



# शोधामृत

(कला, मानविकी और सामाजिक विज्ञान की अर्धवार्षिक, सहकर्मी समीक्षित, मूल्यांकित शोध पत्रिका)

ISSN : 3048-9296 (Online)

3049-2890 (Print)

IIFS Impact Factor-2.0

Vol.-2; issue-1 (Jan.-June) 2025

Page No- 149-167

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www.shodhaamrit.gyanvividha.com

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## A Buddhist Inquiry into Digital Addiction

**Abstract :** In an era where digital engagement permeates every aspect of life, digital addiction has emerged as a subtle yet universal crisis. Digital addiction is often misunderstood as a mere behavioural or technological issue. This paper argues that digital addiction is fundamentally a mental and spiritual disruption that is rooted in trishna, and avidya. Drawing from the timeless insights of Buddhist philosophy, this paper explores how ancient teachings such as the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path and the Five Precepts offer a meaningful framework for understanding and addressing the compulsive patterns of digital consumption. It also highlights how modern technology, while expanding and offering convenience and connectivity, silently reshapes human consciousness- leading to isolation and emotional dysregulation. By applying Buddhist concepts to the contemporary condition, this inquiry reinterprets digital addiction as a deeper form of suffering disguised as pleasure. It calls for a mindful and ethical engagement with technology, guided by introspection, discipline, and awareness- essentially walking the Dhamma path in the digital age.

**Keywords :** Digital Addiction, Buddhism, Trishna, Mind, Digital Ethics.

**Introduction :** Today the lights don't go out, not on the streets, not on the screens and not even in our over exposed minds. From bedroom to boardroom, metro trains to market places, birthday parties to spiritual gatherings, a soft blue light lights up the place and the faces of the people. It is an age where connections are instant but intimacy is hard to source. An age where information is abundant but wisdom is far from sight. A toddler eats not when hungry, but when colourful videos play before him. A teenager chooses virtual combat over a hangout with friends full of laughter. A young woman spends hours scrolling through the digital stores, not to buy goods but seeking to satisfy her momentary feeling of agency. A young man works hard to earn only to fall into the trap of online gambling. An elderly man who was once the axis of shared experiences and memories in the form of stories, now speaks more with forwarded messages and videos. Amidst all this, a subtle and creeping silence takes root, not the silence of peace, but of growing isolation.

The description above is not imaginary. It is our everyday, modern-day reality. Despite being surrounded by people; we are growing inwardly more alone than ever before. Technology has smoothened and simplified our lives to magnificent level, it has proved to add a multiplier effect to our capacities, but in the shadows, it has silently re-wired our

consciousness. We no longer merely use our devices. And as this dependency deepens, we unknowingly surrender our lives to these devices. Convenience gradually takes the form of compulsiveness; choices soon dissolve into never-ending cravings that never satisfy. Tech devices rule our work, studies, friends, relationships and daily routines. The effect of social media that offers something new with every click, dominates not only our time, concentration and energy, but also manipulates our thoughts, words, actions and even our consciousness. Across nations it is effecting the physical, mental, emotional and financial health of people. It is also adversely effecting productivity, eroding concentration and weakening social bonds. Youths in the digital era suffer from lack of sleep and patience, and face extreme level of anxiety and anger. These conditions are visible and deeply felt but often remain unaddressed at their roots.

To understand this crisis, we need to look beyond apps and algorithms and delve into the human mind itself. Here, the ancient teachings of Buddha hold a surprising relevance. It helps us identify that the root of the modern digital addiction lies in trishna- carving- the relentless thirst of connectivity, stimulation, recognition, novelty and escape. Trishna has existed since time immemorial, but in the digital age, it has found a new home in the form of digital addiction. The danger today is even

greater, as consumption happens at a very high pace than ever before. The consumption of digital content has become compulsive, unmindful and unceasing. The process of contemplation disappears with the digital content playing a dominant role in our lives.

To better understand our unconscious habits- our mindless browsing, restless screen time- and the deeper motivations behind them- we resort to the Buddhist philosophy of Four Noble Truths. This theory showcases that no amount of virtual engagement can give us lasting happiness and satisfaction- the only thing which one seeks from virtual engagements. The Ashtangik Marg tell us that it was never a path meant only for the ascetics, it is rather a methodical path to train our speech, thoughts and action, leading to a deeper psychological understanding and liberation from the attachments created by technology. Similarly, the Panchasila remind us that right conduct doesn't just come through withdrawal, but through wise and mindful engagement. This paper is an inquiry into a new kind of suffering cloaked in the illusion of virtual pleasure- with the Dhamma walking beside us not just as a doctrine, but as a guide that takes us to peaceful living and wholeness.

### **Digital Addiction: A Technical and Behavioural Perspective**

Digital addiction is a form of behavioural addiction that is characterised by excessive, compulsive, and uncontrolled use of

digital devices. It is primarily related to smartphones, computers, and the internet. It results in interference with daily life, responsibilities, and psychological well-being. In recent years, there has been growing societal concern about the compulsive and obsessive use of digital and internet-enabled devices (Almourad, 2020). Persistent or recurrent use of digital media, referring to digital devices and related activities e.g., games, social media, could lead to digital addiction (Christakis, 2019) (World Health Organization, 2015). It is known that when an action or a desire becomes so prevalent that it interferes with the daily life and gains one's control thereby taking precedence over the main aspects of one's life like work, school, relationships, daily chores, it is termed as addiction (AddictionCenter). It is characterized by an inability to resist the urge to use the internet or any device, manifesting as compulsive, obsessive and excessive use of digital devices or online platforms. This behaviour can profoundly impact mental health, relationships, and overall well-being. Digital addiction is an umbrella term incorporating sub-types of the long-standing problem of Internet addiction, the highly-discussed issue of game addiction, and the emerging topic on social media addiction, or other digital media addiction (Christakis, 2019).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "Gaming Disorder" is a pattern of gaming behaviour charact-

erized by impaired control over gaming. Also increased priority given to gaming over other activities, and continuation or escalation of gaming despite negative consequences (WHO, 2018). The American Psychiatric Association (APA) includes internet gaming disorder in its DSM-5, defining it as "persistent and recurrent use of the Internet to engage in games, often with other players, leading to clinically significant impairment or distress" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Similarly, (Young, 1998) introduced the term "Internet Addiction Disorder" as "a compulsive behaviour that interferes with the normal functioning of the individual" and also developed a diagnostic questionnaire modelled after pathological gambling criteria.

Previous evidence showed that digital addiction caused significant impairments in health, study, work, and other social functions, and marked distress in personal, family, and social well-being (Bell, Bishop, & Przybylski, 2015) (Dahl, 2020) (World Health Organization, 2015). Concerns about increased risks for digital addiction during the COVID-19 pandemic have also been raised (Király, 2020). Kuss & Griffiths conducted a comprehensive review of social networking sites (SNS) addiction and found it shares symptoms with substance-related disorders, including mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, and relapse (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Twenge (2018) linked increased screen time with

rising depression and suicide rates among adolescents in the United States. (Montag C. S., 2016) said internet addiction was as a global health issue and also discussed neurobiological correlates of digital addiction and highlighted the role of the dopaminergic system in the craving behaviour.

**Typology of Digital Addiction:** There can be many types and sub-types of digital addiction, below are few listed few popular and most commonly found types of digital addiction.

**Internet Addiction:** Excessive browsing, surfing, or spending time online (Chou, 2005).

**Social Media Addiction:** Compulsive checking of apps like Instagram, Facebook, etc. (Andreassen, 2012)

**Doom scrolling:** Obsessive scrolling through negative news and updates (Sharma, 2022).

**Smartphone Addiction:** Repeated and excessive use of mobile phones, often involving messaging and apps (Billieux, 2015). It also results in suffering from "Nomophobia" meaning no mobile phone phobia which can cause- ringxiety (anxiety feeling when phone is not available, repeatedly checking phone even if there is no message or call and even hearing phantom ringing); use of mobile phones in an impulsive way (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017).

**Gaming Addiction:** Persistent and recurrent use of video games, both online and offline, often associated with

Internet Gaming Disorder.

**Streaming Addiction:** Binge-watching series/movies for long hours, ignoring physical/social activities (Singh, 2021)

**Online Shopping Addiction :**

Uncontrolled spending on e-commerce apps (Rose, 2014)

**Gambling Addiction :** Compulsive gambling behaviours online (Griffiths, 2007).

**Pornography Addiction:** Repeated, compulsive viewing leading to psychological and social issues (Love, 2015)

**FOMO (Fear of Missing Out):** Anxiety driven by the feeling of being left out on social media or digital trends (Tandon, 2021).

These subtypes can co-occur and often overlap with each other.

### Data and Statistics

**Increasing Number of Smartphone Users:** Statista reports that the number of smartphone users in India in 2024 reached 700.58 million, making it rank number two in the category following China (Statista Research Department, 2025). In 2024, India imported 12 million units of Apple smartphones, became the 4th largest market for Apple, after USA, China, and Japan, registering a year on year growth rate of 35% (International Data Corporation, 2025).

**Surging Number of Internet Connections:** DataReportal reported that at the start of 2025, the internet users in India stood at 806 million, showing a penetration rate of 55.3% (Simon, 2025).

Ministry of communication reported that internet connections surged from 251.5 million in March 2014 to 969.6 million in June 2024, registering a growth of 285.53% (Ministry of Communications, 2025). It is further expected to reach 1.1 billion by 2025 (Customer Market Insights, 2023). Broadband connections rose from 61 million in March, 2014 to 949.2 crore in August, 2024 growing by 1452% (Ministry of Communications, 2025). It is reported that out of 6,44,131 villages, 6,15,836 number of villages are having 4G mobile connectivity, as of December 2024 (Ministry of Communications, 2025).

**Increase in Tendency Towards More Data Consumption:** Statista also reported about the average data consumption per user per month in India (Sun, 2023), it stood at less than 1GB in 2015, which rose to 20GB in 2022, registering a 20 times rise in 7 years. Average monthly data consumption per wireless data subscriber increased by 353 times from 61.66 MB in March, 2014 to 21.30 GB in June, 2024 (Ministry of Communications, 2025).

**Increasing Screen Time:** In According to a report by Redseer Strategy Consultants, Indians spend approximately 7.3 hours per day on smart phone screen time (Money Control, 2022). The primary reason for a significant number of hours spent on smart phones is the deep and increasing rate of internet penetration. This is primarily because of easy, high-speed and

cheap availability of internet- mobile data packs in India. It is interesting to know that mobile data cost in India is among one of the lowest in the world (Customer Market Insights, 2023). As reported by PIB, per subscriber per GB wireless data cost reduced to Rs. 8.31 in June 2024 from Rs. 268.97 in December 2014, registering a massive reduction of 96.91% (Ministry of Communications, 2025). The Median mobile broadband speed has increased from 1.30 Mbps in March 2014 to 95.67 Mbps in December 2024 (Ministry of Communications, 2025). IAMAI reported that 85% of the screen time is spent on entertainment, 77% on communication and 70% for social media sites/ purposes (IAMAI, 2023). DataReportal stated that there were 491 million active social media users in India in January 2025. Facebook having 384 million users, YouTube having 491 million users, Instagram at 414 million, FB Messenger users were 109 million, LinkedIn had 150 million users, Snapchat was at 208 million (Simon, 2025). India had the highest number of Facebook users across the globe as of 2022 (Basuroy, 2023). In India, screen time noted a sharp increase specially during the covid times. OTT users also grew and reached 668 million and online gaming users at 350 million in 2022 (ICUBE2022, 2023).

#### **Rising Cases of Digital Addiction:**

Forbes reported that worldwide approximately 210 million people are

suffering from social media addiction (Marr, 2023). REVIEWS.org said that Americans check their phones as much as 144 times per day, it can be rounded off to once every 10 minutes. 89% check their phones within 10 minutes of waking up while 82% stated that in case of fire, phone is the first thing they'll carry before evacuating (Kerai, 2023). On an average, globally people spend, 44 per cent of their waking hours looking at screens. It is said that, more than 40% of urban Indian children aged between 9 to 17 years are addicted to internet based activities (Chaudhary, 2022). Reports also suggest that almost 60% of the children in India aged between 5-16 years' showcase behaviour which is indicative of digital addiction. (PTI, 2024).

It is quite evident from the above data and statistics that the number of smartphones, internet connection and data consumption is rising at a very fast pace. As more and more people are spending more time on their individual screens, it is making them more isolated. It is difficult to believe that social media and internet was meant to connect more, however since the history, humans have never been so alone and self-cornered ever. As one spends more time on internet and personal smart device-playing, chatting, scrolling, shopping, watching numerous short reels and other form of contents- it becomes away from its own surroundings. This cut off from family, neighbours, social circles,

institutions and nature becomes the base of various physical, mental and social problems. However, no matter how much one consumes and enjoys the so-called benefits of internet and digital world, the perils don't end. The loop of digital consumption becomes never-ending, a little satisfaction needs more consumption and it continues without an end like an infinity hoop.

### **Buddhist Perspective of Digital Addiction**

Digital addiction is often viewed as merely a technological or behavioural disorder, but its roots run far deeper and are far more complex. It is a crisis of the mind, arising from attachment, the restlessness of the intellect, craving, and ignorance. Buddhist philosophy is a profound science of understanding the mind and paving the path to freedom from attachment. It holds the potential to illuminate the fundamental dimensions of this crisis- digital addiction. From a Buddhist perspective, modern digital addiction is not just a habit; it is a contemporary expression of suffering (dukkha).

Its cessation requires not just external intervention but an inward journey. The insights of the Dhamma offer a deep, introspective path toward gaining dominance over the mind and attaining liberation.

### **The Nature of the Mind and Trishna: The Unquenchable Thirst in the Digital Age**

In Buddhist philosophy, Trishna, known as craving is identified as the root cause of all suffering and the cause of bondage (Dhammapada 334-359) (Ittivuttaka 58). In the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, the Buddha proclaims that it is craving that leads to cycles of birth. Digital addiction, when viewed through this lens, emerges not merely as a technological dependency or behavioural habit, but as a contemporary manifestation of this ancient mental affliction. It is an expression of the mind's incessant longing- for pleasure, for validation, for escape, for a little more- that creates bondage and holds one in cycles of relentless digital usage and data consumption, leading to digital addiction.

This craving, in the digital context, takes many forms: the insatiable urge to check notifications, binge-watch streaming content, scroll endlessly through curated feeds, or maintain a certain image on social media. Beneath these behaviours lies a deeper psychological mechanism- a fundamental dissatisfaction (dukkha) from what is available and a conditioned tendency of the mind to grasp, possess, and get more (restlessness). The Buddha classified Trishna into three primary types- kama, bhava and vibhava trishna (Wisdom Library, 2018) (Williams, Tribe, & Wynne, 2012). These three types help one better understand the depth of Trishna in the context of digital addiction.

### **Kama Trishna (Carving for Sensual**

**Pleasures):** This refers to the thirst for sensory gratification. In the digital context, it refers to the desire to consume content, images, sounds, and experiences that are pleasing to the senses. Watching videos, online shopping, browsing through visual stimuli are all few expressions of kama Trishna. They get intensified by the easy accessibility and immediacy of internet, digital devices, digital platforms and the digital content.

**Bhava Trishna (Craving for Becoming or Existence):** This refers to the desire to become someone- to construct and preserve a particular self-image or digital identity. The relentless pursuit of followers, likes, and recognition on social media reflects Bhava-Trishna, a subtle yet powerful urge to validate one's existence through external metrics and curated personas.

**Vibhava Trishna (Carving for Non-Existence or Escape):** It is the most deceptive type of trishna, this craving manifests as the desire to escape from pain, loneliness, or inner discomfort. The screen becomes a refuge from anxiety, uncertainty, and existential unease. However, this escape is illusory and it often deepens dependence on screens, validations and severs the mind from authentic presence.

Thus, digital addiction is not just about an acquired habit or overstimulation. It is rather deeply rooted in the structural tendencies of the

mind to more satisfaction, become someone or escape from the sufferings and the pain of the world. The only way to break the chains of trishna is gain the right knowledge about the true realities of life and attain liberation by ceasing all pain.

#### **Four Noble Truths: A Diagnosis of Digital Addiction**

At the heart of Buddhist philosophy lies the Four Noble Truths. It is a framework that not only identifies the problem, but also arrives at its root cause, and also gives the remedy by providing the ability to get free from all the problem. The four noble truth help us in understanding suffering, and transcending it through a structured mechanism of- insight, ethical living, and mental discipline (Upadhyaya , 2014). This foundational teaching, delivered by the Buddha himself in his first sermon at Sarnath, is as relevant today as it was 2,500 years ago. In the context of digital addiction, these truths provide a profound diagnostic of the disease and prescribes a therapeutic model to get rid of the disease. A model that does not moralize behaviour, but also investigates its roots, and leads to transformation through a structured analysis of the addiction and the way to empower the mind to get free from all modifications.

**1. Dukkha:** Buddha identified that birth, sickness, old age, death, grief, expectations, dissatisfaction arise due to attachments. Anything that is a product of attachment is pain, suffering and can



never bring happiness and satisfaction. Therefore, all of these are dukkha or sufferings in multiple forms. As one is deeply attached to material happiness of the world which is impermanent in nature and is bound to change due to its inherent nature, it is deemed to cause pain. He also emphasised that this attachment to the world impermanent objects, is the only cause for further cycle of re-birth. All the materialist happiness is directly associated with the fear of losing them (Tuli).

Digital addiction, when viewed through this lens, is a form of modern dukkha. The Suffering is inherent in Digital Dependency. It is the attachment, that leads to further cycles of engagement and disengagement with the screen and the content. The fear of losing, binds the mind tightly with the object. Like birth, sickness, old-age, death, grief, expectation, dissatisfaction, the sufferings of digital addiction manifests in many ways like:

- **Sleep disturbances-** It occurs mainly due to excessive screen time, particularly due to late night scrolling.
- **Cognitive fatigue-** It happens due to attention deficits, and inability to be fully present for eg. random and continuous scrolling through YouTube shorts, reels, stories. It results causing difficulty in concentrating, short videos trigger the mind at a much faster and increasing rate.
- **Emotional disconnection-** The

constant flow of information and hyper-connectivity, results in emotional disconnect from the physical world, causing void and sense emotional fatigue.

- **Social isolation-** Constant connectivity and digital dependency causes isolation and alienation from meaningful human interaction.

- **Anxiety-** The fact that one attaches self with the digital world, it results in the fear of missing out (FOMO), validation-seeking, and information overload, nomophobia, ringxiety etc.

These are not incidental outcomes, but the psychological and somatic cost of a life lived in compulsive engagement with the digital realm. As one immerses itself in the boundless digital world, it tries to find 'I-ness' or 'myself' in the digital interactions. However, the fact that all external objects and the associated actions are impermanent and prone to change. In such a case it is foolishness to seek happiness from such external world and is the source of suffering

**2. Dukkha Samudaya- The Origin of Suffering: Trishna (Craving):** The second noble truth identifies the cause of suffering as Trishna or thirst. In digital culture, this craving is algorithmically reinforced and is also neuro-chemically rewarded. Trishna results in endless pursuit of novelty through relentless scrolling, affirmations in the form of likes and comments, escapism results in binge-watching, gaming, and becoming something by curating online personas. All of

these point toward an insatiable desire to fulfil what the Buddha described as the hungry nature of the mind and its tendency of always consuming. The fact is that such consumption is never ending and never provide with complete satisfaction. Rather the mind gets tangled into unlimited consumption and is never satisfied. This craving is not just above more consumption, but is a result of Upadan (clinginess)- the tendency to keep clinging to the device and content (Saxena, 2012). All of these are a result of the function of tendency of the mind patterns driven by ignorance (avidya).

### **3. Dukkha Nirodha - The Cessation of Suffering: Liberation from the Loop:**

The third noble truth offers a radical proposition that cessation (nirodha) of the sufferings is possible (Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery, 1999). One is not condemned to remain trapped in compulsive digital behaviour. As one identifies trishna, upadan, avidya as the root cause of digital addiction. It is important to cease the root cause by winning over one's attachments, desires of clinginess, delusions, greed, anger, aversions, pride etc. When craving is recognized, investigated, and ultimately released, suffering ceases.

This calls for disentangling from unwholesome attachment to the digital devices and content. It does not necessitate abandoning technology altogether. It is the possibility of inner freedom through the rigorous practice of the right

path propounded by the Buddha- amidst outer use. It will be a state where the digital devices and world will no longer holds the mind hostage.

### **4. Dukka Nirodha Marga- The Path: Mindful Discipline through the Noble Eightfold Path:**

The final noble truth outlines the way out, the Noble Eightfold Path, a holistic ethical-psychological framework. Buddha highlighted that through the practice of this path, one can win over all the delusions of the mind, get freedom from ignorance and head towards liberation (Saxena, 2012) (Mahaprajna, 1999). In the context of digital addiction, it entails:

- **Right View (samyak drishti):** Due to the presence of avidya, one gets confused between the relationship of the inner self with the outside world. It also leads one to consider the impermanent reality to be real and truth. This causes sufferings. As one acquires knowledge, the power to discriminate germinates. It then becomes possible to see the temporariness of the world and not get attached to it. By removing all attachment, we gain right view towards life and aim for liberation. In the context of digital addiction, right view is the first step to recognize digital dependency as suffering, not pleasure. As the pleasure attained from the consumption of digital content is totally impermanent in nature, which due to its inherent nature persuades one into the loop of seeking more pleasures. Then as the fear of losing

pleasure builds, it sows the seeds of sufferings. Right view helps to determine that anything that is born of craving can never lead to happiness. Any amount of satisfaction, validation, dopaminergic system etc. arising pleasure due to digital connectedness is not real and has to perish at some point of time. This right view is the first step towards mental freedom from the tight bondages of the digital cravings.

- **Right Intention (samyak sankalp):** Buddha said that it is important that one cultivates right intentions and resolves to live the life by following and practicing the noble truth forever. A strong determination towards detachment from worldly cravings, non-hatred towards others and non-violence, has to be accepted and applied for liberation. This is known as right intention. In the digital times, cultivating the resolve to live with awareness; detachment towards digital, materialistic content; restraint; not engaging in doom scrolling, video games; staying away from compulsive and obsessive online purchases etc. are the form of right resolve or intention to get free from the digital addiction.

- **Right Speech (samyak vacha):** It is in the form of practicing mindful online expression and communication.

- **Right Action (samyak karmat):** Right intention has to be practiced first as a mental resolution, then it should be practiced in the form of right action-body and speech. Practicing non-

violence, kindness, compassion, non-stealing and control over sense organs has to be done as a part of right. In the context of digital addiction, it is important that the technology is put to use in the most ethical and purposeful way.

- **Right Livelihood (samyak aajivika) :** It brings to light that the source of income in one's life should be pure. If the income is from bad, illegal, impure or breeched sources, then it can never lead to right action. The qualities of love, compassion, kindness should be an inherent property kept in mind while practicing right livelihood. In the digital times it is very important as many of the users of the social media today are influencers, who earn money from the internet. In case they promote things, substances or objects or content that is not in accordance of right action and right speech, then it is for sure a big loop of suffering for them and for all those who follow them. Therefore, it is important to avoid professions or habits that perpetuate harmful digital consumption.

- **Right Effort (samyak vyayayam):** Buddha talks about keeping the mind consistently free from bad and poor thoughts. As the mind has the work of producing thoughts, it keeps on producing both types of thoughts- good & bad. It should be practiced with conscious effort that the mind is watered with productive and compassionate thoughts so that it stays fit and healthy

to instruct the body for rightful actions. In the case of digital addiction, the mind due to its inbuilt tendency will try to get drifted away as bad thoughts will pollute it. However, it is the duty of the self that through right effort to consistently redirect the mind from such impulsivity to the right direction of silence, quiet and balance.

- **Right Memory (samyak smriti):** Buddha emphasised on continuously remembering the four noble truths and forgetting the past. The mind has the habit of training itself, so if it is trained with the newly learnt and acquired good qualities of four noble truths, it will get its habit. Similarly, if it is reminded of old thoughts of attachments, cravings, temporary pleasures then it will try to seek it more. So it is the duty of the practitioner, to continuously remember the reality of mind, body, consciousness etc. As one remembers again and again that the body is prone to birth, sickness, disease, old-age, death etc., a sense of vairagya bhava towards the body develops. This leads to end of sufferings and this is the four noble truth all about. In the digital times, it is important to remember again and again that the likes, shares, followers, digital image is deemed to change and is anytime prone to deplete or degenerate. If one reminds the self that the digital identity is just a reflection of the physical self and all that is received from the pleasures of the physical body is destined to change and perish. In the

same view any pleasure that is derived from the activities of the digital self will surely fade and die. This remembrance will train the mind to develop a vairagya bhava from the digital identity and get away from digital addiction and attain freedom.

- **Right Meditation (samyak samadhi):** At last Buddha says that the previous seven steps help in removing the modifications of the mind and this last one is the final step to attain liberation. This happens through right meditation. It happens in four stages: in the first stage, a mind free of delusions, silently contemplates on the four noble truths; in the second stage, it generates utmost faith in them, a sense of peace and happiness prevails in the mind; in the third stage, the mind starts moving away from peace and happiness towards upeksha bhava, where the mind stands in equanimity and has no quests, no pleasures and doesn't aim for liberation also; in the fourth stage, all the modifications of mind dissolve, equanimity prevails, no happiness no sorrow, no pleasure no pain, nothing to gain nothing to lose, no thoughts- not even of the dhyaan state. A phase of blankness, complete peace, complete detachment, complete cessation. In the context of digital world this stage highlights deepening attentional stability, sharpened concentration, complete mental clarity. A state that is automatically and effortlessly guided by the four noble

truths that leads to harmony with the digital world.

From the path starting from sarvam dukkham to param shanti, Sanyukt Nikay states that the person who is established in sila, contemplates on samadhi and pragya, destroys trishna. Sila here stands for detaching from all craving, Samadhi is contemplation of the pure knowledge, Pragya is the invocation of equanimity of mind in all conditions (Majjhim Nikay Vol.1 pg. 202, Digha Nikay Vol. 1 pg. 124).

In essence, the Eightfold Path functions not just as a moral guide, but as a psychological discipline of retraining the mind to dwell in awareness rather than impulse and reactivity. By applying the Four Noble Truths to digital addiction, we begin to see that the screen is not the root problem. The real problem lies in the conditioned tendencies of the mind. Liberation, therefore, is not about suppression or renunciation alone, but about seeing clearly, choosing wisely, and living consciously. Thereby getting free from all digital cravings and attachments; attaining contemplation of digital, physical and consciousness; and at last establishing equanimity of mind and effortlessly not getting dwindled by the external forces of the digital phenomena.

### **Relevance of Buddhism in the Digital World**

#### **Right Use of Technology**

Buddhism does not inherently oppose

technology, but critiques its use when governed by trishna, upadana and avidya. The ethical emphasis is not on renunciation of technological tools, but on wise engagement with them, guided by right view, right intention, right efforts and compassion. If used with mindful boundaries of the ashtangik marga, technology can serve as a means for connection, learning, and self-growth, rather than a vehicle for escapism or compulsive behaviour. The Buddhist concept of right livelihood, right speech and right action encourages responsible and conscious use of digital tools. The defining psychological challenge of the digital era is chronic distraction, Constant notifications, real-time updates, and information overload pull the mind outward, fragmenting attention and eroding present-moment awareness. By practicing right memory and right meditation, mind is retrained to concentrate and forget the distractions. As the mind defies distractions, it is set towards freedom and liberation from the bonds of digital addiction. Therefore, right use of technology acts as a guiding landmark towards digital liberation.

#### **The Five Precepts and Digital Ethics**

The Five Precepts (Panchasila) of Buddhism: abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, falsehood, and taking intoxicants or alcohol (Baudh, 2018) (Jain Dr., 1983). They offer a compelling ethical framework for navigating digital life, that extent beyond morality

and open doorways to mindful living.

i) In the contemporary context of the internet, the precept to avoid killing expands to not causing harm in the digital realm. It demands digital morality to include kindness, compassion, and restraint, even in anonymous or pseudonymous online spaces. the commitment to non-harming urges users to refrain from engaging with or propagating hate speech, cyberbullying, or voyeuristic content that dehumanizes others, reinforcing the importance of digital empathy.

ii) The second percept of abstaining from stealing can be understood in the digital times as not making use of any content in the form of image, video or any other information that is available on the internet or device, without prior and clear permission of the real owner. In the digital world, users are in the habit of posting regular updates about their whereabouts, personal information and other forms of personal data. This leads to huge array of data availability that deluded minds can tamper with. So the second percept becomes extremely relevant specially when looking at it from the point of view ongoing digital frauds, stealing of data for monetary gains etc. It therefore calls for non-indulging in cyber frauds, digital scams, hacking, phishing, spying, malwares, ransomwares, deep fakes, impersonation etc. No personal benefit in any form should be acquired without the permission of the one who the data pertains to.

iii) The third percept to abstain from sexual misconduct is also particularly relevant in virtual environments. In digital times violations of consent and boundary is predominant, instances of unsolicited messages, stalking, revenge porn, non-consensual image sharing, online pornography, online child abuse etc. are increasingly prevalent (Henry, 2018). Buddha's teachings find deep profound insight in teaching about sexual misconduct in the digital realm. A conduct that is not acceptable in the physical life is to be replicated in the digital life as well. As today generally everybody closely associates themselves with their digital identities, any kind of sexual misconduct in the digital periphery effects physical, mental and emotional well-being of the person and even the society. Respect for digital dignity must become a standard ethical practice.

iv) The fourth percept to abstain from falsehood translates into resisting the spread of misinformation, online trolling, clickbait narratives, and all sort of deceptive content. Social media algorithms amplify polarizing or sensational content forming echo chambers (Cinelli, 2021), this precept becomes crucial for cultivating discernment and truthfulness in digital expression.

v) The fifth percept to abstain from consumption of intoxicants and alcohol is perhaps most important and demanding. This precept concerning can be extended to encompass digital intoxication,

particularly through immersive visual content and algorithmic gratification loops. Excessive screen time, compulsive scrolling, and constant notification checking are not merely habits, they are neuropsychological phenomena. They possess the ability to hijack the brain's dopaminergic reward system, much like addictive substances (Alter, 2018) (Montag C. W., 2021). The mind becomes intoxicated not through ingestion of substance but through continuous stimulation, hyper-curated imagery, and instant gratification, producing effects akin to behavioural addiction. Social media, in particular, leverages psychological vulnerabilities by reinforcing pleasure-seeking behaviour and reward anticipation. It often results in emotional balance, depression, anxiety and psychological distress (Keles, 2020). Such digital stimuli can cloud judgment, distort self-perception, and disrupt mindfulness, much like traditional intoxicants impair mental clarity. As the mind gets clogged, it may engage in any vicious activities like violence, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech etc. Therefore, this percept becomes the most important and most relevant in these times of digital addiction, as this addiction can directly be equationed with traditional alcohol or other form of drugs.

The Five Precepts, when reinterpreted in light of modern challenges, offer more than personal discipline. They provide a moral compass

for digital citizenship and enable the transformation of virtual spaces into sites of ethical cultivation, conscious online presence, and collective well-being. They remind us that freedom comes through wise engagement, not only through compulsive withdrawal.

### **Conclusion: Toward Digital Liberation through Buddhist Wisdom**

The reminiscent images from our everyday lives showcasing family members living under one roof yet immersed in isolated digital worlds, children eating only when YouTube plays in front of them, youth trading restful nights for binge-watching. These are not just signs of a changing lifestyle, they are rather a call to awaken and to become a lamp upon yourself.

As this paper has argued, these images reflect a deeper aspect- delusion of mind and dislocation of consciousness. Digital addiction, in its true essence, is not merely a behavioural issue to be managed with external restrictions or app timers. It is a profound spiritual imbalance, the roots of which are found in craving, attachments and ignorance- the very afflictions that Buddhist teachings have long identified as the roots of suffering. In this light, the Buddhist path does not merely suggest restraint but invites transformation- from compulsive consumption to conscious awareness.

Liberation from digital bondage does not require demonizing and

abandoning technology. It demands reclaiming sovereignty over one's own mind. The Five Precepts, along with the Eightfold Path, offer ethical anchoring by providing guidelines to bring mindfulness, compassion, and discrimination into the digital realm. It makes us realise that in a world saturated with stimuli, true joy arises from inner simplicity and not from endless scrolling. Connection deepens though present-moment presence but not through WhatsApp groups, constant messaging and regular updates. And also the silence that lies beyond screens is not a void, it is, as the Buddha taught, a gateway to contemplation, clarity, peace and equanimity.

Thus, if the digital age has made us users of technology, Buddhist wisdom reminds us to be masters of our attention. In today's digital world of smarter algorithms and faster connectivity, it is required that human beings become much wiser and develop the capability of using technology without being used by it. In that lies the real liberation: not in renouncing the digital, but in living with it Sila (ethical discipline), Samadhi (mental concentration) and Pragya (wisdom)- the three important gems of Buddhism

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