Within the past few years, social networks have become a social phenomenon and played an important role in Vietnamese young people's spiritual life. The purposes, the levels and the ways of participating in social network may vary; however, generally speaking, young people have considered social networks as an indispensable part of their lives to some extent.

The advent and the development of social networks are a remarkable progress in human life and communication. In Vietnam, although social networks have only been introduced recently, they have grown rapidly and brought many advantages to the society. However, there also arise some problems that require consideration.

Social networks

A social network or a virtual social network is defined as "a website where one person can connect with many other people by sharing personal hobbies, residences, education…" [1]. Such social networks as Facebook, Orkut, Friendster, Hi5, Yahoo360, Myspace, etc. are those that have great numbers of members. Social network members may have opportunities to share their hobbies, chat, send emails, see movies and photos, voice chat, write a blog, play games, manage and search for information, connect with their friends regardless of time and space… With those conveniences, social networks have become an indispensable part of hundreds of millions of members' lives all over the world.

The attraction of social network to young people

Above all other means of mass communication, nowadays, the Internet is proving its power, rocket growth as well as great influence on people. Among them, social networks have been and will be a part of many people's social life. Indeed, nowadays, people live and work in an environment of mass communication. They eat, sleep, work, love, hate, etc. with mass communication. In the so-called "Flat World" era, nobody, especially young people, can deny the benefits of social networks. Social networks, a new phenomenon on the Internet that is having a great influence on a part of the population, are a typical event that attracts a lot of attention.

The appearance of social networks together with their diverse features and sources of information has really penetrated into Internet citizens' lives. With the various functions that result in the increasing participation of many members, nowadays, the Internet has changed many young people's habits, thinking, lifestyles, cultures, etc. in some aspects. Young people, with their typical psychological development characteristics, have their own needs and are those who receive advances in science and technology actively, as well as those who are most influenced by audiovisual media both positively and negatively.

There are many benefits that social networks offer to users: fast information; diverse and continuously updated information; entertainment, etc. There is also another important aspect that changes forms of communication among individuals, groups and nations drastically: connectivity. It can be said that this is a nonmaterial public communicative space creating easy, convenient and fastest connections among people via many forms and extensive connections that are not limited to space. Thus, the amount of information shared is substantial and hugely diverse. As a result, the number of social network users is increasing.

Indeed, the number of social network users is rising very rapidly, especially, the number of adolescents and students aged from 16 to 24 accounts for 22%. *"The number of social network users in Vietnam is increasing very rapidly. Approximately 17% of adults usually communicate with strangers via the Internet and this percentage is inversely proportional to age."*

Age	Percentage
16 – 24	22%
23 – 25	7%
Adults	17%

Source: PC World VN

.*Hanoi has the highest number of social network members (30.97%), followed by Ho Chi Minh city (27.63%). Hai Phong is in the 3rd position (4.1%). Other provinces account for under 4%. Moreover, nowadays, social networks have become a business and advertising tool"* [2].

On the basis of what they have already had, social networks will continue to grow whether we want it or not. The development of social networks is inevitable and the trend is to develop deeper and deeper.

Indeed, nowadays, there are more and more demands for social networks. The appearance of more and more websites with convenient, modern, new features has attracted and actually brought quite a lot of benefits to users. Do you want to look for a job, a free English course, a good restaurant, a girlfriend or old pals? You can find them all on social networks. Everybody can get access to the information they need provided that there is an Internet connection.

Many young people have learnt how to use social networks most efficiently. They use social networks as a source of knowledge that help them develop themselves, as a place to unite the communities, as a place for sympathetic people to share weal and woe and help those who are wretched and in need. On this basis, many young people have established websites to raise

funds, rice,… and even invite blood donations to help poor and sick people, and so forth.

Apart from their benefits, social networks bring about some negative phenomena, i.e. "information crisis", "stir in public opinion", and "online addiction" for young people.

Recently, there have been many scandals especially related to celebrities like actors, models, singers concerning their sex videos that are posted on the Internet and spread worldwide by social network users overnight. The most recent cases of schoolboys and schoolgirls assaulting their friend, taking off her clothes and posting her photos on social networks; having uncontrolled sexual relationships, taking nude photos of oneself, shooting sex videos are spread on social networks and have negative influences on adolescents' personality development.

A part of the young now tend to live virtually in real life. They often picture a life that is totally different from the real one. Many of them have to pay dearly for taking nude and sexual photos and posting them on the Internet to show off on the spur of the moment. Some wrongdoers steal such photos and use them for malevolent purposes. When these young people are aware of the seriousness of their action, it is too late to save the situation. Others regard social networks as a target; they live in that virtual world and forget their true selves in the real life.

The fact that a part of the young are addicted to online games, sex games, sex chat… is becoming more and more common, concerning parents and the society, and resulting in many undesirable outcomes for the young themselves, their families as well as the society. The consequences of social network addiction are: decreased productivity, distraction from study, ill health (poor vision, insomnia, mental fatigue…). Besides, the spread of information from social networks is very fast and easy, creating an environment of which wrongdoers can take advantage, do harm to social network users' minds and thinking. The damaging effects of the Internet have partly reduced many adolescents' moral values and human culture nowadays.

Moreover, there is also a large amount of information from unknown sources that is not censored yet and is intended to insult and defame other people or used for reactionary purposes, which damages not only relationships but also ethnic matters and most dangerously opposes the State. One of those dangers is that social network members may establish groups to propagandize unwholesome or untrue information or reactionary powers' conspiracy to oppose the nation.

Conclusion

In short, it can be said that current means of mass communication have had strong influences on people's minds, especially the young. Social networks are a part of the multimedia world and intended to satisfy young people's demands for information, connection and sharing. Especially in the era of integration, with the drastic development of many social networks, adolescents have many opportunities to participate in the informative world and have extensive connections, and simultaneously get access to different thinking systems and values of life.

The question here is how to manage the use of social networks in order to bring positive effects to users and reduce negative aspects. How to strengthen the young's self-control during the process of integration into the multimedia world? This problem may be hard to solve without proper understanding as well as thorough and timely intervention from many levels.

Solutions

Within the scope of the report, we would like to propose several solutions as follows:

- There should be instructions, advice and orientation for the young regarding the use of social networks in a useful and efficient way. Adolescents need to be instructed on the potential dangers of posting their personal information on social networks.

- Besides, young people should be oriented towards the real life with useful activities for themselves and their communities. Education about political thought should be promoted and students' awareness of political and social issues should be improved so that they will have a firm stuff to deal with the information they get from different sides.

- We should not depend too much on social networks and the virtual world. We should establish relationships in the real world instead of spending too much time on the virtual one.

- We should have methods and measures to manage social networks and improve users' awareness in order to make the most of their positive values as well as reduce their negative influences.

A long – term solution to mitigate the negative influences of social networks requires administrators of all levels to create a wholesome entertaining playing field; schools and appropriate authorities to educate and propagandize the negative effects of using social networks improperly.