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Abstract

Drawing on an online meditation community mentored by Samanera Abhisarano in Indonesia, this study explores how the members use digital media to engage in religious practices and teachings. The data were collected through multi-sited digital ethnographic fieldwork conducted from December 2021 to July 2022. During this period, we immersed ourselves in the WhatsApp group and the Zoom virtual room of the community. In addition to participating in their online activities and interviewing five community members remotely, we conducted on-site fieldwork at the temple where the mentor lives and organized a face-to-face in-depth interview with him. Employing Hjarvard's theory of mediatization of religion, we analyzed how Buddhist teaching and practices were mediatised through the intensive use of digital media in religious environments. We argue that digital media have, to some extent, transformed the routine of this community in terms of performing religious activities. The finding supports Hjarvard's argument that mediatization of religion is a process in which the media have taken over some roles of religious authority and transformed the way society interacts with religion.

Keywords
Mediatization of religion, Online community, Digital ethnography, Buddhism and media; Online meditation

Introduction

The way individuals engage with religion is changing as the internet dominates almost all aspects of urban society. Visiting physical religious sites and discussing religion face-to-face are no longer the only ways to engage with religion. As individuals read online articles from religious websites, interact in online forums, listen to religious podcasts, and watch YouTube videos created by religious figures, religious interaction has become increasingly diversified and internet-dependent. In Indonesia,

this shift aligns with the growth of national internet penetration year by year. To contextualize, Data Reportal (Kemp, 2021) reported that the number of Indonesian internet users at the beginning of 2021 increased by 15.5 percent from January 2020. By February 2022, internet usage had reached 73.7 percent of the Indonesian population (Kemp, 2021). This development was partly driven by the COVID-19 outbreak that hit the world in 2020, which restricted some activities while accelerating overall digitalisation, including in religious settings. Many religious organizations are encouraged by these circumstances to adapt by using digital media to engage with their adherents.

Despite the apparent advantages of using digital media for religious leaders, this phenomenon raises significant concerns about the dependency between religious authority and the media. Whether they are aware of it or not, the use of various media platforms to disseminate religious teachings has brought religious leaders to think and work based on media logic. Hjarvard (2013) contends that this phenomenon leads to the mediatization of religion. In further detail, mediatization is fundamentally a long-term process characterized by shifts in socio-cultural institutions as well as modes of social interaction as a result of the media's expanding sway in society (Hjarvard, 2011). The mediatization of religion, as highlighted by Giorgi (2019), impacts religious leaders as they are forced to integrate media logic into their daily activities. Hjarvard (2008) argued that this process might promote the secularization of religious rituals, images, and modes of worship. Hepp (2009) further argues that as religion becomes more mediatised, individualisation and secularization increase, lending weight to this supposition.

However, Setianto (2015) challenged this notion through his research, showing that in the context of the Indonesian Muslim Society in America (IMSA), mediatization does not encourage the members to be more secular. In contrast, it shapes the members to be more religious. Hazim and Musdholiffah (2021) supported Setianto's findings, reporting that in the case of Indonesian Muslims living in Hungary, dependence on media has become an alternative means to obtain religious teachings, given their limitations in accessing local Muslim communities. Hjarvard's thesis on the mediatization of religion was also criticised by Lynch (2011) on the grounds that it is only be applicable within specific social, historical, political, and religious context. Eisenlohr (2017) later pointed out that discussions of this phenomenon are still mostly based on a North Atlantic Christian viewpoint (Hjarvard, 2008; Hjarvard, 2011; Lövheim & Lundby, 2013; Hjarvard, 2015; Giorgi; 2019; Przywara et al. 2021). As a result, investigating this phenomenon from other social contexts is in need of articulation.

Given the aforementioned inconsistencies and gaps, this study proposes an investigation into how religious communities perceive the use of digital media in their religious practices by focusing on an online meditation community in Indonesia. This community was mentored by a Buddhist monk, Samanera Abhisarano. In addition to maintaining an online meditation community through WhatsApp group and Zoom virtual room, Abhisarano also produces meditation-related content on GoMindful channel, available on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. There are two main reasons why this community is considered an appropriate case study. First, this community was established in Indonesia, a Muslim-majority country where Buddhists comprise only about 0.72% of the population (BPS, 2010). Following Giorgi's (2019) argument, in this online environment, marginal voices like those of religious minority groups can gain more exposure. Studying them may contribute to new perspectives that are sometimes neglected. Second, this community maintains more than one digital platform, such as a discussion group on WhatsApp, meditation sessions on Zoom, and YouTube channel. Although the founder physically stays in East Java, the members

come from various cities across Indonesia. Therefore, it represents a religious online community that transcends physical borders.

Research Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach using a constructivist paradigm. Creswell (2007) explains that the goal of constructivist research is to understand the participant's perspectives on particular social contexts. Digital ethnography is adopted as the research method, emphasizing the provision of detailed contextual reports on people's lived experiences (Varis, 2016). Pink et al. (2016) explained that digital ethnography encourages researchers not only to scrutinize the digital world in novel ways but also to pay attention to the practices, media, and environment that have existed in a pre-digital context. According to Pink et al. (2016), direct observation, which is required in traditional ethnography, can be, to some extent, transferred into the digital setting. Digital ethnographers are often engaged in mediated interactions with participants rather than physical presence. Hutchings (2021) further emphasized that when researching digital religion, an ethnographer should immerse themselves in the community's actual circumstances and grasp the social bonds, conversational rhythm, and religious rituals.

This study was conducted using a multi-sited digital ethnography. According to Marcus (1995), multi-sited ethnography enables researchers to move across a single field to document the flows and movements of cultural meanings, artifacts, and identities in a diffuse temporal-spatial setting. We perceive the WhatsApp group and the Zoom virtual room as an ethnographic field, where community members interact and perform daily activities. The fieldwork was conducted from December 2021 to July 2022. During the period, we immersed ourselves in the WhatsApp group and the Zoom virtual room, participated in their daily meditation sessions, observed online conversation, and conducted remote in-depth interviews with five community members: Anton, Christo, Lisa, Sekar, and Hendra.

In addition to gathering data online, we conducted on-site fieldwork to gain deeper and richer data. We visited the temple where the community mentor, Samanera Abhisarano, lives. We stayed at the temple for a week to participate in Abhisarano's everyday activities. This included visiting his personal cottage, observing him guide the meditation session, and approaching him for a face-to-face in-depth interview.

The online and offline in-depth interviews were transcribed. The interview transcripts and the field notes were analyzed using an inductive approach. The first researcher's personal background as a Buddhist played a significant role in analyzing and interpreting the data. We leveraged the researcher's identity to gain access to the community, understand some expressions, and construct the analysis based on the data. This approach was supported by Setianto (2016) who explained that a nuanced understanding could be produced since the researchers have been familiar with the culture they study.

Results and Discussion

The studied online meditation community is under the mentorship of Samanera Abhisarano. In Buddhist society, a samanera is a novice who is not yet fully ordained and typically commits to a monastic life for a temporary period. The members communicate via a WhatsApp group named "Meditasi Rutin 22.00 WIB" (Routine Meditation 10 p.m.) and organize daily meditation sessions on Zoom teleconference platform. The members communicate via a WhatsApp group named "Meditasi Rutin 22.00 WIB" (Routine Meditation 10 p.m.) and organize daily meditation sessions on Zoom teleconference platform. All participants joined this community remotely, united by a shared interest in mediation practice. Some members have been appointed as

group administrators, tasked with assisting Abhisarano in various duties, such as providing Zoom links, sending reminders to the group, sharing screens, and recording sessions when needed. Although the WhatsApp group is open to the public, the members adhere to several common rules, including restrictions on sharing non-meditation-related information and fundraising announcements. To provide others with the chance to join, those who do not open the WhatsApp group for a week in a row are temporarily removed. The group administrators also monitor conversation to ensure that everyone is in compliance with the common agreements.

The Support System

When we first entered this community, we thought everyone was a Buddhist until we noticed a woman wearing a veil. Her name is Sekar. She told us that when the first time she was in contact with the community, she was quite worried about whether the members could welcome her due to her religious identity, "but, thank God, this community is not exclusive to Buddhists only, so I can become part of it and attend its daily meditation session," Sekar uttered.

At the beginning of her participation in this community, almost everything sounded unfamiliar. Moreover, she was raised in a small village in Sumatra with a relatively homogeneous Muslim society. Therefore, she found it fascinating to be exposed to people with different religions.

Sekar was not the only one who found Buddhism new. Another informant, Lisa, admitted that she had never studied Buddhism theoretically, despite Buddhism being her officially recognized religion. The same can be said about Hendra, who had no background in Buddhism as well. Hendra said that he started to know about Buddhism for the first time from this community. Of the five informants that we interviewed, only Christo and Anton had prior knowledge about Buddhism before joining this community.

Within the WhatsApp group, we noticed that some members used nicknames or emojis when participating in the conversation. Grozman (2021) observed a similar pattern when she studied Church activities during the pandemic, noting that anonymity allowed members to learn religion without fear of judgment. The WhatsApp group also serves as a discussion forum where everyone is welcome to ask questions about their personal meditation experiences or things they still do not grasp. For instance, on 31 July 2022, a member named Jons asked whether it was allowed to play a musical instrument while meditating. Then, someone named Jay responded by explaining that the human senses are the biggest challenge in doing mediation and that minimizing sensory contact, including listening to music, is recommended. For Jay, the mind will easily become engrossed in the music.

Another illustration is Roy's inquiry into whether the lotus position during meditation may accelerate the process of mind purification. The lotus position is a cross-legged sitting posture that requires each foot to rest on the opposite thigh. The Buddha himself practiced this kind of position when he conducted meditation. Roy's question sparked many responses from other members, including Jons and Ken. Jons replied that a sitting position could not guarantee the process of mind purification, emphasizing instead the importance of commitment and thought. Ken added that based on his experience attending an onsite meditation retreat led by Bhikkhu Gunasiri, the lotus meditation position should only be employed when a person has reached a certain stage of meditation. He said that this position is quite difficult for beginners. He recommended the sitting position that was taught by Abhisarano for those unable to practice full or half-lotus position.

This WhatsApp group also serves as a support network for one another. As a case in point, on 10 July 2022, Aurell informed the group that her father was brought to

the ICU. She sent a picture of her father lying in the hospital bed and updated her father's condition to the group. She then asked the other group members to pray for her father's recovery. Reading Aurell's message, other group members spontaneously wished Aurell's father a speedy recovery. That night's meditation session included a prayer led by Abhisarano for the recovery of Aurell's father.

When they received an obituary, they would also spontaneously offer condolences. To illustrate this, on 16th July 2022, Abhisarano announced that Kollyana, one of the group members, had just lost her grandmother. Some members then replied with condolences. We noticed that some members responded to an obituary by using stickers containing prayers and sympathy. Most of the condolence texts and stickers were in the Pali language (the language that is commonly used in Theravada Buddhist community) although we did find some that were delivered in Indonesian. The most frequent phrase we found was "*sabbe saṅkhārā annicā*" which means "all conditioned things are impermanent." In the offline environment, by attending a mourning ceremony and sending bouquets, members of a community showed support to one another. In the online environment, this ritual was negotiated. Since spatiality prevented them from paying a visit physically, sending condolences messages and bouquets in the form of stickers to the WhatsApp group—where they assemble virtually— was seen as a way for them to remain supportive of one another.

This finding aligns with Fakhruroji's (2021b) study on mediatised grieving practice on WhatsApp. While Fakhruroji observed the phenomenon of texting condolences in the context of a Muslim community, this study documented the practice from a Buddhist perspective. In the Muslim community, the most popular phrase delivered to respond to an obituary is "*innalillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un*" ("we belong to Allah, and to Allah we shall return") (Fakhruroji, 2021b). Meanwhile, in the Buddhist community, "*sabbe saṅkhārā annicā*" ("all conditioned things are impermanent") is mostly used. Following Fakhruroji's (2021b) and Giaxoglou's (2014) argument, we argue that rather than evolving into something completely new, mourning in an online community is simply being reconfigured.

In addition to daily meditation sessions, Abhisarano also regularly organized a special session, named "Kelas Abhidhamma" (Abhidhamma Class) to build a strong conceptual foundation in meditation among the members. Abhidhamma, a part of Buddhist scripture, presents the teachings of the Buddha in more technical terms, explaining the theoretical explanation about meditation and a systematic elaboration about conscious experience (Ronkin, 2022). Since it was a special session, attendance requires prior registration. The session began with a brief prayer, reciting Pali texts in homage to the Buddha. Abhisarano projected a picture of the Buddha on the screen, so that everyone could perform a bow while reciting *vandana* (three lines of homage in Pali language).

We joined the class for the first time on Sunday, 6 February 2022. In that session, Samanera Abhisarano delivered material regarding different types of consciousness. At the end of the session, participants were divided into groups of four or five and then asked to watch and analyze a short movie. The first researcher was assigned to Group 2 with members Mui Ngo, Jack, and Wiwi. Abhisarano asked all groups to present the analysis at the next meeting held in two weeks. Of the four of us, only Mui Ngo had a better understanding of the concept, having attended several classes and read related books. We learned a lot from Mui Ngo's explanation. Mui Ngo then recommended a website where the first researcher could order the book she read. The behaviour of sharing e-books, articles, and videos related to meditation was observed as well in this online community. We argue that this behaviour is an act of showing care to one another. When a member knew anything ahead of time, he or she would sincerely divulge the source from which the information was obtained.

This online community has transformed beyond a medium for daily meditation to become a support system for its members. Sekar, a Muslim member, admitted that she felt welcomed and encouraged. She told us, "They are really kind and supportive!" Other informants we interviewed also revealed the importance of this community for their personal development. For instance, Anton said, "I enjoy every time someone shares their personal experiences in the WhatsApp group. When we read, we feel like, 'Uh-oh! That's right!' We will acquire more knowledge if we read the group." Meanwhile, Hendra mentioned that

> In practicing meditation, this group plays an important role. We cannot control our everyday moods, right? Sometimes it goes up, sometimes down. Sometimes I'm lazy, sometimes I'm eager. If we join a community, it feels different. There is always someone who reminds me, "Let's meditate!" There is someone who reminds others. (Hendra, personal communication, 10 May 2022)

Based on those observations and interviews, we argue that although the members of this community being from different cities, socio-cultural backgrounds, and stages of meditation experience, they have been emotionally connected as a *kalyāṇamitta* (literally means "a good companion" in Pali)—the term Abhisarano used to greet them in every meeting. This finding actualises the concept of an online community, described by Campbell (2012), as "technologically mediated gatherings of people" dedicated to a shared interest or objective. She emphasizes that communities are formed when there is an emotional investment within the group, mutual support, and perceived collective identity, culture, and symbols. Drawing on Lochhead's research on the emergence of Christian online discussion groups as a case, Campbell (2012) highlighted how online religious communities can develop "a sense of identity as a community that existed independently of whether service they chose for their electronic communication" (p. 58). This means that collectivism can also have its roots in online communities and this collectivism can be recognised in the systems of symbolism and textual significance that members have created to share ideas and maintain order.

Bringing Offline Practices into the Online Space

We first joined the online meditation session on 18 December 2021. Fifteen minutes before it started, Anton, an informant, broadcasted a reminder with a Zoom link on it. We clicked the link and entered the virtual meeting room around 9:50 p.m. Abhisarano and some other participants were already there, engaging in some small talk before the session began. The meeting room used a Zoom's immersive view, making the participants appear to be in a classroom. Abhisarano, dressed in his light brown monk robe, was seated at the center of the virtual classroom. "Well, *kalyāṇamitta*, it's been 10 o'clock; it is the time to practice meditation together," he greeted the participants as the session began. A number of participants had their cameras on, allowing their faces visible on the screen, while others preferred to keep their cameras off. Belonging to the first group, Lisa, an informant who always keeps her camera on during sessions, said she felt more serious about her practice when she did so.

The meditation session was guided by Samanera Abhisarano. He first instructed participants to close their eyes and relax their bodies, asking them to concentrate on their breathing every time they inhaled and exhaled. Both the inhalation and the exhalation are part of a single breath. It yields one. The participants were instructed to count to eight, resetting to one each time they reached eight, and to continue this pattern throughout the session. After providing these instructions, Abhisarano allowed participants to practice the method independently for 30 minutes. There were four meditation sessions in a day. If the members found the night session (10 p.m.)

was too late, they could join the other earlier three sessions at 6 a.m, 12.30 p.m, or 6.30 p.m. However, during these earlier sessions, participants needed to meditate on their own as Abhisarano could not attend the session.

After the 30-minute meditation, Abhisarano proceeded to the praying session. A prayer session in this context refers to the Buddhist practice of merit sharing. The Pali language, which is prevalent in Theravada Buddhist society, is used in this ritual since Abhisarano was ordained in Theravada tradition. Abhisarano presented a slide showing the merit-sharing text in Pali, along with English and Indonesian translations. According to Abhisarano, this ritual was perceived as an aspiration to wish every being happiness and liberation from mental taints. He explained that since meditation was considered virtuous conduct, it might lead to a beneficial result, or in other words, merit. To this extent, the merit-sharing ritual was done to radiate these positive vibrates to other beings. As the objective was not to worship or praise Buddha, this ritual was actually not exclusive to Buddhists. Christo echoed this explanation, noting that although the ritual uses Pali, the English and Indonesian translations provided after each Pali sentence ensured that everyone could easily read and comprehend the significance in their own minds. Everyone could understand that this ritual was aimed at wishing happiness to all beings.

On several occasions when Abhisarano could not attend the Zoom meditation session. In this case, the session still took place. However, recognising that many members still needed his instruction in his absence, Abhisarano recorded his meditation instructions in advance. Lisa or another group administrator would share this voice recording whenever Abhisarano was not available, allowing participants to listen to the meditation instructions even when he was not present.

Based on our eight-month observations in the WhatsApp group, we noticed that discussions were conducted in a convivial manner. Although they still referred to the traditional religious texts when engaging in some religious discussions, group members frequently used emoticons, emojis, stickers, and GIFs in the chat. One emoji that appeared in almost every conversation was the emoticon of *añjali* or folded hands. In Buddhist society, the *añjali* hand gesture is a symbol of respect, particularly while interacting with monks, and is also used during prayers. This explains why the *añjali* emoji is often placed at the end of most sentences. When community members enter the Zoom virtual room and greet each other, they also perform the *añjali* gesture. “When their cameras are on, I can see them perform the gesture of *añjali*. I think the essence is still the same as they perform it in real life,” Samanera Abhisarano explained. Christo also recognised that although interacting in the digital sphere, the members still pay respect to Abhisarano. He mentioned that in the offline context, when meeting a *samanera* in person, people fold their palms and greet him with phrases like ‘Good evening, Samanera,’ ‘Namo Buddhaya,’ ‘Sukhi Hotu.’ Further, Christo said, “It is like a standard greeting. And, this habit is also brought into this online group by my fellow meditation enthusiasts.”

Certain stickers were frequently used by the community members during online conversation. We captured some stickers embedded with the Pali phrases, like “*Sādhu Sādhu Sādhu*” which functions similarly to "Amen" or "*Aamiin*" in Abrahamic religions, being used in response to someone conveying good wishes to others. Other Pali phrases embedded on the stickers included *namakkāra* (bowing down), *anumodanā* (appreciation), *muditā citta* (altruistic joy), and some quotes from the holy scripture. Figure 1 (on the next page) depicts some stickers that appear frequently in this group.

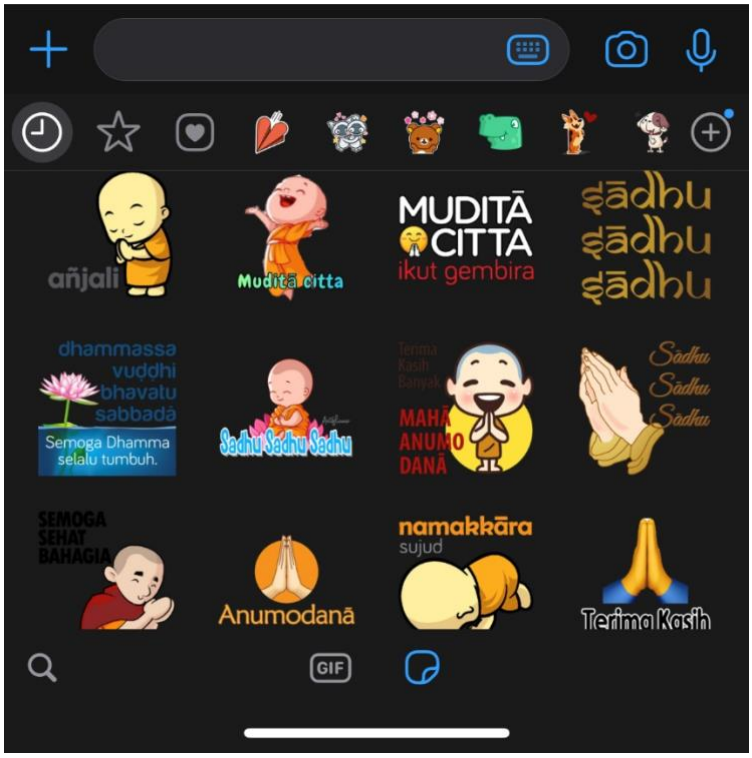

Figure 1. Some stickers that are frequently used.

Mediatised Buddhist Teachings and Practices

The WhatsApp group and Zoom virtual room have extended the ability of the group members to interact and communicate with one another across different geographical and socio-cultural backgrounds. In the Zoom virtual room, community members can assemble virtually, greet each other, conduct meditation collectively, attend Abhidhamma classes, and perform merit-sharing rituals. They did not need to come to the temple or meditation center for collective meditation, as the media offered them real-time access for remote gathering. This would not have been as simple to convene via a video teleconferencing platform decades ago. The advancement of digital media and the internet has made it both feasible and easy to extend human communication in those ways.

Mukherjee (2022) also observed that digital media can expand religious rituals into online context, enabling those unable to celebrate the ritual in person to participate remotely via live streams. In his study of the hybrid form of Durga Puja festivals in the UK, Mukherjee found that members of the Hindu Bengali community perceived the online version of their religious practices as equally important as the on-site version. Referring to Campbell (2010b), Mukherjee concludes that the adaptation of Durga Puja during the pandemic has integrated multiple spatialities and temporalities, illustrating how religion and society have shaped technology. To this extent, this research shares a similar pattern.

Members of this community have also, to some extent, substituted their engagement in a religious environment. For instance, since they could not meet Abhisarano in person, they substituted the gesture of *añjali* (folding palms in front of the chest) and *namakkāra* (bowing down) with WhatsApp stickers and emojis. The printed version of *parittā* texts has been replaced with digital texts shared by Abhisarano or the other group administrators on screen. Most importantly, the Buddha sculpture, considered essential in a Buddhist community, was substituted with the digital image of the Buddha on the screen. Furthermore, rather than visiting

temples to ask monks questions directly, members of this community can simply open their smartphones and send questions to the WhatsApp group.

The tendency to substitute particular religious rituals with media features in the digital realm has also been observed by Addo (2020), who conducted a digital ethnographic study on African Pentecostal communities in Italy. Addo (2020) mentioned that the word "amen" in Pentecostal churches is not merely a closing expression mentioned at the end of a prayer; it is a way for believers to rally their support behind a specific message or moment that they find particularly interesting during worship and sermons. In the digital realm, the "amen" feedback, which is typically spoken out loud, is substituted with messages typed in the chat box. Physical responses, such as clapping and raising hands, are also replaced by emojis. Mukherjee (2022) recorded as well the pattern of replacing physical gestures with emojis in religious communities engaging in the digital realm. He found that participants attending the Durga Puja festival online sent the emojis of folded hands and flowers in the comment section as substitutes for actual prayers and flowers typically presented to the goddess during an on-site ritual. In this current study, we argue that some Buddhist religious practices and places, such as temples, retreat areas, and meditation centers, have been displaced by the "communicative space" of media (Hepp & Krönert, 2008 in Setianto, 2015). This supports Hjarvard's (2008) arguments that the media have taken over some roles of religious authority through the process of the mediatization of religion.

Beside extension and substitution, Hjarvard (2013) also identified amalgamation as the phases of media-induced changes in society. This phase is indicated through an integration of both media-related and non-media activities (Setainto, 2016). In this case, meditation, merit-sharing ritual, and Abhidhamma class, all of which are non-media activities by nature. have been mediatized through digital devices such as webcams, laptops, smartphones, and the Zoom teleconference platform. In his Abhidhamma class, Samanera Abhisarano asked participants to watch and analyze short movies. In that context, movies are utilized to support the learning process of Abhidhamma, specifically while discussing mental consciousness. Movies are non-religious objects, but in this case, movies are used as tools to discuss religious materials. Most importantly, Zoom, originally introduced as a secular video conferencing platform for holding meetings, has been repurposed by this community to support regular meditation sessions and Abhidhamma classes. Supporting Setianto's (2015) and Jansson's (2013) argument, this study demonstrates that media practices and religious practices have become increasingly inseparable through the process of mediatization.

The final phase of media-induced changes in society, according to Hjarvard (2013), is accommodation. This phase is actualised when media logic permeates the religious environment. Fakhruroji (2021) described media logic as the fundamental characteristic of media and technology that might influence the way society interacts. Media logic is made up of several operational modalities through which media can limit and structure our communicative behaviour. As a result, media logic can mold the form of communication and, on a more advanced level, influence the function and characteristics of social relations. According to Fakhruroji (2021), the operation and impact of media logic are critical concepts for understanding the phenomenon of mediatization. In this case, media logic is clearly apparent. To provide an example, Abhisarano not only mentors the community but also creates media content for YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok that explains meditation concepts to a larger audience. He produces regular podcast programmes, inviting meditation experts and practitioners to share more insights. He is really concerned about the image and audio quality of his content. Although YouTube became the main channel where Abhisarano

broadcasted his programme live, he also repacked and molded the video into shorter format for TikTok and Instagram Reels. He created a TikTok account because he recognised the trend of producing and consuming content in TikTok.

From the perspective of the members, media logic is actualized in several ways. First, realizing that Samanera Abhisarano sometimes could not attend and guide the meditation session, the members recorded Abhisarano's voice while giving instruction and played it in his absence. Second, Hendra, appointed by Abhisarano as the group administrator, usually recorded the meditation sessions and Abhidhamma classes. The link to access the recordings was shared with the group, allowing everyone to easily download and rewatch them at any time. Further, members have adapted to the new way of accessing religious information: from reading religious books to watching podcast shows; from turning page after page of a printed book to scrolling down the e-book on their digital devices. Although the Zoom platform's features were utilized to support their routine, members are nonetheless compelled to follow how the platform works, including using the immersive view, turning video and audio on and off, and selecting video backgrounds.

Based on the above explanation, we argue that digital media in this community functions not only as *conduits* for mediating religious information but also as a *language* and *environment* that go beyond this role. As mentioned by Hjarvard (2013), when media was perceived as a language, religious leaders must format religious information "to the modalities of the specific medium and genre" (Hjarvard, 2013). This is evident in how Abhisarano formatted Buddhist teachings on mindfulness using more secular terms and popular media like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. He repacked content from YouTube to fit in the format of TikTok and Instagram Reels. As an environment, media provides the system to reconstruct human interaction and communication (Hjarvard, 2013). In this community, members' behavior has been transformed. Instead of visiting temples to meditate and discuss religion physically, they only need to click the link sent every day on WhatsApp to access the Zoom virtual room, where they can meditate, engage in discussion, and participate in learning sessions – all done remotely.

Conclusion

Based on our multi-sited digital ethnographic research, we argue that the online meditation community led by Abhisarano has been highly mediatized. According to Hjarvard (2008), the mediatization of religion results in a situation where media, to some extent, have substituted the role of religious authorities. Our research strengthens Hjarvard's argument by providing examples from Abhisarano's online meditation community in Indonesia. The use of digital media is not merely a tool for sharing and accessing religious information; it has transformed the way members engage with religion. The WhatsApp group and the Zoom virtual room have expanded members' abilities to interact and communicate across different geographical and socio-cultural backgrounds. Some of their routines in the WhatsApp group and Zoom virtual room have, to some parts, substituted their engagement with physical religious sites. Religious practices such as meditation, merit-sharing rituals, reciting homages to the Buddha, and attending Abhidhamma classes have become inseparable from the use of digital media. In other words, their day-to-day religious practices have been integrated into their media routine.

However, we found no evidence to suggest that the mediatization of Buddhism in this community has led to the process of secularization as Hjarvard proposed. Our study supports the findings of Setianto (2015) and Hazim and Musdholifah (2021), which suggest that instead of becoming secular, the mediatization of religion in some context might enhance religiosity. In Setianto's research on the Indonesian Muslim

Society in America (IMSA) shows that as a religious minority group in the US, they actively use the media to mediate their religious practices and maintain connections among them, leading to increased religiosity rather than secularization. This pattern is also reflected in Hazim and Musdholifah's (2021) findings. They discover that because of the lack of amalgamation of the local Islamic sources, Indonesian Muslims in Hungary are more comfortable accessing religious messages and news from the internet. In particular, they rely more on social media like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram to acquire Islamic information. Hazim and Musdholifah (2021) highlighted that this practice shifted the way they engage with the religion.

Following those previous researches, we argue that the intensive use of digital media in this religious environment has also shaped its members to be more religious than secular. Through their engagement in daily meditation sessions, group discussions, and religious classes, the community members have deepened their conceptual understanding of mindfulness from a Buddhist perspective and improved their meditation practices. Our findings contribute to the broader discussion of the mediatization of religion from an Asian perspective, providing empirical findings from Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority country in the world, but from the case of its minority group.

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