Reel Culture and Short-Form Content Consumption: An Ayurvedic Perspective on Emerging Mental Health Challenges among Young Adults

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Abstract- The rapid emergence of short-form video platforms such as Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, Facebook Reels, and similar applications has transformed digital consumption patterns among young adults. These platforms provide highly stimulating audiovisual content designed to maximize user engagement through endless scrolling and rapid content delivery. While short-form content offers entertainment, education, and social connectivity, excessive consumption has raised concerns regarding attention deficits, emotional instability, sleep disturbances, reduced productivity, social comparison, and compulsive scrolling behavior.

Contemporary neuroscience suggests that repeated exposure to highly rewarding digital stimuli activates dopamine-mediated reward pathways, reinforcing repetitive viewing behavior and increasing digital dependency. The phenomenon commonly referred to as "doom scrolling" or compulsive reel consumption has emerged as an important behavioral concern affecting mental health and cognitive performance.

Ayurveda offers a comprehensive framework for understanding such behavioral disturbances through concepts including *Manas* (mind), *Triguna* (three psychological qualities), *Prajnaparadha* (intellectual blasphemy or crime against wisdom), *Asatmya Indriyartha Samyoga* (inappropriate sensory engagement), and *Manasika Doshas* (psychological morbidities). Excessive sensory stimulation through continuous short-form content may aggravate *Raja* through excitement, desire, and restlessness, while prolonged exposure may subsequently increase *Tama* through dependency, mental fatigue, and cognitive dullness. Persistent imbalance may ultimately reduce *Sattva* and affect psychological well-being.

The present review explores the impact of reel culture and short-form content consumption on mental health through an Ayurvedic perspective and discusses preventive strategies based on *Swasthavritta* (preventive and social medicine), *Yoga*, meditation, and *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* (psychotherapy for mind control).

Keywords: Reel Culture, Short-Form Content, Social Media, Mental Health, Raja Guna, Tama Guna, Prajnaparadha, Young Adults, Attention Span, Ayurvedic Psychology

I.INTRODUCTION

Digital media consumption has undergone a dramatic transformation in recent years. The popularity of short-form video platforms has significantly increased due to widespread smartphone use, high-speed internet access, and algorithm-driven content delivery systems [9–13]. Platforms such as Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and Facebook Reels enable users to consume hundreds of brief videos lasting between 15 to 60 seconds within a single short duration.

Unlike traditional media formats such as television or cinema, short-form content is algorithmically designed to provide rapid sensory stimulation and immediate gratification. Continuous scrolling mechanisms, often referred to as "infinite scroll," encourage prolonged engagement and repeated exposure to novel content, effectively bypassing the user's natural satiety signals [11,14,15]. Young adults, whose cognitive and emotional regulation systems are still maturing, represent one of the most active user groups of these platforms.

Although these applications offer educational opportunities, entertainment, and social interaction,

increasing concerns have emerged regarding their effects on attention span, cognitive performance, sleep quality, productivity, and mental health [10,16–18]. Excessive engagement often leads to compulsive viewing patterns that resemble behavioral addiction, characterized by loss of control, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, and continued use despite negative consequences [14,15].

Ayurveda, the traditional Indian system of medicine, emphasizes the importance of mental discipline, sensory regulation, and balanced lifestyle practices (*Dinacharya*) for maintaining psychological well-being [1–8]. The holistic framework of Ayurveda considers health not merely as the absence of disease but as a state of balanced *doshas* (humors), *agni* (digestive/metabolic fire), *dhatus* (tissues), *malas* (waste products), and a contented state of *atman* (self), *indriya* (senses), and *manas* (mind). Therefore, reel culture may be examined through the lens of Ayurvedic psychology and preventive medicine.

Research Gap:

Although considerable literature exists regarding social media addiction, smartphone dependency, and excessive screen time, limited studies have specifically examined reel culture and short-form content consumption through the framework of Ayurvedic psychology [18,25,26]. Existing research primarily focuses on digital addiction, mental health outcomes, and neurobehavioral mechanisms from a Western biomedical perspective. The influence of continuous short-form content exposure on *Raja–Tama* predominance, *Prajnaparadha*, sensory dysregulation, and reduction of *Sattva* remains insufficiently explored within the Ayurvedic scholarly literature [25–29]. This review attempts to bridge that gap by systematically correlating contemporary findings with classical Ayurvedic concepts.

II.MATERIALS AND METHODS

This narrative review was conducted through a comprehensive literature search of electronic databases including PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and relevant Ayurvedic digital repositories. Keywords such as “reel culture,” “short-form video consumption,” “social media addiction,” “digital dependency,” “dopamine reward pathway,” “Ayurveda,” “Triguna,” “Prajnaparadha,” “Asatmya Indriyartha Samyoga,” and “mental health” were used in various combinations. Classical Ayurvedic texts including *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya* were reviewed to identify concepts relevant to mental health, sensory regulation, and behavioral disorders. Contemporary scientific literature related to social media use, attention span, sleep disturbances, behavioral addiction, and psychological well-being was analyzed and critically correlated with Ayurvedic principles. Only English-language articles and translations of classical texts published up to 2026 were included.

III.NEUROPSYCHOLOGY OF CONTINUOUS SCROLLING

Modern neuroscience explains digital engagement through reward and reinforcement mechanisms. Dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure, motivation, and learning, plays a crucial role in motivation, anticipation, reward processing, and habit formation [15]. Critically, dopamine release is triggered more by the *anticipation* of a reward than by the reward itself.

Short-form content platforms continuously provide unpredictable rewards in the form of:

- Humorous or entertaining videos
- Social validation through likes, comments, and shares
- Novel or surprising information
- Emotional stimulation (e.g., anger, awe, empathy, excitement)
- Personalized algorithmic recommendations

Such intermittent, variable-ratio rewards activate neural reward pathways more powerfully than fixed, predictable rewards and reinforce scrolling behavior [11,15,18]. This is the same neurobiological mechanism underlying gambling addiction.

Unlike fixed rewards, unpredictable reward systems create stronger behavioral reinforcement, making it difficult for users to disengage. Consequently, users frequently continue scrolling in anticipation of discovering more engaging content, often losing track of time [14,15].

Repeated exposure to these reward cycles may contribute to:

- Habit formation and automaticity of use
- Reduced self-control and impulse inhibition
- Excessive screen time averaging several hours daily
- Compulsive engagement despite intentions to stop
- Digital dependency resembling substance use disorders [14,15,18]

IV.ATTENTION FRAGMENTATION AND COGNITIVE EFFECTS

One of the major concerns associated with short-form content consumption is attention fragmentation—the division of attentional resources across multiple, rapidly shifting stimuli [19,20].

Traditional learning, deep reading, and productive activities require sustained attention and deep cognitive processing, which involve the brain's task-positive network and default mode network. In contrast, short-form content promotes rapid task-switching and shallow processing between multiple stimuli, keeping the brain in a state of continuous partial attention [19,21].

Potential consequences include:

- Reduced sustained attention span (some studies suggest a drop from 12 seconds in 2000 to 8 seconds by 2025)
- Difficulty concentrating on lengthy or complex material
- Impaired deep learning and critical thinking
- Reduced working memory retention
- Increased distractibility in daily life
- Decreased productivity in academic and professional settings [20–24]

Young adults who spend significant time consuming short-form content may experience difficulty maintaining focus during lectures, reading assignments, professional tasks, or even extended conversations [21,24].

V.AYURVEDIC UNDERSTANDING OF MIND AND SENSORY REGULATION

Ayurveda recognizes *Manas* (mind) as an important determinant of health and behavior, alongside *Sharira* (body). The mind is considered the seat of sensory and motor functions, emotions, and consciousness [1–4]. Psychological well-being depends upon harmonious interaction among cognition (*buddhi*), sensory perception (*indriya*), emotions (*bhava*), and behavioral control (*yama*).

According to Ayurvedic philosophy, mental functioning is governed by *Triguna*, the three universal qualities of *Prakriti* (nature):

- *Sattva*: Represents clarity, wisdom, awareness, emotional stability, self-control, contentment, and non-attachment. It is light, illuminating, and wholesome.
- *Raja*: Represents activity, desire, ambition, stimulation, attachment, restlessness, agitation, and craving. It is mobile, forceful, and binding.
- *Tama*: Represents inertia, ignorance, confusion, passivity, cognitive dullness, procrastination, and delusion. It is heavy, obscuring, and stagnant [1,2,27].

A healthy mental state is characterized by predominance of *Sattva* and balanced expression of *Raja* (for necessary activity) and *Tama* (for rest and grounding) [1–8]. When *Raja* and *Tama* become excessive, they override *Sattva*, leading to psychopathology.

VI.REEL CONSUMPTION AND RAJA–TAMA DOMINANCE

The behavioral characteristics of excessive reel consumption demonstrate notable similarities with pathological *Raja* and *Tama* predominance [25–29].

Features associated with *Raja* predominance in reel consumption include:

- Constant stimulation seeking and novelty craving
- Curiosity for the next video, driven by variable rewards
- Restlessness and inability to remain idle without a device
- Emotional reactivity (quick anger, excitement, or distress from content)
- Continuous scrolling as a compulsive, high-arousal activity
- Intense desire for social validation (likes, shares, comments)

Short-form content platforms are algorithmically engineered to continuously encourage these behaviors through rapid content delivery and intermittent reinforcement [11,15].

Prolonged exposure may subsequently produce manifestations associated with *Tama* predominance:

- Mental fatigue and brain fog after extended sessions
- Reduced motivation for real-world goals and responsibilities
- Cognitive dullness and slowed thinking
- Passive, zombie-like consumption without active engagement
- Loss of self-regulation and inability to stop scrolling
- Dependency on the platform for mood regulation [25–28]

Thus, reel culture may be interpreted as a pathological cycle in which *Raja* (excitement, desire, restlessness) initiates and fuels compulsive engagement, and *Tama* (inertia, passivity, dullness) sustains dependency and prevents disengagement. Persistent imbalance may ultimately diminish *Sattva*, impairing judgment, wisdom, and psychological resilience [27–29].

VII.PRAJNAPARADHA AND COMPULSIVE SCROLLING

Prajnaparadha is considered one of the three fundamental causes of disease in Ayurveda (along with *Asatmya Indriyartha Samyoga* and *Parinama*). It literally means "intellectual crime" or "offense against wisdom"—the deliberate or impulsive action contrary to one's own discriminatory knowledge [1,2].

Compulsive reel consumption demonstrates several clear characteristics of *Prajnaparadha* because:

- The individual intellectually knows that excessive scrolling reduces productivity, disturbs sleep, and causes mental fatigue.
- The individual has previously experienced negative consequences such as late-night anxiety, poor academic performance, or procrastination.
- Despite this awareness and memory of harm, the individual continues the behavior repeatedly, driven by craving and habit.
- The willpower (*dhi*), patience (*dhriti*), and memory (*smriti*) required for self-regulation are overcome by the force of *Rajas* and *Tamas* [25].

Therefore, compulsive scrolling is not merely a bad habit but can be viewed as a manifestation of *Prajnaparadha* at a subtle level, indicating a disturbance in the discriminative faculty of the intellect (*buddhi*).

VIII.ASATMYA INDRIYARTHA SAMYOGA IN DIGITAL MEDIA EXPOSURE

Asatmya Indriyartha Samyoga refers to improper utilization of sensory organs through excessive (*ati-yoga*), deficient (*heena-yoga*), or inappropriate (*mithya-yoga*) contact with sensory objects [1,4]. This concept is highly relevant to digital media consumption.

During reel consumption, users are exposed to hundreds of rapidly changing visual and auditory stimuli within short periods. This constitutes:

- *Ati-yoga* (excessive use): The eyes, ears, and cognitive faculties are overwhelmed by the sheer volume and speed of stimuli far beyond natural evolutionary capacity.
- *Mithya-yoga* (inappropriate use): The content is often designed to provoke rapid emotional shifts (e.g., from laughter to fear to desire), which is an unnatural pattern for sensory processing. Continuous exposure to bright screens, rapid scene transitions (cuts every 1-3 seconds), loud or jarring music, and emotionally provocative content may overwhelm sensory processing mechanisms, leading to *indriya vikara* (sensory dysfunction) and *manasika vikara* (mental disorders) [16–18].

Long-term consequences may include visual strain, auditory hypersensitivity, and an inability to process normal, slower-paced sensory information from the real world, further reinforcing the craving for digital stimulation.

IX.DHARANIYA VEGA AND DIGITAL IMPULSE CONTROL

Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of controlling certain mental and emotional urges known as *Dharaniya Vega* (suppressible urges). These include excessive desire (*kama*), greed (*lobha*), anger (*krodha*), attachment (*moha*), jealousy (*irshya*), and impulsive behaviors. Unlike natural bodily urges (*Adharaniya Vega*) that should not be suppressed, these mental urges are considered detrimental to psychological well-being when they are not appropriately regulated [1,2].

Compulsive reel consumption may be viewed as an inability to restrain the urge for continuous novelty seeking and instant gratification. The repeated impulse to check notifications, consume new content, and seek social validation reflects impaired self-regulation of *Dharaniya Vega*, particularly *kama* (desire) and *lobha* (craving for more).

In Ayurveda, failure to manage these urges leads to the vitiation of *Rajas* and *Tamas*, which in turn disturbs *Sattva*. Therefore, excessive engagement with short-form content may be interpreted as a disturbance in the proper management of *Dharaniya Vega*, ultimately contributing to *Raja* predominance, emotional instability, and progressive mental dullness.

X.IMPACT ON SLEEP, MENTAL HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY

Extensive contemporary research has associated excessive reel consumption with multiple negative outcomes:

- Sleep disturbances: Delayed sleep onset, reduced total sleep time, poor sleep quality, and disruption of melatonin secretion due to blue light exposure and cognitive arousal [22].
- Anxiety and depression: Increased rates of generalized anxiety, social anxiety, and depressive symptoms, partly mediated by social comparison and fear of missing out (FOMO) [17,23].
- Fear of Missing Out (FOMO): A pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent, driving further compulsive checking [17].
- Reduced attention span and concentration: Difficulty focusing on sustained tasks, academic reading, and professional responsibilities [19,21].
- Low self-esteem and negative body image: Upward social comparison with curated, often unrealistic, content [23].
- Academic and professional impairment: Lower grades, reduced work output, increased procrastination, and difficulty meeting deadlines [24].
- Productivity loss: Significant time wasted in unplanned scrolling sessions that fragment the workday [24].

Algorithm-driven engagement systems continuously reinforce compulsive digital behavior through personalized recommendations and notification cues. This may contribute to long-term psychological consequences, including the potential for diagnosable behavioral addictions in vulnerable individuals [11,15].

XI.AYURVEDIC PREVENTIVE AND THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES

Ayurveda emphasizes prevention through behavioral discipline, sensory regulation, and mental balance rather than merely treating established disease [1–8]. Multiple classical interventions can be adapted for reel-induced mental health challenges:

- *Dinacharya* (Daily routines): Establishing a structured daily routine that includes early rising, personal hygiene, regular mealtimes, and fixed work/study hours reduces impulsive digital checking.
- *Yoga asanas* (Physical postures): Specific postures such as *Tadasana*, *Vrikshasana*, and *Surya Namaskar* improve mind-body coordination, reduce restlessness, and channel *Rajas* constructively.
- *Pranayama* (Breathing regulation): Techniques such as *Nadi Shodhana* (alternate nostril breathing), *Bhramari* (humming bee breath), and *Sheetali* (cooling breath) directly calm the nervous system, reduce *Raja*, and increase *Sattva*.
- *Dhyana* (Meditation): Regular mindfulness or *Trataka* (candle-gazing) meditation improves attention span, impulse control, and emotional regulation [28–30].
- *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* (Psychotherapy): This Ayurvedic psychotherapeutic approach involves counseling, reassurance, cognitive restructuring, and cultivation of self-awareness to strengthen the mind against unhealthy urges.

These interventions may help restore self-regulation, strengthen *Sattva*, reduce pathological *Raja–Tama* predominance, and improve overall psychological well-being [28–30].

XII.ACHARA RASASANA AND HEALTHY DIGITAL BEHAVIOR

Achara Rasayana is a unique Ayurvedic concept describing behavioral and ethical practices that promote mental health, emotional stability, and longevity *without* the use of medications. It emphasizes virtues and lifestyle habits that nourish the mind and body at a subtle level [1].

Qualities such as self-discipline (*sanyama*), moderation (*madhyastha*), mindfulness (*sati*), truthfulness (*satya*), emotional restraint (*dhriti*), non-violence (*ahimsa*), and respect for healthy routines are emphasized in Ayurveda as *Rasayana* (rejuvenative) behaviors.

In the digital era, the principles of *Achara Rasayana* can be directly applied to promote responsible social media use. Practical applications include:

- Limiting screen time to scheduled periods (e.g., 30 minutes twice daily) rather than indefinite access.
- Avoiding late-night scrolling at least one hour before bedtime to protect sleep hygiene.
- Engaging in meaningful interpersonal interactions face-to-face to satisfy social needs naturally.
- Practicing mindful content consumption with conscious intention (e.g., "I will watch three educational reels") rather than passive autopilot.
- Cultivating digital non-attachment (*vairagya*) by periodically keeping the phone in another room.
- Using technology for *Sattvic* purposes (learning, creativity, meaningful connection) rather than *Rajasic* (craving, validation) or *Tamasic* (boredom, escapism) purposes.

Thus, *Achara Rasayana* offers a practical, evidence-informed Ayurvedic framework for developing healthy digital habits and preventing the mental health consequences of reel culture.

XIII.DISCUSSION

The growing popularity of reel-based platforms has fundamentally altered patterns of information consumption, entertainment, and social interaction among young adults. What began as a feature for quick entertainment has become a primary mode of digital engagement, with profound implications for mental health and cognitive development.

Contemporary neuroscience attributes compulsive engagement with short-form content to dopamine-mediated reward mechanisms, variable reinforcement schedules, and habit formation. Continuous exposure to novel and emotionally stimulating content creates a cycle of anticipation, reward, and craving that reinforces repetitive viewing behavior, similar to the neurobiological underpinnings of substance and gambling disorders.

Ayurveda offers a complementary and holistic perspective by interpreting these behavioral changes through disturbances in *Triguna*, particularly pathological elevation of *Raja* and *Tama*. Excessive stimulation, novelty seeking, emotional reactivity, and craving for validation are indicative of *Raja* predominance, whereas prolonged passive consumption, mental fatigue, reduced motivation, and dependency resemble *Tama* predominance. The gradual reduction of *Sattva*—the quality of clarity, wisdom, and contentment—may adversely affect judgment, concentration, emotional regulation, and psychological resilience, leaving the individual vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and attentional disorders.

The concepts of *Prajnaparadha* (acting against one's own better judgment) and *Asatmya Indriyartha Samyoga* (inappropriate sensory engagement) provide further insight into the mechanisms underlying compulsive scrolling behavior. Individuals frequently continue excessive reel consumption despite fully recognizing its negative effects on sleep, productivity, and mental well-being. This paradox reflects an impairment in *buddhi* (intellect) and self-control, central to the Ayurvedic understanding of *Prajnaparadha*. Simultaneously, continuous exposure to excessive and rapidly shifting visual and auditory stimuli represents inappropriate sensory engagement that may overwhelm cognitive processing and lead to sensory *kshaya* (exhaustion).

The integration of modern neuroscience and Ayurvedic psychology may facilitate the development of holistic interventions targeting behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions of digital dependency. For instance, *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* combined with cognitive-behavioral techniques, or *Pranayama* alongside digital detox protocols, may offer synergistic benefits. Such

approaches may prove particularly relevant in the prevention of emerging mental health challenges associated with excessive social media use, especially among young adults whose brains are still developing [1,25–29].

XIV.LIMITATIONS

The present review is conceptual in nature and primarily based on theoretical correlations between contemporary scientific literature and classical Ayurvedic principles. Direct clinical evidence evaluating reel culture through validated Ayurvedic psychometric parameters remains limited. The *Triguna* framework, while insightful, requires standardized assessment tools applicable to digital behavior. Additionally, individual variations in *Prakriti* (constitutional type) may influence susceptibility to reel addiction, which this review does not address in depth. Future observational and interventional studies are required to validate these theoretical associations and establish evidence-based Ayurvedic management strategies for problematic short-form content consumption.

XV.FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research should investigate the relationship between reel consumption and *Triguna* predominance using validated psychometric tools such as the Vedic Personality Inventory or the Triguna Scale. Observational studies may assess dose-response associations between screen time, *Raja–Tama* dominance, sleep quality, and psychological well-being in large young adult cohorts.

Longitudinal studies are needed to determine whether excessive reel consumption precedes or follows *Raja–Tama* imbalance. Interventional studies evaluating *Yoga*, *Pranayama*, meditation, digital detoxification programs, *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa*, and other Ayurvedic lifestyle interventions may provide valuable evidence for integrative management of digital dependency.

Furthermore, exploring the role of *Prakriti* (individual constitution) in predicting vulnerability to digital addiction and response to Ayurvedic interventions would personalize prevention strategies. Finally, further research into *Achara Rasayana* as a formal framework for healthy digital behavior may contribute significantly to preventive mental healthcare in the digital age.

XVI.CONCLUSION

Reel culture and short-form content consumption represent emerging behavioral challenges of the digital era, particularly affecting the mental health of young adults. Excessive engagement with highly stimulating, algorithm-driven content may contribute to attention fragmentation, sleep disturbances, emotional dysregulation, reduced productivity, and compulsive scrolling behavior.

Contemporary neuroscience explains these phenomena through dopamine-mediated reward pathways and reinforcement mechanisms, providing a proximate explanation. Ayurveda, in contrast, provides a deeper, more holistic understanding through the concepts of *Triguna* (particularly pathological *Raja* and *Tama* predominance), *Prajnaparadha* (acting against wisdom), *Asatmya Indriyartha Samyoga* (inappropriate sensory engagement), *Dharaniya Vega* (unrestrained mental urges), and *Achara Rasayana* (virtuous behavior as rejuvenation therapy).

Strengthening *Sattva* through *Yoga*, meditation, *Dinacharya*, mindful digital practices, and *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* offers valuable preventive and therapeutic strategies for maintaining mental well-being among young adults in the digital age. The ancient wisdom of Ayurveda, when integrated with contemporary insights, provides a robust framework not only for understanding but also for addressing the subtle psychological imbalances induced by modern reel culture.

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