Spiritual Practices in The Era of Smartphones & Social Networking: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Nowadays, it is commonly observed that with the advancement of mobile phones, there is an increase in the number of mobile phone users, especially young adults or adolescents. They are using mobile phones very frequently for day to day activities. Keeping in view this thing, it is important to study the relationship between spiritual practices and smartphone & social networking addiction among undergraduate students. The paper will explore the coexistence of spiritual practice and social media plus smartphone usage of adolescent students. The study was conducted on a sample of 110 adolescent students of Sri Sri University Cuttack. Mobile Phone Addiction Scale developed by Dr. A. Velayudhan and Dr. S. Srividya and Social Networking Addiction Scale by Dr. Nivedita Baungoli were used for data collection. The researcher selected the sample of 110 youth out of which, 55 were non-spiritual practitioners and 55 were spiritual practitioners. The main findings indicated it is very intriguing to discover that student that is in spiritual practices have shown a higher level of addiction in relation to students who do not practice. This could be because the students who practice any form of spiritual practices are having more energy thus, if not channelize properly it may lead to mobile or social networking addiction.

Key Words: Mobile phone addiction, Social Networking Addiction, Yogic Practices, Mental Health

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Introduction:

Nowadays our personal life is highly dependent on the technological tools that we have developed. Technology has advanced with years and it has changed the way we purchase products, the way we live, the way we communicate, the way we travel, the way we learn and the way we live! Technological development has transformed our relationship with the world. When we talk about the mobile phone the type of mobile phones we had in the past are no longer on demand in this century, the demands of mobile phone users have changed greatly.

Now people demand simplicity and more functionality, which has forced mobile phone manufactures to develop computer minded smartphones, which are so easy to use, but also, they come with more functionality compared to the type of mobile phones we used to have in the past. Simplicity in terms of functionality here

implies that the phones have been developed to mimic our everyday tasks and increase human productivity. Whatever personal capacity was previously used for particular tasks, is now expected to be carried out by a technological device. Hence it is required to be as 'smart' like us and smarter than us! Since it is primarily communication that is carried out through smartphones, social networking has come to enable mass communication at the click of a button. We are now able to almost live larger and more widespread social lives through these online social networks. It is interesting to imagine the effect of such a platform on our sense of self, community, groups and social relationships.

Social comparison is an instrumental piece in explaining how social media may influence people's perceptions of their body image and their self-esteem. Most individuals are compelled to evaluate themselves by comparing their abilities and body image with others. Social networking and virtual reality give a new "chance" to be "better" and this enhances the self-esteemed and social interaction.

Just as other vices give us an addictive 'high', social media networking elevates our sense of self, and this too can be addictive! Another aspect that social media can influence is the sense of belongingness. The sense of belongingness may increase or decrease based on social media use. For instance, if one has many friends or followers on social media, he or she might have a greater sense of belongingness. On the other hand, people may feel a "disconnection from society by spending more time perusing others' profiles on Facebook" (Schufreider, 2015). Having an increased sense of belongingness is incredibly important because humans are social beings. The level of support and belongingness one has in life may be a buffer to negative life events or stressful situations. Schufreider (2015), states high levels of connectedness help "individuals manage their emotions…facilitate keeping the individual's overwhelming negative feelings at bay" and "can also lessen one's low level of self-esteem". All of these aspects assist an individual to have a greater quality of life. Having a decreased sense of belongingness may contribute to a poor self-esteem. Also, people receive social recognition when they get "likes" or "comments" on their pictures or statuses; "if users receive 'likes' or 'comments' from high status 'friends' this may result in boosts in self-esteem and feelings of well-being" (Blease, 2015).

Recently, smartphone addiction has emerged as a significant problem among users. Smartphone users can access information and entertainment content almost everywhere whenever they want to. This leads to a highly dependent behavior where we users begin to depend on the phone for menial tasks and information. The smarter the phone, the less smart the user? This could lead to addiction in the form of frequent or habitual usage and highly dependent patterns. Relying on our own memory, intellectual and communicative skill fades into the backdrop while smartphone usage takes precedence. People now tend to be less attentive to face to face company and prefer indulging in virtual socialization via the social media network.

Mobile Addiction

In one of the earliest relevant studies, Bianchi and Phillips (2005) argued that the problem of mobile phone use may be a symptom of an impulse control deficit or depression. Addressing the underlying problem as well as inappropriate mobile phone use, they used some dependent variables to predict mobile phone addiction, such as reported time per week spent simply using the device problem use, reported the percentage of use socially based, and reported the percentage of business-based use. Other variables were also considered including the reported percentage of use in other features. The results indicated that the technological addictions offer an appropriate starting point for a consideration of problem mobile phone use. The results also revealed that young people, in particular, appear to be susceptible to high use and problem use. They were the heaviest users of the SMS function and other features of mobile phones. Ross (2011)24 found that three characteristics of mobile phone addiction, the first is that people who are addicted to mobile phone always keep their mobile phones on. The second is that they tend to use their mobile phones even when they have a land-line phone at home. Finally, they normally are confronted with financial and social difficulties due to their excessive mobile phone use. A wide range of other negative consequences from mobile phone addiction among consumers included financial issues, damaged relationships, emotional stress, and falling literacy.

Srivastava and Tiwari (2013) investigated that the effects of the excess use of cell phone on adolescent's mental health and quality of life. They randomly selected 100 male students from Uttar Pradesh, India. They found that limited users of a cell phone have better mental health and quality of life than unlimited users of a cell phone. Acharya, (2013) examined the health effects of cell phones usage amongst students pursuing professional courses in colleges. College students of both sexes in the age group 17-23 years from urban and rural backgrounds were selected at random (those using cell phones). The result showed that headache was to be the commonest symptoms followed by irritability/anger. Other common mental symptoms included lack of concentration and poor academic performance, insomnia, anxiety etc. Among physical symptoms- body aches, eye strain, the digital thumb was found to be frequently in both sexes.

Social Networking Addiction

It would be appropriate first to mention Internet addiction before elaborating on social media addiction. Internet addiction is a psychological disorder Ivan Goldberg developed in 1995. This diagnosis of the disorder is inspired by the first pathological gambling diagnosis given by the American Psychiatric Association. The association defines sub-categories of this addiction. Pornography, enthusiastic and unreasonable passion for games, excessive consumption of time on social networking sites or websites, and online shopping craze are among these sub-categories. The Internet is not an addiction source on its own. Addiction is defined as the excessive use of the Internet that it begins to ruin daily, social and working life. Addiction lies in an idea or an action that is previously tried, has led to a certain satisfaction, and anticipated to provide new fulfillment.

Smartphone & Social Networking Addiction

Whang, Lee, and Chang (2003) defined internet addiction as "an impulse-control disorder with no involvement of an intoxicant; therefore, it is akin to pathological gambling". Online mobile phone or smartphone addiction is closely related to internet addictions because the features are similar. Internet addiction mostly begins with habits such as the checking habit; digital addictions are often the result of using habits to relieve pain or escape from reality. Therefore, there is frequently an undesirable situation with certain habits that become problematic, such as playing games, visiting social media, opening WhatsApp, etc. Smartphone usage can lead to addicted behavior (Wood and Neal, 2007; La Rose and Eastin, 2004). The relationship between people and their smartphone is much more developed than expected compared to the fixed telephone and even with their desktop or laptop computer. This is particularly true of youth, as they spend much time with and on their smartphones.

Another important factor that plays an important role in smartphone addiction but especially in social media addiction is that people receive social recognition when they get "likes" or "comments" on their pictures or statuses; "if users receive 'likes' or 'comments' from high status 'friends' this may result in boosts in self-esteem and feelings of well-being" (Blease, 2015). Like drugs and alcohol alter the way we perceive the world and ourselves and hence gives us a 'high' or 'feel good' factor; similarly, social networking gives us a chance to project a virtual and altered sense of self which can give us its own high. This feeling of being "high" on self-image can trigger addictive behaviors.

Importance of Spiritual Practices

Who am I? Where have I come from? And where am I going? These three questions open doors to spiritual self-discovery. We often get so caught up in material life that we begin to identify with our possessions, our jobs, our roles in relationships and now also with our virtual profiles and status online. Whether we become aware of it or not, we often think of ourselves in direct relationship to our homes, our cars, our clothes, our partners, our families, jobs and the image we have created of ourselves to present to the world. Another way to look at it is that we unconsciously think, "I am my job. I am good because I have a good house. I am enviable because I drive a good car. I am a spouse, etc." And youth today go so far as to think "I am successful because I have many friends on facebook" or "Whatever I say is okay because I have hundreds of followers on Instagram" But what happens when we lose these things? We lose our imagined identity and we no longer know who we really are.

Ancient Indian wisdom traditions used a practice of inquiry as a way to discover who we really are. That is, the part of us which is true, pervasive and never changing. It's a practice of self-discovery to help arrive at the spiritual core of one's being. A guru (Sanskrit for teacher) would encourage students to ask, "Am I my body?" They were expected to answer "neti, neti." "Not that. Not that." My body changes perpetually and eventually will be shed like an old dress or a worn pair of jeans. So, I cannot be the body. "Am I the mind?" My mind will lose its sharpness and its ability to think clearly. I may even lose my mind, so I am not the mind. Then who am I? This spiritual inquiry is the highest need once we transcend our basic and social needs. We begin to move towards the Self and attempt to experience a glimpse of our infinite nature. "Experiencing the infinite is the highest aim in life". The techniques and practices to glimpse, experience and harness this infinite nature, as spiritual inquiry and the highest need of self-actualization, are passed on to us generation after generation through a rich lineage of Gurus. This particular paper looks at 3 such practices followed by the Art of Living Tradition of yoga and spiritual practice:

Padma Sadhana

Usually when one thinks of a lotus, what comes to mind? A fully blossomed flower, where each petal is opening up to the sky. Now observe where does the lotus originate from? Mud. Yet, the lotus remains unstained and untouched by the pond. Imagine if we could also be like the lotus flower - untouched by day-to-day events and blossom with love and joy. Padma Sadhana is a practice that could make such blossoming possible. Designed by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, this beautiful yoga practice comprises a simple sequence of yoga postures, Nadi Shodhan breathing technique (pranayama), and meditation. 'Padma' means lotus and 'Sadhana' is your effort. This practice should, therefore, be as effortless and light as a lotus. Sadhana is the gentle nudge to get on to the mat and Padma is the unfurling of your potential, layer by layer. Together, Padma Sadhana can help you blossom from within through the practice of yoga postures.

Sudarshan Kriya

Breathing is the first act of life. Within the breath is the unexplored secret of life. Sudarshan Kriya is a powerful yet simple rhythmic breathing technique that incorporates specific natural rhythms of the breath, harmonizing the body, mind, and emotions. The technique eliminates stress, fatigue and negative emotions such as anger, frustration, and depression, leaving the mind calm, focused and the body energized, completely relaxed.
Sudarshan Kriya brings a profound depth to life, unraveling its mysteries. It's a spiritual breakthrough giving the experience of a glimpse of infinity. Sudarshan Kriya is the unrevealed breathing process to health, happiness, peace and an insight of life beyond! Day follows night, seasons come and go, a tree sheds it old leaves to get new ones ~ This is Nature's rhythm.

Now, being a part of nature, there is a by-default rhythm within us - the biological rhythm of the body, mind, and emotion. When stress or illness throws these biological rhythms out of order, we experience discomfort, discontent, and feel upset and unhappy. Sudarshan Kriya harmonizes the rhythms of the body, emotions and puts them back in tune with the rhythms of nature. Being in rhythm, we feel good about ourselves, love flows naturally in all relationships.

Sahaj Samadhi Meditation

'Sahaj' is a Sanskrit word that means natural or effortless. 'Samadhi' is a deep, blissful, meditative state. 'Sahaj Samadhi Meditation' is a natural, effortless system of meditation. The Sahaj Samadhi program teaches you a meditation technique that alleviates the practitioner from stress-related problems, deeply relaxes the mind and rejuvenates the system. Regular practice of the technique can transform the quality of one's life, by culturing the system to maintain the peace, energy and expanded awareness throughout the day. These meditation techniques combined with yogic practices can ensure good health and a calm mind. Meditation allows the conscious mind to settle deeply in the Self, giving it rest. When the mind settles down, it lets go of all tension,

making one healthy and focused. The participant is taught to use a simple sound mentally which allows the mind to settle down and go within. When the mind and nervous system are allowed to repose a few moments in the profound silence, the blocks that clog the system and our progress gradually dissolve.

Spiritual Practices effects on addiction

Spirituality in health and healing continues to be recognized as a core element of an individual's care plan, specifically in the field of integrative medicine and mind-body medicine. Bell, et al (2002)38 identified physical, psychosocial, emotional, and spiritual well-being as the whole-person approach to achieve optimal health and discuss the emergence of integrative medicine as a new primary care model. As functional medicine becomes more prevalent and defined in medicine, the opportunity becomes viable for the patient-provider encounter to become customized. It also can become personalized through a holistic approach of integrative medicine and mind-body medicine.

A study conducted by O'Dell O Johnson39, entitled "A Novel Approach to Alternative Integral Practices in African American Communities Challenged with Substance Abuse," demonstrates the helpfulness of integrating mindfulness breathing and yoga practices in conjunction with the 12-Step Program to support inner-city drug users. The study determined that addiction relapse is a never-ending cycle because of the high disparity and disconnection of mind, body, and spirit. The implementation of mindfulness yoga training served to complement existing drug treatment methods by integrating holistic treatments in at-risk African American at the Hoover Treatment Center in Little Rock, Arkansas. Johnson, himself who is a recovering addict, piloted the program, which integrated meditation, yoga, and reiki and nutritional alternatives.

    a. His findings support other key research that yoga practices can help addicts maintain sobriety. Johnson asserts that yoga forces the mind and body to work holistically together in unity and harmony.
    b. Yoga appears to help moderate stress response systems by decreasing heart rate, lowering blood pressure and improving respiratory systems.

Other research confirms the findings that yoga has been found to increase levels of gamma-aminobutyric acid, (GABA) an amino acid which acts as an inhibitory neurotransmitter inhibiting nerve transmission in the brain. Individuals who suffer from depression and anxiety generally have low levels of GABA. Yoga practice has shown to improve these thalamic GABA levels. This is an important contribution to studies on alternative approaches to prescribing pharmacological agents in the treatment of mood disorders, anxiety, and depression, which are often linked to addiction40.

A University of Utah case study (2008) of 12 yoga practitioners, 14 fibromyalgia sufferers, and 16 healthy non-yoga volunteers confirms these findings. The study concluded that both the volunteer and fibromyalgia groups felt pain at lower pressure levels than the yoga group, demonstrating that the yoga practitioners held the highest threshold for pain. This research highlights the therapeutic benefits of yoga as a stress, regulator as well as yoga's ability to reduce physical pain variables and emotional suffering. In addition, studies have shown that regular yoga practice can, moreover, reduce cravings associated with addiction by reducing sympathetic nervous system (SNS) activity and activating parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) activity41.

One study concluded that Sudarshan Kriya Yoga, a method of controlled cyclical breathing, which moves from slow to rapid inhalation/ exhalation, offers relief from alcohol dependency42. At a detoxification program in Bangalore, India, 60 alcohol-addicted men were randomly enrolled in a three-week Sudarshan Kriya yoga practice or a standard treatment program. Sudarshan Kriya yoga practitioners reported a 75 percent reduction of depression and lower levels of cortisol and corticotrophin cortisol. While the standard treatment group also reported, a 60 percent drop in the standard treatment group, stress levels in the control group remained the same. The Bangalore case study suggests that yogic breathing is a beneficial treatment for addicts in the early stages of recovery. Other research confirms that a heated environment constitutes a further complementary therapy for addiction and depression. According to Maren Nyer, director of Yoga Research in MGH

Depression and Clinical Research Program and professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, hot yoga may lead to the regulation and management of "physiological functions that often contribute to the reversal of a depressed state"43. Both Traditional and hot yoga practices combine mindfulness, postures, breathing, and meditation to focus attention on holistic alignment with the physical, emotional, and spiritual body. The mindfulness skills developed in yoga "can target clinically relevant measures of psychological, biological, and behavioral functioning, all of which are implicated in the pathophysiology of yoga"44.

While there are many forms of yoga, Vinyasa, Hatha, Ashtanga, Iyengar, to name a few, hot yoga takes place in a heated environment with temperatures averaging 105 Fahrenheit. According to Maurizio Fava, MD, and director of the MGH Depression Clinical and Research Program at Harvard Medical School," while research is still underway, the benefits of a "heated environment may enhance the antidepressant effects of this form of yoga"45.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES
Aim
The aim of this research survey is to explore the relationship between spiritual practices and mobile & social networking addiction among undergraduate students of Sri Sri University.

Objectives
In addition to dive deep into this relationship, I am hoping to:

- Gauge the behavior patterns of undergraduate students towards social media and mobile
- Discover their inclination towards spiritual practices.
- To explore the correlation, if any, between spiritual practice and mobile & social networking patterns.

Hypothesis
- A negative correlation between spiritual practice and mobile & social networking addiction
- Students who are more inclined toward spiritual practice are more introspected and less prone to addictive behaviors toward mobile and social media platforms
- Students more addicted to a mobile phone are not incline or do not practice spiritual practices
- Spiritual practices have a positive impact on mobile and social networking behaviors

Null Hypothesis
- Spiritual practices and mobile & social networking addiction do not have any correlation
- Mobile & Social Networking addiction is not impacted by spiritual practices

Methodology
Research Design
A survey research design was used to assess mobile phone addiction & social networking addiction.

Sample
The sample comprised of 110 undergraduate students between 18 to 20 years old, consisting of both male (n=55) and female (n=55). The sample consisted of first-year students of B.A.Yogic Sciences, B.B.A, B.COM, B.Sc Agriculture of Sri Sri University and BBA LLB of the National Law University of Odisha.

TOOLS USED:
Following assessment measures were used in the present study:
    I.   Mobile Phone Addiction Scale; Dr. A. Velayudhan and Dr. S. Srividya – PrasadPsyco
   II.   Social Networking Addiction Scale; Dr. Nivedita Baungoli – PrasadPsyco.

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES FOR DATA ANALYSIS:
For analysis and extraction of results, SPSS software has been used. The statistical techniques used in this study for analysis are: Mean, S.D. and t-test).

Results and Analysis

The current survey study was conducted to compare spiritual practices and smartphone addiction and social networking addiction scale of undergraduate students. 55 students who are not spiritual practitioners and 55 students who practice any form of spiritual practice where included in the study. The obtained data were subject to statistical analysis using SPSS. In order to segregate the data properly, the simple descriptive analysis was used, i.e. mean, standard deviation and percentage. The obtained data were further analyzed using independent samples t-test to compare and correlate spiritual and non-spiritual practitioner with MPAS and SNAS.

TABLE-1.1: Comparisons Between Socio-Demographic Variables (Age, Gender Course) And MPAS (N=55)

Variable / Group	MPAS (n=55) Mean + SD
Age (in years)	
18	95.1 + 14.4
19	95.3 + 23
20	91 + 11.2
Gender	
Male	97.4 + 16.2
Female	91.7 + 17.2
Courses	
BBA	96.4 + 18
BCOM	91.4 + 7.3
BBA LLB	81.6 + 11.3
BSC. AGR	97.7 + 18.7

Table 1.1, shows a comparison of age, gender, and a course **on Mobile phone addiction scale (MPAS).** The scores were comparable on these variables. The mean of MPAS of students aged 18 was 95.1 (S.D =14.4), whereas the mean of student aged 19 was 95.3 (S.D = 23), and the mean of students aged 20 was 91 (S.D = 11.2). There was a slight significant difference between male and female, where it shows that the male has a mean of 97.4 (S.D =16.2) and female 91.7 (S.D = 17.2). In the other hand, there was a difference between courses were the mean of BBA was 96.4 (S.D = 18), BCOM 91.4 (S.D = 7.3), BBA LLB 81.6 (S.D = 11.3) and BSC. AGR 97.7 (S.D = 18.7).

TABLE-1.2: Comparisons Between Socio-Demographic Variables (Age, Gender Course) And SNAS (N=55)

Variable / Group	SNAS (n=55) Mean + SD
Age (in years)	
18	87.3 + 14.2
19	86.9 + 15.2
20	89 + 13.4
Gender	
Male	87.9 + 15
Female	87 + 13.4
Courses	
BBA	92.2 + 14
BCOM	81.9 + 12.1
BBA LLB	84.5 + 9.9
BSC. AGR	85.7 + 16

Table 1.2, shows a comparison of age, gender and course across SNAS – Social Networking Addiction Scale. The scores were comparable on these variables. The mean of SNAS of students aged 18 was 87.3 (S.D =14.2), whereas the mean of student aged 19 was 86.9 (S.D = 15.2), and the mean of students aged 20 was 89 (S.D = 13.4). There was no significant difference between male and female. In the other hand, there was a slight difference between courses were the mean of BBA was 92.2 (S.D = 14), BCOM 81.9 (S.D = 12.1), BBA LLB 84.5 (S.D = 9.9) and BSC. AGR 85.7 (S.D = 16).

Experimental Variables

Table 3.1

Variable Group	Non-spiritual Practitioners (n=55) Mean + SD	Spiritual Practitioners (n=55) Mean + SD	F	P
MPAS	87.6 + 14.1	94.7 + 18.4	-.174	.172
SNAS	87.2 + 14.5	87.6 + 14.1	-.187	.891

Table 3.1, shows a comparison of the two scales' scores between the non-spiritual practitioners and spiritual practitioners.

The non-spiritual practitioners in the group found to be lower in MPAS with the mean of 87.6 (SD=3.51) compared to spiritual practitioners group with the range of 94.7 (SD=18.4). The non-spiritual practitioner's group found to be insignificantly lower in SNAS with the range of 87.2 (SD=14.5) compared to spiritual practitioners group with the range of 87.6 (SD=14.1) Both the differences were statistically not significant.

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Discussion of Results

Socio-demographic characteristics (Table, 1.1 and 1.2)

In this study, the two scales (MPAS and SNAS) were compared on important socio-demographic variables like age, gender, and courses. None of the findings were statistically significant because the mean of the socio-demographic variables was not so relevantly high in a relationship with the scale score standards. The mean age was slightly higher in undergraduate students of BBA course 92.2 + 14 compared to other courses like BCOM 81.9 + 12.1. The mean of spiritual practitioners was higher in MPAS 94.7 + 18.4 compared to non-spiritual practitioners 87.6 + 14.1, but the t-test shows that the correlation is not statistically significant (.172). Finally, it is very intriguing to discover that student that is in spiritual practices have shown a higher level of

addiction in relation to students who do not practice. In my opinion, this could be because the students who practice any form of spiritual practices are having more energy thus, if not channelize properly it may lead to mobile or social networking addiction. But, this finding is not statistically significant because the P-value is .172.

Conclusion

o   There is a moderate level of addiction between age groups (18-20) in the Universities
o   There is a significant difference in level of addiction between courses
o   Students attending courses like BBA which have more free time are more inclined towards mobile addiction
o   Busier students and with a higher level of academics like BBA LLB in NLUO, hence have less free time, are not addicted to either Mobile or Social Networking
o   A student that is in spiritual practices might be more addicted because of the higher level of energy not channelized properly

Limitations

•   The study seeks to provide a helicopter view of the field reality and hence interference drawn do not provide conclusive evidence to any correlation in particular albeit they aid us in spotting an underlying trend.
•   The findings are based entirely upon the research conducted in Sri Sri University and NLUO and hence may not be applied directly to a much larger population on counts of socio-cultural diversity and contextual factors.
•   With a larger sample size spread across countries, one might arrive at results with higher confidence levels.
•   Such a survey needs to be undertaken periodically to gauge the exact student behavior that they may keep changing with time.
•   Due to constraints of time, certain topics have not been touched upon at all during the research study while some of them have been explored in a limited manner. An in-depth analysis may be further taken up in each of the sub-topics covered.

Future Perspective

Our study, being of an exploratory and interpretive nature, raises a number of opportunities for future research, both in terms of theory development, concept validation and intervention. More research will, in fact, be necessary to refine and further elaborate our novel findings. First, while have generated a number of new useful conceptual categories, given the in-depth sampling strategy focused on exploring the correlation of spiritual practices and mobile phone and social networking addiction, very little can be said of the nature of information work of a larger population. My study could thus be extended in search of statistical, rather than analytical, generalisability, as we have sought here. In addition, an in-depth intervention can be applied in future studies where non-spiritual practitioners can be initiated in spiritual practices and the same scales can be scored before and after a period of intervention.

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