

EDITORIAL

Knowledge co-creation in the digital age: social science research as a catalyst

The rapid transformation into the digital age has radically altered and redefined the ways in which we access, create, share and use knowledge. Paradigm shifts that have resulted from the impacts of industrialization, modern sciences, technological advancements, and globalization, have significantly affected our educational processes (UNESCO, 2023). Digital transformation has accelerated knowledge sharing and helped advancing towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG4, which aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education (United Nations, 2015). Further, digital competence allows quick access to, and responsible use of information for learning, work, and effective participation in society. Nevertheless, the success of individuals in a society depends not only on the accumulation of knowledge but also on their ability to harness the information effectively, creatively and collaboratively.

While the digital age offers immense promise for educational advancement, it also presents a variety of challenges such as rising inequalities, digital divides, and concerns about data privacy and security. However, these same challenges also provide opportunities for collective action towards finding innovative solutions to them. The Global Report from the International Commission on the Futures of Education which focus on “rethinking the role of education, learning, and knowledge in light of the

tremendous challenges and opportunities of predicted, possible, and preferred futures”, states that, “forging a new social contract for education is a critical step towards reimagining our futures together” (UNESCO, 2021: p. 5). As emphasised in this report, the starting point of this process is to have a shared vision of the public purposes of education and work together to create futures that are shared and interdependent. This also implies the importance of co-creating knowledge through collaborative and co-operative thinking and practices with shared understanding towards achieving common goals.

The concept of co-creation of knowledge is an inclusive process of generating, sharing and applying knowledge among diverse stakeholders. Research, particularly social science research, with its multidisciplinary nature, catalyzes this process by providing multiple perspectives that inform collaborative and creative efforts to address contemporary societal challenges. This editorial focuses on the significant role social science research plays in knowledge co-creation in the current digital era.

Knowledge co-creation involves collaborative inquiry and dialogue, where individuals engage in active exchanges of ideas to explore complex topics, solve problems and generate new knowledge. Cultivating Communities of Practice (CoPs) is recognised as a



powerful mechanism for fostering such knowledge sharing and collaboration within various professional domains (Wenger, 2000). CoPs are groups of individuals who share a concern or passion for a subject and interact with one another on an ongoing basis to expand their knowledge and develop their expertise (Wenger, 1998). Since CoPs bring together individuals with shared interests or expertise to engage in joint activities, exchange ideas and collectively solve problems, they provide the social context and a facilitative environment for effective knowledge co-creation.

Social science research facilitates networking among individuals with shared interests, thus creating opportunities for knowledge sharing within communities. While all collaborative networks may not be essentially CoPs, developing social networks within an ecosystem can lead to CoPs, augmented with digital technologies as well. CoPs support cultivating a learning culture that promotes not only shared knowledge, but also interdependence, empowerment and readiness for change. Social science research facilitates various stakeholders such as researchers, practitioners, policymakers and communities from multiple disciplines, to engage in co-creation of knowledge through critical dialogue and collaborative research initiatives. This issue of *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Sciences* (SLJSS) presents several articles focusing on various aspects of knowledge co-creation and innovative practices within the changing societal paradigms.

For instance, in their article *Strengthening technology and knowledge transfer from Sri Lankan universities by the establishment of University Business Linkage Cells*, Abeytunga *et al.* describe a novel venture implemented in the Sri Lankan universities to stimulate innovation through facilitating collaborative interaction among the government, universities and industries. Establishing Technology Transfer Offices as University Business Linkage Cells was found to be an effective initiative to enhance innovation capacity among academia, which indicates the significance of professional networking and provocative leadership in promoting innovation. This initiative demonstrates how fostering partnerships between academia, industry and government can lead to creating ecosystems that facilitate the exchange of ideas and the translation of knowledge into tangible outcomes. It is a good example of social science research catalyzing knowledge co-creation by bringing together perspectives and practices of diverse stakeholders, which could eventually lead to development of CoPs.

Leadership plays a crucial role in the success of any collaborative team. For instance, leadership styles

of institutional leaders or managers can influence the performance of an institution either positively or negatively. Exploring the impact of effective leadership styles on school performance of Central Colleges in Sri Lanka, Fernando *et al.* identify that bringing out the best, being inclusive, having concern for others, resourcefulness, being innovative and being able to stimulate the environment for performance, as effective leadership characteristics which lead to higher school performance levels. Transformational leadership is evidently a powerful way to bring about positive changes in institutions via promoting collaborative and co-operative practices. Sharing evidence-based insights generated through such research can facilitate informed decision-making and addressing social issues via collaborative efforts.

On the other hand, metacognition, or being aware of one's own cognitive processes also enhances creation and sharing of knowledge. The study by Razzaq & Hamzah on *Unraveling the Impact of Metacognitive Planning on Writing Performance Through Willingness to Write in Pakistani ESL Learners: A Mixed-Methods Study* reveals practical implications for universities to enhance students' writing performance by implementing planning as a metacognitive strategy, thus improving their willingness to write. Such investigations enable identifying underlying causes and patterns to initiate co-creation of intervention efforts to address the prevailing issues.

Nevertheless, behavior trends of individuals in a society may be affected by various factors, including unprecedented circumstances. The article *Rigidity or Fluidity? Does variety-seeking vary based on perceived threat during the COVID-19 pandemic?* by Ashrafi *et al.*, examines the interplay between the perceived threats of the pandemic and variety-seeking among consumers. It reveals an increase in individuals' tendency for variety-seeking in consumable items as their perceived threats intensifies, providing insights into the complex interrelationship between the perceived threat levels and consumer behavior trends. Variety-seeking reflects a fundamental human tendency to seek novelty, exploration and diversity. Understanding such dynamic social behavior through research will facilitate devising strategies to support the development of collective knowledge among the relevant stakeholders.

Implementing collaborative projects is another useful strategy to foster knowledge co-creation. Yet, the success of a project will essentially depend on effective project governance. In their article *Optimizing organizational value: crafting a constructively aligned thematic*

framework for project governance enhancement, Gamlath *et al.* presents a thematic conceptual framework for project-centric entities, derived from an extensive literature analysis. It offers a structured blueprint aligned with project objectives, fostering the twin goals of optimizing value for invested resources and nurturing project sustainability. Project governance frameworks facilitate structured collaborative activities among the project participants, which is a useful research output that will inspire project managers to adopt such strategies.

The diversity of the articles presented in this issue of SLJSS is indicative of the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of social science research, and how it serves the knowledge co-creation process. Through the integration of multiple perspectives from diverse disciplines, it supports not only the creation and sharing of knowledge, but also highlighting societal trends, developing creative solutions for emerging issues, facilitating collaboration and networking, promoting inclusivity and diversity, unraveling insights that inform policymaking, and driving meaningful change. As we progress through the shifting paradigms of the knowledge-driven world, facing increasingly complex societal challenges, social science research serves as an

effective catalyst for engaging diverse stakeholders in the co-creation of knowledge.

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