

Becoming Oneself in the Age of Polycrisis and Digital Alienation: A Reinterpretation of Jacques Attali's Devenir Soi through a Buddhist Perspective

Marc Pilkington^{1*}

¹ Université Bourgogne Europe, France

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the relevance of Jacques Attali's concept of *devenir soi* (becoming oneself) in responding to global social transformations during the 2015–2025 period. This inquiry is important because the last decade has been marked by interconnected crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, climate change, and the rise of digital alienation that has influenced individual processes of self-formation. The study employs a qualitative approach using a *critical philosophical inquiry* design and a critical literature review method. The data consist of Jacques Attali's works, literature on Buddhist philosophy, and contemporary studies on *polycrisis* and social media. The findings indicate that the challenge of becoming oneself in 2025 is significantly more complex than it was in 2015. These challenges emerge in two primary dimensions: external obstacles in the form of pandemics, geopolitical conflicts, and climate change that generate various forms of structural alienation, and internal obstacles in the form of digital identity performativity, technological addiction, attention fragmentation, and dependence on external validation. The study further finds that key Buddhist principles, particularly *pratīyasamutpāda* (interdependence), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *anātman* (non-self), provide relevant ethical and psychological frameworks for responding to these forms of alienation. The implications of this study suggest that self-realization in the age of *polycrisis* requires relational awareness, ethical responsibility, and reflective capacity rather than individual freedom alone. The originality of this study lies in its critical reinterpretation of *devenir soi* through a synthesis of Jacques Attali's thought and

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Devenir Soi; Polycrisis; Digital Alienation; Self-Realization; Buddhism; Social Media.

Article History:

Received 4th January, 2026

Revised 28th April 2026

Accepted 25th May, 2026

Published 29th June, 2026

How to Cite in APA Style:

Pilkington, M. (2026).
Becoming Oneself in the Age
of Polycrisis and Digital
Alienation: A
Reinterpretation of Jacques
Attali's Devenir Soi through a
Buddhist Perspective.
*Smaratungga: Journal of
Education and Buddhist
Studies*, 6(1), 41-62. doi:
10.53417/sjebss.v6i1.198

*Corresponding author: Marc Pilkington email address: Marc.Pilkington@u-bourgogne.fr
Published by Center of Research and Publication of Smaratungga Buddhist Collage

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC 4.0
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)
<https://doi.org/10.53417/sjebss.v6i1.198>

Buddhist philosophy to explain self-realization in the context of contemporary *polycrisis* and digital alienation.

Introduction

The decade from 2015 to 2025 has been characterized by a series of interconnected global crises that many social scientists describe as a polycrisis. The COVID-19 pandemic, prolonged geopolitical conflicts, accelerating climate change, and massive digital transformation have reshaped how individuals understand themselves, build social relationships, and envision the future. The World Health Organization (2022) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant increase in anxiety and depression worldwide, with rates rising by more than 25% during the early years of the pandemic. At the same time, climate reports have documented increasing frequencies of extreme heatwaves, floods, wildfires, and ecological disasters that have contributed to the emergence of eco-anxiety among various social groups (Hickman, 2025). These developments indicate that contemporary individuals live in increasingly unstable social environments marked by uncertainty and substantial psychological pressure.

In addition to these external crises, digital technologies have introduced new challenges to identity formation. The growing intensity of social media use has transformed social space into an arena of continuous identity performance (Stokes & Price, 2017). Digital platforms encourage individuals to present carefully curated versions of themselves while evaluating their worth through quantitative indicators such as followers, likes, and engagement metrics (Azhar, Wel, & Ab Hamid, 2025). These conditions contribute to growing mental health concerns, fragmented attention, digital dependency, and crises of authenticity that have become central topics in contemporary sociological, psychological, and philosophical discussions.

These developments become particularly relevant when examined through Jacques Attali's concept of *Devenir Soi*, which positions the process of "becoming oneself" as a central project of modern humanity. Attali argues that individuals must liberate themselves from forms of social alienation and institutional dependency in order to realize their authentic potential (Attali, 2014). However, the profound social transformations that have occurred over the past decade raise important questions regarding the continued relevance of this framework when individuals must navigate global polycrises, expanding digital capitalism, and increasingly complex forms of psychological alienation that were not fully anticipated in Attali's original context.

Studies on self-realization and identity formation have developed along several major trajectories. First, research focusing on Jacques Attali's thought and the concept of *devenir soi* generally emphasizes individual freedom, personal responsibility, and human capacity for self-development amid social change (Pilkington, 2015; Sen, 1999). This body of literature highlights individual

autonomy as a prerequisite for self-realization. However, these studies generally assume that individuals possess sufficient capacity to determine the direction of their own lives.

Second, research on digital alienation and social media has expanded rapidly over the past decade. Numerous studies have demonstrated that social media contributes to identity performativity, digital dependency, attention crises, and increasing feelings of anxiety and inauthenticity in everyday life (Eyal, 2014; Haidt, 2024; Turkle, 2015). Although these studies successfully explain the psychological consequences of digital technologies, they rarely connect these phenomena to broader philosophical questions concerning self-discovery and self-realization as discussed within existential traditions or Attali's framework.

Third, studies employing Buddhist perspectives have emphasized the concepts of *pratītyasamutpāda* (interdependence), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *anātman* (non-self) as ethical and spiritual foundations for responding to modern forms of suffering (Hanh, 1998; Harvey, 2013; Loy, 2018). These studies demonstrate the relevance of Buddhism in addressing contemporary psychological crises. Nevertheless, most of them have not specifically connected Buddhist principles to the challenges of self-realization within the context of post-2015 global polycrisis and digital alienation.

This literature review reveals an important research gap. Few studies have simultaneously examined the relationship between global polycrisis, digital alienation, and Jacques Attali's concept of *devenir soi* while also evaluating the relevance of Buddhist perspectives as alternative frameworks for understanding self-realization in contemporary society. Most existing studies examine these issues separately and therefore fail to provide a comprehensive explanation of the challenges individuals face in their efforts to become themselves in the contemporary era.

This study aims to analyze how global crises and digital transformation during the 2015–2025 period have complicated the process of self-realization as conceptualized by Jacques Attali. Specifically, the study investigates external obstacles in the form of pandemics, geopolitical conflicts, and climate change; internal obstacles in the form of digital alienation, social media addiction, and mental health crises; and the contribution of Buddhist principles as a conceptual framework for responding to these challenges.

This article argues that becoming oneself in 2025 is considerably more complex than it was a decade earlier because individuals now confront not only increasingly unstable social structures but also forms of digital alienation that operate at psychological and existential levels. The findings indicate that Attali's concept of *devenir soi* requires reinterpretation through a Buddhist perspective. While Attali emphasizes freedom and self-actualization as pathways to liberation, this study demonstrates that self-realization in the age of polycrisis requires

recognition of interdependence, the cultivation of compassion, and the relinquishment of attachment to socially and digitally constructed forms of ego. Consequently, this study not only confirms aspects of Attali's argument concerning liberation from alienation but also expands and revises its ontological assumptions about the self through a synthesis that may be described as "Buddhist Liberalism."

Method

This study focuses on the process of self-realization within the context of global social transformations during the 2015–2025 period. The unit of analysis is the conceptual construction of Jacques Attali's idea of *devenir soi* and its relevance in explaining the challenges of self-formation in the age of polycrisis and digital alienation. The study examines a range of external obstacles, including pandemics, geopolitical conflicts, and climate change, as well as internal obstacles related to social media, mental health, identity performativity, and self-fragmentation. In addition, the study analyzes key concepts in Buddhist philosophy as interpretive frameworks for understanding and formulating responses to these challenges.

The study employs a qualitative approach using a critical philosophical inquiry design combined with a hermeneutic-comparative approach (Burbules & Warnick, 2012). The study adopts this design because its objective is not to measure statistical relationships among variables but rather to understand, interpret, and critically evaluate the relevance of the concept of *devenir soi* within the context of contemporary social change. The hermeneutic approach enables the interpretation of ideas found in Jacques Attali's thought and Buddhist philosophy, while the comparative approach facilitates the examination of the ontological and ethical assumptions that underlie both perspectives in explaining the process of self-realization.

The study relies entirely on secondary data sources. These sources include Jacques Attali's major works, particularly *Devenir Soi* (2014), peer-reviewed journal articles, books on Buddhist philosophy, literature on social media and mental health, and scholarly publications addressing polycrisis, digital alienation, and self-realization. To enrich the analytical context, the study also incorporates reports from international organizations and relevant news coverage concerning contemporary global events discussed in the research.

The researcher collected data through a systematic literature review (Snyder, 2019). The process involved identifying, selecting, and organizing literature relevant to the research focus. The researcher reviewed works on Jacques Attali's thought, Buddhist theories, studies of social media and mental health, and research examining the impacts of pandemics, geopolitical conflicts, and climate change on contemporary human life. The researcher then extracted concepts,

arguments, and findings from the selected literature in order to identify themes related to self-realization in the contemporary era.

The study analyzes data using thematic analysis and argumentative synthesis. In the first stage, the researcher identified major themes emerging from the literature, including interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), compassion (*karuṇā*), non-self (*anātman*), digital alienation, identity performativity, and mental health crises. In the second stage, the researcher categorized and organized these themes according to external and internal obstacles to self-realization. In the third stage, the researcher developed an argumentative synthesis that brought together Jacques Attali's thought and Buddhist perspectives in order to explain the contemporary challenges of *devenir soi* during the 2015–2025 period. Through these stages, the study produced a critical interpretation of the relevance of self-realization in responding to contemporary conditions of polycrisis and digital alienation.

Result

About Jacques Attali

Jacques Attali is a French economist, political thinker, author, and public intellectual who was born in Algiers, Algeria, on November 1, 1943. He completed his higher education at several elite French institutions, including École Polytechnique, Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris (Sciences Po), and École Nationale d'Administration (ENA). This educational background helped establish his position as one of France's leading intellectuals, combining perspectives from economics, politics, history, and philosophy in his scholarly and public work. In addition to his academic and literary activities, Attali has played an important role in public policy. He served as Special Advisor to President François Mitterrand from 1981 to 1991 and later became the founding president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), an institution established after the Cold War to support economic transformation in Eastern European countries (Attali, 2014).

Within intellectual circles, Attali is widely recognized as a prolific author who has published more than eighty works on political economy, globalization, civilizational history, technology, music, and the future of humanity. One of the defining characteristics of his scholarship is his effort to interpret long-term social transformations through an interdisciplinary perspective. His major works, including *A Brief History of the Future* (2011), *The Labyrinth of Time* (1999), and *Devenir Soi* (2014), consistently explore the relationship between global transformation, individual freedom, and the future of civilization. Attali argues that technological, economic, and political transformations will continue to shape the ways individuals understand identity, freedom, and the purpose of life.

Consequently, scholars often regard him as a contemporary futurist thinker who seeks to explain the direction of modern society through historical analysis and normative reflection.

In *Devenir Soi*, Attali develops the argument that every individual bears responsibility for constructing and realizing an authentic self within an increasingly complex and uncertain world. He emphasizes the importance of freedom, self-reflection, the courage to make decisions, and the ability to free oneself from dependence on social authorities that constrain individual development. For Attali, the process of “becoming oneself” (*devenir soi*) is not merely a search for personal identity; rather, it constitutes an ethical project that enables individuals to preserve autonomy and meaning in the midst of various forms of modern alienation. This idea represents one of Attali’s most significant contributions to contemporary discussions of self-realization, individual freedom, and social transformation in the twenty-first century (Attali, 2014; Pilkington, 2015).

External Obstacles: Polycrisis and Alienation

The period from 2015 to 2025 has been marked by the emergence of a condition commonly described as polycrisis, a situation in which multiple crises occur simultaneously and reinforce one another. Within this context, obstacles to the process of *devenir soi* no longer stem solely from individual limitations but also from increasingly unstable social environments. The COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, and climate change demonstrate that contemporary individuals live under conditions of persistent uncertainty, thereby limiting the space available for reflective identity formation.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability of modern social structures while simultaneously revealing the fragility of assumptions regarding human control over social life. Mobility restrictions, lockdowns, and various emergency public health measures disrupted many social relationships that had long served as the foundation of collective life. This situation created a significant paradox. Solitude, which the concept of *devenir soi* regards as a potential space for self-reflection, became an experience of alienation because it emerged through enforced social separation rather than personal choice (Attali, 2014; Pilkington, 2015).

At the same time, the pandemic exposed the limitations of states in responding to global-scale crises. Debates concerning the effectiveness of public policies, access to healthcare services, and the distribution of resources intensified public distrust toward formal institutions. These conditions reflected sentiments that had already emerged through the *Gilets Jaunes* movement in France. The movement represented public dissatisfaction with rising living costs, regional inequalities, and the perception that the state had become increasingly detached from the realities of ordinary citizens’ lives (Attali, 2014). Under such

circumstances, alienation extended beyond interpersonal relationships and evolved into institutional alienation as individuals lost confidence in institutions that were expected to provide protection and political representation.

These developments reveal the limitations of Attali's assumption regarding individuals' capacity to construct themselves autonomously. Personal freedom becomes difficult to achieve when social relationships fragment and public institutions lose legitimacy. Consequently, the process of self-realization cannot be separated from the quality of relationships among individuals, communities, and the state.

The war in Ukraine and the conflict in Gaza demonstrate that the post-Cold War international order is less stable than previously assumed. These conflicts reveal the resurgence of exclusive nationalism, competition among major powers, and the limitations of international institutions in preventing large-scale violence. As a result, individuals' lives are increasingly shaped by geopolitical dynamics that remain beyond their control.

The effects of these conflicts extend far beyond those who directly experience war. Digital media has transformed warfare into a global experience witnessed in real time by audiences around the world. Continuous information flows generate collective anxiety, uncertainty, and feelings of powerlessness regarding international political decisions. This situation has produced a new form of alienation that may be described as geopolitical alienation, a condition in which individuals perceive their lives as being shaped by global power structures that they cannot access or influence.

The conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza also reveal widening differences between Western countries and the Global South. Debates concerning colonialism, double standards in international politics, and unequal representation within global governance systems recall Fanon's (1963) critique of the persistence of colonial power relations in the modern world. Within this context, identity formation no longer occurs within a relatively stable social environment but rather within competing global narratives that are often difficult to reconcile.

If the pandemic exposed social vulnerability and geopolitical conflicts revealed political vulnerability, then climate change has exposed humanity's most fundamental ecological vulnerability. Reports issued by the IPCC (2021) indicate that climate change is no longer a future threat but a present reality affecting millions of people through extreme heatwaves, wildfires, floods, droughts, and other environmental disasters.

This crisis generates a form of alienation that differs from both social and political alienation. Individuals confront environmental transformations occurring on a global scale while possessing limited capacity to alter the trajectory of these changes. This condition gives rise to phenomena such as eco-anxiety and solastalgia, which refer to anxiety and feelings of loss caused by ongoing environmental

degradation (Albrecht, 2005). Unlike economic anxiety, which focuses on present conditions, ecological anxiety is future-oriented and raises questions about the long-term sustainability of life itself.

Table 1. External Obstacles to the Process of Self-Realization in the Age of Polycrisis (2015–2025)

Global Crisis	Form of Alienation Produced	Impact on Self-Realization
COVID-19 Pandemic and the <i>Gilets Jaunes</i> Movement	Social alienation and institutional alienation	Weakening of social relationships, declining trust in public institutions, and reduced social support necessary for identity formation
Ukraine and Gaza Conflicts	Geopolitical alienation	Increased feelings of powerlessness, collective anxiety, and difficulties in developing a stable sense of self amid competing global narratives
Climate Crisis	Ecological alienation	Emergence of eco-anxiety, solastalgia, and uncertainty about the future that disrupt individuals' ability to construct meaning and plan for the future

Table 1 demonstrates that the primary challenges to self-realization during the 2015–2025 period no longer originate primarily from individual factors but from multiple structural crises occurring simultaneously. The COVID-19 pandemic generated social and institutional alienation through the fragmentation of social relationships and declining trust in the state. The conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza produced geopolitical alienation by reinforcing feelings of powerlessness in relation to global power dynamics. Meanwhile, the climate crisis generated ecological alienation that undermined confidence in the sustainability of the future. Together, these forms of alienation indicate that the process of *devenir soi* in the age of polycrisis unfolds under conditions that are significantly more complex than those of previous decades.

Within the framework of *devenir soi*, these conditions have profound implications. Self-realization requires a future horizon that enables individuals to plan their lives and develop their potential. However, climate change undermines confidence in the continuity of that future. Consequently, individuals face not only

social and political uncertainty but also ecological uncertainty that directly shapes how they understand themselves, their lives, and their future. Therefore, the central challenge of self-realization in the age of polycrisis lies not merely in discovering a personal identity but in preserving the capacity to construct meaning within an increasingly uncertain world.

Internal Obstacles: Social Media and the Mental Health Crisis

In addition to the external crises that shape contemporary social conditions, the process of self-realization during the 2015–2025 period also faces increasingly complex internal obstacles resulting from the development of digital technologies. While public attention in previous decades primarily focused on the effects of automation and digital economic transformation, the age of social media has shifted these challenges into psychological and existential domains. Social media no longer functions merely as a communication tool; it has become a primary space for identity formation, social interaction, and meaning production (Azhar et al., 2025). Within this context, digital platforms play a significant role in shaping how individuals understand themselves, evaluate their self-worth, and build relationships with others (Stokes & Price, 2017). Consequently, the process of *devenir soi* is influenced not only by external social conditions but also by psychological dynamics generated through intensive interaction with digital technologies.

Social media encourages individuals to continuously present self-images that can be accepted and appreciated by the public. This condition aligns with Goffman's (1949) concept of impression management, which refers to individuals' efforts to control the impressions they create through various strategies of self-presentation. However, the development of social media has intensified this practice to an unprecedented level because identity is no longer constructed within limited social spaces but is instead displayed to vast audiences on a continuous basis.

Under these circumstances, digital identity becomes a commodity that individuals must continuously produce, curate, and market. External responses such as follower counts, likes, comments, and other forms of digital recognition increasingly determine personal value (Azhar et al., 2025). As a result, the gap between personal self-experience and publicly displayed self-representation continues to widen. Individuals feel compelled to maintain idealized images that often fail to reflect the realities of their everyday lives.

This condition can be understood through Kierkegaard's (1989) concept of despair. According to Kierkegaard, despair emerges when individuals fail to become their authentic selves. Within the context of social media, individuals often devote greater effort to maintaining constructed digital identities than to understanding their genuine potential. Consequently, the process of self-realization transforms into a process of self-branding. The discrepancy between digital identity and lived

experience generates anxiety, shame, impostor syndrome, and various forms of dissatisfaction with oneself.

Another obstacle emerges through addictive mechanisms systematically embedded within the architecture of social media. Digital platforms employ principles of behavioral psychology to maximize user engagement. Notification systems, likes, comments, and other forms of digital rewards operate through patterns of variable ratio reinforcement that trigger dopamine release and encourage repetitive usage behaviors (Eyal, 2014).

These mechanisms create addictive cycles that gradually diminish individuals' capacity to control their attention and regulate their behavior independently. Algorithms designed to maximize engagement increasingly determine individuals' time, focus, and mental energy. Under such conditions, individuals no longer function fully as autonomous subjects directing their own actions but instead react continuously to digital stimuli.

This phenomenon closely relates to Kierkegaard's (1844) concept of existential anxiety. Freedom of choice often produces anxiety because it requires individuals to assume substantial responsibility. Social media offers a relatively comfortable escape from such anxiety through endless streams of content. Individuals consequently exchange reflective freedom for the passive comfort of digital consumption. As a result, their ability to engage in deep reflection, creative thinking, and critical self-awareness gradually weakens.

The rise of TikTok illustrates an increasingly intensive form of digital alienation (Krouglov, 2024). The platform relies on algorithmically curated streams of short videos tailored to user preferences. This system enables users to consume content continuously without engaging in conscious selection processes. Digital experience consequently becomes a form of passive consumption that operates almost automatically.

A defining characteristic of TikTok lies in its ability to shift users' attention rapidly from one piece of content to another. This pattern of consumption reduces individuals' capacity to sustain attention over extended periods (Vermeire, de Haan, Sefton-Green, & Akkerman, 2025). As a result, reflective activities that constitute essential conditions for self-realization become increasingly difficult to perform. Individuals become accustomed to receiving constant bursts of rapidly changing stimuli, making it more difficult for them to engage in deep reflection on their own life experiences.

Furthermore, TikTok illustrates the increasingly blurred boundary between digital and physical life. Public identities constructed through social media no longer exist solely within virtual environments but carry tangible consequences in everyday life. The 2025 murder of Mexican influencer Valeria Márquez while livestreaming on TikTok demonstrates how the performativity of digital identity can intersect directly with forms of social violence occurring in the physical world

(Pardo, 2025). This incident illustrates that carefully constructed digital identities do not necessarily protect individuals from the social vulnerabilities they encounter.

Social media also contributes to the emergence of an epistemic crisis characterized by weakening consensus regarding facts and shared reality. Digital platform algorithms tend to promote content that generates high levels of emotional engagement, including anger, controversy, fear, and conflict. Under these conditions, nuanced and complex information often struggles to compete with sensationalized and polarized narratives.

As a consequence, individuals confront overwhelming volumes of conflicting and difficult-to-verify information. People no longer understand social reality through relatively shared frameworks of knowledge but through competing narratives that frequently contradict one another. This condition generates confusion, uncertainty, and increasing ontological insecurity. As Haidt (2024) argues, the fragmentation of informational spaces significantly affects the psychological development of younger generations because they must construct their identities within increasingly fractured social realities.

Within the context of self-realization, these conditions create a fundamental challenge. Identity formation requires a relatively stable social environment that enables individuals to understand their place in the world. When social reality becomes severely fragmented, identity formation also becomes increasingly fragile and vulnerable to various forms of informational manipulation.

Table 2. Internal Social Media Obstacles to the Process of Self-Realization

Obstacle	Main Characteristics	Impact on Self-Realization
Digital Identity Performativity	Individuals continuously manage self-images to obtain public recognition through likes, comments, and follower counts	Creates a gap between authentic identity and digital identity, leading to anxiety, impostor syndrome, and self-dissatisfaction
Digital Addiction and Attention Erosion	Algorithms, notifications, and digital reward systems encourage repetitive use and dependency on social media	Reduces self-reflection, attention control, and personal autonomy in making life choices
Fragmentation of Attention and Reality	Repetitive consumption of short-form content and exposure to conflicting information	Weakens deep thinking, increases confusion, and undermines the formation of coherent identities

Quantification of Self-Worth	Individual value is measured through digital indicators such as followers, likes, and engagement metrics	Intensifies comparison, inadequacy, dependence on validation	social feelings of and external
-------------------------------------	--	--	---------------------------------

Social media transforms self-worth into a series of quantitative indicators that can be publicly observed and compared (see Table 2). Follower counts, likes, engagement rates, and various other digital metrics become common measures of success and popularity. As a result, the complexity of human experience is reduced to numerical values that fluctuate continuously and invite constant comparison.

This condition intensifies social comparison practices on an unprecedented scale. Festinger's (1954) Social Comparison Theory argues that individuals evaluate themselves through comparisons with others. Within digital environments, this process occurs continuously because social media users remain constantly exposed to carefully curated representations of other people's lives. Such exposure frequently generates envy, inferiority, self-dissatisfaction, and various forms of psychological unhappiness.

This phenomenon also relates to Girard's (1962) concept of mimetic desire. Individuals' desires no longer emerge primarily from reflection on their own needs and potential but instead from what others perceive as valuable. Consequently, individuals experience increasing difficulty in recognizing their authentic aspirations because socially constructed standards of success determine their life orientations. Under such conditions, social media does not encourage diversity of self-expression; rather, it produces the homogenization of desire and reinforces persistent feelings of inadequacy.

Buddhist Principles as a Response to Polycrisis and Digital Alienation

The various external and internal obstacles that emerged during the 2015–2025 period demonstrate that the process of self-realization cannot be explained solely through individual freedom, as assumed in the concept of *devenir soi*. The COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, climate change, social media, and the mental health crisis reveal that individuals always exist within networks of social, political, ecological, and digital relationships that shape how they understand themselves. Within this context, Buddhist principles offer a relevant philosophical and ethical framework for responding to contemporary forms of alienation through the concepts of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and non-self (*anātman*).

The concept of *pratītyasamutpāda* explains that all phenomena arise through interdependent causal relationships and do not possess fully independent existence. This perspective offers a different way of understanding the global crises that have developed over the past decade. The COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, and climate change demonstrate that human life is connected through networks of relationships that transcend national borders, cultures, and social identities. Political decisions made in one region can affect global economic stability, while environmental degradation in one area can generate ecological consequences experienced by communities across the world.

This perspective differs fundamentally from forms of individualism that position the individual as the primary center of self-formation. While Attali emphasizes the importance of individual independence and courage in determining the direction of one's life (Pilkington, 2015), Buddhism argues that self-realization can only be understood through awareness of one's interconnectedness with other people, society, and the natural environment. Consequently, becoming oneself does not require separation from others; rather, it requires understanding one's place within a broader network of relationships.

Awareness of interdependence also provides a response to the various forms of social, political, and ecological alienation that emerge under conditions of polycrisis. Individuals no longer view themselves as isolated subjects living in a hostile world but as members of an interconnected community of life. This perspective encourages a sense of collective responsibility while reducing the feelings of powerlessness that frequently accompany contemporary global crises.

A second relevant principle is *karuṇā*, or compassion. Within the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, *karuṇā* refers to a moral commitment to reduce the suffering of all beings and to encourage actions directed toward the common good. This principle becomes increasingly important when individuals live in social environments characterized by conflict, polarization, anxiety, and uncertainty.

Global events throughout the 2015–2025 period have exposed individuals to unprecedented levels of human suffering through digital media. Pandemics, wars, climate disasters, and humanitarian crises appear daily within digital information spaces that operate continuously without interruption. Such conditions often produce emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and social indifference. Under these circumstances, *karuṇā* serves as an ethical foundation that enables individuals to respond to suffering without becoming trapped in hatred, despair, or apathy.

The cultivation of compassion also carries important psychological implications for the process of self-realization. Awareness of one's own suffering and the suffering of others helps individuals develop psychological resilience in the face of social pressures. Consequently, self-realization is no longer understood as an individual achievement detached from society but rather as a developmental

process that unfolds through concern for others and responsibility toward collective life.

The concept of *anātman*, or non-self, offers the most direct response to the problems generated by social media and digital culture. This doctrine maintains that the self is not a fixed, singular, and independent entity but rather a continuously changing stream of mental processes and experiences (Rahula, 1974). This perspective stands in direct contrast to the logic of social media, which encourages individuals to construct identities that appear stable, attractive, and constantly available for public display.

Digital culture encourages individuals to continuously maintain their self-image through posts, interactions, and forms of social recognition measured quantitatively. As a result, identity becomes an object that requires constant maintenance and validation. This condition reinforces anxiety, self-dissatisfaction, and dependence on external judgments. The concept of *anātman* provides a fundamental critique of this tendency by asserting that no identity is permanent and that no identity must be preserved absolutely (see Table 3).

The principle of non-self gains practical significance through the practice of mindfulness. Through sustained attention to present-moment experience, individuals learn to observe thoughts, emotions, and impulses without reacting to them automatically. This practice helps reduce dependence on digital validation while strengthening the capacity for self-reflection. In the context of social media platforms designed to capture attention continuously, mindfulness functions as a mechanism for restoring control over attention and awareness.

Table 3. Buddhist Principles as Responses to Obstacles to Self-Realization in the Age of Polycrisis

Buddhist Principle	Obstacles Addressed	Contribution to Self-Realization
<i>Pratītyasamutpāda</i> (Interdependence)	Social, institutional, geopolitical, and ecological alienation resulting from polycrisis conditions	Develops awareness that individuals are part of interconnected social and ecological networks, thereby reducing feelings of isolation and powerlessness
<i>Karuṇā</i> (Compassion)	Social polarization, emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and anxiety resulting from exposure to global suffering	Encourages concern for others, strengthens psychological resilience, and directs self-realization

		toward humanitarian	social responsibility	and
Anātman and Mindfulness (Non-Self and Mindfulness)	Digital identity performativity, social media addiction, dependence on external validation, and attention fragmentation	Helps individuals release attachment to the digital ego, enhances reflexivity, and restores control over attention and self- awareness		

Table 3 demonstrates that Buddhist principles provide distinct responses to the various forms of alienation that emerge in the age of polycrisis and digitalization. The concept of *pratītyasamutpāda* addresses structural alienation by emphasizing interconnectedness among individuals, society, and the environment. The concept of *karuṇā* functions as an ethical foundation for responding to the growing social and psychological suffering generated by conflict, crisis, and polarization. Meanwhile, the concept of *anātman* and the practice of mindfulness directly address problems associated with social media, including self-presentation, digital addiction, and dependence on external validation. Together, these three principles demonstrate that self-realization cannot be understood solely as an individual project centered on personal autonomy. Instead, it also requires relational awareness, ethical responsibility, and reflective self-management.

Therefore, self-realization from a Buddhist perspective does not focus on discovering a fixed and final identity. Rather, it emphasizes the cultivation of awareness that enables individuals to live more reflectively, flexibly, and authentically. This perspective expands the concept of *devenir soi* by demonstrating that liberation from alienation requires not only individual freedom but also awareness of interconnectedness, the cultivation of compassion, and the release of attachment to socially and digitally constructed forms of ego.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the process of *devenir soi* during the 2015–2025 period has faced challenges that are considerably more complex than those envisioned in the context of Jacques Attali’s original work. These challenges arise not only from internal individual factors but also from multiple structural crises occurring simultaneously. The COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, and climate change have generated various forms of social, institutional, geopolitical, and ecological alienation that limit individuals’ ability to construct stable identities. At the same time, the development of social media has created new forms of

alienation through identity performativity, digital addiction, attention fragmentation, and dependence on external validation. Under these circumstances, Buddhist principles offer an alternative framework that enables individuals to respond to these forms of alienation through awareness of interdependence, compassion, and non-self.

These findings emerge because the structure of contemporary social life has undergone significant transformations compared with a decade earlier. Attali developed the concept of *devenir soi* based on the assumption that the primary obstacle to self-realization lies in individuals' dependence on social and political authorities. However, conditions of polycrisis demonstrate that individuals face not only challenges related to personal freedom but also systemic uncertainties that remain beyond their control. In this context, self-realization no longer depends solely on individuals' courage to determine the direction of their own lives but also on their capacity to adapt to simultaneous social, political, ecological, and digital transformations. In other words, the growing complexity of the social environment has produced new forms of alienation that were not fully addressed in the original formulation of *devenir soi*.

These findings both support and extend previous research. Studies of *devenir soi* and self-realization generally emphasize individual freedom, personal responsibility, and autonomy as fundamental requirements for self-development (Pilkington, 2015; Sen, 1999). This study supports these perspectives by demonstrating that self-reflection remains an essential component of self-realization. However, the findings also reveal that individual autonomy cannot be understood independently of the surrounding social context. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on individual capacities, this study demonstrates that global crises and digital transformation significantly influence the success or failure of the self-realization process.

The findings also align with previous studies on digital alienation, which have shown that social media contributes to identity performativity, digital addiction, and attention crises (Eyal, 2014; Haidt, 2024; Turkle, 2015). Nevertheless, earlier research has generally explained these phenomena from psychological or digital communication perspectives. This study extends the discussion by connecting digital alienation to philosophical questions concerning self-discovery and identity formation. Consequently, social media should not be understood merely as a communication technology but also as a space that actively shapes, directs, and, at times, obstructs the process of self-realization.

Similarly, previous Buddhist studies have demonstrated the relevance of *pratītyasamutpāda*, *karuṇā*, and *anātman* in addressing modern forms of human suffering (Hanh, 1998; Harvey, 2013; Loy, 2018). However, most of these studies have focused primarily on spiritual and psychological dimensions. This study contributes a novel perspective by positioning Buddhist principles as responses to

two interconnected challenges simultaneously: global polycrisis and digital alienation. This contribution demonstrates that Buddhism remains relevant not only within spiritual domains but also as a theoretical framework capable of explaining contemporary social problems that affect self-realization. In doing so, this study addresses a significant gap within the literature on Attali, digital alienation, and Buddhism.

From a historical perspective, the findings reveal a shift in the challenges of self-realization from struggles for individual freedom against institutional and traditional control toward the challenge of sustaining meaning in the context of polycrisis characterized by social, political, ecological, and digital uncertainty. From a social perspective, the findings indicate that increasingly complex networks of relationships shape individual identity, making the process of becoming oneself less a purely personal journey and more a process that unfolds through relationships with others, society, and the environment (Chen et al., 2011). From an ideological perspective, the findings reveal the limitations of individualistic paradigms that position the individual as the sole center of self-realization. Instead, the findings support the development of the *relational self perspective*, which emphasizes that identity and meaning emerge through social connectedness, affective relationships, and interdependent life experiences (Gillath, Manchanda, Brumbaugh, McIntyre, & Mattingly, 2025; Gough, 2025). Therefore, self-realization in the contemporary era requires not only individual freedom but also relational awareness that enables individuals to develop identities that are more stable, reflective, and meaningful amid multiple interconnected crises.

These findings play an important role in expanding contemporary understandings of self-realization in the twenty-first century. The study demonstrates that liberation from alienation cannot be achieved solely through individual freedom but also requires awareness of human interconnectedness with society and the environment. Nevertheless, several potential dysfunctions deserve attention. An excessive emphasis on relationality may reduce recognition of individual autonomy as an important dimension of self-realization. Furthermore, the practices of mindfulness and compassion promoted within Buddhism risk being reduced to strategies of personal adaptation when separated from the social and structural conditions that generate contemporary forms of alienation. Several critical studies have shown that modern mindfulness is often understood primarily as a tool for improving individual well-being without adequate reflection on social inequality, economic pressures, or the digital structures that shape everyday experience (du Plessis & Just, 2022; Kelly, 2023). As a result, mindfulness may function as a mechanism of adaptation to problematic conditions rather than as a transformative practice capable of promoting broader social change (Leggett, 2022). Therefore, the application of Buddhist principles in responding to polycrisis and digital alienation must be understood more critically by integrating the

cultivation of individual awareness with efforts to address the structural factors that constitute the primary sources of these forms of alienation (Oman, 2025).

Based on these findings, several strategic actions are necessary to support self-realization in the age of polycrisis. At the individual level, practices of self-reflection, mindfulness, and digital literacy are essential for reducing the effects of social media addiction and dependence on external validation. At the social level, communities should strengthen solidarity and create spaces for dialogue that can reduce social polarization and information fragmentation. At the policy level, governments and digital platforms should implement stronger regulations that protect users' mental health, improve algorithmic transparency, and promote healthier digital ecosystems. Consequently, the process of *devenir soi* in the contemporary era should be understood not merely as an individual project but also as a collective responsibility shared by individuals, communities, states, and the global environment.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the process of *devenir soi*, or becoming oneself, unfolds under far more complex conditions in 2025 than it did a decade earlier. The COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, and climate change have generated various forms of social, institutional, geopolitical, and ecological alienation that restrict individuals' capacity to develop stable identities. At the same time, social media has introduced new internal obstacles, including digital identity performativity, technological addiction, attention fragmentation, epistemic crises, and dependence on external validation. These findings indicate that the central challenge of self-realization in the contemporary era no longer concerns individual freedom alone but also involves individuals' capacity to navigate multiple structural and psychological pressures that emerge simultaneously under conditions of polycrisis.

The primary scholarly contribution of this study lies in its effort to extend Jacques Attali's concept of *devenir soi* through a Buddhist perspective. While Attali emphasizes freedom, personal responsibility, and individual courage as foundations for self-development, this study demonstrates that such an approach is no longer sufficient to explain self-realization in the age of polycrisis and digital alienation. Through the concepts of *pratītyasamutpāda* (interdependence), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *anātman* (non-self), this study offers a reinterpretation of *devenir soi* that positions relational awareness, ethical responsibility, and reflective self-management as essential foundations of self-realization in the twenty-first century. Consequently, this study not only enriches scholarship on Jacques Attali's thought but also introduces a new conceptual synthesis that may be described as *Buddhist liberalism*, an approach that integrates individual freedom with awareness of social and ecological interconnectedness.

This study has several limitations. First, it employs a philosophical and literature-based approach and therefore does not empirically examine individuals' lived experiences of polycrisis and digital alienation. Second, the study focuses on the dialogue between Jacques Attali's thought and Buddhist philosophy and does not compare these perspectives with other philosophical traditions that also address self-realization, such as existentialism, critical theory, or humanistic psychology. Future research may therefore develop empirical investigations of self-realization in the digital age or conduct comparative analyses involving other intellectual traditions. Such efforts are important for expanding our understanding of how individuals construct identity, meaning in life, and psychological resilience amid continuously evolving global crises.

References

- Albrecht, G. (2005). "Solastalgia". A new concept in health and identity. *PAN: Philosophy Activism Nature*, (3), 41–55. <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.897723015186456>
- Attali, J. (1999). *The labyrinth in culture and society: Pathways to wisdom*. North Atlantic Books.
- Attali, J. (2011). *A brief history of the future: a Brave and Controversial Look at the Twenty-First Century*. Skyhorse Publishing Inc.
- Attali, J. (2014). *Devenir soi*. Fayard.
- Azhar, K. A., Wel, C. A. C., & Ab Hamid, S. N. (2025). "They Post, I Scroll, I Envy, I Buy"—How Social Media Influencers Shape Materialistic Values and Consumer Behavior Among Young Adults in Malaysia. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 20(3), 172. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jtaer20030172>
- Burbules, N. C., & Warnick, B. R. (2012). Philosophical Inquiry. In *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research* (pp. 489–502). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203874769-31>
- Chen, Z. W., Gao, J. M., Huo, X. X., Wang, L., Yu, L., Halm-Lai, F., ... Shen, J. L. (2011). Genotyping of *Toxoplasma gondii* isolates from cats in different geographic regions of China. *Veterinary Parasitology*, 183(1–2), 166–170.
- du Plessis, E. M., & Just, S. N. (2022). Mindfulness—it's not what you think: Toward critical reconciliation with progressive self-development practices. *Organization*, 29(1), 209–221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508421995755>
- Eyal, N. (2014). *Hooked: How to build habit-forming products*. Penguin Uk.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Festinger, L. (1954). A Theory of Social Comparison Processes. *Human Relations*, 7(2), 117–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202>
- Gillath, O., Manchanda, N., Brumbaugh, C. C., McIntyre, K. P., & Mattingly, B. A. (2025). Attachment theory and the relational self. *Self and Identity*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2025.2589769>
- Giraud, R., & Girard, R. (1962). Mensonge romantique et verite romanesque. *MLN*, 77(5), 537. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3042668>
- Goffman, E. (1949). Presentation of self in everyday life. *American Journal of*

- Sociology*, 55(1), 6–7.
- Gough, J. (2025). The embodied, relational self: extending or rejecting the mind? *Inquiry*, 68(2), 663–695. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2022.2075921>
- Haidt, J. (2024). *The anxious generation: How the great rewiring of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness*. Penguin.
- Hanh, T. N. (1998). The three doors of liberation. In *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*.
- Harvey, P. (2013). Buddhist Reflections on "Consumer" and "Consumerism". *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 20.
- Hickman, C. (2025). What is eco-anxiety? Retrieved June 27, 2025, from UNICEF website: <https://www.unicef.org/blog/what-is-eco-anxiety>
- IPCC. (2021). Chapter 11: Weather and Climate Extreme Events in a Changing Climate. Retrieved from IPCC Sixth Assessment Report website: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/chapter/chapter-11/>
- Kelly, B. D. (2023). Mindful, mindless, or misunderstood? A critical perspective of the mindfulness concept. *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 40(3), 491–493. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ipm.2022.31>
- Kierkegaard, Søren. (1844). *The Concept of Anxiety*. Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. (1989). The sickness unto death. In *Penguin*. England.
- Krouglov, A. Y. (2024). Alienation 2.0: the algorithmic commodification of agency in platform capitalism. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 19(3), 196–212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2025.2497549>
- Leggett, W. (2022). Can Mindfulness really change the world? The political character of meditative practices. *Critical Policy Studies*, 16(3), 261–278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2021.1932541>
- Loy, D. R. (2018). *Lack & transcendence: The problem of death and life in psychotherapy, existentialism, and Buddhism*. Simon and Schuster.
- Oman, D. (2025). Mindfulness for Global Public Health: Critical Analysis and Agenda. *Mindfulness*, 16(3), 573–612. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-023-02089-5>
- Pardo, D. (2025). Valeria Márquez: Who was Mexican influencer killed live on TikTok? Retrieved from BBC News website: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cxe49j51vwxo%0A>
- Pilkington, M. (2015). A review of "Devenir Soi" by Jacques Attali: through the lenses of liberalism and Buddhism. *On the Horizon*, 23(3), 158–168. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OTH-06-2015-0027>
- Rahula, W. (1974). Wrong notions of Dhammatā (Dharmatā). In *Buddhist Studies in Honour of I.B. Horner* (pp. 181–191). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-2242-2_15
- Sen, A. (1999). Development as Freedom. In , *Oxford University Press, Oxford*. New York: The New York Times.
- Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 104, 333–339.
- Stokes, J., & Price, B. (2017). Social media, visual culture and contemporary identity. *11th International Multi-Conference on Society, Cybernetics and Informatics*. IMSCI.
- Turkle, S. (2015). *Reclaiming conversation: The power of talk in a digital age*. Penguin.

- Vermeire, Z., de Haan, M. J., Sefton-Green, J., & Akkerman, S. F. (2025). The desire to learn: the alienation and reimagining of pedagogy on YouTube, Twitch and TikTok. *Critical Studies in Education*, 66(5), 591–609. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2024.2365805>
- WHO. (2022). COVID-19 pandemic triggers 25% increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide. Retrieved March 2, 2022, from World Health Organization website: <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide>

This page has been left blank