International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation
ISSN: 2617-0299 (Online); ISSN: 2708-0099 (Print)
DOI: 10.32996/ijllt
Journal Homepage: www.al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/ijllt

IJLLT
AL-KINDI CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Students' Acceptance and Academic Use of Social Networking Sites: A Qualitative TAM-TTF-Based Analysis

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| ABSTRACT
This study aims to investigate students' acceptance and use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) for academic purposes. Using a qualitative case study methodology and drawing on the integrated Technology Acceptance Model and Task Technology Fit model (TAM–TTF), data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 English studies students from Sultan Moulay Slimane University. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed that students' engagement with SNSs is shaped by a dynamic interplay of technological, individual, and psychological factors rather than a simple behavioral choice. participants particularly identified accessibility, utility, ease of use, and cost-effectiveness, especially the platforms' low data consumption, as key factors driving both their adoption and sustained use of SNSs for academic purposes. The implications of these results for the effective design and implementation of institutional technologies are discussed.

| KEYWORDS
EFL learning, task-technology fit, technology acceptance model, social networking sites

| ARTICLE INFORMATION
ACCEPTED: 20 October 2025 **PUBLISHED:** 03 November 2025 **DOI:** 10.32996/ijllt.2025.8.11.5

1. Introduction

The history of technological progress is a tale of revolutionary innovations that have continually reshaped various domains, with education among the most profoundly affected. From the invention of the printing press to the advent of computers and the internet, each technological advancement has expanded the horizons of teaching and learning into new territories of possibility. A particularly significant transformation occurred with the emergence of Web 2.0, which redefined the internet from a static, consumption-oriented medium into a dynamic, participatory environment. Unlike its predecessor, Web 2.0 allows users not only to access information but also to produce, share, and interact with content in unprecedented ways (Kumar & Cohn, 2012). Among the technologies associated with this era, Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have played a distinctive role. Initially intended for social interaction and community building, these platforms have since evolved into versatile tools that extend beyond leisure or entertainment. They now serve as a valuable aid for academic and institutional purposes that enables both students and educators to share resources, exchange knowledge, and engage in collaborative learning processes (Harris & Rea, 2009; Kumar & Cohn, 2012; Lave & Wenger, 1991; McPherson et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2007).

Building on their evolution into academic tools, SNSs have been widely recognized for their potential to enhance students' learning experiences beyond the traditional classroom. One of their most acknowledged merits is their ability to foster collaboration. SNSs create dynamic and interactive learning environments in which students can work jointly toward shared goals, exchange ideas and resources, and co-construct meaning (Lampe et al., 2011; Suwannatthachote & Tantrarungroj, 2012). These networked learning spaces encourage participation and knowledge sharing through text, audio, video, and other digital media while also promoting peer feedback, problem-solving skills, and deeper engagement with learning tasks (Agosto et al., 2012; Ractham & Firpo, 2011).

Beyond collaboration, SNSs have also been found to contribute to higher levels of student engagement and motivation. Their popularity and interactive features naturally capture learners' interest and stimulate active participation (Chen et al., 2010; Rutherford, 2012). Unlike traditional classrooms, which can constrain participation through time, space, or social barriers, SNSs offer inclusive learning environments where even hesitant students can express opinions and contribute to discussions (Lee & McLoughlin, 2007). Furthermore, SNSs function as vast digital repositories of user-generated educational materials such as videos, readings, and tutorials that enable students to access diverse perspectives, extend study time, and deepen understanding beyond institutional resources (Rutherford, 2010).

Despite the growing scholarly recognition of these pedagogical affordances, much remains to be understood about the mechanisms driving students' acceptance and use of SNSs for academic purposes. While numerous studies have confirmed the merits of SNSs once implemented, fewer have examined *why* and *how* students themselves come to appropriate them as tools for learning. In Morocco, for instance, where students continue to use SNSs for academic purposes despite the availability of institutional platforms, research has mainly focused on the benefits and barriers of technology implementation, be it SNSs or other Web 2.0 technologies, often overlooking students' active role in the adoption process (Faizi, 2018; Hafa & Moubtassime, 2021; Lakhal, 2021; Mafhoum, 2023). Moreover, most studies on technology use and student engagement in Moroccan universities remain largely quantitative. Although such approaches yield valuable generalizable insights, they often fail to capture the subjective and experience-based perspectives that shape students' engagement with technology.

Accordingly, and drawing on the constructs of Dishaw and Strong's (1999) TAM–TTF integrated model, the present study seeks to explore how Moroccan EFL university students appropriate SNSs as informal learning tools, and identify the factors shaping their acceptance and use of these platforms beyond their intended purposes. These objectives are addressed through the following research questions:

- How do Moroccan EFL university students use SNSs to support their academic learning?
- What perceptions and factors shape their adoption and continued use of SNSs as learning tools?

The article is structured as follows. It begins with a review of the literature on the integrated TAM–TTF model, followed by a description of the research methodology. The subsequent section presents and discusses the study's findings, and the paper concludes with a summary of the main results and their implications.

2. Theoretical Background

The widespread use of digital tools in educational settings has prompted extensive theoretical inquiry into the factors shaping individuals' decisions to adopt, reject, or continue using information systems. Among the most influential and theoretically robust frameworks in this area are Davis's (1987) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Goodhue and Thompson's (1995) Task–Technology Fit (TTF) model. While both frameworks aim to predict technology use, they approach it from distinct yet complementary perspectives. TAM emphasizes the psychological and attitudinal determinants of user acceptance, whereas TTF highlights the functional alignment between a technology's features and the tasks it supports (Dishaw & Strong, 1999). Together, these models provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation for examining how users' perceptions and contextual conditions jointly influence technology adoption and continued use.

2.1. Technology Acceptance Model

The TAM model conceptualizes users' behavioral adoption of technology through two core perceptual beliefs: Perceived Ease of Use (PEoU) and Perceived Usefulness (PU) (Davis, 1987). PEoU refers to the degree to which individuals believe that using a technology requires minimal effort, whereas PU represents the extent to which they perceive the technology as enhancing task performance. These beliefs shape users' Attitude Toward Use (ATU), which in turn influences their Behavioral Intention (BI) to use the system, ultimately predicting actual usage (Davis et al., 1989). TAM's enduring strength lies in its parsimonious structure and strong predictive validity in explaining user acceptance through cognitive and attitudinal mechanisms. Nevertheless, the model has been criticized for its limited consideration of contextual and functional determinants of technology use, dimensions that are central to the TTF perspective (Legris et al., 2003; Marangunić & Granić, 2015).

2.2. Task–Technology Fit Model

Unlike TAM, the TTF model emphasizes that technology adoption and effective use depend on how well a system's features align with users' tasks and individual abilities (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995). The model posits that when the fit between task characteristics, technology characteristics, and user attributes is strong, performance outcomes improve, leading to higher satisfaction and continued usage. Specifically, Task Characteristics (TAC) refer to the nature and requirements of users' activities; Technology Characteristics (TC) denote the system's features and functionalities; and Individual Characteristics (IC) capture personal factors such as experience, digital literacy, and motivation. These elements jointly determine the Task–

Technology Fit (TTF), which influences Performance Impact (PI). The model thus underscores that successful technology adoption is not merely a product of users' positive attitudes but also of the compatibility between what the technology offers and what users need to accomplish. Nevertheless, the TTF model has also been criticized for overlooking users' psychological dimensions, such as perceptions and emotions, which can significantly influence technology acceptance, as explicitly addressed in TAM.

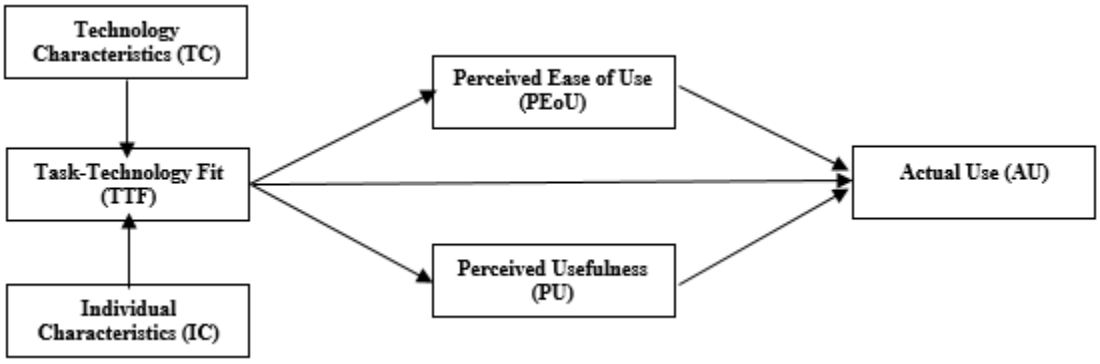
2.3. TAM–TTF Integrated Model

Recognizing the limitations of each framework when applied independently, Dishaw and Strong (1999) proposed an integrated TAM–TTF model that merges TAM's cognitive–attitudinal perspective with TTF's performance-oriented logic. This integration acknowledges that technology acceptance is driven both by users' perceptions of ease and usefulness and by the degree of fit between the technology and their individual and task characteristics. By linking the why (attitudinal motives) with the how (functional alignment), the integrated model offers a thorough and empirically robust explanation of technology adoption than either framework alone (Dishaw & Strong, 1999). The model's explanatory power has been further supported by research examining the adoption of various information technologies across multiple domains (Al-Maatouk et al., 2020; Chen, 2019; Pagani, 2006; Pal & Patra, 2021; Yen et al., 2010).

Building on this foundation, the present study adopts and adapts the integrated TAM–TTF model to investigate Moroccan EFL university students' acceptance and use of SNSs for academic purposes. To better align the framework with the study's objectives and context, two key adjustments were made. First, the BI construct from TAM was removed, as empirical evidence indicates that it weakly predicts actual system usage (Wu & Du, 2012; Pal & Patra, 2021). Instead, the model focuses directly on students' actual academic engagement with SNSs. Second, within the TTF component, the TAC construct was omitted, given that students' academic activities on SNSs, such as sharing materials and discussing assignments, are mainly routine (Pal & Patra, 2021; Yen et al., 2010; Wu & Chen, 2017). In this context, **IC**, including digital competence, motivation, and familiarity with SNSs, are assumed to play a more decisive role in determining fit and performance outcomes. The adapted framework therefore retains the constructs of TC, IC, and TTF, which, when integrated with TAM's PEoU, PU, and ATU, provide a user-centered model that captures both the cognitive and functional dimensions of students' academic use of SNSs. The final integrated model is presented in **Figure 1** below.

Figure 1.

TAM/TTF Integrated Model and Research Hypotheses (adapted from Dishaw & Strong, 1999)



3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

While most studies on technology acceptance and use, particularly those employing the TAM-TTF framework, fall on the quantitative end of the methodological spectrum, this study adopts a qualitative case study design. The decision to use case study methodology was informed by the understanding that this form of inquiry "can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis" (Cohen, 2000, p. 181) and can thus screw deeper into the phenomenon under study. This design is particularly suited to examining the salient attributes of SNSs and uncovering the psychological and utilitarian factors that shape Moroccan EFL university students' acceptance and use of these platforms for learning. Given such a type of study requires an immersive penetration of participants' thoughts and insights, semi-structured interviews were used to collect first-hand data from 20 students in efforts to answer the research questions formulated at the onset of this manuscript.

3.2. Participants

The present study involved 20 undergraduate Moroccan students enrolled for English Studies at Sultan Moulay Slimane University, Faculty of Letters and Humanities in Beni Mellal. To ensure that the sample reflected the population most relevant to the study's objectives, participants were purposively selected based on their use of SNSs for learning purposes. Demographically, the sample revealed an approximately equal gender distribution, with 11 females (55%) and 9 males (45%), aged between 18 to 30 years. Academically, participants were distributed across three semesters, S2, S4, and S6, and all reported having regular access to the internet. In terms of connectivity, 14 students (70%) primarily used mobile data (3G/4G), while 6 students (30%) accessed the internet through Wi-Fi. All participants used internet-enabled mobile phones as their primary device for engaging with SNSs. **Table 1** provides a summary of participants' demographic and academic background information.

Table 1.

Students' Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Value	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	9	45%
	Female	11	55%
Age	18-20	7	35%
	20-30	13	65%
Semester	S2	9	45%
	S4	8	40%
	S6	3	15%
Internet Access	Yes	20	100%
	No	0	0%
Internet Mode	Wi-Fi	6	30%
	3G/4G	14	70%
Used Device	Mobile phone	20	100%
	Personal Computers	0	0%

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted during the final study week of the spring term of the 2024–2025 academic year. Participants were purposively selected based on their active participation in student-managed online communities on SNSs, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp. Initial contact was made with the researcher's S2 students known to use these communities for study-related purposes, who then recommended peers meeting the same criterion. Prior to data collection, the interview questions, developed with reference to the integrated TAM–TTF model (Dishaw & Strong, 1999), were reviewed by two specialists in educational technology to ensure clarity and relevance. Each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes, was audio-recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim immediately afterward. The collected data were analyzed using thematic coding analysis, which involved familiarization with the transcripts, generation of initial codes, and identification and interpretation of recurring themes. Color coding and visual charting were used to organize related responses and to facilitate the comparison and integration of recurrent patterns across participants.

4. Findings and Discussion

This study investigated Moroccan EFL university students' acceptance and use of SNSs as learning tools. Specifically, it sought to explore the factors driving students' acceptance and academic use of these social networking platforms. Thematic analysis of the interview data resulted in the identification of two main categories: Psychological Dimensions and Practical Dimensions of SNSs' acceptance and use, each comprising two subthemes. Within the Psychological Dimensions, the subthemes of Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEoU) represent students' cognitive and affective perceptions of SNSs. The Practical Dimensions, on the other hand, include Individual Characteristics (IC) and Technology Characteristics (TC), which represent users' abilities and the technological affordances that facilitate or constrain their engagement with SNSs. The following sections present and discuss these themes, supported with carefully selected excerpts that balance the researcher's interpretation with participants' voices.

4.1. Psychological Dimensions

Perceived Usefulness

Findings revealed a unanimous perception among participants that SNSs are highly useful tools that complement formal instruction. All twenty students emphasized the platforms' capacity to provide quick and convenient access to course-related materials, which enables them to engage with academic content beyond the classroom. Throughout the interviews, students repeatedly described Facebook and WhatsApp groups as virtual repositories where peers share lecture notes, PowerPoint slides, PDFs, and recorded voice notes. As one student explained, "I live in Ait Ishaq, which is about 90 km away from Beni Mellal, so it's hard for me to attend every class. But that was never a problem because I always get vocal memos of the lessons that other classmates share in our Facebook or WhatsApp groups." Similarly, another one shared, "I live just five minutes away, but sometimes I skip classes because it's really hard to find a seat. I usually get the lectures from the WhatsApp group chat instead." A third one added, "I go to Facebook groups and find posts with PDFs, notes, and even pictures of the slides my professors use."

These narratives illustrate that the perceived usefulness of SNSs lies primarily in their ability to extend learning opportunities beyond institutional boundaries. By mitigating barriers related to distance, massification, and inadequate infrastructure issues frequently reported by Moroccan university students, these platforms promote greater educational inclusivity and flexibility. This finding aligns with previous research showing that online environments broaden the accessibility of educational materials by accommodating diverse learning styles and preferences, supporting self-paced learning, and fostering engagement with content that might otherwise remain limited to formal classroom settings (Ractham & Firpo, 2011; Rutherford, 2010; Wilson et al., 2007).

A particularly valued aspect of SNSs' usefulness was the academic relevance of the shared materials. The groups and online communities through which students access the recourses in question were created and managed by other students from the same department or even group class. This shared context strengthened students' perceptions of utility, as the resources were directly related to their modules. However, it is important to note that while the usefulness of these materials was widely acknowledged, several participants (n=8) voiced concerns about their reliability and accuracy. As one respondent cautioned, "…some students share notes or summaries they got from unreliable sources, and honestly, most of the time you wouldn't even know it." This concern points to an important drawback of SNS-based learning: while usefulness is undeniable, its value depends on users' critical evaluation and digital literacy. In other words, to benefit from SNSs' undeniable utility as a resource repository is conditioned by students' ability to filter and validate information shared within these informal learning environments (El Kandoussi, 2023; Mrah, 2022).

Beyond content access, many participants also emphasized the utility of Facebook pages and groups dedicated to English Studies in sharing past exam papers and mock tests, which they viewed as essential for preparation. One of the interviewed students explained that, "…other students and group admins share some previous mock exams. I use them to practice and prepare for any module." Another added, "Before the exam period, I can find old exams that other students share with their key answers." These practices indicate that students perceive SNSs not merely as information repositories but as platforms that support self-directed and goal-oriented learning. Through engaging with past exam materials, students reported enhanced familiarity with question formats and improved preparation strategies. Such outcomes likely reinforce the perceived usefulness of these platforms, which has been shown to play a significant role in shaping user acceptance and actual use of various technologies (Pal & Patra, 2021; Park, 2009; Tarhini et al., 2013; Yeou, 2016).

Perceived Ease of Use

Regarding the perceived ease of using SNSs, all participants (n=20) reported having absolutely no difficulty in using these platforms for educational purposes. The interviews revealed a strong consensus that SNSs' simplicity and user-friendliness significantly facilitated their adoption for educational use. In fact, the interviewed students all agreed that these platforms are technically accessible and easy to operate, even for individuals with limited digital literacy. In this respect, one student described using SNSs as "a piece of cake!" Another student echoed this sentiment when he said, "It is easy to log in. I can enter and check anything I want anytime I want. It is not difficult at all." Even students who self-identified as having limited technological expertise expressed confidence in using SNSs, as a female student explained, "I don't know much about advanced platforms, but I am a world champion in using SNSs. Actually, I have an Instagram account with over 14,000 followers."

These findings indicate that the user-friendly nature of SNSs reduces the cognitive and technical demands often associated with digital learning platforms. Features such as simple navigation menus, push notifications, and easy multimedia

sharing allow students to focus on learning tasks rather than technological complexities. This low-effort usability not only facilitates access and initial adoption but also enhances students' confidence in employing these tools for academic purposes, regardless of their digital skills. This sense of self-efficacy is particularly salient in the context of Moroccan tertiary education, where many students, if not all, lack formal digital training and rely on SNSs as the digital tools with which they are most familiar (Bachiri, 2022; Bachiri & Sahli, 2020; Jebbour, 2022).

Previous research on technology acceptance demonstrates that PEoU not only drives users' direct engagement with technology but also enhances their PU of the technology (Davis et al., 1989; Pal & Patra, 2021; Yeou, 2016). Simply put, when users find a system effortless to operate, they are more likely to perceive it as useful for accomplishing their goals and fulfilling task requirements. Interestingly, both constructs, PEoU and PU, have been identified as key determinants of users' overall attitude toward use, as individuals form attitudes based on both their cognitive appraisal of a system's utility and the effort required to employ it (Davis et al., 1989; Lepper, 1985). In line with this reasoning, one can venture to say that the interviewed students' acceptance and use of SNSs for learning are largely driven by their positive attitudes toward these platforms, which they perceive as both easy to use (high PEoU) and useful for their learning process (high PU).

4.2. Practical Dimensions

Individual Characteristics

Students' prior experience and familiarity with SNSs emerged as key determinants of their adoption and academic use of these platforms. Growing up in a world with many media forms, both analogue and digital, students have routinely engaged with SNSs for socializing, entertainment, and information exchange. This habitual exposure and engagement cultivate a high level of comfort and competence, which students carry over to educational use. Supporting this argument, one student said, "It's so simple to use SNSs especially Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. It feels like a daily routine, like doing the dishes." Another added, "Scrolling down, searching and posting things, making comments, reactions …. everyone knows how to do that," while a third noted, "I have used WhatsApp and Facebook for years, so using them for learning now feels completely natural."

Students' frequent and routine use of SNSs has made them familiar with these platforms, to the extent that using them for academic purposes has become second nature and requires no additional effort or learning. This accumulated experience reduces the cognitive load typically associated with technology use and enables students to navigate SNSs efficiently, even beyond their intended social purposes. Such familiarity also has direct implications for perceived ease of use and, consequently, perceived usefulness (PU). As students become well-accustomed to the functionalities of SNSs, they are more likely to perceive them as less demanding and more manageable (Dishaw & Strong, 1999; Goodhue & Thompson, 1995; Marikyan et al., 2022). Moreover, when students perceive SNSs as easy to operate, they tend to consider them valuable tools for achieving their learning goals. In this sense, prior experience and familiarity, two key individual characteristics, serve as enabling factors that shape both PEoU and PU, which in turn foster positive attitudes toward technology use and thus support its adoption.

Technology Characteristics

In addition to perceived usefulness, ease of use, and familiarity, the findings of this study revealed that the technological characteristics of SNSs also play a decisive role in shaping students' adoption and continued use of these platforms. All twenty participants reported accessibility and cost-effectiveness as major factors encouraging them to use SNSs for educational activities. Given the high cost of internet services in Morocco, several participants noted that these platforms remain the most practical and viable option for staying connected and informed, without incurring significant fees. One student explained, "I only have Wi-Fi when I'm at a coffee shop. Most of the time I use 3G, and SNSs still work perfectly fine." Another said, "You only need MT-Talk internet to use SNSs," referring to the low-cost, SNS-specific data packages (commonly known as *6) offered by Moroccan telecommunication providers. Similarly, a third student added, "I don't have Wi-Fi, only 4G. So if the information I need is available on Facebook or shared in my class WhatsApp group, I don't bother checking the official websites because they would just consume all my data."

These accounts underpin the role of technological characteristics (TC) in shaping students' acceptance and use of SNSs for learning. Affordability, accessibility, and low data consumption emerged as key determinants, particularly in contexts where Internet connectivity remains a barrier. Unlike many other educational platforms that may require substantial bandwidth, these testimonies reveal that social networking platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp still function with limited data, which makes them highly practical for students. Beyond cost-effectiveness, mobile phone compatibility further reinforces adoption. Although not explicitly discussed in the interviews, the demographic data in **Table 1** (Section 3.2) show that all participants accessed the internet via mobile devices, and SNSs' ability to operate smoothly on smaller screens makes interaction easier. These technological affordances directly strengthen PEoU and, by extension, PU. When students perceive that a platform is easily

accessible, low-cost, and compatible with their devices, they are more likely to integrate it into their learning practices. This observation aligns with findings from previous studies linking platform characteristics to user engagement and sustained adoption (Pal & Patra, 2021; Wu & Chen, 2017).

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that Moroccan EFL university students' acceptance and use of SNSs as learning tools result from the interaction between psychological and practical dimensions. At the psychological level, PU and PEoU constitute the cognitive foundation of acceptance. Students' belief that SNSs are useful in supporting their academic needs enhances their motivation to adopt these tools for learning. This perceived usefulness is further strengthened by students' appreciation of the platforms' simplicity and user-friendliness, as reflected in the consistent emphasis on their ease of use and familiar functionalities. The practical dimensions, represented by IC and TC, provide the contextual and operational grounding for this acceptance. Individual characteristics, particularly students' familiarity and prior experience with SNSs, influence how effectively they exploit the platforms' features. Meanwhile, the technological characteristics of SNSs such as affordability and accessibility act as enabling conditions that make academic engagement technically and economically feasible. Together, these factors reduce structural barriers such as cost, connectivity, and institutional limitations that often hinder the effective use of official learning management systems (Bachiri, 2022; Bachiri & Sahli, 2020; Mouaziz et al., 2022; Zyad, 2022).

5. Conclusions and Implications

Unlike most studies that examine the integrated TAM–TTF model through quantitative analysis, this study adopted a qualitative lens to explore Moroccan EFL university students' acceptance and use of SNSs for academic purposes. Consistent with the core premise of Dishaw and Strong's (1999) theoretical assumptions, the findings revealed that students' adoption of these tools is not an isolated behavioral act but the outcome of an interdependent system of technological, individual, and psychological factors that collectively shape technology adoption.

While the integration of SNSs in formal educational practices remains a complex and challenging endeavor, their practical advantages, particularly accessibility, affordability, and ease of use, can no longer be ignored. Educational authorities are therefore encouraged to design institutional platforms that incorporate the usability and interactive features that students value most in SNSs. Equally important is the provision of training programs that equip students with the technical skills that would enable them use institutional technologies with the same ease and confidence with which they use social media platforms. Addressing barriers related to affordability and connectivity is also paramount to ensure that technology-mediated learning opportunities are equitable and inclusive for all students.

Funding: This study received no external funding.
Conflicts of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
Publisher's note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

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