
An Application of Buddhist Principles to Reduce Youth Technological Addiction through Summer Retreat Program at Hoang Phap Monastery in Vietnam

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Abstract

Technology addiction among Vietnamese youth has become an increasingly serious concern due to its negative effects on mental health, academic performance, emotional regulation, and social relationships. This research article has three objectives: first, to study the problems and causes of technological addiction among youth in Vietnam; second, to examine Buddhist principles and practices for reducing technological addiction; and third, to propose a summer retreat program at Hoang Phap Monastery applying Buddhist principles to reduce youth technological addiction in Vietnam. The study employed a qualitative research approach supported by descriptive survey data. Data were collected through documentary analysis, in-depth interviews with five key informants connected with Buddhist education and retreat activities, a focus group discussion with 15 young people showing signs of technology addiction, and an online survey of 106 students. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis, with survey responses coded to identify recurring patterns.

The findings show that the main causes of technological addiction among Vietnamese youth include academic pressure, social media influence, emotional dependence on virtual interaction, lack of life direction, weak time management, and insufficient family or social guidance. These factors contribute to anxiety, reduced academic concentration, weakened relationships, and poor emotional regulation. The study further finds that Buddhist principles can address the cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions of technological addiction. Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) supports awareness of habitual device use; loving-kindness (*mettā*) encourages genuine human connection; gratitude (*kataññutā*) cultivates contentment; and right faith (*saddhā*) provides moral direction and discipline. Based on these findings, the article proposes a summer retreat program at Hoang Phap Monastery that integrates digital detox, meditation, Dhamma learning, communal living, gratitude reflection, loving-kindness communication,

and faith-based contemplation as a culturally relevant model to help Vietnamese youth restore balance in the digital age.

Keywords: Technological addiction; Buddhist principles; Vietnamese youth; Mindfulness; Summer retreat program; Hoang Phap Monastery

Introduction

In the era of industrialization, modernization, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, digital technology has become deeply integrated into the daily lives of young people. Smartphones, social media platforms, online games, and digital entertainment applications provide convenience, communication, learning opportunities, and access to information. However, uncontrolled and excessive use of technological devices can gradually transform intentional behavior into automatic habit, dependence, and addiction (Paiman & Fauzi, 2024). This situation has contributed to the growing concern over “digital addiction” or “technology addiction,” especially among young people whose emotional regulation, identity formation, and self-discipline are still developing. Globally, internet access among youth has increased rapidly. The International Telecommunication Union reported that by 2023, young people aged 15–24 had particularly high internet usage rates, with 79% accessing the internet compared with 65% among the rest of the population (International Telecommunication Union, 2023). Similarly, many teenagers report almost constant use of platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram (Pew Research Center, 2023).

Vietnam reflects this global trend. Around 70% of the Vietnamese population uses the internet (Kemp, 2020), while 70.1% of social media users are reportedly in the 16–30 age group (Doan et al., 2022). Although digital platforms can support education, creativity, communication, and social participation, excessive use may negatively affect mental health, concentration, academic performance, family relationships, and social skills. The World Health Organization has reported that 4–5% of young people experience severe problems related to internet addiction, while approximately 20% may be at risk of relapse (Boniel-Nissim et al., 2024). In Vietnam, concerns about unhealthy social media use have led to calls for coordinated policy efforts, educational campaigns, and greater individual responsibility in digital life (Doan et al., 2022).

From a Buddhist perspective, technological addiction can be understood not only as a behavioral problem but also as a manifestation of deeper mental patterns such as craving (*taṇhā*), ignorance (*avijjā*), attachment, restlessness, and lack of mindful awareness. Rahula (1974) explains that craving and ignorance are root causes of human suffering, while Gethin (2003) emphasizes the Buddhist path as a process of transforming desire and cultivating liberation. Therefore, technology itself is not the enemy; the problem arises when the mind becomes attached to digital stimulation, virtual recognition, comparison, and emotional escape. Buddhist principles such as mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), gratitude (*kataññutā*), and faith (*saddhā*) provide practical ways to cultivate awareness, regulate behavior, restore emotional balance, and guide young people toward meaningful life direction.

Despite growing research on technology addiction and mindfulness-based interventions, important gaps remain. First, empirical studies on Vietnamese youth in culturally and religiously relevant contexts remain limited (Hanh, 2021). Second, although Buddhist principles have often been discussed theoretically, fewer studies have explored their practical application through structured programs such as summer retreats (Hai, 2018). Third, limited research has integrated perspectives from both Buddhist scholars and youth participants to evaluate Buddhist-oriented approaches to reducing technology addiction (Harris, 2016). Therefore, this study aims to examine the problems and causes of technological addiction among Vietnamese youth, analyze Buddhist principles and practices for reducing technology addiction, and propose a summer retreat program at Hoang Phap Monastery applying Buddhist principles to support behavioral, emotional, and spiritual development among young people in Vietnam.

Research Objectives

1. To study the problems and causes of technological addiction among youth in Vietnam.
2. To examine Buddhist principles and practices for reducing technological addiction.
3. To propose a summer retreat program at Hoang Phap Monastery, applying Buddhist principles to reduce youth technological addiction in Vietnam.

Literature Review

Technology addiction has become a significant issue in contemporary youth development because digital platforms are designed to capture attention, stimulate reward-seeking behavior, and encourage repeated use. Alter (2017) explains that addictive technologies are intentionally structured to keep users engaged through feedback loops, social validation, and constant novelty. Griffiths (2005) similarly identifies behavioral addiction through components such as salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. These concepts are useful for understanding why excessive smartphone, gaming, and social media use among young people may progress from ordinary habits to compulsive dependence.

In the Vietnamese context, technology addiction is closely related to rapid digital transformation and the widespread use of social networking platforms. Toi et al. (2022) note that social networks in Vietnam provide benefits such as communication, learning, and access to information, but they also create problems related to misinformation, excessive use, and social disruption. Pham (2019) argues that the internet offers educational and economic opportunities for students, yet uncontrolled use can lead to wasted time, psychological stress, dependence on virtual relationships, and reduced creativity. These studies show that technology use among Vietnamese youth should be examined not only as a technical or behavioral issue but also as a social, educational, and psychological concern.

Buddhist studies provide another important framework for understanding and addressing technology addiction. Rahula (1974) explains that craving (*taṇhā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*) are central causes of suffering. From this perspective, technological addiction may be understood as a modern form of attachment in which the mind repeatedly seeks pleasure, stimulation, recognition, and escape through digital devices. Gethin (2003) emphasizes that the Buddhist path offers practical methods for transforming desire and cultivating awareness. Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) also presents mindfulness as a practical way to transform suffering into peace and liberation in daily life.

Several Buddhist principles are especially relevant to reducing technological addiction. Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) helps young people recognize automatic patterns of device use and regain self-regulation. Loving-kindness (*mettā*) supports genuine interpersonal connection and reduces emotional dependence on virtual validation. Gratitude (*kataññutā*) cultivates contentment

and counters the continuous desire for novelty and comparison. Right faith (*saddhā*) provides moral direction, discipline, and confidence in self-transformation. These principles can support behavioral change by addressing the cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions of addiction.

Existing studies have examined technology addiction and mindfulness, but limited research has applied Buddhist principles through a structured retreat model for Vietnamese youth. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by proposing a summer retreat program at Hoang Phap Monastery as a culturally relevant Buddhist intervention model for reducing youth technological addiction in Vietnam.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design supported by descriptive survey data to investigate youth technological addiction in Vietnam and to propose a Buddhist summer retreat model at Hoang Phap Monastery. The research focused on three areas: the problems and causes of technological addiction among Vietnamese youth, Buddhist principles relevant to reducing technology addiction, and the development of a retreat-based model for practical application.

Documentary Study

Documentary research was conducted to establish the study's theoretical and conceptual foundation. Primary Buddhist sources included selected teachings from the Nikāya tradition and related Buddhist texts concerning craving (*taṇhā*), ignorance (*avijjā*), mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), gratitude (*kataññutā*), faith (*saddhā*), and ethical self-cultivation. Secondary sources included Buddhist books, academic articles, research reports, and contemporary studies on technology addiction, social media use, youth behavior, mindfulness, and digital well-being. The documentary analysis helped clarify the relationship between Buddhist principles and the psychological, behavioral, and ethical dimensions of technology addiction.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with five key informants selected through purposive sampling. The participants included Buddhist monastic leaders and practitioners associated with Hoang Phap Monastery, as well as one lay youth activity leader familiar with retreat participation and youth behavior. The

interviewees were selected based on their experience in Buddhist education, youth retreat organization, spiritual guidance, and the application of Buddhist principles in everyday life. The interviews explored their perspectives on the causes of technology addiction among youth, the relevance of Buddhist principles to behavioral transformation, and the design of a summer retreat program suitable for young people in Vietnam.

Online Survey

An online survey was conducted with 106 students from major cities in Vietnam, including Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and Da Nang. The survey was distributed via Google Forms and included open-ended questions about participants' owned technological devices, daily usage habits, signs of technology dependence, emotional experiences related to technology use, and perceived difficulties in reducing screen time. The survey data were used to identify recurring patterns in youth technology use and to support the qualitative analysis.

Focus Group Discussion

A focus group discussion was conducted with 15 young people who showed signs of technology addiction based on the survey responses. The discussion explored participants' experiences of excessive technology use, perceived causes of dependency, emotional reliance on digital platforms, academic and social consequences, and possible interest in retreat-based practice. The focus group provided deeper insight into the lived experience of technology addiction among youth and helped inform the design of the proposed retreat model.

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to interpret data from documentary sources, interviews, focus group discussions, and open-ended survey responses. Key themes were identified, coded, and grouped according to the three research objectives: causes and effects of technology addiction, Buddhist principles for behavioral transformation, and components of the proposed retreat model. Survey responses were also categorized descriptively to identify common patterns of device use, emotional dependence, and perceived impacts. The findings from all sources were synthesized to develop a Buddhist summer retreat model to reduce youth technological addiction at Hoang Phap Monastery.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the interviews, focus group discussion, and online survey was voluntary. Participants were informed of the study's academic purpose, and their responses were used only for research analysis. Personal information was treated confidentially.

Research Results

Objective 1: The research results showed the complex reality and causes of technology addiction among Vietnamese youth. The study found that the rapid development of digital technology, particularly social media, online gaming, and entertainment platforms, has had a profound impact on adolescents' psychological and social lives. The study mentioned causes, including academic pressure and societal expectations that lead young people to turn to technology as a means of release; the need for self-affirmation and recognition in cyberspace; a lack of direction in life values and time management skills; and, finally, the influence of the family and social environment. These factors combined have led to the dependence on technology among young people in Vietnam today, negatively impacting their mental health, academic performance, and the quality of their social relationships. Clearly identifying these causes is an important basis for developing interventions appropriate to the current social reality.

Objective 2: This study indicated that Buddhist principles and practices are relevant and positively impact the reduction of technology addiction. The effectiveness of Buddhist principles in addressing youth technological addiction can be understood through their psychological and behavioral mechanisms. Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) plays a foundational role by enhancing present-moment awareness and enabling individuals to recognize habitual patterns in their technology use. Many forms of technology addiction operate automatically, driven by unconscious checking behaviors and dopamine-based reward loops. By cultivating mindfulness, individuals become more aware of these impulses, allowing them to interrupt compulsive usage and regain self-regulation. Loving-kindness (*mettā*) addresses the emotional dimension of addiction. Young people often rely on digital platforms to seek validation, connection, or emotional relief. The practice of loving-kindness fosters positive emotions, empathy, and a genuine sense of interpersonal connection, thereby reducing reliance on virtual interactions as a primary source of emotional fulfillment. Gratitude (*kataññutā*) functions as a stabilizing factor that counteracts the constant desire for stimulation

and novelty commonly associated with digital media use. Technology addiction is often linked to dissatisfaction and the continuous search for new content. By cultivating gratitude, individuals develop contentment with their present circumstances, which reduces the urge to seek excessive external stimulation from digital devices. Right faith (*saddhā*) provides a moral and motivational framework that supports long-term behavioral change. It strengthens trust in positive values and meaningful life goals, guiding individuals to use technology in a more balanced and purposeful way. For youth, the right faith also reinforces discipline and commitment to personal development, helping them resist harmful digital habits.

Together, these principles form a comprehensive approach that addresses the cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions of technology addiction. Rather than merely suppressing behavior, they promote inner transformation, making them particularly effective for sustainable and long-term change among young people.

Objective 3: The study proposed a summer retreat program at Hoang Phap Monastery that applied Buddhist principles to reduce technology addiction among Vietnamese youth. The findings of this objective were supported by data collected from in-depth interviews with Buddhist scholars and survey responses from 106 participants. The results indicate the potential for noticeable improvements after engaging in the retreat program, including increased self-awareness, reduced screen time, enhanced emotional regulation, and improved social interactions. The structured retreat environment, which limits access to digital devices and emphasized mindfulness practices and communal activities, is expected to play a significant role in facilitating these changes.

The program's effectiveness can be explained by the application of four key Buddhist principles. Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) enables participants to recognize and interrupt habitual patterns of technology use. Loving-kindness (*mettā*) helps reduce emotional dependence on virtual interactions by fostering genuine social connection and empathy. Gratitude (*kataññutā*) cultivates contentment, thereby decreasing the constant desire for digital stimulation. Right faith (*saddhā*) provides ethical guidance and strengthens participants' commitment to disciplined and balanced technology use. This process of transformation suggests that integrating Buddhist principles into a structured

retreat setting can support behavioral change and reduce technology addiction among youth.

Table 1: The Role of Buddhist Principles in Reducing Youth Technology Addiction

Principle	Process	Outcome
Mindfulness	Awareness of habits	Reduced compulsive use
Loving-kindness	Emotional connection	Less reliance on social media
Gratitude	Contentment	Reduced digital craving
Right faith	Moral discipline	Balanced technology use

In summary, all three objectives of this research topic have been systematically met: from problem identification and cause analysis to the development of solutions grounded in Buddhist principles and the proposal of a specific application model for a summer retreat. The study not only contributes theoretically to the fields of applied Buddhism and behavioral research but also holds practical value in supporting Vietnamese youth to face the challenges of the digital age with the wisdom and compassion of Buddhist teachings. At the same time, the research results also open new directions for interdisciplinary work, connecting Buddhist studies with psychology, education, and the social sciences to build comprehensive, sustainable, and culturally relevant intervention models for Vietnam.

Discussions

This study proposes a summer retreat program at Hoang Phap Monastery that applies Buddhist principles to reduce technology addiction among Vietnamese youth. This is a novel, interdisciplinary approach that combines Buddhist studies, psychology, and education. At the same time, this is a topic that reflects the spirit of “engaged Buddhism” in contemporary life, addressing modern social issues.

To clarify the urgency, current situation, and causes of technology addiction among young people, it can be compared to the study by Saqib and Faseeh Amin on the development of social media addiction scales (Saqib & Amin, 2022). Saqib and Amin point out that social media addiction shares similar

characteristics with other forms of behavioral addiction, including salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse. Through these characteristics, technology addiction is not just a negative habit but also a complex social and psychological phenomenon. It can negatively impact the mental health, studies, work, and social relationships of young Vietnamese people in particular and young people worldwide in general.

Through Buddhist principles, it can be seen that technology addiction can be addressed by learning and practicing them. Buddhist principles such as Mindfulness, Loving-kindness, Gratitude, and Right Faith, when analyzed, are entirely capable of helping young people improve their technology addiction. Another notable perspective comes from research by Paiman and Fauzi, which examines the determinants of social media addiction in a university setting by combining the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) with usage habits (Paiman & Fauzi, 2024). This is also considered an aspect that allows this study to examine and appropriately incorporate principles into the summer retreat program. Additionally, this study indicates that technology addiction stems not only from the need for entertainment or communication but is also closely linked to perceptions of usefulness, the ease of use of digital platforms, and, particularly, uncontrolled repetitive usage habits. Compared with the summer program proposed in the thesis, Buddhist principles such as mindfulness and awareness serve as a locking mechanism, helping young people recognize and break the chain of automatic behaviors driven by technological habits.

In another aspect, the study by Um et al. (2019) established a link between smartphone dependence and aggressive behavior among high school students and examined the roles of self-esteem, resilience, parental behavior, and friendship. Concluding that technology addiction can lead to aggressive behavior, conflict, and poor emotional regulation. The proposed summer retreat program incorporates Buddhist principles such as compassion and mindfulness to help young people manage the negative effects of technology addiction and promote healthy emotional and social development.

In summary, the summer camp model for tech-addicted youth at Hoang Phap Temple uses mindfulness to help participants recognize and adjust unconscious behaviors, thereby cultivating compassion and gratitude, reducing inner conflict, and strengthening social relationships. This retreat provides a "detoxification phase" away from digital devices, facilitating the transition process. This dissertation presents a novel approach to studying technology

addiction and proposes integrating scientific measurement tools with Buddhist meditation practices to develop a comprehensive intervention model. It emphasizes practical value in the Vietnamese context and aligns with global trends in applied Buddhist research, addressing modern issues such as technology addiction and identity crises, thereby enriching Buddhist perspectives in contemporary life.

Knowledge from Research

This research provides a comprehensive understanding of technology addiction among Vietnamese youth and proposes a practical intervention through the application of Buddhist principles in the summer retreat program at Hoang Phap Monastery. It identifies the main causes of technology addiction among young people today, such as the psychological desire for stimulation (*tanha*), lack of mindfulness in device use, emotional dependence on the virtual world, as well as exposing their negative impact on the mental health, social relationships, and morality of young Vietnamese people.

This research clarifies that the primary contribution lies in integrating Buddhist principles into a practical intervention model, rather than treating them as separate elements. While Buddhist teachings such as mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), gratitude (*kataññutā*), and right faith (*saddhā*) provide the theoretical foundation for addressing technology addiction, the summer retreat program at Hoang Phap Monastery serves as the practical framework for applying these principles.

The findings demonstrate that the approach's effectiveness does not stem solely from the teachings, but from their structured implementation within a controlled retreat environment. In this context, the retreat functions as a transformative space where participants can actively practice these principles through meditation, communal activities, and guided reflection. Therefore, the study contributes both a conceptual understanding of Buddhist-based behavioral transformation and a concrete application model in the form of a summer retreat program designed to reduce technology addiction among youth. This integration represents a novel contribution by bridging Buddhist theory with evidence-based intervention in the context of modern technological addiction.

Additionally, this study contributes new knowledge to the field by proposing a practical application called “The Effects of Youth Technological Addiction”. This model aims to foster harmonious, balanced development of body and mind through mindfulness activities, loving-kindness communication,

and faith contemplation for young people. Essentially, this is a practical and sustainable method of practice that helps young people overcome attachment and addiction to technological devices. Simultaneously, it aims to restore and rebuild the psychological well-being of young people in modern Vietnamese society, society full of challenges in the context of increasingly advanced technology, enhancing social harmony and promoting healthy living.

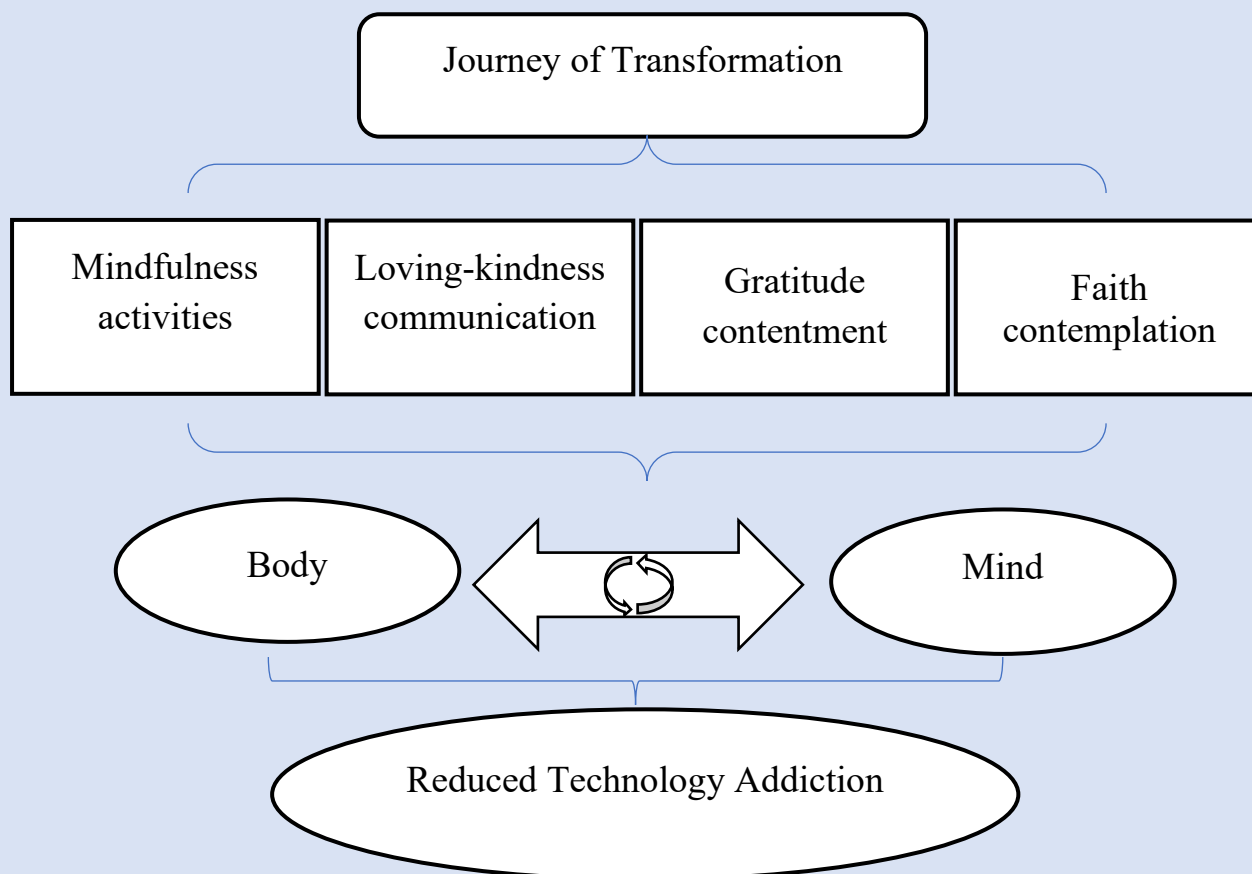


Figure 2: The Effects of Youth Technological Addiction

Conclusion

This study examined technological addiction among Vietnamese youth and proposed a Buddhist summer retreat program at Hoang Phap Monastery as a practical response to this contemporary problem. The findings indicate that technological addiction is shaped by several interconnected causes, including academic pressure, social media influence, emotional dependence on virtual interaction, lack of life direction, weak time management, and insufficient guidance from family and society. These conditions negatively affect young people's mental health, academic concentration, emotional regulation, moral

awareness, and social relationships. Therefore, technological addiction should not be understood only as excessive device use but as a broader behavioral, emotional, and ethical challenge.

The study further found that Buddhist principles and practices offer meaningful resources for reducing technological addiction. Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) helps young people recognize automatic patterns of device use and develop self-regulation. Loving-kindness (*mettā*) encourages genuine interpersonal connection and reduces emotional dependence on online validation. Gratitude (*kataññutā*) cultivates contentment and helps reduce the continuous desire for stimulation, novelty, and comparison. Right faith (*saddhā*) provides moral direction, inner confidence, and commitment to disciplined living. Together, these principles address the cognitive, emotional, social, and ethical roots of technological addiction.

Based on these findings, the study proposed a summer retreat program at Hoang Phap Monastery that applies Buddhist principles to reduce youth technology addiction in Vietnam. The proposed model includes digital detox, meditation practice, Dhamma learning, communal living, gratitude reflection, loving-kindness communication, and faith-based contemplation. The retreat environment creates a supportive space where young people can temporarily distance themselves from digital overstimulation, observe their habits, reconnect with others, and develop healthier patterns of technology use.

This research contributes to applied Buddhist studies by showing how Buddhist teachings can be transformed into a practical intervention model for modern youth challenges. It also contributes to behavioral and educational studies by offering a culturally relevant approach to digital well-being in Vietnam. Future research should implement the proposed retreat program, administer pre- and post-tests, and evaluate long-term changes in participants' technology use, emotional well-being, and moral development.

Suggestions

Based on the theoretical analyzes and practical proposals presented, it can be seen that applying Buddhist principles to the summer retreat program for young people addicted to technology is a promising direction. This approach is both spiritually therapeutic and contributes to the moral education and inner development of adolescents. However, for the program to be truly effective and have sustainable value, further research and specific implementation activities are needed to expand its reach and improve the quality of practice.

First, field research should be conducted after the program is implemented to assess the level of transformation in participants' cognition, behavior, and emotions. Building a technology addiction assessment tool, combined with a Buddhist practice scale, will help quantify the effectiveness of practice in a comprehensive manner. Additionally, training a dedicated team of monks and nuns in youth education is key to ensuring the quality of guidance. The retreat model should also be transferred to other monasteries nationwide, especially in major cities where technology addiction is prevalent. Finally, it is necessary to recommend to educational authorities the integration of Buddhist principles such as mindfulness, compassion, gratitude, faith, and many other useful Buddhist principles into the general education curriculum, in the form of a subject on life skills education and ethical practice.

The above recommendations aim not only to improve the summer retreat model at Hoang Phap Monastery but also to lay the foundation for applied Buddhist education suited to the digital age. Connecting traditional teachings with modern social issues, such as technology addiction and behavioral manipulation, is a necessary direction, contributing to a renewal of the Buddhist approach and expanding Buddhism's influence in contemporary life. This is an opportunity for Buddhism to demonstrate its role in the world, accompanying young people on their journey to rediscover mindfulness and inner balance in a rapidly changing digital world.

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