

A Feature of Dissemination of Buddhism on Social Media: The Strength and the Weakness

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Abstract

The feature of discrimination of Buddhism is gradually changed which depends on the changing society and its environment. Regarding the discrimination of Buddhism, from Buddha's period to the period of IT by using social media with internet access, it indicates the different way thereof. On Buddha's period, Buddha and his disciples preferred propagating Buddhism by approaching the people directly by travelling from city to city, village by village, etc. By the period after Buddhist council, seemingly, the strategy of such this discrimination is not much different from Buddha's period as a missionary monk also preferred travelling for directly giving a sermon to people at different places, but beyond the India to abroad that make Buddhism spreading to other places widely. In the period of social media, religious people, whether monks, laities or religious organization, prefer using social media to disseminate Buddhism by utilizing the high technology as a tool for such this purpose that is internet connection. With this, Buddhism has fast penetrated through every corner of the world wherever internet access is available and people therein comfortably learn Buddhism.

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Introduction

After having attained enlightenment, Buddha had been travelling across India the purpose of which is to teach what he got enlightened to people regardless race, tradition, religion, tribal group, etc. Regarding the legend, it was five ascetics as the first group who listened from Buddha and became Buddha's main disciple. Firstly, in terms of dissemination, Buddha gave the sermon by himself by traveling states by states, cities by cities, villages by villages, and people to people. When the number of Buddha's disciples had been gradually increased, instead, he sent them to various directions for preaching to both Gods and human beings. Later, King Ashoka, after having revised the Buddhist scripture, *Tipitaka*, sent the missionary monks to various countries to disseminate Buddhism. As a result, Buddhism had widely spread across the world. When Buddhism is well known across the world, the number of Buddhists had increasingly been available throughout the globe. The feature of dissemination of Buddhism was considerably changed when people who wanted to learn Buddhism came to monasteries or religious sites and learned Buddhism with monks therein. As a result, the monastery was always utilized as the centre for Buddhist studies as it was the place for providing the facility, tool, equipment of the process of Buddhist dissemination. When technology has been fast developed in the recent world, the channel of dissemination of Buddhism has also been changed; it is the channel in which the disseminating process of Buddhism is easily approached in this regard. This channel is widely known as online world. In terms of "online", it is the network connected by using internet that people can technologically access through various channels so as to find out the essential information. How to use internet for dissemination of Buddhism is challenging us.

What is Social Media?

In terms of “social media”, it is the technology that produces and organizes information of interpersonal relation. (Allmer, T., 2015) All information is widely shared and exchanged by using the service of internet that can be accessed online. The kinds of internet service utilized on worldwide social media are as follows: (Dewing, M., 2012)

1. Blogs: It is an online journal in which pages are usually displayed in reverse chronological order.
2. Wikis: It is a collective website where any participant is allowed to modify any pages or create a new page using here web browser.
3. Social Bookmarking: Its sites allow users to organize and share links to websites.
4. Social Network Sites: It allows individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, to articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and to view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.
5. Status-Update Services: it is as such Twitter that allow people to share short updates about people or events and to see updates created by others.
6. Virtual World Content: These sites offer game-like virtual environment in which users interact.
7. Media-Sharing Sites: These sites allow people to post video or photographs.

All these social media sites are very popular and globally used. People can share information, event, activities etc. and interact with one other through these channels of social media. However, recently, what people post on social media sites is full of: demographic information; lists of friends, family, and associates; logs of activities, preferences, and favourites; maps showing places a person goes and how frequently; time-

stamped posts that indicate where a person was and when; and the content of the posts themselves, where people detail their thoughts, feelings, and idea. (Golbeck, J., 2015)

Dissemination of Buddhism Direct to Society

After having got enlightenment and traveled by himself to deliver his sermon till had gradually many disciples, Buddha had the absolute purpose that was he needed to spread what he extremely found to people regardless the different ethnics, beings, faith, etc. With this, he sent the first missionary to various directions to purposely deliver his sermon instead of him as saying:

“Go ye, O Bhikkhus and wander forth for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, in compassion of the world; for the good, for the gain, for the welfare of gods and men. Proclaim, O Bhikkhus, the sublime, preach ye a life of holiness, perfect and pure.” (Sri Dhammananda, K., 1983)

By the passage above, Buddha needed to proclaimed what he found to the people throughout the world thereby sending his disciples to various directions so as to assure that all people were able to approach his sermon.

Later, in the reign of King Asoka, the feature of dissemination of Buddhism was radically made thereby sending the missionary monk to all part of India and outside India which is similar with the feature of dissimilation made by Buddha. In *Mahavamsa*, the Buddhist text, it gives a detail of missionary monks, supported by King Ashoka as he wanted to extend Buddhism to all part of India including outside thereof, sent to nine regions as follows: (Geiger, W., 1912)

1. Majjhantika was sent to Kasmara-Gandhara region.
2. Mahadeva went to Mahisamandala where he preached the *Devaduta Sutta*.

3. Rakkhita went to Vanavasa where he preached *Anamatagga-Samyutta*.
4. Yonaka-Dhammarakkhita went to Aparantaka where he preached *Aggikkhanopama Sutta*.
5. Mahadhammarakkhita to Maharattha where he preached *Mahanaradakassapa Jakata*.
6. Maharakkhita to Yonakaloka where he preached *Kalakalama Sutta*.
7. Majjhima went to Himalaya region with other four monks where he preached *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*.
8. Sona and Uttara went to Suvannabhumi.
9. Mahinda, who was the son of Asoka, went to Lanka with other four monks.

The process of sending the missionaries monks to nine regions occurred after Mongalitassa Thera brought the council to an end as mentioned in *Mahavamsa*;

When the Thera Moggaliputta, the illuminator of religion of the conqueror, had brought the (third) council to an end and when, looking into the future, he had beheld the founding of the religion in adjacent countries, (then) in the month Kattika he sent forth theras, one here and one there. (Geiger, W., 1912)

With both features of dissemination of Buddhism in period of Buddha and King Ashoka, Monks by themselves were used as the essential tools for propagating Buddhism which worked effectively as Buddhism had widely spread and extended to all part India and outside.

Dissemination of Buddhism on Social Media

At the beginning, Buddhism was disseminated through oral transmission in which the monks who heard the sermon took them into their memorization and made repetition so as to enable transmission the

teaching to others. The feature of such this dissemination of Buddhism was crucially made through oral transmission. By this way, evidently, in many *sutta*, it started with the phrase *evam me suttam* (thus have I heard). (Price, G., Veidlinger G., and Veidlinger D., 2014) The texts themselves were also designed for memorisation; most of them were developed for facilitate memorisation.

In the modernized period, as the technology has been fast developed, Buddhism, whether its text, tradition, practice, religious sites, etc. is considerably disseminated by using the advantage of hi-technology which well known as social media based on internet services. Regardingly, the feature of dissemination of Buddhism is excitingly developed in accordance with the technology fast developed. As seen, individually, some Buddhist monk posts and shares the essential information of Buddha's teaching, their own activities and ethical or philosophical idea, religious sites, etc. on personal Facebook. Excitingly, some uses Facebook live for living incidence such as religious activities, ceremony and so on. Some uses You Tube for posting their essential videos of various kinds of activity such as Dharma talk, meditation practice etc. Monastery is undeniably said to be the centre for Buddhist studies and rituals. Most of them has created Website the purpose of which is to post and share vital information of religious sites, the movement of activities organized by the monastery. Some as the centre for Pali studies posts information of how to study Pali language so as to promote Pali study and inspire people for playing attention to Pali study. Some as the centre for meditation posts and shares the schedule of meditation and video of meditation practice on You Tube. Some monastery located with Buddhist ancient site creates visual tour so as to introduce the site and attract people on online for visiting the site. Moreover, some university has created the *Tipitaka* (Buddhist Scripture) on online so as that people can search Buddha's teaching from each *Sutta*. Some monastery as the centre of mediation utilizes social media; for example, creating website so as to post the

activities, schedule of meditation on that website so as to teach and inform those who are exactly interested in such these activities of the monastery.

With this, many Buddhist monastery, organization, group or whatsoever makes use of various channels of social media such as Facebook, You Tube, Blogs, etc. to purposely post and share the essential functions in this regard.

The Strength of Dissemination of Buddhism on Social Media

Presently, people across the world enable to access internet which can be globally connected as the society is recently as modernized society and internet is also worldwide that can be accessible for people throughout the world. With this, undeniably, if Buddhism is posted or shared on any kind of social media, it can exactly be accessed by people widely. By this way, Buddhism can be effectively propagated and extended to all part of the regions where internet is available. Besides, those who are exactly interested in studying Buddhism can have a choice of selecting and searching essential information of Buddhism, whether its doctrine, tradition, scripture or whatsoever available on various websites. By this, it guarantees that dissemination of Buddhism on Social Media can thoroughly penetrate throughout worldwide region that results in extending Buddhism widely.

Moreover, to disseminate Buddhism on social media can attract the group or organization involved in Buddhism to purposely create the network between Buddhists themselves or those who want to promote Buddhism. To use social medial to create network among Buddhists can gather the group of Buddhists or those who are educationally interested in Buddhism for jointly organizing any activities and sharing the information of the movement of Buddhism in worldwide regions. Regardingly, such this dissemination of Buddhism can effectively penetrate throughout all part of the world. Comparatively, the feature of dissemination of Buddhism done in the period of Buddha, King Ashoka,

and in the age of social media by accessing internet service seems not be different in terms of purpose and the process thereof, but different in terms of the way to disseminate. Anyways, it worked effectively as Buddhism had widely spread throughout the world.

The Weakness of Dissemination of Buddhism on Social Media

Undeniably, at the age of internet, people can easily search the needed information through website by accessing internet as people from various fields post and share information relevant to their field on their website. Buddhism is one of those fields posted on website by various groups of the Buddhists. They provide the information of Buddhism, whether history of Buddhism, tradition, movement, or various activities that they had organized on their website. With this people can easily learn Buddhism through these channels. However, dissemination of Buddhism on social media can effectively made with the information of Buddhism such as scripture, activities or whatever related to the contents. People can learn Buddhism in terms of its information posted on various websites, but meditation. For those who need to practically meditate and get absorption, *Jhānas*, to learn how to practice meditation through social media might not be enough in some respect as there are various conditions that meditators have to deal with while meditating if they are to attain absorption, *Jhānas*. These conditions inwardly and outwardly involve in a specific subjects of contemplation, precise techniques, and skillfulness in dealing with the pitfalls that lie along with it. (Gunaratana, H., 2002) The path of practicing meditation leading to attain the absorption does not merely depend on the meditators themselves but by those who is called “good friend” in some respect. Those who learn and practice meditation for purposely attaining the absorption should approach the good friend or the giver of meditation subject directly and personally. In *Visuddhimmagga*, *The Path of Purification*, it explains the

way to approach the good friend or the giver of meditation subject as follows:

...if the teacher asks him, “Why have you come?” he can explain the reason for his coming. If he does not ask but agrees to the duties being done, then after ten days or a fortnight have gone by he should make an opportunity by staying back one day at the time of his dismissal, and announcing the reason for this coming; or he should go at an unaccustomed time, and when asked, “What have you come for?” he can announce it.

(Buddhaghosa, B., 2010)

Regarding the passage above, it signifies that those who want to learn and practice meditation to purposely attain absorption should approach the good friend or the giver of meditation subject directly and personally. Owing that to practice meditation regarding the forty meditation subjects, meditators should know the special meditation subject which is one from among the forty-meditation subject that be suitable to their own temperament. (Buddhaghosa, B., 2010) With this, it supports them to attain absorption. In this regard, the giver of meditation subject is very helpful to them for selecting the meditation subject suitable for their temperament. As a result, in terms of practicing mediation, to learn from social media is seemingly not enough when the meditator should approach the experienced teacher, well known as good friend, by staying close to them for learning and practicing meditation for purposely attaining absorption.

In addition to the way to practice meditation as the weakness of dissemination of Buddhism posted on any kind of social medias, there are other weakness thereof these are that people who do not know how to access internet and some area is stringently restricted for accessing internet; though, the world of online is globally accessible. With this, such

this people might not unfortunately reach such the information of Buddhism disseminated on any kind of social media in this regard.

Conclusion

As the recent world is exactly regarded as the world of information and hi-technology, internet service is worldwide accessed and the information disseminated on internet can spread fast and widely. Regardingly, people across the world widely make use of internet for various kind of purposes such as interaction with others afar etc. through the world of online by creating the channel which well-known as social media. Wherever internet can be accessible, people therein enable to fast and widely reach the information disseminated on internet. As for disseminating Buddhism on the world of online through social media, it can absolutely meet the target of propagating Buddha's teaching or whatever relevant to Buddhism that is how to propagate Buddhism across the world fast and widely and how Buddhism spread throughout all corner of the world. Social media is inevitably said to be the best channel for disseminating Buddhism owing that it can make Buddhism spreading across the world.

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