

Tolstoyanism in the 21st Century: Revisiting the Philosophy of "Simple Life" in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This article explores the reexamination of Tolstoyanism's philosophy of "simple life" in the digital age and its intrinsic connection with contemporary minimalism from the perspectives of philosophy and sociology, through literature review and qualitative case study. The article first reviews the relevant literature on Tolstoyanism and minimalism in the past five years, revealing the common values and differences between the two in terms of anti-consumption, abstinence and the pursuit of inner fulfillment; then, through the case studies of digital minimalism advocates (e.g., Cal Newport) and Tolstoyan practitioners (e.g., Mark Boyle), the article demonstrates the diversified practices of the philosophy of plain living and the real-life tensions they face in different socio-cultural contexts. diverse practices and the real-life tensions they face. The study shows that although Tolstoyanism and minimalism have their own focuses in terms of motivation, mode of practice, and strength of social critique, they are complementary in coping with information overload and consumerist encroachment in the digital age, and offer possible paths to constructing a healthier and more meaningful way of life. The article concludes with a discussion of the limitations of current practice and directions for future research in cross-cultural comparison, longitudinal tracing, and institutionalized support.

1. Introduction

At the end of the 19th century, the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy shifted from a literary giant to a moral philosopher in his later years, and formed the "Tolstoyism" that bears his name. The idea grew out of Tolstoy's reflections on religious beliefs and social morality, and its core concepts included nonviolence and pacifism, a simple way of life, and strict moral self-discipline. Inspired by the Biblical Sermon on the Mount, Tolstoy advocated love of one's enemies, repaying evil with good, and was firmly opposed to violence and war, practicing the principle of absolute nonresistance (i.e., not responding to violence in the face of evil) (Murphy, 2014). Criticizing the corruption of the Tsarist government and the orthodox church, he opted out of the system and advocated for the supremacy of individual conscience with a Christian anarchist stance. At the same time, Tolstoy advocated a return to simple living or plain living, abandoning aristocratic luxury and practicing spiritual purification through peasant labor and vegetarianism. He physically abstained from the desire for alcohol and tobacco, practiced vegetarianism and frugality, and advocated chastity and diligence to achieve inner moral self-improvement (Trotsky,

1901/1986; Medzhibovskaya, 2009). Tolstoy's beliefs had a profound impact on subsequent generations: his ideas of nonviolence inspired 20th century social movement leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. and his view of living a simple life birthed several Tolstoyan groups to establish Christian communes in Russia, Europe, and the United States in an attempt to live a simple life in isolation (Janzen, 2019).

In the 21st century, another trend centered on simplicity has emerged globally, the “Contemporary Minimalist” Lifestyle (Minimalism Lifestyle). The origins of Minimalism can be traced back to the earlier “voluntary simplicity” movement (Johnson, 2004), and a few people have been practicing the concept of downscale consumption and low material possessions since the second half of the 20th century (Elgin, 1981). However, it is the socio-cultural trends in the last decade of the 21st century that have really brought minimalism into the mainstream: on the one hand, people have started to revisit consumerism after the financial crisis of 2008, and there has been a surge in calls for simple living (Khamis, 2019); on the other hand, there has been an influx of people on social media who preach the concepts of detachment and “less is more” (less is more) philosophy (Neese, 2016). The popularity of the Japanese “disorganization” technique is almost synchronized with the “storage revolution” in North America, which has created a global craze for disorganization and minimalism (Khamis, 2019; Sasaki, 2017). For example, recent years have seen the emergence of bestsellers such as Norishi Sasaki's *Good Bye, Stuff* (2017) and Marie Kondo's *The Heart-Pounding Magic of Tidying Up Your Life*, which encourages readers to discard useless things in order to achieve peace of mind (Sandlin et al., 2022). At the same time, some public media have focused on the challenge this trend poses to consumer culture - in a postmodern consumer society, people have begun to seek meaning in their lives by owning less, which contrasts with the traditional value of equating success with the possession of wealth (Bauman, 2007). As a result, contemporary minimalism has evolved from a niche practice to a popular lifestyle among the urban middle class and even youth: they are actively reducing their material possessions, streamlining their living space, controlling their shopping desires, and seeking to live “less but better” (Atanasova & Eckhardt, 2021). This trend can be seen as a spontaneous reflection and response to overconsumption and digital overload (Uggla, 2019).

Tolstoyism and Minimalism ostensibly belong to different eras and backgrounds, but there are spiritual similarities between them in terms of the value orientation of “simple life”, reflecting the critique of materialism and the search for higher meaning in life (White, 2018). However, there are also tensions and differences between these two ideological traditions in terms of their conceptual foundations, social aspirations and practical approaches, which require in-depth comparative study. From the perspectives of philosophy and sociology, this paper explores the connection between Tolstoyanism and contemporary minimalism, as well as the transformation and practical path of this philosophy of “simple life” in the context of the digital age through literature review and qualitative case study. The paper first summarizes the relevant theoretical background, including philosophy of lifestyle, critical theory of digital society, and analysis of consumer society (Section 2); then reviews the discussions on the contemporary transformation of Tolstoyanism and minimalism in the last five years of academic research (Section 3); in Section 4, two typical cases (advocates of digital minimalism and practitioners of modern Tolstoyan life) are selected to be analyzed; and Section 5 discusses Tolstoyanism based on a synthesis of the literature and the case studies. based on the synthesis of literature and cases, discusses the fit and contradiction between Tolstoyanism and minimalism in the contemporary digital society, as well

as the challenges and possibilities; finally, Section 6 summarizes the research findings and proposes directions for future research.

The central research question of this study is: How do Tolstoyanism and minimalism converge and conflict in the digital age, and what possibilities do they offer for constructing a healthier and more meaningful lifestyle amidst the challenges of consumerism and technological overload?

2. Theoretical Background

Philosophy of Lifestyle and the Ethics of Simple Living. Both Tolstoyanism and minimalism belong to the category of “lifestyle philosophy,” which embodies certain philosophical values through individual life practices (Bell, 2016). In the history of human thought, the concept of simple living has deep roots: the ancient Greek Stoics advocated moderation of desires, believing that the pursuit of virtue alone is sufficient for happiness; Chinese Daoism promoted tranquility, emptiness, and “minimal desires,” following nature to attain inner peace. Religious traditions have repeatedly extolled simplicity, as evidenced by the vows of poverty in Christian monasticism and the Buddhist notion of the emptiness of all things (Shi, 2007). These philosophical and religious ideas regard material simplicity as a necessary condition for spiritual fulfillment, preventing extravagant indulgence from eroding moral will (Burch, 2013). Tolstoyanism inherited this ethical tradition of simple living. After experiencing a spiritual crisis, Tolstoy keenly felt the emptiness of aristocratic life and, emulating the examples of early Christians and ascetics, firmly believed that only by living a hard and simple life and dedicating himself to labor and service could he approach the truth. This idea of ennobling everyday life holds that the choices of daily sustenance, housing, and attire constitute moral practice in themselves, and that a simple life possesses inherent goodness and value (Tolstoy, 1884/1987). In sociology, the phenomenon of elevating lifestyle choices into social movements has emerged in modern times, referred to as “lifestyle movements” (e.g., the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s and low-carbon lifestyle experiments by environmentalists) (Haenfler et al., 2012). These movements employ individual and communal practices to challenge mainstream values and institutional arrangements. Thus, both Tolstoyanism and contemporary minimalism can be regarded as forms of lifestyle philosophy, expressing a critical stance toward modern society and a utopian imagination through the ethicalization of everyday actions.

2.1 A Critical Theoretical Perspective on the Digital Society

The digital age has provided the philosophy of simple living with new contexts and challenges. Contemporary society is highly digitized and networked, with technologies such as smartphones and social media profoundly transforming the ways people live. However, critical theorists point out that while digital technology brings convenience, it also gives rise to problems such as information overload, scarcity of attention, and alienation (Han, 2017). The endless stream of messages and algorithmic feeds on social media immerse individuals in fragmented information and the scrutiny of others, making it difficult to attain inner tranquility (Newport, 2019). Emerging theories of the “attention economy” criticize that large tech companies design addictive products to capture user attention, with business models that sacrifice user focus and privacy (Zuboff, 2019). Numerous psychological studies have also found that excessive use of smartphones and social media is associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression, and the negative impacts of digital technology on mental health have raised widespread concerns (Rich et al., 2019). Against this backdrop, a trend of “tech withdrawal” and “digital restraint” has emerged

in the digital age, namely, the so-called “digital minimalism” and “digital detox” (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). Its underlying idea is that to maintain mental health and autonomy in a highly interconnected era, individuals should consciously limit the use of digital devices, retaining only those digital tools that are truly beneficial to their lives (Newport, 2019). Critical theories of the digital society provide a framework for analyzing this phenomenon: scholars, drawing on theories of alienation, argue that social media creates a form of “false connection” that replaces meaningful social interactions in real life (Lawson, 2019). At the same time, tech critics advocate for reclaiming “self-directed time” by intentionally disconnecting in order to rebuild deep thinking and the capacity for focus (Plato, cited in Newport, 2019). Digital minimalism is precisely a response to this technological environment, with its intellectual foundations tracing back to critiques of technological domination (such as the Frankfurt School's skepticism toward “mass culture”) and a longing for “real life” (echoing Tolstoy’s pursuit of an honest and simple life).

2.3 Analysis of Consumer Society and Anticonsumption

Another important backdrop to the rise of contemporary minimalism is the reflection upon and critique of consumer society. Since the 20th century—particularly in the post-World War II era when Western developed countries entered the phase of consumer society—economic prosperity and mass media jointly shaped a mainstream culture driven by consumer desires (Baudrillard, 1998). In consumer society, individual identity and status are often expressed through the possessions one owns, and consumption is endowed with symbolic meaning and a function of psychological satisfaction (Richins, 2017). The advertising and fashion industries continuously manufacture “artificial needs,” enticing the public to pursue newer and more luxurious goods as a means of self-definition (Bauman, 2007). This tendency toward overconsumption not only creates issues of environmental unsustainability but also gives rise to what is termed “consumption alienation”—in which one’s sense of value is hijacked by external material possessions, leaving the inner spiritual world increasingly empty (Schor, 1998). In response, anticonsumption and voluntary simplicity movements have emerged since the 1970s (Alexander & Ussher, 2012). Anticonsumption advocates resisting overconsumption and reducing dependence on material goods in order to restore autonomy in life and ecological balance (Black & Cherrier, 2010). The concept of voluntary simplicity, proposed by figures such as Gregg (1936), posits that individuals should consciously choose a lower level of consumption in order to pursue a higher quality of life and spiritual growth (Shi, 2007). These ideas directly foreshadowed the cultural soil for 21st-century minimalism. Minimalism can be seen as a concrete manifestation of anticonsumption in contemporary times: it seeks to counter the mainstream value of equating happiness with material possession through “buying less, consuming less, discarding less” (Meissner, 2019). Minimalists often emphasize the anxiety induced by shopping impulses and the relief that follows decluttering, echoing the consumer society analysis that “the more one buys, the more one loses” (Dopierala, 2017). Sociologist Uggle (2019) points out that minimalism is an individualized response to the pressures of modern overconsumption and information overload, emphasizing the reclaiming of control over one’s life through reduction. However, from a critical perspective, minimalism itself contains a paradox: on the one hand, it resists consumerism; on the other, it may be co-opted by the market as a new consumer selling point (such as through the sale of minimalistic goods or courses), turning into another form of “aestheticized restraint” rather than a true consumption revolution (Khamis, 2019; Meissner, 2019). Consumer society theory provides insights for analyzing this tension: it reminds us to pay attention to structural factors (advertising, the logic of capital) that influence minimalist practices, as well as how individual

lifestyle changes may (or may not) transform into collective action and institutional change (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). In summary, Tolstoyanism's concept of simple living and contemporary minimalism share a common thread in their reflection upon consumer society; both contain a critique of materialism and a celebration of spiritual values, yet they differ in the socio-economic conditions and demands of their practical implementation, necessitating an examination in the context of consumer society.

In conclusion, based on the three theoretical perspectives of lifestyle philosophy, digital society critique, and consumer culture analysis, we can preliminarily delineate a space for dialogue between Tolstoyanism and minimalism: both focus on actualizing value concepts through everyday practices, and in the context of the digital age and consumerism, they exhibit renewed practical relevance. The following literature review will further sort out how recent academic research has discussed the contemporary significance of Tolstoyan thought and the developmental features of the minimalism movement.

3. Literature Review

Interpretation and Transformation of Tolstoyanism in Contemporary Times. Although Tolstoy lived in the 19th century and his ideological background was rooted in the religious and social issues of his time, in recent years scholars and intellectuals have reexamined the significance of Tolstoyanism in the 21st century (Christian, 2018). Some studies focus on the insights provided by Tolstoy's advocacy of simple living for contemporary issues (such as consumerism and environmental crises). For example, Tenai (2016), in a study on religion and society, explored how Tolstoy's concept of "simple living" can serve as a resource to address the challenges of modern poverty and consumerism. The study noted that by learning from Russian peasants, Tolstoy realized that a truly meaningful life does not depend on luxurious wealth but rather on fulfilling basic needs, diligent work, and the intrinsic value conferred by faith. This perspective continues to resonate powerfully in today's material-driven world: in some regions of the Global South, the penetration of consumerism has exacerbated wealth disparities and psychological imbalances, and the Tolstoyan ethic of simplicity is regarded by institutions such as churches as a value orientation to balance material pursuits and spiritual fulfillment (Tenai, 2016). Other scholars have focused on the ecological significance of Tolstoyanism. Some analyses point out that Tolstoy advocated for the moderation of material desires and harmonious coexistence with nature, prefiguring certain principles of contemporary environmental ethics (Brock, 2020). For instance, Tolstoy's promotion of vegetarianism, driven by respect for life and the pursuit of moral purity, can today be interpreted as a precursor to ecological sustainability and an awareness of animal rights (Klimek, 2021). Overall, the literature demonstrates that the core values of Tolstoyanism—moral idealism, pacifism, and simple living—continue to possess intellectual resonance in contemporary times, being applied to issues ranging from social justice and environmental protection to personal spiritual growth. However, due to the inherently strong religious and moral character of Tolstoyanism, how it should be adjusted and transformed in a secular and pluralistic contemporary society remains an open question worthy of exploration (Bellinger, 2019). Some studies suggest that Tolstoyan moral absolutism in modern contexts may need to be expressed in a more secular and moderate manner—for example, by advocating "moral consumption" or "public-spirited living" to translate the connotations of traditional faith into modern civic ethics (Jeffries, 2020).

Research Progress on Contemporary Minimalism. In contrast to Tolstoyanism, contemporary minimalism—as an emerging social phenomenon of the 21st century—has attracted significant scholarly interest over the past five years, forming an interdisciplinary research hotspot. The main findings are summarized from the perspectives of motivation, practical characteristics, psychological effects, and social impact:

(1) **Motivation and Values:** Multiple qualitative studies have shown that the motivations for adopting a minimalist lifestyle are diverse and not solely driven by moral or environmental concerns (Zalewska & Cobel-Tokarska, 2016; Meissner, 2019). In an analysis of Polish minimalism blogs, Zalewska and Cobel-Tokarska (2016) found that bloggers promoted minimalism primarily out of a desire for greater control over their lives and relief from psychological burdens, while grand narratives of “saving the world” or anti-consumerism were not prominent (Zalewska & Cobel-Tokarska, 2016). Similarly, Dopierała (2017) pointed out that minimalism is chiefly a personal rebound against overconsumption, aimed at rebuilding identity and life meaning, but rarely elevates to a systematic ethical critique (Dopierała, 2017). This contrasts with Tolstoyanism, which is largely driven by religious or ethical convictions, whereas minimalism is more influenced by individual psychological and pragmatic considerations. Notably, some research has found that certain minimalist practitioners, influenced by the concept of environmental sustainability, regard reducing material possessions as a means to lessen their ecological footprint (Herziger et al., 2020). For example, a survey of 265 minimalists by Herziger et al. (2020) revealed that although environmental concern was not the primary motivation for most, some individuals exhibited higher ecological awareness and a willingness to change their behavior after intervention. Overall, scholars tend to view minimalism as an “egoistic-oriented low-consumption” form—that is, it mainly involves reducing consumption to enhance personal well-being (Uggla, 2019). This individually oriented motivation may facilitate the spread of minimalism because it caters to modern desires for stress relief and improved quality of life (Wiedmann et al., 2018), yet it also results in relatively limited moral appeal (Meissner, 2019).

(2) **Practical Characteristics and Process:** Minimalism does not entail an indiscriminate abandonment of all possessions but rather represents a gradual process of transforming one’s identity and habits (Hausen, 2019). Through an analysis of minimalist authors and blog content, Hausen (2019) summarized the five stages through which individuals transition from materialism to minimalism: dissatisfaction with the status quo, determination to change, introspection and reorganization, consolidation of behavior, and the establishment of a new identity. In studies conducted in the Brazilian context, Mendonça et al. (2021) further identified the triggers and pathways for the minimalist transition: common triggers include financial crises, issues with household clutter, or changes in employment; individuals then learn about minimalist principles through social media, implement lifestyle changes via DIY practices and crafts, and ultimately adapt to and stabilize within a new lifestyle. This indicates that modern media—such as online communities and YouTube influencers—play an important role in the dissemination of minimalism, with many people first being inspired in digital spaces before applying these ideas offline (Mendonça et al., 2021). The practices of minimalism encompass several dimensions: in the domestic sphere, a typical approach is “decluttering,” which involves eliminating excess items and retaining only what is truly needed or cherished (Kang et al., 2021); in consumption, the practice of “intentional buying” involves careful purchasing to avoid impulse buys and unnecessary expenditures (Kang et al., 2021; Lloyd & Pennington, 2020); in the management of

possessions, there is an emphasis on extending the lifespan of items—through measures such as second-hand trading and repair/reuse—to reduce waste (Kang et al., 2021). Based on a survey of 1050 individuals, Kang et al. (2021) identified four dimensions of minimalist living: decluttering, prudent shopping, optimal utilization of possessions, and self-sufficiency, and subsequently developed a minimalism scale. It is noteworthy that in the digital age a subset of practices known as “digital minimalism” has emerged—targeting digital content and devices with “decluttering” measures such as uninstalling superfluous mobile applications, setting strict daily limits on social media usage, or periodically undertaking a “digital detox” (completely refraining from internet use) (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). These practices illustrate that the scope of minimalism has expanded with changing times, extending from the material to the informational realm, while its essence remains consistent—enriching inner life by reducing external burdens (Uggla, 2019).

(3) Psychological Effects and Well-being: A notable appeal of contemporary minimalism is its claim to enhance life satisfaction and mental health (Lambert et al., 2020), a claim that academic research is beginning to validate. In-depth interviews with minimalism practitioners from various countries by Lloyd and Pennington (2020) revealed that most respondents experienced an increase in subjective well-being after adopting a minimalist lifestyle, manifested in enhanced autonomy (no longer blindly following societal expectations in consumption and comparison), increased competence (gaining a sense of achievement through organizing and managing their living environment), expanded psychological space (with reduced clutter leading to clearer thoughts), and more positive, calm emotions. These outcomes align with the basic psychological needs outlined in self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Subsequent quantitative studies have produced similar findings; for instance, a questionnaire survey by Kang et al. (2021) showed that higher minimalism scores were significantly associated with greater flourishing and lower levels of depression. Additionally, experimental research has indicated that guiding individuals to declutter their home environments and reduce daily possessions can, to some extent, lower subjective stress and enhance satisfaction (Rogers & Hart, 2021). However, the psychological benefits depend on the extent and manner in which minimalism is practiced. Martin-Woodhead (2022) found that moderate minimalism—a limited and thoughtfully considered reduction in consumption—contributes to well-being, whereas excessive restraint may generate new pressures (such as suppressing normal needs in the name of minimalism, leading to anxiety) (Martin-Woodhead, 2022). Furthermore, research by Atanasova and Eckhardt (2021) on “digital nomads” (individuals who rely on technology to live and work around the world) suggests that even those who claim to be free from material constraints construct their identities through carefully planned travel and experiences, thereby forming a kind of “invisible materialism” (substituting experiences and digital assets for tangible possessions), so it cannot be simply assumed that their well-being is necessarily higher (Atanasova & Eckhardt, 2021). Overall, most academic evidence tends to affirm the positive impact of minimalism on individual psychological well-being (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020; Kang et al., 2021), while also cautioning against idealizing it as a panacea—since personal background, social support, and the balance of practice all influence the outcomes (Vladimirova, 2021).

(4) Socio-cultural Impact and Critique: As a lifestyle movement, minimalism’s broader impact on society has become another focal point of academic discussion. One perspective holds that minimalism has exerted a disruptive and demonstrative effect on mainstream consumer culture. For instance, after analyzing the works of North American minimalist writers, Rodriguez (2018) noted that although minimalism is not a collective political movement, it disseminates skepticism

toward consumer capitalism through personal narratives and online communication, thereby to some extent undermining the hegemony of consumerism (Rodriguez, 2018). Research by Derwanz and Strebing (2021) found that in German-speaking countries, minimalists actively share information on sustainable clothing and low-consumption lifestyles through blogs and communities, acting as grassroots disseminators of green living, which helps to draw mainstream consumers' attention to issues such as clothing waste (Derwanz & Strebing, 2021). However, many scholars remain skeptical about minimalism's potential for social change. Both Ugglä (2019) and Meissner (2019) have pointed out that current minimalism primarily remains an individual choice and behavior, lacking a direct challenge to institutional structures, and is therefore unlikely to disrupt the capitalist framework of consumption. Meissner (2019) further criticized the minimalist narrative for its inherent contradiction: on one hand, it calls for a reduction in possessions, yet on the other, it fails to completely break free from the consumer paradigm—since many minimalist advocates encourage the purchase of specific new products (such as storage solutions or e-books in lieu of paper books) to facilitate a simpler life, which in effect transforms the nature of consumption rather than fundamentally reducing it (Meissner, 2019). Moreover, when minimalism becomes a fashionable label on social media, its countercultural edge may be diminished. Khamis (2019) argued that the “aestheticization of restraint” has turned decluttering into a new lifestyle aesthetic, with people flaunting minimalist home designs while still engaging in symbolic consumption (Khamis, 2019). Scholars caution that minimalism may be co-opted by commercial and media forces, thereby losing its original critical potency against consumerism. In summary, evaluations of minimalism's social impact in the literature are divided: on one hand, it is recognized for bringing about a shift in values and serving as a demonstrative model of emerging lifestyle ideals; on the other hand, its limitations are noted, as individual-level reduced consumption does not automatically equate to collective social change (Blackburn et al., 2023). Some studies call for minimalists to consider greater organization and collaboration with policy initiatives—for example, by engaging in anti-waste legislation or advocating for a four-day workweek to reduce overproduction and meaningless consumption—in order to have a greater impact (Blackburn et al., 2024). However, at present, the minimalist community as a whole tends to be non-political and non-radical, which is both the reason for its widespread public acceptance and a limitation on its potential to evolve into a large-scale social movement (Ugglä, 2019).

Through the above literature review it is evident that Tolstoyanism in contemporary times primarily influences the fields of ethics, religion, and ecology as a legacy, with its principles and problem-awareness being reinterpreted and applied in new contexts. In contrast, contemporary minimalism, as a thriving lifestyle practice, has developed a preliminary research framework with multi-dimensional explorations of its motivations, practices, effects, and significance. Minimalism research is more grounded in empirical observation and social science analysis, emphasizing its practical operation and impact; whereas contemporary discussions of Tolstoyanism focus more on philosophical interpretation and the extrapolation of values. Although there is not yet extensive direct overlap between the two bodies of literature, an important question is hinted at: Can the moral spirit of Tolstoyanism be infused into minimalist practices to enhance the value depth and social efficacy of the latter? This is precisely the issue that this paper will further explore through case studies and discussion.

4. Case Studies

To better understand the transformation of Tolstoyanism in the digital age and its interaction with

contemporary minimalism, this section selects two representative cases for qualitative analysis. Case One focuses on advocates of the "digital minimalism" concept, which represents a new form of minimalism in the information age; Case Two examines a contemporary practitioner of a Tolstoyan simple lifestyle, exploring how his lifestyle responds to mainstream culture. These two cases illustrate, respectively, the trajectories of simple living philosophy in the 21st century from the perspectives of technological environment and lifestyle practice.

4.1 Case One: The Advocate of Digital Minimalism – Cal Newport's Philosophy

A striking trend in the digital age is digital minimalism, and one of its principal advocates is Cal Newport, an American computer scientist and writer. Newport is not a traditional "Tolstoyan," yet the digital minimalist concept he proposes parallels Tolstoy's advocacy of self-restraint and focused living (Newport, 2019). In his 2019 book, *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World*, Newport systematically elaborates on the philosophy of digital minimalism: carefully selecting and optimizing the use of limited digital tools to maximize their contribution to personal values (Newport, 2019). In essence, it involves substantially reducing the use of social media and fragmented applications, thereby freeing up time and attention to focus on activities that more meaningfully contribute to happiness, such as face-to-face interactions with family, engaging in creative hobbies, and participating in community service.

Newport does not completely reject technology; rather, he emphasizes the intentional management of it. He proposes a specific method for practicing digital minimalism called "digital decluttering" — analogous to decluttering a physical space — by completely abstaining from unnecessary digital media for 30 days to break free from the dependency on smartphones and social networks, and then selectively reintroducing only those applications that are truly beneficial (Newport, 2019). Many readers who followed his advice engaged in a "30-day digital detox" and reported noticeable improvements in their focus and creativity during that period, as well as a clearer judgment regarding which technologies deserved re-adoption (Lawson, 2019). For instance, some discovered that after a month away from social media they did not truly miss it and decided to discontinue its use long-term; others realized that while certain work communication tools were indispensable, their usage could be confined to specific time slots to reduce disruption. This practice embodies the self-reflection and restraint advocated by Tolstoy: first, completely shedding temptations, then moderating usage according to rational principles. It is akin to Tolstoy's approach of renouncing vices and leading a simple life to purify the soul, albeit with the context shifting from 19th-century alcohol and lavish banquets to 21st-century smartphones and information streams.

Newport's digital minimalism also emphasizes a core value—the awareness of "opportunity cost." He argues that the greatest harm of being addicted to smartphones and the internet lies in its opportunity cost—that is, the time and energy occupied by these activities could have been devoted to more meaningful pursuits (Lawson, 2019). While browsing social media may seem like a free form of leisure, the cost is the forfeiture of opportunities such as playing with one's children, reading long-form texts, or engaging in outdoor exercise. Over time, this life, crowded by digital distractions, becomes thin and empty (Newport, 2019). This assertion mirrors Tolstoy's critique of the absurd lifestyle of the upper classes—Tolstoy lamented wasting vast amounts of time in decadent salons, thereby missing out on truly valuable experiences such as labor, creativity, and sincere emotional exchange. Thus, whether it is Tolstoy admonishing himself "not to squander life on vanity" or Newport warning the public "not to let digital fragments erode life,"

both are underpinned by a deep appreciation for the finite nature of life and a yearning for a fulfilling existence. The issues differ only in their historical contexts and specific references: in Tolstoy's era, the problem was the excessive pursuit of fame and material indulgence, whereas in the digital age the concern is over-connection and information overload—yet essentially, both divert individuals from a meaningful life trajectory (Lawson, 2019).

It is also noteworthy that Newport is not alone. In recent years, a considerable number of digital minimalism advocates and groups have emerged. For example, there is a dedicated r/digitalminimalism subreddit on Reddit, where tens of thousands of users share their experiences and advocate for "tranquility in the digital age." Some technology professionals, including former Silicon Valley practitioners, have established organizations such as the "Center for Humane Technology," which promote reducing technology's negative impact on humanity through industry self-regulation and personal practices (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). These developments indicate that in the digital age a new form of simple living philosophy is taking shape—not centered on abandoning material possessions, but on managing and simplifying the flow of information. This approach is in continuity with traditional minimalism, which holds that reducing excess leads to a better quality of life; however, the focus has shifted from tangible "things" to intangible "information" and "connections." Philosophically, digital minimalism extends the Tolstoyan proposition that "inner richness is superior to external accumulation" into the realm of modern spiritual life: inner calm, autonomy, and focus are deemed more valuable than endless online connectivity and entertainment (Syvertsen & Enli, 2020).

4.2 Case Two: Contemporary Tolstoyan Lifestyle Practice – Mark Boyle's Simple Living

While Case One illustrates the practice of simple living in the digital age through technological restraint, Case Two returns to the material realm by introducing a contemporary individual who embodies an almost Tolstoyan lifestyle. Mark Boyle, an Irishman, is renowned for his radical practice of simple living and has been dubbed "The Moneyless Man" and "the Life Experimenter" by the media. Boyle's chosen path largely substantiates the possibility of Tolstoyan ideals in the 21st century: he opts to distance himself from modern economic and technological systems, choosing to live an almost self-sufficient, primitive life (Black, 2018).

Originally trained in business and leading a typical modern life, Boyle was profoundly influenced by environmental concerns. Around 2008, he made a startling decision—to completely cease using money and attempt a "moneyless" existence. In the following years, he managed to live successfully for approximately two years without spending a penny, relying on growing his own food, scavenging discarded materials, and bartering (Boyle, 2010). This experience demonstrates that even on the margins of modern society, it is possible to practice an extreme form of simple living. He documented this experience in his book, *The Moneyless Man*, which sparked widespread discussion. Many have regarded him as a challenge to consumerism, much like Tolstoy's renunciation of aristocratic wealth carried symbolic significance (Harding, 2019).

What is even more admirable is that Boyle did not stop at the moneyless experiment. Starting in 2016, he further pursued a life in complete harmony with nature by moving to a rural farmhouse in Ireland, completely severing ties with modern technology—no electricity, running water, telephone, or internet (Finlay, 2019). He built a wooden cabin with his own hands, used firewood for heating and cooking, sourced water from springs and rain, and sustained himself through

farming and minimal livestock (Boyle, 2019). He embraced a truly "off-grid" existence. This lifestyle is strikingly reminiscent of Tolstoy's experience at Yasnaya Polyana, where he toiled the land in simple attire and meals, except that Boyle entirely abandoned technologies — such as kerosene lamps and railways—that were still present in Tolstoy's era, representing an even more complete return to authenticity.

Boyle recorded his reflections on life without technology in his book, *The Way Home: Tales from a Life Without Technology* (2019). In it, a strong Tolstoyan spirit shines through: he viewed the conveniences of modern civilization as a deprivation of human capabilities and relationships, and advocated "rewilding" oneself to reclaim life skills, community connections, and inner peace (Boyle, 2019). In a column for *The Guardian* titled "Advice from a Year Without Technology: Rewild Yourself," Boyle wrote, "If we resist debt, resist gadgets, and reconnect with nature, the world might change as a result" (Boyle, 2018). These words echo Tolstoy's earnest admonitions to contemporary society: do not become slaves to money and machines; only by returning to the land and engaging in simple labor can humanity regain freedom and happiness. Boyle's lifestyle embodies this conviction — he rejects consumer debt and electronic technology, building an independent life through basic handcraft skills and community mutual assistance. He describes his life without a phone and the internet as one where loneliness sometimes creeps in, yet he experiences the tranquility and beauty of nature around him; while physical labor may be tiring, it brings about sound sleep and robust health (Boyle, 2018).

The response from mainstream culture to Boyle is rather intriguing: on one hand, his story has garnered media attention and praise, being seen as a remedy for modern life; on the other hand, some have questioned the sustainability and universality of such a lifestyle (Hickman, 2019). Some commentators suggest that Boyle's ability to opt out of the system is partly due to his pre-existing social capital and the relatively secure environment in the UK/Ireland, implying that such extreme simplicity may not be suitable for most people (Bennett, 2018). Others worry that a complete rejection of technology might squander its potential to improve the environment or disseminate positive change. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Boyle's experiment offers an extreme yet tangible example, demonstrating that Tolstoyan ideals in the 21st century are not entirely utopian fantasies. Just as Tolstoy once envisioned establishing a peasant commune in his later years, Boyle too explores a personal utopia through his practice. Although he does not explicitly claim to be influenced by Tolstoy, his manner and statements reveal a contemporary embodiment of Tolstoy's spirit—a resolute negation of modern materialism, a deep yearning to return to a simple humanity, and a mission to inspire others through personal example (Healy, 2019).

In summary, Mark Boyle's case exemplifies an extreme form of Tolstoyan practice in contemporary times—while not a mainstream choice, it provides a valuable complement and critique to prevailing cultural norms. His lifestyle emphasizes what modern society has lost: reverence for nature, reliance on community, and an appreciation for the fruits of labor. These values are frequently echoed by minimalists, such as the pursuit of more meaningful interpersonal relationships and the avoidance of an obsession with material possessions (Rodriguez, 2018). In essence, Boyle's extreme practice of simple living aligns with the goals of minimalism in seeking liberation from the cacophony of modern life to find "what is truly important" (*The Minimalists*, 2016). The difference lies in that Boyle resembles more a disciple of 19th-century Tolstoy, choosing an almost ascetic path; whereas most modern minimalists opt to simplify their lives in

urban settings rather than completely withdrawing from society (CAlexander & Ussher, 2012). Both approaches have their limitations and significance, yet they provide tangible references for considering how to live simply in the digital age.

5. Analysis and Discussion

Through the two cases presented above, it is evident that although Tolstoyanism and contemporary minimalism differ in form, they share a profound convergence in their underlying values. At the same time, there exists a tension and contradiction between them that cannot be ignored. Based on the literature review and case observations, this section further discusses the transformation of Tolstoyanism in the digital age and its practical challenges from the perspectives of convergence and tension, as well as exploring the limitations and potential of this philosophy of simple living in contemporary times.

5.1 Convergence and Resonance: The Timeless Value of Simple Living

Firstly, Tolstoyanism and minimalism share a common ethical foundation in their core concepts: both maintain that a truly valuable life does not depend on the accumulation of material wealth but on spiritual fulfillment and moral perfection (Franklin, 2017). Tolstoy expresses this notion in religious terms, emphasizing that simple living purifies the soul and brings one closer to God (Glad, 1995); minimalism, however, is often articulated in secular psychological language, positing that reducing material burdens can enhance happiness and focus (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020). Although their approaches differ, both view “subtraction” as a necessary path to a good life and advocate for freeing oneself from an obsession with external material desires in order to attend to inner needs and values (Rodriguez, 2018). In Case One, digital minimalism represents a new application in the information age of Tolstoy’s principle of self-restraint—by curbing the craving for virtual connections and entertainment, one regains mental freedom; in Case Two, Mark Boyle nearly recreates Tolstoy’s ideal of living, with his practice demonstrating that even in the highly modernized 21st century, a “simple life” can still bring deep satisfaction and meaning (Boyle, 2019). This indicates that the philosophy of simple living possesses a universal human basis and does not become obsolete with the passage of time. Regardless of technological advances or increasing wealth, the longing for a simple and sincere life remains deeply embedded in the human spirit. In today’s era of material excess and information explosion, this longing is even more pronounced, as evidenced by the popularity of the minimalism movement, which reflects a collective psychological desire to “return to simplicity” (Uggla, 2019).

Secondly, both philosophies begin with individual practice and emphasize leading by example over mere rhetoric. Tolstoyanism does not resort to grand political revolutions but advocates influencing society through personal moral cultivation and demonstration. Tolstoy himself set an example by renouncing aristocratic privileges, engaging in agricultural labor, and practicing charity; his followers (the Tolstoyans) often organized small communities to embody his teachings through collective simple living (Maude, 1901). Similarly, contemporary minimalism is not a top-down movement but a social trend formed by the spontaneous practices of countless individuals (Haenfler et al., 2012). Its dissemination relies primarily on sharing personal stories and the influence of opinion leaders—such as minimalist influencers and bloggers on social media—exemplifying a “role model effect” (Rodriguez, 2018). In Case One, figures like Newport and online community bloggers illustrate the benefits of digital minimalism through their personal experiences, thereby influencing others; in Case Two, Boyle’s unconventional

lifestyle has attracted media attention and spurred public reflection on modern living. Clearly, whether through Tolstoyanism or minimalism, both uphold the belief that “life changes life” rather than advancing primarily through theoretical debate or political struggle (Johnson, 2020). This stance aligns with their core values: the desired change is first about transforming attitudes and everyday behaviors, with the belief that widespread individual change will eventually shift social norms and cultural directions (Gregg, 1936). In this respect, both approaches, though different in method, converge in expressing moral idealism across varying historical contexts.

5.2 Tension and Differences: The Misalignment of Ideals, Contexts, and Practices

Firstly, there is a divergence in value motivations. Tolstoyanism is imbued with strong moral and religious motivations; it views simple living as a means to achieve moral goodness and religious truth (including religious redemption and the pursuit of the “Kingdom of God”), and is thus characterized by absolutism and a sense of mission (Tolstoy, 1894). Tolstoy required his followers to adhere to a strict set of moral disciplines—including nonviolence, poverty, and chastity—which imparted an almost ascetic rigor and evangelistic flavor to Tolstoyanism (Christian, 2018). In contrast, contemporary minimalism largely lacks a transcendental moral or religious foundation, with motivations that are more diverse and predominantly centered on secular self-actualization (Uggla, 2019). Many choose minimalism to alleviate stress, improve mental health, or enhance quality of life, rather than out of a commitment to a transcendent belief or social ideal (Khamis, 2019). Consequently, minimalist practices offer significant flexibility and personal definitional space, allowing each individual to choose the “degree of minimalism that suits them” (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020). This difference in motivation leads to variations in the intensity and consistency of practice between the two: Tolstoyanism, with its tendencies toward moral absolutism, often demands rigorous and uncompromising self-discipline from its adherents (as exemplified by Tolstoy’s later-life decision to leave home in pursuit of inner peace—a move akin to martyrdom); whereas minimalists typically adopt gradual and compromise-based strategies, adjusting their practices to suit their individual circumstances, with few completely severing ties with modern society (except in rare cases like Boyle). Although the pragmatic nature of minimalism makes it more accessible to the public, it has also drawn criticism from some—including proponents of Tolstoyan idealism—who argue that it lacks moral depth and constitutes merely a self-serving lifestyle technique rather than an ethical pursuit for the greater good (Meissner, 2019). In this regard, the divide between idealism and pragmatism represents a significant tension between Tolstoyanism and minimalism.

Secondly, there is tension in terms of social engagement and the robustness of critique. Tolstoyanism incorporates a fierce critique of state power and social injustice; Tolstoy himself refused allegiance to the state, opposed war, and condemned the inequities of private property systems. Thus, Tolstoyanism is not solely about personal self-cultivation but also functions as a moral protest against existing socio-political orders (Zelenko, 2013). In contrast, minimalism tends to adopt a politically neutral or evasive stance, with slogans that focus on “changing oneself” rather than directly challenging established systems (Wallman, 2015). As noted in earlier literature, many scholars believe that the current minimalism movement lacks collective action and structural demands; its anti-consumption stance is primarily a personal posture without a clearly defined political agenda (Uggla, 2019; Meissner, 2019). This depoliticized tendency implies that minimalism rarely addresses macro issues such as income disparity, production systems, or labor exploitation—issues that Tolstoy vehemently attacked in his works (Tolstoy, 1900). This disparity partly originates from their differing contexts: Tolstoy’s era was marked by

acute social contradictions in Russia, and his moral critiques consciously targeted structural evils; minimalism, however, arose within the context of the contemporary Western middle class, naturally focusing more on personal issues like hectic lifestyles and overconsumption (Haenfler et al., 2012). Consequently, some commentators have noted that minimalism exhibits “elitist” or “privileged” tendencies: only those with relatively comfortable socioeconomic positions have the leisure and resources to choose to buy less and pursue inner peace (Taylor, 2020). For many in impoverished or unstable conditions, simple living is not a choice made voluntarily but a circumstance imposed upon them; what is needed is a change in social structure rather than merely reducing material possessions (Scott, 2020). Were Tolstoy alive today, he might also criticize certain minimalists for neglecting social injustice: merely reducing one’s own possessions does not directly improve the plight of the poor unless the resources saved are channeled into charity or social reform (Buettner, 2015). Therefore, how minimalism can transcend the individual level and engage with broader social issues remains a tension worthy of reflection. One possible solution is to imbue minimalism with more “Tolstoyan” compassion—for instance, by encouraging minimalists to integrate their practices with public welfare through sharing surplus items or engaging in volunteer work, thereby making simple living beneficial not only for the self but also for others (Sahakian & Bertho, 2018). This may be seen as moving closer to the universal moral care espoused by Tolstoy. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that not all minimalist practitioners endorse or are capable of engaging in political or public welfare activities, so maintaining the movement’s openness and inclusivity is a challenge that must also be addressed (Haenfler et al., 2012).

Thirdly, the conditions of the digital age itself have introduced differences and contradictions in practice. On one hand, digital technology provides new channels for disseminating the philosophy of simple living, as evidenced by the fact that the popularity of minimalism largely depends on online communities and social media (Mendonça et al., 2021). Ironically, in order to advocate for reduced social media use, minimalists must rely on these very platforms to promote their ideas (Sandlin et al., 2022). The emergence of “minimalist influencers” exemplifies this paradox: some individuals post elegantly minimalist photos on platforms like Instagram, proclaiming the beauty of a simple life, yet they themselves become online celebrities attracting vast followings, which contradicts the understated nature inherent to minimalism (Khamis, 2019). Tolstoyanism did not face such a dilemma in its time; however, if Tolstoy were alive today, he might similarly utilize the internet to publish lengthy essays or even produce videos to spread his beliefs while simultaneously condemning the illusory and harmful aspects of the web—a situation not entirely dissimilar to that encountered by modern minimalists. The conflict between the use of technology and the original intent of the philosophy is a common challenge for all counter-mainstream movements in the digital age: without technology, one’s voice cannot be disseminated; yet, by using technology, one risks being captured by its logic (such as chasing clicks or being commodified). For the minimalism movement, this tension must be balanced through deliberate strategies. For example, some minimalist advocates explicitly limit their use of social platforms, employing them solely as one-way channels for information dissemination while reducing engagement to avoid becoming overly entangled. Additionally, there are instances where individuals entirely withdraw from mainstream social media and instead communicate with their audiences via concise email newsletters or blogs (Ekström, 2021). These practices can be viewed as attempts to operate counter-culturally within the system. In this regard, Tolstoyanism offers inspiration: although Tolstoy criticized the literary pursuit of fame, he nevertheless wrote novels and essays to disseminate his ideas, choosing instead a plain and direct style in both his writing

and publishing (for example, self-publishing pamphlets for peasants) (Baylen, 1978). Similarly, minimalists do not reject all media but must explore methods of use that better align with their values. This tension and challenge constitute a new test for proponents of the philosophy of simple living in the digital age.

5.3 The Challenges and Potential of the Philosophy of Simple Living:

Through the aforementioned convergences and tensions, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the fate of Tolstoyanism in the 21st-century digital age. On one hand, its integration with minimalism demonstrates robust vitality: Tolstoy's ideas continue to be revived in new forms under modern conditions—for example, digital minimalism, eco-friendly simple living movements, and even youth cultures such as “lying flat” (a concept popular in China in recent years that advocates lowering one's desires and not engaging in hyper-competition, bearing similarities to Tolstoyan withdrawal). All these phenomena illustrate that the philosophy of simple living is grounded in universal human nature and does not become outdated with changing times. Particularly in the context of the current dual crises of ecological degradation and mental health, a lifestyle characterized by moderate simplicity is regarded as one of the potential solutions from both sustainable development and psychological healing perspectives (Sandlin et al., 2022; Blackburn et al., 2024). As a concrete practice, minimalism has already demonstrated the potential path to increasing happiness by reducing material possessions (Lloyd & Pennington, 2020). If minimalism can be imbued with the higher moral vision of Tolstoyanism, then the philosophy of simple living may not only contribute to individual well-being but also play a role in reconstructing societal values. For instance, extending the principle of nonviolence to everyday consumption could nurture a gentler and more congenial social atmosphere; incorporating moral self-discipline into technology use could help the public adopt a more rational perspective toward and control over new technologies. These represent potential contributions of the philosophy of simple living in the digital age.

On the other hand, it is equally important to recognize that its limitations and challenges are prominent. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, minimalism currently primarily serves individual improvement and lacks structural impact (Meissner, 2019). In the macro context of global capitalism, an individual purchasing a few fewer items or spending a few fewer hours on their phone is insufficient to disrupt the enormous machinery of consumption and production (Balsiger et al., 2019). The forces of institutions and commerce often counteract such lifestyle changes; for example, companies continuously manufacture a sense of “need” through new product launches and advertising, or enhance user retention through software design, making it difficult for individual restraint to be sustained over the long term (Huq, 2020). Secondly, there are socio-cultural limitations in the practice of simple living. Adhering to a simple life often means going against the prevailing trend and requires strong individual agency as well as external support. Not everyone is in a position to choose a life of reduced work and consumption—for many low-income individuals, pursuing minimalism may not be realistic and might even be perceived as “lacking ambition” or as a forfeiture of opportunities to improve their lives (Shi, 2007). How to prevent the philosophy of simple living from becoming a “luxury” accessible only to affluent segments of society is an ethical challenge it must confront (Scott, 2020). Thirdly, although the digital age has facilitated the dissemination of ideas, it has also introduced new temptations. As illustrated in the case analysis, the minimalism philosophy itself may be co-opted by attention and commercialization, evolving into a superficial, commodified version (Khamis, 2019). Some so-called minimalist bloggers or brands, under the guise of simplicity, sell expensive

minimalist-style furniture or monochromatic apparel; such phenomena deviate from the original intent of simplicity and cause the public to conflate “a minimalist aesthetic” with “a simple life” (Sandlin et al., 2022). Tolstoyanism emphasizes inner motivation and sincerity, reminding us that a truly simple life is not measured by how plain or elegant its forms are, but by whether its motives are genuine and its practices align with its discourse (Bellinger, 2019). Maintaining the purity of its underlying philosophy is a long-term challenge for proponents of simple living in contemporary times.

In summary, the interaction between Tolstoyanism and minimalism provides rich insights for lifestyle reform in the digital age. On one hand, minimalism has breathed new life into Tolstoy’s ancient ideals, adapting them to the language and needs of modern secular society; on the other hand, Tolstoyanism infuses minimalism with higher moral and spiritual dimensions, preventing it from becoming superficial. Their convergence has given rise to specific practices such as digital minimalism and eco-minimalism, which offer ideas for addressing issues unique to the digital age—such as the attention crisis and climate change (Pang, 2018; Blackburn et al., 2024). However, their contradictions also remind us that for the philosophy of simple living to truly effect transformative change, a more delicate balance must be struck between individual happiness and social responsibility, as well as between technological use and authentic living. This may imply that future movements will require more comprehensive strategies, such as integrating individual minimalist practices with community action and policy advocacy, or developing multi-layered participation models to attract a broader demographic (Balsiger et al., 2019). These aspects transcend the realm of individual choice and call for further exploration and effort.

6. Conclusion

This paper, through a review of philosophical and sociological literature combined with two qualitative case studies, has examined the relationship and interaction between Tolstoyanism and contemporary minimalism in the digital age. The study finds that, although the two originated in different times and spaces, they share a profound resonance in their core ideas: both advocate for resisting materialism and superficial culture through a simple and restrained lifestyle in pursuit of higher spiritual values and life meaning. This philosophy of simple living has exhibited renewed vitality in the 21st century, its value increasingly evident against a backdrop saturated with digital technology and consumerism. Contemporary minimalism, as the principal practical form of this philosophy, has rapidly developed over the past decade or so, helping many people simplify their lives, enhance their well-being, and to some extent influence mainstream consumer attitudes. However, it should also be noted that Tolstoyanism and minimalism differ in the depth of their motivations, social concern, and modes of practice. Tolstoyanism provides moral and spiritual guidance for minimalism, preventing it from devolving into a self-serving trend; conversely, minimalism has offered a more realistic and feasible contemporary path for Tolstoyanism, ensuring that its teachings do not remain purely idealistic. Their integration is not yet complete, and the points of convergence are also sources of tension. The individualistic tendency of minimalism and the paradoxes inherent in digital media may weaken the efficacy of the philosophy of simple living. Promoting genuine “simple living” transformation in the digital age requires transcending the individual level and seeking mechanisms to transform these ideas into collective strength—such as developing minimalist communities, promoting institutional environments that support simple living (e.g., the sharing economy, four-day workweeks, etc.), and enhancing education to instill in the next generation the value of spiritual wealth over

material wealth.

Regarding future research, several directions merit further exploration: First, a comparative study of the philosophy of simple living from a cross-cultural perspective. Tolstoyanism and Western minimalism are rooted in their specific cultural backgrounds; however, Eastern traditions, such as the simplicity espoused in Daoism and Buddhism, as well as phenomena like China's "lying flat" trend and minimalist lifestyles in Japan and Korea, provide valuable material. Future studies could compare the similarities and differences in concepts of simple living across cultural traditions and explore how these ideas evolve and merge in the era of globalization. Second, longitudinal research on the psychological and behavioral changes of minimalism practitioners is warranted. While existing studies are mostly cross-sectional, future research could track the long-term impact of practicing simple living on individuals' values, consumption habits, and even family relationships, including potential cycles of relapse and withdrawal. This would help assess the stability and depth of the influence of a simple living lifestyle. Third, the relationship between technology and simple living is a topic laden with tension that deserves further investigation. For instance, can digital tools help people lead simpler lives (such as various financial management/organizing apps or the mutual support effects of online minimalist communities) rather than being viewed solely as threats? Moreover, whether the development of artificial intelligence and automation might alleviate livelihood pressures and render simple living a viable option for a broader population is also a question worth exploring. Fourth, how policy and business innovations respond to the minimalism trend deserves attention. For example, the emergence of zero-waste stores and product servitization (renting rather than buying) may be related to minimalist principles—what are their effects; and are government initiatives promoting rational consumption and green living effective? These issues need to be evaluated through the lenses of economics and policy research.

In summary, the dialogue between Tolstoyanism and minimalism provides valuable insights into how humanity might navigate life in the digital age. At a time when material abundance is coupled with a deep spiritual hunger, perhaps it is necessary to revisit the wisdom of pioneers like Tolstoy to draw nourishment for correcting the imbalances of modern life. Of course, the road is long and arduous, and truly integrating the philosophy of simple living into mainstream culture is no easy task. However, as Tolstoy firmly believed, "the truly powerful are those who spread truth through their own lives" (Tolstoy, 1901). As more people begin to embody the principles of simple living, their influence will accumulate like sparks, eventually kindling a conflagration. This study aspires to serve as a catalyst for further discussion on the significance of the philosophy of simple living in the 21st century. By integrating historical wisdom with contemporary practice, we may be able to discover a "path of simplicity" that harmonizes self and others, fostering both inner and outer well-being, so that individuals in the realms of technology and consumer society can once again achieve balance and tranquility in life.

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