



The impact of internet on education and development in Buddhist contemporary society

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Abstract

In this modern society, the Internet is considered the most popular medium to send and receive information. Through social media that almost everyone on this earth uses it for learning, research, communication, medicine, news, etc. Similarly, in Buddhism, the Internet plays a very important role in the education and propagation of the Buddha's Dharma.

When we mention the benefits of using the Internet, it has two sides. First, some individual abused the internet to work against the law, such as the reactionary and offensive images on the Internet, bringing non-educational information, or creating violent online games leading to play truant etc. Second, some individual, use it for dissemination of information, using email and social media to put information on medicine, talking videos on ethics for peace, tolerance and harmony in society. Consequently, the Internet is seen as a double-edged sword which is beneficial or harmful depending on the user's purposes.

In Buddhism, the Internet is considered a tool for spreading and developing Buddhist teachings in today's society. The use of the internet to spread and teach the Buddha's enlightened thought is a new, fast and easy method. Along with using Internet, we have also many difficulties and obstacles from the outside to the inside of monastic life. Some general issues are set for using Internet in Buddhism will be discussed and analyzed in the paper whether positive or negative Internet is, should Buddhist monks use internet and participate in social networking sites or not, what is the importance of Internet in spread and education of Buddhism and how to use the internet for Buddhist monks etc. will be discussed in the paper.

Keywords: internet, social media, Buddhism, education, development, technology, ethics

Introduction

The internet has a great impact on education and development on Buddhism in today's society. Consequently the Internet is considered the most popular medium to send and receive information. In the digital age, we see that we are living in a world of science and technology where we are surrounded by internet gadgets, computers and other tools. Life in this era, for sure, the monks also face new technology as tools for teaching, learning, studying and spreading the Dharma. Internet is a medium which is good or bad, depending on the user's purpose. If it used with wisdom, its use by the monk is right with the Dharma; on the contrary, the monk would destruct himself from it.

Monks, as educators and researchers must learn more about this new technology. Using internet, monks will be skilled and connect with more resources that will help them to develop Buddha's Dharma further. As Ven. Pannyavaro, founder of the website 'Buddha Net' (www.buddhanet.net), said about monks and information technology, "*What is happening now is that we have a new tool and a more sophisticated way to spread Buddhism*". Similarly, Ven. Worachiramethi, founder of the website 'Dharma Today' (www.dharmatoday.com), is spreading the Buddha's Dharma in Thailand, also agreed saying, "*The greatest influence of the world today is not power or money but technology. There are many people who use technology for evil purposes to benefit for oneself, opposite, why not use the technology of the internet to serve the teachings and education*".

We think thankful to the technology and social networking sites, which enabled people to study Buddhism more and easily accessible way. We can get access the teachings of the Buddha any time anywhere in the world. We need not to deny technology and fast mediums of communication, iPhone, iPad or computer, instead, we should use the technology of internet as a tool to expand our potential to make this world a better place to live in. The Internet plays an important role in spreading Buddhist ethics. From the perspective and general aspects, there are now many types of tools and platforms, the most popular in the world as now is Facebook and Twitter with millions of accounts, which are used in the propagation of Buddhism. In Vietnam online forum name PalTalk is also popular in the summer retreat is a forum used not only to preach Buddhism, but also used for many different purposes like contact, conference, study, online ceremony and prayer.

According to some information from the website www.giacngo.vn on the website of 'Dhamma Today' have over 30,000 Facebook members just in one month and 7,000 twitter users in the first two weeks. Two most popular social networking sites in the world with millions of accounts are common tools used today in spreading Buddhism among monks and lay followers.

In Korea, the teacher Haemin used Twitter to convey the teachings of enlightenment and wisdom of the Buddha through the internet with about 55,000 followers. His Twitter account is ranked the most influential in Korea. He said that Monks should use social networking sites like Twitter to communicate with believers. He encouraged, and said, we

should talk more with the young generation, otherwise they will gradually dismiss religion as something of the outdated and obsolete.

Currently, as we know, there are two famous masters and leaders in spreading the way to peace and flourishing – H.H. Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. They have, too, used social networking sites as a means of transmission Dharma. With the method of ‘Engaged Buddhism’, they have put Buddhism on a new turning point in spiritual morality. The image of a monk sitting in front of the computer previously considered a bad for the liberation, but nowadays monks use computers or social networking sites not a strange thing. Important question here is, how to develop Buddhism online in a positive way, and what should be the purpose of its use. Of course, when confronted with the modern world of the internet, it always comes in two aspects positive and negative.

Benefits and disadvantages of internet in general

Speaking of the Internet, surely, we will think of a beautiful place with full of colors as well as a paradise, a house of material and knowledge, but sometimes we say that the Internet is an “illusory world”. It can be true for ordinary life and considered merely a shadow which always follow our daily lives. This is a big problem for those educators who are interested and worrying about education nowadays. Some images of students who dropout to play games, watching movies, looking for love on the Web and then lead to suicidal tendency because of the lie, uploading images and video of sex, using the internet to connect to the reactionary works etc. These are some issues for common concern to society today and when we talk that internet is common use, the demerits also prevail as common. We do not deny that the use of the Internet is a now fastest and prevailing widely as tool for all fields whether economy, research, education or politics. It helps people achieve good results in medical research, philosophy, biology, as an infinite treasure that man has created, such as we can talk to each other around the earth, and easily search study materials, doctrine, information on securities, economics, newspapers, movies, photos using Google as tool, which is the most popular these days.

Thereupon, we see that the internet can help people expand their minds and learn new knowledge with just sitting in one place one can also understand the outside world. If we use the internet for meaningful purposes, it is very useful for ourselves and humanity in general, and contrary, if for wrongful purposes, it can harm us as well as our society.

Should Buddhist monks use internet and social networking sites

As mentioned above, for a monk living in a world of technology, using technologies should be acceptable. In the time of the Buddha, there were no computer, no internet and no automobiles as fastest medium to spread Dharma, but he used his disciples as a medium to spread Dharma among common masses organizing Sangha as a united force.

Consequently, writing on any piece of paper, wood, cloth, leaf or in Microsoft word document what is more important? We know that the most important is the content what we write and not the tools or article write with. If a new monk who has not moral qualities, does not understand deeply the teachings of

the Buddha, has not grasped the essence of Buddhism, he may not be allowed to use the Internet because he has not removed his secular life yet particularly, thus he should have the time to practice and train himself moral rules to become a teacher or master, then he can control himself, and abstinence in every action when joining social networking sites. Otherwise, newly joined monks do not undergo the training of monastic life strictly when they use the Internet or social networking sites. It will be an easily available bad influence to Buddhism and Buddhist followers like posting images lack majesty and depression. For example, they might fabricate personal views which are not consistent with the Dharma of the Buddha but considered it as truth and sublime. Besides that, some monks are not serious in talking to lay followers, or not yet express the decorum in conversation. That is only some minor influences of Buddhist monks should be concerned. Moreover, some individuals abuse the Internet in order to forge a monk’s image to destroy Buddhism through vulgar images, unethical and disrespectful to the masses.

For Buddhist monks, what the criteria and directions, goals and responsibilities of a Buddhist monk are, it is not about using the Internet, but it is about purpose. At the time of the Buddha, he traveled everywhere to preach the doctrine of deliverance that he, himself had attained. So, to human beings could be understood how he also had used a lot of means to help sentient beings escape from the misery of life. So what is that purpose? That is to help people escape from suffering. Thus, how about today’s society? Why we do not use the Internet as a means to spread Buddha’s teachings. This is a very necessary thing for a monk to spread the Buddhist Dharma in this modern age.

Importance of internet to the spread of Buddhism

Nowadays, Buddhism is well-known and strongly developed in most countries such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Thailand, China, Taiwan, Cambodia, Singapore, Indonesia, etc. Thereupon, the spread and development of Buddhism possible everywhere today. We have to admit that for today’s society, the Internet actually plays a very important role, it has impacted strongly on the Buddhist teaching system in particular and the world in general. It is like a bridge among the good hearts comes together.

Besides, the content we post on Buddhist websites, all can be considered doctrines, truth or authentic? How to ensure the authenticity and an orthodoxy of the teachings? The influence of the internet on Buddhism in today’s society, the ideas of Buddhism on the Internet is not threatening or contradictory to ancient knowledge, it only makes Buddhism more accessible and provides an international forum for exchange in fields of education. However, due to high interactivity and unregulated content before uploading, therefore, some websites are considered being sensitive.

In the Buddhist Precepts, there are not any precepts prohibiting monks from using the internet and creating accounts on social networks, but the laws of each locality have their own requirements. The monks with morality whether they are going against those precepts? Surely, it is not because the purpose of the Buddhist monk is to make this society become prosperous, peaceful and with harmony. Accordingly, “how to use the Internet depends on the moral behavior of

each individual". According to a general survey of the benefits and importance of the Internet to the spread of Buddhist teaching comes to human morality. They can be mentioned as follows:

1. Helping monks, nuns and lay followers, especially youth in and an out of the country, easily access Buddhism through Dharma talks or at home.
2. Members of social networks like Facebook; Twitter and PalTalk and other networks have also collected a wealth of material and images about monuments of Buddhism in the world.
3. Some online forums have helped many people learn the teachings of the Buddha and Buddhists have the opportunity to exchange Buddhist culture or to contribute together to social charity or restore the triple gems. It contributes to creating a moral bond for every individual and society in general.
4. Facebook can be considered the most popular today, it has helped each individual to design his own pocket website with many images and materials are very significant for Buddhism.
5. In terms of application, like PalTalk is a bridge to connect among prayers, the remote places, old people, prisoners, traders, busy people who do not have time to come to the temple, etc. Now they can also save the cost and time to hear Buddhist Dharma at home. The Internet, as a means propagated widely to every individual and every nation.
6. Through the social network, members can open their minds to share knowledge and experience with one another on various aspect of Dharma practice.

Conclusion

In short, the Internet is one of the most important tool of spreading the Buddha's Dharma. It plays an important role in improving the spiritual morality among people who want to learn about Buddhism. Today, Buddhist followers have used Internet as a bridge to connect with everyone and be united, creating a beautiful society and now Buddhism has known in the world and some countries have taken the Buddhist standards and ethics to rule the country and further some countries became Buddhist Countries too. These facts cannot be denied about the contribution of Internet today. Occasionally, there are also disadvantages to the propagation of Buddhism by the negative images, the lack of culture, lack of morality of non-believers. But we should not to lose the practical utilization and value of the truth. It is also truth that Internet is considered a 'double-edged sword' the benefit or bad influence depends on the moral actions of its user.

The fact, nowadays, as Buddhism is considered one of the largest religions in the world and also Buddhism is spreading widely not due to deception, greediness, fear, violence or war, but through profound doctrine, compassion and practicality. Buddhism in true sense advocates peace, non-violence, morality, harmony and welfare of all. Thus Buddhism could be recognized the religion of compassion and wisdom even in the era of Internet.

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