

Social Media as a Learning Tool in Moroccan Higher Education from Students' Perspectives

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Abstract

This study is important because it addresses the global shift toward digital education and emphasizes the need to examine the role of social networks in education. By shedding light on this issue, this study aims to address the challenges facing the Moroccan educational system and provide recommendations for improving educational standards and pedagogical approaches considering the country's technological advancements. The research also seeks to answer two key questions: *How do Moroccan undergraduate and graduate students view the integration of social media into education? What insights do Moroccan students offer to guide the development of innovative teaching and learning methods using social media platforms?*

Keywords: Social media, Learning Tool, Digital education

Introduction

The 21st century has introduced a significant technological revolution and has reshaped various aspects of every-day life. Among these transformations, communication tools which have undergone remarkable changes, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Abioui et al., 2020). Social networking, in particular, has emerged as an important means of connecting individuals because it bridges individuals across diverse contexts. What was once considered a platform for social interaction has developed into a diverse tool integrated into various spheres of life, including social, cultural, economic, ideological, and significantly, educational domains. Prensky (2001) explored the domain of education and highlighted that although social media is a new form of communication but was able to spread across different levels, including sending and receiving knowledge.

The integration of social media into education offers benefits for educators and students, as highlighted by Hitler, Hubbell, and Mennoski (2007). They believe that students experience increased engagement due to the familiarity of social media tools in their daily lives, while educators can enhance their pedagogical approaches by incorporating additional resources into their lessons. However, Mardiana (2016) believes that the successful integration of social media into education requires joint efforts. First, students must recognize the importance of face-to-face interactions and digital communication tools. Second, educators should be encouraged to use new digital pedagogies that are compatible with other learning techniques. This will result in creating a win-win relationship between traditional and digital education.

In digital era 2.0, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have created a more flexible environment for teacher-student communication and provided educational models crucial for the learning process (Safsouf, Mansouri, & Poirier, 2020; Bouziane & Elaasri, 2019). WhatsApp, for instance, offers features such as group video calls and file sharing, which can facilitate the teaching of various language skills (Harrizi, Loutfi, & Zaidoune, 2022). This means that there is a need to explore whether social media, initially informal, can effectively transition into a formal model for learning. Thus, this study examines students' perspectives on the use of social media in education, including its benefits and challenges. By surveying undergraduate and graduate students in different Moroccan schools and colleges in higher education, this research aims to understand students' opinions on the role of social media as a new digital learning method.

This study is important because it addresses the global shift toward digital education and emphasizes the need to examine the role of social networks in education. By shedding light on this issue, this study aims to address the challenges facing the Moroccan educational system and provide recommendations for improving educational standards and pedagogical approaches considering the country's technological advancements. The research also seeks to answer two key questions: *How do Moroccan undergraduate and graduate students view the integration of social media into education? What insights do Moroccan students offer to guide the development of innovative teaching and learning methods using social media platforms?*

All the data collected led to hypotheses on which this study is based. In today's society, technology is ubiquitous; indeed, technology has taken part in nearly every aspect of human life. Therefore, this study does not only focus on the use of social media in Moroccan educational institutions, but also explores its implications and potential benefits.

The first hypothesis suggests that integrating social media into education is imperative in today's world because of its undeniable positive impact. This hypothesis also implies that if most students advocate for integrating social media into education, their opinions should be given significant consideration. In this context, Davis et al. (2012) also believe that social media is essential because it can enhance learning outcomes.

The second hypothesis is mainly about incorporating social media into classroom lessons, which is crucial for encouraging student engagement and ensuring a shared learning experience. This hypothesis was indirectly supported by the students' answers to the questionnaire. Their answers indicate a high level of student engagement with social media platforms. Given the technological dependence of today's digital native generation, this hypothesis proposes that embracing social media in education can improve students' participation and understanding. To confirm or refute these hypotheses, the collected data is analyzed thoroughly and presented along with the results in the following sections.

To address these issues, this paper is structured into numerous sections. It starts with a comprehensive overview of social media and various educational tools. It then proceeds to discuss the methodology adopted to answer the research questions. The remainder of this section covers the main results of the study along with their discussion and examination. The paper concludes with general conclusions, some limitations, and openings for further research.

Literature Review:

Social media is traditionally associated with communication and social interactions, but it has now found a new role in education. Many educational institutions are now adopting social media as a tool for knowledge sharing. Such institutions recognize the potential of social media to facilitate communication among the parties involved in the learning process. One of the main educational platforms is Facebook. Students use this platform to connect with teachers and peers to exchange information and share courses and resources. Facebook also serves as a platform for sharing questions, comments, and Q/A sessions related to their subjects and modules. In this regard, Dunn (2013) highlighted the use of social media through various technologies. In fact, he emphasizes the role of social media in developing students' mindsets and personalities. Social media offers accessibility, but Dunn cautions that such accessibility

does not always translate to efficiency. Many users find themselves easily distracted by entertaining content, which, by definition, minimizes their focus.

Other several studies have advocated for integrating of social media into classrooms because of its potential benefits. Bexheti (2014) suggested that social media usage promotes diversity and inclusion. Social media is capable of encouraging students create and share their own content, receive feedback, and learn from comments. Handyani (2017) further emphasized the educational potential of platforms like Instagram and Facebook for information sharing and group activities through multimedia content. Handyani (2017) added that Instagram can effectively motivate students and encourage their classroom participation by creating a sense of belonging and connection. Similarly, Harrizi, Loutfi, & Zaidoune (2022) found that a significant percentage of participants agreed on the educational WhatsApp use. Their research also shows that many students express that social media helps them learn from teachers' communications and improve their academic performance as university students. Generally, these findings suggest that students perceive social media, particularly platforms like WhatsApp, as beneficial tools for enhancing their learning experiences.

Social networks, which are now the 2.0 version of education, have introduced new pedagogies and learning strategies that are used to enhance communication between teachers and students. The work of Manca et al. (2016) reinforces the growing trend of referring to social media, particularly Facebook, as learning tools. Although the initial findings suggest positive student attitudes toward Facebook's educational potential, this idea has not been confirmed in the current study. Social media platforms offer numerous benefits for teaching and learning, including flexibility, informality, and accessibility, while also facilitating improved communication and collaboration among peers. The integration of social media into formal education can help students improve their digital skills and create innovative pedagogical approaches.

However, there are certain concerns raised; Manca (2016) asserted that it is important to address the issues of privacy, distraction, and limitations in communication to mitigate potential negative impacts on students' learning and well-being. It is important to carefully consider these implications, including distractions, lack of control, and the blurring of personal and professional boundaries, to ensure effective and responsible use of social media in educational settings.

Methodology:

To answer the main question of this study, a survey is conducted that involves 46 undergraduate students and 52 graduate students from various higher education institutions in Casablanca, Morocco. The sample was randomly selected from both private and public sectors. This sample represents diverse disciplines for inclusiveness. The 98 participants, who comprised both males and females aged 18 to 25, were from fields ranging from Engineering, Architecture, and Physics to Literature, Humanities, and Design.

The tool used in the methodology in this research is mainly a 15-minutes questionnaire given to students. They will also receive assistance or clarifications, if needed. The questionnaire structure consists of two main parts:

The first section includes different information about the participants' personal details and their use of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube). This section also attempts to examine the frequency of the usage of such platforms in a learning context. The second section explores how students perceive the relationship between social media and education. It attempts to examine the students' attitudes toward integrating social media in schools. This section also analyzes the different advantages and disadvantages of such integration and the potential role of social media in the Moroccan educational context.

Results:

The results of the questionnaire present Moroccan students' perspectives on adopting social media in education and shed light on their digital preferences, which eventually shape their educational pathways. The data analysis provides valuable insights into students' adaptability to technological advancements and sets the foundation for effective integration of social media into the Moroccan educational system with the goal of revolutionizing learning experiences.

The survey presents the different platforms used by Moroccan students in educational engagement. On the one hand, Facebook attracts a quarter of students. This could be translated into Facebook serving as a moderately popular platform for accessing educational content. Instagram actually emerges as the favored platform; it in fact, it captivates 37.5% of students, indicating a preference for visually engaging content. The third platform is YouTube, which is

popular for its rich archive of tutorials and educational videos. The results show that 27.5% of students were attracted to this platform, which means that YouTube has established itself as a significant platform for personalized learning.

On the other hand, the other platforms, including LinkedIn, Twitter, and Twitch, which are well-known for their professional features and real-time interactions, are used by a small percentage of students. TikTok is also not consumed by an important segment of students in the educational context regardless of its popularity. This shows the limited role of these platforms, particularly at the educational level. Finally, A small percentage of students use WhatsApp, which is primarily used for communication, for educational discussions and resource sharing.

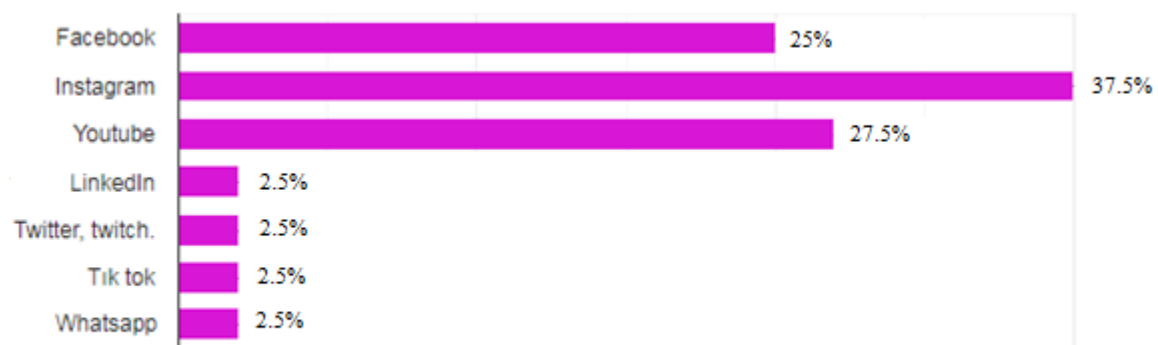


Figure 1: Percentage of Educational Platforms

The second figure shows students' use of social media to seek information, ask questions, search, and share information (Figure 2). The results show that the majority (88.9% of students) consult social media platforms for educational purposes previously mentioned. This result means that students are highly engaged in social media and use it for learning. However, a minority of 11.1% of students do not use social media for educational purposes. This percentage is indeed small, which could mean that there is a subgroup of students who may prefer alternative channels to share information or choose to entirely avoid referring to social media platforms.

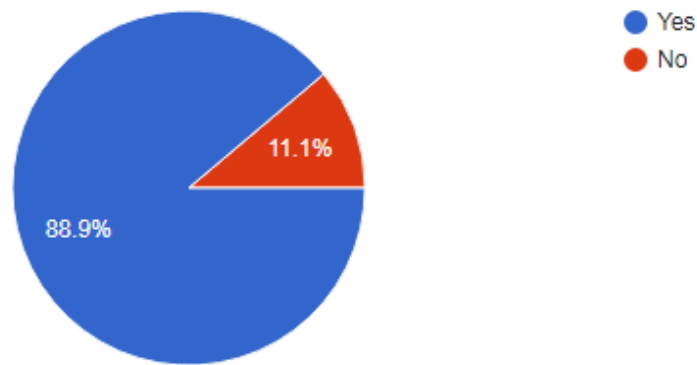


Figure 2: Percentage of the Use of Social Media in Education

The following figure (Figure 3) evaluates the rate of Moroccan students using social media for learning reasons. A considerable portion of the 41.2% of respondents reported daily use of social media platforms for learning. This result shows a high frequency of students' willingness to use social media in their daily educational routines. In addition, 29.4% of the surveyed students use social media in education two to three times a week. This shows a significant proportion of students rely on these platforms to achieve certain learning objectives. This could also mean that certain students rely on social media platforms to obtain educational content. Finally, a percentage of 29.4% of students use social media for education once a week. This reflects consistency but less frequency if we are to compare this rate to daily and bi-weekly users. We can say that these diverse patterns among students reflect the diverse nature of social media's role in education.

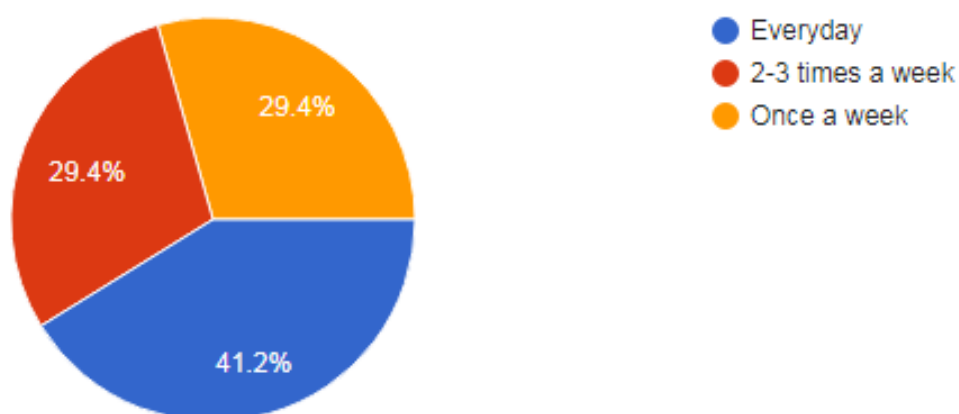


Figure 3: Rate of Social Media Usage in Education

Students were also asked to share their perspectives on their choice of educational platforms. This aspect could provide valuable insights into their preferences and motivations

for making certain choices. First, some students say that Facebook and WhatsApp are essential to consult because one can create groups within the platform. This feature facilitates easy access to information and lessons. The result that could be extracted from this is related to the convenience of group-based interactions that also facilitate sharing resources, which enhances accessibility within specific communities.

In addition, some students talked about Twitter features. They stated that this platform is useful especially for finding documents or files. This platform is also special because of its real-time nature and ability to retrieve information easily and quickly. Lastly, many students mention using YouTube for different educational purposes. These needs include studying, learning new skills, and even improving communication skills. They emphasized the value of YouTube's video content with explanations that could indicate a preference for visual and interactive learning resources. YouTube offers a diverse range of instructional videos adapted to various learning needs and interests that could enable students to explore and acquire knowledge dynamically and engagingly.

As for the various reasons for specific platforms' choices of for educational reasons, the participants provided various responses including:

- *Facebook and WhatsApp because there are multiple groups where I can find the information and lessons I am looking for.*
- *Twitter can easily find a document or file by just tweeting.*
- *YouTube for my studies and learning something else, such as cake design and so on*
- *I use YouTube to improve my communication*
- *I use YouTube because they are videos that include explanations*

The fourth and fifth figures explore students' opinions on whether social media should be considered a formal method of teaching, along with the efficiency of this new technological tool. Two questions are necessary to address this issue. The first concerns the integration of social media into education and the second concerns the effectiveness of such platforms as teaching tools.

On the one hand, figure four is mainly about the use of social media in education. A minority of 17.6% of students called for integrating of social media as a formal teaching tool. However, the majority, which represents 82.4%, do not support the idea. This could be an

indicator of a significant change in opinion regarding this idea of using social media for formal educational purposes and whether it is appropriate.

On the other hand, figure five are about the efficiency of social media in education. A minority of students (23.5%) believed that social media could be a technological tool for education. However, a high percentage (76.5%) of students disagree with this viewpoint. This finding could indicate skepticism regarding the efficacy of social media as a reliable and effective educational resource.

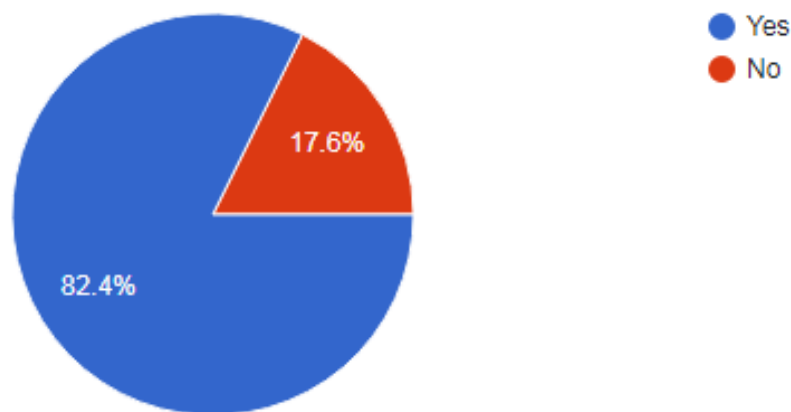


Figure 4: Percentage of Students Agreeing to Incorporate Social Media into Education

Supporters argue that social media can enable the following:

- Enhanced communication
- Increased diversity
- Ease of sending messages

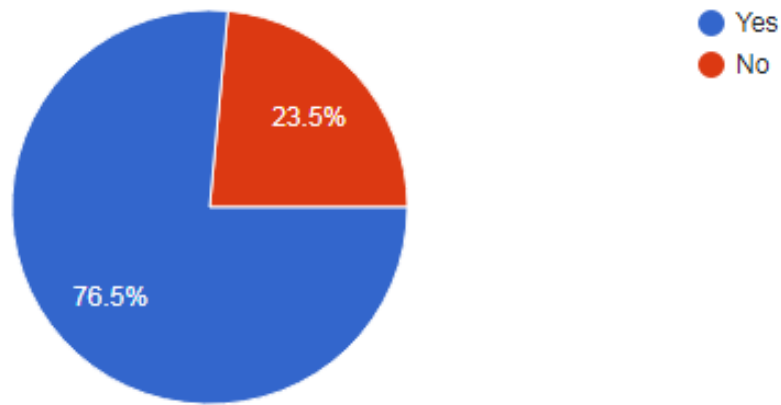


Figure 5: Percentage of Students Trusting the Efficiency of Using Social Media in Education

Figure six explores the ongoing use of social media in higher education and reveals a surprisingly high percentage. On the one hand, the data show that 56.3% of individuals involved in higher education use social media platforms for educational purposes. This means that social media can be used for communication, academic collaborations, and even information sharing. On the other hand, 43.8% of students does not use social media in their education. This percentage is indeed significant since it suggests that there is still an important percentage of students in higher education who have not fully accepted the adoption of social media in their academic activities.

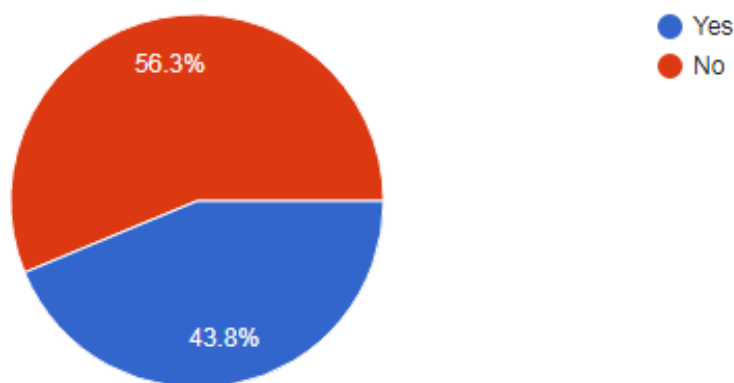


Figure 6: Percentage of the Usage of Social Media in Classrooms

The students who affirm the previous question were asked to develop their ideas on the usage of social media by their teachers. The answers to this question highlight several ways in which teachers use social-media platforms for education. For example, teachers use YouTube to share video content. This provides students with both visual and auditory learning experiences. This approach enhances access and engagement with course materials. Teachers also use WhatsApp as a platform to distribute lesson materials and communicate with their students in addition to traditional classroom communication. The use of such platforms encourages continuous engagement and facilitates learning opportunities between teachers and students.

The students also shared their ideas on using social media with their teachers to enhance explanations through multimedia elements like data, pictures, and visual aids. These strategies include posting educational videos on YouTube and distributing lesson materials via WhatsApp. This approach improves explanation efficiency by referring to diverse media formats. However, the participants also highlighted various drawbacks associated with the use of social media in classrooms. These issues include slow internet connection, lack of focus, and dependency, which could eventually lead to the neglect of traditional learning materials like books. There are other concerns related to distractions, misuse for non-academic purposes, and perceived loss of time due to excessive availability. Additionally, some participants expressed reservations about social media's role in education, which could emphasize its suitability for information rather than academic learning. There are also concerns about the need for proper monitoring and framing to prevent miseducation.

The results of the analysis above have the main objective of understand the role of social media in education among students. These results show several significant findings. First, we could conclude that Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are the most popular and used social media platforms among students in higher education in the Moroccan context. A majority of 88% of students advocate for integrating social media into the educational system. In terms of usage frequency, 40% of students use social media on a daily basis for educational purposes, whereas 29% of the students only use these platforms two to three times a week. The rest of the students usually use these platforms once a week.

Another important result is that students use social media in education for information gathering, seeking explanations, accessing course materials, and improving communication skills. Proponents of social media integration highlight its benefits in terms of encouraging

communication, diversity, and user-friendliness. A significant proportion, which represents 76% of students, express trust in social media for educational purposes. Furthermore, 56% of students reported current usage of social media in their classrooms, with teachers consulting platforms like WhatsApp for lesson sharing and YouTube for video presentations. However, students can also identify potential disadvantages of social media in education, which could be a sign for careful consideration of its implementation.

Discussion and Implications:

The analysis reveals that Moroccan undergraduate and graduate students actively use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube for educational purposes. This idea aligns with the initial hypothesis. These students engage in activities like forming groups and participating in online discussions to create an effective educational environment. These findings also serve as a basis for educational authorities to assess and potentially adapt the current educational framework in Morocco. The results suggest that students in higher education are open to embracing new educational paradigms that necessitate proactive responses from educators.

The analysis of the potential integration of social media into the learning process, as discussed in the second and third sections, presents a promising opportunity (Junco, 2012). With participants expressing receptivity to this idea, conducting experiments using online platforms to assess their effectiveness becomes important. Such experiments yield positive results that would eventually lead to the implementation of such practices across various academic fields and levels. Additionally, the questionnaire results highlight the enthusiasm of many students in incorporating social media (Wang et al., 2011). They cite factors such as ease of use, accessibility, and the wealth of knowledge available on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

The occurrence of social media usage among Moroccan students highlights its role as a channel for accessing information, asking questions, seeking solutions, and exchanging knowledge. This shows its significance not only as a communication tool but also as a facilitator of collaboration and information sharing within the educational sphere. On the contrary, the minority of students who do not use social media for educational pursuits indicates a diversity of preferences and behaviors in their approach to digital learning platforms. The rationale

behind this choice is related to students' different needs and preferences. This enables us to say that inclusive and effective educational strategies have been developed that fit the demands of the digital era.

Furthermore, understanding the usage patterns of social media for educational purposes is significant because it can offer insights to educators and policymakers regarding the progress of creating digital learning environments. This understanding can then inform the development of strategies that effectively integrate social media platforms to improve educational experiences and outcomes for Moroccan students. It is also worth noting from the questionnaire results that some teachers already use social media platforms, which could indicate a level of familiarity with this approach among both students and educators. However, establishing a cohesive framework within the educational system is essential to gradually integrate this method with the guidance of experts in the field. There is also the possibility of establishing a scientific committee to achieve such objectives.

Addressing the drawbacks of integrating social media into classrooms is also crucial. While many participants acknowledged the potential benefits of using social media in education, they also highlighted several concerns, such as distraction and reduced focus. Given that social-media platforms were initially designed for social interaction, adapting them for educational purposes can present challenges in maintaining students' attention. In addition, the participants express concerns about the reliability of online content, as platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube cannot guarantee the accuracy of information shared. Despite these challenges, the implementation of social media in education represents a progressive step toward inclusivity and diversity. This step can engage both the inside and the outside and change the traditional classroom setting (Pimmer, Linxen, & Gröhbbe, 2012).

The study's findings reveal important insights into the role of social media in education among Moroccan higher education students. Firstly, social media platforms are recognized as informal yet effective channels for learning and creating a communicative and collaborative atmosphere among peers. This highlights the potential of social media to facilitate knowledge sharing and engagement within educational contexts. Additionally, the study shows the positive perception of social media among Moroccan students, who view it as a valuable tool capable of enhancing their learning experiences. Acknowledging its innovative pedagogical potential, students express a willingness to incorporate social media into the educational system. However, alongside this enthusiasm, concerns regarding distractions, limitations, and

communication issues are raised. Despite the evident benefits, students remain prudent of the potential challenges associated with integrating social media into formal education settings. These findings include the need for a balanced approach and consider both its advantages and drawbacks to ensure effective and inclusive learning experiences.

Research Limitations:

Acknowledging the study's limitations is important for a full understanding of its findings. One limitation is the relatively small sample size which consists of only 98 participants. While insightful, this sample may not fully represent the diverse student population across Moroccan higher education institutions. Also, the study's generalizability is confined by its focus on the specific context of Moroccan higher education. Social media usage patterns and attitudes toward education may vary in other cultural, socioeconomic, and educational settings which could limit the general applicability of the findings beyond Morocco. Recognizing these limitations emphasizes the need for cautious interpretation and calls for future research to explore diverse contexts and expand the scope of this research.

In addition to focusing on students' viewpoints on social media integration in education, this study could benefit from considering other pertinent factors. These include the educators' attitudes, institutional policies, and technological resources, which collectively shape the educational system. Furthermore, while structured questionnaires offer quantitative data insights, using qualitative methods like interviews or focus groups could provide richer understandings of students' experiences, motivations, and obstacles regarding social media's educational use. Incorporating these broader perspectives and research methodologies could offer a more comprehensive exploration of the topic.

Conclusion:

The study is mainly about the influence of technology on various levels of human existence, particularly in education. While the educational system in Morocco faces periodic challenges, it also witnesses transformative moments, as exemplified by this research. The findings emphasize the students' will to embrace innovative methodologies perceived as conducive to their local context's needs. The study also illuminates social media's dual role

since it serves both recreational and educational purposes. However, there is an aspect which necessitates further exploration which is that of the feedback of instructors. Understanding educators' perspectives on these techniques is important as it provides valuable insights into the efficacy and feasibility of integrating social media into educational practices.

In conclusion, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others offer different and various features for both students and teachers for multiple educational purposes. These reasons include discussing ideas, sharing resources and information, and doing research. However, it is important to note that instructors should filter any information extracted from social media before students consume it. This paper also shows that there are certain challenges such as accessibility and internet connection, particularly in a developing country like Morocco. This necessitates the need for more broader considerations regarding inclusivity and equity in education. This idea highlights the potential for social media to reshape educational practices and call for greater accessibility and equity in the Moroccan educational system.

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