

Virtual Reality Makes Mindfulness Accessible

Heramb Kaprekar, Arundhati Guha Thakurta, Siddhesh Sushil Shirsekar

NMIMS School of Design

Abstract

The Paper explores the merger of technology and meditation as a powerful tool to rebalance the unbalanced mind of the distracted population. With the rise of information overload through various means of media and technology, people are facing stress, which has led to many physical and mental problems,¹ including absenteeism and productivity issues in organizations. The paper discusses some healthy solutions to cope with stress, including exercise, music, and Ayurveda. However, the paper emphasizes the potential of virtual reality (VR) meditation as a tool to manage stress. This paper discusses the application of VR technology with meditation in the reduction/management of stress, specifically in regaining sustained attention and chronic pain management. The research conducted shows that the neuroadaptive virtual reality meditation system that combines virtual reality with neurofeedback helps people recharge and sustain their attention. In the same way, the integration of mindfulness with VR has shown to reduce pain and stress for those with chronic pain, making it a highly acceptable tool for meditation specialists to use.

Keywords- Virtual Reality | Meditation | Mindfulness | Technology | Organizations

Introduction

In the last decade, information overload through various means of media and technology has grown multi-fold. This has created a restless and often distracted population. While technology has its advantages it can also wreak havoc in the mind and take away the balance from life. Meditation as a technique has been around for thousands of years and served the human race throughout history.² This paper delves into the merger of technology and meditation as a

¹ Wang, X., Mo, X., Fan, M., Lee, L., Shi, B. E., & Hui, P. (2022). Reducing Stress and Anxiety in the Metaverse: A Systematic Review of Meditation, Mindfulness and Virtual Reality. ArXiv. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2209.14645>

² BSc, Elaine Mead. "The History and Origin of Meditation." PositivePsychology.com, 22 Feb. 2023, [positivepsychology.com/history-of-meditation](https://www.positivepsychology.com/history-of-meditation)

powerful and effective tool to rebalance the unbalanced mind of the distracted population. Meditation, also known as mindfulness, is a popular method for improving mental health. Many studies have provided evidence that meditation with VR can provide health benefits since the advent of Virtual Reality technology. Meditation is also being elevated by technology. Music and videos have been shown to be therapeutic and stress-reducing because they provide enriched stimuli. And virtual reality only takes it a step further with the level of immersion it provides, allowing you to "teleport elsewhere". VR Meditation can be especially beneficial for those who do not have access to traditional meditation guides or content, or who struggle to commit to the practice without the VR.

Nowadays, most of the people who are working physically and mentally, at home, suffer from stress. A little stress is normal and it is often a good thing. Stress helps a person meet their daily challenges and motivates them to achieve their goals, making them smarter, happier, and healthier person in the long run. But if stress goes out of control and takes control of one's life then it is a leading cause of many diseases. Stress causes both mental and physical symptoms, including irritability, anger, fatigue, muscle pain, digestive problems, and difficulty sleeping.³ These problems in the long run do affect the well-being of the person. To reduce the load, many individuals' resorts to harmful habits like drinking, smoking, and eating poorly; this often results in long-term health issues.

There are some healthy solutions that most people do to cope with stress –

1. **Being active** - Exercise improves your overall health as well as your sense of well-being. Exercising promotes the secretion of endorphins (the feel-good hormone) which in turn gives an individual healthy satisfaction and motivation. As Hippocrates stated that walking is the finest medication known to man.
2. **Music** – It does help in relaxing the body. Music helps in the release of hormones like dopamine and serotonin⁴ which helps boosts coordination and regulate digestive functions including bowel function and appetite.
3. **Ayurveda**- Ashwagandha is a powerful rejuvenating herb that has been used for over 2000 years in the preparation of Ayurvedic medicine. Due to its numerous

³ Lee, S. Y., & Kang, J. (2020). Effect of virtual reality meditation on sleep quality of intensive care unit patients: A randomized controlled trial. *Intensive and Critical Care Nursing*, 59, 102849. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iccn.2020.102849>

⁴ Serotonin. 13 Mar. 2022, 12. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/22572-serotonin#:~:text=Dopamine%20controls%20body%20movements%20and,found%20mostly%20in%20your%20gut.>

pharmacological actions such as anti-stress, neuroprotective, antitumor, anti-arthritis, analgesic, and anti-inflammatory, Ashwagandha is a truly potent regenerative tonic.⁵ It is beneficial for a variety of diseases such as Parkinson's, dementia, memory loss, and stress.

Cost of Stress to organizations

Absenteeism

According to the findings of a poll, one-third of workers said that the high levels of stress in their workplaces caused them to miss at least two or more days of work per month.⁶ 35% of those who stated that they missed two days or more of work claimed that they missed between three and five days a month on average. 38% of respondents indicated they were absent for six days or more. “According to the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), absenteeism alone costs US employers \$225.8 billion annually or about \$1,685 per employee.”⁷

Here is what employees have to say about the impacts of stress on their workplaces:

- They felt they worked in an unsupportive or even hostile environment
- They didn't often trust their co-workers to support them at work
- Some said their supervisor was unsupportive
- Most of them said the stress at work directly caused stress in family and friend relationships
- Most of them admitted they bad-mouth their employers outside of work

Application of VR Technology with meditation in the reduction/managing stress

Regaining sustained attention

To complete specific tasks, the focus is the key. The ability to direct and focus cognitively on a specific stimulus over a long period of time is defined as sustained attention. Traditionally, meditation has been thought to be something that must be practiced almost daily and for

⁵ Singh, Narendra, et al. “An Overview on Ashwagandha: A Rasayana (Rejuvenator) of Ayurveda.” *African Journal of Traditional, Complementary and Alternative Medicines*, vol. 8, no. 55, African Traditional Herbal Medicine Supporters Initiative (ATHMSI), May 2011, <https://doi.org/10.4314/ajtcam.v8i5s.9>.

⁶ Studies, Graduate. “7.2 Stress in an Organization.” *Pressbooks*, 11 Dec. 2019, granite.pressbooks.pub/mgmt805/chapter/stress-in-an-organization.

⁷ Worker Illness and Injury Costs Us Employers. 2015, www.cdcfoundation.org/pr/2015/worker-illness-and-injury-costs-us-employers-225-billion-annually.

extended periods of time. However, there has recently been a surge in interest in short-term meditation or mindfulness programs that can produce results quickly. Mindfulness meditation has been found in several studies to increase concentration and decrease daydreaming. A very effective Meditation and Mindfulness Training is provided by a neuroadaptive virtual reality meditation system (which combines virtual reality with neurofeedback)

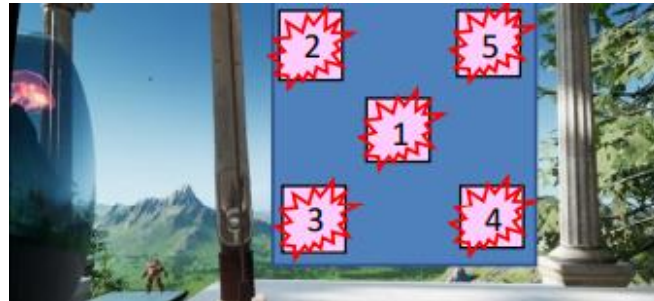


Fig 01. Regaining sustained attention

In a study conducted it was observed that participants were recharged and had their sustained attention at their best after the training, which allowed them to perform and focus better.

Sustained Attention Game

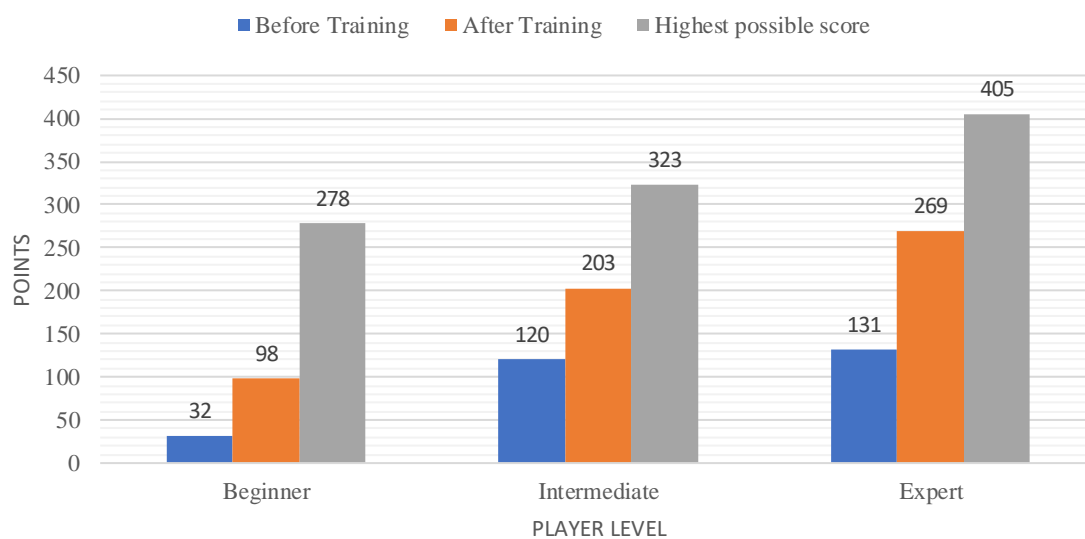


Fig 02. Game performance ⁸

⁸ "A short virtual reality mindfulness meditation training for regaining sustained attention, arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1907/1907.04487.pdf.

Chronic Pain Management

Almost 60 million individuals worldwide suffer from chronic pain, including those suffering from low back pain, arthritis, and migraines. It is defined as "pain that lasts longer than normal tissue healing time,"⁹ which is usually greater than three months, and can create a variety of issues such as anxiety and stress, as well as an inability to work and do ordinary everyday activities. Mindfulness is a practice that directs one's attention to the present moment, for example, by being aware of one's breathing or recognizing one's thoughts or feelings as they arise. Mindfulness integrated with Virtual reality helps a lot, after eight weeks of mindfulness meditation, participants who tried the virtual reality mindfulness experienced reduced pain and stress, according to the research. Meditation specialists indicated a high degree of acceptability for utilizing VR to develop mindfulness and aid the problem.

Facilitate meditation training for leadership development

Virtual reality (VR), an immersive technology described as "a real or simulated environment in which a perceiver enjoys telepresence,"¹⁰ has recently emerged as a useful teaching tool owing to its immersive nature and ability to authentically imitate real-world circumstances. Training and development have interesting implications when VR is used in the workplace. VR is particularly promising for the delivery of training materials in the workplace due to its immersive character. Using VR for training enables firms to teach staff in multiple surroundings without requiring them to leave the office. In addition, the immersive nature of VR allows the learner to forget about office-related distractions and concentrate only on the training objective. It feels that virtual reality is a viable technology for meditation training owing to its deep and nonlinear characteristics. Previous studies have shown that practicing mindfulness meditation in the workplace can have positive effects on an individual's levels of stress, empathy, emotional regulation, employee engagement, and increased attention. These benefits can be attributed to the positive effects that mindfulness meditation has. The beneficial impacts that mindfulness meditation has on people transfer over to organizations in the form of desired outcomes such as enhanced employee engagement and better staff performance.

⁹O'Connor, S., Mayne, A., & Hood, B. (2022). *Virtual Reality-Based Mindfulness for Chronic Pain Management: A Scoping Review*. *Pain Management Nursing*, 23(3), 359-369. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmn.2022.03.013>

¹⁰Sylvan, C. (2019). *Virtual Reality (VR) for leadership: VR assisted meditation training for leadership development*. *Scholarworks*. <https://scholarworks.calstate.edu/concern/theses/vd66w162t>

Over the course of the workday, many companies provide their workers with the opportunity to participate in meditation sessions or seminars. Nevertheless, these events often take place in empty conference rooms, making it difficult for participants to refrain from thinking about their jobs. Since virtual reality is so immersive, workers may use it to transport themselves to other environments and get the advantages of distraction-free meditation even while they are at their desks. Therefore, an immersive environment has the potential to improve the meditation experience. This is especially true in an organizational environment, as a virtual environment can help the participant focus on meditation rather than their work responsibilities, which can be especially beneficial in an organization. As a result of increased communication and the expression of feelings, increased mindfulness leads to considerable gains in professional relationships as well as friendships. After cultivating more emotional intelligence via meditation, relating to others will seem more natural and straightforward.

Conclusion

VR-based mindfulness training has been shown to be more effective than traditional mindfulness training¹¹, as it improves levels of mindfulness and meditation experience while also reducing anxiety, and depression, improving sleep quality, emotion regulation, and generating mood improvement. People who are not comfortable doing meditation the traditional way can opt for VR meditation. VR meditation gives more visual impacts and the brain tries to remember the images better. Sound through the headphones also play a huge impact on the mind and the body. Though there are good impacts of VR, there are some problems that might affect the person, such as giving the person eye strains, and headaches. But keeping in mind the work the corporate professionals do every day, on the laptop and phones, it wouldn't really affect one's life if it is managed as per the hours of work, they do. The time can be allocated for the sessions so it is relaxing as ever. Traditional meditation allows the mind to empty thoughts, naturally. After all, keeping the mind still and forgetting all thoughts, would not hurt the human body but benefit it. Open door to other dimensions never known to mankind.

¹¹ Sunder, Kalpana, and Kalpana Sunder. "Is VR Meditation Better Than the Regular Kind? How It Can Help You Battle Stress, Anxiety and Insomnia, And..." *South China Morning Post*, 8 Nov. 2022, www.scmp.com/lifestyle/health-wellness/article/3198695/vr-meditation-how-it-can-help-you-battle-stress-anxiety-and-insomnia-and-focus-present-moment-better.

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