



The Opportunity of Social Media Curation

From Distractor to Shareholder

A Human -Centered Design Strategy for the Emergence of Futures of Education

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Overview

01

The Global Digital Reality

Understanding the scale and scope of young people's online lives.

02

What Young People Are Actually Doing Online

Survey evidence from 951 respondents across three academic years.

03

From Consumer to Creator

A developmental continuum for digital participation.

04

Social Media as an Informal Learning Ecosystem

Learning already occurs outside traditional educational structures.

05

From Distractor to Shareholder

A Human -Centered Design Strategy for Futures of Education.

The Global Digital Reality

5.79B

Social Media User Identities

Worldwide, April 2026 (69.9% of total population)

+5.4%

Year-on-Year Growth

+294 million new social media users vs. last year

18h 36m

Weekly Time on Social Platforms

Average per user (incl. video), 2026

Source: 2026 April Global Statshot (We Are Social / Meltwater / Manochi), April 2026



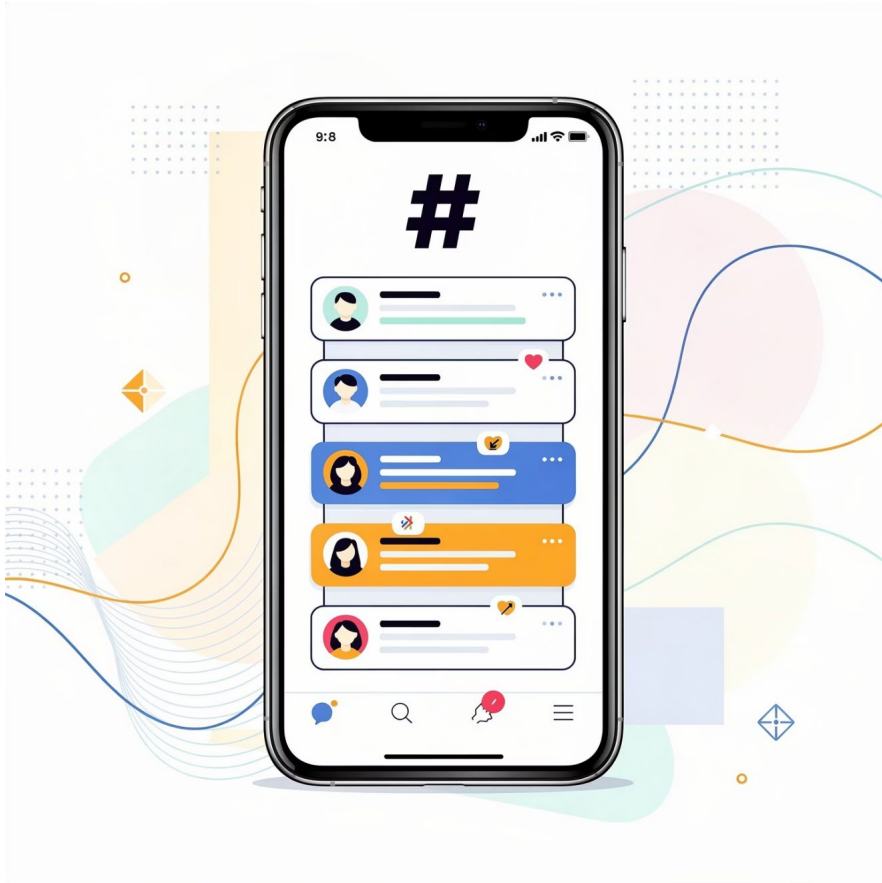
The Scale of Hashtag Culture

The reach of social media content is staggering. A handful of hashtags alone account for trillions of views, illustrating how digital ecosystems now operate at a scale that dwarfs any traditional educational channel.

Hashtag	Approximate Views (2026)
#FYP	1.7+ Trillion views
#ForYou	1.4+ Trillion views
#Viral	900+ Billion views
#Trending	800+ Billion views



Rather than viewing social media solely as a technological phenomenon, this study approaches it as a **socio - technical learning ecosystem** in which learners, communities, platforms, and algorithms interact to shape educational experiences.



CHAPTER 1

The Significance of Hashtags

The #FYP symbolizes one of the largest algorithmically curated information environments in the world. Learners encounter information, ideas, communities, and opportunities through these recommendation systems — often entirely outside traditional educational institutions.

Algorithmically Curated

Content is sorted and served based on behavior, not choice. The feed shapes what learners see, think, and learn.

Beyond the Classroom

These encounters happen outside school walls, yet they influence identity, knowledge, and worldview just as powerfully.

The Algorithmic Recommender System

The Algorithmic Recommender System (ARS)

The ARS is a way of sorting posts in a user's feed based on relevancy and likelihood of liking the post. The ARS locks us in to generate traffic and enhance our hyper - personalized experience of the network.

How Do We Get Locked In?

The ARS uses the following factors to match users with content:

- User behavior
- User characteristics
- Language
- Geographical location

This information is used to match users with content characteristics created by other users.



The factors user behavior and video characteristics are factors that we CAN influence — through Critical Thinking, Media Literacy, and Pedagogy.

Why Address This Topic?

The Iceberg Problem

Social media content is like an iceberg — what we see on the surface (entertainment, trends, viral content) is only a fraction of what is actually happening beneath. The deeper layers involve identity formation, informal learning, behavioral adoption, and societal co - construction.

Three Core Challenges

Facts & Falsehoods

Exposure to ongoing content consisting of facts and falsehoods. Difficulties in verifying factual vs. non -factual content.

Behavioral Adoption

We adopt and reproduce behaviors, thoughts, information, and possible non -factual content throughout our days. This impacts personal development and meaningful use of time.

Lifelong Learning

How we develop as people and regulate informal learning impacts our motivation and how society is further co -designed and co-constructed.

About the Study

Research Purpose

To understand how young people use social media when acquainted with the concept of online learning and explore the implications for the futures of education.

Research Questions

- How do learners use social media?
- How does social media use evolve across developmental stages?
- What educational opportunities emerge within digital ecosystems?
- How might education design for curation and creation?

Research Design

- Repeated cross-sectional design based research
- Three consecutive academic years (2023 –2026)
- Human-Centered Design + Systems Thinking perspective

Participants

- Students aged approximately 8 –18+
- Parents

Methodology

Repeated Cross Sectional Design-Based Research

Data were collected annually between 2023 and 2026 within EduCampus Aruba, a hybrid setting providing formal learning through an online platform. While some participants may have completed the survey in multiple years, responses were collected anonymously and individual participants were not tracked longitudinally. Therefore, the study should be interpreted as a repeated cross-sectional investigation of trends within the EduCampus learner population rather than a cohort study of individual learners.



This study investigates social media not merely as a technology, but as an emerging socio-technical learning ecosystem that may inform the design of future educational systems.

Research Approach

Design-Based Research (DBR)

Investigates real -world educational challenges

Generates design insights for educational innovation

Bridges research, practice, and future -oriented design

Human-Centered Design

Focuses on learners' experiences, behaviors, and needs

Explores how young people engage with digital ecosystems

Identifies opportunities for educational transformation

Systems Thinking

Examines relationships between learners, communities, technologies, and learning environments

Understands social media as part of a broader socio -technical learning system

Data Sources & Sampling

Quantitative Data

Student surveys (2023/24, 2024/25, 2025/26) covering social media use, platform use, time spent online, and purposes for use.

Qualitative Data

Parent perceptions, open -ended survey responses.

Sampling Strategy

Purposeful Case Study — EduCampus

Participants were selected because of prior exposure to online learning, blended learning, and technology -enhanced education.

 Findings are not intended to be statistically representative of all learners in Aruba or the Dutch Caribbean. They provide insights into emerging patterns within a digitally engaged educational community.

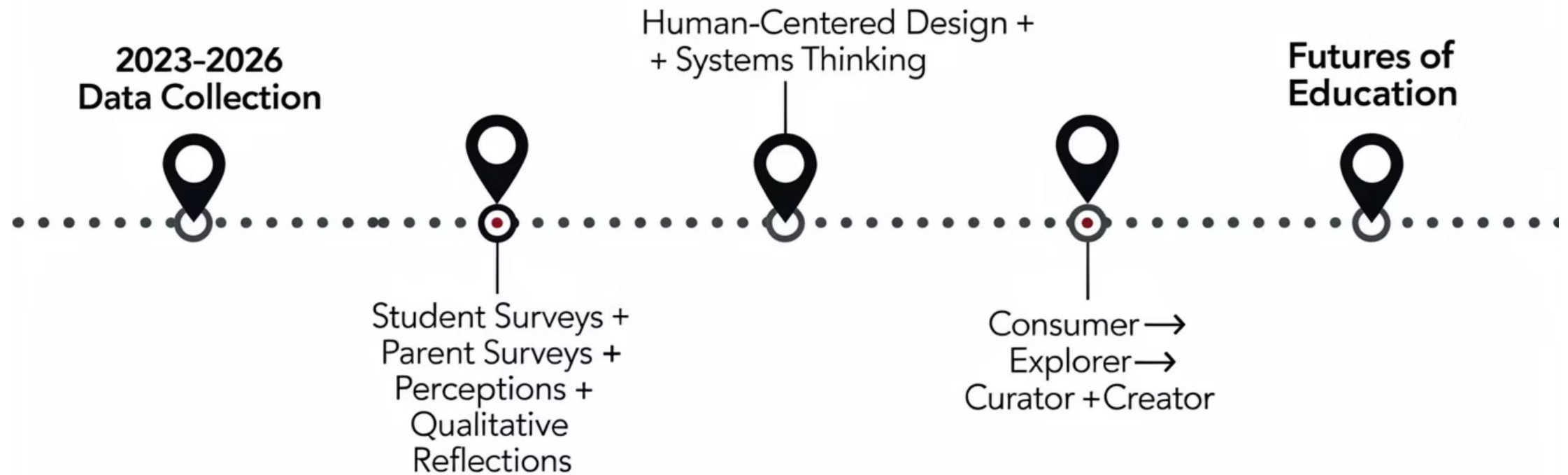
Survey Respondents: 951 Respondents Across Three Years

📄 The 15–18 age group dominates at 468 respondents. Together, 12–18-year-olds represent 85% (809 of 951) of all respondents.

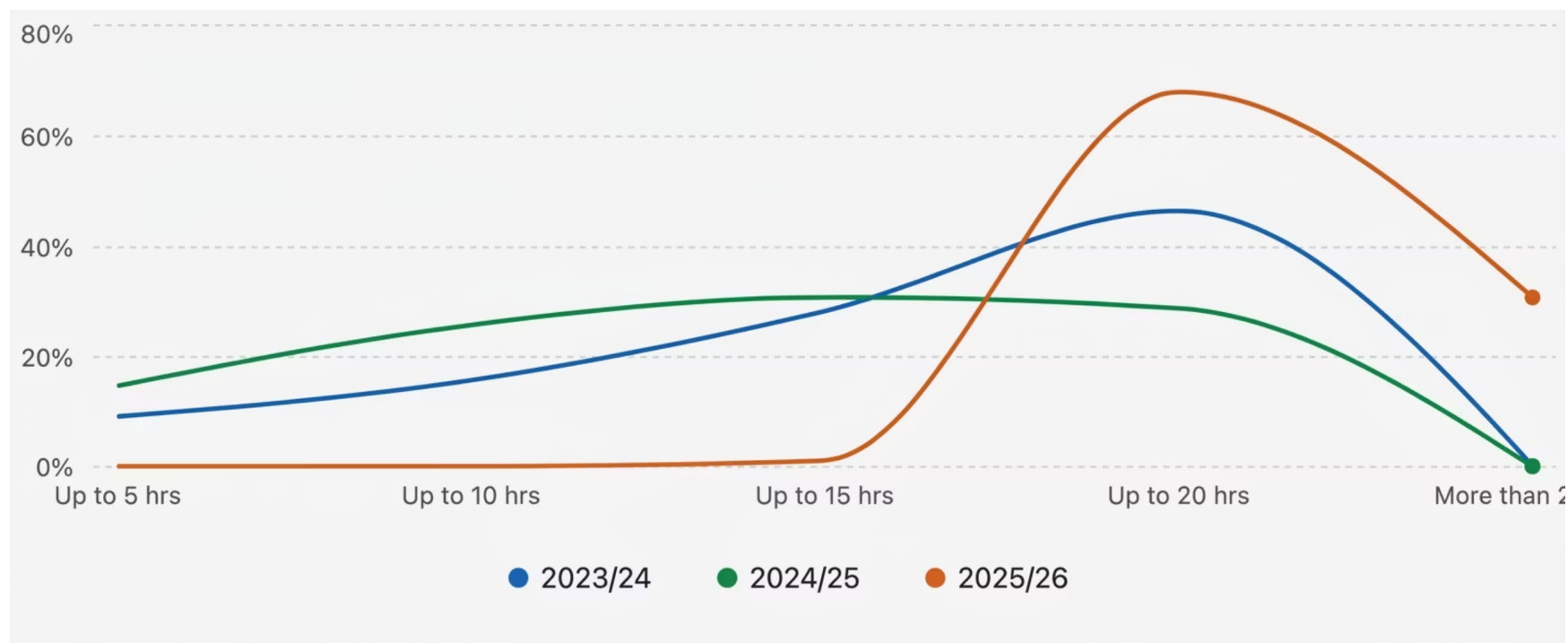
Respondents by Developmental Stage

Stage	Age	Total
Digital Consumers	8–11	97
Digital Explorers	12–14	341
Curators & Creators	15–18	468
Other	>18	45

Research & Design Flow



Weekly Online Engagement Across Cohorts

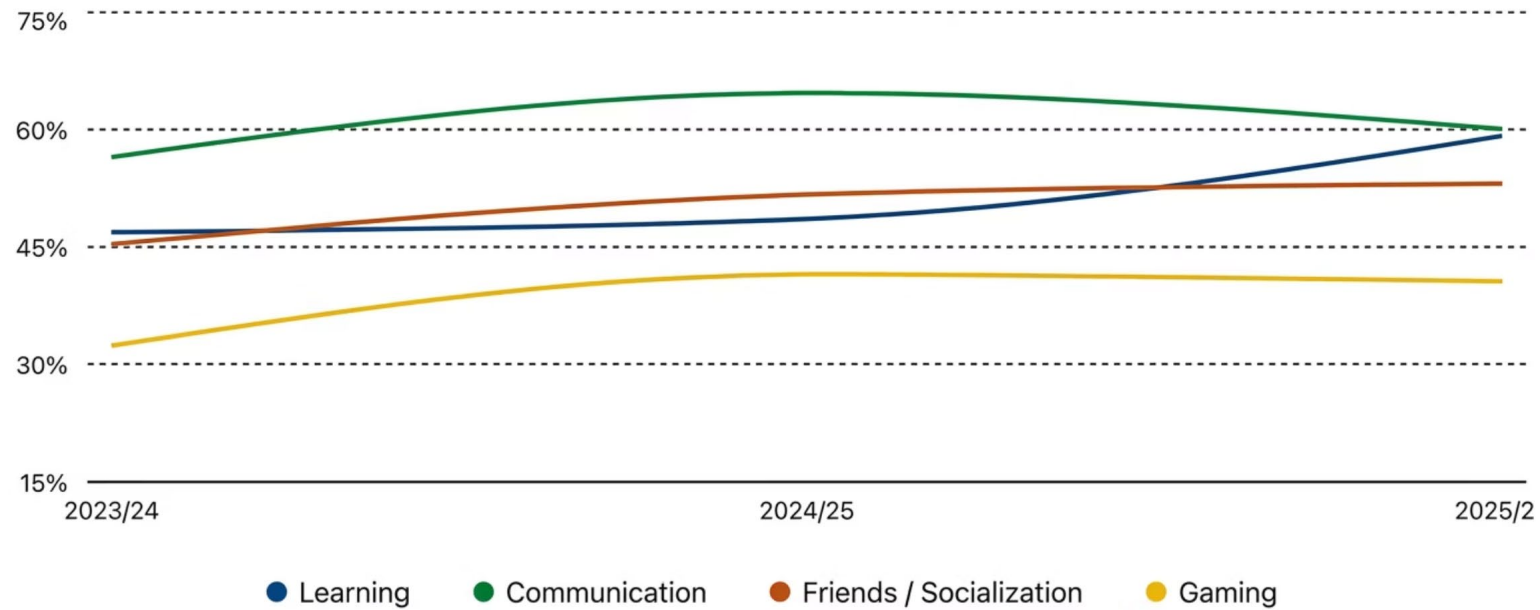


Each cohort shows a clear upward shift in online time. The 2025/26 cohort marks a step change — 65–70% report up to 20 hrs/week, and the 'More than 20 hrs' category surged to 30%, nearly six times higher than prior years. Young people are not just online more — they are embedded in digital ecosystems in ways that have direct implications for how and where learning happens.

Social Media Use Purposes: Evolution 2023-2026

Main purposes of social media use over time

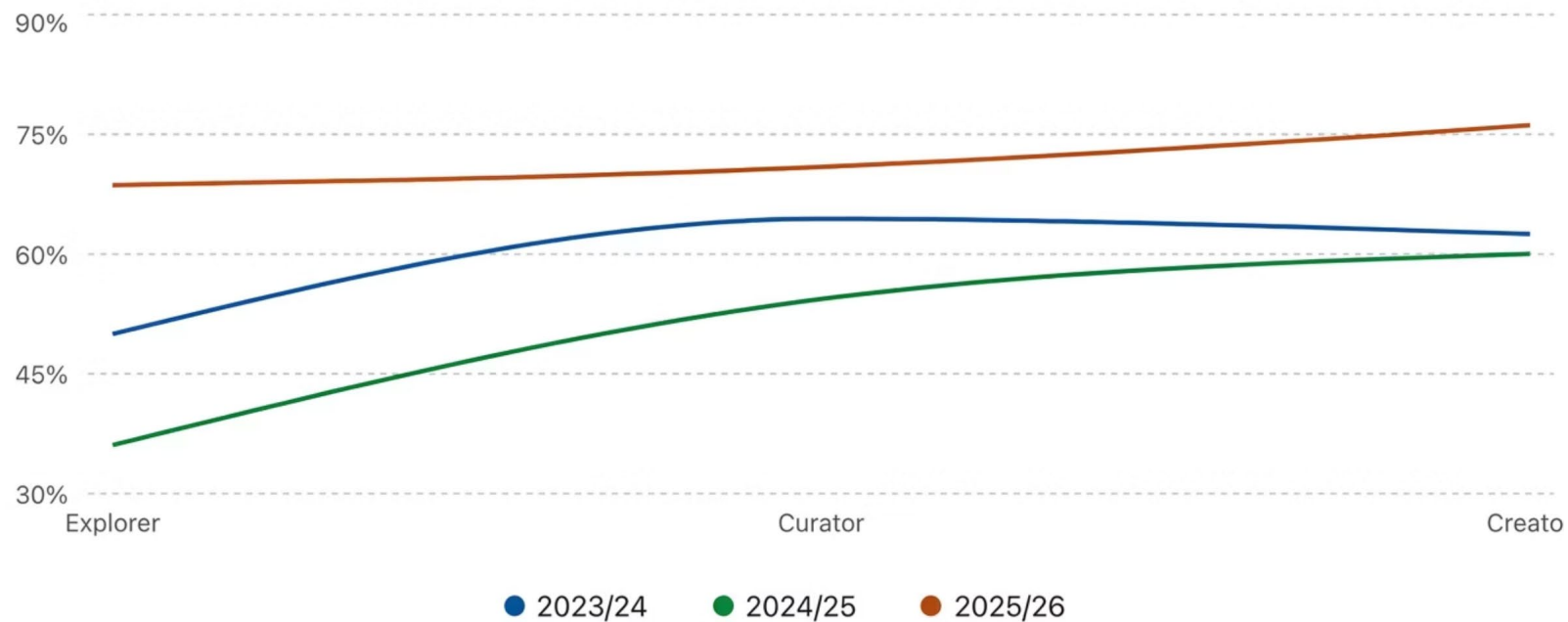
Percentage of respondents reporting each purpose across three academic years.



Purpose Social Media Use: Learning

Learning across developmental stages

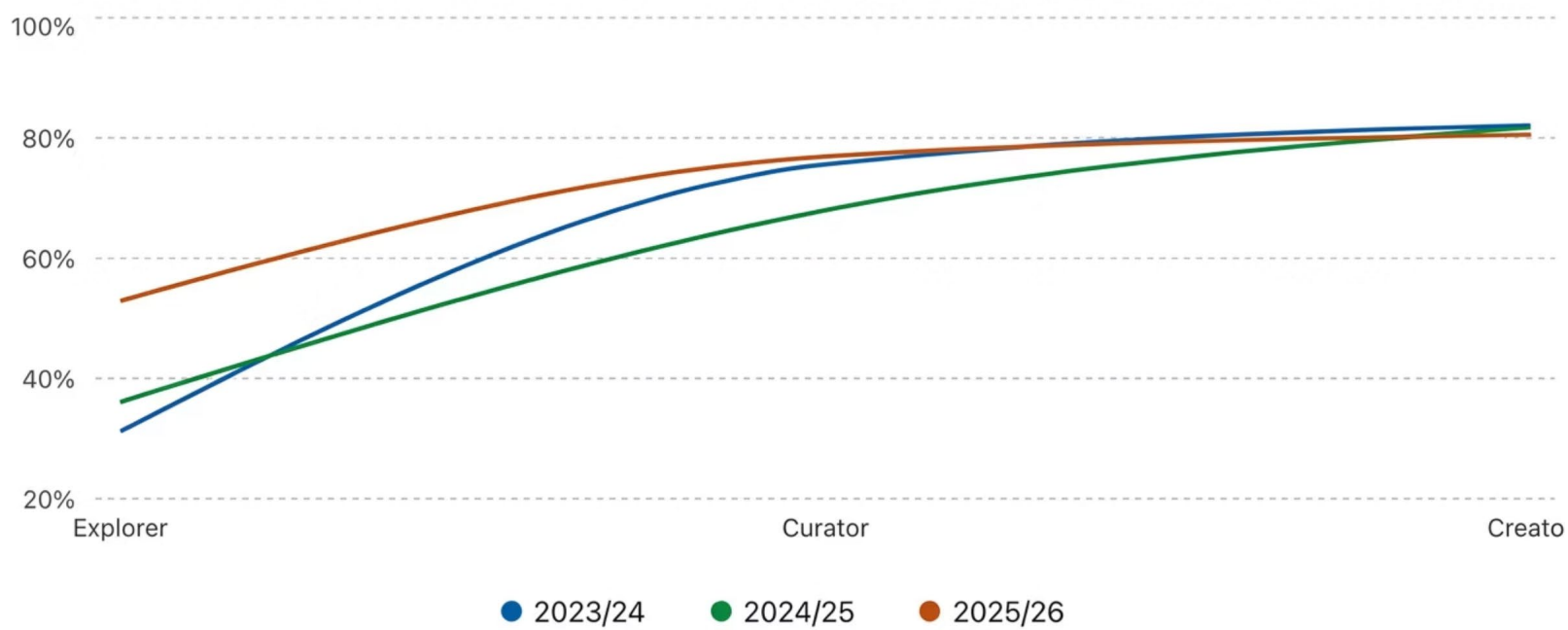
Percentage of respondents reporting learning as a purpose for social media use.



Purpose Social Media Use: Communication

Communication across developmental stages

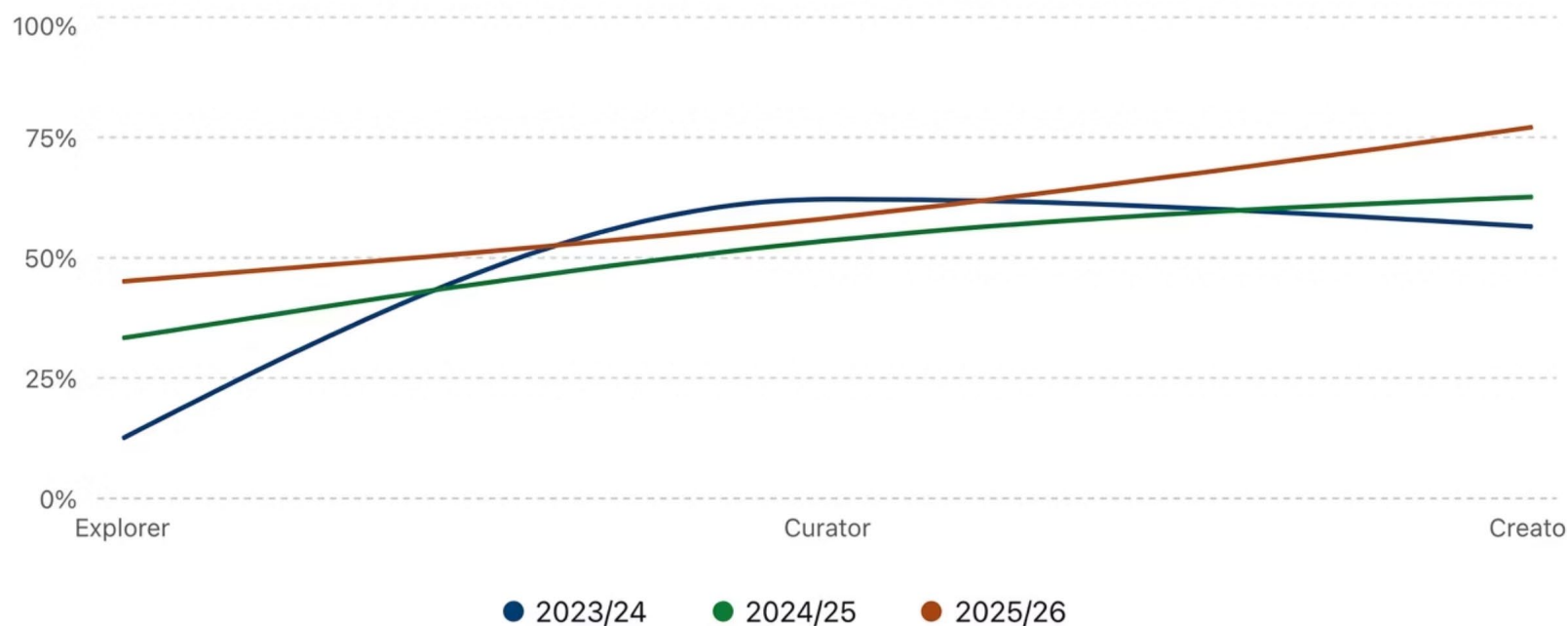
Percentage of respondents reporting communication as a purpose for social media use.



Purpose Social Media Use: Friends and Socialization

Friends and socialization across developmental stages

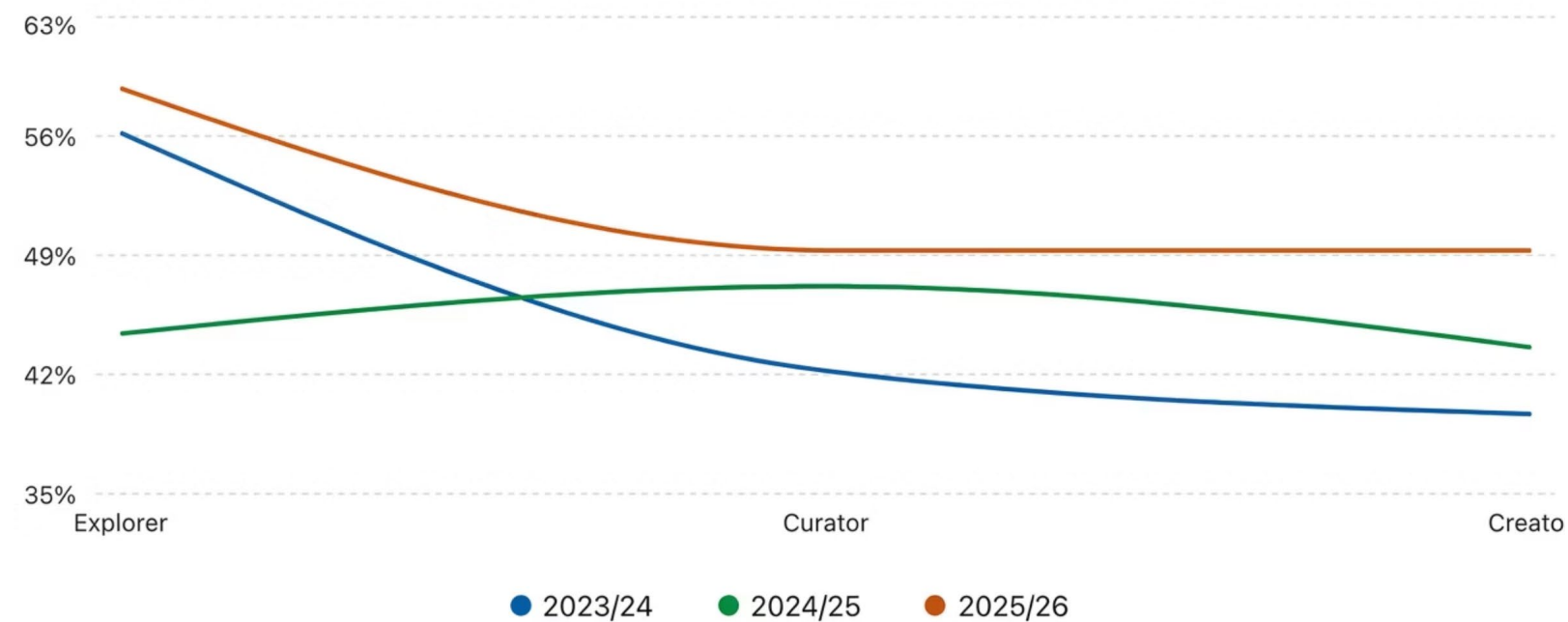
Percentage of respondents reporting friends and socialization as a purpose for social media use.



Purpose Social Media Use: Gaming

Gaming across developmental stages

Percentage of respondents reporting gaming as a purpose for social media use.



CHAPTER 2

Learning Through Social Media: A Rising Trend

All three developmental stages show a **consistent upward trend** in using social media for what students categorize as learning. Curators & Creators grew from ~75 to ~165 — a **120% increase** over three years.

Parents' Perceptions: Shifting Over Time

Theme	2023	2024	2025
Learning Opportunity	27%	46%	39%
Communication / Information	36%	19%	33%
Guidance / Monitoring	13%	7%	17%
Distraction / Screen Time	11%	4%	25%
Safety / Wellbeing	8%	6%	15%

Learning Opportunity peaked in 2024 at 46% before settling at 39% in 2025. Communication/Information dropped sharply in 2024 (19%) but recovered to 33% in 2025. Distraction/Screen Time concerns surged to 25% in 2025 after a low of 4% in 2024. Overall, parents show a nuanced and shifting view of social media over time.



CHAPTER 3

Students Say They Learn on Social Media

The significance lies not in whether social media can replace schools, but in the possibility that learners are recognizing forms of learning that occur beyond formal educational institutions.

Education: From Past Goals to Futures

A recurring tension

For 50 years, UNESCO commissions have pursued the humanistic development of citizens. Yet the strategy has shifted from education as a right (personal responsibility) to education as a duty (State obligation). This shift created the present structures of formal education, funded and regulated by governments. —

The right of citizens to learn throughout life and the knowledge provided by the environment across all UNESCO reports is what we now call informal learning. — this recurring theme

— *International Commission on the Development of Education, 1972*

2021: A Turning Point

01

UNESCO's International Commission on the Futures of Education established in 2019

02

'Reimagining our Futures Together — A New Social Contract for Education' issued in 2021

03

Proposes non-formal and informal education as part of the agenda for 2050

04

Calls for extension of learning environments to digital spaces

05

Aims to fortify education as a global common intangible capital



This new social contract is the policy context within which this research is situated opens for digital learning ecosystems to emerge.

— and the opportunity it

Informal Learning: The 70% We Ignore

"There is a strong tendency for policy makers to admit the importance of informal learning and then proceed without further reference to it."

— *Judith Lloyd Yero, 2020*

What the numbers tell us

70% of all learning across a lifetime is informal

Informal learning is excluded from national KPIs and SDG4 targets

Digital literacy was not included as a target for 2030



Informal learning cannot be structured like formal education driven by the learner's own interests and context.

— its strength lies in being ongoing, personal, and



CHAPTER 3

Digital Visual Culture: The Informal Curriculum

Definition

All human -made expressions presented digitally — videos, images, text, sounds — shared and reproduced across networks.

How it shapes us

Users construct personal identities through constant content creation and consumption. Meaning changes as visuals are shared, adapted, and perceived.

The learning risk

Without critical tools, unverified content can reinforce bias and antisocial behavior.



Pedagogy serves as a mediator — equipping learners to critically analyze content rather than passively absorb it.

Social Media Platforms as Microlearning Ecosystems

Social Media platforms such as TikTok is a search business built on hyper-personalization through its Algorithmic Recommender System (ARS).

What the content analysis revealed (n=20 #FYP videos)

11 of 20 videos had educational value

5 were step-by-step tutorials, 4 were demonstrations

Most used elements: external video + TikTok sounds

0 videos cited external sources for credibility

Why Microlearning Works

- Manages cognitive load effectively
- Transforms long lessons into bite-sized productions
- Positive impact on knowledge acquisition and skill development
- Personalized through algorithmic matching

⚠ The same features that make Social Media such as TikTok powerful for learning — the ARS, endless scroll, instant gratification — are also what lock users into passive consumption and reduce content diversity.

CHAPTER 3

Pedagogy for the #FYP: The Missing Strategy

The scale of the opportunity

The #FYP is the most used hashtag on Social Media with 1.7 trillion views (2026). By comparison, TikTok's own educational campaign #LearnOnTikTok reached 200 billion views — less than 0.5% of the #FYP's reach.

4 ARS factors: language, location, user behavior, video characteristics

Only 2 factors can be influenced by the user: behavior + video characteristics

CHAPTER 3

What Pedagogy for the Futures of Education Must Include

Despite its scale, Social Media platforms such as TikTok have no pedagogical strategy for curating educational content through the #FYP for young users. To mediate between content and user, pedagogy outside the platform must be applied.

Pedagogical Principles for the Futures of Education

01

Respect for the learner's right to learn

02

Recognition of spaces outside the
classroom

03

Critical thinking as a core skill

04

Problem -posing education that teaches learners to navigate
the world

05

Collaboration, cooperation, empathy and co -creation of
desirable futures



Social media is a dangerous tool for spreading fake news — and yet one of the greatest opportunities for education in the times ahead of us.

Summary: What the Literature Tells Us

Informal learning through social media networks faces challenges in multiple areas. To be considered official learning, it needs both a recognition framework and a pedagogical framework for content design and consumption.

The policy gap

Informal learning excluded from
SDG4 KPIs

Digital literacy not a stand alone
2030 target

New social contract (2021) opens
the door for change

The Social Media opportunity

Social Media can become a
learning ecosystem

The same tools that limit it also
define its potential

Training the ARS through
intentional user behavior is the
key

The self-regulation imperative

Users must learn to self -regulate
to lower mental health risks

Curating one's own profile
creates a personalized learning
ecosystem

Pedagogy outside the platform
must mediate content

The possibility for Social Media to become a learning ecosystem arises — but only if the same tools that make it unique are redirected toward intentional, pedagogically -informed use.

Social Media as a Multi Dimensional Ecosystem



Information Ecosystem

Where learners access and encounter information at scale.



Learning Ecosystem

Where learners acquire skills, watch tutorials, and follow experts.



Social Ecosystem

Where learners form relationships, communities, and belonging.



Creative Ecosystem

Where learners create and distribute original content.



Identity Ecosystem

Where learners experiment with self-expression and belonging.

Social media is not merely a technological tool. **It has become an environment.**

The Signature Framework: Towards A Developmental Continuum



Consumer

Receives information. Watches, scrolls, observes.



Explorer

Actively searches for information. Investigates interests.



Curator

Selects, evaluates, organizes, and shares. Demonstrates discernment.



Creator

Produces original content, ideas, and knowledge artifacts.

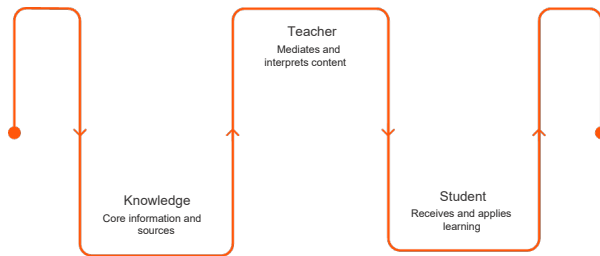


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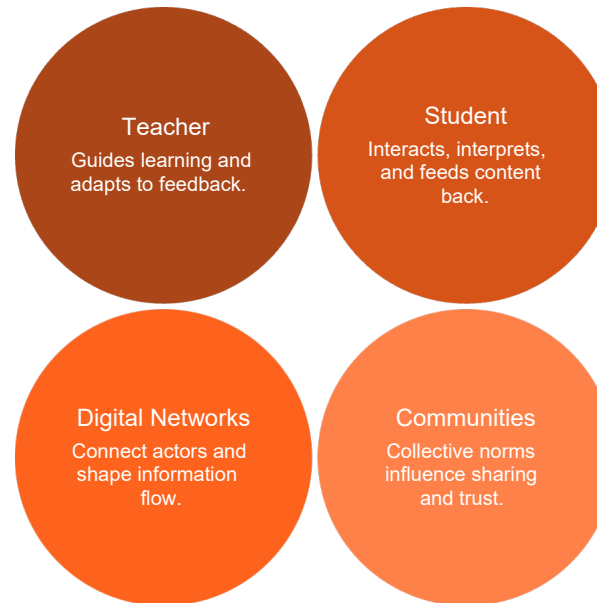
Creates value for communities. Participates in collective futures.

Social Media as a NonHuman Information Carrier

Traditional Educational Model



Emerging Digital Model



In this research the interaction between humans and social media as a **non-human information carrier** within informal learning systems was studied. Knowledge no longer flows in a single direction — **knowledge emerges through networks** .



Project Development: A Systemic Design Approach

To design a human -centered strategy for content creation, systemic design was applied — a methodology that combines systems thinking with design thinking to solve complex societal challenges.

01

Analyzing the Mess

Framing, listening to, and understanding the system — mapping actors, contexts, and dynamics.

02

Envisioning Desired Futures

Designing future state scenarios across a 5 -year horizon with 8 transition scenarios.

03

Exploring the Possibility Space

Identifying intervention strategies across macro, exo, meso, and micro levels.

04

Fostering the Transition

Planning the change process through a Theory of Systems Change and a Roadmap for Transition.



Source: Systemic Design Methodology — Jones & van Ael, 2022

The System We Found: Key Findings

What limits social media as a learning environment

Inability to validate and assess learned content
Blurred perception: educational vs. recreational use
No pedagogical framework for #FYP content
Limited insight on Social Media's educational value
Informal learning not recognized in national policies

What the system archetype revealed

Symptomatic solution: Keep social media out of classrooms

Side effect: Fear of missing out (FOMO)

Fundamental solution: Integrate informal learning into education

Blocker: Social media distraction reinforces avoidance

Three Horizons: From Current System to Futures of Education

The Three Horizons tool mapped the transition from the current education system — toward emerging digital learning ecosystems over a 5-year horizon. — which excludes informal learning

Horizon 1—Now (0–1 year)

Fade out: pedagogy limited to books and formal standards; banning of phones.

Fade in: co-existence of internet activities with schooling; media & information literacy.

Horizon 2—Transition (1–3 years)

Fade in: learning ecosystem exploration terms; pedagogy for content design and consumption; #FYP as a channel for sustainable influence.

Horizon 3—Vision (3–5 years)

Fade in: Social media as a learning ecosystem for Futures of Education; qualitative appraisal of created knowledge; learning credentials through digital content.

 8 future state scenarios were designed across this horizon, mapping what fades out (current perceptions of informal learning) and what fades in (validation and integration of digital learning).

Roadmap for Transition: Three Phases

The roadmap provides a simplistic overview for a possible solution to a complex problem. It consists of three phases unfolding over time.



Pilot: Incubating

A sample population and minimum key actors initiate the program. Students, parents, and educators apply the #FYP framework. Outcomes are measured while research continues.



Scale: Connecting

Other actors connect with the program. Curriculum developers, system engineers, legislators, and policy makers engage. MOOCs and awareness campaigns expand reach.



Practice: Embedded in the System

New laws for co-existence of formal and informal education. New funding structures. Acceptance of informal learning credentials. Regional research on qualitative learning achievement.



The last two phases are pragmatic and susceptible to the outcomes of the pilot phase. The transition is not linear — it depends on behavioral change, policy shifts, and collective adoption.

Pedagogy as the Mediating Strategy for Social Media

Social media should not replace education intentionally. Pedagogy is the bridge — but education must equip learners to engage with digital ecosystems

Problem

The ARS locks users into passive consumption. Content is consumed without critical evaluation, curation, or intentional purpose.

The intervention

Pedagogy mediates between user and content — building critical thinking, media literacy, and intentional design skills.

The outcome

Intentional behavior trains the ARS — turning TikTok into a personalized learning ecosystem.

How Pedagogy Trains the Algorithm

The ARS is influenced by 4 factors: language, location, user behavior, and video characteristics. Language and location are preset. But user behavior and video characteristics can be shaped — through pedagogy.

1

Apply the pedagogical framework

Learners apply critical thinking, media literacy, and intentional content design when creating and consuming content.

2

Behavior changes

The user's interaction patterns shift — from passive scrolling to intentional searching, creating, and sharing of educational content.

3

Content characteristics change

Videos created with pedagogical intent carry different characteristics: sourced, accurate, purposeful, community -oriented.

4

The ARS adapts

The algorithm matches the new user behavior with content of similar characteristics — progressively curating a personalized learning ecosystem.



This is the strategy: train the algorithm through intentional behavior. The #FYP becomes a learning ecosystem not by design of the platform — but by design of the learner.

PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK for Social Media learning



A Pedagogical Framework for Social Media Learning

Learners do not experience social media solely as entertainment. It functions as a dynamic ecosystem where learning, communication, social participation, and information-seeking occur simultaneously.

Humanism

Learners pursue topics based on personal interest and agency. Learning is self-directed, identity-driven, and initiated by the learner — not imposed by an institution.

Social Constructivism

Through comments, shares, and community participation, learners construct meaning together. Communication and social engagement are core to digital learning.

Connectivism

Social media connects learners to distributed knowledge — creators, communities, and digital resources — beyond the walls of formal education.



At the center of the framework: an algorithmically mediated learning ecosystem that continuously curates content based on user behavior, interests, and interactions.

The Three Foundational Skills That Make It Work

Two of the four ARS factors can be influenced by the user: user behavior and video characteristics. These are shaped by three core skills that form the pedagogical foundation of the framework.

Critical Thinking

Evaluating content for accuracy, bias, and credibility before consuming or sharing. Asking: is this true? Is this useful? Does this serve me or manipulate me?

Media & Information Literacy

Understanding how platforms work, how algorithms operate, and how to navigate digital spaces with awareness and agency.

Intentional Content Design

Creating content with purpose — applying pedagogy to ensure what is published is accurate, sourced, community -building, and educationally valuable.



These three skills are not just tools for TikTok. They are 21st century competencies for navigating any digital environment — and for becoming a shareholder of the Futures of Education.

What This Looks Like in Practice

The framework is not abstract. It translates into concrete behaviors — for students, teachers, and parents — that collectively shift how the algorithm is trained.

Students

Search intentionally using #FYP
Create content that is sourced and accurate
Apply the 5 -question checklist before sharing
Reflect on what you consume and why

Teachers

Introduce media literacy as a classroom practice
Use the framework as a pedagogical bridge
Guide students to create educational content
Recognize informal learning as valid

Parents

Understand how the ARS works
Discuss content choices with your child
Support intentional screen time over passive scrolling
Model critical consumption of digital media

 When all three groups apply the framework consistently, the collective behavioral shift trains the algorithm at scale — transforming the #FYP from a distractor into a shareholder of education.

Conclusion: Where we are at—and What Remains

✓ realized

A human-centered design strategy framework for content creation and consumption

A pedagogical framework grounded in Humanism, Social Constructivism, and Connectivism

A playbook and checklist for students, teachers, and parents

A mechanism for training the ARS through intentional behavior

→ Still to be discovered

Validation of informal learning as official learning

Velocity and sensitivity of the ARS to behavioral change

Measurement frameworks for qualitative learning outcomes

The Futures of Education — yet to emerge by 2050

Any foreseen design strategy outcome related to behavioral change on TikTok will remain abductive in nature — dependent on the behavior of users and the perceptions of decision makers.



Further research is recommended in digital sociology, digital anthropology, visual research, and self-ethnography to develop long-term evaluation frameworks

From Distractor to Shareholder: The Outcomes

When pedagogy mediates content creation and consumption, and the algorithm is trained through intentional behavior, three outcomes emerge — at the individual, community, and systemic level.

01

Personalized Learning Ecosystem

The user's #FYP feed progressively reflects their intentional behavior — surfacing educational content aligned with their interests, skills, and development goals.

02

Intentional Lifelong Learning

Learners develop the habit of self -directed, purposeful engagement with digital content — building knowledge and skills beyond the boundaries of formal education.

03

Futures of Education

At scale, this behavioral shift impacts how learning is defined, where it takes place, and how digital spaces become recognized as legitimate learning environments — contributing to the Futures of Education by 2050.

The #FYP becomes a learning ecosystem not by design of the platform — but by design of the learner.

Implementation Possibilities: Micro, Meso & Macro

Level	Description	Qualitative Outputs of Using Social Media for Educational Purposes
MACRO	To recognize digital learning spaces as shareholders of informal learning, hidden curriculum recognition and design	Policies and frameworks that incorporate digital learning spaces and digital visual culture and shareholders within the learning continuum. Skill building programs for social media learning.
MESO	To co-create learning ecosystems within digital learning spaces	Algorithm training courses, foundational courses in media literacy, intentional content design and critical thinking.
MICRO	Tasks related to daily activities, interactions with peers	Formative assignments related to algorithm training, content design and critical thinking skills.

Informal Learning Already Exists

The Educational Tension

Schools Were Designed For

Knowledge Acquisition

Digital Ecosystems Require

Knowledge Navigation

The ability to Search · Filter · Evaluate · Curate · Create ·
Contribute

Learners Already Do This—Before School Gets Involved

- Search for information independently
- Learn skills from tutorials and demonstrations
- Follow experts and join communities
- Share knowledge with peers

 The ADP demonstrates that **learning is already occurring** outside traditional educational structures. The question is whether education will build upon it.

From Information Scarcity to Information Abundance

Industrial Model

Knowledge Scarcity — Schools provided access to information. The teacher was the gateway.

Current Reality

Knowledge Abundance — Tutorials, expert communities, AI, and peer networks are available at any moment.

Educational Need

Sense-Making — The challenge is no longer access. The challenge is **discernment** .

Future Competency

Curation — Selecting, evaluating, organizing, and connecting knowledge in an age of abundance.

Curation is perhaps the most overlooked educational competency of the digital age. In an age of abundance, **curation** becomes more important than consumption .

The Closing Proposition

The future of education will not be determined by access to information. Access is already everywhere. The future of education will be determined by our ability to cultivate learners who can navigate complexity, curate knowledge, create meaning, contribute to communities, and shape desirable futures.

- ✓ In this context, social media is not merely a distractor. **It is an opportunity** — and perhaps one of the most important learning environments of our time.

