The Emergence of Social Media as an Antecedent of Employability : A PLS-SEM Approach

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Abstract

Purpose : This study intended to investigate the influence of social media on the perceived employability of students, with a special emphasis on the use of social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Other independent variables of this study are the contacts of students, which can help them find and attain the desired job.

Methodology : Using descriptive research design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire using a 7-point Likert scale from 339 management students. The psychometric properties of instruments were determined through validity and reliability. Furthermore, structural assessments were conducted using hypothesis testing, model fit estimates, and predictive relevance (*r* - square).

Findings : The results showed a positive and significant influence of SNS and contacts on the perceived employability of students. SNS and contacts were found to create a variance of 33% in perceived employability. Moreover, the reliability and validity of the adapted instrument were well established, supporting its use and application in the Indian context.

Practical Implications : The theoretical implication of this study is for social capital theory and the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology model. The implications of this study are meant for management students, higher education institutes, career educationalists, and policymakers.

Originality : The novelty of this research lies in the fact that it aims at capturing the perception of Indian students regarding the usage of SNS for employability.

Keywords : **perceived employability, social media, social networking sites, contacts, PLS-SEM**

JEL Classification Codes : E24, I23, I25, J23, M51, O10

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The prominence of information technology (IT) in all spheres of business is undeniable. Using social media to search and recruit candidates for vacant jobs is a normal practice these days (Alexander et al., 2019; Arnedillo-Sánchez, 2018; CareerBuilder, 2016). Gen Z presumes that creating a personal brand online is a critical tool to gain employment, and they are lacking in reflecting themselves as a brand online for recruiters

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(Trang et al., 2023). IT tends to have a transformational impact on employment, the labor market, and the national economy. Galloping advancement in computer technologies has enabled the development of perceived employability. Information and communication technology (ICT) skills are considered desirable by recruiters. Moreover, COVID-19 has ignited the need to use social networking sites (SNS) for students to search for jobs online and for recruiters to screen candidates on SNS (Arora & Srinivasan, 2020).

Although the association of contacts with careers was very well pinpointed by Granovetter (1995), this concept has not gained the required importance in research and literature (Geva et al., 2016). According to English et al. (2021), the inability of students to develop professional networks is one of the major missing links to employability (Bridgstock & Tippett, 2019). Grounding on the concept of social relationships, IT, and computing, a lot of value and strength has been added to social connections, which helps in gaining employment. Enders et al. (2008) advocated that SNS make a larger contact pool available to their members and allow them to easily manage and maintain virtually unlimited numbers of contacts by granting access to the long tail of social networking — an additional pool of contacts that is inaccessible via traditional networking. The importance of career-related SNS for job search purposes has been a topic of discussion for researchers and practitioners (Kuhn & Mansour, 2014). The use of SNS, such as LinkedIn, has been marked as an effective job search and strategic human resource management (HRM) strategy in the era of the digital world (Giri & Chatterjee, 2020, Joshi et al., 2017; Smith, 2018). As per Omnicore (2021), 756 million professionals are using LinkedIn worldwide. The prominence of SNS, specifically LinkedIn, has opened new avenues in the world of research (McCorkle & McCorkle, 2012). O'Connor et al. (2022) demonstrated the positive influence of using social media on career-related benefits. Similarly, Facebook has been evidenced as one of the digital platforms capturing the professional space of its users (Verma, 2021).

Despite the influential role of SNS and contacts in enhancing perceived employability, existing literature lacks empirical evidence to assist this concept (Andersson, 2019a, 2019b; Pekkala et al., 2022). Another research gap identified in this area is the lack of well-established scales for measuring SNS and contacts. This study empirically investigates the relationship between SNS, contacts, and employability by using adapted scales from existing literature. This study is also targeted to acknowledge the research gap of the limited number of studies in this area in the Indian context. Implications of this study largely cover all the stakeholders, such as management students, higher education institutes, employers, policymakers, and the national economy. To fulfill the identified gaps, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

↳ **RQ1.** Does the usage of SNS and contacts influence perceived employability?

Based on the research question, the following research objectives were framed:

(1) To measure the impact of SNS on the perceived employability of management students.

(2) To measure the impact of contacts on the perceived employability of management students.

Theoretical Framework

Initially, social capital was defined as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrues to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). Adler and Kwon (2002) explained social capital is the goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor's social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it makes available to the actor. With diverse viewpoints on the definition of social capital, Putman (1995) clarified that social capital is a multi-dimensional construct. Carrying this idea further, Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) described social capital as

"the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit" (p. 243). They defined three dimensions of social capital, which are as follows: structural, relational, and cognitive.

As per the social capital theory, perceived employability is conceived in terms of social networks, trust, and norms people follow during a job search (Ngoma & Dithan Ntale, 2016). The concept of social capital gained importance since Coleman (1988) brought the idea of social capital based on family relations, which can be trusted and used for developing employability through academic achievements. According to Catts (2009), social capital plays a crucial role in shaping young people's identity because of the presence of influential people who help them transition smoothly to the workplace and enhance their employability. Coleman (1988) called social capital to be a relation-specific and non-transferable (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) attribute. Social networks are identified as a key source of increased productivity in the workplace (Tajpour & Hosseini, 2021).

Taking insights from Davies and Esseveld's (1989) technology acceptance model (TAM), Venkatesh et al. (2003) proposed the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) model. This study adapted the performance expectancy construct in the proposed model based on the UTAUT model, which explains the perceived usefulness of IT in enhancing one's performance at the workplace. Perceived usefulness is explained as a measure of an individual's subjective assessment of the utility offered by the new IT in a specific task-related context (Gefen & Straub, 2000). Performance expectancy was used to measure the role of SNS. In the context of this study, performance expectancy is considered as job seekers' perception of the value attached to SNS in enhancing their chances of recruitment.

Review of Literature

Perceived Employability

With a holistic approach to the concept of employability, McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) defined employability as being derived from and affected by individual characteristics and circumstances and broader, external (social, institutional, and economic) factors that influence a person's ability to get a job. Winterton and Turner (2019) referred to employability as the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) of an individual to contribute to society and the national economy. Álvarez-González et al. (2017) explained perceived employability as the viewpoint of an individual regarding their ability to obtain and maintain a job and search for a new one if required. One of the most common definitions of perceived employability was proposed by Knight and Yorke (2002), which is defined as a set of skills, knowledge, and personal attributes that make a person more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation. Gamboa et al. (2009) viewed employability as an individual's capacity to deal with a turbulent labor market environment. Analogous to this, Forrier et al. (2009) outlined the predictors of perceived employability as a set of personal characteristics of an individual that makes him/her capable of moving and advancing in the labor market. Earlier studies have explained perceived employability in terms of the self-perception of undergraduate students because their perception leads to future actions (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). From an employer's viewpoint, perceived employability is defined as a student's ability to demonstrate a range of personal, performative, and organizational skills rather than the possession of traditional academic, theoretical knowledge, and skills (Álvarez-González et al., 2017).

Social Networking Sites

SNSs provide a platform for connecting with old friends and colleagues, making new connections, and sharing ideas. They also act as a source of opportunity for job seekers to build their professional profiles and search for a desired job (Ecleo & Galido, 2017). Initially, SNS was considered a source of enjoyment, but with time, its usage

by employers and job seekers has dramatically changed this perspective (Gamboa et al., 2009). Mogaji (2019) emphasized the importance of using SNS, such as LinkedIn, to promote students toward career progression.

Social Networking Sites and Perceived Employability

Students are advised to use SNS to strengthen their employability properly (Baruffaldi et al., 2017). According to Fitzgerald (2004), connections developed through SNS improve the chances of attaining the desired job. Employers perceive the capacity of students to excel in social networking as an essential skill to attain employment (Harris, 2011). Because employers prefer to use SNS for job hunts, job seekers tend to engage in social media to find job opportunities (CareerArc, 2021). In past literature, IT use and adaptation was measured in terms of performance expectancy. One of the instigating factors of the use of SNS for job search is the acceptance of SNS by employers for job posting, receiving applications, and screening prospective candidates through their social media accounts (Ecleo & Galido, 2017). Career counselors and placement cells in higher education institutes suggest that students should create their social media accounts to enhance their online presence (Arun Kumar & Shekhar, 2017; Dash & Chakraborty, 2021).

Regarding the "UTAUT" model, performance expectancy is explained as the degree to which an individual believes that using the system will help him or her to attain gains in job performance (Venkatesh et al., 2003). According to Plummer et al. (2011), performance expectancy strongly influences the intention to apply for a job through SNS. In this study, the SNS variable was measured in terms of performance expectancy. Grounding on the above arguments, this study intends to propose the following hypothesis:

- **H01 :** SNS are not positively related to the perceived employability of management students.
- **Ha1 :** SNS are positively related to the perceived employability of management students.

Contacts

Contacts indicate an individual's perception regarding his/her personal and social connections with people who can help them in his/her job search and career advancement (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Thriveni Kumari, 2022). Lent et al. (2000) pinpointed the impact of contacts on making career-related decisions. McNally and Irving (2010) suggested collaboration as a key to building contacts, which can help develop perceived employability. The organization tends to facilitate and help its employees to make contacts to reap the benefits of networking (Nesheim et al., 2017).

Contacts and Perceived Employability

People lacking the ability to develop professional connections to gain employment is a problem area (English et al., 2021). Contacts influence perceived employability by enhancing the self-confidence of individuals by providing a facilitating social environment (Sabatini, 2009). Álvarez-González et al. (2017) categorized contacts as personal factors of individuals responsible for enhancing their employability. University faculty helps develop students' employability by providing employment assistance in the form of shared connections with prospective employers (Caballero et al., 2015; Regy & Malini, 2019). Fryczyńska and Ciecierski (2020) emphasized the importance of networking competency to maintain contacts to enhance the employability of employees. Contacts with employees are also beneficial for organizations because the contacts help the employee perform their jobs better (Mitrega et al., 2017). Álvarez-González et al. (2017) confirmed that contacts of an individual exhibit direct and indirect influence through self-confidence on the perceived employability of students. Grounding on the above arguments, this study intends to propose the following hypothesis:

- **H02 :** Contacts are not positively related to the perceived employability of management students.
- **Ha2 :** Contacts are positively related to the perceived employability of management students.

Research Methodology

Employing descriptive research design, the researcher explained the perceived employability concept based on SNS and contacts. Because self-perception leads to future actions, capturing students' responses about their employability is most appropriate and valid (Jackson & Wilton, 2017). Sample selection was based on a mix of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Adapted scales were used in this study, and pre-testing of the instrument was conducted using content validity from five experts in this field. A structured questionnaire was used to collect responses on a 7-point Likert scale from 500 management students of Chandigarh University in Gharuan, Punjab. The responses were collected through an online survey method over 6 months, starting from July – December 2021. A total of 430 responses were received, and after removing outliers and non-usable questionnaires, finally 339 responses were used for data analysis. The PLS-SEM method was used to analyze data with the help of SmartPLS software (third version).

Measures Used in This Study

- ***SNS.*** They were measured through six items of performance expectancy construct adapted from Venkatesh et al. (2003) and Buettner (2016). For example, "I am optimistic that the use of SNSs in my job search would help me find a job that I would like to accept."
- ***Contacts.*** They were measured by five items adapted from the studies of Álvarez-González et al. (2017) and McQuaid and Lindsay (2005). For example, "I have personal contacts that can help me find work."
- ***Perceived Employability.*** It was measured through five items from Wittekind et al. (2010) and Griffeth et al. (2005). For example, "I am capable of finding work easily if I start looking."

Analysis and Results

Preliminary Assessments

A descriptive analysis representing the demographics of respondents is depicted in Table 1. It depicts the gender and age details of the respondents. It also presents the percentage of respondents using SNS for job search, and the semester they were studying in.

Table 1. ***Descriptive Analysis***

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender of Respondents		
Male	198	58
Female	141	42
Age of Respondents		
Less than 20 years	16	5
20–25 years	258	76
More than 25 years	65	19

Semester of Post-Graduation Course		
III Semester	196	58
IV Semester	143	42
Do you Use Social Networking Sites (SNS) for Job Search?		
Yes	275	81
No	64	19
Which of the Following Social Networking Site do you use for Job Search?		
LinkedIn	216	64
Facebook	42	13
Twitter	81	33

Measurement Model Assessments

Content validity was established through a review of five experts and two students from the academic disciplines. The next step of measurement assessment is to conduct an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), but the researcher used well-established scales from the literature; thus, conducting EFA is not recommended (Hulland et al., 2018). Henson and Roberts (2006) argued that following an EFA with a CFA on the same data set is not informative and can be potentially misleading.

The next step in measurement model assessment is to perform reliability analysis followed by convergent

Table 2. ***Indicator Reliability Analysis***

Construct	Factor Loadings
Social Networking Sites	
SNS1	0.589
SNS2	0.832
SNS3	0.813
SNS4	0.837
SNS5	0.852
SNS6	0.797
Contacts	
CN1	0.888
CN2	0.891
CN3	0.895
CN4	0.884
CN5	0.897
Perceived Employability	
PM1	0.807
PM2	0.91
PM3	0.907
PM4	0.918
PM5	0.863

validity. As demonstrated in Table 2, the indicator's reliability is established by using factor loadings of all the indicators, which are reported to be pretty above the minimum permissible limit of 0.708 (Hair et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability (CR) were used to demonstrate internal consistency. As depicted in Table 3, these values for all the constructs are much above the minimum permissible limit of 0.7–0.9 for Cronbach's alpha (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994); 0.7 for rho_A (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015); and 0.7–0.9 for CR (Diamantopoulos et al., 2012). Average variance extracted (AVE) values were computed to establish the convergent validity of all the constructs. As demonstrated in Table 3, AVE values are fairly above the least permissible limit of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3. ***Internal Consistency Analysis***

Construct	CR	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	AVE
Social networking sites	0.89	0.777	0.882	0.627
Contacts	0.851	0.735	0.836	0.734
Perceived employability	0.846	0.828	0.831	0.778

After establishing internal reliability, consistency analysis, and convergent validity, the next step is to demonstrate the discriminant validity of the measurement model. For this purpose, we used three criteria, such as the examination of indicator cross-loadings, Fornell and Lacker's criteria (1981), and the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Voorhees et al., 2016). Cross-loadings refer to the comparative assessment of an indicator's factor loading with its construct and other constructs in the model. As demonstrated in Table 4, indicators of each construct are found to load highest on its corresponding construct compared to other constructs.

As per Fornell and Lacker's criteria (1981), indicators of each construct should share maximum variance with

Table 4. ***Discriminant Validity – Indicator Cross-Loadings***

	SNS	*CM*	*PM*
SNS1	0.589	0.441	0.273
SNS2	0.832	0.39	0.428
SNS3	0.813	0.383	0.448
SNS4	0.837	0.444	0.486
SNS5	0.852	0.369	0.572
SNS6	0.797	0.432	0.646
CN1	0.384	0.85	0.385
CN2	0.382	0.919	0.37
CN3	0.415	0.902	0.412
CN4	0.411	0.903	0.36
CN5	0.356	0.896	0.392
PM1	0.412	0.299	0.809
PM2	0.348	0.272	0.909
PM3	0.341	0.319	0.906
PM4	0.364	0.323	0.916
PM5	0.454	0.39	0.865

Table 5. ***Discriminant Validity – Fornell and Larcker's Criteria***

	SNS	*CM*	*PM*
SNS	0.917		
CN	0.577	0.916	
PM	0.627	0.458	0.891

Table 6. ***Discriminant Validation – HTMT Ratio***

	SNS	*CO*	*PE*
SNS			
CO	0.621		
PE	0.676	0.482	

the indicators of that respective construct in comparison to the indicators of other constructs. To represent the same, the AVE value of the respective construct should be more than the squared correlation value of that construct with other constructs. As demonstrated in Table 5, the AVE value of each construct plotted on the diagonal exceeds the squared correlation of that construct concerning other constructs.

HTMT ratio is described as "the mean value of the item correlations across constructs relative to the (geometric) mean of the average correlations for items measuring the same construct" (Hair et al., 2019, p. 9). As demonstrated in Table 6, the value of the HTMT ratio of each construct is less than the maximum permissible value of 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015), thereby establishing discriminant validation of the measurement model.

Structural Model Assessments

We analyzed the structural model through hypothesis testing, model fit indices, and assessment of the *r*-square. As demonstrated in Table 7, the hypothesis testing results show that the path relationship between SNS and perceived employability is found to be positive and significant with a β value of 0.186 ($p > 0.05$), thereby accepting Ha1. The relationship between contacts and employability is also found to be positive and significant with a β value of 0.139 ($p > 0.05$), thereby accepting Ha2.

The coefficient of determination (r^2) describes the variance caused by the combination of exogenous constructs on the endogenous construct (Hair et al., 2019). As demonstrated in Table 8, the value of *r*-square is 0.33, which explains a variance of 33% in perceived employability caused due to SNS and contacts. As per Hair et al. (2019), the *r*-square values of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 indicate weak, moderate, and good predicting power.

Table 7. ***Hypothesis Testing Results***

Path Relationships	**β**	***T* - Statistics**	***p*-value**	**Inference**
H1				
Social networking sites → Perceived employability	0.186	5.636	0.002**	Supported
H2				
Contacts → Perceived employability	0.139	2	0.046**	Supported

Note. **$p > 0.05$.

Table 8. *r-Squared Value*

Dependent Construct	*r*-Square	*r*-Square Adjusted
Perceived employability	0.325	0.33

Table 9. *GoF (SRMR Criteria)*

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.078	0.078

In social science, an *r*-square value greater than 0.20 is considered to have high explanatory power (Agnihotri et al., 2020).

As per Henseler et al. (2015), the goodness of fit (GOF) index determines the fitness of the understudy model. PLS-SEM provides standard root mean squared residual (SRMR) as a GOF index. As demonstrated in Table 9, the resulting SRMR value is 0.078, which is below the maximum permissible limit of 0.8 (Henseler et al., 2016).

Discussion

According to this study's findings, most respondents are found to use SNS for job searches. LinkedIn is remarked as the most helpful and used platform of SNS for job search. These findings align with the studies of McCorkle and McCorkle (2012) and Peterson and Dover (2014). The results suggest a significant contribution of SNS in enhancing the perceived employability of students, which corroborates with earlier studies (CareerArc, 2021). A positive and significant association is asserted to exist between SNS and perceived employability, which corroborates with earlier studies (Plummer et al., 2011; Ramaprasad et al., 2017).

Similarly, contacts are found to be a positive and significant predictor of perceived employability. These findings are analogous to the findings of Caballero et al. (2015) and Álvarez-González et al. (2017). Furthermore, the measurement model assessment results show that all the indicators fully explain their respective constructs. This indicates the reliability and validation of the research instrument in the Indian context. The structural model assessments reveal that SNS and contacts explain a variance of 33% in perceived employability. This provides a theoretical base and support to the underlying theories, such as social capital theory and UTAUT. Moreover, these findings are in line with the studies of Buettner (2016), Mogaji (2019), Pandow and Salem (2020), and Plummer et al. (2011).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study serves both theoretical and practical implications. With the widespread adoption of technology in the current era, this study explores the relationship between SNS and contacts with perceived employability.

The theoretical contribution of this study encompasses social capital theory and the "UTAUT." The results of this study substantiate both theories and provide empirical evidence to support the theories. The study proposes validated instruments at the confirmatory level, which can be used for future studies in the Indian context. The practical implications of this study serve students, higher educationalists, policymakers, and career counselors. This study suggests that students build their social capital through SNS or personal networks. This would increase their accessibility to important information. Higher educationalists are advised to amend their curriculum to incorporate such activities that enhance the social capital of students by exposing them to opportunities for building social networks. Similarly, career counselors are advised to emphasize building relations while working

on students' career management and education aspects. Policymakers are suggested to devise policies that provide a platform for students to explore and connect with influential people from the corporate world.

Conclusion

Intending to identify the role of SNS and contacts in enhancing the perceived employability of students, this study reveals the urgency of creating and maintaining social relations in real and virtual platforms. In this modern age, adapting technology is unavoidable and a key to unlocking numerous opportunities in the world of work. Not only the usage of SNS is of high importance, but it is also marked as a must-have skill in the current era. Despite the presence of several stakeholders in the concept of employability, the onus of developing employability largely lies with the students only. Students should be counseled to create and maintain their professional accounts so that they become visible to prospective employers. It allows them to participate in discussions and collaborate with influential professional people in the corporate world. Moreover, they can use SNS to acquire information regarding relevant live projects, internships, and final job placement opportunities.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

The first and foremost limitation is using a convenience sampling technique for selecting the sample for this study. Secondly, because the study was restricted to Chandigarh, it cannot be generalized to other parts of the country. To confirm the generalizability of the study, future studies can be carried out at different locations in the country. Perceived employability is a multi-dimensional construct, and its relationship has been tested for SNS and contacts only, which provides a narrow perspective on the concept of employability. Future research should focus on including other important variables affecting perceived employability. Moreover, the current study is cross-sectional, and future studies can be conducted using a longitudinal research design.

Authors' Contribution

All authors have made their respective substantial contributions. Dr. Shikha Agnihotri conceived the idea of this paper based on the literature review of relevant papers from reputed journals. Dr. Shivani Malhan collected and formatted the data as per requirement. Dr. Shikha Agnihotri analyzed the data in SmartPLS software. Dr. Anurag Bhadur Singh framed the structure of the paper and revised it critically for refinement in the final submission.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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Appendix

Constructs		Items	Adapted from
Performance Expectancy	*SNS1*	I am optimistic that the use of SNS in my job search would help me find a job that I would like to accept.	Buettner (2016) ; Venkatesh et al. (2003)
	SNS2	Using SNS increases my chances of achieving what is important to me.	
	SNS3	Using SNS would allow me to accomplish tasks more quickly.	
	SNS4	Using SNS would enhance my effectiveness and performance.	
	SNS5	Using SNS will improve my performance.	
	SNS6	Using SNS enables me to follow the trend in job search globally.	
Contacts	*CO1*	Students have personal contacts that can help them find work.	Álvarez-González et al. (2017) ;
	CO2	Students can use their personal network to develop their career.	McQuaid and
	CO3	Students can use their social network to identify job opportunities.	Lindsay (2005)
Perceived Employability	*PE1*	I am sure that I will find work easily if I start looking.	Griffeth et al. (2005) ;
	PE2	I can think of a number of organizations that would probably offer me a job if I was looking.	Wittekind et al. (2010)
	PE3	I am aware of graduate employability and the skills recruiters expect.	
	PE4	I am unaware of the employment opportunities open to me.	
	PE5	I have decided on what kind of graduate job would suit me.	

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