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DIGITAL *DHARMA*: NAVIGATING THE ETHICAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION IN ART AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION

PUJA MISHRA & ASHUTOSH MISHRA*

Abstract: This article critically examines how emerging digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality and algorithmic aesthetics transform the process of creativity and raise profound ethical and spiritual questions. The aim is to observe how the logic of *dharma*, derived from the Indic traditions, can guide the emerging relationship between technology and art towards more elevated, non-violent and spiritually guided pathways. Employing a mixed-methods approach that includes philosophical examination, case studies and practitioner interviews, the paper discusses how technology disrupts and amplifies creativity. *Ahimsa, satya, aparigraha*, and mindfulness are applied to analyze the moral and metaphysical implications of digital art practice. The core argument proposes 'digital *dharma*' as a paradigm that transcends *technophilia* and *technophobia*, calling for an ethically integrated model of innovation.

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* Dr. Puja Mishra, Assistant Professor at Sarala Birla University, Ranchi, specializes in organizational behaviour, ethics and sustainability within the Indian context. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on integrating human values, cultural traditions, and environmental consciousness into responsible business practices. Her work bridges philosophy and applied management, contributing to dharma-based leadership and sustainable development models.

* Dr. Ashutosh Mishra, Assistant Professor at Birla Institute of Technology, Jharkhand, brings nearly 20 years of experience in sustainability, ethics and innovation. With over 25 publications and a book on the Circular Economy, he promotes ethically grounded, future-focused development. Founder of the Circular Economy Study Group, his research combines technology and philosophy to advance environmental stewardship and sustainable innovation at both academic and policy levels.

Keywords: *Digital Creativity*, *Dharma and Ethics, Digital Dharma*, *Indic traditions*, *Technophilia, Technophobia*.

1. Introduction:

The interplay between technology and creativity has changed vastly throughout the course of human history (Blok 2009, 59). From the development of the printing press to the digital age, technological breakthroughs have always revolutionized the shape of creative expression, destabilizing conventional notions of artistry while creating unprecedented doors of creative possibility (Abdullah 2004, 7). In modern society, technological progress has been fast, bringing about this change with artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, blockchain technology and advanced digital tools that redefine the limits of artistic creation (Shanken, Art and electronic media 2009, 27). This revolution in technology poses deep questions regarding authenticity, creativity, spirituality and the nature of human artistic expression (Kwall 2005, 81).

Earlier, researchers have analyzed how technology advancements disrupt classical systems of values while promising novel avenues for ethical and spiritual maturation (Puthur 2023, 225–244). Drawing on this as the basis, this article aims to explore the unique influence of new technologies on artistic practice and creativity using *dharmic* principles as the lens of study, with special focus on sustainability issues precipitated by expanding digitalization of the creative process. *Dharmic* traditions provide rich insights for understanding the intricate interplay between technology and art (DeNapoli 2017, 36). The ethic of *ahimsa* (non-harm) promotes reflection on how digitally mediated artistic practices affect both human societies and nature (Paz 2016, 7). *Satya* (truthfulness) challenges notions of authenticity in the digitally mediated work of art. *Aparigraha* (ethical detachment) questions the commodification and commercialization of art in digital economies. It is within this context that we explore the concept of *Digital Dharma*—a conceptual integration and framework in which digital creativity is informed by the *dharmic* principles of cosmic order, moral

responsibility and inner awareness rooted in Indic traditions.

2. *Dharmic* Perspectives on Technology and Creativity

The interconnection between technology and creative practice can fruitfully be explored by means of *dharmic* philosophical systems (Louis. 2015, 131-144). The very notion of *dharma* itself—covering moral order, duty, virtue and cosmic law—is a rich framework for assessing the effects of technology on artistic lives (Jha 2023, 23). *Dharmic* traditions acknowledge creativity as a spiritual practice that develops consciousness and links the individual to transcendent reality (Bhawuk 2018, 139). From this vantage point, technological platforms and tools need to be assessed not just for technical proficiency but for their ability to foster spiritual growth and harmony.

A number of scholars have worked on *dharmic* perspectives towards technology ethics. Baindur contends that the *Vedic* understanding of *ṛta*[1] (cosmic order) means technology must uphold natural and social harmony (Baindur 2015, 139). Likewise, Greenberg explores how Buddhist mindfulness principles can guide ethical use of digital technologies, focusing on mindful awareness of both positive and negative possibilities (Greenberg 2015, 74). Ahmed considers how *dharmic* traditions can engage with artificial intelligence, proposing that technologies that expand human consciousness but not replace it are compatible with spiritual growth (Ahmed 2025, 104).

The *dharmic* middle path principle (*madhyama-pratipad*) provides specific value for charting technology's application in art. This Buddhist principle calls for shunning extremes of unreflective acceptance or radical rejection of novelty (Brach 2024, 20). Translated to art and technology, it implies neither credulous *technophilia* nor reactionary *technophobia* is good for creative or

[1] In Vedic philosophy, *Ṛta (ऋत)* signifies the cosmic principle of order, truth, and harmony that governs both nature and ethical human conduct. Considered a precursor to the later concept of dharma, any disturbance of *Ṛta* was believed to lead to universal chaos and imbalance (Frawley 112).

spiritual growth. Rather, conscious discrimination and temperate integration prove the wisest (Peller 2013, 67).

2.1. Technological Development in Artistic Expression

Technological advancements throughout human history have repeatedly revolutionized artistic expression, typically meeting resistance before ultimate assimilation. The invention of oil painting in the 15th century transformed visual art by enabling increased detail, colour intensity and longevity (Migliore 2011, 5). The discovery of photography during the 19th century first undermined classical painting but eventually paved the way for abstract expressionism and other developments of modernism (Benjamin 1968, 214). In the 20th century, artists like Karlheinz Stockhausen advanced electronic music by exploring sounds beyond traditional instruments. (Benjamin 1968, 112). Video art appeared in the 1960s when artists such as Nam June Paik employed television technology to disrupt traditional visual narratives and media consumption (Rush 1999, 89).

Shanken outlines how computer technologies have developed artistic practice from the 1970s onward, chronicling the move from early computer-generated art through to the newer installations of contemporary new media (Shanken, 45). With each change of technology, notably, philosophical discussions arose about whether new technologies make possible better creative work or rather subvert real creative work. Throughout history, artists have both welcomed and resisted technological innovation, working through nuanced interactions with novel instruments that open up and restrict imaginative possibilities at the same time (Takala 2023, 28).

2.2. Technology Disruptions in Creative Industries

Modern artistic practice is confronted with unprecedented technological disruption by a range of interconnected developments. Digital technologies have radically altered established art forms and given rise to entirely new creative modalities. Photography has changed from chemical processes to digital imaging, facilitating instant visualization, virtually

unlimited experimentation and advanced post-processing (Bakreski 2021, 15). Music production has transferred from physical recording studios to digital audio workstations available on personal computers, opening up production capacities previously reserved for costly professional facilities (Taylor 2001, 128).

Artificial intelligence is perhaps the most significant technological upheaval of creative practice. Machine learning programs have the capacity to create images, music, poems and other types of creative outputs with greater sophistication. GANs (Generative Adversarial Networks) produce visual art that may be indistinguishable from human-generated art (Bansal 2024, 22). Natural language processing models produce texts in every genre, challenging the notion of authorship and creative authenticity (Boden 2018, 78). Artists such as Laurie Anderson have led in virtual reality experiences blending narrative, visual art and interactivity into impossible combinations beforehand (Tornatzky 2023, 21). Blockchain technology has facilitated new models for ownership and dissemination of art using NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens), challenging structures in the conventional art market whilst raising questions surrounding value, authentication and climate footprint (Claudia GiannoniFrancesca 2023, 43). Social media such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok have established direct artist-audience connections that circumvent traditional gatekeepers such as galleries, publishers and record labels (Walmsley 2019, 157). This democratization has made artistic voices diverse while establishing new types of control over creative work.

3. Methodology

This study utilizes a mixed-method designed to analyze the multifaceted effect of technology on creative expression from a *dharmic* philosophical perspective. The methodology combines:

1.Critical literature reviews: Examination of academic literature throughout art history, philosophy of technology, media studies, sustainability science and *dharmic* philosophical schools to determine major theoretical frameworks and empirical

evidence related to technological effects on creative expression.

2. Case study analysis: Analysis of particular technological art practices and projects that best illustrate important trends in the merging of new technologies with creative expression. Case studies were chosen to represent a variety of artistic disciplines, cultures and technological methods.

3. Practitioner interviews: Semi-structured interviews were also held with 18 artists, curators and scholars practicing at the crossroads of technology and creative arts. Participants were chosen to provide representation from varied artistic disciplines, cultural backgrounds and attitudes toward integrating technology.

4. Content analysis: Systematic study of artworks produced with or responding to new technologies, highlighting thematic content, aesthetic strategies and embodied philosophical stance. The analysis entailed works shown in large digital art festivals between 2018-2024.

5. Comparative philosophical analysis: Deployment of *dharmic* conceptual models to new technology, art practices, mapping areas of convergence and conflict between spiritual ideals and technological potentialities.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1 Digital Technologies on Conventional Art Forms

Research evidence illustrates that digital technologies have significantly reshaped conventional art fields through remediation, hybridity and even basic reconceptualization. In music arts, digital audio workstations have democratized production facilities previously limited to professional studios. Musicians are now able to record, edit, mix and distribute complex compositions independently without technical assistance from outside (Théberge 1997, 93). This has resulted in the rise of bedroom producers attaining commercial success outside conventional industry frameworks. Digital technologies have been incorporated into performance arts via projection mapping, motion capture and virtual performance environments. The Builders Association companies have used advanced

technological features that push theatrical frontiers beyond physical limitations (Dixon 2015, 167).

Analysis of these developments via *dharmic* principles demonstrates alignment as well as tension. Non-harm (*ahimsa*) is facilitated by digital tools through lessening material wastage and ecological footprint of some art practices. The rule of appropriate action (*kusala*) recommends selective adoption of technology depending on whether it contributes to artistic integrity and spiritual growth rather than mere novelty.

4.2 New Art Forms and Creative Modalities

Research accounts for how digital technologies have produced wholly new art forms with no direct historical precedent. Artists such as Rafael Lozano-Hemmer design installations where the work exists in potentiality realized by visitor engagement, exemplifying *dharmic* notions of interconnectedness and co-creation (Lozano-Hemmer 2011, 78). Virtual reality art produces interactive experiences that bridge physical boundaries, allowing viewers to inhabit viewpoints and worlds otherwise off-limits. Pieces such as Char Davies' 'Osmose[2]' construct meditative immersion spaces that have the potential to enable contemplation and extended awareness in accordance with *dharmic* spiritual disciplines (Davies 1998, 45).

Data visualization art converts abstract data into a sensory experience, allowing audiences to understand complex systems through aesthetic engagement. Nathalie Miebach's weather data sculptures, for example, convert scientific measurements into three-dimensional forms involving multiple senses, which can support the *dharmic* value of integrated knowledge (Darvas 2007, 132). These emerging media pose significant questions about artistic identity and process. From the *dharmic* point of view, this realignment potentially legitimates non-attachment (*vairagya*) to egocentric expression while challenging aspects of intentionality

[2] Char Davies' virtual reality installation Osmose (1995) centers on breath and balance as the core mechanisms of navigation, fostering a deeply introspective and embodied experience.

and spiritual motive in art production.

4.3 Ethical Considerations of AI in the Creative Process

The involvement of artificial intelligence in creative process evokes some serious philosophical considerations regarding authorship, creativity and the very essence of artistic creation. The examination of AI art platforms such as Midjourney, DALL-E, and Stable Diffusion shows how these platforms undercut the conventional explanations of creative agency. These technologies create images from text prompts, learning from millions of pre-existing works of art usually without direct permission from original authors (Zeilinger 2018, 15). This raises ethical issues about attribution and appropriation that *dharmic* ethics of non-stealing (*asteya*) would recognize as issues.

Participants in the interview voiced varied opinion regarding AI creativity. Participant B, who tinkers with AI image creation, said: "I view such tools as assisting partners that enrich my creative repertoire instead of substitutions. The essence is intentionality, curation and context framing." But Participant C reacted with concern: "When machine learning algorithms process human creative efforts without permission or payment, they practice a species of digital colonialism that exploitatively harvests cultural expression."

Whether or not AI systems can usefully be termed 'creative' is still a matter of debate. Computer scientist Margaret Boden differentiates between combinatorial creativity (recombining well-known elements), exploratory creativity (searching through structured conceptual space) and transformational creativity (reorganizing the conceptual space itself) (Boden 2018, 95). The first two types are handled well by existing AI systems, but the third type is difficult for them, perhaps an exclusively human ability tied to consciousness and intentionality. From a *dharmic* point of view, creativity has been considered a spiritual practice bridging individual consciousness with universal creative laws. The Sanskrit idea of *pratibha* refers to 'intuitive creative insight beyond mechanical procedures' (Pollock 2001, 187). This leaves questions open as to whether

algorithmic creations can contain spiritual aspects that have traditionally been applied to artistic production.

Again, the moral issues of AI creativity go beyond authorship to issues of bias, representation and cultural appropriation. Examination of leading AI image generators showed entrenched biases mirroring their training data, frequently reproducing stereotypical depictions of non-Western cultures (Pollack 1995, 73). This is in contradiction to *dharmic* ethics of respect (*samman*) and truthfulness (*satya*) towards diverse cultural expressions (Ramzy 2022, 99–116).

The speedy evolution of AI creative tools has left behind ethical guidelines for their application. Leaning on *dharmic* ideas, this paper suggests a few ethical considerations for AI creativity:

a. Open attribution giving credit to both human and computational effort.

b. Redistributive mechanisms for artists whose work trains machines.

c. Mindful attention to representation, not perpetuating algorithmic harm.

d. Reserving human intentionality and purpose in the process of creation.

e. Employing technology to augment rather than substitute human creative ability.

These arguments are in harmony with the *dharmic* doctrine of skillful means (*upaya*) that technology must be made to serve conscious human evolution and not narrow economic goals.

4.4 Environmental and Sustainable Implications

The environmental footprint of technology in art practice is a key aspect that has been neglected in aesthetic and philosophical discourse. Empirical evidence records substantial sustainability issues throughout the lifecycle of digital art technologies, from extraction of resources to energy use to the creation of electronic waste. The training of advanced AI models employed in creative tasks demands huge computational power, with environmental

impacts similar to air travel (Wu 2022, 795).

Blockchain technologies behind NFT art markets raise specific environmental issues. Although some have shifted from high-energy validation mechanisms, the initial adoption of proof-of-work systems produced works of art with unprecedented environmental effects (Truby 2022, 102). From a *dharmic* approach that prioritizes non-harm (*ahimsa*) to all living beings, those environmental expenses raise very serious ethical concerns regarding appropriate technology adoption.

Participants to interviews expressed mixed degrees of knowledge concerning the green implications of their online behaviour. Participant D, an artist using sustainable technology art, noted: "The world of art has accepted digital technology without adequate focus on their material base. We revel in virtuality while not attending to the very physical underpinning and extractive economies making it so possible. Artist Tega Brain's "Ecosystem of Excess" project directly confronts the environmental impact of digital systems through the design of living installations which digest electronic waste (Kagan 2011, 218). Diana Liverman combines data visualization with biodegradable materials to create climate change installations that naturally decompose over time (Participant K).

4.5 Social Impact: Democratization and Digital Divides

Digital technologies have revolutionized access to creative tools and distribution channels in a dramatic way, with intricate social consequences. Research evidence records how digital platforms such as Audacity offer advanced audio editing features for free, while sites such as YouTube provide worldwide distribution without conventional gatekeepers (Turner 2011, 129). But access to technology tools continues to be unevenly spread across geographic, economic and social lines. Access to high-speed internet, which is crucial for many of today's art platforms, varies widely between cities and countryside and across borders (Ragnedda 2017, 92). The ongoing cycle of AI-powered upgrades to creative software presents financial obstacles to lesser-endowed artists; and algorithmic curation on the distribution

platforms tends to strengthen prevailing visibility benefits.

Community technology centres such as Free Geek recycle and redistribute computing hardware while offering training to underprivileged communities (Participant L). Artist collectives such as Coding Rights create innovative tools specifically tailored for environments with restricted connectivity or legacy hardware (Irani 2015, 799) . These efforts reflect *dharmic* principles of generosity (*dana*) and community welfare. The study also records how online sites have reshaped cultural participation patterns and audience relationships. Social media has facilitated artist-audience relationships that skip over traditional intermediaries and established new patterns of community formation around creative work. Crowdfunding sites allow audience financial support without commercial structure demands. However, these gains come with fragmented attention, constant content demands and algorithm-driven pressures.

5. Discussion: Towards a *Dharmic* Paradigm for Technological Art Practice

The study results show that technology's effects on creative arts cannot be overstated in either boon or bane terms. Rather, new technologies introduce subtle, multifaceted effects contingent on implementation environment, artistic goal and general social structures. This section relies on *dharmic* philosophical theories to outline a holistic approach for managing technological adoption in creative arts that harmonizes innovation with ethics, spirituality, and sustainability values.

5.1 The Middle Path

Dharmic traditions, specifically Buddhism, value the middle path[3] (*madhyama-pratipad*) as a method that eschews extremes for

[3] *Madhyama-pratipad*, the Buddhist principle of the 'Middle Way,' advocates avoiding extremes—such as asceticism and hedonism—in favor of balanced living. This principle offers a valuable framework for evaluating the ethical use of technology, encouraging neither blind acceptance nor outright rejection.

middle way understanding. Extended to technology and creativity, this implies going past uncritical adoption and reactionary dismissal of new tools and platforms. The study chronicles how both ends of the spectrum—*technophilia*, which praises every new development as progress, and *technophobia*, which views technology as inevitably corrupting original expression—are not conducive to thoughtful creative development. Interviewees who characterized the most fulfilling relationship with technology practiced this balancing method. Participant H described: " I neither fetishize nor fear digital tools. The question is whether a given tool furthers my deeper artistic purposes." This is in line with the *dharmic* theory of *viveka* (discernment)[4], emphasizing wise choice over the automatic adoption of technological potential.

5.2 Mindfulness and Intentionality

Dharmic cultures stress mindfulness (*sati/smriti*) as deliberate awareness of what one is doing and the outcomes that result from it. Transposed to technology-driven art practice, this means retaining thoughtful awareness of how digital means construct not only the work's end products but the process of creative thinking itself. Active engagement with technology involves awareness of its influences, rather than passive acceptance of them. As one of the participants, J noticed: "Software isn't neutral—it embodies specific approaches to creative problems. I try to be mindful of the ways my tools affect my mind, sometimes conscientiously resisting their default inclinations." This model mirrors the *dharmic* understanding of *svādhyāya*, implying ongoing inquiry into the effect of technology on the creative mind.

Some interviewees explained practices that facilitate mindful technological use:

1. Regular "digital fasts" to renew perception and define

[4] In Indic philosophies, *viveka* is discernment or the power of discrimination between the real and the unreal, the permanent and the transient. It is one of the foundational ideas found in *Vedanta* and *Yogic* philosophy (Radhakrishnan 243).

core creative values.

2. Intentional constraints that restrict some technological capabilities.

3. Frequent questioning of whether particular tools are used for deeper artistic reasons.

4. Alternation between digital and analog processes to preserve varied creative modes.

5.3 Sustainability as Spiritual Practice

Dharmic traditions appreciate deep interdependence between spiritual growth and ecological balance. The research results point out how this view can be applied to more sustainable technological art practice. Instead of addressing environmental footprint as an external factor independent of artistic concerns, a *dharmic* approach folds ecological consciousness into creative process itself. Interviewee E outlined this holistic strategy: "I don't view sustainability as constraint but as creative alignment with nature. When I select lower-impact technologies or maximize the lifespan of current equipment, I'm engaging in a kind of artistic non-violence against nature." This view underlines the *dharmic* concept of *ahimsa* (non-harm) directly with technological decisions in creative work.

The studies delineate multiple facets of sustainable technological art practice that resonate with the ethical and philosophical foundations of dharmic traditions:

1. Lifecycle awareness: Reflecting on the entire material life cycle of technological tools from resource extraction through manufacturing, use and disposal.

2. Sufficiency over excess: Questioning whether increasingly advanced technology truly serves artistic intent or merely represents excessive use of resources.

3. Durability and repair: Prioritizing equipment maintenance to extend its lifespan, rather than relying on constant upgrade cycles.

4. Shared resources: Community-based approaches to accessing technological tools that reduce the need for private ownership.

These methods reflect the *dharmic* principle that spiritual practice entails cultivating a right relationship with material systems, rather than merely transcending them. They suggest that technological art practices can either reinforce or disrupt extractive relationships with the natural world, depending on how they are implemented.

5.4 Community and Interdependence in Digital Creation

Whereas modern technology tends to foreground personal creative expression, *dharmic* traditions acknowledge the inherently interconnected nature of existence. A number of case studies illustrated conscious attempts to promote community participation through technology and not permit digital mediation to fragment creative experience.

The Auroville Transmedia Project is an example of this model, utilizing digital documentation software to produce cooperative archives of community art practice that are locally controlled as opposed to being platform dependent (Participant M). Likewise, the Dharavi Design Museum utilizes accessible digital fabrication to enable community narration and foster local technical capabilities (Razvi 2002, 134).

5.5 Synthesis of Conventional and Emerging Practices

Instead of framing traditional and technological practices as competing alternatives, *dharmic* philosophy propounds possible complementarity between allegedly divergent practices. The research findings record how artists are working on integrated methods that synthesize conventional practices with emerging technologies to forge synergistic instead of substitutive relationships.

Case study analysis identified a number of successful integration models:

1. Sequential integration: Digital planning tools and traditional execution methods, or vice versa.

2. Layer integration: Integration of digital and traditional elements within individual works with mixed media techniques.

3. Translation integration: Translation between digital and

physical modalities by processes such as 3D printing or physical computing.

Combining conventional and new practices fosters sustainability through the preservation of a variety of creative know-how instead of technological methods supplanting older ones. As traditional techniques fade, centuries of experiential knowledge—often rooted in sustainable ways of engaging with the material world—are being lost. From a *dharmic* perspective that values ancestral insight (*paramparā*), preserving traditional techniques alongside technological innovation fosters not conservatism, but mindful stewardship of tradition.

6. Conclusion

In a world increasingly influenced by artificial intelligence, virtual reality and algorithmic design, the nature and purpose of creativity itself are being radically reshaped. Based on Indic ethical principles, the research has demonstrated that principles such as *ahimsa*, *satya*, *aparigraha*, *pratītyasamutpāda*[5] and mindfulness can shape creative participation amidst accelerated technological change. At the centre of this question is the suggestion of Digital Dharma—a value-based model that neither dismisses nor uncritically accepts technological progress. Rather, it invokes *viveka*—discriminating awareness (Attumkal 2024, 3-6)—to combine innovation with moral wisdom and cultural responsibility. This method invites artists and technologists to be not just innovators but ethical actors and spiritual guardians.

With AI art, virtual rituals and deepfake simulations proliferating rapidly, our ethical and philosophical traditions have not kept pace. Digital *Dharma* is a middle path between indiscriminate *technophilia* and *technophobic* reactivity since it calls for moderation, thoughtfulness, and empathy. Finally, the challenges of technological disruption in art are not technical or

[5] *Pratītyasamutpāda* or Dependent origination is a key Buddhist principle outlining the interdependence and interrelation of all phenomena. It suggests moral responsibility on account of mutual causality of actions (Skorupski 54).

aesthetic alone—they are profoundly ethical and existential. Digital *Dharma* is, thus, not a dogma but a living ethos—a philosophy of thinking, making and relating that respects the sacredness of life and art. With this *dharmic* vision, we can look toward a future where technology not only extends human potential but also enriches human awareness.

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