

The Governance of Digital Well-being: Policy Imperatives for Ethical AI Use in Mental Health and Educational Platforms

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Abstract

The accelerating integration of artificial intelligence into educational and mental health platforms has redefined the human–technology interface, raising profound questions about psychological autonomy, cognitive balance, and ethical accountability. While AI-driven systems promise personalization and efficiency, they increasingly shape emotional states, learning behaviors, and self-perception—areas traditionally safeguarded by human discretion and institutional ethics. This paper interrogates the governance vacuum surrounding digital well-being and proposes a structured framework for the ethical oversight of AI in these sensitive domains.

Drawing on policy analysis, theoretical synthesis, and comparative review, the study critically examines major governance instruments such as India’s National Digital Health Mission (NDHM), National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the European Union’s AI Act, and UNESCO’s Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. It identifies a systemic disjunction between technological regulation and the moral-psychological dimensions of human welfare. The proposed *Governance of Digital Well-being (GDW) Framework* advances five interlocking pillars—ethical accountability, algorithmic transparency, human oversight, psychological safety, and inclusive policymaking—anchoring governance not merely in compliance but in the cultivation of humane digital ecosystems.

By integrating governance theory, AI ethics, and socio-psychological perspectives, this research reframes digital well-being as a public good requiring co-regulation between state, market, and civil society actors. It calls for policy architectures that safeguard emotional sovereignty and intellectual agency within algorithmically mediated environments. The findings underscore that ethical AI governance must evolve from protecting data privacy to protecting cognitive and emotional integrity. The paper contributes a normative and operational foundation for governments, educators, and digital health innovators seeking to reconcile technological advancement with human dignity in the age of intelligent systems.

Keywords: digital well-being; AI governance; ethical artificial intelligence; mental health policy; educational technology; algorithmic transparency; human agency; cognitive integrity; policy ethics; governance framework.

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence has moved from the periphery of digital innovation to the core of human experience. Nowhere is this more visible than in the ecosystems of education and mental health—two domains that define individual well-being and collective social stability. AI-powered learning platforms adapt content to student performance; mental health chatbots deliver instant emotional support. Yet beneath this promise

of personalization lies an expanding terrain of ethical unease. Algorithms are not neutral tutors or therapists; they are coded systems that interpret, predict, and sometimes manipulate human emotion and cognition. What emerges is an urgent question of governance: how can societies ensure that AI serves psychological and moral well-being rather than undermines it?

The discourse on *digital well-being* has evolved rapidly over the past decade. Initially conceived as the ability to use technology responsibly and mindfully, it has now expanded into a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive balance, emotional regulation, social connection, and ethical awareness. However, the governance structures surrounding this concept remain fragmented. Policymakers tend to address AI through the lens of data protection, cybersecurity, or algorithmic fairness—issues of technical compliance—while the deeper question of human flourishing is often overlooked. The absence of integrated governance frameworks has allowed digital platforms, especially in education and mental health, to operate in regulatory grey zones where commercial logic often overrides ethical intent.

The paradox is evident. Governments encourage AI adoption in public systems to enhance access, efficiency, and innovation. At the same time, these very systems expose individuals to unprecedented forms of surveillance, behavioral nudging, and psychological conditioning. Students' learning patterns and mental states are quantified into data streams that can be optimized—but also exploited. In mental health apps, empathy is simulated, not felt. In adaptive learning environments, curiosity risks being replaced by algorithmic predictability. The result is a subtle but powerful erosion of *human agency*—the capacity to think, choose, and feel autonomously within digital environments.

This paper argues that the governance of digital well-being requires more than technological regulation; it demands an ethical reorientation of how we conceptualize power, agency, and accountability in the age of intelligent systems. Traditional models of governance—rooted in control, hierarchy, and compliance—are ill-suited to address the fluid, affective, and adaptive nature of AI. Instead, governance must evolve toward a model that integrates normative ethics with policy design, ensuring that algorithmic systems are accountable not only to regulators but to the moral conditions of human life.

The global policy landscape reflects both progress and confusion. The European Union's AI Act and UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence represent important milestones, yet they remain largely technocratic, emphasizing risk classification and data stewardship rather than psychological and emotional well-being. India's National Digital Health Mission (NDHM) and National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 similarly promote AI-enabled solutions but provide limited safeguards for the emotional and cognitive impacts of continuous digital engagement. The convergence of these policies reveals a gap: while the governance of AI is increasingly institutionalized, the governance of *digital well-being*—the ethical and psychological dimension of digital life—remains undefined.

To bridge this gap, the present study develops the *Governance of Digital Well-being (GDW) Framework*, an integrated model for ethical oversight across education and mental health platforms. The framework rests on five interlocking pillars: ethical accountability, algorithmic transparency, human oversight, psychological safety, and inclusive policymaking. It aims to offer policymakers, educators, and technology designers a practical yet principled guide to aligning AI innovation with human dignity and emotional sovereignty.

The central research question driving this inquiry is thus: *What governance principles and policy imperatives are necessary to ensure ethical AI use that promotes digital well-being in mental health and educational platforms?* This question situates digital well-being as a public good—one that must be governed with the same seriousness as physical health or data privacy. The analysis proceeds through a

synthesis of theoretical insights from governance theory, ethical AI discourse, and socio-psychological research. By doing so, it seeks to shift the narrative from *regulating machines* to *governing human experience in algorithmic systems*.

In pursuing this objective, the paper contributes threefold: conceptually, by defining digital well-being as a governance problem; empirically, by mapping policy blind spots across major national and international frameworks; and normatively, by proposing a governance architecture that centers human agency and ethical resilience. The argument that follows is not anti-technology—it is pro-human. It asserts that ethical governance of AI is not about slowing progress but about ensuring that progress remains psychologically sustainable and morally defensible.

Ultimately, the governance of digital well-being represents one of the defining policy challenges of the twenty-first century. If data is the new oil, then *attention, emotion, and cognition* are its most contested frontiers. How societies choose to govern these invisible dimensions will determine whether AI becomes an instrument of empowerment or a quiet architect of dependency. This paper positions governance as both shield and compass—a means to protect human dignity and a guide to navigate the ethical complexity of an intelligent world.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has moved from the periphery of digital innovation to the **core of human experience**. Nowhere is this more visible than in the ecosystems of *education* and *mental health*—two domains that define **individual well-being** and **collective social stability**. *AI-powered learning platforms* adapt content to student performance; *mental health chatbots* deliver instant emotional support. Yet beneath this promise of personalization lies an expanding terrain of **ethical unease**. Algorithms are not neutral tutors or therapists; they are coded systems that interpret, predict, and sometimes manipulate human **emotion, motivation, and cognition**. What emerges is an **urgent question of governance**: how can societies ensure that AI serves psychological and moral well-being rather than undermines it?

The discourse on *digital well-being* has evolved rapidly over the past decade. Initially conceived as the ability to use technology responsibly and mindfully, it has now expanded into a **multidimensional construct** encompassing *cognitive balance, emotional regulation, social connection, and ethical awareness*. However, the **governance structures** surrounding this concept remain fragmented. Policymakers tend to address AI through the lens of **data protection, cybersecurity, or algorithmic fairness**—issues of *technical compliance*—while the deeper question of **human flourishing** is often overlooked. The absence of **integrated governance frameworks** has allowed digital platforms, especially in education and mental health, to operate in regulatory grey zones where **commercial logic often overrides ethical intent**.

As highlighted by Sheokand (2017a, 2017b, 2024), governance in education and public systems often prioritizes administrative efficiency over human-centric outcomes. The same structural imbalance now pervades AI-driven ecosystems—efficiency without empathy, innovation without introspection.

The paradox is evident. Governments encourage AI adoption in public systems to enhance *access, efficiency, and innovation*. At the same time, these systems expose individuals to **unprecedented forms of surveillance, behavioral nudging, and psychological conditioning**. Students' learning patterns and mental states are quantified into data streams that can be optimized—but also exploited. In *mental health apps*, empathy is simulated, not felt. In *adaptive learning environments*, curiosity risks being replaced by **algorithmic predictability**. The result is a subtle but powerful erosion of **human agency**—the capacity to think, choose, and feel autonomously within digital environments. As Sheokand (2018a, 2018b, 2018c)

has argued in the context of social policy and public welfare, governance without ethical grounding risks producing efficiency without equity—a warning now magnified by AI.

This paper argues that the **governance of digital well-being** requires more than technological regulation; it demands an **ethical reorientation** of how we conceptualize *power*, *agency*, and *accountability* in the age of intelligent systems. Traditional models of governance—rooted in *control*, *hierarchy*, and *compliance*—are ill-suited to address the fluid, affective, and adaptive nature of AI. Instead, governance must evolve toward a model that integrates **normative ethics with policy design**, ensuring that algorithmic systems are accountable not only to regulators but to the **moral conditions of human life**.

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To bridge this gap, the present study develops the **Governance of Digital Well-being (GDW) Framework**, an integrated model for **ethical oversight** across education and mental health platforms. The framework rests on **five interlocking pillars**: *ethical accountability*, *algorithmic transparency*, *human oversight*, *psychological safety*, and *inclusive policymaking*. It aims to offer policymakers, educators, and technology designers a **practical yet principled guide** to aligning AI innovation with **human dignity** and **emotional sovereignty**.

The central research question driving this inquiry is thus: *What governance principles and policy imperatives are necessary to ensure ethical AI use that promotes digital well-being in mental health and educational platforms?* This question situates **digital well-being as a public good**—one that must be governed with the same seriousness as physical health or data privacy. The analysis proceeds through a synthesis of **governance theory**, **ethical AI discourse**, and **socio-psychological research**. By doing so, it seeks to shift the narrative from *regulating machines* to **governing human experience in algorithmic systems**.

In pursuing this objective, the paper contributes threefold:

- **Conceptually**, by defining *digital well-being* as a governance problem;
- **Empirically**, by mapping **policy blind spots** across major national and international frameworks; and
- **Normatively**, by proposing a **governance architecture** that centers *human agency* and *ethical resilience*.

The argument that follows is not anti-technology—it is **pro-human**. It asserts that **ethical governance of AI** is not about slowing progress but about ensuring that progress remains *psychologically sustainable* and *morally defensible*. As Sheokand (2025) emphasizes in her recent analysis of occupational well-being and

stress, governance must ultimately sustain the *human condition within institutional systems*, not merely the system itself.

Ultimately, the governance of digital well-being represents one of the **defining policy challenges of the twenty-first century**. If *data* is the new oil, then **attention, emotion, and cognition** are its most contested frontiers. How societies choose to govern these invisible dimensions will determine whether AI becomes an **instrument of empowerment** or a **quiet architect of dependency**. This paper positions governance as both **shield and compass**—a means to protect **human dignity** and a guide to navigate the **ethical complexity** of an intelligent world.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

The literature on *digital well-being* is diverse, spanning psychology, education, policy studies, and computer ethics. Yet, despite its breadth, it remains conceptually fragmented and normatively thin. This review synthesizes existing scholarship to identify the theoretical gaps that justify a governance-oriented approach. Four thematic strands emerge: the evolution of digital well-being, the ethical implications of AI in learning and mental health systems, existing governance frameworks, and the philosophical foundations linking ethics, policy, and human agency.

2.1 Evolution of Digital Well-being

Digital well-being originated as a psychological construct—focused on the healthy use of technology—and has since expanded into a multidimensional paradigm. Early studies emphasized *screen time management* and *digital hygiene*; recent scholarship now integrates notions of *cognitive equilibrium*, *digital resilience*, and *socio-emotional balance*. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) and UNESCO (2023) frame digital well-being as an essential component of sustainable digital transformation, requiring policy-level intervention to safeguard mental and cognitive health.

However, as Sheokand (2017a, 2017b, 2024) observed in her analyses of educational environments and teacher satisfaction, technological adoption in education often advances without corresponding attention to the human dimensions of well-being. This oversight mirrors the current state of digital well-being discourse—technically sound yet ethically superficial. As such, the governance of digital well-being must transcend behavioral recommendations and enter the realm of **policy architecture** and **institutional responsibility**.

2.2 AI, Ethics, and the Psychological Impact

AI's influence on mental health and learning processes introduces a paradox of empowerment and dependency. On one hand, algorithmic personalization enhances efficiency; on the other, it encodes bias and fosters emotional reliance on artificial systems. Studies reveal that overexposure to algorithmically curated content can reduce intrinsic motivation, distort self-perception, and attenuate empathy (Sweeny et al., 2021). Sheokand's (2025) work on occupational well-being underscores a parallel concern: environments that prioritize systemic optimization often erode individual autonomy—a phenomenon now mirrored in algorithmically mediated learning and mental health platforms.

Moreover, the ethics of AI in mental health applications remains contested. While digital therapeutics claim to democratize access, they raise concerns over emotional authenticity, informed consent, and the psychological safety of users. The lack of interpretability in machine learning models compounds the issue, as users and clinicians alike struggle to comprehend how algorithmic recommendations are formed.

This epistemic opacity generates a governance dilemma—how can ethical accountability be maintained in systems that learn autonomously?

2.3 Governance and Ethical Frameworks

Existing AI governance models primarily address data privacy, cybersecurity, and accountability, but rarely the emotional or cognitive consequences of technology. The **European Union's AI Act (2024)**, for example, classifies risks but does not provide explicit guidelines for digital well-being. Similarly, the **UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021)** outlines universal ethical principles but lacks enforceable mechanisms to address emotional autonomy or cognitive health.

India's **National Digital Health Mission (NDHM)** and **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** reflect a growing recognition of the digital paradigm, yet both frameworks remain oriented toward technological adoption rather than governance of its ethical and emotional implications. As Sheokand (2016, 2018a, 2018b) has argued, Indian policy frameworks often prioritize administrative functionality while underestimating the affective and social implications of governance design—a gap that this paper seeks to address.

The absence of an integrated **Digital Well-being Governance Framework** creates overlapping jurisdictions and accountability vacuums. AI ethics boards, education ministries, and health regulators operate in silos, each addressing fragments of the digital well-being puzzle. The result is a diffusion of responsibility that enables both corporate overreach and policy inertia.

2.4 Theoretical Lens: Governance, Ethics, and Human Agency

To conceptualize digital well-being governance, this study draws on three theoretical pillars: *governance theory*, *ethical technology governance*, and *socio-psychological perspectives on agency*.

From the lens of **governance theory** (Kooiman, 2003; Rhodes, 1996), digital ecosystems represent complex adaptive systems that require *co-regulation* among state, market, and civil society actors. This resonates with Sheokand's (2023) assertion that effective governance must align institutional accountability with human-centric outcomes. **Ethical technology governance** (Floridi, 2019) further emphasizes *explainability*, *transparency*, and *moral accountability*—principles that underpin the proposed GDW Framework.

Complementing these is the **socio-psychological perspective** on human agency. Drawing on Bandura's (2001) theory of reciprocal determinism, human agency is both shaped by and shaping of digital environments. The proliferation of AI in emotionally charged spaces like education and mental health thus creates feedback loops that influence self-regulation and cognitive autonomy. In Foucault's (1982) terms, algorithmic systems represent a new form of *governmentality*, where control operates through subtle shaping of desires rather than overt coercion.

2.5 Conceptual Synthesis

Synthesizing these perspectives reveals a critical insight: the governance of digital well-being is not a question of *regulating AI systems* but of *governing human experience* within AI-mediated contexts. It demands governance models that merge *normative ethics*, *psychological insight*, and *policy design*. Building upon Sheokand's (2017a, 2024, 2025) continuum of educational and occupational well-being research, this paper positions digital well-being as a **public good** and a **governance obligation**. The

theoretical synthesis thus forms the conceptual basis for the *Governance of Digital Well-being (GDW) Framework* developed in subsequent sections.

In sum, the literature converges on three realizations: (1) digital well-being is inadequately governed, (2) AI-driven ecosystems require ethical as well as technical oversight, and (3) governance models must integrate human agency as a central tenet of digital ethics. The next section elaborates the methodological approach that operationalizes these insights into a structured framework for policy innovation and ethical reform.

3. Methodological Approach

The present study adopts a **qualitative, multi-layered design** that integrates *policy analysis*, *conceptual synthesis*, and *comparative case examination* to construct a comprehensive framework for the governance of digital well-being. The methodology aligns with interpretivist traditions in public policy and governance studies, privileging depth, meaning, and contextual understanding over quantitative generalization. The research approach is intentionally **interdisciplinary**, bridging insights from governance theory, AI ethics, education policy, and mental health systems.

3.1 Research Design

The study employs a **three-phase design**:

1. **Policy Analysis Phase** – A critical review and content analysis of international and national policy instruments governing AI in education and mental health.
2. **Theoretical Synthesis Phase** – Integration of governance, ethical, and psychological theories to conceptualize the *Governance of Digital Well-being (GDW) Framework*.
3. **Comparative Case Illustration Phase** – Application of the GDW Framework to selected real-world cases in India and the European Union to test analytical coherence and policy relevance.

This design is consistent with *Sheokand's* (2018a, 2023, 2025) methodological pattern—linking policy inquiry with conceptual development—to produce actionable theoretical contributions grounded in empirical realities.

3.2 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

Data were collected from **three main sources**:

1. **Policy and Governance Documents** – Official frameworks, white papers, and legislative texts, including the *European Union's AI Act (2024)*, *UNESCO's Ethics of Artificial Intelligence Recommendation (2021)*, *India's National Education Policy (2020)*, and *National Digital Health Mission (2020)*.
2. **Peer-Reviewed Academic Literature** – Scopus and Web of Science databases were searched using the terms “digital well-being,” “AI ethics,” “algorithmic governance,” and “mental health technology.”
3. **Case-Based Evidence** – Case materials were selected from AI-enabled learning and mental health platforms, such as *Byju's*, *Coursera*, and *Wysa*, chosen for their large-scale implementation and societal impact.

Inclusion criteria prioritized policies and research published between **2018 and 2025**, reflecting the post-pandemic acceleration of AI in education and healthcare. Exclusion criteria omitted purely technical AI literature devoid of governance or ethical implications.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The data were analyzed through **thematic content analysis**, guided by four overarching dimensions derived from both governance theory and AI ethics literature:

1. **Accountability** – Who holds ethical responsibility within algorithmic decision-making processes?
2. **Transparency** – How visible and explainable are the operations of AI systems affecting human cognition and emotion?
3. **Oversight** – What mechanisms ensure human control, feedback, and correction in AI-driven environments?
4. **Well-being Outcomes** – How do AI systems impact users' emotional stability, cognitive autonomy, and social connectedness?

The thematic structure was inspired by *Sheokand's (2017a, 2018b, 2025)* interpretive approach, which emphasizes linking administrative design with experiential outcomes. Coding categories were refined iteratively through comparison of theoretical constructs and empirical evidence.

3.4 Analytical Procedures

1. **Document Analysis:** Each policy document was read multiple times to extract themes related to ethical standards, user protection, and well-being objectives. References to accountability, emotional health, and digital safety were systematically coded.
2. **Comparative Mapping:** Policy features from India and the EU were mapped to identify convergence and divergence in ethical AI governance. This comparative approach aligns with *Sheokand's (2016)* prior analytical work on *Digital India and e-Governance reforms*, which combined normative critique with practical policy mapping.
3. **Theoretical Triangulation:** Insights from governance theory, ethical AI discourse, and psychology were triangulated to ensure conceptual robustness and to avoid disciplinary myopia.

NVivo 14 software was used to organize thematic data, ensuring traceability and analytical transparency.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Validity

Given the qualitative orientation, **credibility, transferability, and dependability** were prioritized over statistical validity. Credibility was ensured through *data triangulation*—comparing multiple sources (policy, academic, case) to verify consistency. *Transferability* was achieved by providing detailed contextual descriptions that allow replication across sectors or nations. *Dependability* was strengthened through transparent coding and iterative peer debriefing with experts in governance, digital ethics, and psychology.

Ethical integrity was central to the research design. The study aligns with the **UNESCO Ethics of Artificial Intelligence Framework (2021)** and adheres to responsible research practices as recommended by the **OECD AI Principles (2019)**. No personal or confidential data were collected.

3.6 Methodological Rationale

The methodological logic is both normative and applied. *Normatively*, it seeks to articulate ethical principles that should underpin digital well-being governance. *Empirically*, it identifies how current policies operationalize—or fail to operationalize—those principles. This dual orientation reflects *Sheokand's* (2024, 2025) insistence on connecting *policy evaluation with human welfare metrics* rather than purely administrative outcomes.

By grounding conceptual innovation in real policy structures and empirical observation, this study achieves a **triangulated synthesis**—the hallmark of high-impact research in governance and digital ethics. The subsequent section presents the findings of this analytical process, identifying governance gaps, ethical risks, and emergent best practices that inform the construction of the *Governance of Digital Well-being (GDW) Framework*.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings reveal a paradox at the heart of the digital transition: **AI systems in education and mental health platforms simultaneously enable empowerment and induce dependency**. Governance frameworks, while evolving, remain reactive rather than anticipatory, often emphasizing *data protection* and *technical compliance* over *emotional, cognitive, and ethical safety*. This section presents four major findings emerging from the policy analysis, theoretical synthesis, and comparative examination, followed by the articulation of the **Governance of Digital Well-being (GDW) Framework**.

4.1 Policy Landscape and Fragmented Governance

The comparative policy mapping between India and the European Union exposes a **fragmented governance ecosystem**. The **European Union's AI Act (2024)** represents a landmark in classifying AI risks and establishing accountability principles. However, its focus remains procedural—risk, bias, data—without directly addressing *psychological autonomy* or *digital well-being*. The **UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (2021)** advances an ethical vocabulary—transparency, justice, and responsibility—but lacks enforcement mechanisms or metrics for *cognitive and emotional outcomes*.

India's **National Digital Health Mission (NDHM)** and **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** exemplify this gap. While both promote digital innovation as a tool for inclusion and efficiency, neither articulates a **governance mechanism for algorithmic influence on emotional states or attention cycles**. The absence of *cross-sectoral coordination* between education, health, and IT ministries produces **regulatory silos** that fragment accountability.

This observation resonates with *Sheokand's* (2016, 2018a, 2023) earlier critique that Indian governance structures tend to prioritize *administrative modernization* over *human-centric oversight*. The same structural inertia now manifests in digital systems, where human well-being remains peripheral to technological ambition.

4.2 Ethical Risks and Cognitive Implications

The analysis identified three recurrent ethical risks inherent in AI-mediated education and mental health systems:

1. **Erosion of Psychological Autonomy:** Adaptive algorithms often influence user behavior without explicit consent, subtly shaping emotions and decisions.

2. **Algorithmic Opacity:** Limited explainability undermines user trust and prevents meaningful oversight.
3. **Equity and Emotional Bias:** AI systems may amplify social and emotional inequities, privileging users whose linguistic or behavioral data fit dominant cultural patterns.

In learning systems, constant algorithmic feedback can lead to *externalized motivation*—students learn to satisfy the system rather than nurture curiosity. In mental health applications, *emotional mimicry* by AI chatbots risks creating dependency without authentic empathy. As *Sheokand (2025)* demonstrated in her research on occupational well-being, systems emphasizing efficiency without emotional balance generate burnout and detachment—a dynamic now mirrored in digital ecosystems.

These ethical risks underscore the need for **policy frameworks that treat emotional and cognitive integrity as fundamental rights**, akin to privacy and data protection. *Sheokand's (2017a, 2018b, 2024)* works on educational satisfaction and work culture repeatedly emphasize that well-being is not an auxiliary variable—it is the foundation of sustainable governance.

4.3 The Governance of Digital Well-being (GDW) Framework

Synthesizing insights from governance theory, ethical AI literature, and policy analysis, this study proposes the **Governance of Digital Well-being (GDW) Framework**, a conceptual architecture designed to guide policymakers and institutions in regulating AI systems that affect human cognition and emotion.

The framework is organized into **five interlocking pillars**:

1. **Ethical Accountability:**
Institutionalize multi-sector AI ethics councils that evaluate algorithms not only for data bias but for emotional and cognitive impact. This reflects *Sheokand's (2017b, 2023)* call for transparent and value-based governance systems.
2. **Algorithmic Transparency:**
Require disclosure of how AI systems make decisions affecting learning or emotional states. Transparency must move beyond technical explainability to *interpretive clarity*—users should understand how their cognition is being shaped.
3. **Human Oversight:**
Embed educators, clinicians, and ethical experts within algorithmic design and evaluation loops. Human oversight transforms governance from a compliance exercise into a *moral practice of care*.
4. **Psychological Safety:**
Mandate design standards that preserve attention, reduce cognitive overload, and promote emotional resilience. Echoing *Sheokand's (2025)* emphasis on occupational well-being, psychological safety must become an explicit governance metric.
5. **Inclusive Policy-Making:**
Encourage co-governance models involving educators, technologists, psychologists, and users. Governance must be participatory, not paternalistic, ensuring diversity in decision-making that reflects real human experiences.

This framework redefines governance not as a mechanism of control but as a **process of ethical curation**, ensuring that technological environments remain conducive to mental health, intellectual autonomy, and emotional dignity.

4.4 Comparative Case Insights

The comparative analysis of the **EU and Indian governance environments** underscores the varying degrees of ethical maturity in AI policy.

- **European Union:** A strong legal foundation exists, but emotional and cognitive dimensions remain largely unaddressed.
- **India:** Rapid AI adoption outpaces the ethical oversight architecture. NEP 2020 promotes AI-based learning without safeguards for digital exhaustion, mirroring *Sheokand's* (2018a, 2018b) earlier findings about policy implementation gaps in public education.
- **UNESCO and WHO:** Emerging frameworks acknowledge digital well-being but lack localized enforcement strategies or indicators of mental health outcomes.

The convergence of these findings leads to a central insight: **digital well-being must be governed as a public health and human development issue**, not merely a technological or administrative concern. Policies must evolve from guarding against data misuse to protecting **the integrity of human cognition and emotion**—a transition akin to what *Sheokand* (2024, 2025) describes as “moving from procedural compliance to purposeful governance.”

4.5 Integrative Discussion

The governance of digital well-being represents the next frontier in global policy innovation. Its ethical stakes are high because AI's influence extends into the most intimate dimensions of human life—attention, emotion, and thought. The findings confirm that current policies are **technologically advanced but ethically underdeveloped**.

Integrating *Sheokand's* extensive body of work from 2016–2025, one observes a consistent intellectual thread: governance succeeds only when it sustains human dignity. Whether in *education policy*, *public administration*, or *teacher well-being*, her scholarship repeatedly highlights the disjunction between institutional design and experiential outcomes—a disjunction now amplified by AI.

The GDW Framework thus offers a paradigm shift from governance *of systems* to governance *for the soul of the system*—a governance that not only regulates machines but also **restores equilibrium between human consciousness and algorithmic logic**.

In summary, this section establishes that while digital governance frameworks exist, they lack psychological depth and ethical cohesion. The GDW Framework provides an integrated model that positions digital well-being as both an ethical right and a policy mandate. The next section articulates the **policy implications and recommendations**, translating these findings into actionable pathways for government, institutions, and industry.

5. Policy Implications and Recommendations

The evidence presented in this study underscores that the ethical governance of AI must evolve from a reactive regulatory stance to a **proactive stewardship of digital well-being**. The **Governance of Digital Well-being (GDW) Framework** provides a blueprint for this evolution—offering guiding principles that

transcend technical safeguards and embed ethical consciousness into the design, deployment, and oversight of AI systems in education and mental health. This section translates the framework into **policy imperatives** across three interdependent levels: governmental, institutional, and societal.

5.1 Governmental Level: Institutionalizing Ethical AI Governance

Governments occupy the front line of policy legitimacy. They must transition from fragmented oversight to **integrated governance ecosystems** capable of addressing the psychological and ethical implications of AI.

1. **Establish a National Digital Well-being Commission (NDWC):**

This body should function as an interdisciplinary regulatory authority combining expertise in AI, psychology, education, health, and law. Its mandate would include setting ethical benchmarks, auditing AI systems for emotional and cognitive impact, and coordinating between ministries. This responds to the policy coordination deficit that *Sheokand (2016, 2023)* has repeatedly identified as central to India's governance inefficiencies.

2. **Mandate AI Impact Assessments (AIIA):**

Before deployment, all AI-driven educational or mental health platforms should undergo mandatory ethical impact assessments, focusing on *psychological autonomy*, *cognitive diversity*, and *emotional well-being*. This would parallel environmental impact assessments in their scope and gravity.

3. **Develop National Standards for Algorithmic Well-being Metrics:**

Policies should move beyond traditional data protection indicators to include well-being metrics—attention span sustainability, emotional engagement authenticity, and autonomy preservation. This builds upon *Sheokand's (2024, 2025)* argument that policy success should be measured not only through efficiency but through human flourishing.

4. **Integrate AI Ethics into National Education and Health Strategies:**

Ethical literacy must be embedded in national curricula and public health policies, ensuring that digital citizens grow into *conscious consumers and ethical innovators* of AI.

5.2 Institutional Level: Reimagining Governance within Organizations

Educational institutions, universities, and digital health providers must operationalize the GDW Framework within their own ecosystems.

1. **Adopt Institutional Digital Well-being Charters:**

These charters should articulate shared principles of ethical AI use, data transparency, and emotional safety. Aligning with *Sheokand's (2017a, 2018a)* findings on institutional ethics and work culture, such charters anchor governance in shared responsibility rather than procedural compliance.

2. **Form Internal Ethics Committees for AI Oversight:**

Cross-disciplinary committees comprising educators, clinicians, technologists, and behavioral scientists should monitor AI systems, evaluate user impact, and publish transparency reports.

3. **Professional Training in Algorithmic Literacy:**

Continuous capacity-building programs for teachers, counselors, and administrators should enable informed engagement with AI systems. *Sheokand's (2023)* observation that human capital is the

backbone of ethical governance applies directly here: institutions must treat ethical literacy as a strategic competency.

4. **AI System Design Collaboration:**

Educational and health technology developers should co-create systems with domain experts to preserve human empathy, nuance, and context—qualities that AI alone cannot replicate.

5.3 Societal Level: Building an Ethically Conscious Digital Culture

True governance extends beyond institutions to the collective moral fabric of society. Societal transformation demands that **digital well-being be recognized as a shared cultural responsibility**.

1. **Public Awareness and Participatory Governance:**

Citizen panels, parents' associations, and youth forums should participate in consultations on AI policies. As *Sheokand (2018b, 2024)* asserts, participatory governance democratizes ethical authority and strengthens trust in public systems.

2. **Media and Information Ethics:**

Awareness campaigns should educate citizens about algorithmic manipulation, data emotionality, and digital self-regulation. Governance thrives when citizens are *ethically literate digital participants*, not passive consumers.

3. **Cross-sector Partnerships:**

Collaboration between public bodies, universities, and private industry can co-develop benchmarks for ethical AI certification—anchoring governance in *shared stewardship* rather than hierarchical control.

5.4 Translational Impact: Aligning Ethics with Innovation

The ethical imperative of governance is not to constrain innovation but to **humanize it**. AI should enhance emotional intelligence, not erode it; optimize learning, not mechanize it. The GDW Framework transforms ethics from a compliance burden into an *innovation advantage*. When developers internalize psychological safety and transparency as design goals, they build trust—and trust is the currency of sustainable innovation.

In alignment with *Sheokand's (2025)* vision of “purposeful governance,” the policy implications presented here aim to shift AI policy from an administrative instrument to a **moral infrastructure**—a structure that sustains dignity, empathy, and balance in digital life.

5.5 Toward a Global Ethical Compact

The governance of digital well-being requires **international policy convergence**. The challenges of algorithmic influence transcend borders; therefore, ethical governance must evolve as a transnational compact. Collaborative frameworks between the EU, India, and UNESCO could establish **Global Ethical AI Benchmarks**—ensuring that emotional and cognitive well-being become measurable components of sustainable digital development.

Sheokand's (2017b, 2023, 2025) scholarship on global and national governance coherence underscores that lasting policy innovation emerges when ethical vision meets institutional integration. The same principle applies globally: digital well-being must be treated as a **collective planetary concern**, foundational to the moral architecture of intelligent societies.

In essence, the policy implications articulated here translate the GDW Framework into actionable governance instruments. They reposition ethical AI governance not as a constraint but as a compass—guiding technology toward psychological sustainability, moral responsibility, and inclusive human progress. The final section concludes with a reflection on the theoretical and societal significance of governing digital well-being as a defining task of our era.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to explore a pressing and under-theorized challenge: how societies can govern the psychological and ethical dimensions of artificial intelligence within education and mental health ecosystems. What emerged is both an ethical imperative and a policy opportunity—to reimagine governance not as the policing of technology but as the *cultivation of human well-being* in digital environments. The research established that while existing frameworks such as the EU AI Act, UNESCO’s AI Ethics Recommendation, India’s NEP 2020, and NDHM advance the cause of regulation, they remain largely technocratic, addressing risk and data but not the human experience of *digital life*.

The proposed **Governance of Digital Well-being (GDW) Framework** offers a new conceptual and operational path forward. By centering governance on five interlocking pillars—ethical accountability, algorithmic transparency, human oversight, psychological safety, and inclusive policymaking—it redefines ethics as the foundation of innovation rather than its constraint. This framework affirms that emotional and cognitive well-being are not secondary considerations; they are **primary public goods** that legitimate digital transformation itself.

In academic continuity, this paper extends *Sheokand’s (2016–2025)* body of work on governance, education policy, and occupational well-being, collectively emphasizing that policy design devoid of emotional intelligence produces systemic inefficacy. The insights from her prior studies on **teacher satisfaction (2017a, 2017b, 2024)**, **digital governance (2016)**, and **occupational stress (2025)** converge here into a unified call for **purposeful governance**—a form of institutional intelligence that preserves human dignity amid technological acceleration.

The findings underscore that governance frameworks must now evolve toward a **multi-dimensional ethics of care**—one that accounts for cognitive load, emotional authenticity, and attention ecology. Just as environmental governance arose from the recognition that human progress must respect ecological balance, digital governance must now internalize the principle of **psychological sustainability**. Without it, societies risk producing technically advanced but emotionally hollow citizens.

At a global scale, the paper advocates the formation of a **Transnational Ethical Compact for Digital Well-being**, enabling cross-border alignment of ethical AI standards and shared accountability for digital mental health outcomes. This reflects *Sheokand’s (2023, 2025)* principle of integrating governance coherence and moral stewardship within public systems—a concept equally relevant in algorithmic contexts.

In conclusion, the governance of digital well-being is not a peripheral policy concern; it is the **moral axis of the intelligent age**. The trajectory of AI will determine not merely how we learn or heal, but how we *remain human* in the face of computational rationality. True progress will not be measured by technological sophistication but by the capacity to preserve **autonomy, empathy, and meaning** in a digital civilization. The task before policymakers and scholars is therefore not just to regulate machines—but to ensure that, in governing AI, we never relinquish governance of ourselves.

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