
Buddhist Faith (*saddhā*) and Phenomena in the Digital World: A Theravāda Abhidhamma Framework for Defending Human Space through Cetasika Analysis

Lennart Rudstrom

Graduate School. Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University

Corresponding author email: lennart@bikmis.com

Received 26/08/2026; Revised 20/09/2026; Accepted 20/09/2026

Abstract

Contemporary digital environments increasingly shape human attention, interpretation, and volitional autonomy through recommender systems, algorithmic personalization, and persistent information flows. This study examines how Theravāda Abhidhamma may provide a conceptual framework for interpreting such conditions and defending human cognitive space. The objectives were: (1) to analyze *saddhā* (faith/confidence) as a foundational *cetasika* and controlling faculty relevant to digital engagement; (2) to develop an Abhidhammic framework for distinguishing technical digital processes from conventional lived experience; and (3) to apply conditional and *cetasika* analysis to selected digital cases in order to formulate context-specific strategies for preserving human agency. The study employed a qualitative documentary design combined with exploratory framework development and Buddhist-Informed Phenomenological Analysis (BIPA). The study drew primary doctrinal materials from the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, selected Sutta Piṭaka texts, and commentarial sources, while contemporary literature on digital ethics, autonomy, persuasive technologies, and technostress provided comparative context. The study analyzed three qualitative cases through conditional relations (*paccaya*) and mental-factor configurations at the mind-door (*manodvāra*). The study produced three main contributions: a three-stage model of *saddhā* progressing from initial confidence to investigative discipline and resilient stability; an ontological distinction between computational processes and conventional human experience; and Cetasika Remediation Analysis (CRA), which interprets problematic digital encounters through wholesome and unwholesome mental factors and proposes corresponding remedial strategies. These elements are synthesized in the Theravāda Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS). The framework should be understood as a doctrinally informed, exploratory analytical model rather than an empirically validated intervention, and further research is needed to test its applicability across diverse digital contexts.

Keywords: Buddhist faith (*saddhā*); Digital world phenomena; Theravāda Abhidhamma; Defending human space; *Cetasika* analysis.

Introduction

The digital world is increasingly shaped by information infrastructures, recommender systems, and algorithmic methods that organize what users see, attend to, and act upon. These systems can reduce information overload, yet they can also reshape choice environments and raise concerns about manipulation, knowledge formation, identity, and personal autonomy (Bonicalzi et al., 2023). Research on persuasive technologies likewise shows that contemporary digital platforms compete for and structure human attention, making attentional autonomy an ethical as well as a cognitive concern (Bombaerts et al., 2023). From this perspective, the impact of digital technology is not confined to physical interfaces; it also concerns how attention, interpretation, and volition are conditioned during ongoing human–computer interaction. Recommender systems and algorithmic methods are conventional designations (*paññatti*) of the digital world. From an Abhidhammic perspective, a real challenge lies in the structural causal conditions that intercept the mind-door (*manodvāra*). This study therefore uses conditional analysis before turning to mental remediation, ensuring that the foundation of human space is defended at its most basic level.

Theravāda Buddhism, particularly the *Abhidhamma*, provides a detailed analytical vocabulary for examining consciousness (*citta*), mental factors (*cetasika*), objects, and conditional relations. Central to the present study is *saddhā*, conventionally translated as faith, confidence, or trust, which functions within wholesome consciousness and must be balanced with wisdom rather than treated as uncritical belief (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2016; Karunadasa, 1996; Sīlānanda, 2012). Applied cautiously to digital experience, *saddhā* can therefore be interpreted as an ethically directed form of confidence that supports inquiry, stability, and deliberate engagement rather than passive acceptance of technological outputs.

The primary significance of this research lies in its attempt to defend human space, defined here as the human capacity for cognitive and volitional autonomy within highly technologized environments. This concern is consistent with contemporary research showing that recommender systems and personalization can both assist decision-making and constrain autonomy through manipulation, narrowed information exposure, or reduced reflective control

(Bonicalzi et al., 2023). Buddhist ethical scholarship similarly argues that attention should be understood not merely as a scarce cognitive resource but as a practice shaped by right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration (Bombaerts et al., 2023). The Theravada Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS) addresses these concerns with an Abhidhammic methodology centered on the mind-door (*manodvāra*), mental factors, and conditional analysis. Indeed, recommender systems are a conventional designation (*paññatti*) for numeric processes. The Abhidhamma analysis shows that what matters is not only the designation but the raw causality (*paccaya*) that links these numeric stimuli to the mind-door (*mano-dvāra*).

The present study distinguishes between canonical and commentarial concepts from Theravāda Buddhist literature and analytical constructs developed by the researchers to interpret contemporary digital experience. Concepts such as *saddhā*, *cetasika*, *manodvāra*, *paññā*, and *Paṭṭhāna* are treated as established doctrinal categories. By contrast, the Three-staged method of *saddhā*, Buddhist-Informed Phenomenological Analysis (BIPA), *Cetasika* Remediation Analysis (CRA), *Khetta-Vibhāga* for the Digital World (KVDW), *Khetta-Pakarāṇa* Experience Converter (KPEC), and the Theravada Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS) are treated as researcher-developed analytical constructs informed by, but not identical to, canonical or commentarial categories.

Research Problem

Despite growing scholarship on Buddhism, technology, and digital ethics, much of the literature remains focused on broad philosophical, ethical, or social questions rather than on operational analysis of moment-to-moment cognitive processes. Recent Buddhist ethics research has examined persuasive technologies as a problem of attention and autonomy (Bombaerts et al., 2023), while Buddhist approaches to AI ethics emphasize the continuing centrality of human moral agency rather than attributing moral subjecthood to machines (Lin, 2023). A methodological gap nevertheless remains in applying *Abhidhamma* categories directly to specific lived encounters with algorithmically mediated environments.

Furthermore, algorithmic personalization can create what this study terms epistemic gaps: structural distances between human intention, lived meaning, and the data-driven representations through which digital systems sort and present experience. Contemporary work on recommender systems identifies related concerns involving manipulation, identity formation, knowledge, and critical

thinking (Bonicalzi et al., 2023), while broader technostress research documents psychological and behavioral pressures associated with persistent digital demands and technologically mediated work and communication (Kumar, 2024). To address these gaps, the study develops an Abhidhammic framework using *tikas* (triads), *paññā* (wisdom), *cetasika* analysis, and *Paṭṭhāna* conditional relations to interpret and remediate digital experience at the mind-door.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the nature of *saddhā* (faith/confidence) as a foundational *cetasika* and controlling faculty (*indriya*) within the *Abhidhamma*, establishing it as the foundation for a three-staged engineering method for wholesome engagement with the digital world.
2. To identify an ontology and develop a Buddhist-Informed Phenomenological Analysis (BIPA) method and epistemic supports, based on triads (*tikas*) and wisdom (*paññā*) as analytical tools for digital engagement.
3. To analyze and describe lived experience within the digital world through conditional analysis (*Paṭṭhāna*) and mental factor (*cetasika*) analysis, defining individual mental solution strategies to defend human space and cognitive autonomy.

Literature Review

This literature review examines the theoretical, doctrinal, and empirical foundations for understanding human cognitive autonomy in digital environments through the lens of *Theravāda Abhidhamma*. It is organized into three major thematic areas: doctrinal and contemporary scholarship on *saddhā* (faith/confidence), Buddhist philosophical perspectives on technology and digital existence, and conventional designation (*sammā-vohāra*) in relation to ontology and epistemic gaps. The review synthesizes these domains to establish the research gap and presents the theoretical framework guiding the study.

Doctrinal and Contemporary Perspectives on *Saddhā*

In classical Theravāda doctrine, *saddhā* (faith, trust, or confidence) is central to Buddhist psychology and epistemology. Within the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, *saddhā* is classified as the first of the nineteen universal beautiful mental factors (*sobhana-sādhāraṇa-cetasika*), establishing its foundational status in every moment of wholesome consciousness (*kusala-citta*) (Rhys Davids, 1923). In the

Atthasālinī tradition, *saddhā* is described in terms of serene purification (*pasādana-lakkhaṇa*), which clears the mind of defilements, and leaping forward or aspiring (*sampakkhandhana-lakkhaṇa*), which provides an active impulse for wholesome engagement (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2016). The *Vibhaṅga* and later *Abhidhamma* manuals further explain *saddhā* as a governing faculty (*saddhindriya*) that counters skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*) and, upon maturation, as an unshakable power (*saddhābala*) resilient against cognitive disturbance (Thittila, 1969; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2016; Sīlānanda, 2012).

Contemporary Buddhist scholars emphasize that Buddhist faith is neither blind belief nor uncritical dogmatism. Karunadasa (1996) frames *saddhā* within an *Abhidhammic* epistemological structure in which confidence is related to recognition of dhammas and their causal relations. Sīlānanda (2012) underscores its functional role in balancing the five controlling faculties (*pañcindriya*), where *saddhā* must be harmonized with wisdom (*paññā*) and supported by mindfulness (*sati*), energy (*vīriya*), and concentration (*samādhi*). Van Gorkom (2010a, 2010b) highlights how *saddhā* and other cetasikas operate in daily cognitive moments (*vīthi-citta*), linking wholesome mental factors with wise attention and decisive mental engagement. Tilakaratne (2020) likewise emphasizes the relationship between confidence, knowledge, and purposeful Buddhist practice. Across the *Sutta Piṭaka* - specifically in discourses such as the *Kālāma Sutta* (AN 3.65; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012), *Vīmaṃsaka Sutta* (MN 47; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995), and *Caṅkī Sutta* (MN 95; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995)- *saddhā* is presented not as unquestioning belief but as confidence that can initiate inquiry and mature through verification.

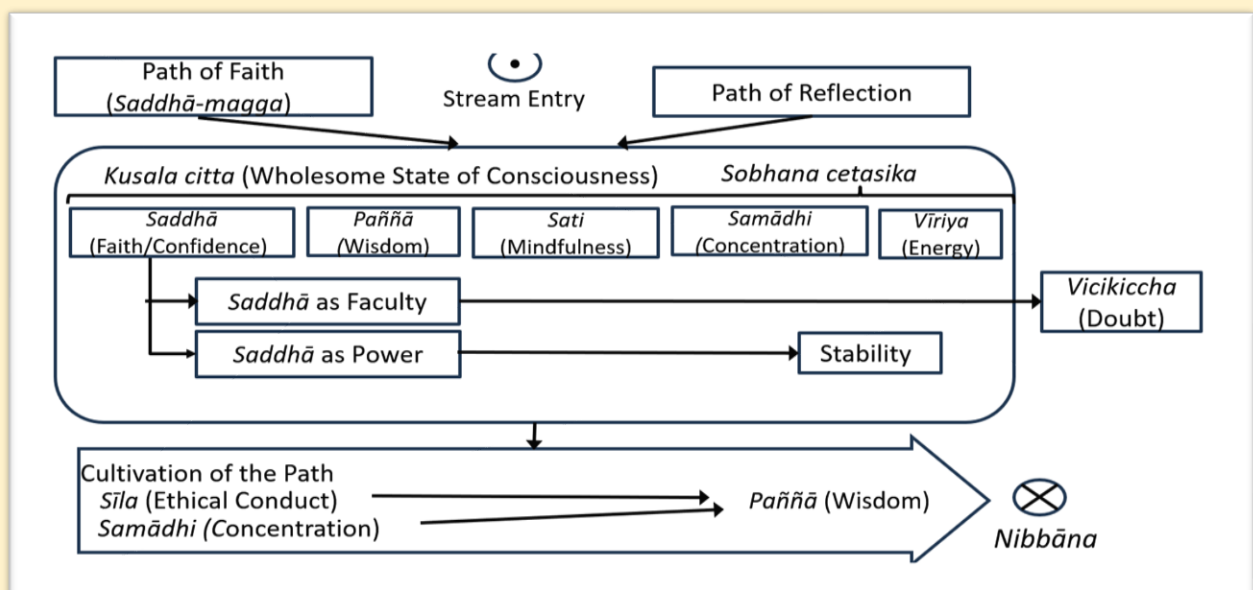


**Figure 1. *Saddhā* in the Cultivation of the Path
Buddhist Analyses of Digital Existence**

The rapid expansion of information systems and digital platforms has generated significant scholarly interest regarding the psychological and ethical impacts of technology. Payutto (2019) provides a Buddhist critique of modern scientific and technological development by distinguishing instrumental technological capacity from the cultivation of wisdom and values. From this perspective, technology may expand human capabilities while also intensifying craving (*taṇhā*) and unwholesome grasping unless ethical conduct (*sīla*) and mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*) regulate its use.

Contemporary scholarship on Buddhism and technology has explored digital environments through philosophical, ethical, and cultural lenses, examining how artificial interfaces, automated feeds, and data-driven systems condition social interaction and attention. Research on digital well-being likewise documents problems such as cognitive fatigue, fragmented attention, and technostress associated with persistent digital engagement. However, these approaches predominantly analyze digital phenomena at a macro-sociological or broad ethical level, leaving an unaddressed gap in applying micro-level mental-factor (*cetasika*) analysis directly to human–computer interactions.

Conventional Reality, Designation (*Sammā-vohāra*), and Epistemic Gaps

A crucial dimension in analyzing digital interactions is the Abhidhammic distinction between ultimate realities (*paramattha-dhamma*) and conceptual designations (*paññatti*). Promta (2016) emphasizes that, within conventional discourse (*sammuti-vohāra*), language can function either as valid conventional communication (*sammā-vohāra*) or as erroneous and distorted talk (*micchā-vohāra*). From this perspective, *micchā-vohāra* reifies conceptual constructs by attributing ultimate existence or conscious volition (*cetanā*) to entities that lack such qualities. Applied to digital systems, attributing consciousness (*citta*) or intrinsic agency to software, algorithms, or artificial intelligence may therefore create ontological confusion. Conversely, *sammā-vohāra* allows practitioners to engage with digital tools as structured information processes without conflating them with conscious human agency.

Technological intermediation introduces epistemic gaps, structural ruptures where algorithmic processing strips away the qualitative richness of

lived experience (*attha-paññatti*), leaving only quantified data. These include the digital object gap (where algorithmic sorting replaces user intent with an engineered *ārammaṇa*), the datafication gap (the omission of non-quantifiable human experience), and the deterministic gap (mistaking fixed interface displays for absolute reality). Navigating these gaps requires structured epistemic tools to stabilize awareness at the mind-door (*manodvāra*) and prevent automated conditioning.

The literature review identifies four fundamental academic gaps:

- Absence of a foundational doctrinal layer for digital existence: While *saddhā* has been analyzed doctrinally, existing research has not established *saddhā* as an operational mechanism for cognitive stability within the volatile digital realm.
- Lack of an *Abhidhammic* digital ontology: A formal ontological framework separating technical machine operations from conventional human experience - defining taxonomies and relational rules corresponding to *sabhāva-dhamma* - is absent from current Buddhist literature.
- Methodological gap in *cetasika* mapping: There is no direct, validated qualitative method to translate informal narratives of digital lived experience into specific *cetasika* configurations and conditional relations (*paccaya*).
- Lack of pragmatic remediation models: Existing Buddhist critiques offer general ethical advice but lack an engineering-like, input-output remediation framework capable of deconstructing digital triggers at the mind-door into actionable mental factor adjustments.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative documentary research design integrated with exploratory reconciliation and constructive framework development. The methodology systematically extracts doctrinal principles from the Theravāda Abhidhamma and applies them to the contemporary digital environment. The analytical scope is strictly confined to the mind-door (*manodvāra*), prioritizing internal mental states over deconstructing physical hardware interfaces.

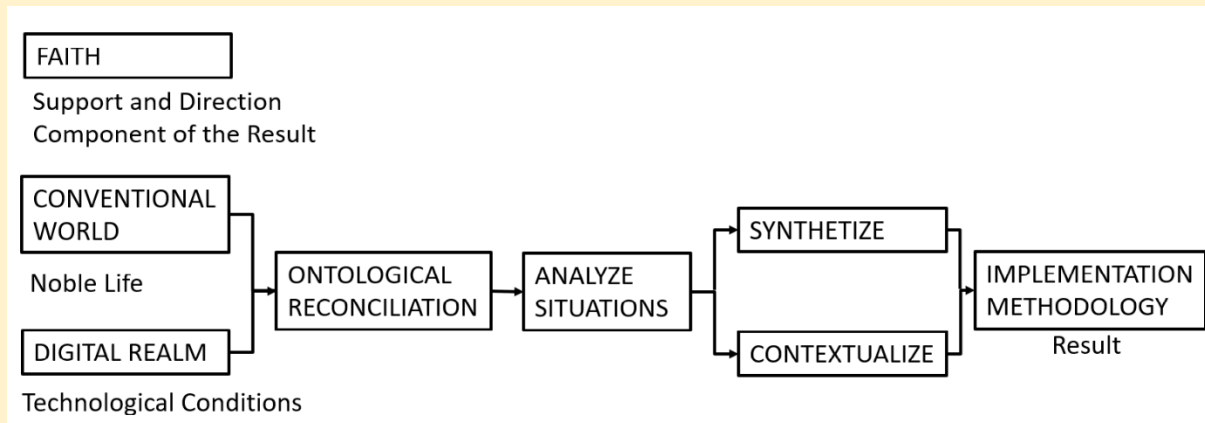


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

Data Collection and Key Informants

This study collected data from both documentary sources and empirical case studies. The theoretical foundation was drawn from a strict separation of documentary sources:

- Primary canonical sources included the Dhammasaṅgaṇī (Rhys Davids, 1923), Vibhaṅga (Thittila, 1969), and Paṭṭhāna (Nārada, 1969, 1981), together with relevant Nikāya texts and commentaries.
- Secondary sources: Contemporary Buddhist scholarship, digital ethics, human-computer interaction (HCI), and technology studies.

Empirical material used to examine the theoretical framework was gathered through phenomenological self-reflection and in-depth interviews. Three qualitative cases represented distinct modes of digital interaction: Bruce (Digital Existence and Manipulation), Prof. Charlie (Formalistic Invasiveness and Determinism), and Leo (The Fortress of Active Resistance).

The Theravada Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS)

To address the gaps identified in the Literature Review, this study constructs a theoretical model grounded in *Theravāda Abhidhamma* and phenomenological inquiry, formalized as the *Theravāda* Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS). The framework operates through four interconnected pillars:

1. The ontology architecture: The model establishes a strict ontological boundary between the technical digital realm (governed by computational code, data, and algorithmic conditions) and the digital world (*sammuti-*

loka, the conventional space of human lived experience). Ultimate reality consists of four *paramattha-dhammas*: consciousness (*citta*), mental factors (*cetasika*), matter (*rūpa*), and *Nibbāna*. (Dhammasaṅgaṇī; Rhys Davids, 1923; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2016). Digital hardware and code are recognized as matter (*rūpa*) and conceptual designations (*paññatti*), lacking consciousness and volition. This separation prevents the reification of algorithms and positions the human agent's mind-door (*manodvāra*) as the primary site of agency.

2. The Three-stage method of *saddhā*: To track and cultivate cognitive autonomy, the framework formulates a two-axis developmental model:
 - The Y-Axis (maturity of *saddhā*): Traces the internal maturation of faith from initial serene clarity (*pasāda-saddhā* / *pubbaṅgama*), to investigative governing discipline (*saddhindriya*), to unshakable, verified stability (*aveccapasāda* / *saddhābala*).
 - The X-Axes (Epistemic Evolution & Support): Organizes epistemic support using *tikas* (triads), defined as sets of three *dhammas* from the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* matrix. (Dhammasaṅgaṇī; Rhys Davids, 1923). The primary X-axis support is the threefold wisdom triad (*paññā-ṭīkā*): learning (*suta-mayā paññā*), reflection (*cintā-mayā paññā*), and cultivation (*bhāvanā-mayā paññā*). Diagnostic progress checks integrate the threefold knowledge triad (*sacca-ñāṇa-ṭīkā*), in which functional action (*kicca-ñāṇa*) is evaluated as a member of the triad.
3. Buddhist-Informed Phenomenological Analysis (BIPA): BIPA functions as the operational bridge to deconstruct lived digital experience into doctrinal categories. It uses the *Khetta-Vibhāga* for the Digital World (KVDW) and the *Khetta-Pakarana* Experience Converter (KPEC) to extract meaning units from user narratives, isolate situational contexts (*pakarana*), and map them to underlying *cetasika* configurations and *Paṭṭhāna* conditional relations (*paccaya*) (Paṭṭhāna; Nārada, 1969, 1981).
4. *Cetasika* Remediation Analysis (CRA): Problematic interactions are diagnosed through the wholesome states triad (*kusala-ṭīkā*) (Dhammasaṅgaṇī; Rhys Davids, 1923) and remediated through two distinct cognitive cycles:
 - Tactical defense cycle: Mobilizes the tactical triplet (*sati – saddhā – vīriya*) to provide immediate agility, detecting weak signals and creating an intentional pause at the mind-door.

- Structural defense cycle: Deploys the resistance triplet (*saddhā – paññā – appamāda*) to deconstruct algorithmic logic, establishing a robust fortress of heedfulness (*appamāda*) that preserves the cognitive interval of Human Space (*manussa-okāsa*).

Results

The research produced three primary structural findings synthesized into the Theravada Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS).

The Three-Staged Method of *Saddhā*

Saddhā (confidence) emerged as a dynamic, functional mechanism that requires systematic maturation to overcome digital volatility. The progression is supported by a *tika* (triad), which organizes the epistemic support for the three-stage model of *saddhā* (X-axis). This study proposes a constructive three-stage model of *saddhā* by synthesizing distinct canonical and commentarial descriptions of confidence, the faculty of faith, and the power of faith (Vibhaṅga; Thittila, 1969; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2016). The developed conceptual synthesis includes:

1. Path Initiation (*pasāda-saddhā*): Establishing wholesome intention and mental clarity.
2. Investigative Discipline (*saddhindriya*): Maintaining cognitive stability during active inquiry into digital phenomena.
3. Unshakable Foundation (*saddhābala*): Reaching verified confidence (*okappanā-saddhā*) where the mental factor becomes a resilient power.

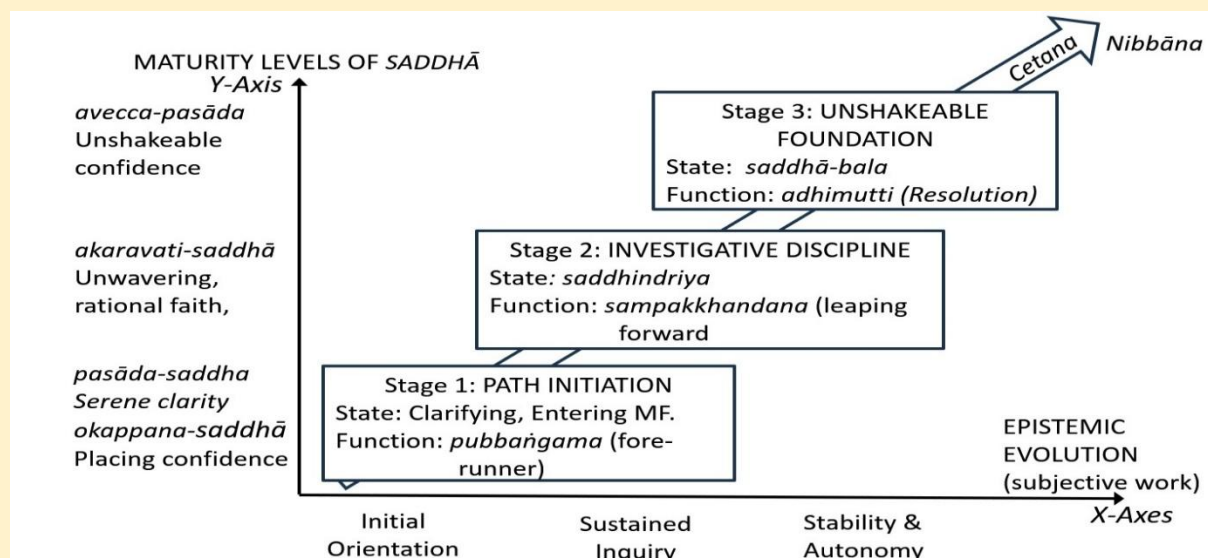


Figure 3. Three-Staged Model of *Saddhā*

Elaborated Ontologies

An ontology is a set of object names, also called taxonomies, and it may also include rules describing relations between these objects. In Buddhism, this corresponds to *sabhāva-dhamma*, to distinguish between different conceptual labels (*paññatti*). The research populated specific ontological domains and generated corresponding data objects:

- The *Khetta-Vibhāga* for the Digital World (KVDW): To classify the different descriptions of fields and situations involving both the digital realm (governed by code, data, and algorithms) and the conventional Digital World (*sammuti-loka*).
- The *Khetta-Pakaraṇa* Experience Converter (KPEC): To identify the correspondences (data points) between conventional narratives and the digital environment. The KPEC was elaborated as an extraction artifact. From a specific situational context (*pakaraṇa*) it extracts distinct meaning units from subjective user encounters.
- Buddhist-Informed Phenomenological Analysis (BIPA): The overarching methodology. BIPA was conceived to bridge the subjective digital encounters within the conventional world with the objective doctrinal categories of the Ultimate World. It uses the outputs of both the KVDW and KPEC to map human responses to underlying *cetasika* configurations and *Paṭṭhāna* conditional relations (*paccaya*).

Case Analysis

The analysis of the cases used the newly developed Buddhist-Informed Phenomenological Analysis (BIPA). Within BIPA, the case studies are elaborated primarily through two complementary approaches: conditional analysis (*Paṭṭhāna*), which evaluates external conditions, and *cetasika* analysis, which focuses directly on mental states and the evolution of *cetasika* clusters. While these two methods form the core of the practical analysis, the more specific *naya* methods from the *Abhidhamma* - namely *Cetasika* Remediation Analysis (CRA) and *Cetasika* Opportunity Analysis (COA) function primarily as *a posteriori* consistency checks to verify the theoretical coherence of the identified *cetasika* configurations. Throughout this process, the framework strictly restricts its analysis of digital environments to the mind-door (*manodvāra*), prioritizing internal mental states over physical interface deconstruction.

Applying CRA to the case studies revealed specific remediation strategies. When measuring cognitive depth and operational function, *kiicca* is evaluated strictly as a member of the *sacca-ñāṇa-ṭīkā* to ensure analytical precision in the epistemic evaluation. The exploratory case analysis identified a two-tiered active defense model:

Tactical cycle (agility): Deploys the triad of *sati* (mindfulness), *saddhā* (confidence), and *vīriya* (energy) to create an immediate cognitive gap against high-frequency algorithmic nudges.

- Structural cycle (depth): Uses *saddhā*, *paññā* (wisdom), and *appamāda* (heedfulness) to construct a fortress of resilience, deconstructing the deterministic logic of the machine.

Table 1. Synthesized Case Study Findings and *Cetasika* Remediations

Case Study	Central Problem	Governing Mental Factor	Primary Outcome
Bruce	Addiction & Algorithmic Steering	<i>saddhā</i> (conviction)	Reclaiming intentional volition from automated reactivity.
Charlie	Formalistic Invasiveness & Determinism	<i>paññā</i> (discernment)	Identifying algorithmic outputs as conditioned phenomena rather than absolute truth.
Leo	Loss of Integrity & Cognitive Overload	<i>appamāda</i> (heedfulness)	Establishing an active defense and digital sovereignty.

Bruce (Digital Existence and Manipulation). The narrative of the Bruce case follows a retired financial adviser who previously organized community discussion groups and engaged in intensive, compulsive nightly sessions consuming political, geopolitical, and consciousness debates on YouTube. Over time, persistent exposure to algorithmic feeds, conflicting information, and perceived manipulation led to profound disillusionment and a feeling of being reduced to an obedient slave. This chronic mental distress and health drainage culminated in his abandoning the internet altogether, which led to severe personal inactivity and manifest signs of depression. Bruce's crisis illustrates affective entrapment defined by an algorithmic object gap and a datafication gap at the

mind-door (*manodvāra*). Manipulative incoming stimuli degrade the object condition (*ārammaṇa-paccaya*), interrupt the resting state (*bhavaṅga*), and generate mental pain (*domanassa-vedanā*). This unwholesome contact conditions conceptual proliferation (*papañca*) dominated by an unwholesome cluster of aversion (*dosa*), skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*), and delusion (*moha*). Because datafied content lacks qualitative depth, decisive support (*upanissaya-paccaya*) is weakened, paralyzing his ability to form sound judgments. To address this, the research proposes, as a theoretical solution strategy, the deployment of the epistemic energy triplet (*kusala-ṭīkā – vīmaṃsā – appamāda*). Under this proposed model, Bruce would utilize *pasāda-saddhā* oriented toward verified secondary anchors to shield the mind-door, mobilize investigative scrutiny (*vīmaṃsā*) to deconstruct platform mechanics, and cultivate heedfulness (*appamāda*). This theoretical pathway is designed to mature faith into an unshakeable power (*saddhābala*), allowing the user to reach the moment of choice (*adhimokkha*) and reclaim volitional intention (*cetanā*).

Prof. Charlie (Formalistic Invasiveness and Determinism). Charlie's narrative follows an anatomy and neuroscience professor whose intellectual life is rooted in a deterministic, materialistic paradigm. An intensive user of academic databases, digital search engines, and scientific media, he encountered an explanatory limit within physical models when analyzing equilibria between competitive and collaborative forces. Although drawn to Buddhism for its parallels with neuroscience, Charlie treats algorithmic models and data-driven outputs as absolute physical laws, struggling to separate information accumulation from genuine wisdom. We interpret Charlie's condition as a cognitive entrapment driven by the deterministic gap. The digital interface exhibits a prenaissance condition (*purejāta-paccaya*), wherein pre-existing, finished computational displays lead his cognition into passive receipt (*avitakka-avicāra*), reinforcing the erroneous view (*diṭṭhi*) that human agency is a mechanistic illusion. His intellectual capacity remains confined to surface designations (*nāma-paññatti*) under *suta-mayā paññā*. Remediation applies a dual X-axis intervention using the three wisdoms triad (*paññā-ṭīkā*) and the initial thought triad (*vitakka-ṭīkā*). By introducing an epistemic design log (a physical cane acting as a secondary anchor) before launching calculations, Charlie intentionally mobilizes initial thought (*savitakka*) to strike the digital object. This active deconstruction breaks the deterministic illusion, shifting his cognition into reflective contemplation (*cintā-mayā paññā*) of the system's conditioned nature, thereby uncovering the interval of human space.

Leo (The Fortress of Active Resistance). Leo's narrative illustrates an intensive user who relies extensively on digital environments for professional production and domestic policy analysis. As a researcher, he understands the foundational importance of heedfulness (*appamāda*), the deliberate capacity to take into account and act upon critical opportunities before it is too late. In his lived experience, however, he encounters the digital environment as an intrusive, colonizing force characterized by high volume but low quality. Leo experiences a direct conflict between the overwhelming speed and efficiency of the machine and the natural reflective tempo required for human cognition, leading to acute cognitive overload and a drop in mental stability whenever control is ceded to an algorithmic flow. Recognizing these hazards, Leo's objective is not passive retreat, but the intentional construction of an active fortress of resistance grounded in *Abhidhamma* principles to safeguard his autonomy. Leo is interpreted as facing systemic entrapment where the machine's intrusive velocity creates an algorithmic object gap. The algorithmic object (*ārammaṇa-paccaya*) arrives so abruptly that it bypasses the natural investigative pause of the cognitive series (*citta-vīthi*), causing a sudden drop in *saddhā* and the rapid arising of restlessness (*uddhacca*). To realize Leo's goal of structured heedfulness, the analysis formulates a two-tiered active defense:

- Tactical defense cycle: Mobilizes the tactical triplet (*sati – saddhā – vīriya*) for immediate operational agility. Mindfulness (*sati*) acts as the signal detector, *saddhā* re-centers the mind on original purpose, and mental effort (*vīriya*) interrupts the automatic technical sequence, creating an intentional pause at the moment of contact (*phassa*).
- Structural defense cycle: Deploys the resistance triplet (*saddhā – paññā – appamāda*) to establish continuous cognitive sovereignty. By applying wisdom (*paññā*) to deconstruct algorithmic triggers as mere conditioned phenomena (*paccaya*) rather than authoritative imperatives, the researcher establishes unremitting heedfulness (*appamāda*). This operationalizes the desired fortress, securing mental steadiness (*thiti*) and preserving human space (*manussa-okāsa*) against systemic colonization.

Discussion

The findings suggest that perceived losses of agency in digital environments can be interpreted through the study's concept of epistemic gaps and through the conditioning of attention and response at the mind-door. This interpretation is broadly consistent with contemporary concerns about persuasive

and recommender technologies, which may influence autonomy through manipulation, identity shaping, and effects on knowledge and critical reflection (Bonicalzi et al., 2023). Buddhist ethics adds a distinctive perspective by treating attention not simply as a resource to be protected but as a practice requiring ethical discrimination, right effort, mindfulness, and concentration (Bombaerts et al., 2023). The present study extends this line of inquiry by proposing *cetasika*-level analysis as a way to examine how specific wholesome and unwholesome mental factors may arise in digitally mediated encounters. However, because the study is qualitative and exploratory, the framework should be understood as a doctrinally informed interpretive model rather than as empirical proof that algorithms directly determine mental states.

The framework also contributes a treatment of *saddhā*. Rather than presenting *saddhā* as passive religious belief, the study interprets it as a stabilizing, wholesome mental factor that works with wisdom, mindfulness, energy, and concentration (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2016; Sīlānanda, 2012). This interpretation also resonates with Buddhist approaches to contemporary technology that preserve human moral responsibility rather than transferring agency to artificial systems (Lin, 2023). Accordingly, *saddhā* should not be interpreted as an autonomous technical stabilizer in a literal engineering sense. Rather, the three-stage method conceptualizes *saddhā* as confidence that becomes progressively more reflective, disciplined, and resilient in uncertain or persuasive digital environments.

The proposed ontological distinction between conscious human experience and algorithmic processing also requires careful qualification. Current recommender systems can shape choice architectures and user behavior, but this alone does not establish machine consciousness or moral agency. Contemporary Buddhist AI ethics similarly argues that artificial systems should not be treated as autonomous moral subjects simply because they simulate intelligent behavior (Lin, 2023). Within the *Abhidhamma* framework adopted here, software, data, and algorithms are therefore analyzed as conditioned objects and processes rather than as bearers of *citta* or *cetanā*. This distinction supports the article's concept of Human Space by locating responsibility for interpretation, evaluation, and ethical action primarily in the human agent.

The TFDHS should nevertheless be positioned as complementary to, rather than a replacement for, existing digital-well-being and technology-ethics approaches. Systematic research on technostress shows that digital demands can

affect psychological, emotional, and work-related well-being through multiple pathways and contextual factors (Kumar, 2024). Likewise, studies of algorithmic systems emphasize that the same technologies may both support and constrain autonomy depending on design, transparency, user control, and context (Bonicalzi et al., 2023). The value of the present framework is therefore its micro-level Buddhist contribution: it offers a structured vocabulary for examining attention, confidence, discernment, heedfulness, and volition at the point of digital encounter. Future research should test whether these proposed constructs can be operationalized reliably and whether they add explanatory or practical value beyond existing models of digital self-regulation and human–computer interaction.

New Knowledge from the Research

The principal body of knowledge generated by this study is the Theravada Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS), a systematic methodology for preserving human agency and cognitive autonomy against algorithmic conditioning and epistemic gaps. While conditional analysis primarily identifies epistemological gaps at the mind-door (*manodvāra*), pure *cetasika* analysis of mental states connects these lived digital encounters with classical *Abhidhamma* categories across the broader cognitive spectrum. The TFDHS consists of three integrated components.

First, the framework introduces a three-stage method of *saddhā*, framing *saddhā* as a dynamic functional mechanism for cognitive stability rather than a static belief. A *tika* (triad) - a set of three dhammas from the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* (Rhys Davids, 1923), for example, the three wisdoms - is used to organize the epistemic support for this three-stage model of *saddhā* (X-axis). The maturation pathway progresses through three distinct phases:

- Stage 1: Path initiation (*saddhā-pubbaṅgama*): Using *saddhā* as a forerunner to establish wholesome intention and mental clarity (*pasāda*) upon initial digital contact.
- Stage 2: Investigative discipline (*saddhindriya*): Applying *saddhā* as a controlling faculty to maintain cognitive stability during active inquiry into digital phenomena.

- Stage 3: Unshakeable foundation (*saddhābala*): Reaching a state of verified confidence (*okappanā-saddhā*) where the mental factor matures into a resilient power, providing steadfastness in digital complexity.

Second, the methodology relies on a framework that strictly separates the technical digital realm from the conventional digital world. An ontology is a set of object names, also called taxonomies, and may also include rules describing relations between these objects. In Buddhism, this corresponds to *sabhāva-dhamma*, to separate conceptual labels (*paññatti*).

Third, the framework operationalizes *Cetasika* Remediation Analysis (CRA), an engineering-like model for deconstructing unwholesome digital interactions into actionable mental remedies. Within this analysis, specific cognitive functions must be rigorously mapped; for instance, *kicca* is treated as a member of the *sacca-ñāṇa-ṭīkā* rather than a standalone function triad, ensuring that the diagnostic assessment of a digital encounter accurately reflects the progression of knowledge and truth.

These components establish an integrated active defense model for reclaiming volitional sovereignty. The synthesis provides a unique answer to how Buddhist faith (*saddhā*) and phenomena in the digital world interact: by applying *cetasika* analysis to these encounters, the framework actively defends Human Space. It transforms *saddhā* from a theoretical concept into an operationalized shield, ensuring that human cognitive autonomy is preserved.

Conclusion

This research establishes the Theravada Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS) as a systematic methodology to navigate the digital age. By isolating the analytical focus to the mind-door (*manodvāra*) and formalizing an Abhidhammic ontology for digital interactions, the findings suggest that the proposed TFDHS framework may provide a structured interpretive approach for examining and potentially mitigating the effects of algorithmically mediated environments on human attention, discernment, and volitional regulation. In doing so, the framework clarifies that digital encounters cannot be evaluated only by behavioral habits, but are structured by identifiable causal conditions (*paccaya*) that act as an operative architecture of lived digital experience. Recognizing these structural conditions allows practitioners and researchers to shift from reactive coping to systematic, *cetasika*-level defense of human space.

Ultimately, this research bridges classical Theravāda doctrine with 21st-century technological realities, demonstrating that ancient psychological ethics driven by the maturation of *saddhā* remain profoundly applicable for sustaining human dignity and agency today.

Recommendations

Future research should scale the BIPA methodology to analyze emerging technologies, such as generative artificial intelligence, and foster interdisciplinary dialogues between *Abhidhamma* scholars and human-computer interaction (HCI) engineers to embed *cetasika*-level ethical awareness into digital design.

References

- Bodhi Bhikkhu. (Ed.). (2016). *A comprehensive manual of Abhidhamma: The Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha of Ācariya Anuruddha (Nārada Mahāthera, Trans.)*. Buddhist Publication Society.
- Bodhi Bhikkhu. (Trans.). (2012). *The numerical discourses of the Buddha: A translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Wisdom Publications.
- Bombaerts, G., Anderson, J., Dennis, M., Gerola, A., Frank, L., Hannes, T., Hopster, J., Marin, L., & Spahn, A. (2023). Attention as practice: Buddhist ethics responses to persuasive technologies. *Global Philosophy*, 33, Article 25. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10516-023-09680-4>
- Bonicalzi, S., De Caro, M., & Giovanola, B. (2023). Artificial intelligence and autonomy: On the ethical dimension of recommender systems. *Topoi*, 42, 819–832. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-023-09922-5>
- Karunadasa, Y. (1996). *The Dhamma theory: Philosophical cornerstone of the Abhidhamma (The Wheel Publication No. 412/413)*. Buddhist Publication Society.
- Kumar, P. S. (2024). Technostress: A comprehensive literature review on dimensions, impacts, and management strategies. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 16, 100475. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2024.100475>
- Lin, C.-T. (2023). All about the human: A Buddhist take on AI ethics. *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, 32, 1113–1122. <https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12547>

- Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu, & Bodhi Bhikkhu. (Trans.). (1995). *The middle length discourses of the Buddha: A new translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Wisdom Publications.
- Nārada, U. (Trans.). (1969). *Conditional relations (Paṭṭhāna)* (Vol. 1). Pali Text Society.
- Nārada, U. (Trans.). (1981). *Conditional relations (Paṭṭhāna)* (Vol. 2). Pali Text Society.
- Payutto, P. A. (2019). *Buddhadhamma: The laws of nature and their benefits to life* (R. P. Moore, Trans.). Buddhadhamma Foundation.
- Promta, S. (2016). *Buddhist philosophy in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka*. Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University.
- Rhys Davids, C. A. F. (Trans.). (1923). *A Buddhist manual of psychological ethics (Dhammasaṅgaṇī)*. Royal Asiatic Society.
- Sīlānanda, U. (2012). *Handbook of Abhidhamma studies (Vols. 1–3; S. E. Marks, Trans.)*. Selangor Buddhist Vipassana Meditation Society.
- Thittila, U. (Trans.). (1969). *The book of analysis (Vibhaṅga)*. Pali Text Society.
- Tilakaratne, A. (2020). *Collected papers: Vol. 1. Buddhist philosophy*. Sarasavi Publishers.
- van Gorkom, N. (2010a). *Abhidhamma in daily life*. Zolag.
- van Gorkom, N. (2010b). *Cetasikas*. Zolag.