

Buddhist Moral Education in the Digital Age: A Philosophical Analysis of Ethical Responsibility and Technology Use among Cambodian Youth

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Abstract—This article examines how Buddhist moral education can inform ethical responsibility in technology use among Cambodian youth. It combines philosophical readings of selected Theravāda discourses with an interpretive review of published Cambodian research on digital citizenship, artificial intelligence in education, civic participation, and digital rights. The analysis distinguishes technical competence, moral understanding, and responsible conduct. Reflection on harm, the ethical significance of intention, standards for truthful and beneficial speech, and caution in claiming knowledge provide resources for examining everyday digital decisions. Their application to contemporary technology is developed as a philosophical interpretation rather than attributed directly to ancient texts. Cambodian studies identify opportunities for learning and participation alongside concerns about privacy, dependence, curricular provision, and protection from exploitation. The article argues that responsible technology use requires learners to assess reasons and consequences, communicate uncertainty, respect other people's interests, and correct harmful actions. These capacities also depend on supportive teachers, accessible learning opportunities, clear institutional expectations, and accountable technological arrangements. A proposed educational approach connects textual study with practical discussion of information sharing, personal data, and assistance from artificial intelligence. The article reports no original fieldwork and establishes no causal effect of Buddhist education on youth behavior. Its

contribution is a contextual framework for evaluating digital moral education without treating religious identity, technological fluency, or participation alone as evidence of ethical maturity.

Index Terms—Artificial intelligence, Buddhist moral education, Cambodian youth, Digital citizenship, Ethical responsibility, Technology use.

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital education involves more than acquiring the ability to operate devices or complete tasks online. Learners must also decide whether information deserves confidence, how to communicate with others, what personal material should be shared, and when assistance from a technology supports their own understanding. These decisions bring educational and ethical questions together. In Cambodia, research on upper secondary curricula identifies partial incorporation of digital citizenship alongside gaps in several competencies [1]. Research on high school students' attitudes toward artificial intelligence (AI) also identifies perceived educational opportunities and concerns about privacy, dependence, and originality [2]. These findings provide a context for examining the contribution Buddhist moral education might make.

The social setting cannot be reduced to individual choices. Research with Cambodian children and young people connects digital rights with wider needs and institutional responsibilities, including the conditions under which technological services are designed and made available [3]. Earlier scholarship on youth participation describes connections between everyday Facebook activity and political engagement

[4]. Digital communication can therefore support learning and public participation as well as expose people to harm. An adequate moral analysis must consider what young people can do, what others can reasonably expect of them, and which responsibilities belong to educators and institutions.

The principal question of this article is how selected Buddhist ethical resources can inform a defensible account of responsibility in Cambodian youth's technology use. The objectives are to reconstruct relevant ethical principles, identify their relationship to digital decisions, and formulate educational applications appropriate for further investigation. The article also asks how personal responsibility can be discussed without overlooking unequal access, institutional practices, or harmful conduct by other people. It does not measure whether Buddhist instruction changes technology use or establish that Buddhist learners behave more responsibly than others.

Buddhist moral education is understood here as education that develops ethical understanding and dispositions through Buddhist teachings and practices. The analysis concerns selected Theravāda sources, without assuming that Cambodian youth share one religious identity or interpret those sources uniformly. Youth refers descriptively to adolescent and young adult learners. The reviewed studies examine different ages and settings, and evidence concerning children is not generalized to all young adults. Ethical responsibility concerns the obligations and capacities relevant to directing action, assessing its effects, and responding to those affected. Technical competence and responsible conduct remain analytically distinct. The central argument is that Buddhist ethical resources can support digital moral education when they are connected with reasoned inquiry, practical information skills, and accountable educational relationships. Religious commitment can offer reasons for taking responsibility, but participation in instruction is not sufficient evidence of moral maturity. The following sections review relevant literature, explain the method, develop the philosophical analysis, propose educational applications, and identify limitations. The contribution is an interpretive framework for examining ethically responsible participation in digital environments rather than a universal program of technological restriction.

II. LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A. Buddhist Ethics and Technological Practice

Bodhi's exposition presents precepts as commitments to training and connects restraint with the cultivation of positive ethical qualities [5]. This makes moral education an ongoing practice of understanding and conduct. Harvey distinguishes Buddhist ideals from the behavior of people whose lives are shaped by several influences [6, pp. 1–7]. The distinction matters educationally: religious affiliation, familiarity with doctrine, and public expressions of virtue cannot establish how a learner responds in a difficult situation. Such indicators may be relevant to learning, but they require interpretation rather than functioning as direct measures of character.

Vallor develops a philosophical account of the virtues required for living well amid technological change and draws on several classical traditions, including Buddhism [7]. Her approach helps frame a question about capacities that remain useful when a particular technology or social setting changes. The present article takes up that question through selected Theravāda discourses and Cambodian educational research. It does not identify Buddhist ethics with every claim of contemporary virtue theory or assume that a single list of virtues resolves all technological conflicts.

Three distinctions guide the analysis. Moral understanding concerns a learner's ability to explain why a decision matters. Ethical disposition concerns tendencies to attend to relevant interests and regulate harmful motivations. Responsible conduct concerns action in a particular setting, including correction when something goes wrong. These aspects can support one another without always appearing together. A student may explain why misleading information is harmful yet share it under pressure. Conversely, a student may comply with an expectation while possessing little understanding of its purpose. Educational assessment should therefore examine reasons and action as related but distinct objects.

B. Cambodian Digital Opportunities and Constraints

The curriculum review in [1] analyzes documents rather than observing students' behavior. Its identification of gaps in digital safety and resilience, emotional intelligence, and creativity points to

questions about educational provision. It cannot establish how individual teachers implement a curriculum or what every learner understands. The survey in [2] collected 315 voluntary online responses, with most participants attending schools in Phnom Penh. Its favorable attitudes and reported concerns provide bounded evidence about perceptions; they do not establish national prevalence or measured educational gains. These limitations help identify where philosophical interpretation must stop short of empirical conclusions.

The report *Disrupting Harm in Cambodia* examines online child sexual exploitation and abuse using several forms of research. It describes barriers to disclosure, including shame, fear, and concerns about others' reactions [8, pp. 70–71]. Its significance for moral education is the need to distinguish responsibility for harmful actions from the situation of someone subjected to exploitation. Exposure to abuse should never be interpreted as proof of deficient moral character. Education that invites young people to seek help must also provide a response that does not blame or humiliate them.

Regional research on girls' digital literacy, including attention to Cambodia, connects digital learning with access and gendered educational conditions [9]. It broadens the inquiry beyond rules addressed to people who already have adequate devices, connectivity, and instructional support. Guidance on generative AI in education likewise emphasizes human agency, privacy, inclusion, and institutional assessment of educational tools [10]. These sources offer contextual and normative resources. Regional findings are not presented here as measurements of Cambodian youth alone, and international guidance is not treated as evidence that a particular Cambodian institution follows it.

The research problem is how to connect ethical cultivation with information practices and institutional conditions. The proposed framework joins these dimensions without claiming that Buddhist digital ethics or Cambodian ethical education is a wholly unstudied topic.

III. SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The article combines philosophical textual analysis with a purposive review of research relevant to ethical judgment, communication, educational responsibility,

and Cambodian digital participation. No original fieldwork or statistical analysis was conducted, and the review does not claim comprehensive coverage.

The primary corpus comprises the *Ambalaṭṭhika-Rāhulovāda Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya* 61 (MN 61) [11]; the *Nibbedhika Sutta*, *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 6.63 (AN 6.63) [12]; the *Abhaya Sutta*, MN 58 [13]; the *Caṅkī Sutta*, MN 95, in the cited excerpt [14]; the *Abhisanda Sutta*, AN 8.39 [15]; and the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya* 31 (DN 31) [16]. These are discourses in the *Sutta Piṭaka*. They are not presented as rules in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* or as instructions about contemporary digital systems. Identified English translations and canonical numbers provide the locations for the readings.

The analysis reconstructs each passage's ethical concern and distinguishes its original claim from a proposed educational application. A discourse on speech, for example, supplies evaluative questions, while digital source checking requires additional skills. Contemporary philosophies and expositions of technology are secondary sources, whose rationale and historical setting are detached from the canon. Cambodian study is used to compare to the established concepts to identify educational opportunities and restrictions. The research included in the review are on distinct demographics and outcomes and are not combined into one data set. While the resulting framework delineates prerequisites for ethical digital education, it does not check their implementation throughout Cambodia.

IV. PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF DIGITAL RESPONSIBILITY

A. Reflection on Harm and the Review of Action

MN 61 introduces reflection on bodily, verbal, and mental action through a mirror comparison. Actions are examined before, during, and after performance for harm to oneself, others, or both. Harmful bodily and verbal actions are to be disclosed to a teacher or knowledgeable companion, followed by future restraint [11]. The sequence makes moral learning responsive to what happens. An initial decision remains open to assessment, and recognizing harm creates a reason to revise conduct.

This article proposes applying that temporal structure to digital decisions. Before sharing a message, a learner can consider its purpose and the people likely

to be affected. While an exchange develops, the learner can notice whether the interaction has become threatening or misleading. Afterwards, the learner can consider whether correction or an apology is required. These are contemporary educational applications, not practices explicitly described in the discourse. They require attention to the features of the actual situation rather than mechanically answering a fixed set of questions.

A hypothetical example concerns an inaccurate message about a classmate. Deleting one's own post may reduce further exposure, but it does not necessarily correct the understanding of people who have already read it. Responsible action may require an accurate correction directed to the relevant audience, without repeating unnecessary personal details. The example shows why moral learning should include response and repair as well as avoidance. An institution also needs procedures that allow learners to acknowledge mistakes without making humiliation a condition of correction.

B. Intention and Foreseeable Effects

AN 6.63 identifies intention as central to kamma and connects intentional activity with bodily, verbal, and mental action [12]. The ethical relevance of intention directs attention to how a person undertakes an action. It does not make a subsequently declared good motive sufficient justification for every result. An educational interpretation must consider the motive, the care exercised in deliberation, and the situation that requires a response. These differentiations avoid the conflation of authentic intention and sufficient accountability in the conversation.

Imagine a student who files a complaint to protect buddies. For example, the concern for others may be acceptable but the learner still has to judge what is known and whether spreading the allegation unfairly exposes someone to harm. The proposed standard is neither perfect prediction nor responsibility for every remote consequence. It is reasonable care proportionate to the stakes, available information, and capacity to act. Responsibilities change when an action concerns a private person, a vulnerable learner, or a claim that could seriously damage someone's reputation.

This interpretation also distinguishes error from deception. Someone who communicates a mistaken belief is not necessarily lying. Deliberate fabrication,

careless repetition, and a reasonable mistake involve different ethical questions, even where each requires correction. Teachers should avoid reducing all misinformation to bad intentions. They should help learners examine why the error occurred and whether greater care was possible. Moral judgment would then support learning instead of producing indiscriminate blame.

C. Truthfulness, Benefit, and Communication

MN 58 evaluates speech through truth, benefit, and appropriate timing, rather than through whether listeners find it agreeable. The discourse allows the possibility of beneficial speech that is unwelcome [13]. This makes the educational question more demanding than avoiding disagreement. Communication can be ethically important because it corrects an error or challenges harmful conduct. At the same time, a true statement may still be inappropriate where sharing it offers no defensible benefit and exposes someone unnecessarily.

The article develops three questions for online discussion: what grounds support the statement, what purpose its communication serves, and whether the audience and timing are suitable. These questions are proposed applications. They do not establish that benefit can be measured mechanically or that speakers may conceal important information whenever criticism is uncomfortable. A complaint about unfair treatment, for example, should be assessed through its grounds and appropriate means of response. Agreement with an authority is not the criterion of truthful or responsible participation.

A hypothetical classroom exercise could compare correcting a public false claim with circulating private information to embarrass a person. Both acts may contain accurate words, but their purposes, audiences, and effects differ. Students could explain which details are needed, who should receive them, and how uncertainty should be expressed. This would connect ethical reasoning with practical communication skills. It would also preserve room for legitimate disagreement, a concern that matters when digital education includes civic participation.

D. Epistemic Care and Claims to Knowledge

The cited passage from MN 95 distinguishes safeguarding truth from an unwarranted claim to final certainty. Conviction, preference, tradition, reasoning

by analogy, and agreement after reflection can each concern something true or something false. A person can state the basis of a belief without asserting that it alone establishes the truth [14]. The passage concerns a religious discussion and a wider path of inquiry. It does not provide a modern method for verifying websites or evaluating artificial intelligence.

Its philosophical relevance is the responsibility to represent one's epistemic position accurately. This article proposes distinguishing what a learner has directly checked, what a source reports, and what the learner presently believes. Popularity, familiarity, or confident presentation should not erase those distinctions. A claim can be communicated as provisional where its basis remains incomplete. Responsible uncertainty can improve communication because it allows others to assess the grounds rather than mistaking confidence for evidence.

For AI-assisted learning, this requires an additional distinction between receiving an answer and having grounds to endorse it. A learner who obtains a fluent explanation still needs to inspect relevant sources and understand the reasoning when using it in assessed work. The educational concern is supported by the reported opportunity for assistance and concerns about dependence and originality in [2]. The proposed application includes checking cited materials, explaining revisions, and following the institution's expectations for acknowledgment. It does not assert that every AI-assisted task is dishonest or that the Buddhist passage anticipated generative systems.

E. Restraint, Privacy, and Protection

AN 8.39 presents abstention from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxicants as gifts that provide other beings with freedom from danger, hostility, and oppression [15]. This gives restraint a social dimension: its value includes the interests of people affected by conduct. The present argument draws on that dimension to ask how digital practices expose others to avoidable harm. It does not equate all digital conduct with a canonical offence or derive a complete privacy policy from the precepts.

In contemporary education, permission to receive information should be distinguished from permission to redistribute it. A learner may be entrusted with a photograph, a message, or details about a classmate without receiving authorization to circulate them. The ethical questions concern the person's interests, the

context in which information was entrusted, and the foreseeable effects of sharing. These are interpretive applications of restraint and care, not claims about specific legal classifications. Digital copies also do not map straightforwardly onto ancient descriptions of taking property, so questions of attribution and access require further argument.

Protection must address the person harmed as well as the action to be restrained. The disclosure barriers documented in [8] indicate why an educational response should enable confidential support and avoid victim-blaming. A young person subjected to coercion or exploitation should receive assistance rather than be judged through a supposed failure to observe a precept. Proposed instruction can clarify how to seek appropriate help and avoid further circulation of harmful material. Moral education has limited value where a learner's request for protection instead becomes an occasion for stigma.

F. Reciprocal Educational Responsibilities

DN 31 pairs the student's respect and attentiveness with the teacher's duties of instruction, understanding, and protection [16, §29]. The relationship is hierarchical, but the text makes responsibilities of teaching explicit. This is relevant to the evaluation of ethical education: standards addressed to students should also inform how they are taught. The passage does not constitute a modern policy for digital safeguarding, and its historical social arrangements require interpretation rather than direct transplantation.

The essay claims that the legitimacy of educational authority is based on effective teaching, fair treatment and responsiveness to learner concerns. If teachers want honesty, they should also be explicit about what kind of help is allowed on an assignment. Institutions that wish to treat personal information with care should describe how they handle learner data themselves. The argument makes these present-day tasks. They ensure that ethical training does not bear the entire weight upon the young person, while permitting the arrangements around them to be left unexamined.

Shared responsibility also concerns technological design. An individual can exercise care while encountering an environment that encourages rapid responses or makes protective controls difficult to understand. This is a possible institutional problem,

not a claim that all platforms have identical effects. It calls for educators to assess the tools they adopt and explain why a particular arrangement supports learning. The human agency and institutional validation emphasized in [10] support including these questions alongside personal conduct.

V. EDUCATIONAL APPLICATIONS IN CAMBODIA

A. Connecting Moral Inquiry with Digital Skills

The proposed educational approach connects ethical reasons with the information skills necessary to act on them. A classroom discussion of truthful communication should include locating an original source, checking a date, distinguishing a report from an opinion, and recognizing when a claim remains uncertain. A discussion of care should include the practical implications of forwarding a private message. These examples are proposals for teaching, not activities observed in Cambodian schools. Their value should be evaluated through what learners understand and can do.

Teachers might prepare short cases in Khmer or a language that participants could understand, and could be age appropriate. A case might ask students to assess a commonly made allegation, to decide if a photo should be shared or to describe how a paragraph written by artificial intelligence would be vetted before it could be used. Learners should explain explanations, identify gaps and discuss alternatives. Assessment should distinguish knowledge of a procedure from understanding its ethical purpose. A student who knows which control to select may still need to consider whose interests the action affects.

B. Supporting Responsible AI-Assisted Learning

AI-assisted work requires expectations suited to the assignment. Assistance with translation, brainstorming, or feedback may support learning where it is allowed and where the learner remains responsible for the submitted work. Other tasks may be intended to assess unaided performance. An institution should explain these differences before assessment rather than relying on an ambiguous demand to use technology responsibly. The distinction gives learners an intelligible basis for their obligations and gives teachers a fair basis for evaluation.

A proposed learning exercise would ask students to compare an AI response with identified sources and explain how they corrected or qualified it. Another would ask students to identify which parts of a submission represent assistance and which parts express their own analysis. These exercises address understanding, verification, and attribution together. They should be accompanied by clear expectations concerning personal information and appropriate tools. International guidance [10] provides a basis for institutional evaluation, while the attitudes reported in [2] identify issues that local research can investigate further.

C. Participation, Inclusion, and Protection

Digital moral education should allow young people to discuss the opportunities they value. "And we should pay as much attention to the promotion of civic participation, peer support and access to learning as we do to the prevention of risk." The research in [4] works against the tendency to see online behavior as disengaged or socially empty. Responsible involvement can mean asking hard questions, bringing an issue forward through the proper means to get it on the record, or correcting misinformation. Respectful communication should not become a demand that learners avoid legitimate criticism or always agree with others.

Access must also be considered when planning instruction and assessment. Activities that depend on personal devices, continuous connectivity, or a paid service can exclude learners who lack those resources. The gender and access questions raised in [9] support investigating who can take part and under what conditions. Schools and community educators could provide alternatives that pursue the same learning purpose. Buddhist institutions may contribute where educational participation is voluntary and inclusive, but they should not be treated as substitutes for qualified technological instruction or professional protection services.

The response to a learner's concern should be part of the educational setting. Institutions can explain where help is available, distinguish correction from humiliation, and establish fair review of complaints. Personal information should be handled with appropriate care. These proposals require local development with learners and relevant professionals. Their justification rests on the educational

responsibilities being defended, not on an unsupported claim that every institution already has the necessary resources.

VI. DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

A. The Contribution of the Framework

The analysis connects moral judgment with the grounds of knowledge and the organization of digital learning. Reflection directs attention to consequences and correction. Attention to intention clarifies agency without making a good motive sufficient. Standards of communication require truth and a defensible purpose, while epistemic care requires accurate representation of what is known. Care for learners and institutional accountability concern whether those capacities can be exercised under fair conditions. The relationship among these elements is the article's proposed contribution.

The Cambodian context gives that contribution a specific educational focus. The selected studies identify curricular questions, attitudes toward AI, experiences of rights education, and opportunities for civic activity. Their differences prevent a single empirical conclusion about national behavior. Nevertheless, they allow the proposed framework to address questions arising within published Cambodian research. The framework offers standards for inquiry rather than evidence that a particular institution achieves morally responsible technology use.

An objection is that the approach places excessive weight on individual character. The institutional dimension is intended to address that problem. Technical arrangements, instructional resources and responses to harm should also be reviewed. Another objection is that a Buddhist vocabulary may exclude learners with different commitments. Educational applications should therefore explain relevant reasons and permit discussion without making religious identification a condition of participation. The article offers a Theravāda contribution to ethical education; it does not claim that responsible digital citizenship requires conversion or a single philosophical tradition.

B. Evidence and Future Research

The study is limited by its selected corpus, reliance on English-language publications, and absence of original fieldwork. It does not study Khmer classroom

interaction or holistic Buddhist educational practice. The empirical sources are about different populations and different dates. Attitudes, curricular content and reported experiences are not equal measures of conduct. Canonical interpretation cannot demonstrate modern compliance, and classroom practice is not examined.

Future studies could explore how learners justify sharing of information, preservation of privacy or support by AI. Repeated assessment and observation can differentiate between reported comprehension and behavior, and change over time.

Studies should specify age, setting, access, and religious participation rather than assuming that one group represents Cambodian youth generally. Research involving minors would require appropriate ethical review, consent and assent arrangements, and protection of participants. These are proposals for future empirical work; no such investigation is reported here.

VII. CONCLUSION

Buddhist moral education can provide philosophical resources for considering responsibility in Cambodian youth's technology use. The selected discourses direct attention to reflection, intention, communication, the grounds of belief, restraint, and reciprocal educational duties. Their relevance depends on careful interpretation and on combining ethical reasoning with the practical skills required by digital environments. Ancient textual authority alone cannot demonstrate the effectiveness of an educational program.

The article's principal conclusion is that responsible participation involves more than technical fluency or successful compliance with instructions. Learners should be allowed to justify choices, judge evidence, respond to those harmed, and make restitution. "Equitable expectations, accessible instruction, and protective responses from educators and institutions are also necessary. Published Cambodian research supports investigating these conditions without establishing a uniform pattern of behavior. The paradigm we suggest may be a guide for teaching and future investigation, while maintaining the separation

between ethical principles, educational opportunities, and demonstrated outcomes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author acknowledges the use of ChatGPT (OpenAI) solely for language editing, grammatical correction, and improving the clarity and readability of the manuscript. The research content, arguments, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions are the author's own. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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