

Can social media influence Buddhist monks to disrobe? A Theravāda perspective based on the Ūmibhayasutta of Aṅguttara Nikāya

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It is clear that social media are so useful that many people and even Buddhist monks cannot live without social media in the modern world. In regard to the Buddhist monks being associated with social media, some may argue that Buddhist monks should not surf the Internet probably because social media would cause them to disrobe. Actually, it is so hard to say that Buddhist monks will give up the training and revert to the lay life because of surfing the Internet or being associated with social media by any kind of modern gadgets. However, it can also be said that some monks will try to give up the training and revert to the lay life because they can get improper experiences by surfing the Internet. In order to clarify this situation, it is important to observe the Ūmibhayasutta of Aṅguttara Nikāya in which the Buddha pointed out four perils that can cause monks to give up the training and revert to the lay life. Among the four perils mentioned in this sutta, the latter two perils; the peril of whirlpools, and of fierce fish, are related to how social media can cause Buddhist monks to disrobe. According to the peril of whirlpools, āvaṭṭabhaya, a certain monk can admire people enjoying, or endowing with the five objects of sensual pleasure. At that time, a monk may think of enjoying the wealth and do meritorious deeds in lay life, and try to give up the training and finally revert to the lay life. Then, according to the peril of fierce fish, susukābhaya, a certain monk can see women dressed in disarray, or badly attired while going for alms. At that time, lust may invade his mind and a monk would try to give up the training and later revert to the lay life. Ancient monks could get these experiences through being associated with people when going for their alms. Nowadays, Buddhist monks can get such similar experiences by being associated with social media without going for alms into a village or a town. By the help of social media, such as Phone, Facebook, Viber, Youtube etc., they can easily see people enjoying the sensual pleasures and connect with a woman they like. This is an obvious changing of the life style between monks in the past and present. Although ancient monks could be invaded by lust while going for alms, modern monks can be invaded by lust while sitting in their room. However, it is still hard to say that every monk who associates with social media will try to give up the training and revert to the lay life. According to the Ūmibhayasutta, if a monk went for alms mindfully, lust would not invade his mind and he would not try to give up the training. Similarly, if a modern monk could associate with social media mindfully, social media would not cause him to disrobe. Nevertheless, modern monks should be fully aware of the negative impacts of social media as it can also cause a monk to disrobe if the monk associates with social media mindlessly.

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