



**Sampreshan**

**UGC CARE GROUP 1**

<https://sampreshan.info/>

**ISSN: 2347-2979**

**Vol. 17, Issue No. 3, September 2024**

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**MINDFUL WORDS IN DIGITAL SPHERE: A BUDDHIST APPROACH TO  
ETHICAL COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

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**Abstract:**

The most advance form of communication with instant dissemination of messages and obsequious nature of social media, not only give it popularity but makes us open dared, cautious and concerned due to the challenges we heard and encounter in our daily life. Acting as a cosmos of information it also contains demerits like misinformation, fake-news, cyber bullying, trolling, privacy concern, online abuse, harassment and mental health etc. To overcome these challenges media literacy is one of the effective tools for the user to consume the digital space and social media platform as a boon of digital felicity. According to Indian rhetoric and communication practicing the Buddhist philosophy seeks the values of truthfulness, compassion and conciliation by its noble eight folded path of ethics in communication comprises with mutuality, open-mindedness, honesty, and respect. Here by studying the Buddhist philosophy we come to understand model of communication. This study will insight that how by following the Buddhist approach in digital sphere will make the social media legitimately viable to use.

**Keywords:** Digital media, Buddhist ethics, Right Speech, social media, digital communication, ethical communication, mindfulness, Eightfold Path, media literacy, Buddhist approach of media literacy, Discourse analysis.



## **Introduction**

From the early medium of communication to the present digital form the evolution of communication mode and medium has undergoes in several theories and tools. Where every theory is propounded by the expert of subjects and thinkers which leads to the development of communication and theories. The verbal and non-verbal form of communication are the fundamental type of communication which commonly practiced to express and to transmit the information. The oldest known form of communication are the cave paintings where painting located within Chauvet Cave, (30,000 BCE) are the oldest.<sup>1</sup> Gradually play, painting, songs, dancing, acting and symbolical uses takes place in the form of communication. From the petroglyphs to printing press and symbols to using emojis today shows that how communication evolved and grow. Invention of scripts and writing gave the opportunity to mass communication but it is invention of printing press in 15<sup>th</sup> century by Johannes Gutenberg is proclaimed as the rise of mass communication. The invention of telegraph makes the sharing of information fast even if there is distance of the message sources are spread in large area.<sup>2</sup> The mode of the communication changes as medium gets evolved from radio, television and today's digital media.

After the development of digital media, the mass communication becomes ubiquitous and instant and social media is one of the key medium and widely used by the people around the world. According to a study it is reported that 5.04 billion users are actively using social media which is 62.3% of total population where the users belong to the 18+ age group, averagely using 6.7 social media platform every month. The top 5 social media platform are Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok respectively and twitter now known as "X" stands 12<sup>th</sup> in the order. The 16.2% of total user belong to South Asia. There is 8% growth has been identified from last year (January 2023 to January 2024). Today 94.2 % of Internet user have social media identity.<sup>3</sup> This shows the growth and coverage of social media among the people around the world.

The popularity of social media brings problems sometime in the form of its demerit of open access and pervasive nature. It is one way a ocean of information which keeps us up-to-date and aware about the happenings around us and across the world. Where it not only feed us with messages and news but helps us to keeps ourself educated on the subject of interest. One the other hand the addiction of social media also increased around the world which arises several



demerits and outlining the online danger of excessive use of social media. According to a NIH cross-sectional study with multistage sampling in government and private PU colleges in the selected urban areas of Bangaluru city it is identified that 36.9% of them are addicted to social media which results some general health problem and behavioural changes like anger, FOMO and selfitis.<sup>4</sup> Whereas global addiction is around 210 million those who are using social media platform foremost tope 5 among them are Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter. These insights are indicators of critical situation of social media users which outlined the issues like suicidal behaviour, Mental Health, anxiety, depression and lower self-esteem.<sup>5</sup>

It is now identified that most of the issues are related to mental behaviour and behaviour as a whole of the social media user leads to addiction level and this can be subsided by the help of mindfulness and this is the principal value of Buddhism.

Buddhist Philosophy it is believed that communication in human being is a nonstop cycle with no beginning and end like concept of Samara the wheel of life. The human communication is constantly transforming according to the time and space and guide us how to communicate. It emphasises on non-violence, tolerance, equality and respect for the individuals. The Eight Paths of Buddhism is the guiding principle and these principles are - Right understanding (*Samma ditthi*), Right thought (*Samma sankappa*), Right speech (*Samma vaca*), Right action (*Samma kammanta*), Right livelihood (*Samma ajiva*), Right effort (*Samma vayama*), Right mindfulness (*Samma sati*), Right concentration (*Samma samadhi*). These eight principles are essential for the improvement and incorporating three disciplines of Buddhism where love, happiness and compassion for all living beings is considered as ethical conduct (*sila*) in once action and speech. Mindfulness and awareness is one of the essential practice in order to develop mental discipline (*samadhi*) to be vigilant towards our mind and bodily activity, feelings, idea, thoughts and things and right thoughts and understanding develop the wisdom (*panna*).<sup>6</sup>



### Social Media: A Collection of Communication

Communication is an integral part of human life and with the advancement of Internet it becomes more ubiquitous and phenomenal. Now people are communicating in such faster and spontaneous way which was not possible ever before. The messages are same but medium become versatile and dynamic. Even today communicating and conversation need to fulfil the basic structure of communication which is message, sender, medium and receiver. There are differences and conflicts among the thoughts and theories, but it is highly emphasized that communication must be ethical in nature. There are six types of communication is defined<sup>7</sup> and social media is a mixture of all of them can be understand in the figure 1.1 below.

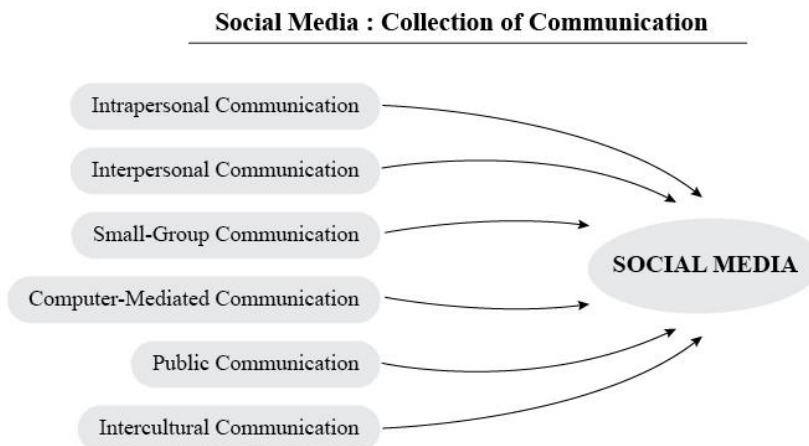


Figure 1.1

There are numerous definitions of social media but still it is difficult to define. According to Peter R. Scott and J. Mike Jacka “it is a set of Web-based broadcast technologies that enable the democratization of content, giving people the ability to emerge from consumers of content to publishers. With the ability to achieve massive scalability in real time, these technologies empower people to connect with each other to create (or co-create) value through online conversation and collaboration.”<sup>8</sup> (Scott & Jacka, 2009, p. 5) The social media a synthesized blend of different types of communication, here people engaged with Interpersonally, in small group or in public diaspora with computer mediated communication. Although Intrapersonal communication doesn’t involve any person or receiver but once own feelings and thought but determine once prospective on their own feelings and helps to decide about the piece of



information which is communicated is right or ethical which is most essential phenomena to mindful communication specially when the information and messages are disseminated socially. While expressing the thoughts and information one can not only communicate but it is exchange of culture and tradition and the better understanding of cultural and language will fulfil the purpose to inform, influence, persuade, convince and to entertain. To ensure the ethical aspect of communication it also become necessary to understand the intention, so here we understand that how Buddhist philosophy will contribute to deal with.

### **The Challenge of Communication in Social Media**

Over the time period the mode and medium of communication gets shaped from the signal of whistles to the paintings, scripts and today's digital form of mass communication. The technological advancement will not only made the communication instantaneous but multifaceted as well. The dominance and hyper use of technology enables us in effective communication and heterogenous impact on peoples. The social media platform is one of the vivid examples of technological advancement, where we all are using this platform without any barrier of boundary, time and space. This characteristic makes the social media ubiquitous in nature and results online challenges of unethical practice of communication on the social media platform. It is a media of network communication and the anonymous users, virtual presence and absence of direct contact are the key concern of social media platforms. Deception of identity and veracity of information are one of the major concerns of social media which also emphasised the need to understand the Buddhist philosophy while communicating.

With all these challenges it becomes necessary to use the social media in such a way where neither your presence is compromised nor the others individuality and decorum of space.

### **Buddhist Philosophy to Limit the Challenges of Social media**

The Buddhist philosophy is all about reality and fallacy. Reality is taking the things as it is which is called *Samyaksambodhi* and there is no middle way (*Madhyamaka*) to reality. There is nothing to do with subjectivity or objectivity it is the philosophy against duality. The core of Buddhism lies in *Sunyata* the emptiness which is all about interdependent, co-arising,



impermanence, and non-self<sup>9</sup> This states that every individual is with its own importance and the existence of humans are depends upon each other and causes impact on everyone life. It is about the philosophy of “growing together” not self-centred. The belief and teaching of Buddhist philosophy is its values lies one “*Dhammapada*” which means Not to do any evil (pāpa), to cultivate the good (kuśala), to purify one’s mind (citta).”<sup>10</sup> Similarly there is a sense of not to hurt or harm while using social media for communication and carefully converse and express owns views and reviews on this platform. So, neither share the unreasoning nor receives bosh.

In this continuation as we all know the basic philosophy of Buddhism is its “*Four Noble Truth*” and they are the *truth of suffering*, the truth of the *cause of suffering*, the truth of the *end of suffering*, and the truth of the *path that leads to the end of suffering*. By this we understand that suffering exists in our life and every suffering has a cause and this is not for always and there is a strong cause which ends the sufferings.<sup>11</sup> Similarly while using the social media as a receiver or as a sender we often notice the issue of crisis of recognition among the users call

FOBI (Fear of Being Insignificant) where people on social media feels that they are not considered or recognised by the community of social media it may be cause due to the digital algorithm of Like, Share and subscribe. If a person on the social media gets lesser value, then that will be the cause of dissatisfaction among the users which some time leads to severe situation for the social media community and the person itself. Where they encounter mental issues or some time result to bullying, trolling and online harassment for the others as well.

So, one the basis of ‘*Four Noble Truth*’ if we study the challenges and issues of social media, we can understand that how these are connected and how these can be overcome. If we consider the situation of online harassment If a person is in fear on getting online on social media, then there is a cause of fear which may the fear of being harassed online, but this fear can be ended and one have to find the way to end this by just having online mindful discussion on the ongoing matter or to ignore the presence of that person by removing, reporting or blocking from there social media account or come up with strong and legit reply. If the person come to understand that presence of such online challenges then this will also help to over come the conflict and mental stress. Being on social media it not necessary to respond on every act provocation. The



challenges arise some time spontaneously but some time person behind the profile is a habitual offender and looking for their next victim by messaging anonymous cyber bullying to victimizing the person by threatening, harassing and humiliating online.

That's why Buddhism emphasise on harmony, mutual dependence, selflessness, compassion, and ethics on the behaviour level which letter on perceive in the characteristic of communication in the region of east -Asia in the form of silence, empathic, emotional control, and avoidance of being aggressive. It is the intuitive type of communication which emphasis on to feel the communication and interaction which spurn the western style. It is a non-verbal expression reflecting the silence as an understanding in communication rather than critique and regret.<sup>12</sup> Some time being silent is the best way to answer without any conflict and controversy. This will also break the mindless argument which may result mental anxiety and baseless conversation.

### **Methodology**

The methodology of the study is a qualitative and Expository Discourse analysis. The study will explain the concept and describe the idea of the Buddhist philosophy of communication. Here the study focused on how by assimilating the philosophy of Buddhist communication will influence the social media user for the ethical use, dissemination of information and media messages. The study will examine that how by following and practicing the Buddhist philosophy will act as a ethical tool of communication dispersion in digital space.

### **Limitation**

The study has limited generalization of content of specific context. Which outline the challenges and issues of ethical communication on social media and being ethical and mindful by following the Buddhist philosophy The used data for study is interpretative in nature, so it may possible that the study has different prospective and precipitation to the other researcher.





## **Findings**

The study finding insight the need of mindfulness while using social media. The uses and dissemination of information or messages must be based on fact and reality. So, the credibility of information preserve and online conflict can be lower done. It is also necessary that we should avoid the controversy as long as possible with compassion to maintain the online harmony and mental peace. This will not encourage the aggressive act on online and social media platform but at the same time stops to stimulate other or control you from others provocation. It is also acknowledging the importance of “Ahimsa” non-harm by practicing the philosophy of Buddhism even in the digital era.

## **Conclusion**

With the advancement and gradual development, the social media becomes more interactive and engaging and now it evolves more than from IT framework and technological communication. It is now becoming the part of our social life where we are not only informed but act and react as well. With the accessibility and mobile technology, it is now becoming the primary source of new-views and entertainment and communication around 462.0 million social media users are present in India which is the covering the 32.2% of total population reported in January 2024.<sup>13</sup> where 99% of them are suing social media through mobile phones or other mobile devices globally.<sup>14</sup> The proximity of media and the medium is the speciality of this digital technology. Whear the nearness of social media keeps us informed and updated at the same time there is a possibility of online threat, troll and harassment. Sometime tapping and swiping frequently seen among social media users which results the anxiety among the social media user specially when active on mobile phones. So, there are number of issues are reported among the social media users. Privacy and mental health are also a big concern among them, so, it also becomes important to be a mindful presence on the digital sphere. Because the medium is disseminating the messages from “one-to-one” to “one-to-many” where messages are being accessed, consumed and created by the users with there contacts or anonymously. The person using social media are invisible to the world which make the communication precarious.





From the computer geeks to general population the social media changes and developed in a way where people are now converse on any subject around the world. Now people are discussing on politic, culture, tradition and expression owns personal view in a collaborative manner and in democratic way but it is not necessary that people get agree on the shared message and get coincide with the conversed view. There is chance that it may arise the argument but might possible that there is conflict which result the online suffering among the users of social media. To overcome this challenges and online issues by using the social media the basic philosophy of Buddhism of “*Four Noble Truth*” will keep us aware about the truth of and cause of our online suffering. It also makes us understand that the controversy will be overcomes but we have to find the way to end by following the harmony, mutual dependence, selflessness, compassion, and ethics on the behaviour level. The Buddhist philosophy prepare use to dealing negativity in pragmatic way.

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