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Social Media Learning Ecosystems: An Educational Analytics Framework for Engagement, Knowledge Co-Creation, and Human Flourishing

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *Social media is now widely used for learning, yet its educational value is often judged through surface-level indicators such as views, reactions, and participation counts. This review develops the Social Learning Value Analytics Framework (SLVAF) to explain how well-designed social-media learning practices may support psychological engagement, digital belonging, knowledge co-creation, and human flourishing.*

Design/methodology/approach: *The article adopts an integrative, theory-building review. It brings together social learning theory, connectivism, self-determination theory, the Community of Inquiry framework, positive psychology, and recent digital-education research. The review organises the literature around inputs, mechanisms, outcomes, and boundary conditions, and translates the synthesis into a testable process model, measurement architecture, and empirical research agenda.*

Findings: *The synthesis suggests that platform activity alone gives an incomplete account of learning value. Educational value is more plausibly understood as a pathway in which relevant learning practices encourage engagement, engagement and belonging support continued participation, and collaborative activity enables knowledge co-creation and broader human development. Psychological safety, digital literacy, inclusive design, ethical participation, and information overload may strengthen or weaken this pathway.*

Originality/value: *The paper contributes an educational analytics perspective that separates visible platform activity from the psychological, social, and knowledge processes through which learning value may develop. SLVAF offers educators, institutions, and researchers a practical structure for programme evaluation while also presenting hypotheses and measurement options for future empirical validation.*

KEY WORDS: digital belonging, digital learning analytics, human flourishing, knowledge co-creation, learner engagement, social media learning.

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1. Introduction

Social media has become part of the infrastructure through which learners locate expertise, exchange resources, observe practice, join professional communities, and produce knowledge. Yet organizations often evaluate these activities through easily available platform indicators such as views, reactions, membership, posting frequency, or completion. Such measures describe activity, but they do not establish whether a learning initiative creates durable psychological, educational, or organizational value.

This measurement problem matters to education because digital-learning initiatives require careful design, governance, capability development, and evidence of meaningful outcomes. Universities, schools, professional associations, workplaces, and public institutions increasingly operate online learning communities. Their effectiveness depends not only on the availability of content but also on participation quality, trust, reciprocal exchange, and the conversion of interaction into useful knowledge.

Prior scholarship explains important parts of this process. Social learning theory emphasizes observation and modeling (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Connectivism treats learning as the capacity to form and navigate knowledge networks (Siemens, 2005). Self-determination theory identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as foundations of sustained motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). The Community of Inquiry framework explains how social, cognitive, and teaching presence support meaningful online learning (Garrison et al., 2000; Garrison, 2017). Positive psychology broadens the outcome domain toward engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, and flourishing [8-10]. However, these perspectives are rarely integrated into a managerial analytics model that separates platform activity from intermediate mechanisms and final value outcomes.

Recent evidence reinforces the need to distinguish access and activity from learning quality. A review of 130 studies found that social media was commonly associated with learning benefits, but also showed that the evidence was concentrated in higher education and varied across contexts (Alshalawi, 2022). Collaborative-learning research further suggests that interaction, active learning, and academic self-efficacy influence how social-media participation relates to learner performance (Liu et al., 2022). A later systematic review likewise identified both educational opportunities and risks, including privacy concerns, distraction, cyberbullying, and the need for stronger digital literacy (Samala et al., 2024).

This article addresses that gap by proposing the Social Learning Value Analytics Framework (SLVAF). The framework explains how designed social-media learning practices may create educational value through four linked constructs: psychological engagement, digital belonging, knowledge co-creation, and human flourishing. It also specifies governance conditions and a quantitative research agenda. The central argument is that social-media learning should be evaluated as a learning-value pathway, not as a collection of isolated digital interactions.

1.1 Research questions

- RQ1. Through which psychological and social mechanisms do social-media learning practices create learner, community, and institutional value?
- RQ2. Which constructs and indicators can distinguish platform activity from meaningful learning outcomes?
- RQ3. How can the proposed learning-value pathway be tested using quantitative research designs?
- RQ4. Which governance conditions strengthen or weaken the conversion of social participation into learning value?

1.2 Contribution to Education and Digital Learning Research

The paper makes three contributions to education and digital-learning research. First, it shifts attention from platform use to the process through which digital participation creates meaningful learning value. Second, it provides a measurement framework that can support educational evaluation, survey development, learning dashboards, and future empirical research. Third, it identifies governance conditions that influence the quality of social-media-supported learning, including psychological safety, digital literacy, inclusion, ethical participation, and responsible data use.

2. Review Design and Analytical Approach

The literature was identified through a purposive search of scholarship addressing social-media learning, online engagement, digital belonging, learning communities, knowledge co-creation, positive psychology, and human flourishing. Foundational theoretical works were combined with peer-reviewed studies that contributed directly to construct definition, theoretical explanation, measurement, or the identification of boundary conditions. Sources were then organised according to their role as inputs, mechanisms, outcomes, or contextual conditions within the proposed framework. As the review was integrative and theory-building rather than systematic, it does not claim exhaustive coverage of all relevant literature.

The study follows an integrative review and theory-building approach. This design is appropriate when a research problem spans multiple theoretical traditions and the objective is to generate a coherent conceptual model rather than estimate a pooled effect. The source paper drew on literature from educational psychology, digital learning, communication, social media research, and positive psychology. The present reframing reorganizes that evidence around a business value chain and a quantitative validation logic.

The review is not presented as a systematic review or meta-analysis. No exhaustive record count is claimed. The analytical procedure consisted of four stages: identifying recurring constructs; grouping them into inputs, mechanisms, outcomes, and boundary conditions; aligning constructs with established theory; and translating the synthesis into propositions, indicators, and empirical testing options.

Stage	Analytical task	Output
1. Construct identification	Extract concepts repeatedly associated with effective digital and social learning.	Candidate constructs and definitions
2. Causal ordering	Separate enabling practices, mediating mechanisms, outcomes, and moderators.	Process logic
3. Theoretical alignment	Map each construct to the theory that best explains it.	Integrated theoretical basis

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Stage	Analytical task	Output
4. Quantitative translation	Specify measures, hypotheses, and validation options.	Empirical research agenda

This transparent positioning avoids overstating method. Future authors may convert the study into a systematic review by documenting databases, search strings, screening decisions, inclusion criteria, quality appraisal, and final study counts.

3. From Digital Activity to Learning Value

A key distinction in analytics is the difference between activity, mechanism, and outcome. Platform metrics are useful operational signals, but they are not substitutes for value measures. A high volume of posts may coexist with weak trust or shallow learning. Conversely, a smaller community may generate strong knowledge exchange and substantial professional growth. The unit of analysis should therefore shift from content exposure to the learner's pathway through engagement, belonging, co-creation, and flourishing.

Layer	Illustrative indicators	Managerial question
Activity	Views, posts, reactions, comments, participation frequency	Are people present and active?
Engagement mechanism	Attention, interest, absorption, persistence	Are participants psychologically invested?
Community mechanism	Inclusion, identification, support, trust	Do participants experience belonging?
Knowledge mechanism	Contribution, feedback, synthesis, collaborative problem-solving	Is interaction producing usable knowledge?
Value outcome	Growth, purpose, accomplishment, resilience, continued learning	Does the ecosystem create meaningful value?

4. Theoretical Foundations

The proposed sequence represents a theoretically reasoned pathway rather than a fixed pattern that must apply in every learning context. Engagement may help learners develop a sense of belonging, but belonging may also strengthen engagement by encouraging continued participation. Similarly, engagement may influence flourishing directly, and governance conditions may operate as antecedents as well as moderators. Presenting relationships in a sequential form makes the framework testable, while future research should compare this sequence with plausible alternative models.

4.1 Theoretical Tensions and the Need for Integration

Although the theories are complementary, they do not imply an identical process. Self-determination theory suggests that relatedness can strengthen engagement, while SLVAF places engagement before digital belonging. Community of Inquiry research also treats social and cognitive presence as mutually reinforcing rather than strictly sequential. Connectivism explains access to distributed knowledge, but wider connection does not automatically produce belonging, co-creation, or flourishing. SLVAF therefore presents a theoretically reasoned sequence for empirical comparison rather than a fixed universal order.

4.2 Social Learning and Observational Value

Social learning theory explains how visible demonstrations, peer exemplars, feedback, and recognition reduce the distance between information and practice (Bandura, 1977, 1986). On social platforms, learners can observe expert performance, compare approaches, reproduce techniques, and receive reinforcement. For analytics, this perspective suggests measuring not only exposure but also attention, retention, application, and motivation.

4.3 Connectivism and Networked Knowledge Access

Connectivism treats the ability to establish and maintain knowledge connections as a core learning capability (Siemens, 2005). Social platforms extend access to experts, communities, and distributed resources. In managerial terms, network quality, diversity, reciprocity, and the capacity to locate credible information may be more informative than raw network size.

4.4 Self-Determination and Sustained Participation

Self-determination theory proposes that autonomy, competence, and relatedness support intrinsic motivation and wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Platform designs that permit meaningful choice, feedback, mastery, and connection may therefore promote sustained participation. Designs dominated by surveillance, coercive participation, or public comparison may weaken these benefits.

4.5 Community of Inquiry and Learning Quality

The Community of Inquiry framework emphasizes social, cognitive, and teaching presence (Garrison et al., 2000; Garrison, 2017). These dimensions clarify why unmoderated information exchange is not equivalent to a well-designed learning community. Facilitation, reflective dialogue, and a credible social environment shape whether digital interaction becomes educationally useful.

4.6 Positive Psychology and Expanded Value Outcomes

Positive psychology extends the evaluation of education beyond task completion toward positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, resilience, and flourishing [8-10]. This broader outcome domain is particularly relevant when organizations justify investments in lifelong learning, professional identity, employee development, and community capability.

Theory	Primary explanatory role	SLVAF construct
Social learning theory	Observation, modeling, reinforcement	Learning practices and engagement
Connectivism	Access to distributed knowledge networks	Belonging and co-creation

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Theory	Primary explanatory role	SLVAF construct
Self-determination theory	Autonomy, competence, relatedness	Engagement and belonging
Community of Inquiry	Social, cognitive, and facilitative presence	Belonging and co-creation
Positive psychology	Meaning, growth, relationships, accomplishment	Human flourishing

5. Social Learning Value Analytics Framework

SLVAF conceptualizes value generation as a mediated sequence. Managed social-media learning practices are expected to stimulate psychological engagement. Engagement supports a sense of digital belonging, which makes reciprocal participation more likely. Belonging then enables knowledge co-creation, and co-creation contributes to human flourishing and continued learning. The relationships are conditional on governance and capability factors.

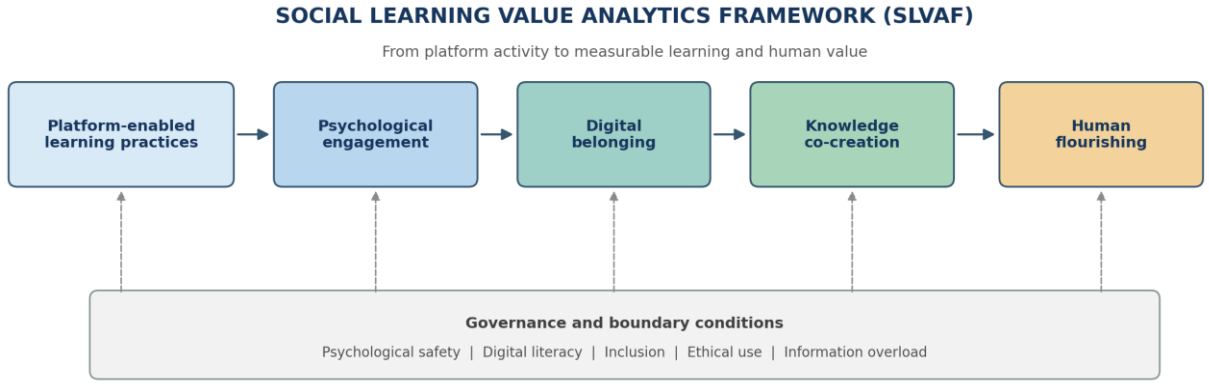


Figure 1. Social Learning Value Analytics Framework (SLVAF).

5.1 Platform-enabled learning practices

The input layer includes curated content, collaborative discussion, peer feedback, communities of practice, mentoring, and user-generated learning. These practices are manageable design choices. Their quality can be assessed through relevance, diversity, reciprocity, facilitation, accessibility, and alignment with learning objectives.

5.2 Psychological engagement

Psychological engagement represents cognitive, emotional, and behavioral investment. It is reflected in focused attention, curiosity, persistence, reflective participation, and willingness to apply learning. Prior work links online participation and social-media use with engagement, while also showing that participation quality matters [11-14].

5.3 Digital belonging

Digital belonging is the perceived experience of inclusion, recognition, connection, and legitimate membership in an online learning community. It is not identical to network membership. Belonging requires relational quality and psychological safety, and it supports persistence and participation (Tinto, 2017; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012).

5.4 Knowledge co-creation

Knowledge co-creation occurs when participants jointly generate, test, refine, and apply ideas. Communities of practice provide a useful foundation because learning is embedded in participation, shared repertoires, and collective problem-solving [17-19]. Co-creation can be observed through synthesis, constructive feedback, problem resolution, reusable resources, and innovation outputs.

5.5 Human flourishing and durable learning value

Human flourishing captures the broader value created when learning supports purpose, positive relationships, accomplishment, resilience, and continuing development [8-10, 20]. At organizational level, such outcomes may be reflected in learning agility, knowledge sharing, professional confidence, and commitment to development. These organizational implications require empirical testing and should not be inferred from platform activity alone.

5.6 Governance and boundary conditions

Digital literacy, inclusive design, ethical participation, psychological safety, privacy, and content credibility shape the value pathway. Social media can expand access and collaboration, but it may also introduce distraction, misinformation, harassment, unequal access, and algorithmic narrowing (Selwyn, 2016; Redecker, 2017; Chen & Bryer, 2012; Yue & Cowling, 2021). Recent reviews likewise emphasise both the educational potential of social media and the importance of responsible use, digital literacy, and protection from platform-related risks (Alshalawi, 2022; Samala et al., 2024). Governance is therefore a condition that shapes the development of learning value rather than an administrative afterthought.

Perceived inclusion is treated as a dimension of digital belonging, while inclusive design refers to institutional practices that promote equitable access, participation, and recognition within the learning environment.

The framework also spans several levels of analysis. Psychological engagement, digital belonging, and human flourishing are primarily learner-level experiences, whereas knowledge co-creation may be examined through individual perceptions, group processes, and collective outputs. Institutional value should therefore be assessed through appropriate programme-level indicators rather than inferred directly from individual responses.

6. Propositions and Testable Hypotheses

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Hypothesis	Statement
H1	The quality of platform-enabled learning practices is positively associated with psychological engagement.
H2	Psychological engagement is positively associated with digital belonging.
H3	Digital belonging is positively associated with knowledge co-creation.
H4	Knowledge co-creation is positively associated with human flourishing.
H5	Psychological engagement, digital belonging, and knowledge co-creation sequentially mediate the relationship between learning practices and flourishing.
H6	Psychological safety strengthens the relationship between learning practices and digital belonging.
H7	Digital literacy strengthens the relationship between learning practices and knowledge co-creation.
H8	Perceived information overload weakens the relationship between learning practices and psychological engagement.

7. Quantitative Measurement Architecture

The framework is designed for empirical validation. Constructs should be operationalized with established scales wherever possible, adapted cautiously to the social-learning context, and evaluated through content validity, pilot testing, reliability analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis. The table below presents an indicative rather than definitive measurement plan.

Construct	Illustrative dimensions	Indicative evidence source
Learning-practice quality	Relevance, reciprocity, facilitation, accessibility, feedback	Participant survey; platform records; facilitator assessment
Psychological engagement	Attention, interest, absorption, persistence, active contribution	Validated engagement items; behavioral traces
Digital belonging	Inclusion, recognition, connection, community identification	Belonging/relatedness measures
Knowledge co-creation	Contribution, integration, feedback, collective problem-solving	Survey; content coding; artifact assessment
Human flourishing	Meaning, relationships, accomplishment, growth, continued learning	Wellbeing/flourishing measures
Psychological safety	Freedom to question, disagree, and make mistakes	Psychological safety scale
Digital literacy	Search, evaluation, creation, ethical use	Digital competence measure
Information overload	Perceived excess, interruption, cognitive strain	Information-overload scale

7.1 Recommended validation sequence

- Content validity: expert review of construct definitions and items.
- Cognitive pretesting: interviews to detect ambiguous wording and context mismatch.
- Pilot study: preliminary reliability and item performance assessment.
- Measurement model: confirmatory factor analysis, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and common-method checks.
- Structural model: direct, mediated, and moderated relationships using covariance-based SEM or PLS-SEM, selected according to the research objective and data properties.
- Robustness: alternative model comparison, subgroup analysis, and sensitivity to control variables.
- Predictive assessment: out-of-sample prediction or holdout testing where sample size permits.

7.2 Potential data designs

A cross-sectional survey can provide an initial test, but stronger inference would come from longitudinal or multi-source designs. Researchers could combine participant surveys with platform traces, facilitator ratings, or assessments of collaboratively produced artifacts. Repeated measurement before and after a learning intervention would help distinguish initial enthusiasm from sustained value. Multilevel analysis may be appropriate when individuals are nested within communities, courses, organizations, or platforms.

7.3 Model specification

The basic structural model can be expressed as a sequential mediation process: learning-practice quality predicts engagement; engagement predicts belonging; belonging predicts co-creation; and co-creation predicts flourishing. Psychological safety is proposed to strengthen the development of belonging, while digital literacy is expected to help learners convert belonging and participation into meaningful knowledge co-creation. Information overload enters as an inhibitor of engagement. Relevant controls may include prior digital experience, voluntary versus mandatory participation, age group, learning purpose, platform type, and community tenure. Controls should be theoretically justified rather than added mechanically.

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8. Discussion

The framework changes the managerial interpretation of social-media learning. The central issue is not whether social platforms can host educational content. They clearly can. The more consequential issue is whether organizations can design and govern these environments so that activity becomes engagement, engagement becomes belonging, belonging enables co-creation, and co-creation supports durable human value.

This sequence also explains why apparently successful initiatives may underperform. A campaign can generate reach without attention, attention without community, community without substantive knowledge exchange, or knowledge exchange without sustained growth. Each break in the chain requires a different intervention. Content relevance may address weak engagement; facilitation and psychological safety may address weak belonging; structured collaboration may address weak co-creation; and reflection or application opportunities may help translate knowledge into enduring value.

The quantitative contribution lies in specifying a model that can be falsified. If the proposed sequence is unsupported, alternative paths can be compared. Engagement may directly affect flourishing, belonging may precede engagement, or governance factors may operate as antecedents rather than moderators. The framework therefore provides a starting structure rather than a closed theory.

9. Educational and Policy Implications

9.1 For educational and institutional leaders

Educational and institutional leaders should require learning dashboards to distinguish operational activity from learning mechanisms and outcomes. Decisions about continuing or expanding an initiative should not rely solely on participation counts. Evaluation should examine whether participants experience engagement, belonging, useful knowledge exchange, and meaningful development.

9.2 For learning and development teams

Learning teams should design for reciprocal contribution rather than continuous broadcasting. Clear facilitation roles, community norms, feedback routines, inclusive participation, and opportunities to apply knowledge can strengthen the value pathway.

9.3 For platform and community managers

Community managers should monitor participation concentration, response quality, unanswered questions, exclusion signals, information overload, and content credibility. These indicators can provide early warning of breaks in the learning value chain.

9.4 For policymakers and educational institutions

Policy should address digital access, competence, privacy, safety, and responsible use. Expanding access without strengthening evaluation skills and psychological safety may increase participation while leaving learning value unevenly distributed.

10. Limitations and Future Research

The article is conceptual and does not report new empirical data. Its integrative review design supports theory development but does not provide the coverage guarantees of a systematic review. The causal ordering of constructs remains provisional, and the meaning of flourishing may vary across cultures, age groups, professional contexts, and voluntary versus mandatory learning environments.

Future studies should compare alternative structural models, validate measures across contexts, and use longitudinal, experimental, or multi-source designs. Cross-cultural invariance testing would establish whether the constructs retain comparable meaning. Network analysis could complement survey models by assessing position, reciprocity, and knowledge diffusion. Cost and benefit data could eventually support economic evaluation of learning ecosystems, although such analysis requires careful specification of outcomes and time horizons.

11. Conclusion

Social media-based learning creates value only when digital activity is converted into meaningful psychological, social, and knowledge outcomes. The Social Learning Value Analytics Framework integrates established theory into a testable sequence linking learning-practice quality, engagement, belonging, co-creation, and flourishing. By distinguishing activity metrics from value metrics and embedding governance conditions within the model, the paper offers a stronger fit with business management and quantitative research. Its practical value lies in helping organizations ask not merely how many people participated, but what forms of human and organizational value their participation produced.

Declarations

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Author Contributions

Trinanjan Gupta: Conceptualization, methodology, literature synthesis, framework development, writing, review, and editing.

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Data Availability Statement

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Ethics Statement

This article is a conceptual review and did not involve human participants, personal data, animals, surveys, or experiments. Ethical approval and informed consent were therefore not applicable.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no financial or non-financial conflict of interest.

Artificial Intelligence Usage Declaration

Microsoft Copilot was used to assist with structural reframing, language refinement, and document formatting. The author reviewed and remains fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, citations, arguments, and final content. This declaration should be updated by the author to reflect the complete and exact use of AI tools before submission.

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