African Scientific Journal
ISSN : 2658-9311
Vol : 03, Num 37 Aout 2026

# THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE INFORMAL LEARNING OF SOFT SKILLS AMONG YOUNG GRADUATES.

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**Pour citer cet article :** **RAJI .Z, JUIHER .E M & OUADDI .H (2026) « THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE INFORMAL LEARNING OF SOFT SKILLS AMONG YOUNG GRADUATES», African Scientific Journal « Volume 03, Num 37 » pp: 0296 - 0313.**

**DOI : 10.5281/zenodo.21397542**

**Abstract**

This study examines the role of social media in the informal learning of soft skills among young graduates. In a context where employability increasingly depends on communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, and leadership, social media platforms have become important spaces for accessing professional content, career advice, peer experiences, and learning resources outside formal education. Based on a positivist perspective and a hypothetico-deductive approach, the study uses a quantitative survey to test the effects of three dimensions of social media as an informal learning environment: exposure to educational content, accessibility of learning resources, and online interaction. Data were analyzed using SmartPLS. The results confirm the reliability and validity of the measurement model and show that the three dimensions positively influence informal soft skills learning among young graduates. Exposure to educational content has the strongest effect, followed by accessibility of learning resources and online interaction. The study contributes to the literature by linking social media-based informal learning with soft skills development and highlights the practical value of digital platforms for graduate employability.

***Keywords***: social media; informal learning; soft skills; young graduates; employability; SmartPLS.

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ISSN : 2658-9311
Vol : 03, Num 36 Juin 2026

## Introduction

In the current digital era, social media has become an important space for communication, information sharing, networking, and learning. Platforms such as LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook are increasingly used by young graduates not only for entertainment or social interaction, but also for accessing professional advice, career guidance, educational content, and employability-related knowledge. This transformation reflects a broader shift in learning practices, where knowledge acquisition is no longer limited to formal educational institutions but increasingly occurs through informal, flexible, and self-directed digital experiences. Previous research has shown that social media can blur the boundaries between formal and informal learning by supporting interaction, participation, collaboration, and access to diverse learning resources (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). At the same time, the transition from higher education to the labor market has increased the importance of soft skills among young graduates. Employers increasingly expect graduates to demonstrate not only technical knowledge but also communication, teamwork, adaptability, problem-solving, leadership, and professional behavior. These skills are considered essential for employability and workplace success, especially in a context marked by digitalization, organizational change, and growing competition in the labor market (Robles, 2012; Andrews & Higson, 2008; Succi & Canovi, 2020). However, higher education does not always provide sufficient opportunities for young graduates to develop these skills in practical and professional contexts.

Despite the growing importance of both social media and soft skills, limited research has directly examined how social media contributes to the informal learning of soft skills among young graduates. Existing studies often focus either on social media as a tool for formal education or on soft skills as employability-related competencies, while the connection between these two areas remains insufficiently explored. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of social media as an informal learning environment in developing soft skills among young graduates. More specifically, it investigates the effects of exposure to educational content, accessibility of learning resources, and online interaction on informal soft skills learning.

This article is organized as follows. The first section reviews the literature on social media as an informal learning environment and soft skills development among young graduates. The second section presents the research methodology, including the epistemological positioning, research design, variables, and data collection process. The third section reports the empirical findings obtained through SmartPLS. Finally, the discussion and conclusion highlight the theoretical contributions, practical implications, limitations, and future research directions.

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ISSN : 2658-9311
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## Literature review

The literature on social media, informal learning, and soft skills highlights the growing role of digital platforms in supporting learning beyond formal education. For young graduates, social media offers access to professional content, career advice, peer interaction, and models of workplace behavior that may contribute to the development of key soft skills such as communication, adaptability, teamwork, and problem-solving. At the same time, existing studies often examine social media learning and soft skills development separately, which justifies the need to review both areas in order to understand how social media may function as an informal learning environment for young graduates.

### 1. Social Media as an Informal Learning Environment

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has profoundly transformed the ways individuals access, produce, and circulate knowledge. Social media platforms, initially designed for communication and networking, have progressively become learning environments where users engage with educational content, professional communities, peer experiences, and expert knowledge. In this context, learning is no longer limited to formal institutions but increasingly occurs through everyday digital practices, particularly among young graduates who use platforms such as LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and X/Twitter to search for career advice, observe professional behavior, follow experts, and participate in online discussions. This shift reflects a broader transformation in educational practices, where learning becomes more distributed, participatory, and learner-driven (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). A central contribution of the literature on social media and learning is the idea that digital platforms blur the boundaries between formal and informal learning. Greenhow and Lewin (2016) argue that social media can connect institutional learning with informal knowledge acquisition by supporting participation, interaction, collaboration, and content sharing. Their analysis moves beyond a purely technological understanding of social media and emphasizes its socio-educational dimension. In the same perspective, Selwyn (2012) notes that social media should not be understood merely as a set of digital tools, but as a social space where identities, relationships, and knowledge practices are negotiated. This interpretation is also consistent with Jenkins' (2006) concept of participatory culture, according to which digital users are not only consumers of content but may also become participants, contributors, and co-producers of knowledge.

Informal learning is generally defined as learning that occurs outside formal curricula, often through experience, observation, interaction, and problem-solving. Marsick and Watkins

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(2001) describe informal and incidental learning as embedded in daily activities and shaped by the learner's environment, needs, and reflection. Similarly, Livingstone (2001) emphasizes that informal learning is often self-directed and may occur without formal certification or institutional recognition. Applied to social media, these perspectives suggest that young graduates may acquire professional knowledge and soft skills without enrolling in structured training programs. For instance, they may learn communication techniques, job interview strategies, networking practices, leadership attitudes, or workplace norms by following career coaches, human resources professionals, influencers, alumni, and peer communities. The role of observation is particularly important in explaining how social media supports informal learning. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory argues that individuals learn through observing models, retaining information, reproducing behaviors, and evaluating consequences. In digital environments, social media users are constantly exposed to professional models, communication styles, success narratives, and behavioral scripts. Deaton (2015) extends social learning theory to the age of social media and argues that digital platforms can support attention, retention, motivation, and knowledge acquisition when users interact with meaningful content and credible models. In this sense, a young graduate who observes how professionals present themselves on LinkedIn, manage conflict in workplace-related discussions, or communicate expertise through short videos may gradually internalize certain professional behaviors.

Social media-based learning can also be interpreted through the perspective of self-directed learning. Knowles (1975) defines self-directed learning as a process in which individuals take initiative in diagnosing their learning needs, identifying resources, choosing strategies, and evaluating outcomes. This theory is particularly relevant for young graduates, as the transition from university to employment often requires them to identify skills gaps and actively seek resources beyond formal education. Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012) argue that personal learning environments supported by social media can connect formal and informal learning by helping learners organize resources, interact with others, and regulate their own learning process. Similarly, Zimmerman (2002) emphasizes that self-regulated learners actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, which suggests that social media becomes educationally meaningful only when users move beyond passive consumption toward intentional learning practices. Another relevant theoretical lens is connectivism, which views learning as a process of forming and navigating networks. Siemens (2005) argues that in digital environments, learning depends not only on what individuals know but also on their ability to connect with relevant sources, communities, and information flows. Although connectivism has been debated as a learning theory, it remains useful for understanding social media learning because knowledge on digital

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platforms is fragmented, dynamic, and networked. From this perspective, young graduates learn not only from individual content but also from the connections they establish with communities, professionals, algorithms, and digital networks. This is especially visible on platforms such as LinkedIn, where employability knowledge circulates through posts, comments, recommendations, groups, and professional interactions.

Empirical research also supports the idea that social media can facilitate learning, engagement, and professional development. Tess (2013), in a review of social media use in higher education, shows that digital platforms can encourage participation and interaction, although their educational effectiveness depends on the pedagogical context and the quality of use. Manca and Ranieri (2016) similarly argue that social media offers opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing, but its adoption in education remains uneven due to institutional, cultural, and pedagogical barriers. More recent work by Kumar (2019) highlights the role of social media in lifelong informal learning, showing that open online environments allow learners to access resources, follow experts, and participate in professional communities. These studies converge on the idea that social media can support learning, but they also caution against assuming that access automatically leads to deep or effective learning. The educational value of social media therefore remains debated. On the one hand, social media provides flexibility, accessibility, multimodal resources, peer interaction, and opportunities for professional networking. On the other hand, it may also encourage fragmented attention, superficial engagement, misinformation, algorithmic bias, and dependence on unverified sources. Selwyn (2016) warns against overly optimistic interpretations of digital learning and argues that educational technologies must be analyzed critically in relation to power, inequality, commercial interests, and user practices. This critical perspective is important because informal learning through social media is not automatically structured, evaluated, or guided by pedagogical standards. Consequently, young graduates may be exposed to valuable professional knowledge, but they may also consume motivational, simplified, or misleading content that does not necessarily lead to real competence development.

In the specific case of young graduates, social media can be understood as a complementary informal learning environment. It offers access to career advice, professional narratives, peer experiences, employability tips, and soft skills content that may not be sufficiently addressed in formal university programs. However, the effectiveness of this learning depends on several conditions, including the credibility of content creators, the learner's motivation, the ability to evaluate information critically, and the possibility of transferring digital learning into real professional situations. This suggests that research should move beyond the general question

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of whether young graduates use social media and examine how they use it, what types of content they engage with, and whether such engagement contributes to the actual development of soft skills.

## 2. Skills Development among Young Graduates

Soft skills have become a central issue in employability research, higher education policy, and labor market studies. They refer to non-technical, transversal competencies related to communication, teamwork, leadership, adaptability, emotional intelligence, problem-solving, creativity, time management, responsibility, and professional behavior. Unlike hard skills, which are often discipline-specific and easier to measure, soft skills are relational, behavioral, and context-dependent. Robles (2012) identifies communication, courtesy, flexibility, integrity, professionalism, responsibility, teamwork, and work ethic among the most valued soft skills in the workplace. This classification remains influential because it reflects employers' expectations and highlights that professional success depends not only on technical knowledge but also on interpersonal and behavioral competence. The increasing importance of soft skills is closely related to transformations in contemporary labor markets. Technological change, digitalization, globalization, automation, and organizational complexity have created a strong demand for workers who can collaborate, adapt, communicate, and solve problems in uncertain environments. Heckman and Kautz (2012) argue that non-cognitive skills significantly influence educational achievement, employment, wages, and life outcomes. Their work challenges the traditional dominance of cognitive and technical skills by showing that personality-related and socio-emotional skills have measurable economic and social value. Deming (2017) further demonstrates that social skills have become increasingly important in the labor market, particularly because many jobs require coordination, interaction, and flexible problem-solving rather than isolated technical execution.

For young graduates, the development of soft skills is especially important because the transition from university to work often reveals a gap between academic preparation and professional expectations. Andrews and Higson (2008) show that employers across Europe value not only business and technical knowledge but also communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and interpersonal abilities. Their findings suggest that employability is multidimensional and cannot be reduced to academic credentials. Similarly, Yorke (2006) conceptualizes employability as a combination of achievements, understandings, and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and succeed in their careers. This approach positions soft skills as an essential bridge between academic learning and

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workplace performance. Several studies confirm that employers often perceive soft skills as insufficiently developed among graduates. Succi and Canovi (2020), comparing students' and employers' perceptions, found that soft skills have gained increasing importance in recent years and that employers tend to rate them as more important than students or graduates do. This perception gap is significant because it indicates that young graduates may underestimate the importance of soft skills or may not clearly understand how these competencies are evaluated in recruitment and workplace contexts. Chamorro-Premuzic, Arteche, Bremner, Greven, and Furnham (2010) also highlight the role of individual differences and personality-related variables in academic and professional outcomes, reinforcing the idea that employability depends on a broader set of qualities than technical expertise alone.

Higher education institutions have attempted to address this challenge by integrating employability skills into curricula, internships, project-based learning, career services, and competency-based education. However, the literature suggests that formal education alone may not be sufficient to develop soft skills. Clarke (2018) argues that graduate employability should be understood as a broader process involving human capital, social capital, individual attributes, career identity, and labor market factors. This perspective is useful because it shows that soft skills are not developed only through classroom instruction but also through social interaction, identity construction, professional exposure, and practical experience. Similarly, Jackson (2015) emphasizes the importance of work-integrated learning for developing employability capabilities, suggesting that students need authentic contexts in which to practice and reflect on professional behavior. The difficulty of soft skills development is also linked to the issue of transfer. Laker and Powell (2011) argue that soft skills training is often more difficult to transfer than hard skills training because it involves behavioral change, contextual adaptation, and interpersonal judgment. For example, learning about communication in theory does not automatically make a graduate an effective communicator in a job interview, team meeting, or conflict situation. This means that soft skills require repeated practice, feedback, observation, and reflection. In this regard, informal learning environments can play an important role by exposing young graduates to practical examples, professional models, and peer feedback outside formal education.

Social media may contribute to this process by offering continuous exposure to professional behaviors and employability-related content. LinkedIn, for instance, allows young graduates to observe how professionals build personal brands, communicate achievements, engage with recruiters, and participate in professional communities. YouTube and TikTok provide accessible videos on public speaking, job interviews, productivity, emotional intelligence,

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workplace communication, leadership, and confidence-building. Instagram and Facebook groups may facilitate peer support, motivation, and career-related discussions. These platforms can therefore support soft skills development by combining observation, self-directed learning, peer interaction, and professional modeling. Nevertheless, the relationship between social media and soft skills development remains insufficiently explored. Existing research on social media and education has largely focused on student engagement, digital literacy, academic performance, online collaboration, or formal learning contexts (Tess, 2013; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). At the same time, the literature on soft skills and employability has generally focused on employer expectations, curriculum design, graduate outcomes, and workplace readiness (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Robles, 2012; Succi & Canovi, 2020). Few studies bring these two streams together by examining how young graduates use social media informally to acquire, understand, and practice soft skills. This gap is important because young graduates increasingly construct their professional identity and employability strategies through digital platforms.

A further research gap concerns the depth and quality of soft skills learning through social media. Exposure to content about leadership, emotional intelligence, communication, or adaptability does not necessarily result in genuine behavioral competence. Soft skills development requires reflection, practice, contextual application, and feedback. Social media may provide models and motivation, but it may also encourage passive consumption, imitation without understanding, or dependence on simplified advice. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between perceived learning and actual skill development. This distinction is particularly relevant for young graduates, who may believe they are improving their employability through social media while still lacking opportunities to test and refine these skills in real professional contexts. Based on the reviewed literature, social media can be considered a complementary informal learning environment that may support soft skills development among young graduates. Its contribution lies in accessibility, flexibility, professional modeling, peer interaction, and self-directed learning. However, its effectiveness depends on the quality of content, the credibility of sources, the learner's motivation, critical digital literacy, and the transfer of online learning into offline professional behavior. This study therefore addresses an important research gap by examining the role of social media in the informal learning of soft skills among young graduates, at the intersection of digital learning, employability, and professional development.

Although previous research has examined the educational potential of social media and the importance of soft skills for graduate employability, limited attention has been given to the way social media functions as an informal learning environment for young graduates. Most studies

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focus either on social media as a support tool for formal education or on soft skills as employability-related competencies, while the link between social media-based informal learning and soft skills development remains insufficiently explored. This gap is important because young graduates increasingly use social media to access educational content, interact with professional communities, and learn outside institutional training. Therefore, this study examines the effect of three dimensions of social media-based informal learning on the informal learning of soft skills among young graduates.

*H1: Exposure to educational content on social media has a positive effect on informal soft skills learning among young graduates.*

*H2: Accessibility of learning resources on social media has a positive effect on informal soft skills learning among young graduates.*

*H3: Online interaction on social media has a positive effect on informal soft skills learning among young graduates.*

In this study, the independent variable is social media as an informal learning environment, measured through three dimensions: exposure to educational content, accessibility of learning resources, and online interaction. The dependent variable is informal soft skills learning among young graduates.

## 3. Methodology

The choice of a positivist epistemological position is justified by the objective of this study, which seeks to examine measurable relationships between predefined variables. Since the research aims to test the effect of social media dimensions on informal soft skills learning, a hypothetico-deductive reasoning approach was adopted. This approach allows hypotheses to be developed from the literature and then empirically tested using quantitative data. Therefore, a survey-based quantitative design was considered appropriate for assessing the proposed conceptual model through SmartPLS.

This study adopts a positivist epistemological position, as it aims to objectively examine the relationship between social media-based informal learning and the development of soft skills among young graduates. A hypothetico-deductive approach is used because the research is based on hypotheses developed from the literature and tested through empirical data. The study follows a quantitative research design using a survey questionnaire as the main data collection instrument. The target population consists of young graduates who use social media platforms for educational, professional, or career-related purposes. The collected data will be analyzed using SmartPLS, which is appropriate for testing relationships between latent variables and

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assessing the proposed conceptual model. This method allows the evaluation of both the measurement model and the structural model, including the effects of exposure to educational content, accessibility of learning resources, and online interaction on informal soft skills learning.

The questionnaire is structured around one independent variable and one dependent variable. The independent variable is social media as an informal learning environment, measured through three dimensions: exposure to educational content, accessibility of learning resources, and online interaction. The dependent variable is informal soft skills learning among young graduates. All items are measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The codification of the variables and items is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Summary of Variable Codification

| **Variable** | **Dimension** | **Code** | **Items** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Social media as an informal learning environment | Exposure to educational content | EEC | EEC1: I frequently encounter educational content related to soft skills on social media. EEC2: I follow pages, accounts, or influencers that provide advice about communication, leadership, teamwork, or employability. EEC3: Social media exposes me to practical examples of soft skills used in professional contexts. EEC4: The content I see on social media helps me better understand the soft skills required in the workplace. |
| Social media as an informal learning environment | Accessibility of learning resources | ALR | ALR1: Social media makes soft skills learning resources easily accessible to me. ALR2: I can access soft skills-related content on social media whenever I need it. ALR3: Social media allows me to learn soft skills without enrolling in formal training programs. ALR4: The availability of free content on social media encourages me to learn soft skills informally. |
| Social media as an informal | Online interaction | OI | OI1: I interact with posts, videos, or discussions related to soft skills on social media. OI2: Comments and discussions on social media help me better |

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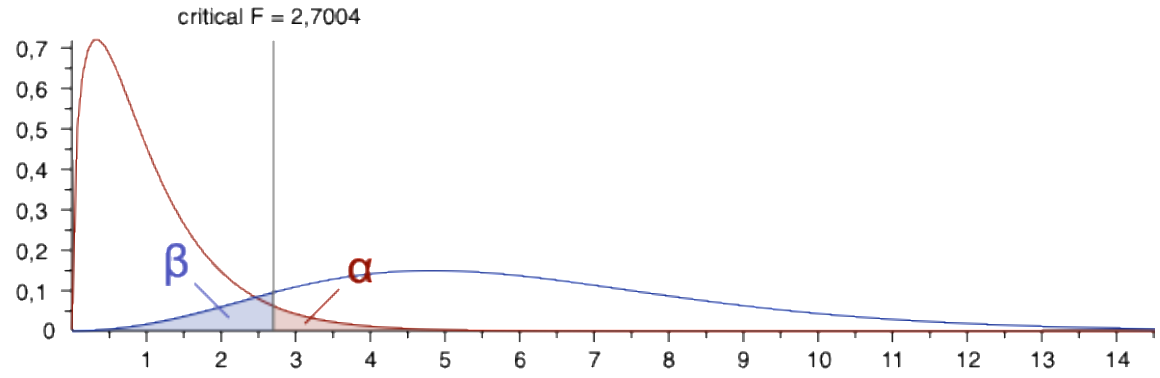
| Variable | Dimension | Code | Items |
|---|---|---|---|
| learning environment | | | understand soft skills. OI3: I learn from the experiences shared by other users on social media. OI4: Online communities or professional groups help me improve my understanding of soft skills. |
| Informal soft skills learning among young graduates | , | ISSL | ISSL1: Social media helps me improve my communication skills. ISSL2: Social media helps me develop my teamwork skills. ISSL3: Social media helps me improve my problem-solving skills. ISSL4: Social media helps me become more adaptable in professional situations. ISSL5: Social media helps me develop leadership-related skills. ISSL6: Social media contributes to my overall informal learning of soft skills. |

Source : Authors

Figure 1. G*Power calculation for minimum sample size




**Source:** Author's calculation using G*Power.

To determine the minimum required sample size, this study used G*Power software. An a priori power analysis was conducted using the F-test family for linear multiple regression with a fixed model and $R^2$ increase. The input parameters were set as follows: a medium effect size of $f^2 = 0.15$, a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, statistical power of 0.90, and three tested predictors corresponding to the three dimensions of social media as an informal learning environment: exposure to educational content, accessibility of learning resources, and online interaction. The results indicated that the minimum required sample size was 99 respondents, with an actual

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power of 0.901. Therefore, a sample of at least 99 young graduates is considered sufficient to test the proposed model.

In conclusion, this part clarified the methodological foundations of the study by presenting the research posture, the quantitative design, the data collection instrument, and the codification of the main variables. The study is based on a positivist perspective and a hypothetico-deductive approach, using a survey questionnaire to test the proposed relationships between the three dimensions of social media as an informal learning environment and informal soft skills learning among young graduates. After defining the variables and their measurement items, the next section will present the data analysis procedure and the statistical techniques used to assess the reliability, validity, and structural relationships of the proposed model.

## 4. Result

The results section begins with the assessment of the reliability of the measurement scales using Cronbach's alpha. This step is necessary to verify the internal consistency of the items used to measure each construct, namely exposure to educational content, accessibility of learning resources, online interaction, and informal soft skills learning. After confirming the reliability of the constructs, the analysis proceeds to the evaluation of the structural model through the coefficient of determination, $R^2$. This indicator allows us to assess the explanatory power of the model by showing the extent to which the three dimensions of social media as an informal learning environment explain informal soft skills learning among young graduates.

**Table 2. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity**

| Construct | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability (rho_a) | Composite Reliability (rho_c) | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ALR | 0.939 | 0.942 | 0.956 | 0.846 |
| EEC | 0.937 | 0.939 | 0.955 | 0.840 |
| ISSL | 0.953 | 0.953 | 0.962 | 0.809 |
| OI | 0.933 | 0.938 | 0.952 | 0.831 |

Source: SmartPLS.

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that all constructs demonstrate strong internal consistency and convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.933 to 0.953, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, which confirms the reliability of the measurement scales. Similarly, the composite reliability values, both rho_a and rho_c, are above 0.90 for all constructs, indicating a high level of construct reliability. In addition, the

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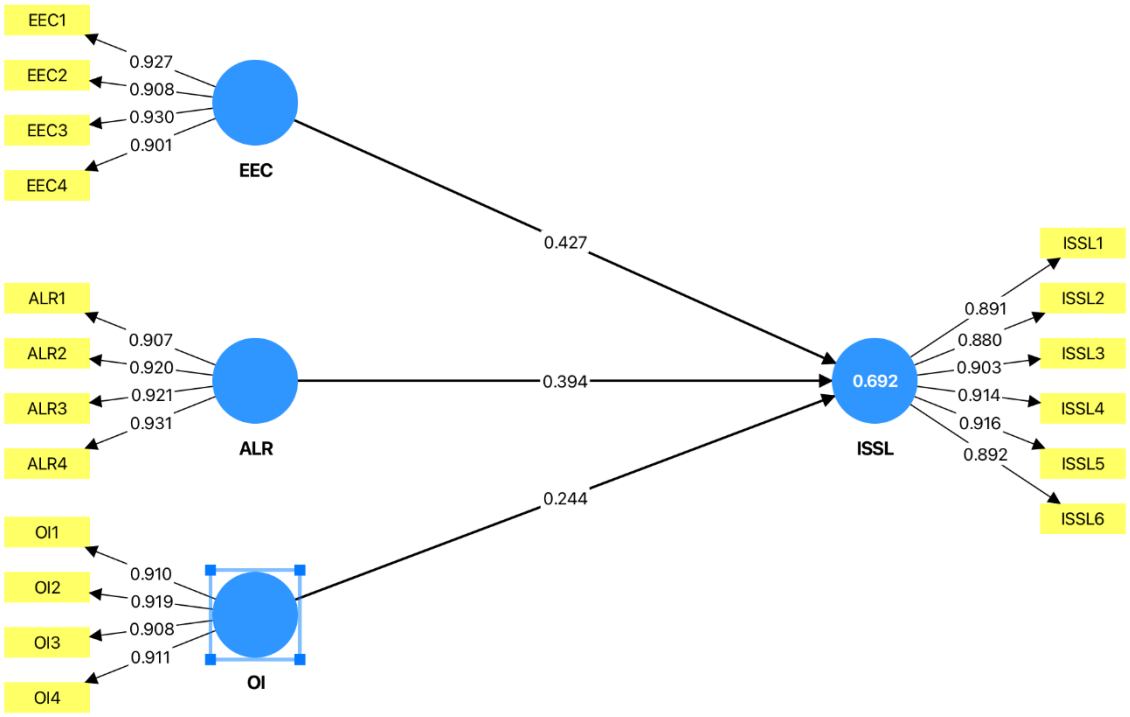
AVE values range from 0.809 to 0.846, which are well above the recommended minimum threshold of 0.50. This confirms that each construct explains a substantial proportion of the variance in its indicators. Therefore, the measurement model can be considered reliable and valid, allowing the analysis to proceed to the assessment of the structural model.

**Figure 2. PLS-SEM Measurement and Structural Model Results**




**Source:** SmartPLS.

Figure 2 presents the PLS-SEM results of the proposed model. The outer loadings of all measurement items are above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the indicators are strongly associated with their respective constructs. For exposure to educational content, the loadings range from 0.901 to 0.930. For accessibility of learning resources, the loadings range from 0.907 to 0.931. For online interaction, the loadings range from 0.908 to 0.919. Finally, the items measuring informal soft skills learning show loadings ranging from 0.880 to 0.916. These values confirm the reliability of the indicators and support the convergent validity of the measurement model.

Regarding the structural model, the results show that the three dimensions of social media as an informal learning environment positively influence informal soft skills learning. Exposure to educational content has the strongest effect on informal soft skills learning, with a path coefficient of 0.427. Accessibility of learning resources also has a positive effect, with a coefficient of 0.394. Online interaction has a weaker but still positive effect, with a coefficient of 0.244. The coefficient of determination, $R^2 = 0.692$, indicates that the three independent

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dimensions explain 69.2% of the variance in informal soft skills learning. This reflects a strong explanatory power of the model and suggests that social media-based informal learning plays an important role in supporting the development of soft skills among young graduates.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study show that social media plays an important role in the informal learning of soft skills among young graduates. The strong explanatory power of the model indicates that the three dimensions examined, exposure to educational content, accessibility of learning resources, and online interaction, contribute meaningfully to explaining how young graduates develop soft skills outside formal education. This result supports the idea that social media platforms are not only tools for communication or entertainment, but also informal learning environments where users access professional knowledge, observe behavioral models, and engage with employability-related content. The strongest effect was found for exposure to educational content. This result suggests that young graduates benefit significantly from being exposed to content related to communication, leadership, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and employability. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn, YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram provide continuous access to videos, posts, professional advice, and examples of workplace behavior. This finding is consistent with social learning theory, which argues that individuals learn by observing models and reproducing behaviors. In the context of this study, young graduates may learn soft skills by observing how professionals communicate, present ideas, manage career challenges, or share workplace experiences.

Accessibility of learning resources also has a positive effect on informal soft skills learning. This finding indicates that the open and flexible nature of social media facilitates learning beyond institutional settings. Young graduates can access learning content at any time and without the constraints of formal training programs. This supports the perspective of self-directed learning, which emphasizes the learner's ability to identify personal learning needs and select appropriate resources. Social media therefore appears to complement formal education by offering accessible and practical resources that help young graduates improve their employability skills. Online interaction has a positive but weaker effect compared to the other two dimensions. This result suggests that interaction through comments, discussions, professional groups, and online communities contributes to soft skills learning, but its influence may depend on the quality and depth of the interaction. While online exchanges can encourage peer learning, feedback, and sharing of experiences, they may also remain superficial if users do not actively participate or reflect on the content. This finding highlights the importance of distinguishing between passive social media use and active engagement. Informal learning

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ISSN : 2658-9311
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becomes more meaningful when young graduates do not only consume content but also discuss, question, share, and apply what they learn.

These results contribute to the literature by linking two research areas that are often studied separately: social media-based learning and soft skills development. Previous studies have largely examined social media in relation to formal education, student engagement, or digital learning, while soft skills research has mainly focused on employability and employer expectations. This study bridges these perspectives by showing that social media can support the informal development of soft skills among young graduates. It also confirms that informal learning is increasingly shaped by digital environments, where young people construct professional knowledge through exposure, accessibility, and interaction.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that universities, career centers, and employability programs should consider social media as a complementary tool for soft skills development. Instead of treating social media only as a distraction, educational institutions can guide students and graduates toward credible professional content, digital communities, and career-related platforms. Young graduates should also be encouraged to use social media more intentionally by following reliable sources, engaging in professional discussions, and applying the knowledge acquired online to real-life situations such as interviews, teamwork, networking, and workplace communication.

However, the findings should also be interpreted with caution. Although social media can support informal soft skills learning, it does not automatically guarantee real competence development. Watching content about communication or leadership is not the same as practicing these skills in real professional contexts. Therefore, the effectiveness of social media learning depends on the learner's motivation, critical thinking, quality of content, and ability to transfer online learning into practical behavior. This means that social media should be viewed as a complementary learning environment rather than a substitute for formal education, practical experience, or professional training.

In summary, the discussion confirms that social media contributes positively to the informal learning of soft skills among young graduates, especially through exposure to educational content and accessibility of learning resources. Online interaction also contributes, but its effect appears more limited and may require deeper engagement to produce stronger learning outcomes. These findings reinforce the relevance of studying social media as an informal learning environment and open the way for further research on how digital practices influence employability and professional development.

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## Conclusion

This study examined the role of social media in the informal learning of soft skills among young graduates. Based on a positivist perspective and a hypothetico-deductive approach, the study tested the effects of three dimensions of social media as an informal learning environment: exposure to educational content, accessibility of learning resources, and online interaction. The empirical results obtained through SmartPLS confirmed the reliability and validity of the measurement model, as Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and AVE values all exceeded the recommended thresholds. The structural model also demonstrated strong explanatory power, with the three independent dimensions explaining a significant proportion of the variance in informal soft skills learning. The findings show that exposure to educational content has the strongest effect on informal soft skills learning, followed by accessibility of learning resources and online interaction. This suggests that young graduates benefit from social media when they are exposed to professional advice, career-related content, practical examples, and learning resources related to communication, teamwork, adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving. The results also confirm that social media can complement formal education by providing flexible, accessible, and self-directed learning opportunities outside institutional settings.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature by connecting two research areas that are often treated separately: social media-based informal learning and soft skills development. It supports the idea that digital platforms can function as informal learning environments where young graduates observe professional behaviors, access employability-related content, and interact with online communities. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that universities, career centers, and employability programs should guide students and graduates toward credible digital resources and encourage a more intentional use of social media for professional development. However, this study has some limitations. First, the use of a quantitative survey limits the depth of understanding of individual learning experiences. Second, the study focuses on perceived informal learning rather than direct measurement of actual soft skills performance. Third, the sample is limited to young graduates, which may reduce the generalizability of the findings to other populations. Future research could adopt a mixed-method approach, include interviews, compare different social media platforms, or examine how informal digital learning is transferred into real workplace behavior. Overall, this study confirms that social media can play a meaningful role in the informal development of soft skills among young graduates, provided that learners engage with credible content, interact actively, and apply what they learn in professional contexts.

African Scientific Journal
ISSN : 2658-9311
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