can be understood as the sum of social relationships and networks that help mobilise graduates' existing human capital and bring them closer to the labour market and its opportunity structures. Social capital can shape and facilitate graduates' access and awareness of labour market opportunities and then being able to exploit them (p. 342).

Social media networks (SMNs) help students build their social capital. These sites allow students to communicate with others with similar interests, values, or views. These networks present graduates with potential employment opportunities. Generally, SMNs can boost social capital and foster employability skills like networking, communication, collaboration, and interpersonal interactions.

Furthermore, SML can support students' identity development by helping them better understand their characteristics, beliefs, and values by engaging with like-minded individuals on SM platforms. This will allow students to express and investigate their identities through meaningful conversations, experiences they have in common, and knowledge gained from peers who share similar identities and interests. Graduates whose identities drive them to consider their employability attributes and future careers proactively and creatively are more likely to see improvements in their employment prospects. Previous studies have also highlighted the importance of considering students' identities when discussing employability (Collet et al., 2015; Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Lackovic, 2019; Peters et al., 2019). Graduates' identity plays a crucial role in guiding individuals' career choices, fostering continuous growth and contributing to personal satisfaction in the workplace. When individuals are deeply connected to their careers, they are motivated to do their best to contribute to their organisation's success in dynamic workplace environments.

This research employs an inductive mixed-methods approach. In this study, no specific hypotheses were predefined; instead, they emerged from data generation and analysis to create patterns and themes in the exploration of a specific social phenomenon. Additionally, this research is based on a mixed-

methods design: qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect and analyse the data. Cohen et al. (2018) explain that qualitative methods involve investigating and understanding specific social acts by exploring people's perspectives, while quantitative research methods involve using numerical data to identify the relationships between two or more variables. The primary research methods employed in this thesis involve the content analysis of job advertisements within the business sector and conducting semi-structured telephone interviews with employers and graduates.

In social research, the use of mixed methods relies on the principle of triangulation. This enhances the validation of findings for accuracy, minimises research method bias and provides well-developed and valid research instruments (Denscombe, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Cohen et al. (2018) provide a sound rationale for the advantages of employing mixed methods in social research to achieve triangulation. They argue that

Triangular techniques in the social sciences attempt to map out or explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and, in so doing, by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data. Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity (ibid, 2018: 265).

The two research methods can be applied and implemented in different ways. For instance, quantitative data can serve as an initial reference for framing questions employed in qualitative methods to explore participants' perspectives and opinions and explain the quantitative results obtained previously, as demonstrated in this study. Conversely, quantitative methods can be implemented after qualitative data has been collected. This approach provides a comprehensive depiction of the critical issues to be investigated. Mixing different methods in a research study allows the researcher to validate the findings by comparing the results collected using different research approaches (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2018). Moreover, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) suggest that the findings could be characterised as a blend of rich, subjective (qualitative) data and generalised objective (quantitative) data.

However, using a mixed approach has several drawbacks. The use of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches is stressful, time-consuming and expensive (Cohen et al., 2018). Moreover, studies employing mixed methods

can be arduous for other researchers to duplicate in their own studies (Creswell, 2018). In general, the advantages of using the mixed-methods approach in social research outweigh the drawbacks, as it provides robust evidence for a more accurate comprehension of the subject under investigation.

3.4. Research Questions

This research investigates how SM can improve graduates' employability attributes. Investigating the impact of SML on graduates' employability and addressing market demands will help identify practical uses of SM within institutional practices. Research questions play a pivotal role in refining research objectives and narrowing the scope of a research project (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2018), so developing an appropriate research design starts with formulating appropriate research questions. This thesis explores the influence of social media on graduates' employability attributes. The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What employability skills or attributes are most sought after by employers in today's Omani labour market?

RQ2: How do stakeholders (graduates and employers) view the role of social media literacy in enhancing graduate employability?

RQ3: What are the challenges that graduates or employers experience in using social media for employment purposes?

RQ4: What practical implications do the findings of this study have for enhancing graduate employability attributes in Oman's HEIs?

3.5. Data Collection

This section provides detailed information about the data collection process and procedures. This information includes details about the data sample and the tools and strategies used to collect the data.

3.5.1. Job Advertisements

This thesis collected 300 online job advertisements posted for business graduates between March 2022 and November 2022 to identify job requirements. These job postings were sourced from a variety of online platforms and SMNs, including company websites, job aggregation websites (such as LinkedIn.com

and Dawam.com), and various social media sites on Instagram (such as careers_Oman, careers.om, omancareers and oman_careers). Due to limitations imposed by search engine tools, common and frequent terms were used during the search process to locate advertised positions. Furthermore, the focus was exclusively on entry-level positions. Detailed records of all advertisements were maintained, and each advertisement was analysed to identify key information, including job title, employer, job description, job requirements and qualifications. The study focused mainly on entry-level business-related vacancies. Various criteria were used. First, only job vacancies advertised for the local Omani market were collected for analysis. Second, the study concentrated on positions advertised on SM platforms and organisations' websites, as these digital channels are the primary means for companies to announce job openings. Lastly, advertisements for special roles requiring long experience were excluded, as the study was limited to entry-level positions suitable for fresh graduates.

Analysing job advertisements is one of the few ways to investigate direct communication between employers and prospective employees. Such adverts allow employers to stipulate the specific skills required for the openings advertised (Rios et al., 2020). This analysis of job advertisements offers a real-world glimpse into labour market demands, shedding light on the attributes required in the business sector, such as educational background, experience, skills and attitudes. Notably, this approach facilitates the examination of many job advertisements, enabling stakeholders to draw accurate conclusions about job attributes and prerequisites.

This database provides valuable information on a wide range of stakeholders, including graduates, policymakers, academics, employers and business specialists. It aids in identifying the competencies and skills required to secure a particular job. Analysing the content of job advertisements is vital for this research because of the inadvertent focus of colleges and universities on equipping students with technical skills, and therefore sometimes neglecting the essential soft and employability skills required to equip them to function well in the workplace. In this context, the content analysis of job advertisements offers a spotlight on the most up-to-date skill requirements within a specific field in the labour market. According to Lipovac and Babac (2021: 513), “researching online

job advertisements to identify the mix of desired skills is very useful and can be exploited as valuable input to student counselling services or curriculum development". Identifying the essential skills and qualifications for particular jobs enables academic institutions to refine their academic and training programmes accordingly. Graduates can also leverage this information to pursue further educational opportunities, seek relevant work experience or engage in professional development activities to enhance their employability.

3.5.2. Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out to investigate participants' perceptions of the impact of SML on employability attributes. Given the exploratory nature of this study, a purposeful sampling technique was employed to select participants for data collection. Research has found this approach to be an effective way of gaining insights into the core aspects of the investigated phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). In other words, purposeful sampling involves a sample group of individuals who are knowledgeable in the field and have experience with the phenomenon of interest. This approach ensures that participants can eloquently and thoughtfully articulate their experiences and viewpoints (Palinkas et al., 2015). It is, therefore, imperative to target individuals with specific characteristics or backgrounds to ensure the quality of the data they contribute.

However, in qualitative research, a large sample is not required. Interviews provide a sufficient basis for data collection. With this method, redundancy and response overload can be identified (Leavy, 2014). Thus, 18 participants were involved in this study, comprising 11 graduates and seven employers. The employers selected for interviews were those responsible for hiring business graduates. The business graduates were from the University of Technology and Applied Science (UTAS). The tables below provide an overview of the graduates' areas of specialisation and the employers' fields of work.

Graduates	Business-Specific Majors
G1	Data Analysis
G2	Human Resources
G3	Accounting
G4	Finance
G5	Airport Management
G6	Marketing
G7	Accounting
G8	Project Management
G9	Media Management
G10	Human Resources
G11	Marketing

Table 3.1: Interviewees' (graduates') business-specific majors

Employers	Business-Specific Fields
E1	Dental Centre
E2	Beauty Centre
E3	Training Academy
E4	Medical Centre
E5	Beauty Centre
E6	Dental Centre
E7	Electrical Connections and Extensions Company

Table 3.2: Interviewees' (employers') business-specific field

Employers were selected for interviews in various ways, including referrals from friends and relatives with businesses. They were then contacted via telephone or email. During the ensuing conversations, the purpose of the study was explained to them, and their consent to participate in phone interviews was sought. Although the absence of essential social elements and non-verbal communication might undermine the salient conduct of the interview (Cohen, 2018), several attractions of telephone interviews have been recognised. Block and Erskine (2012) argue that the telephone is a user-friendly interview tool because of its advantages, such as cost-effectiveness, flexibility, and enabling interviews to be conducted conveniently without the need for travel. In addition, Cohen (2018: 536) added

that a telephone interview is cheap, quick, and “enables researchers to select respondents from a much more dispersed population”.

Once participants had agreed to participate in the study, suitable dates and times were scheduled for the interviews. Participants were also allowed to choose the language of the interview, i.e. either Arabic or English. Most interviewees chose to have interviews in Arabic so that they would be able to articulate their views properly. The recorded interviews were subsequently reviewed, notes were taken, and specific excerpts from the transcripts were translated into English for use as quotations in the section describing the data analysis process.

Following the advice of Cohen et al. (2018), the interview questions all followed the same sequence and had the same format for all interviews to enhance interview reliability. This approach ensured that the interviews consistently focused on the themes identified for discussion and adhered to the main questions and potential sub-questions or probes. It also helped maintain the interviewees' focus and prevented them from straying off-topic. The questions did not follow an identical format to encourage participants to express their honest views rather than seeking strictly comparable responses, meaning that a degree of flexibility was allowed. Given the nature of the study, the interview questions could be adapted to suit the characteristics of the interviewees or their respective companies so that relevant information could be elicited (Appendix 1 and 2).

Although semi-structured interviews can be time-consuming and costly, they provide invaluable insights from participants (Denscombe, 2010). Besides, these interviews facilitated rapport between the interviewee and the interviewer, leading to participants sharing more freely than they might have done with other methods (Cohen et al., 2018). They also allow for the possibility of follow-up questions to seek clarification. Creswell (2018) emphasises that qualitative interviews involve open-ended questions, enabling participants to express their views openly and without constraint. The flexibility inherent in semi-structured interviews allows participants to focus on essential and specific issues within a broader topic.

Moreover, the approach encourages the exploration of additional relevant information when necessary without introducing bias through leading or misleading questions. The interviewer's technique ensures that questions are

asked in a manner that does not influence the interviewees' responses. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, provide additional insights or contribute further information.

With reference to the interview structure, a list of questions was formulated on SM, pedagogical and employability concerns. Examples of these questions were “Do you think social media can be used to improve students’ digital skills? How?” The interview questions were designed to align with several key aspects of the research. They were formulated to investigate stakeholders’ perceptions and were also informed by the results obtained from the analysis of job vacancies. Equally importantly, the interviews were structured to reflect the researcher’s overarching goal of identifying the potential influence of SML on employability and its implications for improving educational practices within HEIs to enhance graduates’ employability attributes and meet the demands of the labour market.

A pilot test was conducted before the formal commencement of the study to ensure that the interview questions were clear and rational and to eliminate any potential ambiguities.¹ The initial interviews with each group served as pilot sessions. The results of these pilot interviews were not included in the data analysis to ensure the quality of the data obtained.

3.6. Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was carried out in two main phases: an analysis of the job advertisements involving both quantitative and qualitative tools, and an analysis of the semi-structured interviews, which focused on qualitative data. Figure 3.1 below illustrates the relationship between these two phases and how they were coordinated throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

¹ Section 3.7 provides details of the pilot study

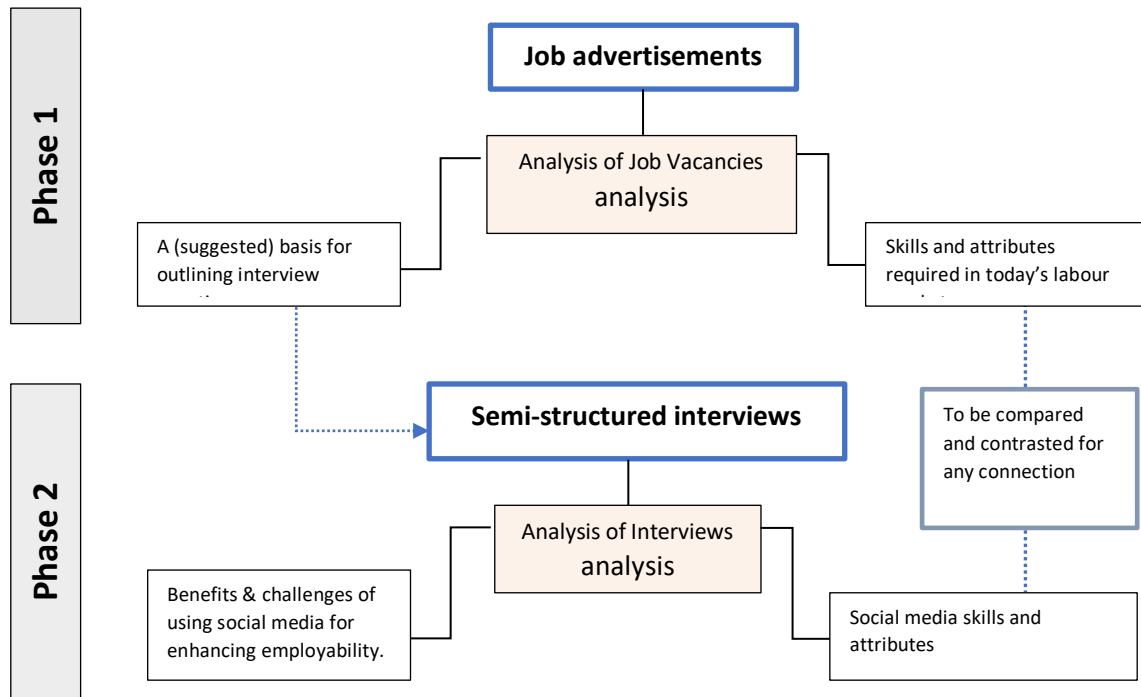


Figure 3.1: The two phases of data collection and analysis

3.6.1. Job Advertisements

During the initial phase, 300 job openings within the field of business studies were carefully selected, and their content was meticulously analysed. The primary objective of this was to identify crucial employability skills and job characteristics, including educational qualifications, skill sets and the competencies necessary to secure specific positions. In addition to analysing job advertisements, there was a focus on identifying attributes related to specialisation, non-technical proficiencies and interpersonal skills. These competencies were instrumental in defining the employability attributes deemed essential in the Omani labour market. A comparative analysis was performed to assess the alignment between these attributes and those highlighted by the participants as being developed through SM. Figure 3.2 below illustrates the process of analysing the data collected from job advertisements.




Figure 3.2: The process of collecting job advertisements, analysing their content, and presenting the findings

Figure 3.2 shows that advertisements were collected from web-based job sites and social media networks. The next step was to record them all and organise them with a focus on identifying key details such as the job title, job description and requirements, and the qualifications required. Finally, a thorough review of the advertised positions was conducted to interpret data and draw meaningful conclusions, ensuring that the analysis was appropriate and complete.

To facilitate skill identification, texts were rewritten in lowercase, punctuation marks were removed, and descriptions were simplified into sentences. While some job vacancies explicitly listed qualifications and other requirements, making organisation and categorisation straightforward, many advertisements did not provide detailed skill descriptions. The absence of these specifics did not necessarily indicate that some skills were not required for the positions advertised. Rather, it suggested that employers might not have deemed it necessary to include such details when posting vacancies. Because of this, each job description was meticulously examined to identify the essential skills and competencies needed for analysis.

Figure 3.3 below shows a job advertisement that provides detailed information about job responsibilities and tasks but lacks specific requirements.

 ZAHRAWI

JOB DESCRIPTION

Accountant - Oman

Job Purpose
The Accountant is responsible for the day to day transactions of Zahrawi, auditing financial documents and procedures, reconciling bank statements and ensuring that all payments are done accurately and in a timely manner.

Job Responsibilities:

Account Opening:

- Opening a supplier account in Zahrawi's ERP system as per opening request form, including the necessary documents from the supplier (supplier contract, trade license, etc.).
- Responsible to keep separate filing for all supporting document of supplier account.

Transaction Posting:

- Posting supplier bill on Zahrawi's ERP system as per the Purchase Order.
- Posting Journal Vouchers for non-inventory invoices such as freight, service charge, etc.
- Posting Journal Vouchers for Debit/Credit note and supplier advance.
- Posting Journal Vouchers required for matching supplier invoices used in clearing and posting allocation of supplier payments, ensuring all supporting documents are attached.

Process & Verification:

- Reconciling & cleaning up all supplier, advance, other receivable & other payable account.
- Reconciling RPT.
- Coordinating with the Accounting Manager and preparing debit/credit note to be sent to the supplier (related to inventory & non inventory).
- Coordinating with the Accounting Manager and preparing letter & issuing email to supplier for any type of dispute matter.
- Collecting cheques from customers.
- Verifying the accuracy of payroll posting with HR record.

Reporting & Analysis:

- Completing the month end posting before closing calendar date.
- Preparing monthly Advance supplier schedule.
- Preparing report of credit limit usage on a weekly basis.
- Preparing monthly AP aging report.
- Preparing monthly future payment report.
- Preparing monthly MIS reports

Minimum Qualifications	Bachelor's Degree in Accounting / Finance
Experience	2-3 Years of experience
Nationality	Any Nationality

If you are interested, please send us your CV to careers@zahrawigroup.com with the subject "**Accountant - Oman**"

Figure 3.3: Example of a job advertisement (job description)

In the example presented in Figure 3.3 above, certain words or phrases within the job description can be correlated with particular skills or attributes. For instance, in the job responsibility related to "coordinating with the Accounting Manager and preparing letters and issuing emails to suppliers for any type of

dispute matter", skills such as communication, customer focus and digital proficiency can be linked to this task. Additionally, the job description implies the need for other competencies, including reporting, analytical and collaboration skills. All the job advertisements were examined in this way, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the analysis in relation to the demands of the job market.

Furthermore, any relationship between the results which was perceived as critical to the research was labelled and defined. For descriptive analysis, Excel and NVivo software were used to obtain descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation and frequency, as illustrated in Figure 3.4 below.

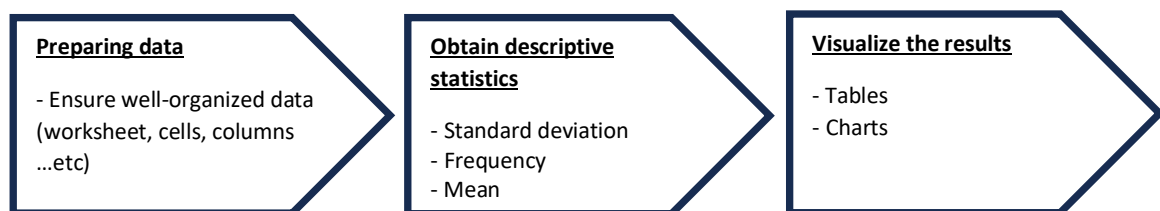


Figure 3.4: The process of obtaining descriptive statistics

This analysis is instrumental in designing graphical representations of the findings, such as bar charts and cross-tabulations. Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009) emphasise the importance of descriptive data in displaying both the range and the meaning of percentages, which are easier to understand than raw frequencies.

3.6.2. Semi-structured Interviews

In this study, the interview data was evaluated using content analysis. The purpose of the analysis was to understand participants' perceptions of a particular issue. The interviews extended beyond simply communicating interviewees' ideas and concepts. The interviewer employed an explanatory approach to understand the data collected using other methods. In interview analysis, content analysis is used for:

organising, describing, understanding, accounting for, and explaining data, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation (of which the researcher is one), noting patterns, themes,

categories and regularities, all of which are the task of the qualitative.
(Cohen et al., 2018: 643)

Transforming qualitative data into meaningful findings is not a straightforward process. There is no one-size-fits-all formula, but the method chosen should align with the research aim. Qualitative data analysis is also distinguished by its interactivity, which involves “a back-and-forth process between data collection and analysis” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009: 251). Data collection and analysis can be approached interchangeably, enabling the integration and restructuring of data to uncover emerging themes for the interpretation of the data collected.

All the interviews were analysed using the same procedure and methods in order to maintain the research’s internal validity and credibility. For systematic analysis, the qualitative data in the current thesis was managed, analysed and interpreted using the following steps: preparing, thematic coding, synthesising and interpreting (Figure 3.5).

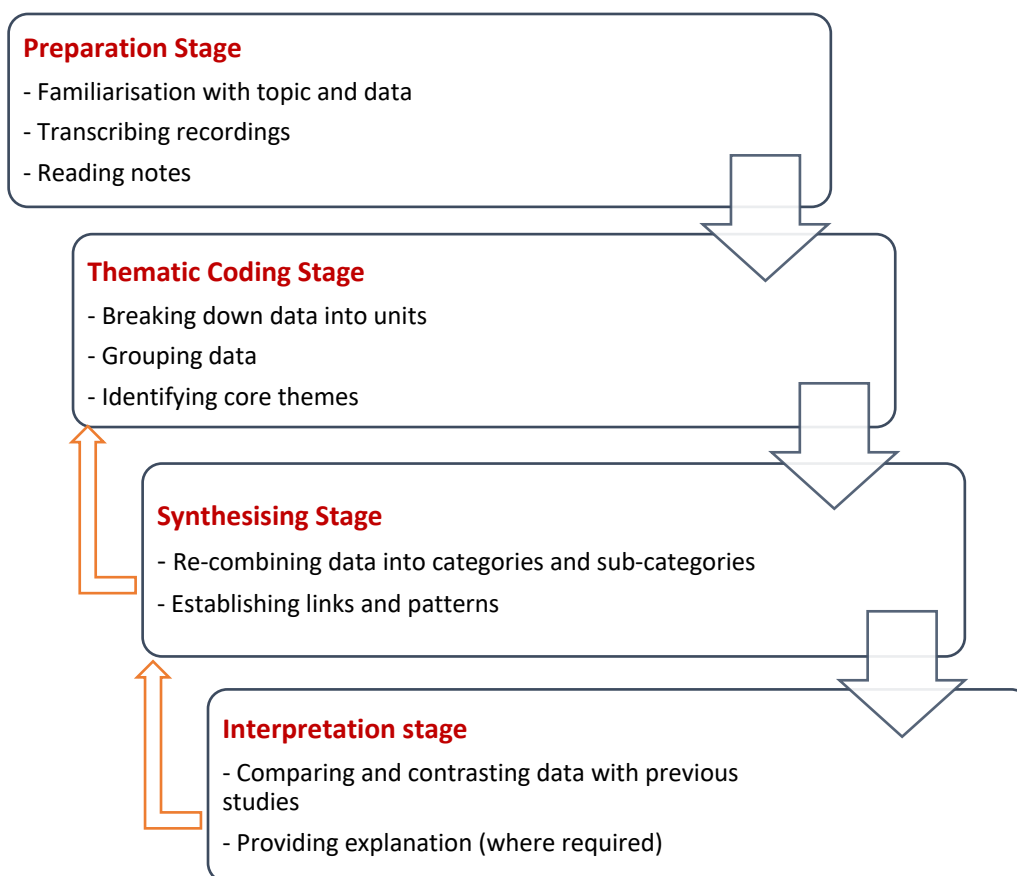


Figure 3.5: The stages of analysing qualitative data

As illustrated in Figure 3.5, the thematic analysis process starts with the preparation stage. This involves familiarising oneself with the raw data and the interview transcripts to identify areas related to the study purpose and research questions (King et al., 2018). The next stage is thematic coding, which involves breaking down the collected data into themes, codes and sub-codes. This categorisation is achieved through the conceptualisation and organisation of responses, focusing on important recurring statements, words, phrases and patterns (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell, 2018). Where appropriate, relevant supporting quotes from interviewees' responses were included in the analysis to illustrate key themes and relevant excerpts. After identifying the key themes, they were synthesised into main categories and sub-categories and re-combined to identify patterns in the synthesising stage. This process gives meaning to the data and prepares it for the final stage, i.e. the interpretation stage, in which the research findings are contextualised in relation to existing work, allowing comparisons and contrasts to be made with the findings of similar studies conducted previously.

Although defining the stages for analysing qualitative data provides support and makes the analysis process systematic, it is crucial to maintain flexibility in the process, as there is always a possibility of identifying related merging or distinct themes. Thus, the key themes and research questions were always readily available to prevent data overload and the inclusion of irrelevant information. Nevertheless, any new codes or themes that emerged and were relevant were duly considered. Cohen et al. (2018) and King et al. (2018) suggest that researchers should revisit their notes and comments, redefining themes or codes whenever new codes surface. This practice was integrated into the qualitative analysis in this study, as illustrated in Figure 3.5 above.

It is worth mentioning that combining qualitative and quantitative data results in triangulation, which enhances the study's credibility. Applying mixed methods in the higher education context is "compatible with quantitative approaches that emphasise the interventionist logic for the research of causal regularities, as well as qualitative ones that emphasise the act of interpretation both in its importance for human interaction and the research process" (Seyfried & Reith, 2019: 115). To some extent, the empirical insights obtained from quantitative approaches and

the interpretation from qualitative approaches help eliminate each other's shortcomings, ultimately improving the validity and reliability of the research outcome (Cohen et al., 2018).

3.7. The Pilot Study

A pilot study allows the researcher to test the data collection instruments, check the appropriateness of the methods used for data collection and analysis and conduct the main study professionally (Creswell, 2018). In this research, pilot interviews were carried out before collecting the actual data to ensure that the proposed questions aligned with the research aim. The pilot interview was also conducted to verify that the wording of the questions was unambiguous. Conducting semi-structured interviews means managing the time resource effectively, so piloting was essential. The piloting helped estimate the time needed for carrying out and transcribing each interview. Also, the pilot indicated how the interview should be conducted effectively. In addition, the pilot interviews served as a valuable means of assessing and refining the interview techniques, ensuring that subsequent interviews would yield effective and valid results. For instance, during the first interview, the responses from the participants were not thoroughly explored and discussed. Consequently, more time was allotted to delve into the interviewees' responses in subsequent interviews. Encouraging participants to provide clarifications and additional details about their responses had the advantage of gathering more valuable information, potentially uncovering new and intriguing aspects of the research topic.

Two structured pilot interviews were performed: one with an employer (employing business graduates) and one with a business graduate. First, permission to participate in the study was sought from both the business graduate and the employer. Prior to the interviews, the interviewees were provided with a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 3 and 4), furnishing them with details of the study. Subsequently, each interviewee was requested to sign a Consent Form (Appendix 5) in compliance with ethical considerations.

The pilot interview with the graduate proceeded smoothly, although some issues with the wording and structure of certain questions were identified. For example, a question formulated as "Have you heard of critical media literacy?" was

somewhat unclear, which meant that the interviewee initially struggled to provide an answer. This momentary confusion caused a brief delay in the interview. During the pilot interview with the employer, it was observed that certain questions required a more precise formulation, particularly when inquiring about the importance of social media in the employer's business. The employer was initially not sure whether the questions pertained to personal social media accounts or business-related accounts. This was clarified, and extra care was taken to ensure clarity during the rest of the interview.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are integral to all forms of research, spanning social sciences, the humanities and various other disciplines. These ethical concerns should be a focal point at every stage of the research process. For example, Cohen et al. (2018: 112) emphasise that “educational researchers must take into account the effects of the research on participants; they have a responsibility to participants to act in such a way as to preserve their dignity as human beings.” For this reason, research ethics should be carefully weighed to balance the demands of any empirical investigation in the pursuit of truth and safeguard the participants' rights, which may be at risk due to the research procedures employed (ibid, 2018). Similarly, Denscombe (2010) stresses the importance of upholding participants' dignity and conducting the research process with transparency and integrity. Considering the chosen research topic and the proposed methodologies, it was anticipated that there were no moral issues or situations that could potentially harm the participants. Therefore, all necessary measures were taken to ensure the research was conducted in a lawful, honest and ethical manner.

To uphold research ethics, this thesis obtained ethical approval documents from the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University. Participants were given a Participant Information Sheet outlining the purpose and scope of the study, including the study procedure, the participant's rights, and the researcher's details and responsibilities toward the participants (Appendix 3 and 4). Before the data collection exercise, participants were asked to sign a Consent Form, which included all necessary research details, to ensure that they

understood the aim of the research and to confirm that their inquiries (if any) had been answered (Appendix 5). Before the interview, the participants received a copy of the Information Sheet via email, which meant that they had sufficient time to read and understand the study's purpose. They were informed that they had the freedom to withdraw at any stage of the research: before, during, and until the final write-up of data analysis.

Furthermore, the participants were assured that their responses would be handled confidentially and that their details would not be identifiable in the results or discussion. Data confidentiality was guaranteed, and participants' anonymity was ensured through a coding system used to analyse and interpret the data. The researcher stored interview audio recordings on a computer with only login access. These principles and precautions were taken to demonstrate the research's honesty and to avoid compromising participants' privacy.

Another ethical concern was the potential for emotional distress, especially among learners or job seekers. Individuals might feel emotionally distressed when discussing their educational or social experiences with others. This ethical concern is discussed by Cohen et al. (2018), who emphasise the importance of taking precautions to ensure stress-free communication with participants. This precautionary measure can be achieved by implementing research ethical guidelines and regulations - for instance, by providing a transparent, comprehensive Information Sheet and Consent Form, which clarifies the purpose of the study and the procedures it employs, making participants more confident to participate. Also, candidates were assured that their personal information and responses would be kept confidential. The participants were encouraged to ask questions, their inquiries were answered, and support was given throughout the research, reassuring them that they would not be assessed or judged and that all their answers and opinions were valued. Therefore, the interviews were stress-free and non-threatening.

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the underlying theoretical framework, the research design, the data collection and analysis methods, and other issues related to

methodology. The research design was developed to investigate social media's impact on enhancing graduates' employability.

This research uses a constructivist approach to develop a deeper understanding of the influence of SML on improving employability attributes in the Omani labour market. This approach centres on stakeholders' beliefs and perspectives, emphasising their views over simple facts and established norms. Accordingly, the analytical foundation is grounded in human and social capital theories. Human capital theory is particularly relevant as it delves into the specific skills and attributes employers seek in prospective employees. In contrast, social capital theory is intimately tied to social media platforms, which facilitate the acquisition of employability attributes related to networking, communication and interpersonal interactions.

Furthermore, this thesis employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data originates primarily from the analysis of job advertisements, yielding descriptive findings that are presented, compared and elucidated. Qualitative data, on the other hand, is derived from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including both employers and graduates. The insights and perceptions of the participants are systematically coded, reviewed and re-coded into main categories and sub-categories, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the subject under investigation.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals from the business domain, which was in line with the exploratory nature of the study. A purposeful sampling technique was employed to select participants with specific knowledge and experience of the phenomenon being studied. This approach ensured that participants could openly articulate their experiences and confidently express their viewpoints. Consequently, the study focused on individuals with distinct characteristics or backgrounds, aiming to elicit high-quality, first-hand insights.

The findings were triangulated by integrating multiple research methods, minimising the likelihood of errors in data interpretation. This approach offers a comprehensive view of human behaviour and bolsters the validity and accuracy of the research results. It mitigates biases in research methods, reinforces the

validity of the research instruments and enriches the understanding of the research subject (Denscombe, 2010). Additionally, this thesis incorporates secondary data from previous research and social studies, further enhancing the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the research findings.

The following chapters present the results obtained through the varied data collection methods.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1. Introduction

This research uses mixed data collection methods to address the overall aim and objectives. The primary purpose of this thesis is to gain an understanding of the impact of social media literacy (SML) on improving the essential employability skills of business graduates. This chapter, therefore, presents and analyses the findings of the primary research conducted for this project, which includes the analysis of job advertisements and semi-structured interviews.

First of all, the content of web-based job advertisements was analysed to provide valuable insights into current job market trends and determine the most in-demand employability skills in today's labour market. This analysis also sheds light on skill gaps and can therefore assist higher education institutions to improve their practices to align with market needs. Content analysis is a valid and reliable method of investigating employers' perspectives, as it reveals employers' viewpoints regarding their prospective employees. Consequently, job seekers will enhance their prospects of being selected for job interviews if they understand the essential skills, qualifications and experience necessary for a specific role, thereby aligning themselves with the expectations of future employers.

Secondly, the data collected from the interviews conducted with the participants was analysed to explore their views on the impact of SM literacy on enhancing employability skills. The purpose of these interviews was to gather valuable insights, opinions and perspectives within each group to identify potential disparities in the positions and viewpoints of the two groups concerning the impact of SM on enhancing graduates' employability. Eighteen interviews were conducted with graduates and employers to explore their perceptions about social media literacy, employability attributes and the link between them. Also, their challenges were highlighted, and possible solutions were suggested.

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows. Section 4.2 presents the analysis of the job advertisements. It describes the advertised jobs and the labour market demand for each type of job, highlighting requirements in relation to education, experience, skills and personal attributes. Section 4.3 then analyses the content

of the interviews conducted with graduates and employers. Finally, Section 4.4 concludes the chapter and summarises the main findings.

4.2. Job Advertisements

As shown in the previous chapter, information from job advertisements may offer specific and comprehensive data about the labour demand, including educational and skills requirements and the field-specific experience needed. They are, therefore, a valuable source of information due to their propensity to offer dependable and comprehensive insights into the skills and job roles demanded by companies. The analysis of job advertisements also offers valuable insights for graduates by aligning candidates' skills and attributes with job requirements and enhancing the overall recruitment outcomes.

4.2.1. The Classification of Advertised Job Vacancies

The process of allocating job titles to occupation categories poses challenges due to the diverse intentions behind their creation by companies, resulting in the use of different terms to describe the same occupation. Therefore, the data extracted from the advertisements analysed was used to classify the titles into occupations manually, as will be explained below. Although manual coding is time-consuming, it effectively guarantees that job titles will be classified accurately according to their main occupations. The main business occupations within the business sector, as indicated by the various job titles found in the advertisements examined, can be categorised as follows:

Primary Job Title	Alternative Titles
Sales Executive	Sales officer, sales representative, sales associate, sales specialist, sales operation analyst, business sales executive
Accountant	Purchasing accountant, accountant assistant, financial accountant, payable accountant
Marketing Executive	Marketing officer, marketing specialist, marketing analyst, digital marketing specialist, marketing communications specialist, marketing coordinator, marketing representative
SM Specialist	Social feasibility studies specialist, associate SM specialist, SM manager, marketing specialist in SM
Financial Analyst	Destination financial analyst
Business Development Executive	Business development specialist, talent development and training specialist, business development associate
Operation Executive	Operation officer, operation specialist, commercial operation officer
Administrative Officer	Administrative assistant, administration specialist, administrative coordinator, general administrative
Customer Service Specialist	Customer service representative, customer service officer, customer support executive, customer support agent
Human Resource Executive	Human resource officer, human resource assistant

Table 4.1: The main business occupations aligned with substituted titles as they appear in a sample of 300 business job advertisements

As illustrated in Table 4.1, a particular business occupation can have a variety of related job titles. For instance, the 'sales executive' occupation can be designated 'sales officer', 'sales representative', 'sales associate', 'sales specialist', 'sales operation analyst' or 'business sales executive'. Unfortunately, this made it difficult to categorise job advertisements to prepare them for analysis. The main problem was the interchangeable and overlapping responsibilities of a particular job title, where a title means a certain occupation. In addition, the responsibilities listed under one job title overlap with other titles. Since the study targeted entry-level business occupations, overlapping responsibilities are common because the job advertised requires a diverse skill set, as the job holders may play different roles in a small-scale organisation. Thus, assigning job titles to a specific category proved challenging due to their applicability across multiple categories. For

instance, ‘sales executive’ and ‘sales officer’ come under different categories because of the tasks, qualifications and requirements listed. While these terms do not possess identical meanings, they might be used interchangeably in the context of different industries.

Additionally, choosing job titles is inherently subjective, as different individuals might interpret the job description and qualifications differently, depending on whether the person choosing the job title is responsible for posting the job or the prospective applicant. Some job advertisements also lack sufficient information to categorise job titles accurately. Such advertisements have, therefore, been excluded from the analysis, as detailed before in Chapter 3 (Sections 3.5.1. and 3.6.1).

Following the guidelines for aligning job titles with their respective primary business categories is therefore crucial for accurate classification and job analysis. Figure 4.1 illustrates the process of categorising job titles into six main business categories, namely accounting, general business management, marketing, finance, public relations and human resource management.

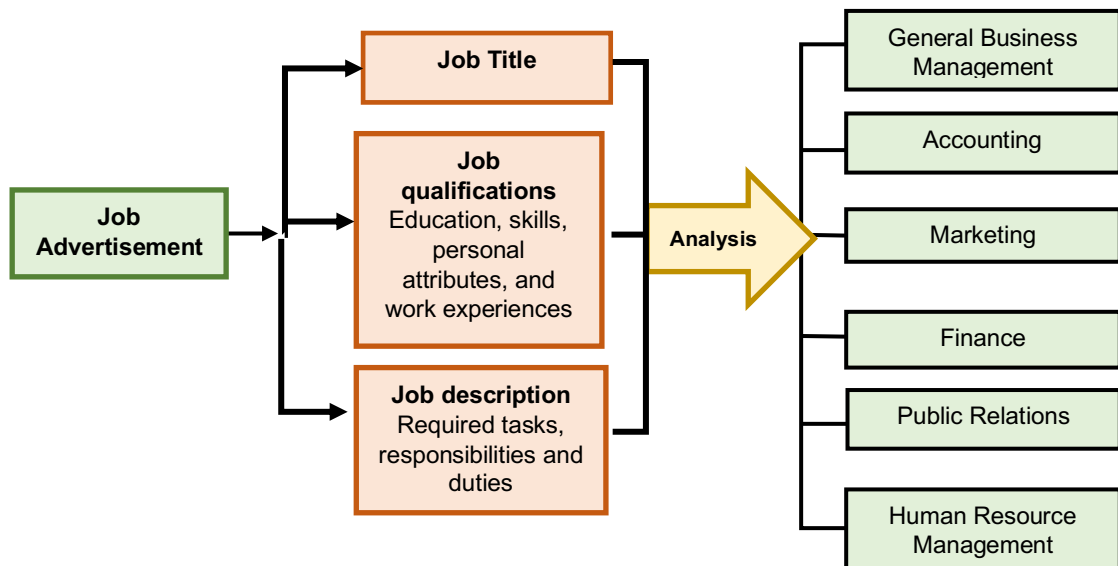


Figure 4.1: the process of categorising the job titles from a sample of 300 business job advertisements into six main business categories

The classification process depicted in Figure 4.1 categorises job titles into appropriate categories. It is important to acknowledge that job advertisements can often be formulated subjectively, may lack comprehensive information, and

feature interchangeable titles and/or overlapping responsibilities. Thus, the job title, job description and the qualifications required should be considered carefully. This analysis facilitates the precise categorisation of advertisements.

Possible discrepancies in job titles, qualifications and job descriptions should be avoided to prevent ambiguities and inconsistencies in job advertisements. An appropriate standardisation system to map job titles onto their corresponding categories should be proposed to help address job classification challenges. Moreover, achieving a harmonious equilibrium between creating overall categories that capture the main job requirements and role descriptions with sufficient specific detail is essential to portray the advertised occupation's inherent characteristics accurately.

4.2.2. Labour Demand for Business Categories

This thesis analysed 300 job advertisements, categorising them into six business groups, as shown in Figure 4.2 below.

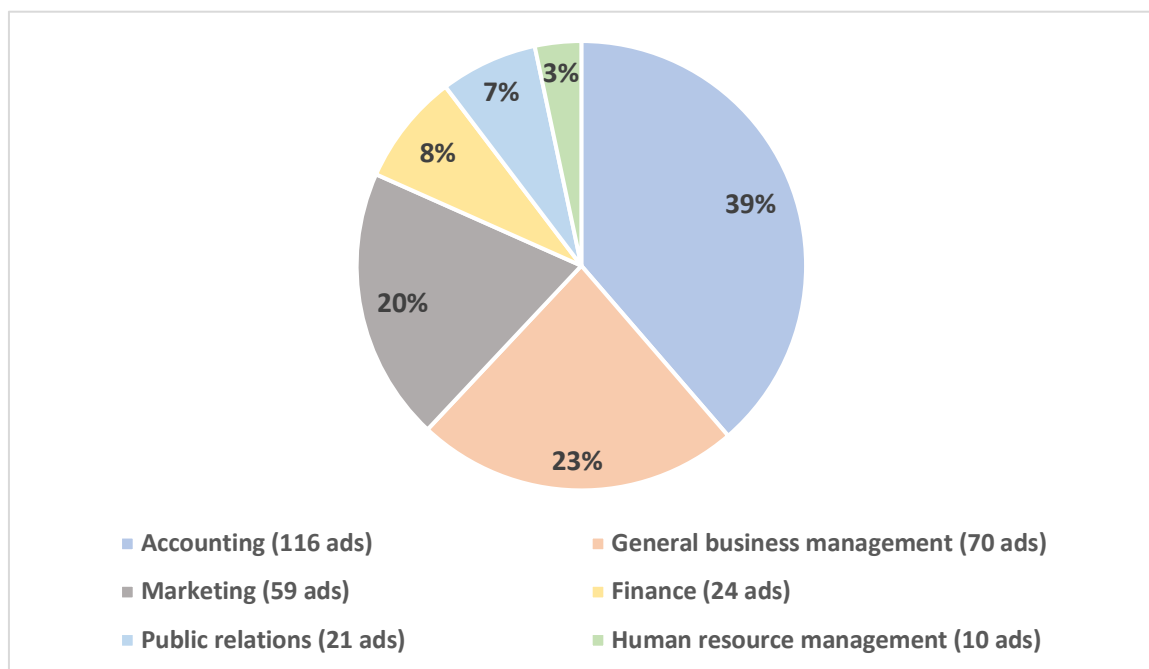


Figure 4.2: Categorisation of business job vacancies in a sample of 300 job advertisements

As shown in Figure 4.2, a substantial portion of the job advertisements (39%) are for positions in accounting. General business management and marketing advertisements represent 23% and 20%, respectively, of the total job advertisements. These three jobs account for more than two-thirds of the total

occupations advertised. The size of these categories can be attributed to their perceived significance, as they are closely linked to the fundamental functions of any organisation and play a crucial role in ensuring the smooth running of overall operations and business growth. The possibility of such partition is due to the primary entry skills required in these occupations, which any new business graduate can handle effectively. In addition, these three business categories require a set of skills widely applicable across industries, making this field more attractive to individuals due to the enhanced prospects which they offer for employment.

On the other hand, the smallest percentage of adverts are for vacancies related to finance (8%), public relations (7%) and human resource management (3%). The low demand for these occupations might be related to the fact that these categories are supporting functions rather than primary drivers of business outcomes. Furthermore, these categories require industry-specific knowledge, especially those in finance and human resource management, potentially reducing the number of viable job opportunities.

While certain fields may experience varying levels of popularity at any given moment, the emergence of new roles and opportunities can change the demand for different roles. Individuals' preferences and personal interests also play an essential role in career choices and the popularity of specific careers compared to others. The following sections, therefore, investigate the main requirements (education, experience and skills) in the six business categories.

4.2.3. Education Requirements

Education is considered a key factor across all six business categories, i.e. accounting, general business management, marketing, finance, public relations and human resource management. Since the job search was limited to entry-level positions, only job advertisements specifying a diploma² or bachelor's degree as the required education level were considered. Table 4.2 illustrates the importance of degree in different business fields.

² A degree awarded upon the successful completion of a college program.

Business Field	Degree Required	Mean	SD
Accounting	66%	69%	0.137
General business management	73%		
Marketing	57%		
Finance	88%		
Public relations	52%		
Human resource management	80%		

Table 4.2: The percentage of adverts including education requirements according to different business categories in a sample of 300 job advertisements

The overall findings indicate that education is a critical factor for employers in their search for suitable candidates, as evidenced by the fact that on average 69% of job advertisements require educational qualifications. Specifically, a degree is required for candidates applying for finance or human resource management positions, according to 88% and 80% (respectively) of the advertisements. More than two-thirds of the job advertisements for business management and accounting (73% and 66%, respectively) stipulate that applicants should have a degree. More than half of the jobs in marketing (57%) and public relations (52%) require applicants to have a degree. The standard deviation (SD) of 0.137 indicates that reasonable inconsistencies have been recorded, as the demand for degrees might vary according to the occupations advertised. One possible reason for this might be the necessity of specialised industry expertise in areas such as finance and human resource management. This highlights the importance of obtaining an academic degree, as explained in Section 4.2.2. However, the other occupations require only proficiency in basic business knowledge and skills, which can be obtained through education but also through experiential learning and training.

Turning to the degree prerequisites for business graduates, Table 4.3 presents the percentages of the job advertisements examined which specified degrees to bachelor's or diplomas.

Required Degree		No. of Job Advertisements (out of 300)	Percentage
Degree (specified & unspecified)		200	67%
Specified	Bachelor's degree	147	49%
	Diploma	30	10%
Unspecified (diploma or bachelor's degree)		23	8%

Table 4.3: Degrees specified in a sample of 300 job advertisements

As illustrated in Table 4.3, almost two-thirds of the job advertisements (67%) require job candidates to possess a degree to be eligible for a business-related position. However, these advertisements did not specify the type of degree required. Bachelor's degree holders (49%) are preferred to individuals with a diploma (10%), illustrating employers' tendency to hire candidates with higher levels of education. Only 23 of the 300 (8%) job ads required candidates to possess a related educational degree in the vacant being announced. Academic knowledge is important as it equips candidates with theoretical business knowledge and a comprehensive understanding of business concepts and principles. Accordingly, this knowledge forms the basis for further development, building professional networks and fostering lifelong learning.

4.2.4. Experience Requirements

Although this study considers entry-level job vacancies, the adverts revealed a clear emphasis on experience as a requirement in the Omani labour market (Table 4.4).

Business Field	Experience	Mean	SD
Accounting	60%	62%	0.044
General business management	57%		
Marketing	67%		
Finance	58%		
Public relations	67%		
Human resource management	60%		

Table 4.4: The percentage of a sample of 300 job advertisements specifying a requirement for experience in different business categories

The findings presented in Table 4.4 make it clear that experience is seen as a crucial characteristic which job seekers should consider when applying for most business vacancies. Holding a degree is a key requirement, as shown by the fact that it is included in 69% of job advertisements (see Table 4.2 above), followed by field-related experience included in 62% of advertisements (Table 4.4 above). This is only 7% lower than the requirement that candidates should possess a degree. This is an unexpected finding and shows that education and experience are seen as almost equally important for entry-level jobs. Interestingly, this is consistent across all business fields, as evidenced by the SD of 0.044, indicating similar percentages in all business categories, underscoring the necessity of experience for achieving a business position. Hands-on experience is essential in marketing and public relations, as shown in 67% of the total job advertisements in each category. This is due to the inherent requirement for individuals in these roles to possess not only theoretical knowledge but also a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved, as well as the ability to identify potential opportunities and challenges that may arise in various work contexts. Such practical expertise cannot be gained solely through formal education.

Table 4.5 below presents the percentage of the job advertisements examined which specify experience.

Required Degree		No. of Job Advertisements (out of 300)	Percentage
Experience (specified & unspecified)		189	63%
Specified	One year of experience	52	17%
	Two years of experience	78	26%
Not specified		59	20%

Table 4.5: Experience specified in a sample of 300 job advertisements.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of job advertisements require applicants to possess general experience (Table 4.5). About 17% of job advertisements require at least one year of experience, 26% require two years of experience, and 20% do not specify the requisite number of years of experience. As with the education requirements presented in Table 4.3, the greater an individual's years of experience, the greater their employment opportunities. These results

demonstrate that candidates with industry experience are more likely to obtain employment than those without experience.

These findings show that experience is essential for entry-level occupations and comparable to the importance of a degree. However, staying updated about new industry trends, technologies, and practices is also crucial in business. The acquisition of experience alone does not guarantee the development of skilled and versatile candidates. However, candidates can enhance their performance in their respective fields by acquiring appropriate education and staying abreast of the latest theories and practices.

4.2.5. Required Skills and Personal Attributes

The dynamic relationship between the skills and competencies of individuals and the skills demanded by employers is an important factor with substantial ramifications for crucial outcomes such as increasing job productivity and the employment rate. As explained in Chapter 2, a considerable proportion of Oman's unemployment rate can be attributed to the disparity between the supply of skills and the demand. The analysis of the job advertisements presented above gives an idea of the skills required in the current Omani market. The significance of skills is illustrated in Figure 4.3 below, which is made up of the words most frequently found in analyses of job qualifications and requirements.



Figure 4.3: The words most frequently found in analysis of job qualifications and requirements.

The data presented in Figure 4.3 shows that the frequency with which specific terms are used indicates how frequently particular qualifications and skills are required for candidates to apply for business occupations. For instance, 'skills' is a prominent factor, underscoring the importance of recruiting and hiring skilful candidates. Additionally, words like 'experience', 'knowledge' and 'bachelor' stand out, confirming the importance employers attach to hiring knowledgeable candidates with degrees and experience. Generally, the analysis of job advertisements reveals that common skills such as 'good communication', 'management', 'computer' skills and 'fluent English' are in high demand. Specifically, depending on the job being advertised, candidates familiar with 'marketing', 'business', 'social media', 'accounting', 'sales' and 'financial' issues are required. However, it should be noted that the importance attached to these competencies does not suggest that other competencies are not necessary for employment.

The most frequently used words in the job vacancies will provide an insight about the most required skills in the market. Therefore, a comprehensive breakdown of the employability skills and attributes mentioned ten times or more in a sample of 300 job advertisements shows a diverse range of skills required in the labour market. These skills are divided into two main categories: non-technical skills (general business and personal attributes) and technical skills, as shown in Table 4.6.

Employability Skills/Attributes	Frequency
NON-TECHNICAL SKILLS	
General Business Skills	
Communication skills	231
Customer orientation	201
Digital skills	165
English proficiency	153
Social media management skills	94
Organisation skills	63
Analytical skills	63
Teamwork skills	57
Time management skills	56
Negotiation skills	49
Collaboration	46
Strategic thinking	42
Multi-tasking	42
Presentation skills	39
Problem-solving skills	34
Attention to detail	27
Leadership skills	22
Ability to persuade	19
Decision making	17
Punctuality/meeting deadlines	15
Personal Attitudes	
Self-development & Self-motivation	97
Interpersonal skills	29
Working under pressure	28
Creativity	22
Flexibility	11
TECHNICAL SKILLS	
Financial knowledge	128
Reporting skills	124
Data analysis	63

Table 4.6: Categorisation of the skills required in the labour market and their frequency as specified in a sample of 300 business job advertisements

As demonstrated in Table 4.6, almost all job advertisements emphasise the importance of non-technical skills. The majority of the job advertisements sought candidates with practical general business skills, such as communication skills and customer orientation. This result is not unexpected, as industries within the business sector need individuals who can communicate effectively with clients and meet their various demands. Moreover, in today's globalised, digitalised era, possessing digital skills and proficiency in the English language are essential prerequisites for succeeding in the market. Other essential skills are social media management, organisation, analytical abilities, team management and negotiation skills. However, leadership, persuasion, decision-making and punctuality are less critical than the skills specified in Table 4.6 above. Turning to personal attributes, a considerable number of the advertised vacancies sought self-motivated candidates. Surprisingly, the importance attached to interpersonal skills and working under pressure was not as important as self-motivation.

These findings reveal that technical skills are not considered as important as non-technical skills. A considerable proportion of the job vacancies explicitly require essential technical skills, specifically knowledge of financial principles and reporting skills. Knowledge of data analysis is essential in some occupations, as job advertisements stated it as a prerequisite for applications. A thorough in-depth analysis of job advertisements in the six main business categories (accounting, marketing, finance, public relations, general business management and human resource management) gave the same results, as will be explained and discussed later.

The skill set requirements for each of the six main business categories is presented in Table 4.7 below to give an overview of the skills required in the Omani business field.

Business Category Skills	Accounting	General business management	Marketing	Finance	Public relations	Human resource management	Mean	SD
Communication skills	61%	77%	52%	67%	57%	60%	62%	0.0871
Digital skills	51%	54%	63%	54%	38%	80%	57%	0.1400
English proficiency	49%	63%	45%	25%	67%	50%	50%	0.1489
Financial skills	27%	11%	3%	46%	5%	0%	15%	0.1783
Organisation skills	12%	26%	8%	13%	0%	20%	13%	0.0909
Analytical skills	15%	14%	18%	25%	19%	20%	19%	0.0394
Problem-solving skills	7%	9%	3%	8%	19%	50%	16%	0.1748
Interpersonal skills	7%	16%	7%	8%	0%	30%	11%	0.1046
Social media skills	2%	3%	42%	0%	43%	0%	15%	0.2134
Customer-oriented skills	25%	21%	12%	13%	24%	10%	18%	0.0660
No./Percentage of advertisements (in a total of 300)	116 (39%)	70 (23%)	59 (20%)	24 (8%)	21 (7%)	10 (3%)		

Table 4.7: The percentage, mean and standard deviation of business occupation requirements in different business categories in a sample of 300 job advertisements

Table 4.7 presents the skills employers expect from recently employed staff as specified in the job advertisements. The means of the most commonly required skills are presented in Figure 4.4 below.

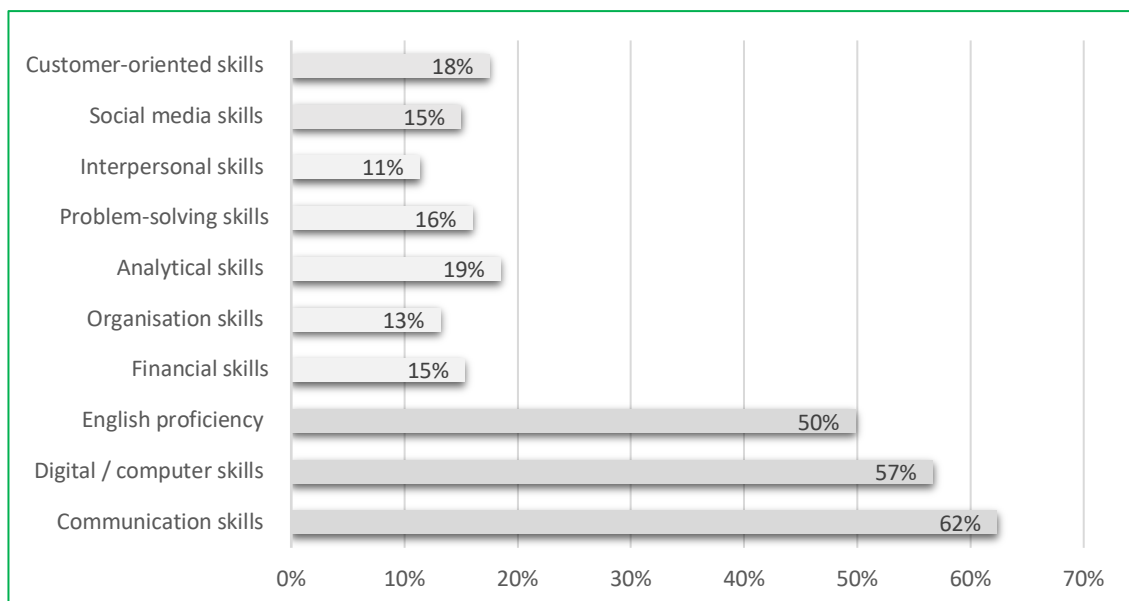


Figure 4.4: The means of the most commonly required skills across the six business categories

Based on the data presented in Table 4.7 and Figure 4.4, the skills with the highest rankings, as indicated by the mean scores, are communication skills (62%), digital skills (57%) and English proficiency (50%). These top three skills are required in more than half of all the vacancies analysed across various business sectors, with the exception of English proficiency in finance and marketing. About 25% and 45% of the job advertisements analysed required candidates with good English in finance and marketing, respectively (Table 4.7). Moreover, these three key competencies consistently emerged as highly sought-after qualifications in over 50% of all advertised positions. The priority given to these skills is expected as they intersect and reinforce one another. English is widely used for effective communication in professional settings in today's technology-driven world. The impact of these skills should also be considered in relation to personal and professional development, taking into consideration their interconnection.

The skills which are less in demand are organisational and interpersonal, with means of 13% and 11% respectively. The low demand for these skills can be attributed to the nature of the occupations. The findings above indicate that there is not much need for these skills in all occupations, as the demand in all categories is no more than 25%, with the exception of interpersonal skills in human resource management (30%).

The standard deviation of each of the listed skills across the six job occupations was calculated to determine whether there is a significant discrepancy in the requirement for each listed skill and the announced vacancy, as presented in Figure 4.5

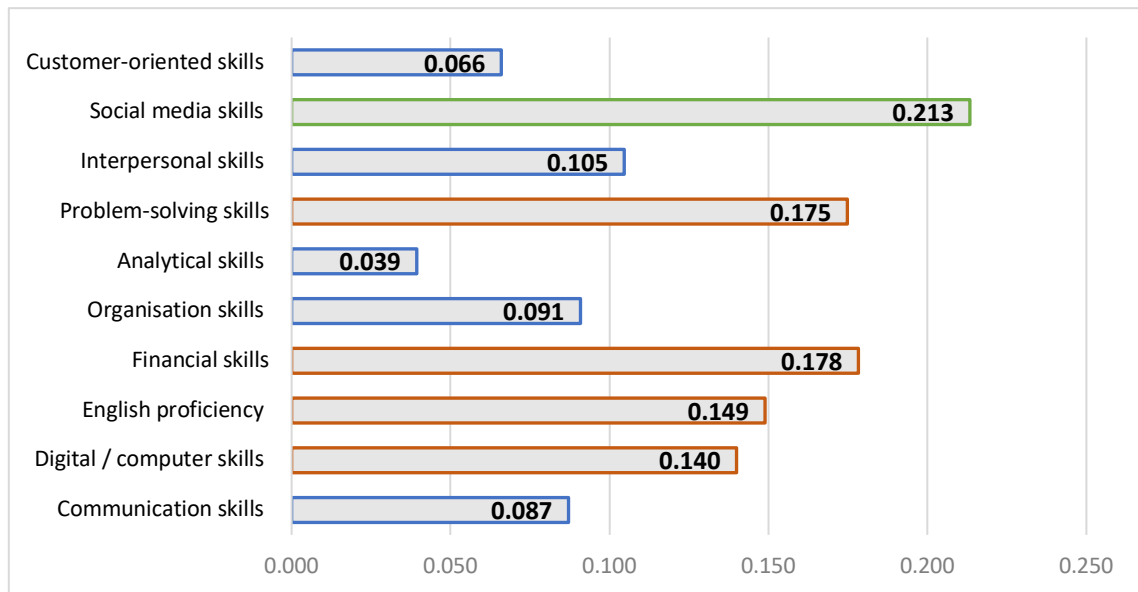


Figure 4.5: The standard deviations of the skills required across the six business categories

Figure 4.5 illustrates the degree of variability or dispersion for each skill within the business categories, which are segmented into three distinct groups as outlined below.

- A. High standard deviation:** The data collected for SM skills is widely spread around the mean (0.213), indicating substantial discrepancies within the business categories. This suggests that these skills are in higher demand for some business occupations than others. For example, it is imperative to have proficient SM skills to secure positions in marketing or public relations, with percentages of 42% and 43%, respectively. Conversely, the requirement for SM skills for other occupations does not exceed 5% (see Table 4.7).
- B. Moderate standard deviation:** The requirement for financial skills (0.178), problem-solving (0.175), English (0.149) and computer skills (0.140) shows moderate variability across the business categories. The findings indicate that there are notable inconsistencies in the demand for these skills, which can fluctuate depending on the specific job positions advertised by businesses.
- C. Low standard deviation:** Employers consistently identify analytical skills as a requirement across various business categories, as indicated by an SD of 0.039, with a variance of no more than 10% across all business categories.

Low differences were also recorded in communication skills (0.087), organisational skills (0.091), interpersonal skills (0.105), analytical skills (0.039) and customer-oriented skills (0.066). These findings indicate that these skills are commonly required in all business categories, irrespective of their perceived significance, as evidenced by their proximity to the mean in terms of SD.

The SD analysis provides insights into the variability and desirability of each of the listed skills. Although the SDs of some skills are higher than others, the specific nature of the vacancies advertised can explain the variety, as was the case with occupations in marketing and public relations, which require SM skills. The requirements for other skills show reasonable divergences related to the job characteristics and the responsibilities that potential employees are expected to handle. Therefore, an in-depth investigation of the required skills in each business occupation will provide valuable insights into the skill requirements in each business category.

4.2.5.1. Accounting

The job vacancies announced in accounting represent over a third of the total job advertisements. Table 4.8 shows the requirements (degree, experience and skills) that job seekers should possess to secure a position in accounting.

Required Skills (Accounting)	Ads. as a percentage of Total Sample*	No. of Advertisements (116)	Percentage
Degree	39%	76	66%
Experience		70	60%
Communication skills		71	61%
Digital skills		59	51%
English proficiency		57	49%
Financial skills		31	27%
Organisation skills		14	12%
Analytical skills		17	15%
Problem-solving skills		8	7%
Interpersonal skills		8	7%
SM skills		2	2%
Customer-oriented skills		29	25%

* No. of advertisements analysed was 116 out of 300

Table 4.8: The percentage of adverts specifying particular skills as necessary in occupations related to accounting in a sample of 116 job advertisements

As shown in Table 4.8, a degree (66%) and experience (60%) are significant in hiring candidates as accountants. Regarding the skills required, almost half of the vacancies prioritise applicants with strong communication skills (61%), digital skills (51%) and proficiency in English (49%). Almost a quarter of the accounting advertisements required candidates with good financial and customer-oriented skills. However, accounting does not look for proficiency in SM: only 2% of these job advertisements ask for SM knowledge. Also, problem-solving skills and interpersonal skills are not in high demand since only 7% of the advertisements look for accountants with these competencies. Overall, the findings demonstrate the need for candidates who can do basic accounting tasks, communicate effectively with customers, and can apply their digital competencies in their workplace.

4.2.5.2. General Business Management

Table 4.9 provides a comprehensive overview of the general business management skills requirement, representing 23% of the advertised occupations.

Required Skills (General Business Management)	Ads as a Percentage of Total Sample*	No. of Advertisements (70)	Percentage
Degree	23%	51	73%
Experience		40	57%
Communication skills		54	77%
Digital skills		38	54%
English proficiency		44	63%
Financial skills		8	11%
Organisation skills		18	26%
Analytical skills		10	14%
Problem-solving skills		6	9%
Interpersonal skills		11	16%
SM skills		2	3%
Customer-oriented skills		15	21%

* No. of advertisements analysed was 70 out of 300

Table 4.9: The percentage of adverts specifying particular skills as necessary in occupations related to general business management in a sample of 70 job advertisements

Degrees and experience are important requirements for more than half of the openings, namely 73% and 57%, respectively. As with accounting, more than half of the vacancies emphasised the importance of communication skills (77%), English proficiency (63%) and digital skills (54%). However, SM skills are not in

high demand since they are specified in only 2 of the 70 job advertisements, representing only 3% of the total. The results are expected since individuals in general business management positions should possess solid digital skills, communication skills and proficiency in English.

4.2.5.3. Marketing

Table 10 below presents the percentages for the skills required for 59 marketing vacancies in the Omani market.

Required Skills (Marketing)	Ads as a Percentage of Total Sample*	No. of Advertisements (59)	Percentage
Degree	20%	34	57%
Experience		40	67%
Communication skills		31	52%
Digital skills		38	63%
English proficiency		27	45%
Financial skills		2	3%
Organisation skills		5	8%
Analytical skills		11	18%
Problem-solving skills		2	3%
Interpersonal skills		4	7%
SM skills		25	42%
Customer-oriented skills		7	12%

* No. of advertisements analysed was 59 out of 300

Table 4.10: The percentage of adverts specifying particular skills as necessary in occupations related to marketing in a sample of 59 job advertisements

As stated in relation to the preceding two business categories, more than half of the job advertisements analysed required a relevant degree (57%) and experience (67%) as prerequisites for considering candidates for marketing positions. Like accounting and business management, marketing candidates should have digital skills (63%) and communication skills (52%). In addition, many marketing job postings show that candidates should be fluent in English (45%) and have experience with SM (42%). These requirements indicate that many businesses generally rely on SM platforms to market their services and products and enhance their business brands within the contemporary digital landscape. Furthermore, English is an international language widely used for communication, including on SM platforms. However, financial and problem-solving skills are not a significant requirement for marketing positions (with 3% each), which is to be expected considering the nature of the job.

4.2.5.4. Finance

Table 4.11 outlines the requirements for finance vacancies in the Omani business market. Finance specialists are not in high demand in entry-level occupations since only 8% of the jobs advertised are for organisations interested in obtaining financial analysts. Positions related to finance require an adequate knowledge of basic business practices and principles, which explains why adverts for finance jobs constitute such a low proportion of the total.

Required Skills (Finance)	Ads. as a Percentage of Total Sample*	No. of Advertisements (24)	Percentage
Degree	8%	21	88%
Experience		14	58%
Communication skills		16	67%
Digital skills		13	54%
English proficiency		6	25%
Financial skills		11	46%
Organisation skills		3	13%
Analytical skills		6	25%
Problem-solving skills		2	8%
Interpersonal skills		2	8%
SM skills		0	0%
Customer-oriented skills		3	13%

* No. of advertisements analysed was 24 out of 300

Table 4.11: The percentage of adverts specifying particular skills as necessary in occupations related to finance in a sample of 24 job advertisements

The importance of hiring candidates with excellent financial knowledge and expertise is emphasised, with emphasis placed on a degree (88%). This is a solid foundation for acquiring financial knowledge, enabling individuals to comprehend financial concepts and principles in order to provide accurate financial analyses. Additionally, communication skills (67%), digital skills (54%), experience (58%) and financial skills (46%) are of considerable importance in the finance field. In this context, the relationship between SM and finance is not established, as no advertisement specifies it as a requirement.

4.2.5.5. Public Relations

Table 4.12 shows the prerequisites for jobs in public relations. As in the field of finance, the demand for public relations is low compared to other business categories. Table 4.12 below shows that public relations accounts for only 7% of overall job advertisements.

Required Skills (Public Relations)	Ads as a Percentage of Total Sample*	No. of Advertisements (21)	Percentage
Degree	7%	11	52%
Experience		14	67%
Communication skills		12	57%
Digital skills		8	38%
English proficiency		14	67%
Financial skills		1	5%
Organisation skills		0	0%
Analytical skills		4	19%
Problem-solving skills		4	19%
Interpersonal skills		0	0%
SM skills		9	43%
Customer-oriented skills		5	24%

* No. of advertisements analysed was 21 out of 300

Table 4.12: The percentage of adverts specifying particular skills as necessary in occupations related to public relations in a sample of 21 job advertisements

Since public relations involves professional interaction to manage the communication and relationships between an organisation and its target audience and society, experience (67%), English proficiency (67%), and communication skills (57%) are in high demand for these positions. Furthermore, 52% of the jobs advertised required applicants to possess a degree. These main requirements can be deemed crucial for establishing professional networking and maintaining relationships with organisations and clients that can benefit the business. Considerable importance is also given to SM (43%) and digital skills (38%), as public relations candidates are expected to actively engage in SM platforms with their target audience to create meaningful content, monitor online interaction and enhance the organisation's reputation. Interestingly, none of the advertisements included organisational and interpersonal skills in their requirements.

4.5.5.6. Human Resource Management

Human resource management occupations accounted for the lowest proportion of job advertisements, 3% only. Table 4.13 presents the requirements for applicants for human resource positions.

Required Skills (Human Resource Management)	Ads as a Percentage of Total Sample*	No. of Advertisements (10)	Percentage
Degree	3%	8	80%
Experience		6	60%
Communication skills		6	60%
Digital skills		8	80%
English proficiency		5	50%
Financial skills		0	0%
Organisation skills		2	20%
Analytical skills		2	20%
Problem-solving skills		5	50%
Interpersonal skills		3	30%
SM skills		0	0%
Customer-oriented skills		1	10%

* No. of advertisements analysed was 10 out of 300

Table 4.13: The percentage of adverts specifying particular skills as necessary in occupations related to human resource management in a sample of 10 job advertisements

Human resource management is the effective management of an organisation's valuable assets. In this regard, obtaining a degree is crucial, as shown by 80% of the adverts. Digital skills are of great importance (80%) since digital sites are used as platforms on which job vacancies are announced. As might be expected, 60% of the advertisements ask for candidates with previous experience and communication skills. These are important for dealing professionally with candidates during recruitment activities, ensuring a positive work environment and employers' satisfaction, motivating employees and fostering continuous learning and professional growth. Furthermore, it is imperative to possess additional skills, such as English proficiency and problem-solving skills, constituting 50% of the required skill set. However, no importance was given to financial and SM skills.

In summary, all business categories included a degree and experience as central requirements when hiring fresh candidates since more than half of the occupations require these. The rationale behind the equal importance of experience in nearly all business occupations, regardless of category, stems from the recognition that these positions prioritise skill development over knowledge acquisition. In such roles, candidates' non-technical skills and personal attributes are more important than a college degree. Some skills are specified as requirements only in certain categories, but the three main employability skills

across all business categories are communication skills, digital skills and proficiency in English. Strong communication skills enable employees to articulate their thoughts, convey ideas, negotiate with clients and build strong stakeholder relationships. In addition, English is widely recognised as the global language of business, which therefore facilitates business interactions. In today's technology-based era, companies rely heavily on technology to succeed in their business tasks, enhance productivity and stay competitive in the evolving business landscape. Developing these central skills can improve one's career prospects, employability chances and overall success in the business world.

4.3. Semi-structured Interviews

This section presents the findings of the interviews carried out with graduates and employers, focusing on the impact of SM on enhancing employability. The results are presented according to the main themes of the participants' responses. To ensure interviewees' privacy and research confidentiality, participant identifiers were used to refer to the participants; for example, G1 means Graduate 1, and E1 means Employer 1. The detailed findings of each group interview are presented in the following sections:

4.3.1. Graduate Interviews

Eleven business graduates from the University of Technology and Applied Science (UTAS) were interviewed by telephone. Participants' responses in the following sections were categorised into themes.

4.3.1.1. Uses of SM in Graduates' Lives

All the participants reported using various SMNs to accomplish specific objectives. Although they gave various reasons for using SM, they said they used these platforms to communicate with others, improve their hobbies, follow news trends, promote a business, achieve academic goals and seek employment opportunities.

All students use different social media networks because we like to keep ourselves updated on novel technologies. (G5)

Although the participants listed several purposes for using SMNs, they agreed on six main reasons: communication, improving their hobbies, keeping up with news,

business, academic goals and employment. According to all the users, the primary reason for using SM was to communicate with friends and family, usually through SMNs. They also felt that it enhances one's level of interest, which is another motive for using SM platforms. Candidates claimed that exciting information and valuable tutorials on things such as photography, cooking and designing could easily be found on SM. Additionally, graduates reported that SMNs keep them abreast of recent global, local and institutional news. Interestingly, five of the 11 graduates used SM for marketing their businesses.

These different uses were demonstrated in their responses:

Nowadays, it has become commonplace for higher education institutions (HEIs) to use social media platforms as a means of disseminating institutional news and updates. (G7)

I have a keen interest in photography and have learned many techniques by looking at various social media accounts. I have an account to which I upload the photographs I have taken. (G8)

I have a strong interest in culinary pursuits and have contemplated embarking on an entrepreneurial endeavour by establishing a cooking-oriented social media account with the intention of promoting and marketing various food products. Corporations pay me for promoting their merchandise. (G11)

Most graduates stated that they spent long time on SMNs. However, the time spent seemed logical, as they provided long lists of tasks that SM was used to fulfil, including communication, studying, shopping, cooking and pursuing their interests and hobbies.

Social media platforms have topics in different fields: fashion, news, design, self-development, business tips and tourism. (G11)

Each social media programme has its features and usages. (G5)

The graduates admitted that SM consumed their time:

I am trying to manage my time effectively. I have dedicated much time to engaging with social media platforms. (G5)

These findings made it evident that actively using different SMNs to fulfil different goals reflects the central role of SM in an individual's life. The effect of SM on individuals' lives cannot be ignored. These graduates' use of SM can be directed to enhance their academic and career lives.

4.3.1.2. Social Media and Academic Life

Participants used SM to enhance their academic performance. Starting with graduates, they used SM to search for extra curriculum information and felt that YouTube was the most used source of all SMNs. Interestingly, Twitter was reported to have been used in some academic courses. The participants used different features of SM platforms, such as voting on Instagram and distributing questionnaires on WhatsApp. They also mentioned that they had used various SM platforms to obtain academic information or complete academic projects:

I use the YouTube platform as a means to conduct information retrieval pertaining to my academic coursework. Instagram hosts a variety of educational accounts that offer valuable academic content. (G4)

On YouTube and LinkedIn, some candidates like to share their courses and workshops. (G8)

In one of my academic courses, the instructor assigned a collaborative task wherein we [students] were required to form teams and develop a hashtag to generate a trend. Additionally, the task involved analysing the dashboard to discern the elements that capture users' attention within this context. [During the COVID-19 pandemic], some teachers tried to make SM a part of our education. For example, a topic would be raised on Twitter, and we would actively participate by posting tweets, and in return, we get marks for tweeting. It was exciting, and our interaction was positive. (G10)

We used SMNs in our graduation project. As a team, we searched SM accounts for ideas and ways to improve our project. During the course, we acquired knowledge and proficiency in presentation skills, strategies, and marketing techniques. (G11)

Respondents also used the institution's SM to stay up-to-date with college news like organised events, exam dates, course registration and the announcement of results. It was, therefore, their only way of updating themselves on college news.

However, graduates were not satisfied with the way their institutional SM accounts were managed. They felt they should have had more active and professional social accounts that would assist them in improving their employability:

We desire the college's social media account to be more effectively utilised, surpassing the mere dissemination of news updates. For instance, an account containing examination papers and study guidance would prove advantageous. (G2)

The primary purpose of the college's social media account is to disseminate important information pertaining to the institution, such as updates on course registration and results announcements. (G3)

It would be advantageous if the educational institution provided guidance regarding the importance of utilising SMNs and imparted effective strategies for their integration into academic pursuits. As individuals engaged in academic pursuits, we possess the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively utilise these networks. The institution has the potential to furnish students with comprehensive instructions and guidelines pertaining to the proficient utilisation of social media platforms for academic purposes. (G7)

There is a need for improved strategic planning in the management of college social media accounts. Social media accounts are a way to market the institution even abroad. (G8)

The college appears to have recognised the importance of SM; after COVID-19, SM platforms proved their positive effects. (G11)

4.3.1.3. Employability Attributes Developed Through SM Literacy

Using SM to enhance employability is beneficial if graduates exercise caution when using these networks. All the participants used SMNs to improve their employability and search for employment (Table 4.14).

Employability Skills/Attributes (from Interviews with Graduates)
NON-TECHNICAL SKILLS
General Business Skills Technical communication English language competencies Digital competencies Collaboration & Networking Analytical skills Critical thinking Personal Attributes Self-assurance Creativity
TECHNICAL SKILLS
Subject-related skills

Table 4.14: The categorisation of skills and attributes that are more likely to be acquired through social media as specified in graduates' interviews

Table 4.14 above outlines the skills and attributes that are more likely to be enhanced because of social media exposure. These were:

Technical Communication

Participants used various SMNs to interact with job experts or find job opportunities. They watched YouTube episodes to improve their job interview skills, used LinkedIn to search for training and job openings, and secured job opportunities through platforms like Instagram:

I watched YouTube episodes that guided me on how to pass a job interview. LinkedIn was helpful to search for training and job openings. (G2)

I have my current job through Instagram. There was a job advertisement; I applied and subsequently received acceptance. (G3)

LinkedIn was extensively used during my graduation project to source potential interview participants. The target demographic was identified through an extensive search of job titles. I also used it to prepare my CV and search for training and job vacancies. (G5)

I used social media networks to prepare myself for job interviews. For example, I wrote 'How to be clever in an interview'. I learned how to be confident and use body language appropriately. In order to pursue training opportunities, I initiated contact with companies by utilising the information provided on their social media accounts. (G8)

On LinkedIn, I searched for common interview questions and how to prepare a professional CV. (G9)

Moreover, the graduates' responses testified to the positive impact of SM on enhancing employability by developing specific employability-related skills and competencies. Valuable materials are available on SM platforms, which makes it attractive for graduates to use them as sources for improving their competencies. When pedagogical and employability concerns were discussed, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram were the preferred options. These attributes will be categorised and clarified later.

English Language Competencies

Most participants stressed the significance of using SM to enhance their English language skills. They provided numerous instances of how they used SM platforms to boost their literacy:

I prepared myself for IELTS through YouTube. AbdulRahman Hijazi, a YouTuber, presents useful techniques to approach IELTS questions properly. There are also helpful accounts on Instagram to learn English. (G1)

My English competencies improved greatly through listening and reading English posts, especially in English educational accounts. (G4)

I watched short English videos and clips. If I do not understand a word, I will look up its meaning in a dictionary to expand my vocabulary. (G6)

The acquisition of knowledge does not require financial compensation. Short reels encountered while surfing social media platforms, especially YouTube and Instagram, are available at no cost. (G8)

There are a lot of English accounts on SM. Communicating with others from different countries whose mother tongue is English has helped me improve my English. (G11)

Digital Competencies

The individuals who participated in the study acknowledged the benefits of SM for enhancing their digital abilities. Moreover, engaging in SM platforms has allowed them to hone their digital skills by participating in various programmes and discovering new technological aspects:

People are generally more aware of how to deal with technology. They can figure out fake links. However, hackers can still find their way around. So, we cannot say we are confident in using technology; it should be used carefully. Precautions should be taken, and personal information should not be released easily. (G1)

Once anyone opens an account on any SM platform, they should know how to link it with their email. In addition, many suggested educational tutorials on SM require activating certain features. This will encourage new users to explore and learn more about these platforms. (G5)

Through continued use of SM platforms, users get used to such technology and even go further to discover new features. (G6)

A discernible improvement is evident upon conducting a comparative analysis of my work in SM at present and in the past. (G9)

Collaboration and Networking

Every participant highlighted the importance of SM in their daily interactions with friends and family. According to the participants, the critical reasons for using SM to share fascinating news with friends and family include the fact that SM is easy to use, and its adaptability and portability. Additionally, graduates could expand their networks and contacts by meeting new acquaintances. Specialisation, shared interests and business were the main reasons for making such links:

I disseminate information to my acquaintance. Therefore, it is important to initiate a comprehensive analysis of the news from various perspectives. (G4)

I have more friends in SM than in real life. I know people from different countries. We share the same interests. I have some connections on LinkedIn, and they helped me find a job. (G10)

On the other hand, a few participants were cautious about building new connections through SM:

Nowadays, we cannot trust anyone. We are careful with people we know, so what about someone we do not know? (G4)

Establishing a robust interpersonal connection with individuals with whom one lacks familiarity or has not encountered in person poses a considerable challenge. (G5)

Additionally, comment sections on SM allow users to express their opinions and learn about others' views. However, graduates tended to read comments but not post comments. For example, G3 claimed that reading comments helps them evaluate how people view certain news so that they see the matter from different angles. One of the participants considered comments a powerful tool:

Posts that are open to comments are more likely to reach exploration. Authorised bodies might also post news to get citizens' opinions. Comments play a crucial role in determining the level of acceptance or rejection within the public sphere. (G8)

Analytical Skills and Critical Thinking

Participants acknowledged that they had improved their analytical and critical media thinking competencies since they had started approaching SM content critically. The participants illustrated the benefits of analysing SM posts by the fact that they understood the content, source and reporting style. As mentioned previously, participants only believed information from officially certified accounts. All other news was considered misleading, and additional research was necessary to prove its accuracy. They recognised that SM had a positive impact on their critical thinking abilities, potentially boosting their attractiveness to employers:

Employers are more likely to prefer individuals who can evaluate posts on SM because this indicates strong evaluation skills. (G4)

The candidate who has developed good critical media literacy is selective, positively reflecting the individual's future career. In addition, analytical skills are important in the workplace. Thus, candidates possessing such skills benefit more than other job seekers. (G5)

[Users'] evaluation skills will be improved as they have to compare, contrast, and analyse various factors. This development is expected to yield benefits in the context of professional settings. (G6)

Evaluating news on SM according to certain factors is related to interpersonal skills. This is analogous to the activities undertaken during our training programme. We were asked to evaluate and analyse quotation requests from other companies to ensure they meet the terms and standards. (G9)

Essential Identity Attributes: Self-assurance and Creativity

Respondents demonstrated technological ingenuity in SM contexts. For example, extensive information searches and communication with others attested to their level of digital innovation. Additionally, participants indicated that their comfort level with technology had increased due to their regular participation in SMNs. They also stated that their interest in digital advances had grown:

I know many people whose digital abilities have increased through SM. For instance, my friend created the logo for my business. I was impressed by her work and inquired about how she learned. She used YouTube and attended a workshop through SM. Currently, she operates her own enterprise specialising in logo design. (G1)

Social media is a source for generating ideas, learning new techniques, improving skills, improving one's plan, developing ideas to create new ones and learning from the work of others. (G9)

4.3.1.4. The Challenges of Using SM: Graduates' Perceptions

Graduates identified several challenges in using SM to enhance employability. Many respondents agreed that most of the news posted on SM was misleading and fake. Those who posted such news aimed for more 'views,' 'likes,' 'comments' and 'followers' (G1, G6, G7, G9, G10, G1). These were used to attract users to a post; sometimes a specific topic could develop into a trend on SM, making it 'irresistible' for other users to check what it was about (G6, G10). Moreover, some users forwarded what they received without checking the content (G2, G9). Therefore, "we cannot take what is on social media seriously" (G5). Social media fans or celebrities are usually the sources of this fake news, and they do it to get more followers quickly:

Many social media users want to be famous. They attempt to become superstars and influence others regardless of their content. (G4)

Anyone can open an SM account and start posting anything. Therefore, users should exercise caution when selecting what is helpful and useful for them. (G5)

Some accounts post unverified news. These accounts are the sources of the most misleading news. (G6)

In addition, some participants were apprehensive about the privacy of SM (G1, G5), the potential release of candidates' personal information (G4) and security breaches. This made G1 emphasise the importance of taking precautions and refraining from readily divulging personal information. This concern was observed when some participants were cautious about building new connections through SM. Thus, these findings revealed that users continue to question the privacy and security of SM platforms.

[Because] hackers can find their way around. So, we cannot say we are confident in using technology; it should be used carefully. Precautions should be taken, and personal information should not be released easily. (G1)

Furthermore, choosing trusted sources in SM is challenging for many users, especially with information overload. Filtering information in SM is challenging because of the great amount of misleading and fake news (G3, G4, G7 and G9). Unfortunately, fake job openings are a serious problem (G6 and G10). As stated by one of the graduates, "Some job advertisements were fake, and the information provided was untrue." (G6).

Another challenge was the shortage of trusted professional accounts that could be used as reliable sources to improve candidates' professionalism and employability:

The shortage of professional information on SM on how to develop our employability skills is a serious challenge. SM platforms lack professional accounts to guide and prepare graduates for the labour market. (G7)

The digital challenges of implementing SM features to enhance employability and specific related skills should be considered. For instance, some participants highlighted a few challenges of searching for information or targeting the right audience on SM platforms:

Poor searching skills are a serious challenge. Like any other digital platform, SM is rich with information, but how to search and what keywords or symbols to use to get the information precisely should be taught. (G10)

Social media sites are excellent platforms for marketing, but it is technically challenging to target the correct audience. Moreover, numbers do not represent one's success; more followers do not mean you are successful in marketing. (G11)

Moreover, many users admitted that they spent hours on SM and found it difficult to control their time. This is why SM can be addictive and time-consuming. In addition, users were easily distracted by endless notifications and pop-up advertisements. Therefore, effective time management helps allocate time efficiently:

As individuals engaged in academic pursuits, students often encounter challenges in effectively managing their time to acquire new skills since it can be time-consuming. (G1)

4.3.1.5. Possible Solutions: Graduates' Suggestions

The graduates proposed several suggestions to deal with SM challenges. Due to the massive amount of misleading posts on SM, social media users must use tools and techniques to distinguish between trustworthy and biased news. For instance, all graduates agreed that they got news from official news accounts verified as representing the authority of specific trusted organisations or agencies:

The proliferation of fake news is pervasive, extending beyond the confines of social media platforms. Consequently, it is imperative to ensure the accuracy and reliability of your source. (G8)

Additionally, at the school or college level, providing a course on the importance of SM might be beneficial. The course might include how to use SM professionally. For example, how to create helpful content, what to follow and how to interact (G5, G9, and G10). Building these skills from the beginning might enhance users' employability by improving their awareness and minimising the problems they might face later. At the internal institutional level, SM can be embedded in skills programmes or educational courses to encourage others to use it (G2). Specifically, colleges can have their internal SM platforms that help offer courses on "how to use social media to find a job":

My college provides a course on using LinkedIn to submit job applications. The course provided instruction on how to construct our webpage, publish our details, structure our credentials, and, above all else, optimise it to appeal to potential employers. (G5)

Creating an institutional internal SM platform is beneficial. For example, the company where I am training has internal platforms for its employees to post news and interact with each other. The content of this account is internal to company employees and is not open to the public. I wonder why our academic institutions do not have a similar idea! Creating internal SM platforms for students can be for anything related to employability, like training opportunities, vacancies, and ways to improve one's employability. (G9)

Creating an SM account about 'life after graduation' might be beneficial. Such an account will promote graduates' feelings of belonging to the college even after graduation. The platform will provide counselling for job searching, completing a higher study, or starting a business. Also, we can consider linking the account with other useful related accounts that offer training opportunities to improve graduates' skills. (G10)

Furthermore, providing a program which helps filter reliable SM accounts from others will help users rely on trusted sources (G1), yet designing this program might be a technical challenge. Activating the role of electronic police can help solve the technical problem (G5). Additionally, concerned authorities should audit job advertisements and clearly state the terms to curb fake job vacancies (G6).

Developing creative platforms with purposeful content is more likely to attract users to these platforms. As the graduates explained, an attractive account speaks of its owner:

Employers should create an attractive account on SM to attract employees. As job seekers, we sometimes check the company's website and SM accounts. Based on their financial statements, one can deduce the nature of the organisation. (G4)

4.3.2. Employer Interviews

Seven employers who hired business graduates were interviewed via telephone to explore their views on how SM influenced the employability of graduates and its use in their companies.

4.3.2.1. The Uses of Social Media in Business

Although employers in the business sector worked in various fields, they all acknowledged the importance of SM in their business as it was “the easiest way for marketing and it can reach more people” (E2). Additionally, SM is today’s necessity because everyone is on SM, which was not previously the case (E4). As a result, many active users exist on different SM platforms, mainly WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. Moreover, some employers used alternative platforms like Snapchat and Facebook, albeit without active engagement. Social media platforms were used for different reasons:

- Brand exposure and recognition: SM provides all the necessary information, such as location and contact information. These channels could also be used to identify the company’s products, services, and offers (E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, and E7).
- Customer service and support: SM plays an influential role in the labour market; therefore, responding to customers’ queries and maintaining a company’s reputation is crucial to maintaining customers’ stratification. Social channels answer clients’ concerns and address negative comments (E4, E5 and E6).
- Content distribution: SM channels distribute content and promotions (E1 and E4). Posting content on SM should be planned and timed appropriately and strategically to maximise its reach and impact (E6).
- Data and insights: Some employers use SM to get valuable insights about audience demographics, engagement analytics and content performance (E1, E3, E4 and E6). This data can be used to analyse visitor information such as their views, genders and ages, as well as dislikes and peak visiting hours. This helps identify gaps and address users’ needs and interests.
- Online job boards: All seven of the employers interviewed agreed that SM is the preferred and fastest-paced platform for reaching potential job seekers (details will be discussed later):

Social media plays a central role in our business. We use business accounts for (1) marketing, (2) providing information about fields we are working in to raise public awareness, (3) answering clients’ concerns, (4) a clinic profile with all details like location and working hours, (5) booking appointments, (6) collecting satisfaction feedback from clients, and for digital analysis purposes (insights). (E1)

Our team uses SM to get insightful data on account visitors and visiting peak hours. Accordingly, we post offers targeting our clients, and our posts are posted during the busiest visiting hours to reach the maximum audience. The results are great and fruitful. (E6)

4.3.2.2. The Use of Social Media to Improve Graduates’ Employability Skills

Participants’ responses showed that SM is a valuable tool for improving graduates’ employability, particularly their digital competencies and critical thinking skills since it enables users to learn and practice skills intensively on interactive platforms. Table 4.15 illustrates the skills and attributes that employers demand most and which can be cultivated through SM.

Employability Skills/Attributes: from Graduates’ Interviews
NON-TECHNICAL SKILLS
<p>General Business Skills Digital competencies SM management Analytical skills Critical thinking</p> <p>Personal Attributes Self-assurance Resourcefulness Adaptability</p>
TECHNICAL SKILLS
Nothing was mentioned in this category.

Table 4.15: The skills and attributes that are more likely to be acquired through social media as specified in employers’ interviews

The employers who were interviewed specified some skills and attributes that could be improved through SML, namely:

Digital Competencies

The benefits of SM for improving graduates’ digital skills were generally acknowledged. Some employers mentioned that engaging in different SM teaching programmes (E1) and following specialised accounts (E2 and E7) helped individuals learn about new technical advances. However, SM “might support sharpening digital literacy, but these competencies cannot be improved through SM only” (E4). Other participants added:

SM platforms like YouTube and Instagram provide free digital tips and courses where interested candidates can join and benefit. Also, SM has raised public awareness about electronic fraud and how to avoid cyber-attacks and online scams. (E1)

Our lives are digitalised so that all our tasks can be fulfilled online. Our lives revolve around technology, and SM is an important component of this technological improvement. Thus, SM improves digital skills. (E6)

Using SM helps candidates know more about the digital world, including how to adjust their skills and improve their careers in this digitalised world. (E7)

Social Media Management

Almost all employers agreed that candidates who engaged in SM were more likely to develop SM management skills. Since SM platforms may boost the recognition of a business among potential customers and promote business exposure, the significance of these skills has recently increased. Employers believed that SM management enhances a business's modern marketing and communication strategies. The importance of SM management had been clear since SM platforms were used for brand exposure and recognition, customer service and support, content distribution, data and insights and online job boards, as explained in Section 4.3.2.1 above:

Before recruiting an employee, I look at their personal SM account. Being creative in SM is a plus for job seekers. (E1)

When I opened my business seven years ago, I was not interested in SM, unlike now. Effectively utilising SM platforms is imperative in order to expand one's client base. (E4)

Analytical and Critical Thinking Skills

All employers agreed that candidates involved with SM would probably acquire good critical media literacy. These individuals would be more likely to be hired since they possessed competencies related to critical analysis, evaluation, and understanding of the media. Therefore, these candidates might get "better chances in the labour market" (E3) as they might develop essential employability skills like analytical (E2), critical thinking (E1, E3, and E7), problem-solving (E5) and communication skills (E5 and E6):

We frequently share content on SM for our business, but we need to assess its effectiveness. Have they succeeded in their goals? Critical media literacy plays a crucial role in contemporary society. (E2)

Critical media literacy is important to content creators or readers in producing influential content or appropriate reactions. (E5)

Social media is full of fabricated posts and news that might cause critical issues and affect the business. Nevertheless, candidates who are literate in SM and can judge news critically will be able to distinguish true news from fake news. (E7)

If they are active SM users, individuals' digital literacy and critical thinking skills improve as they have to evaluate the posted news. Consequently, their career prospects are enhanced because they are updated on the latest trends and best practices. Also, developing these skills might help them become effective communicators and efficient problem-solvers in today's media-rich and information-driven market. This might explain why employers want to hire candidates with good SM backgrounds and skills.

Essential Identity Attributes: Self-assurance, Resourcefulness and Adaptability

Employers recognised SM's positive role in improving users' self-assurance, ingenuity and flexibility. Besides, employers made it clear that graduates who have shown technological creativity in SM were preferred. For instance, candidates' management of personal SM accounts and their interaction with technology indicated how far they had mastered digital innovation. Being involved with technology on an almost daily basis was more likely to boost users' comfort level with technology and keep them updated about technological advances:

Social media is the easiest way to update you about digital development worldwide. (E2)

Nowadays, critical media literacy is important for candidates seeking jobs. It helps them write impressive content on SM and interact positively with the news. (E6)

4.3.2.3. Social Media and Recruitment

Although degrees and skills are essential in recruitment, SM is now considered an important factor, according to interviewed employers. One participant stressed that skills and degrees should be considered against the background of specific fields and industries (E4). For example, a degree is essential in the medical field because medicine is a heavily regulated profession, but skills and experience are more important in the technology and business industries (E2, E4 and E6).

In recruiting business candidates, all employers reported prioritising those with specific skills over those with college degrees. Employers also said they preferred to hire job seekers with solid work portfolios and field experience since it “polishes one’s skills” (E2). In addition, for some employers, being an active SM user was just as important, if not more important, than having a degree because it means “getting more clients and customers” (E1). Other employers added:

I hired fresh graduates with excellent skills. They were fresh but with exceptional SM knowledge. (E1)

Sometimes, a degree is not more than a certificate. We are in an era where skills are practically more important than degrees. In business, we look for creative candidates rather than academically high achievers. (E5)

A degree does not represent a candidate’s skills. Skills can be seen in a person’s work. Employees’ skills are important because they reflect the institution, service provided, quality, and our reputation in general. (E6)

A degree certificate is awarded because a candidate has completed some subjects successfully. We might not need their knowledge of these subjects more than their skills. Thus, skills come first. (E7)

When announcing a business opening, most participants believed listing required skills and competencies was more important than listing responsibilities and tasks. According to the majority, the responsibilities of employees would be discussed later during the interview (E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, and E7). This highlights the importance of skills in shaping the futures of job seekers in the market:

My ultimate concern is skills. During the interview, I explored graduates’ skills and judged their ability to handle certain tasks. When a candidate is selected, detailed responsibilities and tasks will be stated in the job offer. (E3)

Employers preferred hiring business graduates who were familiar with SM, which could be judged from their personal SM accounts (E6 and E7). Other respondents added:

Before choosing employees, I look at their SM accounts to see how skilled they are in managing their accounts. I previously employed an individual as a trainee, selecting her for her adeptness in implementing innovative strategies for account management. (E1)

One of the tasks I use to judge a candidate’s skills is asking the candidate to propose improvements to the institution’s SM account. (E4)

4.3.2.4. Challenges in Using Social Media: Employers' Perceptions

All the employers interviewed agreed that SM has been central to their businesses. However, they addressed some challenges they faced. Employers agreed that misleading posts on SM have become a problem. Misinformation can take many forms, including misleading news, fake identities and forged certificates (E1). The ease with which fake news can be shared on these platforms can be related to the fact that "everyone can use SM, and it is impossible to control the posted content" (E5). Most employers (E1, E4, E5, E6 and E7) stated that misleading news negatively affects their business. In addition, some employers said fake post is intentionally spread with agendas like financial gain (E1 and E6) or undermining peoples' reputations (E4 and E5):

Some advertisements are fake and only for marketing purposes. Unfortunately, some people experience the consequences. This is one of the serious problems I have faced in my business. (E1)

Misleading post affects our business. On one occasion, a client inaccurately reported our centre on the social media platform Twitter, negatively impacting our reputation. We contacted the client, who lodged a complaint and elucidated the circumstances, resulting in the client's realisation that the issue resulted from a misinterpretation! Also, some misleading news is spread by competitors. (E4)

Unfortunately, some misleading news is from competitors as they try to distort the reputation of successful [businesses]. The feedback we get on SM is not always reliable. (E5)

In certain instances, prominent individuals or public figures are remunerated for participating in promotional campaigns and media coverage. Hence, assessing and appraising these posts is imperative to avoid subjectivity. (E6)

Social media is a public platform on which everyone can share content, express their opinions and engage in discussion freely. However, reputation management was a serious challenge in the context of SM. Thus, poor media management might damage employers' reputations and credibility (E1 and E5). Some candidates reported a disadvantage, as SM was used to spread negative publicity and criticism:

Unfortunately, we got untrue and disappointing comments on SM. We learned that our competitors spread fake news and posted harmful comments on SM to tarnish our reputation. (E1)

Another challenge was a lack of awareness of the importance of SM in business (E1, E2, and E7) and a lack of initiative and responsibilities in relation to improving one's digital skills (E3, E4, E5, and E6). Many individuals could not fully understand the impact of SM on improving their professional reputation and job prospects. In addition, it was crucial to respond to the technological advances in this area:

Many individuals lack awareness regarding the importance and impact of SM. The subject matter is not approached seriously. (E1)

Meta or Instagram update their algorithms monthly. We need to cope with this fast improvement. (E3)

Another challenge was the limited availability of SM specialists. Three employers reported dissatisfaction with the way SM was integrated into their business operations, citing the need for additional improvements in business SM platforms; however, they encountered challenges in locating experts in this particular field (E1, E2, and E6):

I struggle to find creative employees who can develop new and innovative ideas to persuade clients through creative designs. (E6)

4.3.2.5. Possible Solutions: Employers' Suggestions

Employers suggested practical solutions for these problems. First, users of SM should be vigilant and cautious when evaluating any content posted or shared on these platforms. Thus, all employers agreed on the importance of fact-checking information before sharing it; confirming the accuracy of the news from official and reputable accounts is, therefore, a must. For instance, some employers contacted authorised people to verify whether a news item was true or false (E1, E3, E5, E6, and E7). Some employers claimed that misleading information can be identified by how it is written, whether essential details are left out or whether it is presented to support a particular side (E2 and E4).

Another solution is raising public awareness of SM's positive and negative effects on individuals' lives (E1 and E6). For instance, fake news or comments on SM might damage the company's reputation. Thus, clients' opinions and judgements should be honest and reliable:

Authorities should guide the public on how to manage SM from an early age in schools or later in colleges. They should be taught SM's influential role in society and how to deal with SM content carefully. (E6)

Additionally, individuals should make an effort to improve their digital and SM skills. This can be done by attending online tutorials and courses (E1 and E2) or taking part-time jobs (E5):

Nowadays, everything, including free tutorials and courses, is available online. People are expected to be initiative. (E2)

Encouraging students to engage in part-time employment during their academic pursuits can facilitate the acquisition of valuable skills and practical experience. As a result, they graduate with degrees and skills. They will also be desirable in the labour market. (E5)

Establishing collaboration between HEIs and stakeholders in the market was also one of the suggestions. For example, training programmes to improve graduates' digital skills might be offered. The programme could be institutional training for new employees (E2 and E4) or a short national programme, similar to that offered by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology in Oman (E3):

Training improves graduates' digital skills, allowing them to deal with potential workplace problems and challenges. (E5)

Employer 2 suggested using artificial intelligence to integrate SM in business efficiently. Artificial intelligence is increasingly important in modern business operations since it offers increased efficiency, cost savings and better customer experiences. Therefore, integrating AI into managing SM will benefit those in the business field.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the impact of SML on boosting employability traits by analysing and interpreting data from two sources: job advertisements, and interviews with graduates and employers. The present thesis has yielded several noteworthy discoveries that clarify the research topics and objectives. The thesis has highlighted an important correlation between SML and the improvement of employability.

This thesis has made several findings. The analysis of job advertisements identified precise skill prerequisites within the contemporary labour market. Regardless of occupations and job titles, several skills were found to be in high demand, the most important of which were communication skills, digital skills and English proficiency. Furthermore, other crucial employability skills were identified, such as a knowledge of financial principles, reporting, self-development, and social media management. The importance of SM in the context of employment was also highlighted, as many of the key skills identified could be cultivated through engagement with SMNs. Moreover, it was found that job advertisements frequently highlight the importance of candidates' work experience and educational qualifications. The advertisements showed that employers valued candidates' degrees, experience and non-technical skills more than technical competencies.

Additionally, the findings from the interviews conducted with graduates and employees substantiate the importance of SML in today's digitalised era. The graduates and employers had almost the same perceptions; they acknowledged the importance of SM in one's personal, academic and business life. Moreover, their comments showed how SM improved employability by helping people build various employability-related skills and competencies. SM helped graduates to improve their employability skills and develop their attributes: English, digital competencies, collaboration, networking and analytical skills, as well as to improve their critical thinking skills and essential identity attributes like self-assurance, resourcefulness and adaptability. Employers also believed that SM improved an individual's digital competencies and analytical and critical thinking skills. Moreover, organisations used SMNs for recruitment, advertising job vacancies and evaluating candidates' competence in effectively managing their SM accounts.

However, the challenges mentioned by interviewees might limit the value of using SM to enhance employability. The challenges mentioned were misleading news, privacy concerns, lack of awareness of the importance of SM, not having specialised SM accounts, digital challenges and the time spent surfing SM.

As well as acknowledging certain challenges, the interviewees offered pragmatic solutions. Raising users' awareness of the importance of SM was one suggestion.

In addition, working on professional and focused content would improve the quality of what was available in SM. Also, SM platforms could be enhanced to cater effectively to the professional needs of graduates through collaboration between HE and employers.

The next chapter synthesises the findings presented in this thesis with those from earlier, similar investigations. It provides a more comprehensive analysis of the results and discusses their implications for theory and practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the thesis's findings with analysis and interpretation. More specifically, it explores the impact and implications of the research results in relation to findings in the extant literature. This exploration delves into the theories and concepts of employability attributes and social media (SM), emphasising their impacts and the link between them. The analysis, interpretation, explanation and discussion of the findings, from both job advertisements and interviews, align with the research questions posed in this thesis. The discussion is structured around the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the employability skills or attributes most sought by employers in today's labour market in Oman?

RQ2: How do stakeholders (graduates and employers) view social media literacy in relation to graduate employability?

RQ3: What challenges do graduates or employers experience in using social media for employment purposes?

RQ4: What practical implications do the findings of this study have for enhancing graduate employability attributes in Oman's HEIs?

This chapter starts by discussing the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the results, Section 5.2. Then, in Section 5.3, the employability requirements in the Omani market, including skills, attributes, degrees and experience, will be explored. Section 5.4 examines stakeholders' perceptions of the impact of social media literacy (SML) on enhancing employability. Section 5.5 discusses how human and social capital can build employability. Then, Section 5.6 explains the impact SML has on fostering learner autonomy. Section 5.7 highlights the challenges respondents face when using social media to enhance their employability. The practical implications for enhancing graduate employability attributes in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Oman are explored in Section 5.8. Finally, Section 5.9 concludes the chapter by highlighting important points.

5.2. The Homogeneity or Heterogeneity of the Research Results

Homogeneity is a recurring theme in this research. The analysis of job advertisements and interviews reveals substantial similarities regarding employability skills and attributes. Furthermore, the thematic analysis of interviews with employers and graduates shows similarities in opinions about SM and its impact on enhancing employability. This homogeneity in the results suggests a considerable degree of reliability and generalizability, strengthening the validity of the research findings.

The job requirements found in the job advertisements are vital to understanding market needs. By leveraging the data obtained from job analysis advertisements, applicants can tailor their qualifications and skills to increase their employability in the job market. Notably, employers and graduates mention similar requirements for hiring business graduates, as explained previously in Chapter 4, and these requirements will be discussed further in Section 5.3.1.

This similarity is also evident in the interviews with both employers and graduates. Despite the diverse backgrounds of the participants, they agreed on key issues regarding the impact of SML on employability. Some participants opined that certain competencies could be developed through SML. Since students come from diverse social, economic and digital literacy backgrounds, integrating SML into employability initiatives allows for personalised development within a flexible framework established by industry associations. Therefore, HEIs may adopt this approach and other strategies, moving away from the one-size-fits-all approach that has prevailed in many institutions.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge factors which may influence the homogeneity of the research findings. These factors include the size and composition of the sample, the methodology employed and other aspects of the research process. Addressing these factors promotes transparency and facilitates a comprehensive evaluation of the research outcomes.

Generally, when different instruments are used for data collection, and the data obtained consistently points to the same outcomes, it strengthens the robustness of the study's findings. Furthermore, homogeneous results enable the pooling of data, enhancing its statistical power and allowing more reliable meta-analytical

conclusions to be drawn. Therefore, consistency in research findings not only enhances generalizability, validity and reliability but also allows researchers to draw constructive conclusions.

5.3. Employability Requirements in the Omani Labour Market

Empirical evidence from this study shows that employers favour non-technical skills and personal attributes over technical skills. The findings also show that employers favour general business skills. These findings align with the results obtained by Bhanugopan and Fish (2009), who found that most employers were not searching for job-specific expertise in prospective workers; rather, they prioritised fundamental employability skills and attributes. This perspective may be rooted in the belief that soft skills help individuals adapt and act constructively, enabling them to navigate the obstacles in their daily and work lives (Succi & Canovi, 2020). In this context, soft skills encompass a variety of interpersonal abilities and attributes applicable across different economic fields and sectors. The encompassing nature of this concept makes it difficult to define, especially against the background of ongoing changes in the labour market. Thus, the discourse surrounding the increasing impact of soft skills in an ever-evolving environment for enhancing graduate employability is gaining momentum among employers. As expected from all employees, employers highly value graduates' ability to communicate effectively, demonstrate self-efficacy, maintain professional relationships with teams and adapt to market changes.

The results of this thesis emphasise the primacy of non-technical skills and personal attributes over technical skills. These findings are consistent with the investigations conducted by Saunders and Zuzel (2010) and Succi and Canovi (2020). These scholars investigated employability skills from employers' perspectives, concluding that employers prioritised soft skills and personal qualities over technical and subject-related skills. Equally important, the dynamic nature of the labour market, with its frequent technological advances, necessitates the development of soft skills, often at the expense of technical proficiency. Most stakeholders agree that soft skills are more critical than technical abilities in today's increasingly globalised economy. A similar observation has been noted in different business employability frameworks

(Griffin & Coelho, 2019; Jackson & Chapman, 2012; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Smith et al., 2016; Suarta & Suwintana, 2021), studies which all found that soft skills were prioritised over technical expertise (Table 2.1 and 2.2). All stakeholders, including graduates, academics and employers, should ensure that graduates are equipped with the requisite abilities and attributes to excel in their careers.

Furthermore, the importance of soft skills, particularly in the light of technological advances, has transformed the creation, processing, assessment and interpretation of information. This shift is likely to impact market requirements and alter the responsibilities of stakeholders in meeting these demands. However, employers' preference for general skills and personality traits does not diminish the importance of subject-specific knowledge. Rather, it underscores the added value of core competencies and unique personal qualities, favouring employees who can adapt to anticipated market changes.

5.3.1. The Employability Skills/Attributes Required

This thesis identifies key employability competencies: technical and non-technical skills. Table 5.1 presents the most frequently required employability skills and attributes in the job advertisements. The table also compares these competencies with participants' views (employers and graduates) regarding the skills and attributes which are improved through SM.

Employability Skills/Attributes		
Job Advertisements	Interviews	
Skills/Attributes (percentage)	Interviews with Employers	Interviews with Graduates
TECHNICAL SKILLS		
Financial knowledge Reporting skills		Subject-related skills
NON-TECHNICAL SKILLS		
General Business Skills		
Communication skills Customer orientation Digital skills English proficiency Social media management	Digital competencies Social media management Analytical skills Critical thinking	Technical communication English language competencies Digital competencies Collaboration/Networking Analytical skills Critical thinking
Personal Attributes		
Self-motivation	Self-assurance Resourcefulness Adaptability	Self-assurance Creativity

Table 5.1: The categorisations of skills and attributes required in the labour market as specified in business job advertisements (a sample of 300) and participants' interviews (employers and graduates)

Table 5.1 above shows some connections between business employability skills and the attributes required in the market and the employability skills that might be acquired through SM.

5.3.1.1. Technical Skills

The job advertisements underscore the importance of technical knowledge for business graduates, with a particular emphasis on financial knowledge and reporting skills. Similarly, the business graduates interviewed (G4, G8, G10, and G11) reported using SM to enhance their subject-related skills. This is hardly surprising, given the pervasive influence of digitalisation, which extends to various learning resources. Many professionals use SM platforms to share their expertise and knowledge through posts, videos and articles, thereby expanding students' professional networks as they follow industry leaders, mentors and collaborators who can provide valuable guidance for developing technical skills.

Moreover, the fast-paced nature of SM makes it an excellent way to stay abreast of the latest knowledge, trends and technological advances in the field.

Previous studies also conclude that learners' pedagogical achievements were enhanced and technical skills related to their majors improved through the use of SML (Benson et al., 2014; Benson & Morgan, 2016; Greenhow & Gleason, 2014; Kimmel, 2021). College students are expected "to know that social media platforms enable them to have access to information, videos, and pictures which may assist and enhance their ability to plan, arrange, coordinate, communicate, cooperate and execute projects toward the achievement of goals" (Olowo et al., 2021: 75). Interestingly, some teachers use SM platforms to encourage students to share information about academic content and develop their collaboration and communication skills with their teams and classmates (G10). Thus, active participation in online communities provides opportunities for learners to learn from others, share ideas and acquire the best insights and practices in relation to technical matters.

Nevertheless, it is essential to evaluate the information on SM critically, as verifying the credibility of online sources is essential when developing one's knowledge and expertise in a particular subject. Additionally, while SM can be a valuable resource, it cannot replace other learning materials or hands-on practical experience. It should be approached thoughtfully and used in conjunction with other learning resources.

5.3.1.2. Non-technical Skills

The relevance of SM in enhancing some non-technical skills required in the labour market has been noted. These are:

General Business Skills

The examination of job advertisements underscores the impact of certain non-technical general business skills. Notably, communication skills were the most frequently required competencies in the market since effective communication stood out as a pivotal competency sought by employers during the recruitment process. Related research by Abelha et al. (2020), Low et al. (2016), Rios et al. (2020), and Tejan and Sabil (2019) also emphasised employers' preference for

hiring business candidates with strong communication skills. Similarly, communication skills are essential, as stated in some of the most used employability frameworks, for instance, Jackson & Chapman (2012) and Smith et al. (2016). These findings align with the views expressed by graduates in the interviews, who noted that their technical communication skills had been enhanced through SM. These results demonstrate that communication skills, which could be improved through SM, are important for employment.

The sustainability of a business depends heavily on its ability to satisfy customers. Analysis of the job advertisements showed that customer orientation was essential in the business labour market. This variable was closely linked with communication skills, collaboration and networking. Customer orientation relies on effective communication with clients to convey information, meet customers' requirements and address their needs and concerns. Concise customer communication fosters positive relationships as it involves connecting with other candidates. It also entails collaboration with teams in order to meet customers' needs. Effective collaboration requires strong communication skills to share, exchange and discuss ideas and thoughts and to leverage diverse perspectives to develop customer-centric initiatives. Networking, on the other hand, allows candidates to build relationships with potential clients through active participation in social activities and industry events, contributing to their understanding of labour market demands, customer needs and market trends. The analysis of the job advertisements and interviews highlights the transformative impact of technological advances on the communication sector, creating new opportunities for communicators and businesses (G4 and G10). This observation aligns with the findings of Royle and Laing (2014), who noted the growing importance of digital marketing in response to the widespread use of SM sites like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and YouTube. The results are also in line with the opinion of Crittenden and Crittenden (2015), who stated:

While educators should still be interested in student learning and attempting to tap into the most appropriate learning orientation, students know how to use the technology—the key, academically, is to discern how to best create the marketing academic environment in which students can use their skills related to parallel processing, graphics awareness, and random access most effectively, so as to turn those social media skills into online marketing skills. (p.73)

These findings demonstrate the important impact of social media on enhancing graduates' employability skills regarding customers' orientation. By using SM platforms effectively, organisations will be able to understand and communicate efficiently with their customers to deliver exceptional customer experiences. Consequently, graduates with good customer orientation skills can enhance the organisation's image, customer satisfaction, and business success, making them a preferable choice for employers.

Another similarity can be found in relation to digital skills, which were prominently featured as essential requirements, according to the analysis of the job advertisements. These findings are also consistent with those obtained from the analysis of the interviews with employers and graduates, which showed the role of SM in fostering digital capabilities (G1, G5, G6, G9, E2, E5 and E7). In today's digitalised workplace, employers seek new graduates who possess digital literacy, as these digital skills benefit both individuals and organisations. The results of this thesis are consistent with the findings of Belwal et al. (2017), who found that graduates with computer skills were preferred over others. Furthermore, these results corroborate the findings of Suarta and Suwintana (2021), who proposed a conceptual employability framework combining two main competencies: generic digital skills and personal attributes. In addition, stakeholders, including employers, academics and graduates, agreed that digital skills are essential for enhancing employability (Chapter 2, Table 2.2). Generic digital skills are generally required for different business occupations as well as in different situations to succeed in work, education and life.

Furthermore, the results of this thesis showed that proficiency in English stood out as an important requirement compared to other employability skills and attributes. This finding explains why graduates with English proficiency are more likely to be employed than others (Belwal et al., 2017). Likewise, business graduates (G1, G4, G6, G8 and G11) agreed that SM helped them to improve their English language competencies. This was supported by Yuan et al. (2019), who emphasised the enhancement of English language skills through active engagement in digital settings. Given SM flexible affordances for various

purposes, social media platforms cross traditional teaching boundaries to accommodate learners' different learning needs and styles to improve their English proficiency.

Additionally, job advertisements identified social media management as a requirement in the Omani labour market. Benson et al. (2014) found employers valued graduates' SM skills more than their degree qualifications. Similarly, Crittenden and Crittenden (2015) argue that social media management is a fundamental component in business because the increasing range of marketing activities relies on innovative tools and techniques to meet the demands of today's labour market. The integration of SM in today's businesses is beneficial as SM is used to influence and analyse trends, engage customers, and grow businesses. The employers interviewed in this thesis expressed similar opinions and stressed the value of recruiting graduates with good SM management abilities (E1 and E4). These findings are hardly surprising in the digital age, where SML can significantly impact employability. Thus, in today's digitally competitive job market, job seekers can enhance their chances of acquiring an attractive job by improving their SM skills.

Organisation skills were also mentioned in the business job vacancies which were analysed. Organisation skills enable candidates to create a cohesive framework for achieving goals efficiently and productively and making optimal use of resources. In this context, Tejan and Sabil (2019) reported that employers expected employees to have strong organisational skills. These results aligned with the perspectives shared in the interviews, where organisation skills were defined as skills which could be improved through the use of SM.

Lastly, both employers and graduates pointed out two more skills that could be improved through SM: analytical and critical thinking (G4, G5, G6, G9, E1, E2, E3, E5 and E7). These skills are essential for navigating SM effectively, particularly in platforms where assessing the credibility and reliability of information sources is necessary. Previous studies have also emphasised the demand for business graduates with analytical skills (Paterson, 2017; Succi & Canovi, 2020; Tejan & Sabil, 2019) and critical thinking (Paterson, 2017;

Taderera, 2018). Both of these skills empower users to identify trusted sources, mitigate the impact of bias and develop a more balanced understanding of issues in SM.

Personal Attributes

Table 5.1 above shows that self-motivation is prominently featured as an important requirement in the job advertisements. In contrast, self-assurance emerges as an attribute that can be developed through exposure to SM, as indicated in the interviews (G1, G9, E2 and E6). Self-motivation and self-assurance are closely intertwined: self-assurance refers to people's confidence and belief in their abilities, while self-motivation fuels the determination to pursue specific goals. Prior research findings align with these findings as employers reported that they prefer to hire graduates with solid motivation skills (McMurray et al., 2016). Similarly, Suarta and Suwintana (2021) argue that employees value an individual's principles and attributes at work that reflect personal beliefs rather than skill sets, and they are deemed just as important as general and occupation-specific skills. These personal values, including integrity, meticulous attention to detail, independence, self-assurance, flexibility and a strong work ethic, indicate a graduate's potential (ibid, 2021).

Self-motivation sets in motion a positive cycle, inspiring individuals to take the initiative to enhance personal attributes such as adaptability, creativity, and resourcefulness. This then leads to developing and nurturing these qualities and other potentials that contribute positively to career growth and success in the workplace.

5.3.2. The Requirement of a Degree

The analysis of job advertisements showed the importance of earning an undergraduate degree to secure a job in the labour market. This emerged from the analysis of business job advertisements (Table 4.3 in Chapter 4), where relevant college degrees were stipulated as prerequisites for professional positions. More specifically, bachelor's degree holders were preferred over students with a diploma. Interviews were conducted to delve deeper into the preference for degree holders. Surprisingly, the value of skills and degrees varies

by profession, with certain highly regulated fields like medicine placing a premium on formal education (E2). In contrast, soft skills and practical experience take precedence in sectors such as business and technology (E2, E4, and E6). Prior research findings align with these observations, as some employers prioritise graduates' SM skills over their degree qualifications in specific professions, particularly in business-related roles (Benson et al., 2014).

Although an educational degree remains essential in certain business fields, the demand for soft skills (Artess et al., 2017; Succi & Canovi, 2020) and experience (Cranmer, 2006) is notably increasing. Employers are more likely to prioritise skills and experience over education in a rapidly evolving industry where skills and technology are subject to constant change. Nonetheless, individuals who combine educational degrees with practical skills and work experience are better positioned to succeed in business and access more promising opportunities.

5.3.3. Required Experience

Although this thesis focuses on entry-level job openings, it has revealed a strong emphasis on experience as something sought by employers when reviewing prospective employees. Approximately two-thirds of the advertisements analysed explicitly stated that they were looking for candidates with work experience (Table 4.4). Furthermore, employers preferred candidates with a substantial work history and relevant experience, as this experience was considered a means of “polishing one's skills” (E2). These findings explain why candidates with experience have a higher chance of securing a job than those without experience. Students are expected to acquire both practical experience and formal education to build their theoretical knowledge and practical experiences to become employable graduates with promising opportunities to secure employment (Björck, 2021). Similarly, McMurray et al. (2016) clarified that job experience enhanced soft skills, boosted confidence, produced more well-rounded individuals and improved their ties to the labour market.

Higher education institutions must be aware of employers' expectations and their preference for employees with field experience. Björck (2021: 308) explains that “to foster ‘employable graduates’, higher education must become more ‘practice-based’”. Thus, a social constructivist approach can be applied, and learning

should allow students to gain insights from their experiences and interactions with others (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Social constructivism is recognised as a valuable educational strategy, as it is rooted in students' social interactions and critical thinking processes when students experience the real world through meaningful practice that they can relate to on an emotional or cognitive basis (ibid, 2009). Here, the interactive SM platforms, as discussed earlier, could contribute to the construction of knowledge by allowing users to engage actively in various forms of meaningful social interactions.

Additionally, business graduates might be provided with contextualised experiences to learn and gain the necessary experience to develop business employability skills and attributes. This should not only be the sole responsibility of HEIs, as academics may not have real experience in business themselves but only in academia, suggesting that business organisations and institutions should also contribute actively. Involving work-integrated learning (WIL) initiatives in academic curricula, such as industry projects, simulations, and case studies, will allow business graduates to apply their knowledge and theories to real-world contexts. Al-Harthi (2011), Belwal et al. (2017), Hinai et al. (2020), and Taderera (2018) raised the challenge of a mismatch between Omani graduates' attributes and market demands, so this integration could boost their employability to solve this challenge. Thus, WIL allows business graduates to apply their knowledge and ideas to real-world situations (Björck, 2021; Jackson, 2015; Smith et al., 2016; Taylor & Govender, 2017). The partnership between HEIs and the labour market will enable graduates to gain hands-on experience to meet employers' expectations³.

5.4. Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Role of SM in Enhancing Graduates' Employability

As discussed in this chapter and Chapter 4, there is a consensus between employers and business graduates about the positive impact of SML on enhancing employability. They also agreed on the most frequently required employability skills that could be developed through SM (Table 5.1). Also, employers recognised social media's integral role in society and business. This

³ Discussed further in Section 5.8.2

suggests that business graduates who are proficient in SM management could make significant contributions to organisations' growth. Candidates with substantial knowledge of SM were preferred over others who did not possess this skill. Besides, employers were increasingly utilising social media networks (SMNs) for recruitment purposes, with all the employers who were interviewed using platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram and LinkedIn to announce job openings. This implies that candidates are expected to engage actively in SM, thus enhancing their opportunities to access vacancies. Business graduates interviewed also shared these views as they were fully aware that candidates with excellent knowledge of SM stood out from other candidates so that this knowledge could boost their employability prospects. Learners used SMNs to improve their subject-related knowledge and employability attributes. They also used SM platforms to enhance their professional portfolios by marketing their education, skills and experience. These findings align with those of previous empirical research (Section 5.3).

In sum, SM is a powerful tool for preparing graduates for the workplace by improving their employability skills and attributes, expanding the professional networking and enabling them to access better job opportunities. If SM continues to play an important role in business operations, its impact on employability is likely to remain a crucial consideration for both employers and graduates. Therefore, a theoretical exploration of social media's impact within the context of human and social capital is essential for harnessing SM platforms effectively in building graduates' employability.

5.5. Building Human, Social and Identity Capital for Employability

As discussed in Section 3.3 and Chapter 4, human, social and identity capital play a pivotal role in helping individuals access employment opportunities that align with their interests. In the current thesis, almost all participants highlighted the importance of social media literacy in building their employability skills (human capital), providing them with employment opportunities (social capital) and enhancing their understanding of their characteristics, beliefs and values (identity capital). Various forms of capital mutually reinforce and enhance one another. While human capital is unquestionably vital for graduates who seek to become

appealing candidates for employers, possessing skills alone may prove insufficient. Social capital is essential for graduates because they need social capital to identify training and employment opportunities, particularly if they have developed a professional network (Figure 5.1).

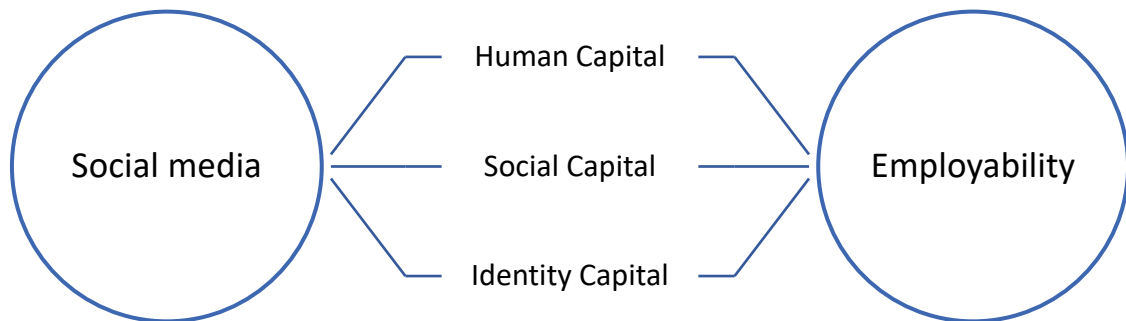


Figure 5.1: The influence of social media on enhancing employability through human, social and identity capital

As illustrated in Figure 5.1 and in accordance with the insights of the graduates who were interviewed, meaningful social interaction (social capital) with professional contacts in SMNs enabled them to employ their skills and personal attributes (human capital) and enhance their understanding of their characteristics, beliefs, values and interests (identity capital). This in turn led to their recognition by potential employers, making it easier to find training opportunities and secure employment (G2, G3, G4, G5, G8 and G9). Similarly, Crossan (2022) discussed the importance of developing graduates' technical and soft skills to bolster their overall human and social capital. Moreover, the social capital which graduates cultivate beyond the classroom setting deserves thoughtful consideration, as it also plays a crucial role in assisting graduates to secure jobs. This perspective aligns with the works of Higdon (2016) and Tomlinson (2017), who view employability as a multifaceted concept encompassing not only knowledge and skills but also social and identity capital, contributing to effectiveness and success in the job market.

The graduate capital model proposed by Tomlinson (2017) is in keeping with this study's findings, as it conceptualises employability as encompassing various interactive forms of capital: human, social, cultural, identity and psychological

(Figure 5.2). The model depicts two main dimensions for each capital: the key resources and their utilisation in the market.

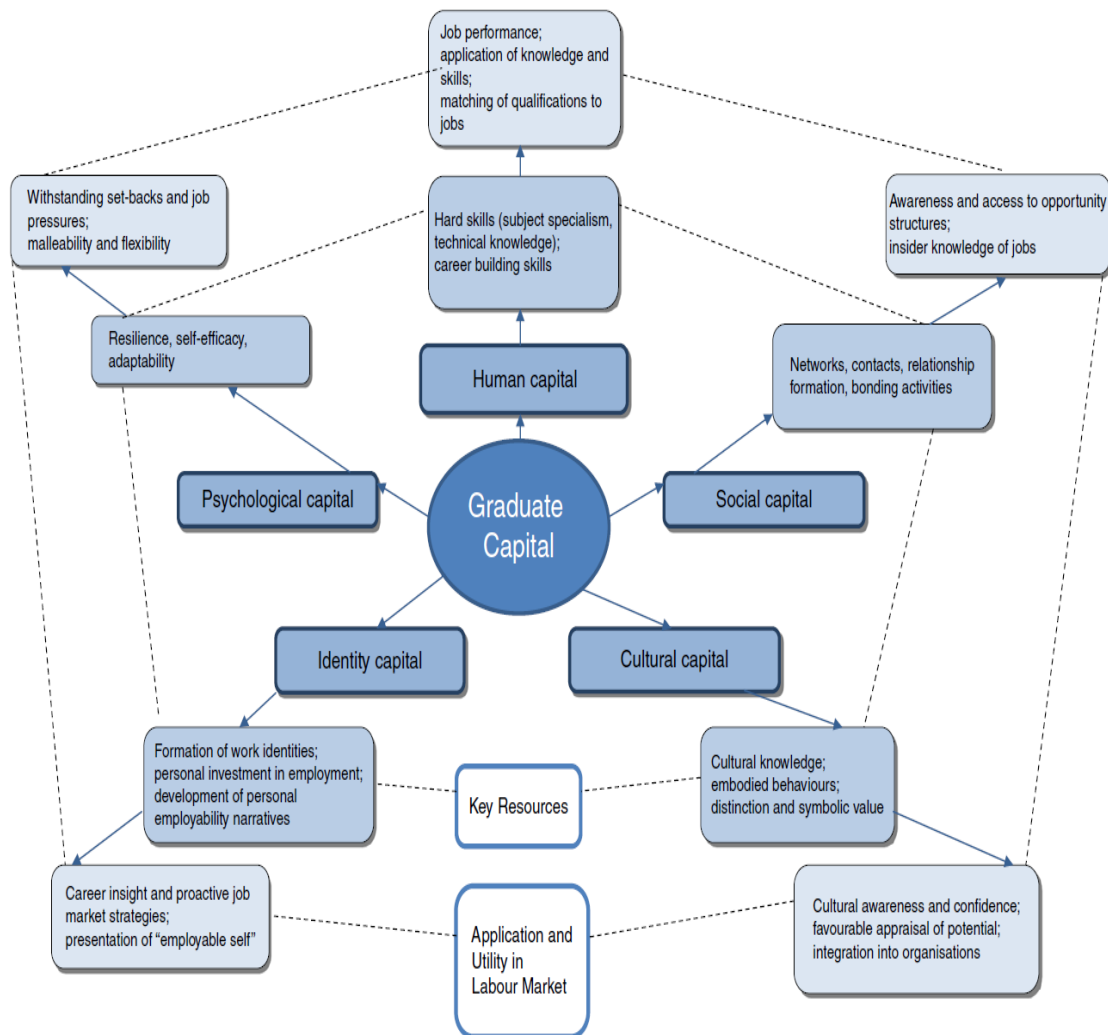


Figure 5.2: The graduate capital model (Tomlinson, 2017)

The importance of social capital becomes evident in the way it influences career direction since it has a central role in opening up work opportunities for graduates (Higdon, 2016). Human, social and identity capital are rooted in the contribution of the individual skills and social resources that candidates are expected to possess for obtaining or retaining employment. These three resources, which are enhanced through SM, are intertwined dimensions with complementary roles in building employability. Thus, the graduate capital model serves as a foundation for proposing a framework that shows the influence of SM on human, social and identity capital in Figure 5.3 below.

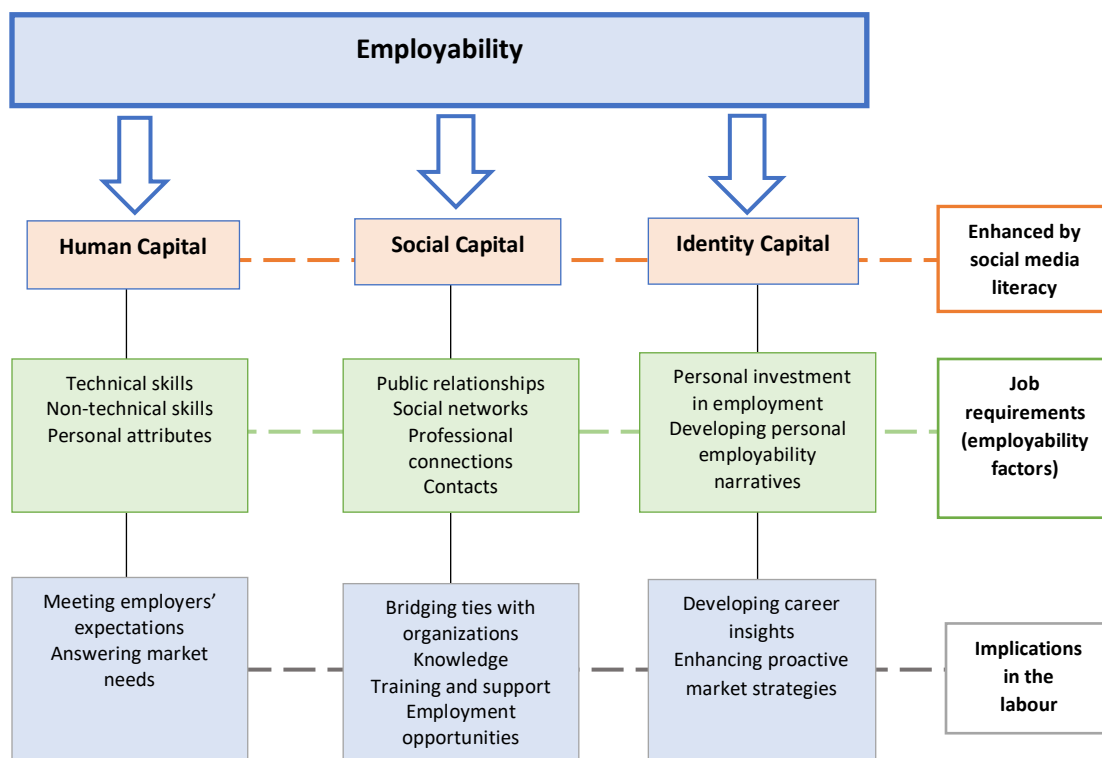


Figure 5.3: Model of human, social and identity capital contribution (enhanced by social media literacy) in building graduates' employability

The model suggested above underscores the impact of human, social and identity capital in enhancing graduates' employability attributes and providing accessible employment opportunities in the labour market. While the formation of human capital in relation to occupation-specific requirements represents its relevance for graduates, social and identity capital have proved their significance as well, according to the graduates in this thesis and others (Crossan, 2022; Higdon, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017). More specifically, human capital indicates the skills graduates have acquired to enable them to operate in a productive workforce, social capital shows whom graduates should contact to access employment opportunities by using their network and connections, and the identity capital personalises one's experience by fostering their understanding of their characteristics and interests. Tomlinson (2017) elaborates this process as career-related abilities, which include understanding one's target labour market (e.g. the skills required, demand and trends), being knowledgeable about how to

apply for positions and be hired (e.g. CV development and entry requirements) and being aware of one's identity (characteristics, values and interests).

According to the responses of graduates and employers, individuals with satisfactory skills, attributes, personalities and behaviours are not well-equipped to meet market demands and employers' expectations. Thus, stakeholders should participate actively in developing graduates' human capital. Higher education institutions are expected to make substantial investments in enhancing the quality of education and providing practical experiences for their students.⁴ Enhancing transferable skills that are valuable across different industries and workplaces can benefit graduates, making them attractive candidates for prospective employers. Also, the partnership between HEIs and industry is essential, as it ensures that graduates are well-versed in the latest industry trends and demands. Such partnerships can offer technical training, internships, on-the-job training and part-time employment, thereby affording learners valuable hands-on experience and opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings. Moreover, graduates should take proactive steps to enhance their employability by staying informed about industry practices through reading and participating in professional networks.

Moreover, social capital is cultivated through social networks, building relationships and maintaining social connections in the public or professional sphere. According to graduates, connections made through certain social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn) have sometimes facilitated access to technical training and employment opportunities. Tomlinson (2017) discusses a similar relationship between SM and employability in which social capital, including relationships and networks, helps graduates mobilise their existing human capital and gives them better access to labour market opportunities. Higdon (2016) emphasises that it is social capital, rather than the development of graduates' competitive abilities, that is the critical factor which opens up work opportunities. According to the researcher, it is insufficient for individuals to maintain social capital. However, they can leverage social intelligence to tap into the right resources to secure employment. Social capital should be cultivated through meaningful connections by establishing valuable links between candidates and potential employers.

⁴ Discussed further in Section 5.8

When graduates actively engage with their social network, they can present themselves effectively as attractive candidates to prospective employers. Moreover, establishing connections with experts in their respective fields facilitates knowledge acquisition, secures support and opens doors to training opportunities.

Additionally, SM can contribute to students' identity development by enhancing their understanding of their characteristics, beliefs and values by engaging with like-minded individuals on SM platforms. This will enable students to express and explore their identities through meaningful discussions, shared experiences and learning from peers with similar interests and identities. Learner autonomy is more likely to be fostered through social interactions, which can be enhanced by social technology (Reinders & White, 2016). Similarly, Tomlinson (2017) argues that social capital is one of the key factors for enhancing graduates' employability in the job market. According to the researcher, this capital is an indication of graduates' personal investment in developing their employability skills and future careers.

However, graduates from poor socio-economic backgrounds are likely to get limited employment opportunities compared to those with strong socio-economic connections. Technological advances also play a vital role in augmenting social capital by facilitating professional connections and expanding social networks. For instance, SM empowers graduates to bolster their social capital by forging meaningful social connections with professionals in their specialised fields. As SM is available to all individuals, it levels the playing field and offers equal opportunities to graduates, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, to increase their social capital.

5.6. Social Media Literacy: Fostering Learners' Autonomy and Self-identity

Participants' responses showed that many practical employability skills were acquired through self-directed learning via digital media networks. These networks offer learners opportunities for self-guided learning and foster their self-efficacy and self-control (G1, G4, G6, G11 and G9). Online learning communities create a supportive environment for meaningful discussions and resource sharing. Interactions with other SM users also enable individuals to document

their learning journey, exchange ideas and seek constructive feedback if and when it is needed. Likewise, online environments promote informed choices and self-regulation of the learning process, which are integral aspects of learner autonomy (Ludwig & Tassinari, 2023). According to Olowo et al. (2021), graduates can proactively share their knowledge and thoughts on SM platforms, thereby promoting their autonomy and enhancing their employability skills.

Furthermore, it is worth noting the link between learners' autonomy and their identity, as students' identities can influence their sense of empowerment to exercise autonomy in their academic pursuits. Students with well-defined identities are more inclined to take charge of their education, assert their autonomy through proactive learning and seek opportunities aligned with their identities. Just as identity can influence autonomy, autonomy in turn can shape one's identity, as autonomous learners may discover new aspects of their identities. Educational environments that promote a sense of belonging and encourage self-expression support the connection between identity and student autonomy. Therefore, it is essential to provide a highly individualised approach that honours students' identities, fosters learning autonomy and supports the overall improvement of employability. Given the influence of current trends and technological advances, the findings of this thesis suggest that SM can be thoughtfully leveraged to empower students' identities and enhance autonomous learning. Reinders and White (2016) comprehensively explain the importance of ecological methods to comprehend learner autonomy through social technology. They emphasise how people learn in multiple learning environments, the importance of individuals' contributions, and how students adapt and rearrange elements of their learning surroundings to create more conducive learning environments.

It is important to consider the positive impact of SML on fostering graduates' self-identity (identity capital) and autonomy as well as human and social capital (Section 5.5). Thus, Figure 5.3 can be developed into Figure 5.4 below, which demonstrates the influence of SML on enhancing graduates' human and social capital, self-identities and autonomy, and their relation and contribution to employability.

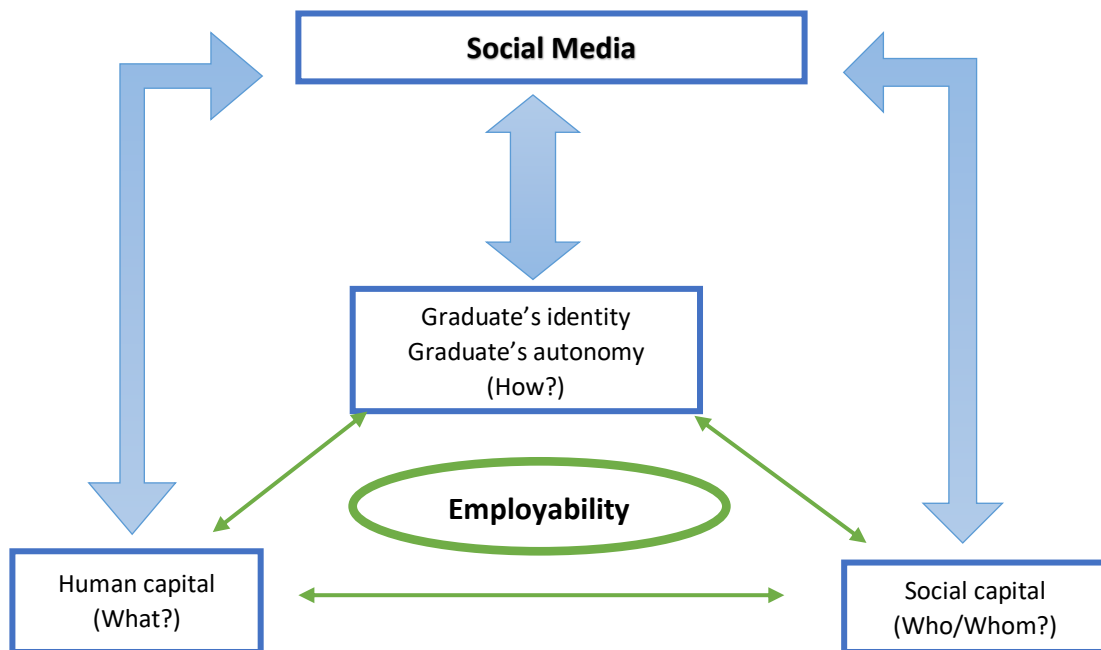


Figure 5.4: The influence of social media literacy on enhancing graduates' human capital, social capital, self-identity and autonomy, and their relation and contribution to employability.

Figure 5.4 above shows the role of SM in developing human, social and identity capital (as discussed earlier). Social media networks serve as platforms for interaction, contributing to the improvement of these three factors, all of which are essential employability factors. The employability system is represented by the 'what' (human capital), 'who/whom' (social media) and 'how' (graduates' identity and autonomy). As explained in Chapter 5.5, 'what' emphasises the skills, competencies or attributes, 'who/whom' refers to the entities, including individuals, organisations or communities that job seekers should contact to facilitate their access to resources, support and job opportunities, and 'how' indicates the methods, practices and techniques individuals employ to enhance their identities and autonomy. These methods may involve engaging in interactive and supportive environments like SMNs. Meaningful engagement with professional networks fosters professional development, enhances graduate skills and guides academic and professional growth.

The three employability factors, human, social and identity capital, create an overlapping set of resources that enhance employability. In a constructive feedback loop, having one of these factors can enhance the development of the other employability factors. For instance, human capital or 'what' represents the

candidate's skills and attributes, which can be fostered by social capital or 'who/whom' through facilitating an individual's access to resources, training and job opportunities, and the identity capital or 'how' personalises one's experience by fostering self-directed learning and autonomy. The same principle applies when autonomous learners with a strong sense of self-identity invest time and effort in enhancing their skills and knowledge, thereby enriching their human capital and expanding their social ties and connections. In this proposed model, the growth of any one employability factor can theoretically reinforce the growth of others, creating a holistic approach to employability enhancement.

This discussion also highlights learners' responsibility for enhancing their employability, shifting the focus from HEIs to the students themselves. Given a wide range of activities and resources available to help them prepare for the job market, students are expected to take an active role in improving their employability by nurturing self-motivation. Consequently, the narrative surrounding employability in HE should shift towards a more individualised and comprehensive approach that empowers students to self-reflect, self-assess and self-direct their development according to their needs.

However, precautions should also be taken to minimise the negative effects of SM on learner's identity and autonomy. The regulated nature of SM can contribute to a distorted perception of reality, leading students to feel inferior and, therefore, to engage in unhealthy comparisons with others. Social media may promote preconceptions and reinforce stereotypes, limiting exposure to a range of perspectives and preventing the exploration of different identities. Also, cyberbullying and cyberattacks may have a negative impact on learners' self-esteem and autonomy and prevent them from engaging in positive interactions on these platforms. These challenges should be addressed by guiding students on how to navigate SM platforms thoughtfully, encouraging them to critically evaluate the content and recognise potential biases. When SM is used responsibly in a supportive and inclusive environment, it can provide valuable opportunities for learners to enhance their identities and autonomy, ultimately improving their employability.

5.7. The Challenges of Using Social Media to Enhance Employability

Using media has advantages in enhancing business graduates' employability. However, individuals may encounter challenges when using social networking sites. These include (1) lack of awareness about the importance and impact of social media, (2) privacy and security concerns, (3) information overload, (4) a shortage of trusted sources, (5) poor time management, (6) limited availability of SM specialists and (7) poor reputation management.

5.7.1. Lack of Awareness of the Importance and Impact of Social Media

The first and most important concern is the lack of knowledge about the importance and influence of SM on employability. Although the participants acknowledged social media's role in enhancing their employability, they emphasised the importance of educating individuals about the impact of SM on employability. Individuals should take the initiative, improve their technological knowledge and update themselves about the latest developments in the field. Participants, employers, and graduates claimed that if individuals are not aware of the importance of social media, they may miss opportunities to remain attractive in today's competitive market and miss out on potential growth and success. By embracing the full power of SM responsibly, candidates can harness its benefits and contribute actively to a more connected and knowledgeable global community.

5.7.2. Privacy and Security Concerns

Privacy has emerged as an important challenge in SM. This concern should be handled carefully on SM platforms, as individuals are likely to share personal information, which should be kept confidential. Furthermore, SM companies gather information about their users, such as browsing habits and demographic details, which might be used to target users or personalise advertisement content. In the survey, participants said that they worried about personal information being released and possible security violations. Benson and Morgan (2016) raised similar concerns, questioning the technical security and privacy of SM. Users should also be mindful of the information shared online, as employers may use their comments and statuses posted online to evaluate their competencies and professionalism.

Suggestions can be made to address this challenge. First, users' privacy in SM should be prioritised through strict security measures, enhancing the transparency of data collection and providing user-friendly services. More importantly, users should be cautious when disclosing personal information online and pay close attention to the terms and conditions of SMNs regarding privacy and security concerns.

5.7.3. Information Overload

Information overload is another challenge that limits the use of SM to enhance employability. It involves filtering information to find trusted and relevant job vacancies. This process is challenging and time-consuming. The vast amount of data and the speed at which news spreads on SMNs outpace fact-checking and efforts to verify the accuracy of information. Fletcher and Park (2017) and Guath (2019) report the same concern in a study in which they evaluated the trustworthiness of online news and information. Thus, a multi-faceted approach is required to address information overload on SM platforms by promoting transparency of content and diversity in algorithmic processes, and possibly labelling misleading information and untrusted sources. Also, candidates should be aware that they should evaluate sources critically before sharing information online.

5.7.4. The Shortage of Trusted Sources

The shortage of trusted sources is another growing concern related to the use of SM. Although SM is a powerful information-sharing tool, verifying the accuracy and reliability of the content and information it shares is challenging. SM users can create and share content without proper fact-checking, and the platform lacks gatekeeping mechanisms to ensure accuracy before sharing. It is, therefore, essential to sift through the vast amount of information on SM and identify what can be trusted. Guath (2019) raised a similar concern, highlighting the complexity of evaluating digital news. He found that students struggle to distinguish trustworthy online news from biased and false information (ibid, 2019).

Developing effective strategies to address the shortage of trusted sources in SM has immense benefits. Social media platforms and society should collaborate, prioritise and share accurate information. They should also promote critical

thinking literacy among users and encourage fact-checking organisations to address biased information. Research has demonstrated that SML fosters the development of analytical and evaluative skills (Chen et al., 2018; Khodeir & Nessim, 2019) and critical thinking skills (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2014). Besides, involving individuals in SMNs to be cautious about how they deal with what they find beneficial. This approach is valuable because evaluating news content necessitates the use of analytical and critical thinking skills.

5.7.5. Poor Time Management

The addictive nature of SM can impact users' ability to manage their time effectively. The participants reported spending a great deal of time scrolling through pages and looking for information on SMNs. Dealing with the constant stream of notifications and ongoing engagement, such as 'comments', 'likes' and 'shares' can be time-consuming. However, the findings of this thesis are inconsistent with the results of Griffin and Coelho (2019) and Hill et al. (2016), who asserted that SML contributed positively to an individual's sense of time management, leading to improvements in employability.

However, users can manage their use of SM by creating healthy habits. For instance, setting a screen limit may be an effective strategy to manage the time spent in front of the screen. They could also allocate the time to be spent online. Switching off unnecessary notifications allows users to focus on tasks without interruptions. Individuals can strike a balance through the mindful use of SM and effective time management.

5.7.6. Limited Availability of Social Media Specialists

The limited availability of SM specialists is a challenge, and it is becoming a greater challenge, especially with the growing number of SM users. The limited availability of SM experts can be attributed to the expanding and evolving nature of the industry. The field of SM is relatively new and constantly growing and developing, with a limited pool of professionals with substantial experience in managing SM. In addition, SM demands a diverse skill set for a range of tasks, such as content creation and data analysis, all of which require critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. It can be a formidable challenge to identify individuals who meet all these requirements.

In the age of increasingly fast and voluminous digital flows, different technical skills, competencies, techniques and strategies are required to process information with digital tools. Many business organisations use SMNs as a marketing and communication tool, and the scarcity of SM specialists makes it difficult to build brand awareness, engage effectively with clients and generate leads to achieve business objectives. Suarta and Suwintana (2021) propose a modern conceptual employability framework to integrate digital competencies into the modern digital workplace. Investing in professional training and development and staying updated with the industry's latest trends can address the scarcity of specialists in the SM field.

5.7.7. Poor Reputation Management (Organisations)

Reputation management is another challenge of using SM to enhance employability, with negative consequences for individuals and businesses. Social media platforms are known for facilitating the rapid spread of both positive and negative information. Therefore, regular monitoring and appropriate proactive measures are necessary to maintain a good reputation among company clients. Special attention should be given to harmful content, including clients' complaints, negative reviews and public controversies that may damage a business's reputation. Unfortunately, harmful SM content has long-lasting effects, making it challenging to rebuild customers' trust as content can be accessed by a quick online search.

Individuals should, therefore, maintain a professional image and be mindful of sharing questionable or sensitive content on SM platforms. Social media users should aim for constructive discussions, share valuable content and respond promptly and professionally to negative content. Cultivating a positive online presence can help counterbalance any negative sentiment effectively.

5.8. Practical Implications for Enhancing Graduate Employability Attributes in HEIs in Oman.

Several valuable recommendations have been put forward for the effective integration of SML into HEI practices. Adopting such measures can be a game-changer and may take manifest various forms, such as curriculum enhancement and forging partnerships with industries.

5.8.1. Curriculum Enhancement

Higher education institutions are aware of the widespread use of SM. They understand that SM platforms considerably shape online interactions, communication and information sharing (Benson et al., 2014; Chai, 2020; Livingstone, 2016; Olowo et al., 2021; Sutherland et al., 2020; Sutherland & Ho, 2017; Valentine et al., 2019). Thus, emphasising the impact of SM should be a prominent component of career guidance programmes and online resources. These initiatives should emphasise the value of managing one's digital presence effectively, using personal branding strategies, expanding professional networks and cultivating a positive professional image in online environments. By doing this, individuals can be empowered to leverage their skills, take responsibility for their learning and ultimately develop into well-rounded digital professionals.

Furthermore, integrating SML into academic curricula is essential. Incorporating SM into academia helps foster a more connected and involved academic community. Yuan et al. (2019) observed that the authentic and interactive learning environment found in SMNs could enhance learners' pedagogical achievements (Benson et al., 2014; Benson & Morgan, 2016; Greenhow & Gleason, 2014; Kimmel, 2021; Olowo et al., 2021). Therefore, the integration of SM should develop a comprehensive set of essential digital skills and offer opportunities to improve information retrieval, digital communication, data analysis, critical thinking, problem-solving and social interaction. This integration can take various forms or approaches, including:

- 1. Professional networking:** social media platforms provide opportunities for academics, students, employers, employees, researchers and other professionals in a particular field. These stakeholders use the platforms to communicate, share resources and engage in productive discussions. LinkedIn is an example of such a platform.
- 2. Research and professional development:** social media provide rich virtual spaces for researchers to discuss and share their ideas and thoughts. They enable interdisciplinary collaboration, mediate professional discussions about recent and current research topics and

provide constructive feedback where needed. Such platforms include ResearchGate, LinkedIn and Twitter.

3. Educational engagement: social media platforms can be used as educational tools in classrooms. For instance, students may benefit from educational videos and visual presentations on YouTube and Instagram. Also, creating a course-related hashtag on Twitter provides a dynamic atmosphere for constructive debates and productive discussions.

Certain steps should be considered if academic institutions plan to use SM as educational tools or propose structured programs. Diagram 5.5 below illustrates an approach for integrating SM into academia.

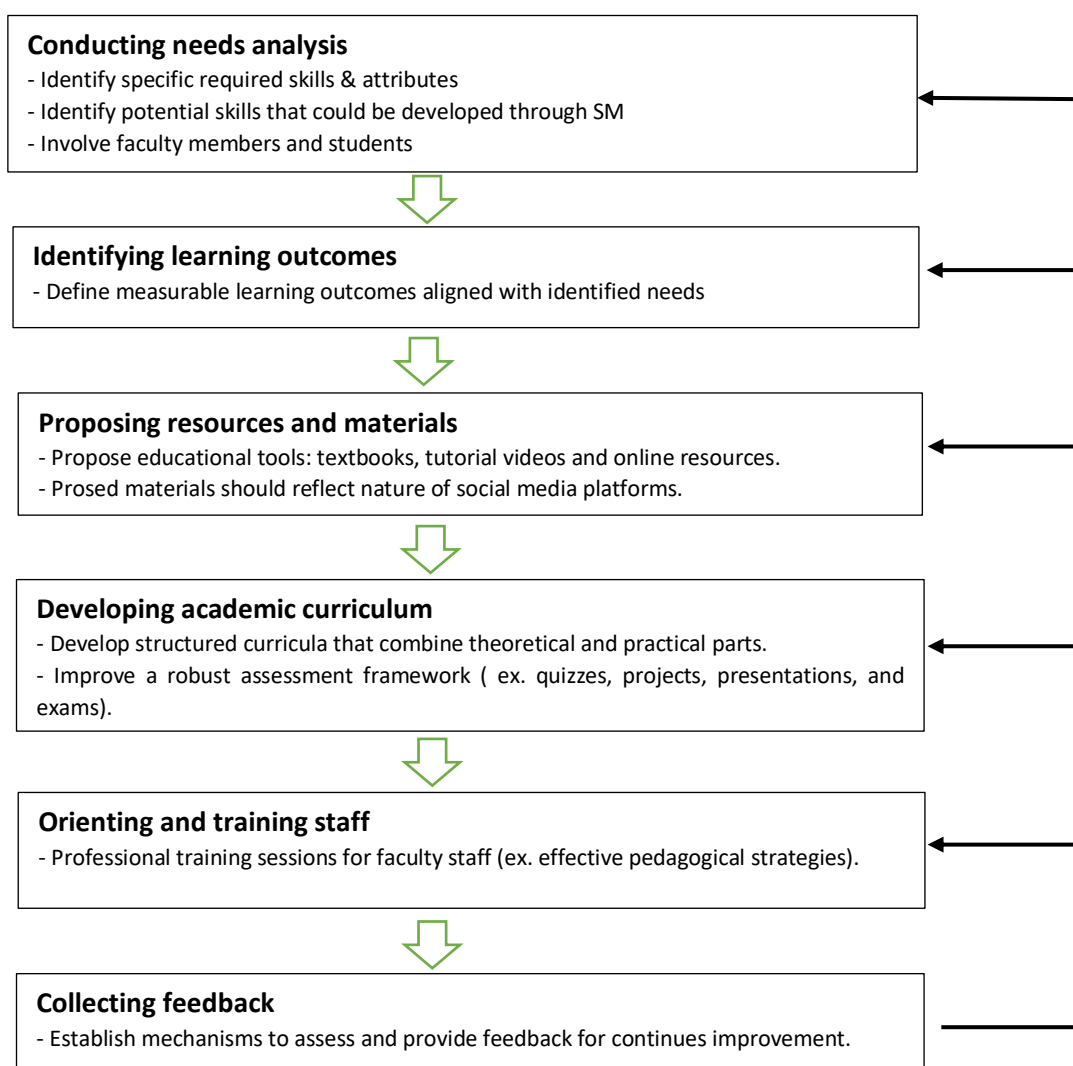


Figure 5.5: The proposed integration approach of social media in academic curricula

The diagram above shows the process proposed for integrating SM into academic curricula. First, a needs analysis should be conducted to identify the specific skills required in a particular education setting, including skills that could be developed through SM by involving academics and learners. Second, measurable learning outcomes should be defined before proposing teaching materials such as textbooks, tutorial videos and online resources. The materials proposed should be compatible with the SM platforms which are used. Fourth, the theoretical element (learning outcomes) should be combined with the practical element (educational resources) to form a well-structured curriculum. However, this curriculum will not be complete without developing an appropriate assessment framework, including quizzes, projects and exams. The fifth step is to give consideration to staff orientation and training, as conducting professional training sessions requires effective pedagogical strategies. Finally, obtaining feedback is essential to ensure that the established goals have been achieved and improvements have been made to keep up with the evolving technological landscape. Feedback can be gathered at any stage during the curriculum development process.

All the steps proposed should incorporate the latest emerging trends and technologies into SM. Regular feedback from students and faculty should be used to improve teaching practices. Tutors should ensure that the course content is continually reviewed and updated to incorporate the latest SM trends and technologies. However, ethical concerns, privacy issues and questions of responsible usage should also be addressed when integrating SM into academic curricula. Developing clear guidelines and policies is vital to ensure appropriate usage and maintain a secure academic environment.

5.8.2. Industry Partnerships

Developing industrial partnerships can bridge the gap between academia and the labour market. Such collaboration can help align graduates' needs and employers' expectations, allowing graduates to work in real-world settings, gain practical experience and develop industry-specific skills. Employers may have organisational motives for setting up such graduate training programs. The fact that employers are the most directly concerned party will ensure that the training

offered will be more relevant to market needs, easily adapted to meet local needs and cost-effective, with no need for extensive training for handing job responsibilities to new employees. Additionally, the partnership has the potential to facilitate recruitment and improve staff retention rates, consequently reducing costs.

Furthermore, a genuine partnership between HEIs and industry leaders should be considered. A constructive dialogue should be initiated between the two parties to ensure that graduates meet labour market needs. Figure 5.6 below represents a proposed model for an industry-academia partnership for effectively incorporating SML in the curriculum.

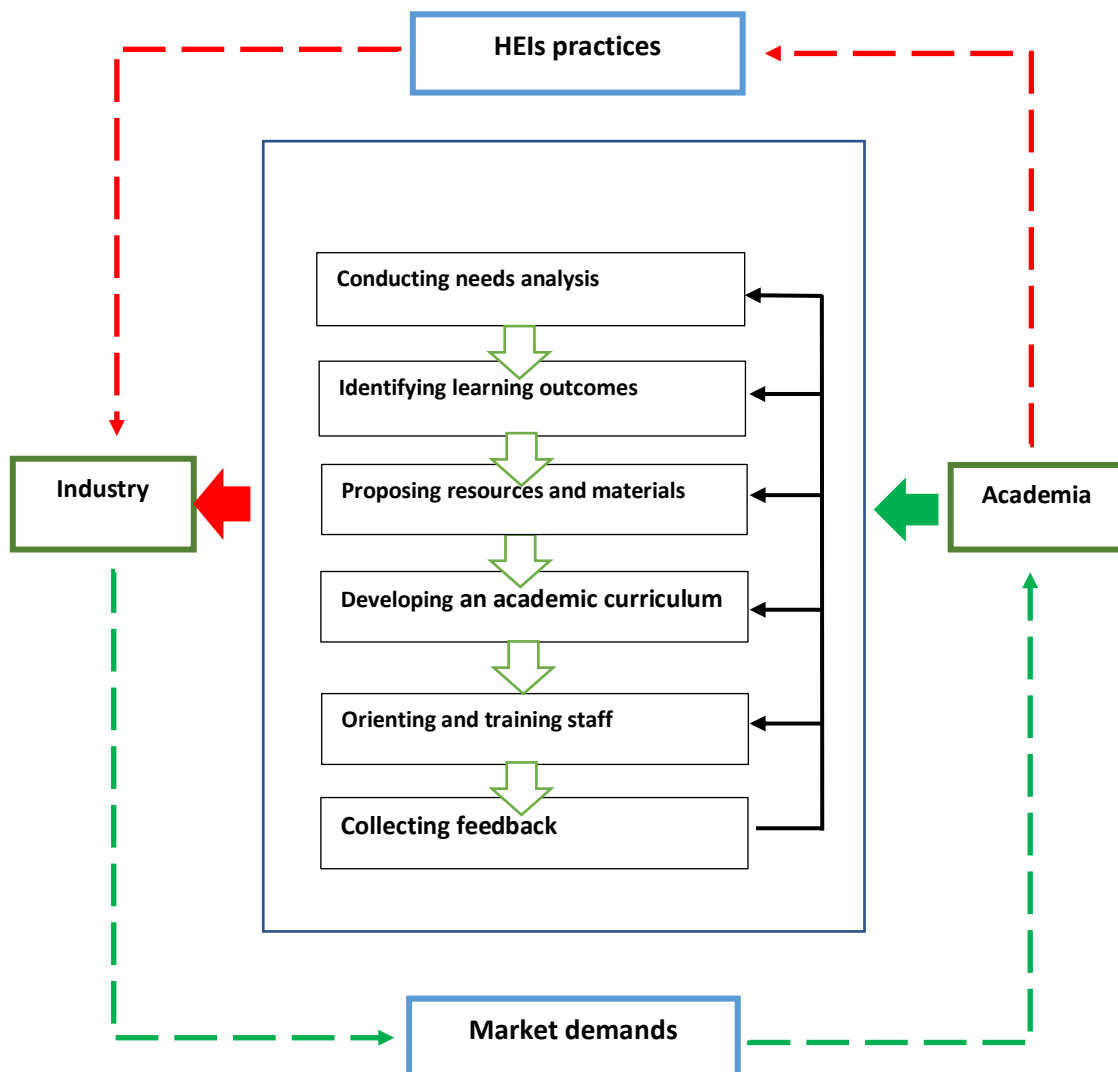


Figure 5.6: A proposed model for an industry - academia partnership for the effective incorporation of social media literacy in the curriculum.

The proposed model in Figure 5.6 shows the ongoing need to consult industries for valuable input regarding academic curricula and teaching-learning approaches and techniques. The integration of any new technical developments into the teaching system of an academic institution should be through industry consultation. Academic courses and educational methodologies should be thoughtfully developed to ensure that graduates are appropriately trained and qualified to compete in the labour market. Hanieh et al. (2015) agree on the necessity for genuine cooperation. They propose a model for an industry-academia partnership that could meet market needs and contribute to general social and economic development. Tomlinson (2017) highlights the importance of employers' engagement in formal education to enhance graduates' employability through providing internships, where they will have a chance to gain more first-hand knowledge about job requirements and increase their chances of success in the market.

Consequently, the collaboration between HEIs and industry associations should be considered. It can take various forms, including work-integrated learning (WIL), advisory boards and alumni networks. The inclusion of WIL is considered an essential part of the programme curriculum for enhancing learners' experiential and authentic learning by allowing them to improve their hard and soft skills (Jackson, 2015). Also, WIL gives business graduates a chance to apply their knowledge and ideas to real-world situations (Björck, 2021; Smith et al., 2016; Taylor & Govender, 2017). Graduates can obtain practical experience through this collaboration and show how far they meet employers' expectations.

Furthermore, establishing advisory boards composed of industry professionals is crucial. These boards can provide insights into industry trends, skills requirements and job market demands. They can also guide curriculum development, evaluation schemes and identify training opportunities. Maintaining regular communication with employers ensures that HEIs stay up to date with industry needs, emerging business trends and skill gaps so that they will be able to equip graduates with the necessary employability competencies.

Additionally, involving successful alumni in the process can motivate current students as they share insights and experiences related to the job market. HEIs may organise alumni events where these individuals can share their experiences

and provide valuable perspectives on navigating the labour market. Given their shared educational background, alumni are often more influential and convincing. In summary, collaboration between HEIs and the labour market plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between classroom theories and practical workplace requirements. This partnership benefits not only graduates but also all stakeholders by strengthening the connection between academia and the industry, fostering innovation and contributing to economic growth.

5.9. Conclusion

This chapter summarises the research findings and compares them with previous studies to uncover useful insights into the impact of SM on graduates' employability. All the research questions are addressed in this chapter. Analysis of data indicated that SM had a considerable influence on employability. The analysis of job advertisements and interviews showed many parallels in employability skills and attributes. Thematic analysis of interviews with employers and graduates also revealed similarities in their perspectives on employability skills and attributes. The consistency of the findings suggests a high level of reliability and generalisability, thereby strengthening the validity of the research results.

The key findings of this thesis showed that many graduates lacked the necessary skills to gain employment. This could be partly attributed to the misconception that earning a degree is sufficient, and that there is no need to improve soft skills and personal attributes. The research demonstrated that employers preferred graduates with solid non-technical skills and personal attributes over technical or subject-related skills. Furthermore, employers favour candidates with degrees, relevant job experience and transferable soft skills over those with technical business skills.

The employers and business graduates shared perceptions of the contribution of SML in enhancing graduates' employability. They acknowledged that SML played a vital role in the technology-based economy and that SM platforms should be used wisely to improve client interaction and increase brand exposure. As SM continues to be an integral component of business operations, employers and

graduates are more likely to acknowledge the influence of SM platforms on employability.

This thesis emphasises the value of SML in developing graduates' employability skills (human capital) and providing them with job opportunities (social capital). Human capital is necessary for graduates to become attractive to employers, equipping them with the necessary skills and attributes for workplace success. At the same time, social capital is essential as it helps graduates navigate their journey to securing employment through professional networks and connections, thus enabling them to identify training and career opportunities.

Moreover, participants' responses revealed that many practical, employable skills were self-taught through digital media networks. Social media platforms gave learners the opportunities for self-directed learning and supported the development of independence and autonomy. The supportive online environments allowed individuals to interact constructively and share helpful information. Learners with strong identities are more likely to take charge of their own education, demonstrating independence through proactive online participation and actively seeking opportunities that align with their identity. As identity affects autonomy, the reverse is also true: as learners become more autonomous, they may also discover new facets of their identities. Educational environments that encourage self-expression and foster a sense of belonging can help nurture the connection between identity and student autonomy, particularly on social media platforms. Therefore, adopting a flexible, highly digitalised and individualised approach that respects learners' identities and promotes learning autonomy is essential for enhancing employability.

At the same time, the study also highlights several challenges associated with using SM in the context of job prospects. These challenges include a lack of awareness of the importance and impact of SM, privacy and security concerns, information overload, a shortage of trusted sources, poor time management, the limited availability of SM specialists and issues related to reputation management. These problems can be addressed through the promotion of SML, the implementation of content moderation practices, the strengthening of privacy and security measures, and the creation of positive online environments.

Finally, the study offers practical implications for enhancing graduate employability. These include the need to enhance aspects of the curriculum and establish industry partnerships to improve HEI practices. Moreover, curricula should be designed to align with industry needs and adapt to ongoing technological advances, with regular reviews to incorporate the latest knowledge and skills. Comprehensive collaborations with industry partners can provide invaluable insights into current industrial trends and the skills required in the labour market. Such partnerships can take the form of work-integrated learning (WIL), advisory boards and alumni networks, bridging the gap between academic practices and industry demands and ensuring that graduates are well-prepared for their future workplaces.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Introduction and Summary of the Research Findings

This thesis explores the impact social media (SM) have on enhancing employability. In particular, this seeks to determine how and to what extent social media literacy (SML) helps graduates improve their employability in today's digitalised competitive market. Therefore, online job advertisements were analysed to explore prevailing market demands in terms of skills and qualifications. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with graduates and employers to investigate their perceptions of the potential impact of SM on employability.

In this study, SM plays an important role in improving graduates' employability skills and attributes, mainly in terms of English language, digital competencies, collaboration, networking, analytical skills, critical thinking skills and personal characteristics. Moreover, the findings from interviews conducted with graduates and employees confirmed the importance of SML in today's digitalised era since both groups acknowledged the importance of SM in various aspects of individuals' lives, including their personal, academic and business lives, which are heavily influenced by technology.

Furthermore, the study has explored the potential practical implications of the research findings and their potential influence on the improvement of academic practices in HE. This chapter presents areas for future research and growth in the field, as it aims to stimulate investigations that can enhance the use of digital and social media literacies to improve employability. It also outlines the study's contribution to our understanding of social media and employability.

6.2. Key Findings of the Research

The findings of this research demonstrate the important impact SM have on enhancing business graduates' employability attributes. There is also a recurrent homogeneity in the research. The parallels between and uniformity of the findings might imply a considerable level of dependability and generalizability, improving the validity of the results.

Analysing job advertisements provides valuable insights into market expectations by delineating the skills required in today's business labour market. In terms of professional competence, non-technical skills and personal attributes tend to be seen as more important than technical skills. Regardless of occupations and job titles in business, some skills stand out as being in high demand. These skills typically include effective communication, digital competencies and English proficiency. Furthermore, most job advertisements emphasise that work experience is as important as an academic degree.

The impact of SML in today's digital age is further supported by the results obtained from the interviews conducted with graduates and employees. Both graduates and employers had almost the same perceptions, as they acknowledged the importance of SM in influencing individuals' personal, academic and business lives. Moreover, the interviewees' comments highlighted the positive impact of SM on improving employability by facilitating skill development and competency acquisition. For graduates, SM has played an important role in enhancing their employability skills and attributes. These include proficiency in the English language, digital competencies, collaboration, networking, analytical skills, critical thinking skills and essential identity attributes such as self-assurance, resourcefulness and adaptability. Similarly, employers believed that SM enhance an individual's digital competencies and analytical and critical thinking skills. Moreover, companies used SM platforms for recruitment by advertising job openings on employment-focused SM accounts, such as LinkedIn, and assessing applicants' proficiency in SM management.

While the findings emphasised the role of SM in developing business graduates' employability skills and attributes, some challenges have been acknowledged and discussed. These challenges might reduce the benefits of incorporating SM to improve employability. The challenges discussed include a lack of understanding of the importance of SM, a lack of specialised SM accounts, false information, privacy concerns, technical difficulties, and excessive time spent on SM.

Interviewees proposed practical solutions to these challenges. Raising users' awareness of the importance of SM is vital, as this facilitates their engagement in

the meaningful use of these platforms. In addition, working on professional and purposeful content will improve the quality of content disseminated through SM platforms. Most importantly, integrating SM into academic curricula will maximise the value of using SM to enhance graduates' employability and address their needs professionally.

6.3. Contribution to Knowledge

The findings of this thesis make valuable theoretical and substantive contributions to our understanding of the use of SML to enhance employability. Investigating SM presents inherent challenges because it is multifaceted and multidimensional. The findings of this thesis will, therefore, enhance the existing body of knowledge, which will help develop a better understanding of the multidimensionality of this concept. The study provides theoretical insights into SML, allowing researchers to explore this area in depth. It considers various features associated with SML that may influence its potential for improving employability. The literature regarding the influence of SM on employability in Arab contexts is limited. The findings of this research will contribute to a deeper comprehension of this subject matter within local Arab communities and across the globe.

The two models in Chapter 5 (Figures 5.3 and 5.6) propose an integration process for SM in academic curricula. The process can be modified by incorporating different SM components to fit different educational contexts. In addition, graduates' identities are well-articulated when SM is believed to enhance employability attributes since it highlights their willingness to learn and be guided in their employment (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011). Furthermore, Lackovic (2019) argues that it is important to consider the active engagement of technology, as it mirrors the current state of affairs in which technology is shaping labour market demands. Thus, the use of SM might be an ideal way for HEIs to integrate technology in academia, as graduates' identities are well-presented in the integration process. Additionally, learners will be encouraged to be mindful of their human and social capital throughout their learning journey, inspiring them to take control of their future professional lives by realising the value of employability beyond the academic knowledge acquired in universities.

Additionally, the study offers insights into the importance of providing hands-on experience, which is considered just as important as a formal degree within the Omani labour market. It should be acknowledged that experiential learning provides direct engagement with real-world situations, which will contribute to acquiring the required knowledge, developing employability skills and gaining valuable insights. These vocational pre-training programmes, Work-integrated learning (WIL), internships, fieldwork and on-the-job training are essential for professional development and workplace learning initiatives.

6.4. Recommendations

The following recommendations are formulated with regard to the research context and might be relevant and applicable to similar educational contexts.

1. Using SM in educational contexts: HEIs should make a real commitment to normalising the use of SM in their educational contexts. The limited incorporation of SML into the educational curriculum presents a potential obstacle. Nevertheless, integrating SM in educational settings should be carefully considered and moral, legal and ethical issues need to be resolved.
2. Curriculum enhancement: the importance of technology and SM as important tools should be addressed by developing innovative practices aligned with technological advances. Incorporating SM in academic practises offers several advantages, as it facilitates the development of a more interconnected and engaged academic community. It will also improve core digital skills and opportunities: retrieving and handling information, digital communication, data analysis, critical thinking, problem-solving and social interaction. In addition, regular feedback should be obtained from learners and faculty as a basis for improving teaching practises by reviewing course content and incorporating emerging trends and technologies in SM. Ethical concerns, privacy issues and responsible use must be taken into account if SM is to be successfully incorporated into academic courses. Clear standards and procedures should, therefore, be established to ensure proper use and maintain a safe academic environment.

3. Higher education - industry partnership: a genuine partnership between HEIs and industry should be further developed to ensure that graduates are adequately prepared to meet the demands of the labour market. The partnership between HEIs and the labour market has the potential to bridge the gap between theories learned in the classroom and practices required in the workplace by producing graduates who can effectively apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired to succeed in their future workplaces. This partnership benefits all stakeholders by strengthening the cooperation between academia and industry and fostering innovation and economic growth.

6.5. Further Research

The findings of this thesis provide a foundation for future research which explores the use of SM to improve employability-related skills and attributes. Firstly, it is imperative to conduct ongoing research on digital and social media literacies and their potential applications in professional practices within HEIs, updating the picture definition as the digital world develops. Given the increased exposure of the younger generation to SM, HEIs must acknowledge and address the extent of digital literacy that ought to be integrated into their curricula both now and in the future. Studies such as this will, therefore, enable HEIs to offer academic courses which are relevant to industry needs and to be aware of employers' expectations when they design and update their curricula.

Additionally, professional academic knowledge is a critical issue that requires further investigation. To help graduates acquire the necessary digital and SML skills, academics should be proficient in using digital technologies. Therefore, researchers in this field can investigate the factors that contribute to teachers' effective use of digital skills to facilitate their students' development of digital literacy skills. Acquiring this knowledge will guide the practical use of digital tools, which can be effectively employed for both content instruction and the development of literacy. In addition, it is essential to consider developing meaningful assessment tools to evaluate graduates' digital and social media literacies.

The existing body of literature on the influence of SML on employability in Arab contexts is limited; the findings of this thesis will, therefore, contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing valuable insights, particularly in a culturally diverse context like the Arab world. This will pave the way for further research on the potential influence of cultural factors on SM for enhancing employability attributes. Additionally, it would be advantageous to examine the potential effects of SM on variables beyond those already investigated in this study, such as factors related to human behaviour, social dynamics and individual identities. The results could then be used to integrate SM appropriately in HE contexts.

It is essential to conduct further research on the establishment of a robust and credible framework for the ongoing analysis of labour market demands to identify possible skills gaps and current market requirements. This should not be based on traditional methods such as employers' surveys to gather data because of the costs it would incur. Instead, it is recommended that alternative, innovative, accurate and fast approaches should be explored. The detailed characteristics of the labour market demand for specific occupations must be established so that accurate conclusions can be drawn as a basis for addressing market requirements promptly. Although the current thesis has used online job portals to analyse job advertisements since they provide a low-cost and up-to-date picture of market demand, further examination is required to avoid biases and address limitations.

Further research should be carried out to explore the effects of some factors, such as learners' personality traits, the environment and cultural issues, on using SML to enhance business graduates' employability attributes. It is imperative to consider the potential impact of these factors on integrating SM into academia to ensure that it is effective. First, personality traits play an important role in how graduates interact with SM platforms. Understanding individual differences will enable employers and job seekers to devise specific strategies to maximise their opportunities for using SM effectively. Investigating possible environmental factors such as educational, social and economic backgrounds can provide insights into potential barriers. This knowledge will be valuable input to help stakeholders provide effective and equitable social media platforms for

employability enhancement. In addition, recognising cultural factors such as norms, values, expectations and behaviours can considerably impact how individuals engage with social media platforms. Understanding such issues will help graduates navigate cultural differences and adapt their SM strategies to meet job market demands. Further research on these factors will provide valuable insights into ways of addressing individual differences, environmental barriers and cultural variations to optimise the ways social media can enhance employability in today's digitally dominated labour market. Overall, this information will foster greater inclusivity, diversity and equality in the workplace.

6.6. Personal Reflections

Undertaking this research has provided me with valuable insights into the impact of SML on enhancing employability attributes. Throughout this study, I have been consciously aware of my insider status and position. This thesis has allowed me to explore ideas and thoughts on employability as a stakeholder in various contexts: as an academic, a student, a parent and a researcher. The research journey has provided me with insights into how learners can develop their employability skills and attributes through SML. Additionally, it has helped me develop a deeper understanding of the interplay between my role as a researcher and my approach to teaching and learning.

Before embarking on this research, I had a limited understanding of SML and its role in employability. However, I have learnt from this thesis that SM provides graduates with valuable knowledge as a basis for improving their skills and attributes to achieve their objectives in the workplace. I have also realised the importance of SM in enhancing a graduate's human capital (skills and attributes) and social capital (social connections and professional networks). Moreover, SM platforms play a central role in the job search and recruitment processes, as employers use these platforms to advertise job openings while graduates rely on them to explore potential employment opportunities. These findings prompted me to recognise the impact of integrating social media platforms into the educational context, as their impact extends beyond traditional classroom learning.

Additionally, investigating employers' perceptions revealed that employers prefer skilled graduates who can effectively navigate technological challenges and

demonstrate adaptability in the contemporary digitalised work environment. Therefore, my role as a teacher is to encourage a culture of continuous learning and support students in their learning process by presenting them with challenges and opportunities for growth.

Overall, this thesis has proven to be a gratifying endeavour, as it has allowed me to learn how to effectively impart meaningful instruction to my students in line with the practical demands of their prospective professional environments. There is no doubt that active and meaningful engagement in SM platforms can contribute effectively to developing employability skills and attributes since research has proven that SM is a powerful tool for enhancing business graduates' employability and lifelong learning skills. Thus, as an academic, it is imperative that I should offer contextualised experiences to my students, enabling them to sharpen their skills both during their academic studies and in their subsequent professional endeavours upon graduation.

6.7. Limitations

Although the current thesis contributes to our understanding of the positive influence of social media literacy on graduates' employability, it is important to acknowledge that the research has certain limitations. First, the fact that I am an insider can be seen as a limitation since an insider is likely to be less objective and more biased, taking into account the fact that the researcher may be viewed with "suspicion or resentment ... when his/her true role comes to light and who may lack the necessary objectivity to observe reliability" (Cohen et al., 2018: 543). Even though I was extremely careful in my examination and interpretation of the research data, I may have overlooked certain issues that an external observer might deem important, thereby influencing my approach and my comprehension of the context.

Additional limitations pertaining to temporal factors and geographical locations were encountered throughout the study. First, it was imperative to establish a specific time frame within which the study would be conducted, limiting the data collection process to ensure the research could be successfully completed. For instance, more job advertisements could have been considered, and more interviews could have been conducted; however, time constraints meant that this

was not feasible. Furthermore, the data was collected from specific locations and universities in Oman only, limiting the cultural and educational backgrounds of the students who shared their opinions. Individuals with different experiences from other places could have produced different understandings of employability and job requirements. Thus, while the findings may not be generalisable to other higher educational contexts, it can be assumed that they might apply to other Arab countries, particularly those in the Gulf region, as the similarities in education systems and labour market demands are relatively high (Al Qubaisi, 2012; Al-Hinai, 2011; Belwal et al., 2017). Further research could be conducted in other higher education contexts to generalise the findings, making them applicable to a wider range of contexts.

Another limitation of this thesis pertains to the limitations inherent in the data collection process. Firstly, the data was collected only from businesses, graduates and employers. Involving academics in the study would have provided valuable insights into HE's role in enhancing employability. In addition, considering a more diverse sample of sectors and organisations would have enhanced the data by including the experiences and views of a larger sample of graduates and employers in different sectors of the economy. Furthermore, the job advertisements are based on a subjective identification of the required skills, as they represent only employers' opinions. Similar limitations may apply to the semi-structured interviews, as they may yield biased data due to the possibility that interviewees may lack a sufficient understanding of the employability skills and attributes required for specific occupations. While it was assumed that interviewees would provide honest responses, some participants have given 'socially acceptable' or uncontroversial information, particularly in relation to job search and employee recruitment processes (Al Qubaisi, 2012).

Additionally, the interviewees were selected by purposive non-probability sampling methods, which reduces the overall diversity and accuracy of the results since it relies on the researcher's judgment when selecting the individuals to be interviewed. Although this sampling method may be effective for obtaining the data required to meet the study's objectives (Creswell, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2015), it carries a high risk of bias because the researcher's subjectivity may have influenced the selection of this sample as well as the analysis and interpretation

of the results. Acknowledging this drawback is of the utmost importance as it can potentially undermine the reliability of a qualitative study. The potential influence of the researcher's expectations, opinions, prejudices and subjective assessments of the data might influence what is perceived or recorded in the results, which should be considered an important limitation.

Furthermore, selecting the graduates from one institution, the University of Technology and Applied Science (UTAS), might affect the findings. Technically, it is imperative to acknowledge the important impact that social capital and networking among graduates and their universities can exert. For instance, graduates who attend reputable universities with strong career networks can help their graduates secure jobs. In addition, as indicated by interviewed graduates, personal networks could facilitate a graduate's journey in searching for a job or launching their businesses. Moreover, graduates with solid and professional SMNs get better opportunities than those without, as they are more likely to secure training in industrial organisations, which improves their employability skills and attributes.

The scope of this thesis was limited to the examination of 'social media' without considering other aspects of digital literacies, thus limiting its comprehensiveness. To better understand the impact that other digital components may have on employability attributes, it would be necessary to conduct a more comprehensive investigation to explore these other factors. Future studies are more likely to provide better results if they explore other digital factors which could improve employability skills and attributes.

6.8. Conclusion

With regard to the research aims and the questions posed in this dissertation, it has been shown that SM considerably enhances students' employability and their study paths. The findings of this thesis will contribute to understanding how to use SML to improve employability-related skills and attributes. Additionally, the findings indicate that SM could be incorporated into students' HE experiences differently. Employability could be enhanced through good practice, which involves taking a flexible approach to building the required skills and attributes. Integrating SM in HE will shift the focus from what universities teach graduates

to a more personalised, student-centred form of learning in which students take ownership of their HE journey to improve their employability. The flexibility of SM platforms appeals to individuals' heterogeneous needs; moreover, these platforms provide common ground that can effectively attract a larger number of learners, thereby facilitating the enhancement of graduates' skills and attributes.

It should be noted that the concept of employability has evolved continuously due to technological advances and dynamic changes in the labour market, which both shape the skills required for future job roles. Therefore, individuals should build their human capital by acquiring and maintaining the skills, knowledge and personal attributes which enable them to remain desirable and employable in today's labour market. In addition, jobseekers could build their social capital by maintaining professional networks and social connections, which facilitate access to job opportunities. Furthermore, SM allows individuals to market themselves effectively to potential employers by creating a carefully tailored resume and developing strong networking skills and the ability to articulate their skills and experiences during job interviews.

The main objective of employability extends beyond producing employable graduates who meet the demands and requirements of a particular occupation at a specific time; it is rather to enable individuals to find and maintain employment in an advanced, technologically changing market. Preparing employable graduates should not be the responsibility of HEIs alone but rather a collective effort involving employers, students and society. Social media platforms have the potential to facilitate the enhancement of students' knowledge, skills and competencies as a way of improving their employability. The multidimensional use of SM platforms will support individuals' professional development and use of technology as something indispensable worldwide. Therefore, incorporating SM in academia is essential as it has the potential to help students to adapt to online learning and improve their digital literacy. HEIs should, therefore, consider integrating SM into their academic curricula to transform these social platforms into valuable teaching and learning resources.

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8. Appendices

8.1. Appendix 1: Interview Questions - Employers' Version

Opening questions

Kindly, introduce yourself (age – business/ organization)

Questions on social media/SM-related attributes

- Do you have social media accounts?
- In your opinion, what are the purposes of being a social media user?
- Did you think there is a lot of misleading news on social media platforms? Why/why not?
- What techniques can social media users use to identify misleading or so-called fake news?

Social media and employability concerns

- What do you value more: the graduates' skills and experiences or a college degree?
- When you list a vacancy opening, what is essential: expected tasks and responsibilities or the required candidate's skills and educational background?
- Do you use social media in your business? How?
- Have you used social media in the recruiting process?
- Do you think being skilful in digital and social media advantages jobseekers? How? Explain
- Do you feel your company's digital and media skills needs are unmet, but would you like this to be the case? What are these? Explain
- Do you think social media can be used to improve students' digital skills? How?
- Have you heard of critical media literacy? (Tell them the definition: knowing how to evaluate and analyze digital and social media with their content, creation, authors, reading, audiences, and effects). How important is it? Do you think this is connected to graduates' employability?

Closing questions

- In your opinion, what are the challenges of developing skills to use social media effectively in business?
- What are the possible solutions to overcome these challenges?
- Do you have any questions?
- Anything to add?

8.2. Appendix 2: Interview Questions - Graduates' Version

Opening questions

Kindly, introduce yourself (age- major)

Questions on social media/SM-related attributes:

- Do you have social media accounts?
- In your opinion, what are the purposes of being a social media user?
- How much time do you spend on social media?
- Do you think there is much misleading news on social media platforms? Why/why not?
- What techniques can social media users use to identify misleading or fake news?
- Do you have the habit of commenting on the news or reading comments on social media? Why?
- Do you share the news with friends? Why? Explain.
- Have you made new friends or met new people on social media? If yes, was it intended or not? How did it happen? Explain.

Social media and pedagogical and employability concerns

- Do you use social media in your study? How?
- Do you think digital and social media help you improve your employment skills and prospects? How? Explain
- Do you feel your digital and media skills needs are unmet in your education, but would you like this to be the case? What are these? Explain
- Have your English language competencies improved by engaging with social media? Explain
- Has your confidence in using technology improved through social media? How and why? Explain
- Do you think social media can be used to improve students' digital skills? How?
- Have you heard of critical media literacy? (Tell them the definition: knowing how to evaluate and analyze digital and social media with their content, creation, authors, reading, audiences, and effects). Do you think this is connected to your employability?

Closing questions

- In your opinion, what are the challenges of developing skills to use social media effectively?
- What are the possible solutions to overcome these challenges?
- Do you have any questions?
- Anything to add?

8.3. Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet (Employers' Version)



Participant Information Sheet

Title: Social Media Literacy for Raising Employability in Today's Competitive Labour Market: Meeting Stakeholders' Expectations and Market Needs

For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage: www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection

I am a PhD student at Lancaster University and I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about the impact of social media literacy to raise employability in Omani labour market.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?

This study aims to investigate and synthesizes students' and employers' perspectives about the influence social media literacy has on enhancing employability attributes.

Why have I been invited?

I have approached you because you are one of the target groups in the study. As an employer, I am interested to know your views about the importance of social media literacy in enhancing the employability attributes of the employees you intend to hire. Then, your perspectives will be compared and synthesized with the ones graduates have in order for higher education instructions to come up with useful implications to benefit from social media literacy to enhance their graduates' employability attributes. I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decided to take part, this would involve sitting for a semi-structured interview (30-45 minutes) which will be about the impact of social media literacy on graduates' employment like the skills and competencies you are looking for and announcing for openings and vacancies.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

Taking part in this study will contribute to our understanding of the impact of social media on enhancing employability attributes, which in turns may increase your awareness about the influence social media has, if any, on Omani market.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you participate. Your participation is voluntary.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you can withdraw at any time while participating in this study. If you want to withdraw, please let me know, and I will extract any ideas or information (=data) you contributed to the study and destroy them. However, it is difficult and often impossible to take out data from one specific participant when this has already been anonymised or pooled together with other people's data. Therefore, you can only withdraw up to 4 weeks after taking part in the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part in the study.

Will my data be identifiable?

After the interview, only I, the researcher conducting this study and my supervisor, if needed, will have access to the information you share with me.

I will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is I will not share it with others. I will remove any personal information from the written record of your contribution. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use the information you have shared with me only in the following ways:
I will use it for research purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and other publications, for example, journal articles. I may also present the results of my study at academic conferences.

When writing up the findings from this study, I would like to reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. I will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from my interview with you), so that although I will use your exact words, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect your anonymity in our publications.

How my data will be stored?

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that is no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access them) and on password-protected computers. I will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office. I will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic). In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

**What if I have a question or concern?
If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens
concerning your participation in the study, please contact me or my supervisor:**

Research Student: Ibtisam Al-Kharusi
Full Address: Oman _ Muscat
Tel: +968 99075721
Email: i.al-kharusi@lancaster.ac.uk

Supervisor: Professor Malcolm Tight
Tel: +44 (0)1524 510851
Email: m.tight@lancaster.ac.uk
Room: County South, D32, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK.

**If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person
who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact:**

Professor Paul Ashwin – Head of Department
Tel: +44 (0)1524 594443
Email: p.ashwin@lancaster.ac.uk
Room: County South, D32, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK.

Sources of support

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project.

8.4. Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet (Graduates' Version)



Participant Information Sheet

Title: Social Media Literacy for Raising Employability in Today's Competitive Labour Market: Meeting Stakeholders' Expectations and Market Needs

For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage: www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection

I am a PhD student at Lancaster University and I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about the impact of social media literacy to raise employability in Omani labour market.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?

This study aims to investigate and synthesizes students' and employers' perspectives about the influence social media literacy has on enhancing employability attributes.

Why have I been invited?

I have approached you because you are one of the target groups in the study. As a student, I am interested to know your views about the impact social media has on enhancing your employability attributes. Then, your perspectives will be compared and synthesized with the ones employers have in order for higher education institutions to come up with useful implications to benefit from social media literacy to enhance their graduates' employability attributes. I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decide to take part, this would involve sitting for a semi-structured interview (30-45 minutes) which will be about social media in your life, like the purposes of using social media, the skills you have developed and if it has helped you find an opening or a job.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

Taking part in this study will contribute to our understanding of the impact of social media on enhancing employability attributes, which in turns may increase your awareness about the influence social media has, if any, on today's market.

Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you participate. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide not to take part in this study, this will not affect your studies and the way you are assessed in your courses.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you can withdraw at any time while participating in this study. If you want to withdraw, please let me know, and I will extract any ideas or information (=data) you contributed to the study and destroy them. However, it is difficult and often impossible to take out data from one specific participant when this has already been anonymised or pooled together with other people's data. Therefore, you can only withdraw up to 4 weeks after taking part in the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is unlikely that there will be any major disadvantages to taking part.

Will my data be identifiable?

After the interview, only I, the researcher conducting this study and my supervisor, if needed, will have access to the ideas you share with me.

I will keep all personal information about you (e.g. your name and other information about you that can identify you) confidential, that is I will not share it with others. I will remove any personal information from the written record of your contribution. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use the information you have shared with me only in the following ways:
I will use it for research purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and other publications, for example, journal articles. I may also present the results of my study at academic conferences.

When writing up the findings from this study, I would like to reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. I will only use anonymised quotes (e.g. from my interview with you), so that although I will use your exact words, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect your anonymity in our publications.

How my data will be stored?

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that no-one other than me, the researcher, will be able to access) and on password-protected computers. I will store hard copies of any data securely in locked cabinets in my office. I will keep data that can identify you separately from non-personal information (e.g. your views on a specific topic). In accordance with University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

**What if I have a question or concern?
If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens
concerning your participation in the study, please contact me or my supervisor:**

Research Student: Ibtisam Al-Kharusi
Full Address: Oman _ Muscat
Tel: +968 99075721
Email: i.al-kharusi@lancaster.ac.uk

Supervisor: Professor Malcolm Tight
Tel: +44 (0)1524 510851
Email: m.tight@lancaster.ac.uk
Room: County South, D32, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK.

**If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person
who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact:**

Professor Paul Ashwin – Head of Department
Tel: +44 (0)1524 594443
Email: p.ashwin@lancaster.ac.uk
Room: County South, D32, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK.

Sources of support

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you for considering your participation in this project.

8.5. Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM



Project Title: Social Media Literacy for Raising Employability in Today's Competitive Labour Market: Meeting Stakeholders' Expectations and Market Needs

Name of Researchers: Ibtisam Al-Kharusi

Email: i.al-kharusi@lancaster.ac.uk

Please tick each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during my participation in this study and within 4 weeks after I took part in the study, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within the 4 weeks of taking part in the study my data will be removed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications or presentations by the researchers but my personal information will not be included and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I understand that my name/my organisation's name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation without my consent.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I understand that any interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I agree to take part in the above study.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____ Date _____
_____ Day/month/year

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in the files of the researcher at Lancaster University