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Exploring Chinese Undergraduates' Perceptions of Using Social Networking Sites in English Writing

Zhenfang Liao [1,2]* , *Supyan Hussin* [1] , *Harwati Hashim* [1]

[1] *Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 436000, Selangor, Malaysia*

[2] *School of Foreign Language, ABa Teachers College, Wenchuan 623000, China*

ABSTRACT

This study investigates Chinese undergraduate students' perceptions of using social networking sites (SNSs) for English writing development and identifies associated challenges. In light of the persistent challenges with English writing among Chinese undergraduates, especially with the relatively low pass rates in the writing section of the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) exam, this study seeks to understand how SNSs, as digital learning tools, are perceived in the context of writing skill enhancement. Data were collected through questionnaires administered to 80 undergraduates, with descriptive analysis revealing generally positive perceptions of SNSs for writing practice. Semi-structured interviews with nine randomly selected participants further uncovered their key challenges, including language proficiency and accuracy concerns, psychological and social barriers and platform-specific limitations. There is no doubt that the findings provide the basis for concluding that SNSs have great potential as adjuncts for English writing instruction. However, there remains an equal need for effective pedagogical approaches to address the constraints inherent to digital SNSs tools. This study contributes to the discourse on technology-enhanced language learning by highlighting the dual role of SNSs as both facilitators and impediments in educational contexts, thereby advancing discussions on balancing technological integration with pedagogical efficacy in foreign language education.

Keywords: Social Networking Sites; College English Writing; English Language Learning; Undergraduates Perception; Challenges

1. Introduction

English writing proficiency is a critical component of language education in China, reflecting students' ability to apply vocabulary, grammar, and discourse structures effectively[1]. Despite its importance, English writing remains a persistent challenge for Chinese undergraduates, particularly non-English majors, who often struggle with low pass rates in standardized assessments like the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4)[2]. It has been reported that Chinese students have certain problems, difficulties, and challenges in writing in English[3]. As some studies have indicated, Chinese college students have a relatively low level of EFL writing competence, commonly lack of confidence, low motivation, or to some extent suffer psychological stress and apprehension in their writing practices[4,5]. These challenges highlight the urgent need for effective pedagogical interventions that can enhance students' writing competence and engagement. In response, the College English Teaching Guidelines advocate for integrating digital tools to shift students from passive recipients to active participants in learning, emphasizing the role of technology in fostering innovation in instruction. Among these digital tools, social networking sites (SNSs) have emerged as increasingly significant platforms. As Internet-based technologies, SNSs allow users to generate and share content through various modalities, such as text, images, audio, and video, creating expansive opportunities for communication and information exchange in today's globalized world. Their relevance has grown even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated digital transformation across professional and educational sectors, including business, science, and language education[6,7].

In China, SNSs such as WeChat, QQ, and others are now deeply embedded in everyday life and are widely used for both personal and academic purposes. These platforms enable users to exchange ideas, access professional information, and collaborate across geographic boundaries. Within education, SNSs have played a critical role in maintaining high-quality instruction amid disruptions, and their potential to support formal and informal English language learning has been increasingly recognized[8]. Beyond simple text-based communication, SNSs support multimodal interaction, which aligns with contemporary pedagogical approaches that emphasize the use of multiple symbolic resources to enhance expression and understanding[9,10].

Additionally, a number of studies have documented the possible advantages of SNSs for practicing multimodal writing[9,10], web-based collaborative writing with wikis and Facebook[11,12]. Information has been transformed through multimedia means such as pictures, videos, audio and so on. It is widely believed that students in the information era should learn to use multimedia elements to express their ideas vividly and clearly. Especially in language teaching, educational activities should also incorporate a variety of symbolic resources to prepare students for the contemporary world where the emphasis is more on communication function, which has had a significant impact on the integration of multimodal techniques in foreign language teaching. A range of benefits of using SNSs have been reported, including chances for extensive writing practice, interacting synchronously with teachers and peers, and enhancing audience awareness[13,14]. However, most studies have centred on English-language-dominated SNSs, which are often inaccessible in China due to national internet regulations. As a result, there is a scarcity of research focusing on how Chinese EFL learners use domestic SNSs for writing development[15]. Moreover, while existing research underscores SNSs' pedagogical value, few studies have investigated students' perspectives on using these tools, which is crucial for understanding the pedagogical value and challenges of SNSs integration in the Chinese EFL context.

In light of these gaps, this mixed-methods study investigates Chinese non-English majors' perceptions and experiences of using domestic SNSs for EFL writing development, highlighting implications for balancing technological affordances and pedagogical challenges in EFL instruction. The research employs a mixed-method research design combining a quantitative questionnaire (N = 80) and qualitative semi-structured interview (N = 9). The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of Chinese EFL undergraduates towards using SNSs in improving their writing?

RQ2: What challenges do Chinese EFL undergraduates encounter when they use SNSs in their English writing?

2. Literature Review

Social networking sites (SNSs) have demonstrated transformative potential in technology-enhanced language education, yet their specific role in EFL writing in non-English-dominant contexts remains underexplored. Globally, SNSs are recognized as valuable tools for enhancing English language skills in authentic, low-pressure environments. Studies highlight their efficacy in improving writing, grammar, and vocabulary through multimodal features (text, images, videos) that align with digital literacy principles [14,15]. For instance, research on platforms such as Facebook shows that engaging in authentic online discussions can enhance writing fluency, clarity, and collaborative skills among learners [13,16,17]. Similarly, messaging applications like WhatsApp and Telegram facilitate speaking practice and promote grammatical accuracy via interactive feedback mechanisms [18,19]. These findings underscore the potential of SNSs to foster cooperation, boost learner motivation, and contribute to perceived language proficiency gains.

Despite these advancements, critical research gaps remain. Most studies have focused on English-dominant platforms, often overlooking contexts such as China where access to global SNSs is restricted due to strict internet censorship and regulatory policies [20]. This gap is significant because Chinese undergraduates experience digital learning environments that are fundamentally different from those in countries with unrestricted internet access. Their unique experiences, challenges, and expectations necessitate dedicated examination to determine how localized SNSs can be effectively harnessed to optimize EFL writing instruction. Moreover, given the national mandate for technology-integrated education in China[1], future research should investigate how these platforms can balance their inherent digital affordances with the academic rigor required for language learning.

China's SNS ecosystem operates as a self-contained digital universe that blends social interaction with multifunctional services including mobile payments, e-commerce, and mini-programs. Unlike many global platforms, which tend to center on entertainment and social networking, Chinese SNSs are deeply integrated into daily life and offer a variety of multimodal communication tools such as text messaging, voice notes, and short videos[21]. Among these, WeChat stands out as the dominant platform, exemplifying the convergence of social networking with academic functionalities. Educators have repurposed features such as "Groups" and "Official Accounts" to distribute learning materials, facilitate peer feedback, and conduct interactive writing tasks [22,23]. This multifunctional design not only overcomes the spatial and temporal limitations of traditional classrooms but also provides a dynamic environment where students can engage in collaborative learning.

Research on WeChat indicates that its various functionalities are effective in enhancing writing autonomy, fostering critical thinking, and promoting cooperative learning among students[24,25]. For example, its group chat feature allows for real-time collaborative revision and immediate feedback, which can support iterative writing improvements. However, the platform's informal, entertainment-centric design also poses potential drawbacks. The constant influx of non-academic content and the risk of fragmented attention can undermine its educational potential if not managed with appropriate pedagogical strategies [26]. This dual nature underscores the need for a strategic integration of such tools into formal EFL writing curricula. Educators must design activities that leverage the communicative strengths of WeChat while implementing measures to mitigate distractions and maintain academic focus.

Although studies in other contexts have documented the benefits of SNSs, there is a paucity of research that delves into how Chinese learners perceive these tools, what challenges they encounter, and how cultural and regulatory factors influence their experiences [20]. Since digital communication in China is shaped by unique sociocultural norms and governance frameworks, a localized perspective is essential to fully understand the interplay between technology use and academic performance in EFL writing.

In summary, while existing literature substantiates the general benefits of SNSs in language education, significant gaps persist regarding their pedagogical application in EFL writing within China. There is an urgent need for studies that specifically focus on the perceptions and challenges of Chinese undergraduates, and that investigate how localized SNSs can be optimized to balance the informal nature of digital communication with the structured demands of academic writing. Addressing these gaps will not only enhance the effectiveness of technology-integrated language instruction but also support the broader national objectives for advancing English language education in China.

3. Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design that integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore Chinese undergraduates' perceptions of using social networking sites (SNSs) in English writing. The mixed-methods design proves particularly appropriate for examining educational phenomena that require both statistical generalization of perceptions and in-depth exploration of complex experiential dimensions [27]. Through quantitative surveys using 5-Likert-scale questionnaires, this research systematically measures students' general perceptions toward SNSs-assisted writing practices. In addition, semi-structured interviews are used to qualitatively investigate the challenges that happen when writing through social networking sites. Additionally, it helps to triangulate and elaborate the survey results. This triangulation is achieved by comparing themes and patterns emerging from the interviews with the responses obtained in the survey. Through the integration of the quantitative data and the insights obtained from the semi-structured interviews, this method allows for the investigation of how students' direct experiences with SNS-mediated writing correspond to the broader trends identified in the survey, providing a more comprehensive and detailed picture of the ways in which SNSs influence their writing performance.

This study employed a convenience sampling approach to recruit participants from Aba Teachers College. A total of 80 first-year students who were not majoring in English were selected from a single class. These students were enrolled in the researcher's class, which was convenient to facilitate direct access and data collection. All participants were native Mandarin Chinese speakers with intermediate English proficiency, as determined by their undergraduate entrance placement test scores. This university was selected because the researcher has direct access to the students and teaching environment, which facilitates data collection and interaction. More importantly, it represents a typical higher education institution in China where undergraduates engage with SNSs while developing their English writing skills, such as Bilibili, Xiaohongshu, WeChat, blogs, etc. Its emphasis on technology integration in EFL learning made it an ideal environment for exploring students' perceptions of using SNSs in English writing. Despite utilizing convenience sampling, the participants show reasonable representativeness for non-English majors in similar regional Chinese universities. All participants were first-year non-English major students who had recently completed the National Higher Education Entrance Examination (*gaokao*). They were of similar ages, typically between 18 and 19 years old, and had received comparable English instruction through the standardized national secondary school curriculum, with demographic characteristics summarized in **Table 1**. From the selected class, nine participants were randomly chosen for semi-structured interviews. Before the interviews began, all participants were given clear explanations about the study's goals, how their data would be used, and the promise to protect their privacy. Written consent was collected from each participant after they confirmed these details. Additionally, the academic and ethics committee at this university reviewed and approved the study to ensure it met ethical standards.

Table 1. Participants' demographic information.

Demographic Info	Category	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	38	47.5%
	Female	42	52.5%
Age Group	Below 18	5	6.25%
	18–19	67	83.75%
	19–20	8	10%

The questionnaire in this study was adapted from the work of Azlan and Yunus [28]. Recognizing the unique context and needs of Chinese EFL non-English majors, some modifications were made by the researcher to tailor the survey to our target population (see **Appendix A**). The original questionnaire contains 21 questions including three aspects, namely perception of personal use of SNSs, perception of the use of SNSs for academic use, and perception of functionality. This questionnaire was adopted in the Malaysian context which was different from China as to the internet environment. Therefore, five from the original 21 were removed due to conceptual redundancy. For

example, the first two questions mentioned in the original questionnaire were "*I think online chatting helps me to improve my English writing*", and "*I think SNSs (writing comment) help me to improve my writing*". The first item was removed based on the recommendation of the researcher and expert reviewers during the content validity check, as it was found to overlap conceptually with the second item. Specifically, the idea of "online chatting" was considered a subset of the broader activity described in the second item, which refers to writing comments on SNSs. Including both items was deemed redundant and could have led to confusion or inflated responses due to their conceptual similarity. Therefore, to enhance the clarity and precision of the questionnaire, the first item was eliminated. After the revision, the finalized questionnaire consists of 16 items that are more closely aligned with the characteristics of the participants in this study. The questionnaire in this study is based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which identifies key factors influencing users' acceptance and use of technology, including perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and behavioral intention. The 16-item scale was organized into three dimensions that correspond closely to these constructs. Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 16 measure students' perceptions of using SNSs for academic purposes in English writing, which reflects perceived usefulness, or the extent to which students believe that SNSs can enhance their learning outcomes. Items 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 examine students' evaluations of the functionality of SNSs, corresponding to perceived ease of use. Items 6, 7, 13, 14, and 15 focus on students' personal use of SNSs, indicating their behavioral intention and actual usage. Through this structure, the questionnaire offers a theoretically informed approach to investigating students' acceptance of SNSs in English writing. The questionnaire was reviewed by a qualified and expert lecturer in education and social media, who assessed the face and content validity of items. To further validate the research instrument, a pilot study was conducted with 40 additional undergraduate students at this university, and the SNSs scale demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.971. The three subscales also showed strong reliability, with alpha values of 0.912, 0.904, and 0.918 respectively, indicating that the instrument has good overall reliability, according to Tavakol and Dennick[29], who also note that acceptable Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.70 to 0.95.

As shown in **Table 2**, it presented the reliability of each subscale, which showed the items in the instrument can be employed in the actual study. The obtained data was then presented through descriptive analysis, which includes mean score, frequency, and percentage.

Table 2. The Cronbach Alpha of the questionnaire scale.

	Cronbach Alpha
Personal use	0.912
Academic use	0.904
Functionality	0.918
Total items	0.971

The semi-structured interview aims to explore the challenges students face during the writing process and their perceptions of using multimodal elements such as videos, pictures, audio, and infographics to enhance their writing skills. To ensure a balanced representation, 9 students were randomly chosen from a pool of 80 participants. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and followed a semi-structured format designed to elicit both general and specific challenges encountered in the students' SNSs-based writing processes. The interview protocol was reviewed and refined by three experts in applied linguistics and educational research to ensure content validity and clarity. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin, the participants' native language, to promote comfort and encourage authentic responses. With the participants' informed consent, the interviews were audio-recorded in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines and procedures, ensuring participants were aware of their rights, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Transcripts were translated into English by two bilingual researchers, and the translated versions were returned to participants for accuracy confirmation. To

enhance the credibility and accuracy of the translated transcripts, a member-checking process was conducted. The English translations were returned to the respective participants for review, allowing them to confirm the accuracy of the content and clarify any ambiguities. Although back-translation was not employed in this study, participant validation ensured that the translated transcripts preserved the authenticity and intended meanings of the original responses. This process contributed to the trustworthiness and validity of the qualitative data. Transparency in ethics and procedures is essential to avoid suspicions of bias or data manipulation. Finlay, the collected data was subjected to thematic analysis in NVivo, a qualitative analysis software program that identifies themes, patterns, and insights in the data. This approach ensures that the researcher could comprehensively understand each participant's challenges and perceptions, providing rich qualitative data to complement the study's quantitative findings and find out the correlate relationships among the data.

4. Results

4.1. RQ1: Finding of Perceptions of Chinese EFL Undergraduates towards Using SNSs in Improving Their Writing

The questionnaire consists of 16 items designed to study students' perceptions of using SNSs to improve their English writing. It has evolved into a perspective of personal feelings, academic goals, and the functionality of SNSs based on the TAM model. The findings corresponding to each construct were presented separately in the following sections to ensure clarity and thematic coherence.

The results of students' perceptions regarding the personal use of Social Networking Services (SNSs) for English writing practice are summarized in **Table 3.** Among the five items under the "Personal use" category, Item No.6 ("I feel comfortable practicing English writing on SNSs with my friends") received the highest mean score (M = 3.35, SD = 1.092), indicating relatively strong agreement. The total mean score across all personal use items (M = 3.232) suggests an overall neutral-to-moderately positive inclination among students. While they feel comfortable using SNSs for collaborative writing with peers (No.6). For this item, it could be supported by the semi-structured interview where one interviewee said "*I find that interacting with my friends on social media provides a comfortable environment for me to practice and improve my English writing skills, and I feel ease even some mistakes would be made.*" Conversely, Item No.7 ("I feel good using the English language on SNSs") yielded the lowest mean score (M = 3.15, SD = 1.17), indicating that students might still be reluctant to use English for casual online communication. Nevertheless, the general increasing trend for all items (M = 3.15–3.35) highlights that students perceive SNSs as useful platforms for language use. These results corroborate prior research by Azlan and Yunus findings [28], who similarly identified SNSs as effective tools for enhancing learner engagement in English writing practices.

Table 3. Frequency of perception on the personal use of SNSs.

Category	Items No	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
	No.6	2	16	30	16	16	3.35	1.092
	No.7	4	22	27	12	15	3.15	1.170
Personal use	No.13	5	18	27	16	14	3.20	1.163
	No.14	4	17	30	15	14	3.23	1.125
	No.15	4	16	32	14	14	3.23	1.113
Total Mean Score							3.232	

The findings regarding students' perceptions of SNSs for academic writing purposes are presented in **Table 4**. Among the six items under the "Academic use" category, Item No.5 ("I believe that SNSs is the platform to learn") received the highest mean score (M = 3.49, SD = 1.091), with 27.5% of respondents agreeing (A) and 21.25% strongly agreeing (SA), suggesting that students view informal SNSs interactions as advantageous for enhancing formal writing skills by exposing them to a variety of linguistic styles. Notably, Item No.16 ("I found it easy to complete my essay using SNSs") yielded the lowest mean score (M = 3.26, SD = 1.156) in the academic use

category, suggesting that despite an overall recognition of the educational potential of SNSs, students may encounter practical difficulties when using these platforms for more formal writing tasks, such as essay composition. A participant explained, "*When I write essays, SNSs are too casual and distractive. I prefer using platforms like Word or Google Docs or write on paper where I can better organize my ideas and adhere to academic standards,*" which emphasized that the informal nature of SNSs may limit their effectiveness in structured academic writing. The findings support the idea that social media language often includes abbreviations, slang, and non-standard punctuation, which can negatively affect students' formal writing skills[30, 31]. The overall positive trend across academic use items reflects students' general acceptance of SNSs as language learning tools. However, the variability in responses, particularly the lower agreement on Item No.16, emphasizes the challenges students may face when transitioning from informal social media engagement to completing structured academic tasks. This suggests a potential gap between students' perceptions of the usefulness of SNSs and their actual experiences when applying these platforms to formal writing.

Table 4. Frequency of perception on the use of SNSs for academic use.

Category	Items No	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
Academic use	No.1	3	12	28	19	18	3.46	1.113
	No.2	2	13	28	21	16	3.45	1.066
	No.3	3	14	27	23	13	3.36	1.070
	No.4	3	10	28	24	15	3.48	1.055
	No.5	3	11	27	22	17	3.49	1.091
	No.16	5	17	23	22	13	3.26	1.156
Total Mean Score							3.417	

As shown in **Table 5**, students generally held a positive perception of the functionality of SNSs in supporting English writing, with an overall mean score of 3.359. Among the five items under the "Functionality" category, Item No.10 ("I am conscious about spelling when I write on SNSs, e.g., chats, comments, and posts") received the highest mean score (M = 3.50, SD = 1.158), indicating that a majority of students pay attention to spelling accuracy even in informal digital communication. This suggests that despite the casual nature of SNSs, students exhibit a notable degree of linguistic awareness. One participant reflected this sentiment, stating, "*Even when I post casually in my WeChat Moments, I try to make sure the spelling is correct, otherwise I worry that people will think my English is poor and laugh at me.*" In contrast, Item No.9 ("I am conscious about grammatical structure when I write on SNSs") had a lower mean score (M = 3.25, SD = 1.185), indicating that students are somewhat less attentive to grammatical accuracy compared to spelling. This discrepancy may be attributed to the immediacy and fragmented nature of SNSs communication, where spelling and other superficial mistakes are typically easier to see than grammar mistakes.

Table 5. Frequency of SNSs use for perception on functionality.

Category	Items No	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
Functionality	No.8	2	16	30	16	16	3.35	1.092
	No.9	4	19	27	13	17	3.25	1.185
	No.10	5	10	23	24	18	3.50	1.158
	No.11	2	15	26	19	18	3.45	1.113
	No.12	4	13	30	18	15	3.34	1.113
Total Mean Score							3.359	

Figure 1 illustrates the mean scores of the three subscales measuring students' perceptions of using SNSs in English writing. Among the three dimensions, students reported the highest level of agreement regarding the use of SNSs for academic purposes (M = 3.417), followed by perceptions of SNS functionality (M = 3.359). The lowest mean score was found in the personal use dimension (M = 3.232). This pattern suggests that while students may not frequently engage in personal writing via SNSs, they still hold a strong belief in the educational potential and practical value of these platforms in supporting academic writing. In other words, while students acknowledge the educational potential and functional benefits of SNSs for supporting English writing, some students are relatively reluctant to use these platforms for personal writing activities. In follow-up interviews, one student explained "*SNSs are effective tools for improving my writing skills, but I am unwilling to write in English on these platforms because I feel a little bit anxious and shy to write English in SNSs.*" This reluctance can be interpreted through the lens of Krashen's filter hypothesis, which posits that affective factors such as anxiety serve as a filter that hinders language acquisition. Another student mentioned, "*During the writing process with SNSs, I feel unconfident to write in the public and worried about the mistakes I made.*" This finding is consistent with Bandura's self-efficacy theory, which posits that individuals' beliefs in their own abilities significantly influence their behavior and performance. Students with lower self-efficacy in English writing may experience higher levels of anxiety and shyness, leading them to avoid using SNSs for personal writing despite acknowledging its potential benefits. In addition to individual affective barriers or lack of confidence, the specific characteristics of the Chinese internet censorship and policy restrictions, which block many foreign websites including Google, Facebook, and Twitter, may also play a crucial role. Therefore, most social networking platforms used in China primarily support communication in Chinese and opportunities for authentic English interaction are limited. As a result, students are often reluctant or feel unmotivated to use English in personal digital spaces, which further reduces their chances to practice English writing. This sociolinguistic context may partially explain the lower engagement in the personal use of SNSs for English writing, despite students' general recognition of the academic and functional potential of such platforms.
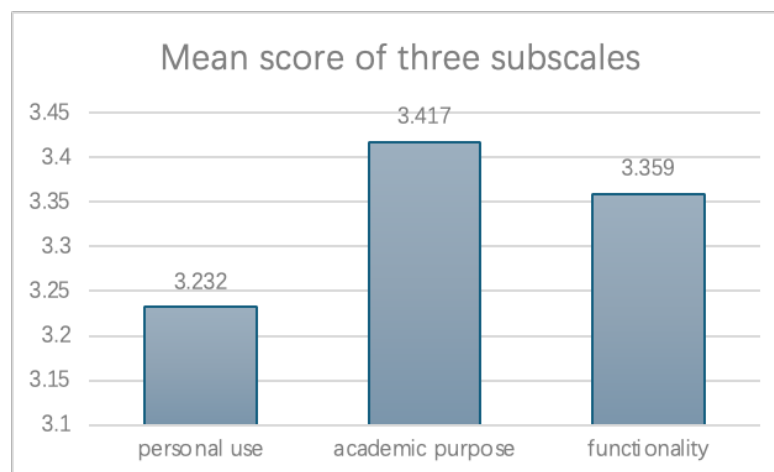

Figure 1. Means of the three subscales of the questionnaire.

The correlation matrix as shown in Table 6 reveals strong and statistically significant positive relationships among the three subscales: academic purpose, personal use, and functionality. Specifically, academic purpose is highly correlated with functionality (r = 0.886, *p* < 0.01) and personal use (r = 0.863, *p* < 0.01), indicating that students who perceive SNSs as functionally supportive of writing are also more likely to recognize their academic utility. Additionally, the high correlation between personal use and functionality (r = 0.866, *p* < 0.01) suggests that students' engagement with SNSs for personal purposes may contribute to their awareness and appreciation of the platforms' functional affordances. These high intercorrelations suggest a coherent perception pattern: students who

are comfortable using SNSs in personal contexts and who recognize their technical and interactive features are also inclined to view them as valuable tools for academic writing. Taken together, the mean score distribution and the correlation coefficients collectively point to an integrated perception framework: although students are relatively less engaged in personal writing on SNSs, their recognition of the platforms' functional features and academic value is strong and interconnected. These results align well with the TAM Model, where perceived usefulness and ease of use jointly influence user attitudes.

Table 6. Correlation among the three subscales.

Correlations			
	Academic Purpose	**Personal**	**Functionality**
Academic purpose	1		
Personal	0.863 **	1	
Functionality	0.886 **	0.866 **	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To examine gender differences in students' perceptions of SNSs in relation to English writing, independent sample t-tests were conducted for each of the three subscales: academic purpose, personal use, and functionality.

As shown in **Table 7**, it indicated no statistically significant differences between male and female students on any of the subscales. For academic purpose, female students (M = 3.47, SD = 1.06) reported slightly higher mean scores than their male counterparts (M = 3.37, SD = 0.73), however, an independent samples t-test indicated that there was no significant difference between male and female students, $t(78) = 0.528$, $p = 0.599$, as the p-value is greater than the conventional significance level of .05. Similarly, in terms of personal use, females (M = 3.32, SD = 1.06) scored marginally higher than males (M = 3.15, SD = 0.89), yet this difference was also not statistically significant, $t(78) = 0.202$, $p = 0.229 > 0.05$. Regarding functionality, the pattern remained consistent, with female students (M = 3.50, SD = 1.06) reporting slightly higher perceptions than males (M = 3.27, SD = 0.88), though the difference did not reach statistical significance either, $t(78) = 0.135$, $p = 0.143 > 0.05$. These findings suggest that gender does not appear to play a major role in shaping students' perceptions of the use and usefulness of SNSs for English writing within this sample. The lack of significant gender differences contributes to the internal consistency of the data and supports the generalizability of the findings across male and female students.

Table 7. Independent sample t-test of gender difference.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	*t*	*p*
Academic purpose	Female	38.00	3.47	1.06	0.528	0.599
	Male	42.00	3.37	0.73		
Personal use	Female	38.00	3.32	1.06	0.202	0.229
	Male	42.00	3.15	0.89		
Functionality	Female	38.00	3.50	1.06	0.135	0.143
	Male	42.00	3.27	0.88		

4.2. RQ2: Finding of Challenges of Chinese EFL Undergraduates When They Use SNSs in Their English Writing

Thematic analysis processes and trustworthiness enhancement strategies discovered three core codes and a total of 9 related themes. These were carefully derived from the data to ensure broad coverage and depth in exploring the challenges that people face when using SNSs in English writing. Thematic analysis outlining three primary codes and their associated themes derived from interviews with students regarding challenges encountered when using SNSs for English writing is displayed in **Table 8**.

Table 8. Thematic analysis results of students' challenges when using SNSs in English writing.

Codes	Themes
Language proficiency and accuracy concerns	Spelling fixation
	Grammar anxiety
	Vocabulary limitations
Psychological and social barriers	Anxiety about peer evaluation
	Reluctance to share publicly
Platform-specific limitations	Distraction from multimodal overload
	Privacy concerns
	Reduce concentration
	Time management difficulties

The analysis reveals three interconnected categories of challenges faced by Chinese EFL undergraduates when using SNSs for English writing, each encompassing distinct thematic obstacles. To begin with, students struggle with language proficiency and accuracy concerns. They reported heightened anxiety over linguistic precision, particularly an excessive focus on spelling accuracy and a fear of grammatical mistakes, which appeared to suppress their creative expression. This aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that emotional factors such as anxiety can raise the affective filter, thereby limiting language input and hindering acquisition. In this context, students' linguistic anxiety likely elevated their affective filter, reducing their willingness to take risks and inhibiting their engagement in more expressive or experimental use of language. Many students struggled with vocabulary limitations, which, along with broader deficiencies in language competence, such as inadequate understanding of grammar, spelling, and stylistic conventions, made effective self-expression in English-mediated SNSs interactions particularly challenging. As highlighted in previous research, insufficient linguistic knowledge, including grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, often impedes learners' ability to communicate effectively in social media[31].

Psychological and social barriers also significantly affect students' writing experiences on SNSs. Many feel anxious about how their peers might evaluate their English writing, with some fearing that grammatical errors or unconventional expressions could lead to ridicule or perceived incompetence. This anxiety is further intensified by the public nature of SNSs platforms, where posts are visible to both peers and strangers. According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory, individuals' beliefs about their capabilities influence their choices, efforts, and emotional re-

sponses. In this context, learners with low writing self-efficacy may perceive public sharing as a threat rather than an opportunity, leading to avoidance behaviours. As one participant expressed, "*I prefer to keep my drafts private because I don't want others to judge my unfinished ideas. And I think my writing is not so good, I do not want many people see it.*" This statement reflects a lack of confidence in one's writing ability, which can discourage active participation and risk-taking in SNSs-mediated environments. These intertwined psychological and social dynamics highlight the need for creating safer, low-stakes digital environments that encourage risk-taking and gradual confidence-building in language use.

The challenges students face when using social networking sites (SNSs) for English writing are deeply rooted in the platforms' inherent design and sociotechnical dynamics, as evidenced by their struggles with multimodal overload, privacy concerns, diminished concentration, and time management difficulties. The constant influx of notifications, auto-playing videos, and visually fragmented interface features of SNSs design overwhelm students' cognitive resources, diverting attention from writing tasks and fragmenting their focus. This aligns with cognitive load theory, which posits that extraneous sensory stimulus exhausts working memory, leaving fewer mental resources for complex tasks like drafting or editing texts. The finding echoes that students get distracted by the multimodal information overload typical of social media environments, such as competing notifications, auto-playing videos, and visually cluttered interfaces that fragment their attention during writing tasks[32]. Some respondents also express concerns about privacy issues when sharing their writing online, fearing personal data misuse or unintended exposure of drafts to unintended audiences. Additionally, time

management difficulties arise from the blurred boundaries between social interaction and academic work. Students often spend excessive time navigating non-essential features like liking posts or browsing feeds, which influences the efficiency of SNSs-mediated writing practice. These platform-driven challenges highlight a tension between SNSs' potential as collaborative tools and their inherent distractions that weaken academic objectivity.

These challenges collectively underscore a paradox: while SNSs offer accessible platforms for authentic language practice, their inherent design, combining informal communication norms, multimodal distractions, and technical complexities, creates barriers that disproportionately affect learners with lower confidence, introverted tendencies, or poor self-control. Addressing these issues requires pedagogical strategies that balance SNSs' informal nature with structured support, such as guided practice for linguistic accuracy, privacy-protected collaboration spaces, and training to navigate platform features effectively.

5. Discussion

This study's findings reveal that Chinese non-English majors exhibit an overall neutral-to-moderately positive perception of using domestic SNSs as tools to enhance their English writing. While the quantitative data indicate that students recognize the academic value and functional potential of SNSs, the qualitative insights expose significant challenges ranging from linguistic anxieties to platform-induced distractions. However, to fully understand these findings, it is crucial to situate them within the specific characteristics of Chinese internet censorship and policy restrictions.

Chinese SNSs operate in a digital ecosystem that differs markedly from those in many Western contexts. The existence of the national firewall and restrictions on global SNS platforms have propelled the development and use of homegrown alternatives (e.g., WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin). These platforms are designed with multifunctionality in mind, blending messaging with entertainment, commerce, and education. Although the multifunctionality of these domestic platforms provides broad utility, the absence of globally oriented features may limit exposure to the full range of English language interactions. This linguistic environment limits students' exposure to authentic

English-language exchanges, as most content creation and communication occur in Chinese. The lack of organic English immersion opportunities on these platforms contextualizes the lower mean scores observed in the "personal use" subscale (M = 3.232) and aligns with interview findings where students expressed reluctance to publicly engage in English writing. As one participant noted, "Posting in English feels unnatural here, everyone uses Chinese, so I worry about standing out or making errors." This phenomenon reflects Bandura's self-efficacy theory, where limited exposure to English-language contexts reduces learners' confidence in their ability to write English in SNSs. Consequently, even students who recognize SNSs' academic potential hesitate to use English openly, perpetuating a cycle of avoidance that reinforces linguistic insularity.

Another significant factor for the low value of personal use and the interviewee's anxiety and unwillingness to write English in public SNSs is the role of "face culture" in China. The concept of "face", the desire to be perceived positively by others, is a powerful sociocultural force that influences interpersonal interactions and learning behaviors. Within the context of SNSs, where writing is publicly visible, the fear of making mistakes and facing ridicule is magnified. This fear, as evidenced by interview insights, leads to hesitation and reduced willingness to express ideas openly. The affective filter theorized by Krashen comes into sharper relief in this cultural context. Psychological barriers stemming from self-consciousness and anxiety are not merely personal inhibitions, they are interwoven with cultural expectations of perfection and conformity in academic performance. Students' reluctance to post and engage in English writing on SNSs can thus be seen as a protecting mechanism to protect their "face". These findings echo that while many Chinese students have a solid foundation in English due to extensive educational exposure, their reluctance to use it in informal online settings stems from a combination of factors, including perceived inadequacy in English proficiency and the fear of losing "face"[33]. The reluctance of shy students to post on social media ("*I avoid sharing ideas due to shyness*") shows how personal traits affect digital learning. These students struggle when quiet personalities meet the public nature of online platforms, creating tension between their comfort zones and the need to participate with others. This highlights how social anxiety can limit learning opportu-

nities in digital spaces where sharing is expected. These challenges highlight an important conflict: even though social networking sites make authentic language practice available to everyone, they are designed primarily to keep users engaged rather than to teach effectively. This design approach unintentionally creates more difficulties for students who already lack confidence in their English writing abilities.

While the College English Teaching Guidelines encourage technology integration, actual classroom practices vary considerably. On one hand, teachers may employ SNSs to facilitate discussion and collaborative learning; on the other, concerns over distractions and the informal nature of these platforms can lead to hesitancy in fully endorsing them as academic tools. The tension between leveraging technological affordances and maintaining academic rigor reflects a larger national debate on how best to reconcile modern pedagogical methods with traditional educational expectations. The findings emphasize the importance of exploring localized SNS platforms in EFL contexts and call for further research into how these digital tools can be used to support the complex socio-emotional and pedagogical needs of Chinese students. Future studies might investigate interventions that specifically address the cultural and psychological barriers identified, such as training on digital literacy that is sensitive to the nuances of face culture and developing classroom practices with digital innovation.

6. Conclusions

This study investigated the perceptions and experiences of Chinese non-English majors using domestic social networking sites for English writing improvement. The findings reveal that students appreciate the academic value and technical functionalities offered by these platforms while simultaneously facing significant challenges in their writing practices. The research demonstrates that students benefit from the interactive and multimodal capabilities of SNSs which allow them to access diverse forms of language input and real-time feedback. At the same time students are adversely affected by language anxiety and cultural pressures such as face concerns that hinder their willingness to post or experiment with written content in a public digital space. In addition, the restrictive digital envi-

ronment created by national internet policies influences the way students engage with these platforms. As a result, the study not only highlights the pedagogical potential of domestic SNSs in supporting English writing skills but also exposes the contextual barriers imposed by technology use policies and the broader educational system in China.

Based on the empirical evidence gathered through surveys and in-depth interviews the study proposes a new model of SNS-assisted writing instruction. The importance of phased guidance was emphasized where instructional strategies are implemented gradually to build students confidence and competence in using digital platforms for academic writing. Educators are encouraged to create low-risk learning environments that promote collaborative peer feedback and iterative revisions[34]. Then, teachers may explicitly differentiate between the informal nature of everyday social media interactions and the structured demands of academic writing. This differentiation is expected to help students recalibrate their expectations and align their digital communication skills with formal writing requirements. Moreover, the approach advocates for the adoption of specialized feedback tools and task designs that direct student's attention to specific writing aspects such as vocabulary range and syntactic complexity. Such targeted interventions are seen as crucial for reducing language errors and building self-efficacy. On the technological side, developers should consider integrating educational tools into SNSs platforms to better support academic use. Features like focus modes (to block distractions), enhanced privacy settings (to protect student work), and AI-powered grammar and spelling assistance could make SNSs more suitable for learning while retaining their social appeal. This contribution is significant because it integrates digital affordances with traditional writing pedagogy in a way that is both contextually relevant and practically implementable in Chinese higher education.

Although the research design incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate Chinese undergraduates' perceptions of SNSs in writing development, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. On the one hand, the sample size of 80 non-English major undergraduate students is relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. A larger number of samples would have offered stronger statistical

evidence and may have shown other patterns or effects that were not detectable in the data at hand. In addition, the study was conducted exclusively at Aba Teachers College. This single-institution context limits the applicability of the results to other educational settings within China. Future studies should aim to include a more diverse range of institutions from different regions and varying educational backgrounds to capture a broader spectrum of experiences and perceptions regarding SNS-based learning. In light of these limitations, further investigation is needed to deepen our understanding of SNS-based writing instruction. Future research should include students from diverse regions and various institutional contexts, covering multiple levels of English proficiency to better determine how these factors influence the use of SNSs in writing. Moreover, longitudinal studies would be valuable to examine the long-term effects of regular SNS engagement on writing skills. Such studies could shed light on how continuous interactions on these platforms contribute to improvements in language proficiency and overall writing performance.

Author Contributions

Funding

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were guaranteed, and participation was completely voluntary.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgments

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Questionnaire—Students' perception of using of SNSs in enhancing their English writing.
1-Strongly Disagree.   2-Disgree.   3-Neutral.   4-Agree.   5-Strongly Agree

No.	Students' Perception of the Usage SNSs in English Writing	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I think SNSs help me to improve my writing	1	2	3	4	5
2	I think SNSs language influence my formal writing positively.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I use SNSs to enhance my English writing skill.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I use SNSs for learning and academic purposes.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I believe that SNSs is the platform to learn.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I feel comfortable to practice English writing on SNSs with my friends.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I feel good to use English language on SNSs.	1	2	3	4	5
8	My friends will correct my mistakes on my status or comment.	1	2	3	4	5

No.	Students' Perception of the Usage SNSs in English Writing	SD	D	N	A	SA
9	I am conscious about grammatical structure when I write on SNSs.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I am conscious about spelling when I write on SNSs. (chat, comment and write)	1	2	3	4	5
11	I am conscious about punctuation when I write on SNSs. (chat, comment and write status)	1	2	3	4	5
12	Peer comment on the SNSs really helped me to improve my writing in English.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I felt comfortable giving feedback to my peers on their writing in English using SNSs.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I felt comfortable posting ideas or opinions on SNSs.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I inculcated a more positive attitude towards learning English as a second language after using SNSs.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I found it easy to complete my essay using SNSs.	1	2	3	4	5

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