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Article

Communication Theology and Synodality: A Sociological Reflection on the Digital Evangelization Challenges and Opportunities for the Catholic Church in Vietnam Today

Fr. Minh Nguyen
University of Santo Tomas, Graduate School, Manila, Philippines
Correspondence: nguyen.minh.gs@ust.edu.ph

Abstract

This study examines the direction of the Catholic Church's digital evangelization in Vietnam, situating its pastoral mission within both theological and sociological frameworks. Digital evangelization, through the use of the internet, social media, and online platforms, extends the Church's mandate of preaching Christ not only to the faithful but also to wider Vietnamese society. To be effective, this pastoral approach must engage with Vietnam's socio-cultural realities, including youth culture, technological adoption, and the pluralism of modern Vietnamese life. The analysis employs communication theology and synodality as guiding lenses, emphasizing that evangelization must be dialogical, participatory, and responsive to the lived experiences of communities. Synodal communication theology underscores shared responsibility and collective discernment, aligning evangelization with the Universal Church's thrust toward inclusivity and co-responsibility. From a sociological perspective, digital evangelization is understood as a form of social integration, fostering community participation and bridging generational divides. Findings highlight that digital evangelization is most effective when it engages sociological realities such as generational shifts, the role of youth in shaping online discourse, and the marginalization of peripheries who rely on digital spaces for connection. The study concludes that synodal approaches, informed by sociological principles of community participation and cultural adaptation, render digital evangelization both relevant and sustainable. Recommendations include strengthening youth-focused digital ministries, fostering online spaces for dialogue and solidarity, and integrating local cultural narratives into evangelization strategies. By bridging theology and sociology, the study affirms that digital evangelization in Vietnam is not merely a technical adaptation but a transformative pastoral response to contemporary social realities.

Keywords: *Digital Religious Communication, Synodal Participation, Theology of Communication, Vietnamese Social Context*

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Introduction

The Catholic Church in Vietnam has long been recognized as a young, dynamic Church with great missionary potential. With a population of 101,870,223, the Catholics account for 6.73% of the population with 6,865,413 faithful. A fervent liturgical life characterizes the life of the church in Vietnam, as does society's respect for priests and religious, along with numerous vocations and an abundant lay faithful. The recent statistics show that 274 priests were ordained in 2023, and tens of thousands of religious and catechists were ordained.[1]

However, in terms of the growth in the number of Catholics, there has been little progress over 65 years (1960-2025). In an interview with *Vatican Insider*,[2] Bishop Đinh Đức Đạo said that "In 1960, there were 2.43 million Catholics out of a total population of 35 million, accounting for 7%. Forty years later, in 2000, the number of believers was 5.2 million out of a population of 77 million, equivalent to 6.75%. In 2014, there were 6.6 million Catholics out of a population of 95.2 million, or 7%." These figures show that since the establishment of the hierarchy in 1960, the proportion of Catholics in Vietnam has remained virtually unchanged, and even shows signs of decline.

Bishop Anphong Nguyen Huu Long also noted that 80–90% of adult converts come from those born into Catholic families or from those who marry Catholics. It is also an increasing situation in Vietnam that even young people from Catholic families do not necessarily grow up as Catholics. In terms of population, it can be said that after 50 years, the evangelization of Vietnam has not achieved significant results. Statistics from 2014 show that there are 4,635 priests (3,546 diocesan priests and 1,089 religious priests), 2,357 seminarians, 2,389 pre-seminarians, 19,717 religious (2,834 male and 16,883 female), along with 59,448 catechists, for a total of 88,546 personnel involved in missionary activities. However, the number of new converts joining the Church that year was only 41,395. Thus, on average, for every two newly selected missionary personnel, less than one person was brought into the Church, not to mention the significant presence of Catholic associations throughout the country.[3]

This shows that the Catholic Church in Vietnam still faces many challenges in its missionary work. Amidst these enormous challenges is the reality of the internet and social media as an increasingly powerful agora for evangelization to address this concern. The Vietnamese society has one of the highest rates of Internet and social media use in Asia. By the end of 2023, Vietnam ranked 12th globally and 6th in Asia in terms of Internet users, with over 73% of the population regularly using the

[1] Vietnamese Bishops' Conference, "Evangelization in Vietnam Today: Light and Shadow," Commission for the Proclamation of the Gospel, 2023, accessed September 4, 2025, https://hdgmvietnam.com/chi-tiet/truyen-giao-viet-nam-hien-nay-anh-sang-va-bong-toi-40319

[2] "Vietnamese Church, when faith is not about numbers," *Vatican Insider*, La Stampa, October 14, 2015, accessed September 4, 2025, https://www.lastampa.it/vatican-insider/en/2015/10/14/news/vietnamese-church-when-faith-is-not-about-numbers-1.35215113

[3] Vietnamese Bishops' Conference, "Vietnamese Evangelization Today: Light and Shadow," Commission for the Proclamation of the Gospel, 2023, accessed September 4, 2025, https://hdgmvietnam.com/chi-tiet/truyen-giao-viet-nam-hien-nay-anh-sang-va-bong-toi-40319

Internet.[4] The Church's missionary activities in the digital environment are the way forward for the future growth of the Church in Vietnam. The Church must improve its pastoral and social communication and tap into the potential of artificial intelligence and social media.

Fr. Anthony Nguyen observes that "Evangelization efforts seem to be nothing more than a personal crusade, fragmented and aimed at individuals and volunteer religious orders."[5] Sister Marie Nguyen in Saigon adds that "Dioceses and the Church in Vietnam generally lack enthusiasm, a comprehensive evangelization strategy, and investment in means and tools for the evangelization mission, especially in rural or remote areas."[6]

This study presents the key challenges of evangelization in Vietnam and how these challenges provide the context and elements for enhancing the social and pastoral communication approach. Moreover, given the universal thrust of the Church to become a synodal Church, it explores how the principles of synodality make the communication ministry a practical missionary approach for the Church in the digital age. In doing so, it is essential to return to the theological foundations of synodality while seeking creative models of communication and pastoral ministry appropriate to Vietnamese culture and society.

Missionary concerns and challenges

One of the most notable features of the Catholic Church in Vietnam is the vibrant life of local communities. Father Mi Sheen, Professor of Communication Theology at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas in Manila, after visiting Vietnam, remarked that "the Church in Vietnam is truly dynamic, with large numbers of faithful attending Mass, filling churches, dressed in their best clothes, and participating in numerous pastoral activities before and after Mass."[7] This observation reflects the reality that most parishes in Vietnam maintain a vibrant, enthusiastic, and well-organized liturgical life. Alongside liturgical celebrations, many lay apostolic movements, religious associations, and youth activities have also flourished, contributing to a diverse and rich community life. This demonstrates the missionary potential of a Church that is both traditional and capable of gathering people together.

In addition, because of the strong influence of Confucianism and Buddhism, Vietnamese people are often considered gentle, compassionate, and always respectful of religious leaders, parents, and teachers. This cultural mindset has contributed to the

[4] "Lượng người dùng Internet Việt Nam đứng hàng đầu thế giới," *Vietnam.vn*, accessed September 4, 2025, https://www.vietnam.vn/luong-nguoi-dung-internet-viet-nam-dung-hang-dau-the-gioi

[5] Anthony Nguyen, quoted in "Vietnam: Catholic Church and the Challenge of Evangelization," *VietCatholic News*, accessed September 4, 2025, https://www.vietcatholic.net/News/html/64937.htm

[6] Marie Nguyen, quoted in "Vietnam: Catholic Church and the Challenge of Evangelization," *VietCatholic News*, accessed September 4, 2025, https://www.vietcatholic.net/News/html/64937.htm.

[7] Mi Sheen, oral remarks to the Theology of Communication class, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, 2024.

formation of a devout spiritual life and a spirit of obedience to the clergy among Vietnamese Catholics, creating strong consensus in the practice of faith.

Another notable highlight of the Catholic Church in Vietnam is the abundance of vocations. According to a report by the Evangelization Committee of the Vietnamese Bishops' Conference, in 2023, the Catholic Church in Vietnam had 5,107 diocesan priests, 2,014 religious priests, 28,755 male and female religious, and 2,715 seminarians nationwide. In 2023 alone, 274 new priests were ordained. Currently, Vietnam has 11 major seminaries along with hundreds of institutes belonging to religious orders. These figures reflect the vitality of faith, the generosity of young people in responding to the call to commitment, and the Church's continued religious and social position. In a context where many Churches in the West are facing a severe decline in vocations, Vietnam has become a unique case and a source of interest for research in pastoral theology and religious sociology.

Another critical achievement of the Catholic Church in Vietnam is its social credibility**.** The Catholic community actively participates in educational, medical, and charitable activities, thereby building a trustworthy image in society. In recent years, as Vietnam has integrated into the international community, its religious policy has become more open. The 2013 Constitution affirms that freedom of religion is one of the fundamental rights of citizens: "Everyone has the right to freedom of belief and religion, to follow or not follow any religion. All religions are equal before the law."[8] In practice, the government increasingly recognizes and appreciates the Catholic Church's contributions to education, social charity, and healthcare.

A concrete example is President Võ Văn Thưởng's statement (August 7, 2023), in which he acknowledged the dedication of the Catholic community, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when priests, monks, and laypeople actively participated in caring for the poor, orphans, and vulnerable groups.[9] Many social surveys also show that the community often respects priests and religious as people of moral integrity, sacrifice, and service. This social credibility has become an important asset, giving the Church a voice in culture, education, and charity, while also opening up opportunities for the Church to contribute more to the construction of a just, humane, and compassionate society amid the country's rapid changes.

Over the past decade, many dioceses, religious orders, and individuals in Vietnam have actively utilized social media and digital platforms for pastoral and missionary work. The Diocese of Xuan Loc and Saigon, along with other dioceses and congregations, are now using social media for evangelization. It is easy to get online now. Many religious orders, such as the Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, and Salesians, have developed their own websites and YouTube channels, sharing the Bible, spirituality, and interfaith dialogue programs. Lay associations have also

[8] Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2013, Article 24, Clause 1.

[9] "Vietnamese Bishops' Conference Welcomes President Vo Van Thưởng," *hdgmvietnam.com*, August 7, 2023, accessed September 4, 2025, https://hdgmvietnam.com/chi-tiet/hoi-dong-giam-muc-viet-nam-don-chu-tich-nuoc-vo-van-thuong-52342

created Facebook and Zalo groups for learning, prayer, and charitable support. Many young priests, religious, and laypeople have also become "Catholic influencers" on TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook, posting videos explaining the Bible, sharing Christian life, or guiding prayer. These initiatives show that social media and digital communication technologies are not only official channels of information but also spaces for lay people to actively participate, becoming missionaries on par with priests and religious, while helping the Church expand its mission of proclaiming the Gospel in the digital age.

Alongside the strengths mentioned above, the Catholic Church in Vietnam also faces many issues and challenges. These are the key considerations the Church in Vietnam must address in designing its evangelizing communication model.

In many pastoral environments, decision-making power remains concentrated among the clergy, while the role of the laity is often limited to implementation or collaboration, rather than shared responsibility. Bishop Paul Nguyen Thai Hop has called on the Vietnamese Church to "sincerely look at itself" and carry out a "renewal of its organizational structure, way of thinking, and way of acting" to truly live in communion.[10] The clericalism mindset was formed in a long historical context, leading to the community not fully embodying the spirit of the "People of God"[11] that Vatican II emphasized. Pope Francis also strongly warned that "clericalism, whether fostered by priests or laypeople, causes division within the body of the Church; this division both encourages and perpetuates many evils that we denounce today. Saying no to abuse is unequivocally saying no to all forms of clericalism."[12]

An inevitable consequence of the clericalist mindset is the laity's passivity. The culture of "doing what you are told" is still quite prevalent in many communities, limiting creativity, shared responsibility, and the laity's ability to initiate new ideas. In many parishes, all decisions are made by the parish priest; the laity participates only at the implementation level and is often not consulted. Parish financial management lacks transparency: revenue and expenditure are mainly managed by the priest, while the community has no mechanism for oversight or shared responsibility.

Another challenge is the absence of a culture of listening in Church life. Many parishioners feel like "second-class Christians," expected to obey absolutely. Any opinion contrary to that of the parish priest is often labeled opposition or disrespect for the clergy, or even seen as "disobeying the priest means going to hell." This situation leads to discouragement, stifles initiative, limits the rich participation of the faithful, and in some cases even leads to apostasy or loss of faith. Young people and women often feel that they are not listened to or valued. Dialogue between priests and

[10] Paul Nguyen Thai Hop, "The Mystery of the Church and the People of God," Presentation at the 2010 Vietnamese People of God Conference, accessed September 4, 2025, https://tgpsaigon.net/bai-viet/tham-luan-cua-dgm-phaolo-nguyen-thai-hopgp-vinh-41576

[11] Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium (1964), nos. 9–17.

[12] Francis, Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God, August 20, 2018, accessed September 4, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didio.html

parishioners, between generations, or between groups with different points of view is not widely encouraged, directly affecting the community's ability to communicate and discern together.

Social factors also contribute to this situation. The economic crisis and the wave of migration from rural areas to cities have changed the social structure: many rural parishes are depopulated, while cities have become noisy and tense. Workers, especially laborers, often focus solely on their jobs and lack time to care for their families, causing moral values and family traditions to fade gradually. In this context, consumerism and pragmatism are on the rise, corruption is rampant, and money increasingly dominates all areas of life, strongly affecting the religious observance of Vietnamese Catholics. The communist political regime also restricts freedom of speech and the press to some extent.

While the Church in Vietnam remains vibrant, it must address the above issues and challenges to sustain this positive direction. With young people swayed toward technology, which negatively impacts their faith, then ministry to youth is a crucial concern for the survival and future of the Church in Vietnam. It is for this reason that digital evangelization becomes a perfect opportunity for the renewal and strengthening of the Church in Vietnam.

The opportunity, therefore, for evangelization in the digital space in Vietnam is enormous, provided that the Church knows how to be actively present, uses appropriate cultural language, and does not stop at "communicating" but also opens dialogue and programs for those who do not yet know God. This aligns with the direction of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), which affirms that: "Communication is the soul of the Church's evangelization efforts."[13]

The Synodal Digital Missionary Approach

Since Vatican Council II, the Church has affirmed the fundamental role of communication in life and mission. The decree *Inter Mirifica* (1963) begins by calling social media "wonderful gifts from God."[14] Subsequently, the Instruction *Communio et Progressio* (1971) considered communication as an instrument for communion and evangelization, emphasizing that "by its very nature, communication aims to connect people, build fraternal communion, and thus become an effective instrument for evangelization."[15]

Pope John Paul II, in the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), clearly defined the missionary identity of the Church, affirming: "The Church is missionary by nature, for the command of Christ is not something incidental or superficial, but touches the very heart of the Church."[16] Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation

[13] Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences – Office of Social Communication (FABC-OSC), "Communication Is Central and Fundamental to the Synodal Church," December 2022, accessed September 4, 2025, https://www.fabc-osc.org/2022/12/communication-is-central-and-fundamental-to-the-synodal-church

[14] Second Vatican Council, Inter Mirifica (1963), no. 1.

[15] Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Communio et Progressio (1971), no. 11.

[16] John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), no. 62.

Evangelii Gaudium (2013), developed the concept of "missionary joy," calling the whole Church to leave its comfort zone and go to the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel.[17] In *Christus Vivit* (2019), he emphasized the importance of being present in the digital environment, considering it a priority space for reaching young people and inviting them to participate in the life of the Church.[18]

The Synodal Process of Bishops on Synodality (2021–2024) continues to affirm that a synodal Church is a Church of "communion, participation, and mission." The pre-Synodal document emphasizes that synodality is not just a governance structure. but a living spirituality of listening, discernment, and shared responsibility.[19] In the Asian context, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) highlights three fundamental dimensions of mission: dialogue with the poor, with religions, and with cultures.[20] Today, this dimension needs to be extended to the "digital culture," where millions of young people are present and forming their identities.

In addition, there have been academic studies on the impact of social media in a religious context. For example, Le Duc conducted surveys across Southeast Asia to analyze the impact of digital development on the Church and society, including in Vietnam.[21] Another study focused on the trend of Vietnamese people, especially women, participating in online religious activities through platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Zoom, religious forums, and online communities."[22] However, these works mainly stop at describing social impacts and user statistics, without proposing specific strategies for applying communication to missionary and pastoral work in Vietnam.

In Christian theology, communication is not only the exchange of information, data, or events, but also a theological reality originating from the mystery of the Holy Trinity. In the Trinity, there is always a movement of giving and receiving love among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which serves as the foundation for all forms of human communication. UST theologian Father Eilers emphasizes that "the Church is the fundamental sacrament of communion with God and among human beings," in which communication plays an essential role.[23] Human beings have the capacity for

[17] Francis, Evangelii Gaudium [Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of the Gospel], 2013, no. 20.

[18] Francis, Christus Vivit [Apostolic Exhortation The Living Christ], 2019, no. 87.

[19] Synod of Bishops, Pre-Synodal Document on Synodality (Vatican: Synod of Bishops, 2021), no. 2.

[20] Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Final Document of the FABC General Conference, 2019.

[21] A. Le Duc, "The Effect of Digital Development on Church and Society in Southeast Asia: A Survey," ResearchGate,2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342701741_The_Effect_of_Digital_Development_on_Churh_and_Society_in_Southeast_Asia_A_Survey.

[22] M. T. Dung and M. N. Linh, "Research on the Trend of Vietnamese Women's Participation in Online Religious Activities with the Rise of Social Media," ResearchGate, 2024, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384922355_Research_on_The_Trend_of_Vietnamese_Women's_Participation_in_Online_Religious_Activities_with_The_Rise_of_Social_Media.

[23] Lm. Franz-Josef Eilers, SVD, "Các nhu cầu và điều kiện chung của truyền thông Mục vụ và Truyền giáo," chuyển ngữ Ủy ban Truyền thông Xã hội, Hội Đồng Giám Mục Việt Nam, 08/06/2022, https://hdgmvietnam.com/chi-tiet/cac-nhu-cau-va-dieu-kien-chung-cua-truyen-thong-muc-vu-va-truyen-giao-46103.

communication because they are created in the image of God, who is perfect communication, and through whom God reveals himself in history, reaching its peak in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word. The Church continues this mission, proclaiming the Gospel so that people may understand one another, be united, and praise God.

The Second Vatican Council laid the foundation for modern theology on communication through the decree Inter Mirifica (1963). This document emphasized that the use of communication media must always be linked to moral law and requires people to act in accordance with justice, charity, and conscience. Since then, the Church has constantly emphasized that communication is not only a functional tool, but also an essential dimension of proclaiming the Gospel and carrying out the missionary mission.

As the document *Communio et Progressio* (1971) affirms, communication is a path leading to "fraternal communion,"[24] while opening up the possibility for the Gospel to touch every dimension of human life.[25] In the digital age, the Church earnestly invites the faithful to embrace and use communication technologies as privileged instruments for proclaiming the Gospel and expanding the mission on the so-called "sixth continent": the digital continent. The core value of Christian communication lies in its ability to transform these technologies into spaces for encounter and exchange of faith, where the Gospel of Christ is not only shared but also proclaimed in creative and vibrant ways to inspire new faith.

Furthermore, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) emphasizes that digital communication should not be reduced to mere content transmission, but must become a process of proclaiming the Gospel through authentic interaction, listening, discernment, and the participation of the entire People of God.[26] This vision aligns with Pope Francis's call for communion, urging the Church to practice a dialogical, inclusive, and missionary style of communication. Accordingly, Christian communication in the digital age does not stop at online presence. Still, it becomes a new means of evangelization, contributing to building communion and reflecting the mutual self-giving of the Holy Trinity.[27]

Another significant pastoral opportunity is the synodal process that the universal Church is promoting. The Synod of Bishops on Synodality (2021–2024) affirmed that a synodal Church is a Church of "communion, participation, and mission."[28] In the Vietnamese context, where clericalism and passive laypeople persist, the synodal process opens a new path: inviting the clergy to listen more and creating opportunities for laypeople to speak, contribute, and share responsibility in community life. The practice of synodality can help parishes reduce authoritarianism

[24] Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Communio et Progressio (1971), no. 8.

[25] Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the 47th World Communications Day, 2013.

[26] Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Final Statement of the Tenth Plenary Assembly: FABC at Forty Years—Responding to the Challenges of Asia: A New Evangelization (Xuan Loc, 2012).

[27] Pope Francis, Address at the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, October 17, 2015.

[28] Synod on Synodality, *Instrumentum Laboris* (Vatican: General Secretariat of the Synod, 2022), 15–16.

in governance, increase transparency in pastoral and financial decisions, and encourage the active participation of young people, women, and other groups of believers.

In particular, the widespread popularity of digital media and social networks in Vietnam (Facebook, Zalo, YouTube) creates a new space for practicing synodality. These platforms are not merely information channels but can also become forums for the faithful to express their needs, share their opinions, and contribute ideas to the community. Instead of limiting dialogue to formal meetings, digital tools help make the listening process more frequent, expansive, and inclusive, especially for groups that are often overlooked, such as young people, women, migrants, and migrant workers.

In other words, synodality, combined with digital communication, is significant not only as a new model of governance but also as a culture of dialogue, transparency, and shared responsibility. It is through this change that the Vietnamese Church can both renew its internal life and expand its missionary work, so that the Gospel can be shared more vividly in the digital age.

Synodal Digital Environment

The church in Vietnam is called upon to fulfill its missionary mandate by fully utilizing the potential of digital evangelization to build fraternal communion and nation-building. At the heart of this mission is to bring Christ to the peripheries, in particular the young people of today, to live the hope and joy of Christ. Digital evangelization should become the platform for young people and the peripheries to experience the deep love of Christ through the living spirituality of listening, discernment, and shared responsibility. This means that young people and marginalized groups should not merely be subjects and recipients of evangelization. The call for synodality demands that the Church in Vietnam include them from the beginning to the end in the process of evangelization. Renewal of pastoral programs should ensure the participation of youth and the peripheries at all stages of preparation, consultation, and implementation to deepen the community's faith.

Perhaps the most significant youth presence in the digital environment offers the greatest opportunities for evangelization for the Church in Vietnam. Most young Vietnamese use platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube daily, turning the online space into a space for identity formation, learning, and sharing.[29] This is a wide-open "mission field" if the Church knows how to dialogue in the language of young people and effectively exploits modern means of communication.

Digital evangelization, therefore, should animate communication theology, in which Christ, through the Church, communicates his salvific ministry. It should be appropriate, both in human experience and development, that the love and unity of

[29] Pew Research Center, "Social Media Use Continues to Rise in Emerging Economies," 2022, accessed September 4, 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2022/11/22/social-media-use-continues-to-rise-in-emerging-economies.

the Holy Trinity is the very communication of God's love to humanity. This is further enriched by the theology of synodality, which calls for the church to become a listening church to engender broader participation, leading towards deeper communion and making the entire community of the faithful a missionary of Christ to the world. It is for this reason that a practical digital communication approach of the Church in Vietnam should consider the following elements:[30]

1. Diverse content

The digital evangelization approach should not only publish official diocesan information (pastoral letters, liturgical calendars, priest appointments), but also offer numerous sections serving pastoral needs: sermons, reflections on the Word of God, catechism, Catholic news both domestically and internationally, and research and study materials. Regular posting of youth activities, marriage catechesis, pastoral training programs, and other church programs and activities that celebrate and promote the faith are good "living resources" for the life of faith.

2. Language and presentation style

Effective digital communication should use easy-to-understand language and a more pastoral than academic style. Illustrative images, liturgical clips, and video sermons are posted to help bring the content to life. The combination of text, sound, and pictures demonstrates an effort to integrate multimedia communication, in line with the reception habits of today's internet users.

3. Community connectivity

The digital environment should demonstrate its ability to maintain communion beyond family and parochial relationships. An effective form of digital communication should create a Christian identity that transcends the boundaries of language, ethnicity, politics, and culture. During the COVID-19 pandemic, websites played a central role in broadcasting Masses online, sharing pastoral announcements, and providing prayer materials for believers who could not attend church. Many parishioners, especially migrants in Ho Chi Minh City, consider it their "online spiritual home," where they can find information, companionship, and support for their faith.

4. Transparency from the top and combating clericalism

The process of selecting bishops must be transparent and public, allowing the laity to participate in decision-making. At the same time, the Holy See should consult even those priests who have been excluded to identify blind spots and gain a comprehensive view of the candidates, thereby ensuring accurate selection and preventing clericalism.

[30] Archdiocese of Saigon, "Home," TGPSG (website), https://tgpsaigon.net.

5. Innovation in the training and communication ministry

The subject of communication theology and digital media skills should be incorporated into the training programs for seminarians, religious, and catechists, so that they can become "digital missionaries."

6. Strategy for training communication personnel at all levels

It is necessary to develop a strategy for training communication personnel for dioceses, parishes, religious orders, and even core laypeople, through courses, training, and professional guidance. The Vietnamese Bishops' Conference and dioceses need to coordinate to standardize programs, ensuring a common direction and consistent use of digital media to serve the mission.

7. Link and unify communication **platforms**

Diocesan and parish websites, chatboxes, and digital platforms should be linked and unified to build consensus, improve communication effectiveness, and ensure a consistent user experience.

8. Interaction and outreach to non-believers

Communication content should be highly interactive and reach non-believers, helping them learn about God and the Church and thereby enhancing understanding and cultural dialogue.

These are just a few suggestions that we can derive from the communication theology as points for consideration in designing pastoral communication theology in Vietnam. Admittedly, some limitations should also be acknowledged. Digital evangelization should not focus solely on the internal life of the Church, but also consider its relevance and contribution to building peace, harmony, and unity in the country. It should foster two-way dialogue or adopt more creative forms, such as interactive livestreams, dialogue podcasts, or short TikTok-style videos. In the context of digital culture, where responsiveness, interactivity, and continuous creativity are essential conditions for maintaining public interest, the lack of these elements can diminish its appeal to young people. This poses a pastoral challenge for the Church, because as Pope Francis emphasized, "communication must become a form of sincere dialogue, helping the Church to meet and accompany everyone."[31]

Conclusion

In the context of globalization and digitalization, the Catholic Church in Vietnam faces essential opportunities and challenges in its mission to proclaim the Gospel. Data on digital users, particularly young people, offer significant

[31] Francis, Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 48th World Communications Day: Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter, January 24, 2014, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20140124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html.

opportunities to enhance and renew the Church's evangelization work in the digital environment. The document Communio et Progressio[32] emphasizes that communication is not only a means of exchanging information but also a path to communion, an essential principle for the Church to reconsider its role in the digital society. A synodal communication theology challenges the Church in Vietnam to design an online communication theology that is not only inclusive but also creates an event that will allow the faithful, especially the youth, to experience the love of Christ.

Thus, the mission of communication and communion is not just a secondary task but the very essence of the Church in today's world. Proclaiming the Gospel through digital media is to establish a bridge of communion, overcoming barriers of power, and opening the way to an open, companionable, creative Church, while becoming a living witness to the Gospel of joy and hope. It is therefore essential that the Church in Vietnam enhance its digital evangelization to become an attractive and practical minister to the youth and the peripheries. The recommendations in this paper aim to initiate a discourse on developing digital evangelization in Vietnam that is consistent with its culture and responsive to the issues and challenges the Church in Vietnam faces today. A synodal communication theology renders digital communication consistent with the Church's teachings and, at the same time, animates it to engender greater participation and deeper communion among the faithful, thereby strengthening the missionary character of the local church.

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About the Author/s

The researcher is a student at the Graduate School of the University of Santo Tomas, Manila Philippines. He is a Vietnamese priest belonging to the Diocese of CanTho.