

**BUDDHIST COMMUNICATION THEORY AND EDUCATION IN A CONSUMERIST AND CAPITALIST WORLD: A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *Raṭṭhapālasutta*.**JDA Kumara<sup>1</sup>**Abstract**

The concept of communication has undergone a tremendous transformation over the last century. The advent of 'mass communication' and 'mass media' within a new 'mass' culture marked a historical turning point, further accelerated by capitalist and consumerist ideologies. This mode of communication evolved into a new form of social control with the rise of computerization, the proliferation of media and information, and the advancement of new techniques. When engaging with media, people from different cultures, traditions, and societies should not necessarily adhere to Western-oriented concepts. This study seeks to theorize communication and examine communication education through a Buddhist lens while critically questioning the commodification of reality via mass media. There is a dire need for communication theory and communication education that reflect the identities of non-Western societies and traditions in the multipolar world of the 21st century, where the cognitive empire of Eurocentrism is dwindling. In this context, Buddhism, as a comprehensive knowledge system that has evolved with a complete range of currents of thought, holds special significance. In philosophizing communication theory and education, the *Raṭṭhapāla Sutta* from the Buddhist canon was used. Critical Discourse Analysis was employed as the methodology.

**Keywords:** Consumerism, Capitalism, Communication, Education, Buddhism

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## Introduction

The idea of communication, with its pedagogical outlook, has taken on a new meaning with the advent of 'mass communication' and 'mass media' within a new 'mass' culture, particularly in the early part of the twentieth century (McQuail, 2010). This new social phenomenon became a central aspect of the emerging modern world, shaped by industrialization and popular democracy. This shift called for revisiting the idea of communication, as it led to a new form of social control with the rise of computerization, the proliferation of media and information, and the advancement of new techniques (Marcuse, 2013, p. xxxii). The scientific and technological rationalities that Marcuse describes are even more powerful today with the emergence of computerization, the proliferation of media and information, and the development of new techniques and forms of social control. And yet the society is more irrational than previously.

This "technological society" operated in tandem with capitalism and consumerism. As media have evolved into the primary channel for cultural representation and expression, they have also become the main source of images of social reality, playing a vital role in shaping and maintaining social identity (Lemish, 2015). In the case of handling media, people from different cultures, traditions and societies should not necessarily follow Western oriented concepts, postulates, and resources. This study does not imply the outright rejection of Western theories but rather the rejection of their uncritical acceptance. Theorizing communication through a Buddhist lens aims to critically question the commodification of reality through mass media. It also questions the manufactured demand that has constructed a new form of human nature, where people recognize themselves in their commodities. Unlike Western theory and practice, the Buddhist approach to communication does not see things as discreet and rational, rather interdependent.

“The relationship between the cause and effect is one of mutual dependence. Therefore, to refer to them as ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ would be misleading because that would presuppose the clear priority of the causes” (Dissanayake, 1983, p. 32).

As Buddhism fundamentally recognizes the importance of interdependence, its communication pedagogy should nurture nonviolence (*ahimsa*). Buddhist communication teaching has to be based on mutual respect among diverse communities to renew the foundation for mind-expanding pursuits. It needs to offer a holistic and ethical framework that integrates personal transformation with collective well-being. The development of a society is only possible if people are empowered through a meaningful learning and practice of the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya-atthangikamagga* in Pali) which is currently absent in the colonial process of learning. For this, teachers' training programs could be rearranged to protect our mother earth, society, and community for sustainable development (Wane, 2022). The Buddhist pedagogical approach focuses on mindful concentration (*bhavana*) and ethical (*sila*) practice within the learning context and environment as an emancipatory ideology to promote cultural diversity rather than political and social imposition (Barua, 2022).

A well-known Buddhist sutta, namely the *Ratṭhapāla Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, has been chosen as the central doctrinal focus of this study, as it offers deep insights into the Buddhist view on being and ontology. This sutta tells the story of a wealthy young man who, after hearing the Buddha's teachings, renounces his luxurious life to become a monk. This sutta has implications for modern-day consumerism, which depends on a logic of never-ending growth and desire. In spite of (perhaps because of) globalisation, the privatisation and pricing of environmental 'goods' has accelerated; with the expanding rhetoric of consumerism, nature becomes a marketplace. A fundamental transformation has been taking place in many societies as a result of the rapid extension of market approaches to natural resources (fishing stocks, forests, etc.) and organic products (including genetic material and body parts)-in response to ideological commitments, technological developments as well as economic and ecological problems (Ingold & Palsson, 2003). The Western and Eurocentric approach has been the dominant paradigm for communication theory and communication education throughout the last century and into the present, driven by capitalism and consumerism-oriented structures, ideologies, and practices that are presumably anthropocentric, individualistic, and positivistic (Ishii, 2001; Moyo, 2021). The Western and Eurocentric approach has been the dominant paradigm for communication theory and communication education throughout the last century and into the present, driven by capitalism- and consumerism-oriented structures, ideologies, and practices that are presumably anthropocentric, individualistic, and positivistic (Ishii, 2001; Moyo, 2021). It is time to openly discuss a communication ecology tailored to the new normality the EU is navigating. A communication model that should be organic, deliberative, communal, diverse, and (trans)human. In this scenario, information, regarded as an intangible asset, needs to transcend the toxicity inherent in a non-organic, static communication model founded on [Western] power control, conflict, and the entrenchment of the predominant values of standardized and hierarchical journalism (Alonso, 2024) The hegemonic presence of Western-oriented Eurocentric communication theory continues to be sustained by developments in consumerism and capitalism to fulfill the needs of neoliberal and laissez-faire markets (Son, 2020). As Marcuse highlights, the "advanced industrial society" has created false needs that integrate individuals into the existing system of

production and consumption via mass media, advertising, industrial management, and contemporary modes of thought (Douglas, 1991).

This paper argues that communication theory and education based on Buddhist doctrinal insights will reveal an alternative paradigm to the all-encompassing methods of control imposed by the so-called "mass culture," which is driven by consumerist mass media (Rosenberg, 2012; Nam, 2013). As the world becomes increasingly multicultural and multipolar, communication research is also expected to investigate alternative theoretical foundations and new paradigms that differ radically from the hegemonic and dominant ways of understanding human communication (Chari & Akpojivi, 2023). Thus, adopting a Buddhist approach to communication allows for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the diversity of human experiences in connection and communication (Walton & Hayward, 2014). Consumerism, in the contemporary context, views individual spending on goods and services as the key driver of economic growth (Featherstone, 1991). It is also a social and economic system in which many individuals' expectations extend to acquiring goods and services that go beyond basic survival needs or traditional markers of status. Consumerism, as an idea, emerged in Western Europe before the Industrial Revolution and became widespread around 1900. It makes consumers act irrationally, resulting in psychologically destructive effects. As consumerism promotes consumption as both an ideology and a policy, consumer choices strongly influence manufacturers' decisions about what to produce and how, thereby shaping the economic organization of a society driven by mass media culture, a new concept of leisure, and anomie in affluent societies.

In contrast to Buddhist teaching that inculcates that attachment to material possessions, wealth, and the pursuit of sensory pleasures leads to suffering (*dukkha*), and that true contentment arises from letting go of these attachments, consumerist ideology asserts that greater consumption of goods and services leads to individual well-being and happiness (Rambelli, 2013; Rahula, 2007). Thus, it is a market-driven ideology focused on promoting continuous economic growth through consumer spending (Fraundorfer, 2022, p. 314). For example, John Maynard Keynes, the renowned English economist and philosopher, highlighted that consumption is central to creating income and employment, securing vibrant markets in the process. Thus, the capitalist system is rooted in the idea of increasing consumption, with consumerism viewed as a positive force. A decline in income due to a decline in the level of employment, if it goes far, may even cause consumption to exceed income not only by some individuals and institutions using up the financial reserves which they have accumulated in better times, but also by the Government, which will be liable, willingly or unwillingly, to run into a budgetary deficit or will provide unemployment relief, for example, out of borrowed money. Thus, when employment falls to a low level, aggregate consumption will decline by a smaller amount than that by which real income has declined, by reason both of the habitual behaviour of individuals and also of the probable policy of governments; which is the explanation why a new position of equilibrium can usually be reached within a modest range of fluctuation (Keynes, 2006). It places significant emphasis on private individuals or entities that own and control property, driving economic growth and market dynamics.

As Bauman observes, consumption is a self-perpetuating activity and remains insatiable. With relentless ambition for power, people act in pursuit of their own good and self-interest, without socio-political pressure toward altruism – an integral part of consumerism (Bauman, 2013). This insatiable drive creates an ideological gulf with Buddhist epistemology and the Buddhist *weltanschauung*, in which giving, sharing, and selfless generosity—without expecting anything in return—are regarded as fundamental characteristics (Goenka, 2016, p.150). If generosity is seen as generating karmic fruitfulness, it is also seen as good to share this with others. In the Theravadin tradition, an act of karmic fruitfulness may be performed not only by empathizing (*anumo-dana*) with someone else's good deed, but also by the sharing of its karmic fruitfulness - or, more exactly, 'what has been gained' (*patti*) - with another being (Harvey, 2000). Accordingly, the ideas preached by the Buddha in the *Raṭṭhapālasutta* have been taken into account, as a central conception for theorization in this study: the key idea from the same sutta to be investigated is *uno loko atittho tanhadaso* (*The world is wanting, insatiable, the slave of craving.*)(Majjhima-nikāya, 1974).

Buddhist philosophy, by and large, offers a comprehensive set of insights into development communication, particularly by transcending the traditional notions of good and evil (Webster, 2005, p.211). On the other hand, Buddhists base their beliefs and practices not on the ethical dimension but on the ontological dimension by realizing that everything is impermanent and interdependent, and understanding that evil is entirely relative to good. Good and evil are inseparably related to one another. Therefore, what the Buddhist is concerned with is not how to overcome evil by good, but how to transcend the good-evil duality (Clooney, F. X. (2007). In this framework, the dichotomy of good and evil is rejected in favor of emphasizing the impermanent nature of the world (Story, 2011, p. 82). As this sutta emphasizes, the world is ontologically limited, implying that the pursuit of desire must also be limited. In capitalism, the pursuit of materialistic desires is viewed positively, in stark contrast to Buddhist core principles. Buddhism is a vibrant and dynamic engagement with the realities of desire, whereby it does indeed seek to help us be still and calm, but this is for the purpose of clarity of thought.

Furthermore, the still and calm is far from immediate and may require the exertion of significant energies to achieve. To seek to withdraw from all mental activity would be, it seems to me, to move away from a middle-way towards the desire for annihilation. As we shall see, the Buddhist spiritual renunciant may have renounced much, but the remaining inner-task is an arduous one, requiring of great energy and exertion (Webster, 2004). Consumerist and capitalistic communication systems, making the human being a cog in the consumer machine, actively promote desire, encouraging personal gratification through the acquisition of material goods. However, the Buddha identifies desire as one of the three poisons, which are seen as the root causes of suffering: desire, particularly when fueled by greed or ignorance, keeps human beings trapped in a cycle of craving and dissatisfaction (Benn, Robson, & Meeks, 2009).

When it comes to communication education and scholarship, the dominant frameworks often fail to sufficiently integrate alternative thought coming from knowledge systems like Buddhism. Buddhism, that accepts transitoriness of human existence, offers a balanced approach between extreme indulgence and extreme renunciation to avoid despair, laying a strong philosophical ground for communication (Ling, 2013, p.205) (Luthra, 1996, p.12). Once, the Buddha was residing near Varanasi, in the Deer Park at Isipatana. There, he addressed the group of five mendicants:

“Mendicants, these two extremes should not be cultivated by one who has gone forth. What two? Indulgence in sensual pleasures, which is low, crude, ordinary, ignoble, and pointless. And indulgence in self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and pointless. Avoiding these two extremes, the Realized One understood the middle way of practice, which gives vision and knowledge, and leads to peace, direct knowledge, awakening, and extinguishment.” (Sujato, 2018)

This approach emphasizes cultivating desires that align with ethical living and spiritual growth while recognizing that craving leads to suffering. This approach sustains a more empathetic, human-centered communication and pedagogy, in contrast to the uncritical dominance of Cartesian philosophy, which is rooted in mind-matter dualism, mechanistic views of both human and natural beings, and the linear progressivism of science and technology (Beauvais, Shukla & Richard, 2010). Western communication education has been built on values of independence and individualism, despite the reality that no being exists entirely independently or in isolation. Furthermore, Western communication theory has traditionally been speaker-centered, emphasizing persuasion while often overlooking the relational aspects of communication.

It is noteworthy that, in the contemporary age, the education systems of many non-Western countries have been shaped by centuries of colonial interventions, making communication education inevitably rooted in colonial logic. Colonial rule was never a direct dictate; some internal elites had to be included by way of a pact. The interaction between external elites, internal elites and majority populations played important roles. The internal elites had two basic options: accept or refuse a colonial pact. In many cases, this was not a choice. Several states were exposed to great power attempts at annexation, and most of them were forced into pacts (Rokkan, 2024). Non-Western epistemologies are profoundly linked to historical contexts, offering the potential for new, alternative theories. Particularly, Buddhist epistemology that can be figured out in canonical, commentarial, and pseudo-canonical texts, is rich in insights that can give birth to alternatives to dominant Eurocentric theories (Harvey, 2019). As epistemic imperialism continues to influence global thought, theorizing Buddhist communication has significant impact across a wide range of educational approaches, from teaching methods and theory to the social, political, and psychological development of learners.

### Literature Survey

In recent decades, rediscovering alternative theories of communication and their pedagogical approaches, driven by contemporary developments in global political, social, cultural, and economic arenas were on the increase. This warrants a deep exploration of classical canonical texts and traditions to conceptualize communication through different paradigms. According to Dissanayake (2007) “one of the productive strategies adopted by communication scholars who are interested in uncovering Asian theories of communication has been to focus on classical Asian concepts as inscribed in traditional and canonized texts”. In this context, as this paper examines, Buddhist communication theory and education—focused on mindfulness, ethical conduct, compassion, and interconnectedness as essential components for effective, meaningful, and transformative communication—offer a contrasting paradigm to Eurocentric communication models.

For example, the Buddha taught the four sublime states of mind, loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*), carry profound implications for communication (Nyanaponika, 2000, p. 332). These states of mind are identified as the *Brahma-viharas* in Buddhist canonical texts, and are considered sublime because they implicate the ideal conduct towards all living beings (*sattesu samma patipatti*) (Bartles-Smith & Tilakaratne, 2023, P. 432). The practice of the four Brahma-vihāras involves

radiating outwards the positive qualities associated with each, directing them first towards oneself, then to one's family, the local community, and eventually to all beings in the universe (Keown, D) They provide insights for addressing the challenges that arise in social interactions and communication with the 'Other'. In early Buddhism, *karuṇā* figures as the second of the four *Brahma-vihāras*, or 'Divine Abidings'. These are states of mind cultivated especially through the practice of meditation.

These qualities serve as powerful remedies for tension, peacemakers in social conflict, and healers of wounds caused by the struggles of existence. They dismantle social barriers, sustain harmonious communities, rekindle forgotten magnanimity, restore abandoned joy and hope, and promote human brotherhood in the face of egotism. Such epistemic fundamentals of Buddhism paves way to a mindful communication theory and practice; being fully present, aware, and intentional in all aspects of communication—whether speaking, listening, or observing (Seneviratne, 2018). A mindful communicator with Buddhist values involves with the 'Other' by perceiving a situation from another person's perspective beyond their own experience without judgement in a way that is attentive, empathetic, and free of distraction. If everybody is infinitely responsible for everybody else, it might seem that the much stressed asymmetry between the Other and the Same disappears-unless we stress that I (this unique I who speaks or writes here and now) am more responsible and, therefore, more guilty than all others. The 'constitutive Other' is not just an object of consciousness for Buddhism.

"Mindful communication" also has its roots in Buddhist teachings. It means to listen and speak with kindness and awareness toward others. To communicate effectively, such mindfulness mentality is required in communication. These concepts of care and being thoughtful of others are naturally embedded in the Japanese cultural identity mainly because of the "high-context" linguistic characteristic and religious influence of Shinto and Buddhism. For the improvement of mindful communication, origami can also be a useful tool as people discuss what to make, show finished pieces, and share thoughts through communication. It is said that origami is more effective when done while talking with others, in places such as nursing homes or classrooms, rather than doing it sitting quietly alone."

In a consumerist world, theorizing Buddhist mindful communication and teaching the same provides a counterbalance to the often overwhelming and superficial nature of modern consumer culture where constant acquisition, status symbols, and external validation are celebrated. As the central question of this study, philosophically substantiating the idea of the ontological limitation of the world in the *Raṭṭhapālasutta*, unlike traditional Western ontologies that focuses on essence rather than being, Buddhism deconstructs instrumental or objectivistic grounds for communication.

In the contemporary world, consumerism promotes endless consumption of material objects, encouraging people to seek immediate and tangible gratification, often driven by false needs and subconscious manipulation. With consumerist drives, people objectify and alienate themselves; privacy and intimacy are key parts of their life where social isolation with emotionally unfulfilling relationships (TenHouten, 2016). The private individuals in a regime of superproduction, in order for all the products to be sold, are deceived by the capitalist communication systems. In contrast, the Buddhist value system rejects self-oriented, self-directed, egocentric, autonomous, and self-contained life-style. Buddha says

*“Anupavado anupaghato  
patimokkhe ca samvaro  
mattannuta ca bhattasmim  
pantanca sayanasanam  
adhicitte ca ayogo  
etam buddhana sasanam.”*

Not to revile, not to do any harm, to practise restraint according to the Fundamental Instructions for the bhikkhus, to be moderate in taking food, to dwell in a secluded place, to devote oneself to higher concentration - this is the Teaching of the Buddhas. (Dhammapada, 1986)

According to Dhammapada Buddha has found moderate life in contrast to overconsumption or super consumption. The Buddhist concept of *śūnyatā* is rooted in non-duality and it denounces the hegemonic discourse that celebrates

material goods, viewing it as mere *māyā* (illusion) (Tilakaratne, 1993). Buddhist traditions find emptiness (*śūnyatā*) as the true nature of reality, where what is real neither arises nor diminishes. The term is used in both Pāli and Mahāyāna Buddhism, but differently. Śūnyata in Pāli Buddhism generally means, first, that this world of samsara is empty of value and should be negated in favor of nirvana; and second, that both samsāra and nirvana are empty of any self because all compounds are only clusters of dharma-element (Loy, 2019). This understanding, which transcends both good and evil, is free from the influence of desire.

Capitalist technology and technological rationality, along with administration, bureaucracy, the capitalist state, mass media, and consumerism, work as new modes of social control, leading to a decline in both freedom and democracy (Feenberg, Brey, & Misa, 2003). In this McDonaldized world, trapped in an ‘Iron Cage’, reason has transformed into an instrument of domination (Ritzer, 2004). It is clear that there is no way that we can think of society today in terms of an iron cage and, furthermore, it is almost impossible to envision a scenario—especially one involving the increasing prevalence and preeminence of consumption settings—in which the result is such an all-embracing phenomenon in the future (Ritzer, 2009). As Marcuse emphasizes, "It helps to organize, administer, and anticipate the powers that be, and to liquidate the 'power of Negativity' (Kellner, 1984, p. 231). The McDonaldized world finds reason as something that has aligned itself with reality: what is actual is deemed reasonable, even though what is reasonable has not yet manifested in actuality (Ritzer, 2004)

The capitalist project, in Marcusean terms, a ‘happy consciousness’ in which people could not comfortably or easily express discontentment with the world, and so would have extreme difficulty changing those aspects of the world that displeased them. Accordingly, this 'happy consciousness' involves feeding people cheap goods—junk food, plastic trinkets, fake jewelry, and low-quality products—giving the illusion of affluence. Another aspect is the trivialization of art and literature, reducing them to superficial entertainment—bouncy music, romance novels, action films, and salacious dance—designed to make people 'feel good' without engaging their intellect. Furthermore, it relies on a constant stream of ‘artificial’ crises—pointless wars, exaggerated threats, and sensationalized news filled with violence and brutality—to distract the public from real issues. In Buddhism to obtain the highest goals of life people need to cultivate gentleness (*mudu*), contentedness (*santussako*), satisfaction with material goods (*santrindiyo*), etc.

For the Buddha, happiness is free from desire. According to *Anana Sutta* of the *Anguttaranikaya*, four kinds of happiness can be identified:

1. *Atthi-sukha* – The happiness of ownership.
2. *Anavajja-sukha* – The happiness derived from wealth earned through right livelihood. This includes avoiding professions that cause harm, such as dealing in weapons, slaughtering animals and selling flesh, selling liquor, trafficking humans (e.g., slavery and prostitution), or dealing in poisons.
3. *Anaṇa-sukha*– The happiness derived from being free of debt.
4. *Bhoga-sukha* – The happiness of sharing one’s wealth. This form of happiness is a particularly important concept in Buddhism. (Ñānārāma, 1996)

The Buddhist idea on consumption and wealth is free from baneful—affluence (Ratnapāla, 1993). The production of excessive and harmful material wealth is always discouraged by Buddhist doctrinal assertions and the key insight taken for this study, *Ūno loko atittho tanhadaso* (The world is wanting, insatiable, the slave of craving.), rejects flooding humanity with worthless, shoddy goods (Hecker, 2009). As Buddha accepts, our existence is circumscribed and limited by the horizon of meaningful possibilities given by the world itself; human communication should also be finite, existential, ungrounded and dynamic (Miron, 2012). From a philosophical standpoint, this perspective denies the appeasement of unlimited desires.

Hence, the Buddhist philosophical views such as interdependent co-arising, impermanence, and non-self demands a deeply empathetic approach to communication. Two and a half millennia ago Gotama the Buddha put forth the doctrine of causality called *paṭicca samuppada*, or dependent co-arising. It is basic to the Buddhist view of life. Indeed in no other religion we know is a teaching of causation accorded so explicit and fundamental a role. In this vision of reality, the existence of both self and world are seen in terms of mutually conditioning psycho-physical events, which arise and pass away, interdependently. It is so comparable to the causal paradigm emerging in our own era that it can appear to us like an ancient, forgotten city, overgrown by jungle and awaiting rediscovery and restoration (Macy, 2010).

“With formation as condition, consciousness; with consciousness as a condition, mentality-materiality; with mentality-materiality; as a condition, the six fold sense base; with the six fold sense base as a condition, contact; with contact as a condition, feeling; feeling with as a condition.” (Sutta Nipāta, 1977, p.80)

From this perspective, a society that relies on spaces and institutions will allow for the public to negotiate matters of common concern in an empathetic way. It has implications for development communication, particularly in the case of environmental protection, especially as the future of humanity grows increasingly uncertain (Kane, 2016). A Buddhist theory of development communication is not only possible but essential, as it fundamentally and ontologically recognizes the finite nature of the world.

Buddhist doctrine is grounded on the radical finitude of human existence and the preconceptual lived world, where relentless growth is oxymoronic. This has an ethical allusion to human existence with finitude as human beings are ethically bound to its 'Other'. This Other is an unintergratable alterity as responsibility for the 'Other' will appear at all encounters (Friedlander, 2017). The following conversation between the king and the *Raṭṭhapāla* thero in the *Raṭṭhapālasutta* stands as a clear example for how Other is important in human communication.

“Great king, the Blessed One who knows and sees, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha has taught these four summaries of the teaching for recitation. It was after knowing and seeing and hearing these that I went forth from the lay life to homelessness. While these four summaries reflect key teachings of the Buddha, they are not found as such in early texts.

What four?

‘The world is unstable and swept away.’ This is the first summary.

‘The world has no shelter and no savior.’ This is the second summary.

‘The world has no owner—you must leave it all behind and pass on.’ This is the third summary.

‘The world is wanting, insatiable, the slave of craving.’ This is the fourth summary (Majjhima-nikāya, 1974).

In this conversation, the Buddha invites us to perceive our existential environment as something contingent (the world is unstable and swept away) and man's natural desires and propensities have to be quelled. From which ethical life arises, from the point of view of Buddha, ethical life is counted as a finite, existential, ungrounded dynamic. Buddha's idea on the contingent world is based on empathy rather than rational scrutiny, where 'capitalism's inherent drive to growth' is denounced (Woo, 2017). In this limited, decaying world human being's duty is to lead a much empathetic life. In contrast to Buddhist core values, growth of mass consumption engenders 'false needs' and social existence of the 'individual' are affirmed (Paterson, 2006). The communicative systems operating in the capitalist and consumerist societies produce a culture that robs people of their imagination and takes over their thinking for them as Horkheimer and Adorno argued (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997). A communication theory based on *Raṭṭhapālasutta* is against insidious manipulation in profit extraction and strikes a balance between material and spiritual progress free from 'inflaming of desire'. *Raṭṭhapālasutta* approach inveighs a web of relations between things that restricts a linear, vertical or top-down fashion communication that engenders passive audiences with a persuasive mission to increase consumption.

### **Major Research Problem:**

Exploring the application of Buddhist philosophical and communicative insights found in *Raṭṭhapālasutta* addressing in contemporary communicative systems driven by consumerism and capitalism.

### **Problem Statement:**

In the contemporary globalized world, capitalism and consumerism are deeply embedded in all aspects of human life including communication. They serve as dominant ideologies in modern societies and shape societal values. The consumerist ideology that gathered its momentum in the 20th and 21st centuries, encourages a relentless pursuit of wealth and power, often reinforcing the capitalist worldview. This study seeks to delve into figure out the potential for applying Buddhist philosophical insights, particularly from the *Raṭṭhapālasutta* of the Buddhist *Tripitaka*, in modern communicative contexts dominated by consumerism. The research problem throws a light on certain Buddhist teachings, such as detachment, non-attachment, and the concept of "right livelihood," in case of formulating alternative frameworks to challenge the dominant consumerist approach ingrained in communicative systems as a counter-narrative to the hegemonic capitalist-driven consumerist communication systems.

### **Research questions**

- How does the Buddhist perspective on attachment and desire challenge the consumerist-driven worldview that dominates contemporary communication and media?

- What elements of the *Raṭṭhapālasutta* can be applied to modern communicative contexts to counter the commodification of human experience and promote more holistic ways of interaction?
- Can Buddhist teachings provide practical tools for individuals and societies to navigate the pervasive capitalist ideology while fostering more conscious, equitable forms of communication?
- What role does Buddhist philosophy play in reimagining the relationship between individuals, society, and the environment in the age of rampant consumerism?

### Hypothesis

As the cardinal features of this culture were acquisition and consumption the communicative systems being used to achieve such goals in the contemporary world is problematic and the ancient wisdom of Buddhism has an alternative path to address the modern day value and moral issues; Buddha's idea of limited world highlights embeddedness in time and embeddedness in space. With the view that the world is limited, existence does not have totality. The communication will be based on existential understanding.

### Methodology

In this paper Critical Discourse Analysis has been used as the methodology. Certain terms, ideas and concepts found in Buddhist Sutta called *Raṭṭhapālasutta* of *Majjhima Nikāya* are analyzed to figure out communicative insights in contrast to the capitalistic and consumerist modern communicative practices. In this project values, beliefs and assumptions pertaining to communication in *Raṭṭhapālasutta* were rediscovered and interpreted in line with relevant social, political and historical contexts. The study attempt to reveal connotations and draw out the narratives in *Raṭṭhapālasutta* and they are critically evaluated with phenomenological philosophical insights to understand how communicative concepts function and meanings are created. Communicative ideas in Buddhism for instance, emphasis on receiver, understanding, empathy, symmetricity, mindfulness, perspectivism were rediscovered through the discourse analysis, limiting to *Raṭṭhapālasutta*.

### Research objectives

- Identifying the notion of equal respect and solidaristic responsibility for everybody in Buddhist key philosophy and applying it to modern world communicative systems and communicative pedagogy where post-metaphysical justification reigns.
- Identifying Buddhist pedagogical approaches in communication that are focused on mindful concentration and ethical practice within the learning context and environment.
- The rational reconstruction of traditional intuition based pre-theoretical and pre-scientific communication insights through Buddhist wisdom found in *Raṭṭhapālasutta*.
- Establishing a normative understanding of society which is driven by selfish and frivolous collecting of products, or economic materialism.

### Limitations

This study was limited to communicative aspects that can be found in *Raṭṭhapālasutta*. This particular Sutta is a prime example for Buddhist philosophy on sustainable consumption. The study was limited to *Raṭṭhapālasutta* as investigating more doctrines of Buddhism would divert the focus of the key question being addressed in the study.

### Discussion and results

In this study, it has been argued that communication theory and communication pedagogy developed on Western ethos and philosophical grounds are not comprehensive enough to grasp the codes, contexts, and complexities of communication that reflect and respond to the cultural ethos of non-Western peoples (Weiming, 2000). In this context, communication theory and education grounded in Buddhist principles secure significant importance, incorporating strong ethical profundities that emphasize mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom, based on interconnectedness. Mindfulness involves the skillful use of attention to both your inner and outer worlds. Since your brain learns mainly from what you attend to, mindfulness is the doorway to taking in good experiences and making them a part of yourself. (Hanson & Mendius, 2011). As far as modern Western thought is concerned, the philosophy of René Descartes has played a pivotal role in shaping its ideology (Mulready, 2023, p. 68). The Cartesian worldview has sustained the dualistic way of seeing the world. Separation of mind and body is a primary ground in Cartesian understanding, and it continues to shape modern Western philosophy. Hence, the world is grasped by the modern communication theories as a collection of distinct, separable components that can be understood through abstract analysis and rational thought.

“Thus any theory of communication, any dominant paradigm, any pervasively informing metaphilosophy, will have its limits, and its limitations. No alternative to a dominant paradigm would be perfectly limitless, perfectly unlimiting. Yet the dominant contemporary perspective is especially limiting of specifically human possibilities and criteria.” Lee Thayer (1979, p. 12)

Dissanayake (2007) observes that communication scholars in the West, for the most part, and in the East as well, posited the identities of the communicator and the receiver as if they were transparent, self-present, and unproblematic. These entities are relatively under-theorized in the domain of communication studies. In Buddhism *Anattā* concept sustains the idea of "no-self" – that no unchanging, permanent self or essence can be found in any phenomenon (Ergas & Todd, 2016). While often interpreted as a doctrine denying the existence of a self, *Anattā* is more accurately described as a strategy to attain non-attachment by recognizing everything as impermanent, while staying silent on the ultimate existence of an unchanging essence (Cassaniti, 2022). This philosophical stance throws a strong weight on the communication scholarship. This particular study is based on the ontology project of Buddha mentioned in *Raṭṭhapālasutta* from the *Majjhima Nikaya* in the *Pali Canon*. In line with Buddhist elaborations on the ontological finitude of the world, a Buddhist form of communication activity, theory or pedagogy would be anti-essential, anti-positivist and anti-individual (Prasad, 1991). The Buddha in *Raṭṭhapālasutta* characterizes the world as a place without shelter, without protector (*attano loko anabhissaro*), a place without ownership (*assako loko sabbam pahaya gamaniyam*), insufficient, insatiable, a slave to craving (*uno loko atittho tanhadaso*) (Jayatilleke, 2010). Hence, the key strategy of Buddhism is to dissolve ego to reach the pure awareness (*nibbāna*), that is free from self-existent essence. In Buddhist communication, the fluid nature of meaning and how it is contingent, or subject to change has to be well perceived.

Buddhist communication systems cannot be effectively understood through the objective cognitive standards found in traditional logic, particularly in capitalism and consumerism, which are confined to Weberian "iron cage.". The shared social structures and systems in a capitalist world are replete with clear and certain criteria to guide adjudication (Douglass, 2018). Most of the theoretical models of communication proposed in the West are mathematically oriented and mechanical. In contrast, a Buddhist approach to communication will help to perceive ethical life, its conditions, demands, and difficulties in a much authentic and pre-scientific way (Chapman, 2012). So, Buddhism finds communication as an activity with social profundities rather than a theoretical specialty. As Buddha claims in *Raṭṭhapālasutta*, the world has no shelter and no savior, empirical contingencies of the ethical field is well manifested. With an ultimate God, where finitude is denounced, as claimed by many faiths, absolutistic, transcendental moral systems are constituted and such a moral doctrine will be detached from a more worldly, finite, lived morality. Philosophical insights brought forward by the *Raṭṭhapālasutta* envisions that all experience and action must necessarily appear phenomenologically as happening to or originating from a finitude "I", not from a permanent, unchanging "self" or essence (Ihde, 1971).

The rationalized modes of authority in communication models in the capitalist and consumerist world is essentially reductive and based on rational calculations of efficiency and utility. No subjective values are counted in the capitalist systems as efficient components of their so-called "profit maximization". Various public and private bureaucracies that administer communication systems adopt ethical habits geared towards efficiency and utility maximization. Such capitalist and consumerist communication systems are locked in an iron cage of rational efficiency as compared to the Buddhist approach of communication that relies on a preconceptual lived world. Buddhist pedagogy for communication is a transformative educational approach that emphasizes mindfulness, ethical conduct, compassion, wisdom, etc. Hence, communication education demands an unconventional model of teaching different from the Western pedagogies that often prioritize knowledge transmission, standardization, and competition (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). A new paradigm of Buddhist communication pedagogy relies on self-awareness, moral responsibility, and the interconnectedness of all beings.

As Buddhism preached a doctrine that affirms the idea of absence of a monotheistic creator deity, is open for perspectivism that denies any sort of axioms leading to transcendent, unborn, and unconditioned ultimate realities (Story, 2012). Hence, in Buddhism introspection, self-reflectivity and intrapersonal communication is much appreciated as compared to the dualistic modes of capitalistic and scientific modes of communication. Given that absolutes have been denied, Buddhism emphasizes self-reflectivity and oriented on the receiver in the communication process.

## Conclusion

Communication theory and communication education that reflect the identities, traditions, and values of non-Western societies are a dire necessity in the multipolar world of the 21st century, where the cognitive empire of Eurocentrism is dwindling. In this context, Buddhism emerges as a comprehensive knowledge system that has evolved through a diverse range of intellectual currents. Despite the vicissitudes encountered over time, Buddhist

principles have been continuously reinterpreted, rethought, and reformulated, resulting in a vast body of knowledge from which many disciplines, including communication studies, can benefit.

This paper challenges the epistemic foundations of dominant communication theories and pedagogy, particularly in response to the expansion of capitalism and consumerist modes of communication. Modern industrial society has reduced individuals to a single, conformist dimension, suppressing their critical and creative faculties in favor of passive consumerism and obedience to the status quo. As a consequence of colonial encounters, the non-Western world faces the ongoing threat of the "colonization of the mind," whereby Western epistemic violence has long dismissed, devalued, and actively suppressed non-Western knowledge systems. Unearthing, rediscovering, and theorizing Buddhist knowledge in the modern context represents an epistemic transformation.

In contrast to the anthropocentric, individualistic, efficiency-oriented, and positivistic theories of communication rooted in Western value systems, Buddhist communication emphasizes mindfulness, compassion, and non-reactivity. In today's consumerist world, it offers a pathway to transcend the ego and cultivate wisdom. In philosophizing communication theory through a Buddhist lens, this paper draws upon the ontological claims of the Buddha as articulated in the *Raṭṭhapālasutta*.

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