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PATTERNS OF THREADS USAGE AND STUDENTS' ACCEPTANCE: EVIDENCE FROM HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: *This study examines how higher education students in Malaysia use Threads and how they perceive and accept the platform. Based on 211 valid questionnaire responses, the study describes patterns of Threads usage and acceptance, explores the relationship between usage and acceptance and compares acceptance across different usage-frequency groups. The questionnaire included five items measuring Threads usage, five items measuring acceptance and five single-item measures covering perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, social influence, perceived enjoyment and accessibility. Both the usage and acceptance scales showed high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of .928 and .945, respectively. Overall, the mean usage score was 2.73 (SD = 1.25), while the mean acceptance score was 2.97 (SD = 1.18). Among the perception measures, accessibility recorded the highest mean (M = 3.52, SD = 1.32), followed by perceived enjoyment (M = 3.36), perceived ease of use (M = 3.35), perceived usefulness (M = 3.30) and social influence (M = 3.06). A strong positive relationship was found between Threads usage and acceptance ($r = .871$, $p < .001$). Acceptance also varied significantly across the four clearly coded usage-frequency groups, $F(3, 202) = 41.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .380$. Daily users reported the highest level of acceptance (M = 3.91), while those who had a Threads account but had never opened the platform reported the lowest (M = 1.81). Overall, the findings suggest that although students generally perceive Threads as accessible, accessibility by itself does not necessarily lead to frequent use. Instead, actual usage and acceptance appear to be closely connected. As the study is cross-sectional and based on*

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participating respondents, the findings should be viewed as evidence from the study sample rather than as nationally representative estimates.

Keywords: *Threads, usage patterns, student acceptance, higher education students*

Introduction

Social media has become part of everyday life for many students, particularly those in higher education. Students use social media not only to communicate and maintain social connections but also to seek information, interact with peers, share ideas and support their learning. In higher education, these platforms have increasingly been used to complement teaching and learning activities and to facilitate interaction among students. A systematic review by Perez et al. (2023) highlighted the growing interest in social media as a teaching and learning tool in higher education, while Al-Qaysi et al. (2023) found that social media adoption in educational settings can be influenced by a combination of user, social and technology-related factors. These findings indicate that students' use of social media involves more than simply being present on a platform, it also reflects how and why they engage with it.

However, students do not necessarily use social media in the same way. Their level of engagement may differ in terms of frequency of use, time spent, interaction and the purposes for which they use a particular platform (Tarifa-Rodriguez et al., 2024). This is important because actual usage and acceptance are related but distinct aspects of students' experience with a technology. For example, having an account on a platform does not necessarily mean that a student uses it regularly or finds it useful and enjoyable. In contrast, students who use a platform more frequently may become more familiar with its features and develop different perceptions of the platform over time. Examining usage patterns alongside acceptance can therefore provide a clearer understanding of how students experience and respond to an emerging social media platform. Recent empirical studies on Malaysian education further demonstrate that social media adoption among Malaysian youth and students is driven by factors beyond passive platform availability, including informal peer exchange and targeted communication platforms (Abas et al., 2025; Al-Sabaawi et al., 2021).

The Malaysian higher education context provides a relevant setting for examining these patterns. Social media has become part of the digital practices of Malaysian university students, although their preferred platforms, frequency of use, duration and reasons for use may vary. Nordin (2025), for instance, examined social media behaviour among Malaysian undergraduates and reported differences in platform preferences, frequency, duration and purposes of use. Other studies involving Malaysian higher education students have also explored the role of social media in areas such as student engagement, well-being and academic outcomes (De Rycker & Abdul Jamal, 2023; Mat Said et al., 2025). Taken together, these studies suggest that understanding social media use among students requires attention not only to whether they use a platform, but also to how often and for what purposes they engage with it.

Within this context, Threads provides an interesting platform for further investigation. Launched by Meta in July 2023, Threads is a relatively new social media platform that developed from Instagram and offers a different environment for users to share and interact with content. Early research on Threads has identified differences in content and engagement patterns when compared with Instagram, suggesting that users may engage with the two

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platforms in different ways (Zhang et al., 2025). However, research focusing specifically on Threads among higher education students in Malaysia remains limited. This gap provides an opportunity to examine how students are using Threads and how they perceive and accept the platform within the Malaysian higher education context.

Therefore, this study examines patterns of Threads usage and students' acceptance among higher education students in Malaysia. Specifically, the study aims to (i) identify the reported usage patterns of Threads among higher education students in Malaysia (ii) determine the levels of Threads usage and acceptance (iii) examine the relationship between Threads usage and acceptance and (iv) determine whether acceptance differs according to usage frequency. By addressing these objectives, the study provides empirical evidence on students' experiences with an emerging social media platform and contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between actual usage behaviour and acceptance of Threads.

Literature Review

Social Media Usage in Higher Education

Social media is now a familiar part of student life in higher education. Students use these platforms not only to communicate and maintain social connections, but also to share information, access content, collaborate with peers, and support their learning activities. In this sense, social media use in higher education involves more than simple communication. It reflects different forms of digital engagement that can be shaped by users' perceptions, social influences, and the features of the technology itself. Al-Qaysi et al. (2023), in their systematic review of social media adoption in education, highlighted the importance of user, social, and technology-related factors in shaping adoption. Perez et al. (2023) likewise found that technology-acceptance theories are widely used to understand how students adopt and use social media in higher education.

Evidence from Malaysia also shows that students' perceptions are closely related to how they use social media. Al-Rahmi et al. (2022), based on a survey of 312 undergraduate students in Malaysia, found that technology-acceptance factors such as performance expectancy, effort expectancy, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use were related to students' behavioural intentions and actual use of social media. The study also linked actual social media use with educational performance. These findings suggest that examining students' actual use alongside their acceptance can provide a more complete understanding of their engagement with social media platforms.

Recent research on educational technology adoption further indicates that students' engagement with digital platforms is rarely shaped by a single factor. Feng et al. (2025) identified performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions as important dimensions of technology adoption in higher education. Similarly, Xue et al. (2024), in a systematic review of 162 studies using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), found that performance expectancy and social influence are among the factors frequently considered in explaining technology acceptance in higher education. Taken together, these studies indicate that students' use of digital platforms depends not only on what the technology offers, but also on whether they perceive it as useful, manageable, and socially relevant.

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The connection between technology acceptance and social media use can also be seen in other higher education settings. Alshammari et al. (2024), in a study involving 369 undergraduate students at public universities in Saudi Arabia, examined students' intention to use social media for educational purposes through an e-learning acceptance model. Their findings showed that several acceptance-related factors were associated with students' intention to use social media, although the effects were not consistent across all of the proposed factors. This indicates that students may consider different aspects of a platform when deciding whether to use it, and that the importance of these aspects may vary according to the educational and cultural context.

Another important consideration is that students do not necessarily use social media with the same level of frequency or intensity. Tarifa-Rodriguez et al. (2024), in their systematic review of social media engagement in tertiary education, noted that engagement can be measured through different indicators, including frequency or count-based measures, time-based measures, and text-based indicators. This distinction matters because having an account or occasionally accessing a platform does not necessarily mean that a student is an active or regular user. Considering usage frequency together with acceptance can therefore offer a clearer picture of how students engage with a particular platform.

Research from other countries also shows that the factors associated with social media adoption may differ depending on the context and purpose of use. Dhume-Shinkre et al. (2025), using the UTAUT2 framework among higher education students in Western India, found that effort expectancy, facilitating conditions, hedonic motivation, and social influence were important factors in students' intention to use social media for academic purposes. The role of hedonic motivation is particularly relevant to the present study because perceived enjoyment is included as one of the descriptive perception dimensions. At the same time, the findings indicate that social media adoption may involve a combination of functional, social, and experiential factors rather than accessibility alone.

Overall, the literature points to two closely related but distinct aspects of social media engagement in higher education: what students think about a platform and how they actually use it. A student may have easy access to a platform and consider it useful or easy to use without becoming a frequent user. Likewise, students who use a platform regularly may become more familiar with it and develop more favourable perceptions through continued exposure. Examining usage and acceptance together is therefore useful for understanding students' experiences with an emerging platform such as Threads.

Threads as an Emerging Platform

Threads is a relatively new social media platform, and research on its users and usage patterns is still developing. Launched by Meta in July 2023 and closely connected to Instagram, Threads provides an opportunity to examine how users respond to and engage with a newly introduced social media platform. Zhang et al. (2025) examined Threads in comparison with Instagram and found differences in posting behaviour, content preferences, and engagement patterns. Their findings suggest that, although Threads and Instagram are connected within the same broader ecosystem, users may use the two platforms for somewhat different forms of interaction and content sharing.

More recent research has begun to look beyond patterns of Threads usage and consider why users adopt and continue using the platform. Chen (2026) examined Threads adoption among Generation Z using an integrated model combining Social Impact Theory, the Technology

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Acceptance Model, and digital-risk perspectives. Based on data from 314 users, the study found that social impact was associated with acceptance-related perceptions, while perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and perceived pleasantness were important in explaining behavioural intention. The study also highlighted that intensive engagement with Threads may involve risks such as internet addiction and immersion-related experiences.

These emerging findings are relevant to the present study because several of the dimensions examined in recent Threads research overlap with the perceptions included in the current questionnaire. Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, social influence, and enjoyment are included as descriptive perception dimensions in this study. However, the purpose of the present research is different from that of Chen (2026). Rather than developing or testing a causal model of Threads adoption, this study focuses on describing students' usage and acceptance and examining how these two aspects are related.

Usage and Acceptance

The relationship between technology use and acceptance has been widely discussed through technology-acceptance models. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) proposed by Davis (1989) identifies perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as two central factors underlying users' acceptance of technology. Over time, research on technology acceptance has expanded to consider other influences, including social, affective, and contextual factors.

Recent evidence continues to support the importance of these broader perspectives in higher education. Santini et al. (2025), in a meta-analysis of 299 primary studies involving 158,096 participants, found that students' technology acceptance is influenced by several factors, with enjoyment emerging as an important antecedent. The study also showed that methodological, cultural, and contextual factors can affect the relationships among technology-acceptance constructs. This is in line with Xue et al. (2024), whose systematic review showed that technology-acceptance research in higher education has increasingly used integrated models, particularly combinations of TAM and UTAUT.

Social influence is another factor worth considering when examining students' acceptance of digital platforms. Students' decisions about technology use are not made entirely in isolation. Their perceptions of peers, social groups, and the wider digital environment may shape how they view and engage with a platform. Feng et al. (2025) similarly identified social influence as one of the important dimensions in educational technology adoption. This may be especially relevant to social media because these platforms are inherently social, with users continually exposed to the activities, preferences, and expectations of others.

Based on this body of literature, the present study considers perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, social influence, enjoyment, and accessibility as relevant perception dimensions. These dimensions are included for descriptive purposes rather than being treated as separately tested causal predictors. The main focus remains on the overall relationship between Threads usage and acceptance. This approach allows the study to describe students' perceptions while avoiding the assumption that any individual perception dimension directly causes acceptance.

Research Gap

Research on social media use and technology acceptance in higher education has grown considerably, but much of the existing literature still focuses on established platforms or broader categories of digital technology. Threads represents a relatively new area of research because

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the platform was introduced only in 2023. Recent studies have started to examine Threads from different perspectives, including differences in user behaviour and engagement compared with Instagram (Zhang et al., 2025) and factors associated with adoption among Generation Z users (Chen, 2026). However, these studies do not specifically examine higher education students in Malaysia.

Within the Malaysian context, previous research has considered social media in relation to usage behaviour, student engagement, well-being, and academic outcomes (De Rycker & Abdul Jamal, 2023; Mat Said et al., 2025; Nordin, 2025). Even so, empirical evidence on Threads usage and acceptance among Malaysian higher education students remains limited. In particular, there is still limited evidence on how frequently students use Threads, their overall level of acceptance, the relationship between usage and acceptance, and whether acceptance differs across usage-frequency groups.

The present study therefore addresses this gap by examining Threads usage and students' acceptance among higher education students in Malaysia. Specifically, it describes students' usage patterns, determines the levels of usage and acceptance, examines the relationship between the two constructs, and compares acceptance across different usage-frequency groups. In doing so, the study provides context-specific empirical evidence on an emerging social media platform without making causal or nationally representative claims.

Methodology

Research Design and Data

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine Threads usage and students' acceptance among higher education students in Malaysia. The dataset comprised 211 valid questionnaire responses. The questionnaire included five items measuring Threads usage and five items measuring Threads acceptance, both using a five-point Likert scale. It also included five single-item perception measures: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, social influence, perceived enjoyment and accessibility. Demographic information and self-reported Threads usage frequency were also collected.

The respondents represented a participating, convenience-type sample, as no probability sampling frame was documented in the available dataset. Therefore, the findings describe the participating respondents and should not be interpreted as representative of the wider Malaysian higher education student population.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics. Means and standard deviations were used to describe Threads usage, acceptance, and the five perception dimensions. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency of the Threads usage and acceptance scales. Pearson's correlation was then used to examine the linear relationship between Threads usage and acceptance, with the result interpreted as an association rather than a causal effect.

Finally, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare acceptance across usage-frequency groups, followed by Tukey's HSD for pairwise comparisons. Five responses with mixed frequency selections could not be assigned to a single group and were therefore excluded from the ANOVA, resulting in 206 observations for the group comparison. The analysis considered

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the assumptions of independence, approximate normality, and homogeneity of variance. However, formal diagnostic results were not available in the dataset; therefore, no claim is made that these assumptions were formally verified. Given the unequal group sizes, Levene's or Brown–Forsythe test should be considered when assessing variance homogeneity, with Welch's ANOVA used if the assumption is violated.

Results

Overall Levels of Usage and Acceptance

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Threads Usage, Acceptance and Perceptions

Construct	Mean	SD
Threads Usage	2.73	1.25
Threads Acceptance	2.97	1.18
Perceived Usefulness	3.30	1.27
Perceived Ease of Use	3.35	1.27
Social Influence	3.06	1.39
Perceived Enjoyment	3.36	1.32
Accessibility	3.52	1.32

Source: Authors' analysis of 211 questionnaire responses.

The overall mean for Threads usage was 2.73 (SD = 1.25), while the acceptance mean was 2.97 (SD = 1.18). The higher acceptance mean indicates that respondents' evaluative acceptance was somewhat more favourable than their reported usage intensity. Among the five single-item perception dimensions, accessibility had the highest mean (M = 3.52, SD = 1.32), followed by perceived enjoyment (M = 3.36, SD = 1.32), perceived ease of use (M = 3.35, SD = 1.27), perceived usefulness (M = 3.30, SD = 1.27) and social influence (M = 3.06, SD = 1.39). These results are descriptive and should not be interpreted as evidence that any single perception dimension causes acceptance or usage.

Reliability Analysis

Table 2: Internal Consistency of Usage and Acceptance Scales

Scale	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Threads Usage	5	0.928
Threads Acceptance	5	0.945

Source: Authors' analysis of the survey dataset.

The five-item Threads Usage scale showed excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .928), while the five-item Threads Acceptance scale also demonstrated excellent internal consistency (α = .945). These coefficients support the internal consistency of the two composite scales used in subsequent analyses. Reliability was not estimated for the five perception dimensions because each was measured with a single item.

Relationship between Usage and Acceptance

Table 3: Pearson Correlation between Threads Usage and Acceptance

Variables	Pearson r	p-value
Threads Usage and Threads Acceptance	0.871	< .001

Source: Authors' analysis of the survey dataset.

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Threads usage was strongly and positively associated with acceptance ($r = .871$, $p < .001$). Pearson's r indicates a large positive linear association in this sample; $r^2 = .759$, which can be described cautiously as approximately 75.9% shared variance between the two composite scores. This is not evidence that usage explains or causes 75.9% of acceptance, because the study is cross-sectional and correlational. Respondents reporting higher usage scores tended to report higher acceptance scores, but the direction of influence cannot be established.

Acceptance by Usage-Frequency Group

Table 4: Acceptance by Clearly Coded Usage-Frequency Group

Usage group	n	Mean acceptance	SD
Daily users	54	3.91	0.93
Several times a week	34	3.22	0.60
Rarely	74	2.83	1.03
Account but never opened	44	1.81	1.02
Total analysed	206		

Source: Only the 206 respondents with a single clearly coded frequency category were included in this ANOVA comparison.

Table 5: One-way ANOVA and Effect Sizes for Acceptance by Usage Frequency

Source of variation	df	F	p	η^2	ω^2
Usage frequency	3	41.31	< .001	0.380	0.370
Error	202				

Acceptance differed significantly across the four clearly coded usage-frequency groups, $F(3, 202) = 41.31$, $p < .001$, with $\eta^2 = .380$. Daily users reported the highest acceptance ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.93$), followed by respondents using Threads several times a week ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.60$), rarely ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.03$) and respondents who had an account but had never opened Threads ($M = 1.81$, $SD = 1.02$). The effect size indicates that usage-frequency grouping accounts for a substantial proportion of the observed variation in acceptance within this sample.

Tukey HSD comparisons showed significant differences between daily users and respondents using Threads several times a week ($p = .007$), daily users and rare users ($p < .001$), daily users and respondents who had never opened the platform ($p < .001$), several-times-a-week users and the dormant group ($p < .001$) and rare users and the dormant group ($p < .001$). The difference between several-times-a-week users and rare users was not statistically significant ($p = .197$). The clearest acceptance gradient is therefore between active daily users and respondents who had never opened Threads.

Note. η^2 = eta squared; ω^2 = omega squared. The reported η^2 is the proportion of total variance associated with usage-frequency grouping. Because formal assumption diagnostics were not included in the supplied analysis, the ANOVA result should be interpreted with this limitation in mind.

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Discussion

The findings show that students' acceptance of Threads was somewhat higher than their reported level of usage. Among the five perception dimensions, accessibility recorded the highest mean, suggesting that students generally viewed Threads as accessible even though their overall usage was moderate. This finding highlights an important distinction between having access to a platform and actively using it. In other words, students may perceive a platform positively or find it easy to access without necessarily using it frequently. This observation is consistent with previous research showing that social media engagement can vary considerably in terms of frequency, time spent, and type of interaction (Nordin, 2025; Tarifa-Rodriguez et al., 2024).

The strong positive relationship found between Threads usage and acceptance provides further insight into students' experiences with the platform. Students who reported higher levels of usage also tended to report higher levels of acceptance. This finding is broadly consistent with the technology-acceptance literature, where perceptions such as usefulness, ease of use, and enjoyment are recognised as important aspects of students' technology experiences. Santini et al. (2025), for example, found that enjoyment was an important antecedent of students' technology acceptance across a large body of previous research. Social and technology-related factors have also been identified as relevant to social media adoption (Al-Qaysi et al., 2023). However, the present finding should be understood as an association within the study sample. The cross-sectional design does not allow the study to determine whether greater usage leads to greater acceptance or whether students who already have more favourable views are more likely to use Threads.

The differences observed across usage-frequency groups provide a similar pattern. Students who used Threads daily reported the highest level of acceptance, while those who had an account but had never opened the platform reported the lowest. Students who used Threads several times a week and those who used it rarely fell between these two groups. This pattern suggests that students' experiences with the platform may be related to how frequently they engage with it. More frequent use may give students greater opportunity to become familiar with the platform, explore its features, and recognise its value. However, the relationship may also operate in the opposite direction. Students who already perceive Threads as useful, enjoyable, or suitable for their needs may be more inclined to use it regularly. Thus, the observed differences should be interpreted as differences in acceptance across usage groups rather than evidence that frequent use causes higher acceptance.

The findings also add to the emerging literature on Threads. Zhang et al. (2025) showed that Threads has distinctive patterns of content and user engagement compared with Instagram, highlighting the importance of examining Threads as a platform in its own right rather than assuming that user behaviour is the same across social media platforms. More recently, Chen (2026) found that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived pleasantness, and social impact are relevant to Threads adoption among Generation Z users. The present study complements this emerging evidence by focusing specifically on higher education students in Malaysia and by examining the relationship between actual usage and acceptance. Rather than developing a causal adoption model, the study provides a descriptive and comparative view of how acceptance varies according to reported usage frequency.

Overall, the findings suggest that Threads acceptance among the participating students is closely related to their reported level of use. At the same time, the results indicate that

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accessibility and positive perceptions of a platform do not necessarily translate into frequent engagement. The combination of moderate usage, somewhat higher acceptance, and clear differences across usage-frequency groups suggests that students' experiences with Threads are not uniform. These findings provide useful initial evidence on Threads within the Malaysian higher education context, while the cross-sectional design means that the observed relationships should not be interpreted as causal.

Conclusion

This study examined Threads usage and students' acceptance among participating higher education students in Malaysia. The findings show that reported Threads usage was moderate ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.25$), while acceptance was somewhat higher ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.18$). Among the five perception dimensions, accessibility recorded the highest mean, indicating that students generally viewed the platform as accessible despite their moderate level of use.

A strong positive relationship was found between Threads usage and acceptance ($r = .871$, $p < .001$). Acceptance also differed significantly across usage-frequency groups, with daily users reporting the highest level of acceptance and students who had an account but had never opened Threads reporting the lowest. These findings indicate that higher usage and greater acceptance tend to occur together within the participating sample. However, the cross-sectional design does not establish whether greater usage leads to higher acceptance or whether more positive perceptions encourage more frequent use.

Overall, the study provides useful initial evidence on Threads within the Malaysian higher education context. It adds to the emerging literature on the platform by examining both actual usage patterns and acceptance rather than focusing on adoption intention alone. At the same time, the findings should be viewed as context-specific evidence from the participating respondents rather than as nationally representative or causal evidence. Further research using more representative samples, longitudinal designs, and behavioural measures would help provide a clearer understanding of how students' use and acceptance of Threads develop over time.

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