Zen Buddhism and Media

A study of how media alter or reinforce Zen Buddhism in Norway

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Abstract

This thesis concerns how the media, especially the Internet, influences Zen Buddhist practices and discourses in Norway. Various social networks, such as Facebook, make it possible to expand religious discourses and make them available all over the world. Not only are social networks on the Internet a means of communicating, but frequently, different sources related to Zen Buddhism are assuming media forms, being shared and commented on. By analyzing how the Rinzai Zen Center and the Norwegian Soto Zen Buddhist Order, two of the main Zen Buddhist communities in Norway apply media forms, I show how the Internet influences their practices and discourses. Most importantly, this is shown by how members from the two communities are relocating real-life discourses to the Internet, on Facebook. Furthermore, I have interviewed members from the two communities in order to give a more detailed account of how the members understand their own application of the Internet and other media forms.
Acknowledgements

For the first time of my life I can say that I understand what it means to have written a master’s thesis. It has been an inspiring process, although I must admit that it sometimes felt like fighting a beast. Now in retrospect, I feel thankful.

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1 Introduction to the research topic

The concepts “religion” and “media” are often mentioned together. Although there seems to be few apparent connection between these two concepts, apart from all the news about religiously motivated terror attacks, as well as other often negatively oriented news, these two concepts actually have a lot in common. It is the difficult, or one could say impossible to determine at what point in history these concepts first appeared, and they are more intertwined than one perhaps would initially anticipate, both historically and today. In this thesis, I will not try to reconstruct the history of the interrelation between “religion” and “media,” since this would certainly require a life time of work. Nor will I try to discuss how religion is being portrayed in the contemporary news media. I will rather try to find out and explain how these concepts are related in contemporary Norway. In order to do this, I have chosen to focus on Zen Buddhism in Norway. There are several ways in which Buddhism in general, and Zen Buddhism in particular, and the media may be connected or interrelated. This is something that will be discussed further on in this thesis. In order to examine how media and religion are intertwined, I will base my research on the mediatization theory, which postulates that the media cause alteration or reinforcements of different social and cultural practices. The research topic concerns how the media can alter or reinforce Zen Buddhist practices, with an emphasis on how Zen Buddhism, as a result of the growing importance of the Internet, can assume media forms and how practices are being shaped by the Internet. I will do this by focusing on two profiled Zen Buddhist communities in Norway, which are Rinzai Zen Center in Oslo and the Norwegian Soto Zen Buddhist Order in Kristiansand.¹

Both media and Zen Buddhism are phenomena that may refer to a vast array of different things, it is therefore necessary to redefine the meanings of these categories. When I use the concept Zen Buddhism in this thesis, I refer to the Norwegian contemporary Zen Buddhist practice. While a detailed historical perspective would undoubtedly shed light on current Zen Buddhist practices, I will only include such a perspective when it is directly connected to the contemporary practice.

The concept media may appear as an apparent and unequivocal concept, yet the usages and significances of the term ‘media’ have changed radically for centuries, and can refer to quite different cultural and social phenomena. For instance, the concept can be used in order to

¹ Henceforth referred to as RZC and NSZBO.
explain the development and importance of bookbinding during the reformation, as well as the usage of computers in the 21st century. Considering these obvious dissimilarities, it is necessary to define what media signify in this thesis. I have chosen to define media as various means of communication through mediums. In this thesis, the Internet, especially Facebook and various modes of communication available there, will constitute the main part of the empirical data. I will describe and analyze posts, contents and variations of communication that exist on two pages and one group associated with RZC and NSZBO. Also, webpages, various Internet sources with Buddhist content, books and articles, as well as video sources such as YouTube, will also be referred to. All of these various forms of communication can be categorized as media. These media sources, the analysis of them and how Zen Buddhists utilize them, will constitute the main body of the empirical data, along with interviews of a selected number of members of RZC and NSZBO. The interviews are, however, secondary to the Internet sources, as they will be used to shed light on the empirical data generated from the Internet sources.

In order to analyze the empirical data, a suitable conceptual framework is inevitable. Since I will emphasize media’s influence on religion, categories and analytical models derived from both science of religion and media science are required.

David L. McMahan has discussed how Buddhism changed when faced with modernity and the Western world from the end of the 18th century and onward. New “hybrid” appearances of Buddhism, both in the West and in the East, that emerged as a result of these encounters, have often been explained by the concept Buddhist modernism. Interestingly, and something that will be further elaborated on later, is the importance the media have had in this process. Today, the media are still intertwined with several expressions of Buddhism, and play an important role for local, as well as global Buddhist practices. My research question is: how do the media, in the form of the Internet, influence Zen Buddhist practices in Norway? McMahan has in The Making of Buddhist Modernism given a series of categories which are useful for answering those questions. These categories are individualization, detraditionalization, demythologization and psychologization. These categories will be further elaborated on in chapter 1.2.2, and will constitute the basic set of tools for explaining alterations or reinforcements of social practices within the theoretical framework.

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2 McMahan (2008).
3 Mitchell 2012: 312. McMahan does mention other tendencies and categories as well. I have chosen to focus primarily on the aforementioned, since they are the most expedient for explaining how Zen Buddhism is being influenced by the Internet.
Along with Buddhist modernism, media science contributes with theories for explaining how media influence, in terms of alter or reinforce, social and cultural practices and phenomena. One topical theory is the aforementioned mediatization theory, which in its most basic form constitutes a framework for understanding the process where media alter or reinforce the social practices of social institutions, and how these institutions in their turn may change how the media function. In other words, mediatization is a theory that enables us to explain and describe the process where society as a whole, influenced by the processes of globalization, urbanization and individualization, becomes gradually more dependent on the media and media’s intrinsic logic.⁴

Mediatization as a concept and theory is closely related to the concept mediation. Although related, mediation deals with a much smaller and shorter process than that of mediatization. Researchers define and apply these two concepts differently, and there is to this date no consensus on the terminology in the academic discipline of science of media.⁵ I will in this thesis draw on the theorizing of Stig Hjarvard, on his definition and application of mediatization as a theoretical concept and as an analytical framework respectively. He points out that “mediation [is] the concrete act of communication through a medium.”⁶ Mediatization, “by contrast, concerns the long-term process whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of the media’s influence.”⁷ Buddhist modernism and its associated categories, mediatization and mediation will be elaborated on in chapter 1.2 and 1.3, respectively. But first I will give a brief introduction of the Norwegian Zen Buddhist landscape.

1.1 The Norwegian Zen Buddhist landscape

Remarkably little has been written about the history and the contemporary practice of Zen Buddhism in Norway.⁸ I will not provide a full historical account here, but rather provide some background information in order to contextualize the contemporary empirical data that will be analyzed in this thesis.

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⁴ Hjarvard 2013: 7; 17-18.
⁵ Martino 2013: 12. See also Livingstone (2009), and Couldry and Hepp (2013).
⁷ Ibid.
⁸ One recent work that concerns Zen Buddhism in Norway is Trygve Johan Andal Svarstad’s master’s thesis Nordmenn si tilflukt I dei tre juvelar (2014), (Norwegian’s refuge in the three jewels), University of Bergen.
Zen Buddhists are spread throughout Norway, yet the majority of them are found in Oslo and Kristiansand. Rinzai Zen Center is located in Oslo, and is also a part of the Norwegian Association of Buddhists. Since there is no account of the exact number of members within each branch of Buddhism in Norway, I have chosen to use the number of members listed on the Facebook group and pages as an indication of the membership number, which is 78 members. They also have a public page which 193 subscribers. The members of RZC gather at small venue in Grønland, a district in the eastern part of Oslo. Due to the lack of other reliable sources, the information given on RZC’s webpage will constitutes my main source on the history of RZC. Since I am addressing the contemporary practice of this community, and the focus is on how the Internet is influencing their practices, I have chosen only to give a brief account and rather place an emphasis on the empirical part in this thesis.

The center was initially established as Zen-Skolen on the fourth of February in 1972. During the first years, the community consisted of meditation enthusiasts who discussed in what way they should establish a Norwegian form of Zen. In 1981, the community made connections with a Japanese Zen master named Joshu Sasaki Roshi, who at that time was living in the United States and was associated with the Myoshin-ji school of Zen Buddhism. Joshu Sasaki Roshi stayed in Oslo in 1984 and 1986. The confrontation between traditional Japanese Zen and the Norwegian perception of Zen Buddhism resulted in a restructuring of the community and a changing of the name to Oslo Zazenkai. They decided to get in touch with Joshu Sasaki Roshi’s disciple, the Austrian Zen master Genro Seiun, Osho. He visited Norway for the first time in 1988. Oslo Zazenkai constituted the foundation for traditional Rinzai Zen Buddhist

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9 Defining who is or is not a Zen Buddhist is not a simple question, since some individuals may solely be interested in Zen Buddhist philosophy, literature or practice without being associated with a community, while still considering themselves as Zen Buddhists. In this thesis, however, individuals who are associated with RZC and NSZBO will constitute the main research subjects.

10 The Norwegian Association of Buddhists (Buddhistforbundet) is an umbrella organization which tries to facilitate for its member groups to develop and execute its practice in a best suitable way within the regulations submitted by the association. They do also take care of and distribute the governmental guaranteed financial support given to every registered religious organization in Norway.


14 Translated as the Zen school, or school of Zen.

15 The term Zen master is not used here as a formal denotation of the person, but rather as an emic term used by the adherents themselves to denote someone who has to some extent formal training from a Zen Buddhist institution, and authority to guide and teach other Zen Buddhists.

16 The Myoshin-ji is one of the larger schools in the Rinzai Zen lineage.
practice in Norway, during the period it was renamed. With the relocation of their meeting place in 1996, they changed the name to Rinzai Zen Center Oslo. Today, the main activities of Rinzai Zen Center consist mainly of morning and evening meditation sessions, *sesshin*’s a couple of times each year, along with various activities, talks and lectures.\(^{17}\)

The Norwegian Soto Zen Buddhist Order is located in Kristiansand. They have regular meditation and religious services at their small temple called Bagaku Zen Temple. As with RZC, little information is available about NSZBO apart from what is written on their page. The NSZBO’s page is by far more extensive than RZC’s webpage, and includes information not only about their practice in Norway, but about Buddhism in general and Zen Buddhism in particular.\(^{18}\)

NSZBO as a religious community began when Zen priest and monk Såzen Larsen Kusano, who had lived in Japan for about thirteen years in a Zen Buddhist monastery, returned to Norway in order to establish a Zen Buddhist temple in Norway. The community was established in 2002, and consists of four monks, three nuns, as well as members in 18 of Norway’s counties, according to NSZBO.\(^{19}\) Their Facebook page has 3625 subscribers,\(^{20}\) a far larger membership number than RZC. This difference between NSZBO and RZC in regards to membership numbers will be elaborated on in the analysis of the empirical data in chapter 2.

NSZBO has expanded rapidly since its inception. The order is currently in the process of establishing a Zen Buddhist monastery in Norway, which will be the first of its kind.\(^{21}\)

After this brief introduction of the two religious communities, a more thorough description of Buddhist modernism, its associated categories, mediatization will follow. This will provide the analytical tools and the theoretical framework for analyzing the empirical material. The empirical data will be presented and discussed in chapter 2.

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\(^{17}\) *Sesshin* is a period of extensive meditation practice where the attendant is often guided by a Zen Master with formal education in Buddhology or Zen Buddhist practice, from a Zen temple or monastery.

\(^{18}\) [http://www.sotozen.no/](http://www.sotozen.no/) [read 28.07.16.]

\(^{19}\) [http://www.sotozen.no/ordenen/om-ordenen/](http://www.sotozen.no/ordenen/om-ordenen/) [read 28.07.16.]


1.2 Buddhist modernism – tendencies and categories

Buddhist modernism signifies a historical process that has shaped Buddhism globally from the end of the 19th century until today, as well as a series of analytical concepts for understanding these alterations. The two significances of the concept are interrelated; the analytical framework of Buddhist modernism is a result of the historical process. As an analytical framework, Buddhist modernism can help to categorize and understand how Buddhism has changed since its initial encounter with Western modernism. How Buddhism has changed historically as a result of this encounter, is well documented by several academics,22 I therefore restrict myself to give an outline of the developmental process.

There is no consensus on the exact place of origin or time when the historical process of Buddhist modernism commenced.23 It was, however, strongly influenced by Western colonization of several Buddhist Asian countries. Also, scientific rationalism, the Romanic Discourse, and especially for Zen Buddhism, the political condition that shaped Meiji-Japan, strongly influenced the process.

After describing the development of Buddhist modernism, I will introduce and explain the categories individualization, detraditionalization, demythologization and psychologization, categories associated with Buddhist modernism. These categories, defined and discussed by McMahan, will be used as analytical tools in my discussion of contemporary Zen Buddhist practice in Norway, and media’s influence on their practices.

1.2.1 Buddhist modernism – tendencies

Colonization

During the 19th century, Western powers colonized large parts of the Asian continent. Colonization constituted an important backdrop for the process of Buddhist modernism. Along with the political and economic impacts of colonization, orientalism, a way of regarding the East as subordinate to the West, emerged in the aftermath. Since the late 1970s, orientalism has

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23 Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and Japan have been mentioned as two places where some of the earliest features of Buddhist modernism emerged. McMahan 2012: 162; 164.
played an important part in cultural and social sciences, especially after Edward Said published his influential work *Orientalism*.24

Drawing on Said’s application of the term, orientalism refers to the “Near Orient, […] that is, the lands of Islam, or the Arabs, or both.”25 Yet, Said acknowledged that the study of the Orient encompasses “the whole Orient (including the civilizations of China, Japan, India and the Muslims[.])”26 Orientalism comprises the distinct ways the West has defined the East with lack of discernment, and by perceiving the East as the “orient other,” in terms of being an “aggregate” with archetypical and stereotypical properties.

The Western powers did not only exploit the various countries being colonized in terms of merchandise and materials, there were political and religious agendas as well. The Christian missionaries that came to the various Asian countries did not only deem the religions that existed there as inferior, but intentionally or not, they helped in characterizing the contemporary and later studies of them as well. In fact, as Snodgrass has shown, the very first accounts of religious practices in Asian countries were written by travelers and missionaries during the late 18th century.27 Snodgrass points out that “what is surprising is the extent to which pre-academic assumptions of the nature of Buddhism derived from these sources persisted and informed the later academic interpretations.”28

The suppression by the Western powers led not only to disputes between the authorities in the colonized countries and the Western powers, prominent adherents of Buddhism entered the discourse as well. Buddhism gradually became a research topic in the West, in many respects due to the “missionary imperative to “know the enemy” and colonial administration’s documentation of its subjects[.]”29 The Buddhists were more or less forced to respond in order to defend their religious tradition. This led to further disputes between Buddhists, Christians and Western researchers, a discourse mainly unfavorable for the Asian advocates of Buddhism. The Westerners who studied Buddhist scriptures frequently explained the religion in terms of being “nihilistic, pessimistic, passive, ritualistic and superstitious[.]”30 The Buddhists main

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26 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
30 McMahan 2008: 95.
response was to adopt the polemic language of their suppressors in order to defend their religious tradition.

Within this dialectical discourse, some of the first seeds of Buddhist modernism were planted. Although Buddhism had been known to the Western world for centuries, the encounters between the Western colonizing powers, missionaries and the Buddhists, resulted in an alteration of the language used by the Buddhists.

Yet, colonization cannot fully explain how and why Buddhist modernism developed, especially not in regards to countries like Japan and Tibet, which were never colonized per se by Western powers, but were rather influenced by it indirectly.

**Scientific rationalism**

During the 19th century, the Western world experienced drastic changes. These changes were not only due to the industrial revolution and the progressive development it entailed, but also as a result of new perspectives deriving from scientific discoveries. Perhaps most notable was the evolution theory introduced in Charles Darwin’s 1859 book *On the Origin of Species*. Indeed, evolution, and the advent of a scientific understanding of the world would have immense impact on the development of Buddhist modernism, both then and later.

Briefly explained, scientific rationalism is a discourse which has its origins in the Enlightenment period. It entailed a transition from a cosmology based heavily on religious reasoning to a perception of the world influenced by the then recent scientific discoveries, notably by Western science and philosophy. McMahan defines scientific rationalism as “the ideas and practices derived from the Enlightenment’s epistemological claim that knowledge comes from systematic observation and reason.”

Evolutionism became particularly influential; the discovery of the laws of nature resulted in an increased skepticism towards the reliability of the Christian doctrines, and consequently the political power of the Christian churches. This had repercussions not only for the Western perception of the world, but it also accordingly influenced Buddhist doctrines and teachings.

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid: 63.
The aforementioned colonization and the Buddhists’ response to it became significantly important. In order to defend their religious doctrines, many Buddhists adopted the scientific language of their adversaries, thereby taking advantage of the internal dispute between adherents of Christian doctrines and the proponents of the new scientific worldviews. The Buddhists, who in many ways regarded the Christian missionaries as the very epitome of colonial suppression, intentionally used the scientific language in order to deprecate Christian doctrines and to further explain how and why Buddhism, in contrast, was in full accordance with these scientific discoveries and the laws of nature.

At the end of the century, the Parliament of Religions was held in Chicago in 1893, arranged as a conference where all major religions of the world were invited to participate on equal footing. It was meant to provide a foundation for friendly discourse and general receptiveness towards other religious traditions. However, the Western spirit of imperialism and colonization greatly influenced the atmosphere. In many ways, the Parliament epitomized the attitude of the West towards the East as the “orient other,” presenting the diversity of Eastern culture and religion in stereotypes. Implicitly, the Western culture and Christian religion was accentuated as distinctive and superior. Two of the most noticeable Buddhists attending the Parliament were Shaku Soen (1860-1919), representing Japanese Buddhism and particularly the Zen branch, and Dharmapala (1864-1933), who represented “southern Buddhism.” Instead of explaining their religious traditions in Buddhist terminology, they consistently argued for coherence between Buddhism, especially between its philosophical systems and the evolutionary laws of nature. This has until today characterized the Western perception of Buddhism as being scientific in nature.

The Romantic discourse

Along with scientific rationalism, the Romantic discourse emerged as an important counterpart. It became prevalent during mid-19th century until the early 20th century, and would influence the process of Buddhist modernism heavily. The Romantic discourse denotes a variety of tendencies found within philosophy, religion, literature, art and music. In many ways, the Romanic discourse can be understood as a reaction to the scientific discourse and its

34 Snodgrass 2003: 121-122.
35 Southern Buddhism is often understood as synonymous with the Theravada branch of Buddhism, prevalent in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.
disparagement of the transcendent, or the “disenchantment of the world.”

However, the Romanic discourse did not “re-enchant” the world as one would perhaps anticipate, but rather “[reasserted] the value of emotion, passion, and creativity in human affairs, which [made] it a progenitor of later expressive individualism and “the psychological turn.” As with scientific rationalism, the Romantic discourse cannot be classified as a homogenous “movement,” it should rather be referred to as a discourse, albeit there were several tendencies and “movements” within the Romantic discourse. Accordingly, the Romanic discourse should be perceived as somewhat different from scientific rationalism, the former being perhaps to a lesser extent interconnected or unified. The most prominent movements, which would completely or partially be characterized by the Romanic discourse, were the “American Transcendentalists, Theosophists, and adherents of other alternative spiritualities and, later, the Beat poets and countercultural figures of the late 1960s.”

What untied these quite different movements was their relatively similar perception of mankind, philosophy, and in the context of this thesis, especially their conception of Buddhism.

Especially salient for the development of Buddhist modernism was the concept perennialism, a pivotal concept within the Romanic discourse. When speaking of Buddhism or religion in general, it can briefly be summarized as “the idea of a common set of truths held by all peoples in all times and places, first suggested in the sixteenth century by Augustino Seuco and developed by Leibniz.” What placed Buddhism in a special position was that several persons who were prominent within the early Romanic discourse, such as Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907), co-founder of the Theosophical movement along with Helena P. Blavatsky (1831-1891), asserted that “Buddhism was the best expression of the primordial esoteric tradition that infused all religions.”

Although Buddhism was then not studied in order to understand the enemy, as with the colonists, the religion was still seen through lenses heavily shaded by Western presumptions, which in turn characterized the study of Buddhism. This resulted in an emphasis on certain elements within the religion, which did not necessarily correspond with the

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36 The “disenchantment of the world” gets one to think of Max Weber and secularism, and it is indeed a relation. Max Weber asserted that religion would gradually lose influence in society and within different societal institutions. This is related to scientific rationalism, since Weber asserted that science would prevail over religion, and that science could explain social and natural phenomena without the aid of religious dogmas. (Ivy 2005: 314; Jenkins 2000)


38 McMahan 2008: 11.


actual practice of the Buddhists in the East, or the way they understood their religious practice and tradition.

Another pivotal characteristic of the Romanic tendency’s influence on Buddhism and something which has highly affected contemporary Zen Buddhist practice, is the understanding of Zen Buddhist teachings as trans-historical, and thereby not necessarily related to a region or country. Marilyn Ivy has argued that there are two modes of imagining Buddhism, “one historically located one and one transhistorical: (1) Buddhism as objects of modern fantasy and longing, bearing the nostalgic freight of the premodern and the non-Western; (2) Buddhism as a transhistorical religion comprising transcendent technologies of liberation, thus intrinsically empty of historical signification or cultural baggage, the way it is, when- and wherever.”

**Meiji-Japan and the process of Buddhist modernism**

Japan has perhaps been the most prominent country for the formation of Zen Buddhism, in older as well as more recent times, and also for the making of Buddhist modernism. During the period when Buddhism began facing modernity, Japan was as noted not directly affected by colonization. It was thereby only tacitly influenced by the Westerners presence on the Asian continent. During the 18th century, Japan, partially due to the political situation experienced by the rest of the Asian continent, went through a rapid growth of nationalism, aggressive self-assertion and skepticism towards the West and other Asian countries. This led to a reconfiguration of the government, as well as of several social, cultural and religious institutions in Japan. Some of these transformations would consequently alter the Japanese Zen Buddhism’s practices and traditions.

The historical processes Japan went through during the Meiji-period have been well documented by several scholars, and I restrict myself to give a short introduction, with an emphasis on the aspects that has directly influenced the making of Zen Buddhist modernism.

There was a series of incidents and conditions that transformed the relation between the Japanese government and religious institutions, and which would consequently lay the foundation for the Zen Buddhist practices visible around the world today. Most important

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41 Ivy 2005: 313.
42 The Meiji-restoration lasted approximately from 1868 to 1912. However, the Meiji-period lasted until the end of the Second World War 1945. (Seiko 1995: 9-10).
perhaps, was the growing nationalism, which was initially instigated by the political elite during the mid-19th century. This nationalism was made manifest by the exaltation of the Emperor of Japan, who prior to the 19th century had not held any formal political position. However, during the Meiji-restoration, the emperor would not only become the epitome of what was to be accepted as “Japaneseness” by the Japanese, but would in fact be regarded as a divine figure.44

In conjunction with the alteration of the emperor’s political and religious position, an exaltation of everything deemed Japanese followed.45 This entailed a growing skepticism towards other cultural, political and religious traditions. The Japanese were also aware of the Western powers’ presence in Asia and their imperial aspirations. The Western imperialism influenced the political agendas of the Japanese government, mainly in two ways. Firstly, Japan was influenced by the concept of imperialism, which during the Meiji years gave Japan the aspiration to compete with the Western powers. Secondly, in light of the preceding reasons, Japan began to consider itself as a leading power and a “protector” of Asian values and heritage.

The presence of the Western powers led to an ambivalent situation for Japan. On the one hand, Japan welcomed the various technological, political and cultural innovations they regarded as developmental, but at the same time, wanting to restrain the very origins of these features. As a result of these conflicting views, Japan began to change from within. This would decades later46 give rise to the Meiji-restoration, which would consequently reshape the practices of Zen Buddhism.

Buddhism, which had existed along with Shintoism in “shrine-temple multiplexes”47 for centuries, now became regarded as foreign, alien to Japanese traditions, and as something not capable of expressing the true Japanese consciousness and identity. As a result of these nationalist tendencies, Buddhism was no longer appreciated by the state and was close to become obliterated in Japan. Buddhist temples, iconography and sutras were vandalized, and Buddhist priests and monks lost their positions. The Buddhists’ strategy in order to gain favor

44 The Japanese emperor would eventually be perceived as “the national father who embodied a cultural essence that had been transmitted down through the ages in an unbroken lineage from the Shinto sun goddess Amaterasu.” (Ives 2009: 14).
45 Interestingly, much of what has been regarded as Japanese, speaking of cultural, as well as philosophical and religious traditions, often originally derived from China. This includes for instance much of the Japanese writing system, as well as ideas associated with Confucianism and Daoism, which have for centuries influenced Japanese thought.
46 During the mid-19th century.
within the Japanese government, and thereby establish a new foundation within the Japanese society, was to develop New Buddhism (*Shin Bukkyo*). According to Brian D. Victoria,

New Buddhism was designed to answer the anti-Buddhist critique of the early and middle years of the Meiji period. Its first priority was to show that priests and temples could make a valuable contribution to the nation’s social and economic life. Second, it insisted that although “foreign-born,” Buddhism could still effectively promote loyalty to the throne, patriotism, and national unity. Last, the New Buddhism made the case that its basic doctrines were fully compatible with the Western science and technology then being so rapidly introduced into the country.\(^48\)

Along with these alterations, institutional Buddhism gradually became accepted and achieved more or less detachment from other societal institutions, somewhat also due to the separation between the Shinto and the Buddhist institutions. Buddhism was accepted as a distinctive religious tradition that could operate on its own terms, while still maintaining a close relationship with the state. A number of changes took place within the Zen Buddhist institutions as a result of the New Buddhism, and *Imperial-Way Buddhism,*\(^49\) and the close association the Buddhist institutions would develop to the State. Perhaps the most conspicuous alterations were the ones made in relation to practice that occurred under *Order 133.* This was an announcement “made on April 25, 1872, by the Ministry of State [which] stated that Buddhist priests could, if they wished, eat meat, get married, grow their hair long, and wear ordinary clothing.”\(^50\)

Although the announcement and the following alterations it entailed were met with protests by several prominent Buddhists, Order 133 was still not retracted. Ironically, the alterations were initially suggested by Zen Buddhists and in particular by Otori Sesso (1814-1904).\(^51\) Not surprisingly, these changes were proposed in order to improve the relation between the state and the Buddhist institutions during the early years of the Meiji-period. Victoria explains that “Otori's overall goal was [to end] the government's anti-Buddhist policies, and like his Buddhist contemporaries he believed that the best way of achieving this goal was to demonstrate


\(^{49}\) There are overlapping significances between *New Buddhism* and *Imperial-Way Buddhism.* *New Buddhism* refers to tendencies occurring within the Buddhist institutions in the earlier years of the Meiji-period (late 1880s), as reactions towards the restrictions imposed on Buddhist practice. *Imperial-Way Buddhism,* on the other hand, emerged during the 1930s, and is in many ways a continuation of *New Buddhism,* yet with even more nationalistic features. “The emergence of imperial-way Buddhism (*kodo Bukkyo*) in the 1930s was not so much a new phenomenon as it was the systematization or codification of previous positions. Stated in Buddhist terms, imperial way Buddhism represented the total and unequivocal subjugation of the Law of the Buddha to the Law of the Sovereign. In political terms, it meant subjugation of institutional Buddhism to the state and its policies.” (Victoria 2006: 79).

\(^{50}\) Victoria 2006: 8.

\(^{51}\) Otori Sesso was an influential Soto Zen priest according to Victoria. (Victoria 2006: 9).
Buddhism's usefulness to the state, specifically through the promulgation of the Great Teaching.” Along with these changes, catalyzed mainly by the restrictions imposed on Buddhist practice during the earlier years of the Meiji-period, the Buddhist institutions were gradually deprived of their authority. That is to say, the distinction between the laity, priests and monks became less discernible, as opposed to before and during the early Meiji-period. Although the alterations entailed repercussions for the daily Buddhist practice of the priests and the monks, the changes were to a greater extent visible among the laity, since they adopted practices that had been most prominent among the priests and the monks. Perhaps was the facilitation of daily zazen among the laity the most important one, a practice which had mainly been performed by monks and priests within Buddhist institutions, such as temples and monasteries. In contemporary times, zazen, along with mindfulness, is the prime concept and practice associated with Zen Buddhism and is a common practice in every temple and monastery all over the world, by laity as well as by monastics and priests. Zazen along with other noticeable characteristics that changed the Zen Buddhist tradition will be elaborated on when analyzing the empirical in chapter 2.

Victoria 2006: 9. The Great Teaching signifies and is constituted by three pillars. These pillars are: “(1) the principles of reverence for the national deities and of patriotism shall be observed; (2) the heavenly reason and the way of humanity shall be promulgated; and (3) the throne shall be revered and the authorities obeyed.” (Victoria 2006: 7).

Sharf 1993: 8. Notice that Buddhist nuns, and women in general, are seldom mentioned as prominent characters in the making of Buddhist modernism, nor within the transformation of Buddhism and Buddhist institutions in Meiji-restoration. One of the main reasons why female influence is lacking is unfortunately simply the lack of female characters within the transformation of Buddhism, due to state repression and a well-established patriarchy. In the former chapter about the Romantic influence, and especially in relation to Theosophy, Helena P. Blavatsky was referred to as an important figure, but she is sadly one of few. In relation to the Meiji-period of Japan, women in general had little influence on the making of Buddhist modernism, its nationalistic features, and the enabling of Buddhist practice for the laity. In the book A Place in Public (2010), Marnie S. Anderson discusses the topic of women's rights in Meiji Japan. Although female participation in the public and political sphere was in many respects suppressed, it is important to take into account that women's role and status was indeed a debated issue also during the Meiji-period. “Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, […] the Meiji era (1868-1912), a number of individuals, ranging from ordinary people to government officials, addressed the topic of women's status, roles, and right in a variety of forums, including newspapers, journals, pamphlets, and public debates.” (Anderson 2010: 1). Women's lack of influence and deprivation of power must therefore be understood as a long-lasting issue with many cultural and historical tendencies and incidents forming the outcomes, and the topic is too large to be dealt with here in depth.
1.2.2 Buddhist modernism – categories

The categories mentioned at the beginning of this chapter are tools for analyzing how, why, in what way and to what extent Buddhism has changed when facing modernity. The categories do not necessarily explain the origin of these transformations, but they provide a precise language in which to discuss the changes. One of the categories’ main tasks, so to speak, is to make it possible to discern what “modern” Buddhism is, in contrast to what has been understood as “traditional” Buddhism. Indeed, Buddhism itself is a special case, since the very notion of “Buddhism” itself is modern. Moreover, Buddhism entered modernity through scriptural sources, and as such, a modern “invention” by the Western world. In the Western modern understanding, Buddhism has been bound to its textual sources, not just academically, but emically as well since the early 19th century. In the West, the texts are the most common way for people to obtain knowledge about Buddhism today, be it books or by Internet sources. Buddhism has, so to speak, since its first encounters with the Western world, been closely related to media, be it the classical scriptures, modern interpretations and through digital media devices and platforms. Media sources have shaped as well as made a modern foundation for Buddhism, making it possible for a Western audience to study its doctrines, teachings and practices. Thereby, in relation to media’s influence on social practices, Buddhism lends itself as a particularly suitable study object. Its modern configurations, especially in the Western world, is directly associated with media on several levels; its modern appearance is bound to textual sources, and thereby linked to the notion of “media” to an extent that has perhaps not been fully recognized. The categories individualization, detraditionalization, demythologization and psychologization, will, as mentioned earlier be used as conceptual tools in order to understand media’s influence on Buddhism. I will apply them in order to try to analyze the alterations or reinforcements of religious practices, made possible by the influence of the media, on Norwegian Zen Buddhists. The categories are closely related, and will be used to understand phenomena that are reciprocally influencing each other. By dividing them into

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54 Ivy 2005: 312.
55 It should be noted that texts have played a major role for the formation of the Buddhist religion since its inception, and the Buddhist canon is huge and multifaceted, spanning a wide variety of genres which has been extended through the centuries after the death of the Buddha. However, although texts have been a pivotal element in the Buddhist religion, the texts have always existed in relation to rituals, prayers, meditation techniques, etc. In contemporary times, and especially in the West, this has changed. Texts alone may play a much larger part in modern Buddhist practice, and the original texts have been more or less detached from their original institutional framework and cultural tradition.
four separate categories, as McMahan describes in *Making of Buddhist Modernism*\(^{56}\) it becomes easier to obtain a more detailed understanding of modern media’s impacts on Buddhist modernism. A brief introduction of each of the categories will follow.

**Individualization**

Individualization is a concept one can use in order to describe how people understand themselves as religious persons, what they believe in and how they practice their religion.

Individualization is often used interchangeably with *privatization*. Evidently, privatization, or individualization, has something to do with what is private. McMahan describes, in relation to religion as privatized, that “the truly significant is not what takes place at a public celebration or in ritual, but what happens inside one’s own mind or soul.”\(^ {57}\) This indicates, as the quote implies, that the psychological factor stands as a major element in privatization.\(^ {58}\) Apart from the apparent psychological properties the category encompasses, privatization furthermore entails a “shift of orientation from external to internal authority and the associated reorientation from institutional to privatized religion[].”\(^ {59}\) While both individualization and privatization are usable concepts for describing alterations or reinforcements of religious practice as a result of the influence of the media, I will in this thesis use individualization. This is because individualization is a common term in media sciences as well, and the concept has very similar significances within the two academic fields, i.e., science of religion and media science.

Individualization of religion does not necessarily involve a complete absence of institutional religious commitment or affiliation. What it does imply, however, is that the religious individual attains greater authority to define his or her religious beliefs, how the religious teaching can be interpreted individually and how and why religious practices should be carried out in the private sphere.

In relation to Zen Buddhism, meditation, or *zazen*, as it is frequently referred to, is a suitable point of departure for explaining and understanding individualization of Buddhist practice. As discussed in chapter 1.2.1, dealing with the Meiji-restoration’s influence on Zen Buddhist practice, the facilitation for the laity to practice *zazen* became one of the pivotal

\(^{56}\) McMahan (2008).
\(^{57}\) Ibid: 7.
\(^{58}\) Cf. Psychologization.
\(^{59}\) McMahan 2008: 42.
catalyzers for the process of Buddhist modernism to emerge. When zazen, which had been closely related to institutional practices for centuries in Japan, became accessible for the laity, the laity could privately gradually interpret and apply this method. As Buddhism became known in the West during the first quarter of the 20th century, particularly in North America, meditation became one of the main practices that were highlighted by Western Buddhist enthusiasts. Nowadays, zazen is regarded as a means for living a simpler life, and has become a pivotal practice for developing mindfulness among Western practitioners. Furthermore, the practitioners do have to be affiliated with a Zen institution of any kind. Zazen, thereby, is no longer necessarily linked to Buddhist practice solely, but may be practiced by people adhering to different religions, or to none. In this way, the practice has become individualized and privatized, the individual is free to carry out the practice on her or his own terms; the Buddhist institutions do not any longer have the authority to define how and why one should practice zazen. McMahan describes that

The multivocality of modern culture throws into question all voices, so that no one authority or tradition can enjoy taken-for-granted status. Individuals must now choose for themselves, construct for themselves their own religious meaning, weighing each claim and trusting their reason or intuition as a guide to their own paths. Religion is an individual, private affair.

**Detraditionalization**

The Zen Buddhism that became established in the Western world among Western practitioners, was detached from its original cultural and religious framework, institutions and even languages, and then redefined in relation to the cultural configurations it encountered. Most of the people who embraced Buddhism in the Western world did so through their own native language and often without the knowledge of Buddhism’s doctrinal teachings or long institutional history. Detraditionalization is a suitable concept for describing this process, where traditional forms of religions are deemphasized or reconfigured. Closely related to individualization, detraditionalization denotes the outcomes of the change from external to internal authority, and the individualization of practices associated with institutions “known as

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60 Most of the important contributors for the establishment of Zen Buddhism in the West, particularly North America, were Japanese Zen Buddhists who had been taught by Zen master being influenced by the Meiji-government. It can be argued that their way of describing Zen Buddhism was perhaps not the traditional Buddhism which had been practiced in Japan for centuries, but a “hybrid” Zen which had been strongly affected by the Meiji-regime. This “Meiji-Zen” was, as described in chapter 1.2.1, particularly oriented towards the facilitation for the laity to practice Zazen. (Sharf 1993; Nishijima 1998).

61 McMahan 2008: 58.
Detraditionalization. Detraditionalization helps in explaining the alterations or reinforcements of practices and beliefs that are detached from the institutional structures which are associated with traditional religions. It should be noted that defining and explaining the results of detraditionalization is complex matter.

McMahan points out that “[d]etraditionalization embodies the modernist tendency to elevate reason, experience, and intuition over tradition and to assert the freedom to reject, adopt, or reinterpret traditional beliefs and practices on the basis of individual evaluation.” Detraditionalization alters thereby not only the individual practice or belief, but results in reconfigurations of modern Buddhist institutions across the globe. An example of this is how Zen Buddhist practices have been used in therapeutic settings, “often for non-Buddhist goals and without requiring commitment to explicitly Buddhist values.”

An example of how Buddhist beliefs have changed as a result of detraditionalization and individualization is how Bodhisattvas are being understood. Buddhism was, as noted, presented by Western scholars and the advocates of Japanese Zen Buddhists as being in accordance with a scientific world view. This entailed that traditional teachings and doctrines, deities and supernatural incidents, entities and persons became rationalized. In relation to Buddhism, concepts such as karma, reincarnation, beliefs in for instance Bodhisattvas and a supernatural understanding of the universe, became understood as metaphors or scientific facts written in a religious language. One example is how the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, which has traditionally been understood as a bodhisattva or deity associated with compassion, became explained and rationalized as an attribute representative of compassion. Avalokiteshvara became a symbol or a metaphor for what compassion is. Reincarnation and karma were for instance described in scientific terms by Shaku Soen, mentioned in chapter 1.2.1.

Detraditionalization may appear as a less delimited concept than individualization and in many ways, it is. In this thesis, however, detraditionalization will be applied in order to describe and explain the alterations or reinforcements of practices from an external point of view. That is to say, how institutional Buddhist practices and beliefs are altered or reinforced.

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62 Ibid: 43
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid: 57.
67 cf. Shaku Soen at the Parliament, insisting that “Buddhism is also in harmony with natural science […] in its presentation of life as governed by inexorable laws of cause and effect, in contrast to Christianity's reliance on the miraculous.” (McMahan 2008: 68).
especially in regards to media’s influence. Individualization, although overlapping with
detraditionalization, will be used to delineate the practices and beliefs from a personal point of
view.

**Demythologization**

Demythologization can be used to describe various Buddhist doctrines and dogmas which are
supernatural in nature, such as karma and rebirth, in a language which is scientifically inspired.
Therefore, demythologization is connected with the other categories in several ways, especially
with detraditionalization and psychologization.

Demythologization, denotes the way doctrines, dogmas and practices within a religion
are being and have been reconstructed and reconfigured in order to be in accordance with a
modern, and especially Western perceptions of the world and the human nature. In other
words, “demythologization is the process of attempting to extract–or more accurately, to
reconstruct–meanings that will be viable within the context of modern worldviews from
teachings embedded in ancient worldviews.” This entails a wide spectrum of ways of
comprehending the teachings and practices of the religion, as well as laws of nature, such as
supernatural descriptions of the origins of life and the universe. In relation to Buddhism, karma,
reincarnation and supernatural beings are often translated into a psychological and scientific
language in order to make sense of these categories within a modern context. The
aforementioned example of the interpretation of Avalokiteshvara is a suitable example for
describing the process of demythologization. As mentioned, Avalokiteshvara, which has been
worshiped for centuries in several Buddhist countries, is explained in terms of metaphors and
symbols. Also, religious inspired legends and tales of the Bodhisattva and other supernatural
beings are given symbolic value in terms of analogy. The religious myths are then no longer
real per se, but have been reduced or de-mythologized. Karma, reincarnation and dependent
origination have been described as “pre-modern” ways of describing cause, effect and
evolutionism by Shaku Soen. The Buddha was in fact presented as a “pre-modern scientist,”

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68 “There are passages in the vast Buddhist canon that can easily be brought into dialogue with modern sensibilities, and prominent Asian Buddhist authors have promoted demythologized Buddhism.” McMahan 2008: 50.
69 McMahan 2008: 46.
70 Dependent origination is an essential concept in Zen Buddhism. It “[d]enotes in […] the chain of causes and conditions that give rise to all phenomenal existence in the world of impermanence, birth, death, and rebirth (samsara).” McMahan 2008: 154.
71 Thompson (2005).
or “empiricist,” that had figured out these “scientific” facts a couple of thousand years earlier than the West.\(^{72}\) Demythologization therefore concerns not only the private practice and beliefs of religious individuals, but how new configurations of beliefs systems are emerging in modern countries. McMahan describes that “[d]emythologization, […] internalizes what in traditional accounts are ontological realities, and in some cases, […] also externalizes them into concrete, visible realities.”\(^{73}\) Demythologization proves to be useful category for describing how adherents of Zen Buddhism explain the myths and supernatural belief systems, and how they adapt the teachings of the canonical texts in a Western language and understanding.

**Psychologization**

In chapter 1.2.1 I mentioned that the Romantic discourse entailed a progress towards a “psychological turn.” When speaking of the “psychologization” of Buddhism, it is often related to the inception of modern Western psychology and quite frequently to more contemporary practices, such as therapeutic means of meditation, “mindfulness,” and other methods to help people live a more balanced life. Since the category refers to a variety of phenomena, it is useful to divide the psychologization category into two subcategories, i.e., the older psychological turn of Buddhism often related to psychoanalysis, to Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud and Erich Fromm, who were all fascinated by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (1870-1966), a pivotal person for the development and dissemination of Japanese Zen Buddhism. This way of exploring Buddhism in the early 20\(^{th}\) century also marked the foundation for a scientific psychological research of Buddhism.

The other turn is a more recent trend related to daily practices which have been detached from their original institutional and cultural contexts, often a set of practices applied to achieve calmness or stress reduction, as well as methods for living in the present, frequently referred to as “mindfulness.” Since psychologization therefore comprises such different elements, it is appropriate to divide psychologization into the psychological turn and the therapeutic turn of Buddhism.

The psychological turn of Buddhism has its origins in Western psychoanalysis. McMahan states that “[t]he translation of Buddhism into psychoanalytic language has also been

\(^{72}\) McMahan 2008: 64. Note that Shaku Soen applied such a language in order to defend Buddhism against the disparagement by the Christians, and to persuade the Western scientists to regard Buddhism as compatible with science. (Snodgrass 1998; Sharf 1993).

\(^{73}\) McMahan 2008: 47.
a significant component in the introduction of Zen Buddhism to the West, beginning with Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, who interpreted the collective unconscious as an aspect of the dharma-kaya."  

It is in this respect also possible to speak of a psychologization of meditation practices and of different meditative states, which have traditionally been described in religious terms. This process has since the initial interrelation between Buddhism and Western thought shaped Zen Buddhism and Buddhism in general, in significant respects.  

And as McMahan points out, “[t]he psychoanalytic interpretation of Buddhism has by no means lost its popular hold today, but it has moved well beyond Freud and Jung.”  

The psychological turn concerns how the Buddhist teachings can be understood within a modern, and often Western, scientific context and language. Therefore, since the psychological turn is less about practice than teachings, it is perhaps better understood within or as an analytical framework for describing and apprehending Buddhism within a psychological language, which is highly topical in contemporary times. However, when scientific research is used in order to understand meditative states and how meditation influences the brain, practices are involved in order to obtain empirical data. Regardless of how one perceives the relation between psychology and Buddhism, the psychological language has shaped the modern perception of what Buddhism is, and how and why one choses to adapts its related practices. When one construes Buddhism in light of this influence, different aspects and patterns emerge that are visible among practitioners of Buddhism all over the world. This extended perception of the religion helps to shed light on how Buddhism has entered modernism, in many respects in a close relation with psychology and its related language.

The therapeutic turn of Buddhism concerns practices in particular, yet even such an understanding is based on a similar analytical framework mentioned in the former subsection, which have been scientifically established. Hence, the therapeutic turn of Buddhism is in many respects based on the discourse between psychology and Buddhism, beginning with psychoanalysis and early psychological science.  

This way of perceiving Buddhism has been developed, and has also become a commercial business, and today, Buddhist practices are part of a public and largely secular domain. Meditation courses are held all over the world, and

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74 Ibid: 56 Dharma-kaya is referred to as the cosmic aspect of the Buddha, a popular conception in Mahayana Buddhism.
75 Due to the reciprocal influence, Western, and especially popular modern psychology, along with psychological science, has also been shaped by Buddhism. Cf. Cho (2012).
76 McMahan 2008: 56.
77 Safran (2003).
several religious movements have adopted the *zazen* mediation practice fully or partially. In some cases, the practice has solely been renamed, often in order to make it more accessible. Examples of proponents, who advocate popular mediation practices that have not been completely detached from Buddhist institutions, are for instance Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926) and the 14th Dalai Lama (b. 1935). Thich Nhat Hanh has written extensively on different topics related to living a balanced life for people of all faiths. He also held retreats and given talks about topics related to Buddhism and everyday life, environment, meditation, and etc. Despite the fact that Thich Nhat Hanh teaches mediation in accordance with traditional Zen Buddhism in several ways, the reasons for his lectures are in many cases not necessarily religious, but are often therapeutic methods given to aid people to live simpler and more balanced lives.\(^78\)

The psychological and the therapeutic turn are in many ways two sides of the same coin; dividing the concept helps us focus on certain aspects of the same religious practice and belief. Most importantly, the psychologization category provides an important perspective for understanding the reason why people adopt Buddhist practices in the contemporary modern world. Secondly, it can function as a tool for understanding how the psychological language has been adopted by many contemporary Buddhists, and how this language functions.

### 1.3 Mediatization - theory and process

While Buddhist modernism provides a suitable framework and categories for explaining alterations or reinforcements of practices, it remains insufficient for explaining how the media participates in the process, at least in detail. Mediatization is a theoretical framework which enables us to specifically point out, and thereby describe and understand alterations or reinforcements in Buddhism as a result of media’s influence. The definition of the mediatization concept and how its associated theoretical framework is used vary among researchers, which is something I will briefly discuss later in this chapter in connection with the discussion of the concept *mediation*. As noted earlier, I will base my understanding and application of mediatization mainly on the theorizing of Stig Hjarvard, while using other researchers’ viewpoints as supplementation.

Mediatization signifies a long-lasting process where the society as a whole, in accordance with globalization, urbanization and individualization, becomes gradually more

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\(^78\) McMahan 2008: 8
dependent on the media and media’s intrinsic logic. In relation to this postulate, I have chosen to separate mediatization into a micro and macro perspective. The micro perspective is related to the individual’s application of media devices and how each individual is affected or, one could say, reacts to media’s presence in a society. The macro perspective refers to the larger picture, zooming out to view broader interactions between larger social institutions. This separation of mediatization is something I suggest in order to make it easier to understand mediatization by approaching it from different angels. The two perspectives are combined in a synthetic perspective, when taking into account how people are related to institutions in various ways, which is something I will briefly elaborate on in this chapter.

Currently, the media appear in many diverging forms, as news, journals and papers; we use computers and mobile phones connected to the Internet, and by using these devices we can obtain information through online newspapers and radio, etc. The media are, however, constrained by economic, technical, political and social conditions, in other words, they depend on various conditions. In practical terms, a mobile phone with connection to the Internet costs money, and one will need to be a place where it is possible to connect. The government may also censor various media sources, as it is done by many totalitarian states today. There are many examples where dissident users of blogs and other news media have been jailed and even assassinated. Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu point out that web sources with sexual content, acceptance of gay and lesbian rights, and web sources connected to the US are being blocked. Despite various repressive measures taken by totalitarian regimes, “[s]ocieties worldwide are being reshaped, for better or for worse, by changes in the global media and information environment. So, too, are the everyday lives of their citizens.”

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79 Hjarvard 2013: 7; 17-18. Media’s intrinsic logic refers to how the media function in relation to the production of media content, and how the media affect the targeted audience, which is the full spectrum of a society. In a broad sense of the concept “media,” the media accommodate to the various conditions with which it operates. The media logic can then be described as the *modus operandi* of the media. “Media logic” does not suggest that there is [an] universal, linear, or single rationality behind all the media. It is to be understood as a conceptual shorthand for the various institutional, aesthetic, and technological *modus operandi* of the media, including the ways in which the media distribute material and symbolic resources, and operate with the help of formal and informal rules.” (Ibid 2013: 17).

80 An example of this can be found in China, where the government removes media content that can be regarded as a “potential subversion of [China’s] authority.” (Xu 2015).

81 Xu 2015; Goldsmith and Wu 2006: 87-88.

82 Goldsmith and Wu 2006: 92. It is however important to take into account that the Internet landscape is continuously changing due to technological developments, and changes as a result of how the international political landscape is changing, these restrictions are therefore not static.

The process of mediatization means that the media gradually and to a greater extent influence the general public arena, the religious sphere, politics, as well as social and cultural contexts in nearly every industrial society where the media are present. \(^8^4\) Since the media’s influence is relative to various conditions, mediatization does not occur as a homogenous process; the process may materialize differently in various parts of the world. Since I am writing about media’s influence on Zen Buddhist practices in Norway, I will focus specifically on how the media function and influence in Norway, and how mediatization can explain social practices in general, and religious Zen Buddhist practices in particular.

Mediatization as it is defined and applied in this thesis, does not signify “a strict analytic concept, but rather an ambiguous term which refers to the increasing cultural and social significance of the mass media and other forms of technically mediated communication.”\(^8^5\) In this thesis, as earlier noted, the Internet will be my main research topic, and the mediatization theory will be applied to Internet usage, and how the Internet usage influences Buddhist practice. Internet usage, is a vague concept, and will in this thesis mainly refer to social networks, specifically the individual and institutional application of Facebook, as means of discussing religious beliefs and practices, but also distributing a variety of Buddhist related media content. This will be explained in detail in chapter 2, when discussing the empirical material.

Norway, which is a highly advanced industrialized country with a more or less stable economy, where the news media have freedom of speech, every condition is facilitated for the media to function as a semi-independent institution. A semi-independent institution denotes and operates in a condition where

\[\text{[t]he media intervene with, and influence the activity of, other institutions, such as the family, politics, organized religion, etc., while also providing a “commons” for society as a whole, i.e., virtual shared forums for communication that other institutions and actors increasingly use as arenas for their interaction.}^{8^6}\]

In relation to Buddhism and the usage of media platforms and devices, the mediatization framework implies that the reciprocal interaction between the Buddhists and the media will gradually result in alterations or reinforcements of their practices and how the media function. The theory therefore indicates that there are alterations or reinforcements not only in Buddhist

\[^{8^4}\text{It is difficult to determine an exact rate of media’s influence, nevertheless it is possible to measure media usage of people, and how frequently various media sources are involved in social practices.}\]

\[^{8^5}\text{Harvard 2013: 10.}\]

\[^{8^6}\text{Ibid: 21.}\]
practices and beliefs, but the media are also being reconfigured according to how these are being applied and in relation to “demands” of the users. This is referred to as the reciprocal influence between religious institutions and the media.

Alterations may entail that some traditional Buddhist practices assume media forms. This is the case when scriptures become digitalized, or the learning of how to practice mediation is done through a digital medium, such as through videos available on the Internet or by Skype conversations. Most importantly, the media, by for instance functioning as platforms for communication as well as the application of various media devices, thereby become a central element in the religious discourse. The way people affiliated with Buddhism, obtain information, how they communicate their religious beliefs and practices, and how other people and institutions globally as well as locally communicate within a religious discourse, are increasingly done through media platforms. Consequently, according to the mediatization theory, religious institutions become gradually more dependent on the media, and how the media function.87

As noted previously in this chapter, the mediatization process does not necessarily influence social practices uniformly. Hjarvard points out that “[m]ediatization is not a universal process that characterizes all societies. It is primarily a development that has accelerated particularly in the last years of the twentieth century in modern, highly industrialized societies.”88 The process relies on a well-established modernized society, where institutions, such as families, schools and government are well-functioning and operative. These functioning institutions assist in the industrialization of the society, which in turn, has influenced digitalization and a technological turn of various communication forms. Successively, this has influenced, and still influences the social practices of individuals and institutions that interrelate with each other through digitalized media forms. Since media sources become more and more available to individuals, in many respects due to technological and industrial developments, the process of mediatization strengthens the individualization of each person; various media devices enable people to communicate without the restraints of time and place. People are increasingly more able to share their experiences and life stories in unprecedented ways, and this applies to religious practices and beliefs as well. Along with individual application of media

87 Cf. the media logic.
88 Hjarvard 2013: 18. His emphasis.
devices, the media news agencies *tell the story* of what is happening in different social spheres. Hjarvard explains,

[t]he media ritualize the small transitions of everyday life, as well as the events in the wider society[.] in earlier societies, social institutions, like family, school, and church [or any kind of religious institution], were the most important providers of information, tradition, and moral orientation for the individual members of society. Today, these institutions have lost some of their former authority, and the media have to some extent taken over their role as providers of information and moral orientation, while at the same time the media have become society’s most important storyteller of society itself.89

A suitable example of the *story teller* function of the media is how the media are a part of, and influence the election campaign in highly advanced industrialized societies. The media institutions host the debate while at the same time broadcast it. The debate is available for every person who owns a television, a radio, computer or a phone with Internet connection. Furthermore, the debate is also advertised all over the country, and in major cities, one finds advertising on the metro, on billboards and digital screens. Everyone is free to comment on the debate through social media, and through the media sources one can share one’s own opinion. The media function as a disseminator of the political opinion of each party, while at the same time *tell the story* about the campaign itself. The media are, so to speak, permeating the platform of the political discourse. Nick Couldry notes that “there is […] no question any more of politicians doing politics without appearing in or on media, and no social campaign can operate without some media presence.”90

While news agencies have for decades been shaping societies, as the mediatization theory indicates, the digital revolution, inaugurated by computer and Internet usage, has changed this in contemporary times. As digital devices become more available and advanced, different types of media may change social practices and platforms differently than how news agencies have done previously.

Earlier in this text I mentioned that mediatization is related to globalization, and the application of digital media devices, such as computers and the Internet, accelerates and intensifies this process. According to Hjarvard, mediatization and globalization are

[related] in at least two ways: on the one hand, globalization presumes the existence of the technical means to extent communication and interaction over long distances and, on the other

89 Ibid: 87.
90 Couldry 2008: 376.
hand, it propels the process of mediatization by institutionalizing mediated communication and interaction in many new contexts.91

Digitalized media, such as computers and phones with access to the Internet, are not restricted to any national borders, but mainly to conditions which have been discussed previously; the media function as a provider for distribution of information all over the world. This enables Buddhism to disperse and develop in new directions due to the ubiquitous nature of the Internet. People all over the world can communicate and discuss Buddhist practices, beliefs, and so on, and thereby becoming influenced by the practice of people living all over the world, which, according to the mediatization theory, results in alterations or reinforcements of their practices.

The institutionalizing mediated communication and interaction may work differently in different contexts. One way is how social media, for instance Facebook and Google+, enable religious individuals to communicate within a digitalized “institution.” These institutions may already exist in reality, such as with RZC and NSZBO, but these communities also become digitalized when the members of the religious community communicate through digitalized mediums or platforms, such as Facebook. The religious communities, in other words, have two different platforms where they can communicate, and the religious language may change as well as how the adherents respond to the communicated content.

The terms alteration and reinforcement play an important role when discussing mediatization, since they are the two main outcomes of the mediatization process. Alteration, as a result of mediatization, appears as less complicated. Winfried Shulz summarizes the alterations as follow

>[Four processes of change represent different aspects of mediatization. First, the media extend the natural limits of human communication capacities; second, the media substitute social activities and social institutions; third, media amalgamate with various non-media activities in social life; and fourth, the actors and organizations of all sectors of society accommodate to the media logic.92

While this is not a complete list, especially since the media and the extent of media usage are changing, the list still points to four of the most important aspects of alterations caused by the media.

Reinforcements of practices are in some respects related to the alterations, since the media are still appended to the already existing religious practices. But instead of altering the

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91 Hjarvard 2013: 18.
92 Shulz 2004: 98.
practices into something new or completely transforming the practices into media forms, the reinforcements of practices refer to how practices are “strengthened.” Hjarvard exemplifies this by pointing to the introduction and social use of the first telephones in the United States, where the phones did not change the social interaction between people, but rather reinforced the already existing social relations. In the same manner, it is possible that the usage of Internet sources may not change how people practice their religion and their belief, but only strengthen and sustain the more “traditional” practices. This is something that I will discuss further when dealing with the analysis of the empirical data. Interestingly, although alteration and reinforcement of practices have been presented here as quite contradictory results of mediatization, in more complex contexts, one can observe elements of both alterations as well as reinforcements of practices.

1.3.1 Mediatization – related concepts and categories

Although these concepts and categories are presented similarly as with Buddhist modernism, mediatization is, as mentioned, not to a strict analytic concept; the categories presented here are ways of making mediatization and media’s influence tangible. They will not be used directly in this thesis as analytical tools, but are explained here in order to provide a more detailed picture of how the media function. First, I will explain the three metaphors of media, which are media as conduits, media as languages, and media as environment, then move on to mediation. They are applicable concepts that can be used in order to contextualize how the media function, relative to different conditions and situations.

Media as conduits

Media as conduits indicates that “the media are a “channel” or a “conduit” through which a sender will pass a message to a receiver. This metaphor seems to highlight the message as free from the constraints of the medium, since this one would simply carry information from one point to another.” It is important to note that media as conduits is highly related to mass media, and how the media employ religious related material only to a certain extent. When the media generate information about religion, drawing from secular sources, the media are often

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93 Hjarvard 2013: 5.
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represented negatively, mainly because of the secular values the media are associated with. In certain circumstances, when religious symbols are transformed into media forms such as for instance movies, the religious elements are often detached from their original context, making them more commercial or symbolic than religious in nature.

**Media as languages**

While media as conduits may not be the most adequate concept for describing the Norwegian Zen Buddhist’s application of media sources and devices, media as languages, on the other hand, sheds light on important aspect of their usage. While media as languages is still perhaps most applicable on a macro level, focusing primarily on larger media such as mass media through television, radio, etc., media as languages still helps us understand how media transform social, religious and cultural practices. Most importantly is perhaps how the media “format religion in different ways.”

Hjarvard discusses how media help in formatting “adventure, consumer guidance, reality television, science fiction etc.” through the media. However, as he further on points out, this trend of portraying and generating religious inspired configurations may have other side effects as well, for instance by “promoting individualism. […] The spread of interactive media [such as social networks] allows people to express religious ideas and feelings in a variety of genres that usually have not been available to institutionalized religion.” Media as languages, when seen from such a perspective, becomes a useful metaphor and tool for understanding how the digitalizing of the religious communication influences religious practices due to mediation and as a part of the longer mediatization process.

**Media as environments**

In the same way, as with media as languages, media as environments helps to portray and contextualize how the media influence the religious discourses and practices. The religious mediated language has to be transmitted on a certain social platform, and this can be understood as media as environments. While it is possible to understand media as environments on a macro scale, such as mediation of large public celebrations or cultural occurrences, it proves itself to

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95 Hjarvard 2012: 27.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
be functional on a micro level as well; understanding media as environments as for instance social networks available through the Internet. Through such social networks and platforms, the original place of religious platforms becomes divided, and a new environment appears where people can communicate and address religious beliefs and practices without the restraints of time and place. Media as environments thereby gives an important contextual perspective to how one may portray and understand the location where the religious discourse takes place through the media.

**Mediation**

Mediation is a concept that has been used interchangeably with mediatization by several academics, and there is, as noted, an ongoing debate concerning their application. Without going too much into detail, it should be noted that the discrepancy with regards to the definitions of these concepts has an impact on how one perceive the outcomes of the mediatization process.

But first, while mediatization denotes a long-lasting process and a theoretical framework, the term is furthermore related to the concept of mediation, however mediation signifies a much shorter process than that of mediatization. Hjarvard states that

> "the process of mediatization must be distinguished from the partly related concept of "mediation". There may be no generally accepted definition of mediation, but for the sake of comparison we will consider mediation as the concrete act of communicating through a medium. Thus, compared to non-mediated communication (i.e., face-to-face in co-presence), mediated communication extends human communication in time, space and ways of expressions. [T]he particular instance of mediation does not alter the social institution itself or its relationship towards the outside world. Mediatization, by contrast, concerns the long-term process whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed [or reinforced] as a consequence of the growth of media’s influence [and presence]."  

Mediation, in other words, signifies a process where media devices and platforms, often referred to a certain type of mediums, are used in order to extend the spatial conversation. Not only is the conversation being directly expanded in terms of time and space, but the expansion is allegorical as well, since the medium (a media device and/or media platform) enables the mediated content to be submitted to a larger number of people, as opposed to for instance in a normal conversation. The mediation process seemingly alters the means of communication, this depends however, heavily on how one measure the alterations and reinforcements that occur.  

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98 Hjarvard 2013: 26. My emphasis.
99 Ibid: 26
In order to distinguish mediation as a concept from mediatization, it is important to emphasize that meditation denotes the process of conveying messages and communication through one or several mediums, while mediatization denotes the process and the theoretical framework for describing alterations or reinforcements of social and cultural practices that occur over time, due to the application of mediums, and the media’s growing influence on public, political, religious and social practices. Mediation cannot be the cause of alterations or reinforcements, since mediation is solely the concept used in order to describe the reconciliation of two parts by a third. Mediation applied and defined in this manner becomes a pivotal constituent of the mediatization theory; the alterations and reinforcements which can be described by the mediatization theory are caused by mediation over a prolonged period of time. Mediatization explains how and why alterations and reinforcements occur; mediation signifies the application of a medium, which is referred to in this thesis as various media devices, platforms and social networks. When the concepts are divided in this manner, mediation appears as a practical and useful concept for describing the utilization of media sources in religious contexts, such as through social networks and platforms on the Internet.

1.4 Summarizing

I will in this last section of the first chapter try to sketch out a unified theoretical framework that will enable us to analyze how the media affect religious practices and beliefs, and vice versa. But before I will configure the theoretical framework and making a correlation between the different categories, I will elaborate on the position of texts in Zen Buddhism. I will do this because text have been, and still are, the most important media used in Zen Buddhism, be it the religious canon, comments on the scriptures and commentaries, both in real-life and on the Internet.

Zen Buddhism and texts

When the influence of the media on Buddhism is only seen from a modern perspective, one loses the ability to recognize how media, especially in the form of texts, have been an important constituent of Buddhism for centuries. However, as noted, texts have been an important component of Buddhism long before Buddhism was represented to the West during early modernity. While Zen Buddhism can be associated with and assume the form of many
types of media, it should be noted that very often, the main type of media are often texts, and texts within the contexts of other types of media, such as videos. I will therefore place an emphasis on textual usage in Zen Buddhism.

The two main branches of Buddhism, Mahayana and Theravada, have their own textual bodies. Zen Buddhism, which is considered a branch of the Mahayana tradition, is, however, a special case. While traditional Zen Buddhism has been associated with a set of texts of which the most prominent are *The Heart Sutra* and *The Diamond Sutra*, it is common among Zen Buddhists to regard texts as secondary to the actual practice. While this is true, it is important to take into account that Zen Buddhism as a religious tradition has constantly been transforming for centuries, adopting to various cultural and political conditions, and so too has the textual body and the application of it. This indicates that the importance of texts have changed throughout the centuries.

Contemporary Zen Buddhism, and especially Western Zen Buddhism, is complex when it comes to textual sources; texts are viewed as less important than the actual practice itself, but texts still play an important role in a several ways. An example is the textual body created by authors and scholars like Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (1870-1966), Alan Watts (1915-1973) and Shunryu Suzuki (1904-1971), who have all contributed to the large quantity of modern interpretations of Buddhist practice, and many of their works, are read by contemporary Norwegian Zen Buddhists as well. Interestingly, D. T. Suzuki’s writings on Zen Buddhism were heavily shaped by the Meiji-restoration, and impacts caused by the restoration on Zen Buddhist practices are visible in his writings. Alan Watts and Shunryu Suzuki, who became imperative personalities for the development of a Western and modern Zen Buddhist practice, were influenced by D. T. Suzuki and his writings. They contributed to the expansion of the tradition, inaugurated by modern tendencies and influences, while continuing the dispersal by D. T. Suzuki’s writings. The modern Western Zen Buddhism would become heavily characterized by the interpretations of these writers, who in turned emphasized the importance of practice above studying and chanting texts.

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100 “Zen,” which derives from *Chán* in Chinese and *Dhyana* in Sanskrit means meditation, which in turns alludes to the importance of practice in the tradition.

101 See Steve Heine and Dale S. Wright, et. al. (2006) for extensive discussions on the topic and related discourses.

102 The Norwegian Zen Buddhist’s application of modern Zen Buddhist books will be dealt with in chapter 2.

103 Note that D. T. Suzuki was a student of the well-known Zen master Soen Shaku, who in turn was teaching a Zen Buddhism heavily shaped by the Meiji-restoration. Fields 1981: 171-172; 174.

The Romantic discourse was referred to as an important progenitor for the modernizing of Zen Buddhism and this is especially true when speaking of the understanding and application of texts within contemporary Zen Buddhist practice. It is widely believed among contemporary Zen Buddhists that the Zen Buddhist tradition was in fact not transmitted from generation to generation by the reading, writing and assembling of religious texts, but by Zen masters who would convey the teaching “without words.” The teachings of Zen, referred to as the dharma, are frequently, also in contemporary times, believed to have been transmitted uninterruptedly from the Buddha himself until contemporary times.105

While many Zen Buddhists believe in the transmitting of the dharma, which in turn can be characterized as somewhat supernatural,106 modern Zen Buddhism is frequently described as scientific by its adherents. This scientific explanation of Zen Buddhism, as we have seen, derives largely from the religious discourses in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where Christianity, adherents of scientific rationalism and Buddhism, within the context of colonization, played important roles. At that time, as we have seen, the most important scientific doctrines in Buddhism were its compatibility with science in terms of evolution. With such an understanding of the Buddhist doctrines, tacitly, the texts lose some of their religious and supernatural features. The understanding of Buddhism in the light of scientific rationalism was, as shown, grounded on scriptures that were considered to contain religious doctrines compatible with a modern worldview. This may seem unproblematic, yet the Buddhist canon, in the Theravada and Mahayana traditions alike, contains numerous stories with supernatural events, and where the Buddha, including Bodhisattvas and other supernatural entities, perform several paranormal deeds. One additionally finds, especially in Eastern Asia, different branches of Buddhism with various paranormal and transcendent ontological perceptions of the world, individuals, animals and objects. A suitable example of this is the veneration of scripture, where

105 See for instance Finney (1991), for an example of such a conviction. The notion of a lineage of Zen Masters is considered imperative within Buddhism in general, although it has a distinctive flavor in the Zen Buddhist tradition. The conviction derives from the Flower Sermon given by the Buddha. According to the Sermon found in The Gateless Gate, a collection of Zen Koans first compiled in the 13th century in China, the Buddha supposedly transmitted the dharma to Mahakasyapa, a disciple of the Buddha, without using words. The Buddha was solely lifting up a flower and showing it to the audience which was ready for the Buddha to speak. When Mahakasyapa saw the flower, he smiled gently to the Buddha, showing him that he had understood what the Buddha was trying to say, and the he had attained enlightenment. This spontaneous and immediate way of attaining enlightenment without the emphasis on words would become an important characteristic of modern contemporary Zen Buddhist practice. This example also indicates that the seeds of an understanding of texts as secondary to practice are not a new, but has existed within Zen Buddhism for centuries.106 This obviously depends on how one chooses to discern what the transmission is, since it may as well be portrayed from a psychological perspective. However, enlightenment within the context referred to here is still to be explained in scientific terms, as it is commonly referred to as a religious experience.
the scripture especially in early Mahayana context, was regarded as an evocation of or an embodiment of the Buddha himself.\textsuperscript{107} Such a conception of scriptures has in many respects been engendered as a result of the incorporated legitimization found within certain types of the scripture, i.e., the veneration of the scripture itself, found within for instance the \textit{Lotus Sutra},\textsuperscript{108} if a good man or good woman shall receive and keep, read and recite, explain or copy in writing a single phrase of the Scripture of the Dharma Blossom… that person is to be looked up to and exalted by all the world, [and] showered with offerings fir for a Buddha… Let it be known that that person is a great bodhisattva.\textsuperscript{109}

Buddhist scripture has been regarded as an embodiment of the words of the Shakyamuni Buddha, other Buddhas, \textit{Bodhisattvas}, or other types of transcendent beings, while at the same time as the means of comprehending the diversity of Buddhist doctrine of, for instance, the ontology, cause and effect, karma, and so on, and thereby enabling the path of liberation. Along with such understandings, the scripture itself has also been recognized as \textit{inherently} blessed and sacred, and has been venerated as a means of salvation. This has led to a diversity of rituals and beliefs heavily related to the notion of objects as sacred.

Interestingly, the diverging and contrasting ways of understanding the textual body within the Zen Buddhist tradition was accompanied by the new modern scientific way of construing and explaining the content of these texts. In order to cope with these aforementioned contrasting characteristics of the Buddhist scripture, it required an approach towards the scripture that could make these supernatural themes embedded in the scripture intelligible. The way Western scholars and advocates of Zen Buddhism described and rationalized the content and the meaning of these texts, in many respects paved the way for the making of a Buddhist modernist perspective.

The Romantic discourse and scientific rationalism have in most cases provoked quite different outcomes concerning the development of modern Buddhism, and in relation to texts, it shows itself to be an interesting matter. While the Romantic discourse did not entail, as noted, a re-enchantment of the world, it did give rise to understandings of religion that can be considered more “religious” than scientific. It is important to note that the precursors of the Romantic discourse, such as Olcott of the Theosophical movement, considered their perennial

\textsuperscript{107} Williams 2009: 45. This conviction still exists in several branches of Buddhism, and there are also modern expressions of such beliefs as well.

\textsuperscript{108} The \textit{Lotus Sutra} is a venerated text in Zen Buddhism, traditionally as well as in modern configurations, it is also applied by NSZBO and RZC.

\textsuperscript{109} Schaeffer 2009: 45.
philosophy “scientific,” such as the unitary higher truth within all religions. If taking Olcott as an example of the early Romantic tendencies in relation to religion, the discourse entailed understandings of religion and philosophy that can hardly even be explained as “quasi-scientific.” Interestingly, Olcott was perhaps the first to officially become a Buddhist, still holding such views, and still consider Buddhism in accordance with evolution. In a way, Olcott becomes a type of precursor for, and perhaps even an embodiment of the modern Zen Buddhist; he relates to Buddhism with quite contradictory perspectives, deriving from different cultural and religious discourses, melting contrasting views together, forming a view of Buddhism that is detached from original institutional, as well as cultural and social contexts. This applies to texts as well, they are often in Western contemporary and modern Zen Buddhism regarded as secondary to practice, but are still read frequently, and especially prominent are interpretations. While interpretations are important, the religious textual body is still venerated, with evident religious connotations.

Taking into account the wide spectrum of new possibilities associated with the Internet, the adherents and practitioners of Zen Buddhism in Norway, and around the world in general, are now able to study the religious textual body of Buddhism in new and different ways. By using Internet sources, Zen Buddhists may relate to texts differently, which in turn may alter or reinforce practices, which Buddhist texts have normally been associated with. The alleged alterations or reinforcements of the usage of texts and practices may not be visible if it is not seen in relation to how Zen Buddhism has been practiced within traditional contexts. Since the Internet is a multi-medium, texts in form of religious accounts, comments, discussions, and so on, are now often related to pictures, movies and a whole variety of combinations texts can be a part of. In order to examine these new, contrasting and different ways of applying texts in relation to Zen Buddhism, I will now combine the two theoretical frameworks, forming a whole that can hopefully be used to frame and analyze the empirical data, which will be presented and discussed in the following chapter.

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111 The association between texts and practices are manifold. Within many branches of Buddhism, texts are chanted and/ or worshiped as the embodiment of a bodhisattva or as the Buddha, mentioned in this subchapter. In Zen Buddhism, this practice exists in traditional as well as in modern contemporary groups. Dogen Zenji (1200-1253), a venerated and important Zen Buddhist master and founder of the Soto Zen school in Japan, wrote the text **Fukanazazengi**. Although the text is mainly technical and concerns the method of practicing zazen, it is still traditionally venerated as sacred. It is also used in Norway, especially by the NSZBO.
1.4.1 Buddhist modernism and Mediatization – a unified theoretical framework

Mediatization has been described in the former chapter as a process which is often highly associated with a macro perspective, concerning the influence the variety of media forms have on several societal institutions. This, however, is only true if institutional usages of the media, in forms of mass media, media devices, and so on, are solely seen from the macro perspective. As mentioned earlier, the macro and micro perspectives are coherent. It is important to note that when individuals are communicating and obtaining information through various media devices, they interact as members of already existing institutions or as relative to them, such as school, university, work, church or temple, in a particular type of society. As members of a society they cannot act as totally independent of any kind of institution, since they are inevitably relative to the existence of them. At the same time, they are not losing the characteristics of being independent individuals. Therefore, the usage of media devices by individuals becomes associated with various institutions, since institutions are always relative to the interaction between individuals. Theoretically, this will in a long-term perspective result in alterations or reinforcements of social practices between the various institutions. According to the mediatization theory, the various media devices reinforce the social relation between individuals who are associated with various institutions, while at the same time the media may change how institutions interact with each other, and how individuals interact with institutions. The problem, in relation to the notion of 'institution,' is therefore mainly terminological and depends on how one perceives 'institution' and 'individual,' and how one understands the interaction between the institutions, as well as the interaction between institutions and individuals. Since NSZBO, for instance, is a much larger institution than that of RZC, the influences may vary due to conditions like membership numbers. This indicates that there may be differences in how the mediatization process influences the two religious communities. The mediatization process is neither restricted to media’s influence on the communities exclusively, neither as wholes; the two communities are also relative to other

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112 As the Internet gradually becomes more important in nearly every interaction between individuals and institutions, the initial understanding of media as demarcated entities, such as television, radio, phones, newspapers, etc., becomes disrupted. As the computer develops and adopts new forms, radio, television, and other media devices, become available on the Internet. The Internet also becomes the platform where people, for instance, schedule their appointment with their doctor or dentist, renew loans at the library, as well as dealing with foreign affairs related to VISA applications, such as the ESTA application, which gives the possibility of visiting the US. In this way, institutions and individuals become more dependent on the existence of the Internet and the means of communication which are accessible there.
institutions they may communicate with, in other words, there may be regional differences as well. The mediatization process influence the society in entirety, not one by one institution independently. The influences are visible on a larger scale, but also on an individual level, due to the modus operandi of the media.

The categories associated with Buddhist modernism that were described in chapter, are tools for recognizing modern characteristics and features in Buddhism. As explained in detail earlier, there were various historical tendencies and incidents that would lead to the modernizing of Buddhism, doctrinally, textually, but also in terms of practice, and Buddhism’s position in society. Although media have played an important role in this formation since the 19th century, due to Buddhism being described and elaborated on in books, journals, newspapers, etc., I assert that the new forms of media, especially digitalized media devices, such as computers and phones with Internet applicability, helps in propelling the modernization process of Zen Buddhism in Norway. Without doubt, many will consider this as an apparent platitude, yet as the results of the empirical data alludes, the answer to media’s influence on Zen Buddhism in Norway is more complicated than what I initially anticipated when I started working on this thesis.

The four different categories that were described in chapter 1.2.2 will be applied with the question of media’s influence in mind. Without question, there may be many other cultural impacts that have influenced their practices, yet in order to make a tangible impression of media’s role in modern Zen Buddhist practice in Norway, Zen Buddhism’s relation to media must be the main topic in question, without losing grasp of the larger picture. This will be done by structuring and analyzing a certain spectrum of Internet activity on social networks, especially Facebook, which is one of the most common social network in Norway. Hopefully the interviews will help discern how, in what way and to what extent media play a role in the practice of Norwegian Zen Buddhists. Moreover, I wanted to find out, at least to some extent, how Zen Buddhism is being mediatized, which implies how cultural, political and religious configurations are translated into media forms. This is as noted an important and frequent result of the mediatization process. In order to make a tangible impression of media’s role in modern Zen Buddhist practice in Norway, I will apply the categories deriving from Buddhist modernism as tools for understanding the ways in which Buddhist modernism is changing or being reinforced due to media’s influence. The categorizes associated with mediatization will be of
help in shedding light on how the mediatization process is occurring, and give a perspective on media’s influence on the categories deriving from Buddhist modernism.
2 The empirical data and analysis

I have chosen to focus on two types of Internet sources and the interviews mentioned earlier. In regards to the interviews, I am interested in how the Zen Buddhists in Norway understand their own application of the Internet. The interviews will shed light on the empirical data generated from the Internet sources. I will now briefly introduce these empirical sources, before going more into detail with each of them.

The first way I use the Internet as a source is by documenting general usage by Zen Buddhists adhering to the two communities in Norway, within a group and on two pages on Facebook. The usage can for instance consist of sharing of information, such as articles, pictures and videos. The Facebook Zen Buddhist pages and the group include comments made by the members, since each member or subscriber has the possibility of commenting on posts published on the page or in the group. Various media sources posted from January 2015 until September 2016 will constitute this part of my empirical material.

I will describe how the Zen Buddhists apply these Internet sources, applications and media platforms within a set of categories. These are: (forms of) media contents, expressions of communication and participation, and modes of sharing. Media contents, expressions of communication and participation, and modes of sharing will be presented as categories which I will use as tools for understanding and describing the contents being shared and distributed, how they function and how they may influence the users of media platforms and sources, such as Facebook.

The various forms of media contents, expressions of communication and participation, as well as modes of sharing will help to produce a larger framework for understanding what Zen Buddhist media participation is. This part of the empirical data will enable a quantitative analysis of Zen Buddhist media participation, where the larger picture is the topic in question.

The last of the sources from which the empirical data have been established is from interviews with a selected number of members from the two communities in Norway. I have systematized and analyzed the interviews in order to provide a holistic description of their Internet usage, while pointing out tendencies, variances, similarities and differences in usage. How the adherents use social networks and how they relate to media contents may differ from how they themselves regard Internet applicability. This empirical source will constitute a

113 I will address these pages and the group in detail later on in this chapter.
qualitative perspective which will engender a more comprehensive view on how Zen Buddhists relate to Internet usage and how Zen Buddhism is assuming media forms.

While the analytical framework discussed in the former chapter will be applied to some extents throughout this chapter, the results of the analysis will be presented at the end. The suitability of the analytical framework and the quality of the empirical data will then be questioned. At the end of this thesis in chapter 3, a summary of the results will follow, and eventually a conclusion of whether mediatization is an applicable analytical model for explaining alterations or reinforcements of practices among Zen Buddhists due to media influences. It is possible that the media are playing a less important role then what I initially anticipated, which will then render the mediatization concept less useful.

2.1 Presenting media participation on Facebook

The empirical data have been obtained from two pages and one group on Facebook, where one page and one group are associated with RZC, and one page with NSZBO. The difference between a group and a page is mainly that a page tends to be less interactive; on a page the subscribers are often more inclined to be recipients rather than participators. In a group, on the other hand, the members often participate on equal ground. This has a lot to do with the usability and functionality of the two modes of communities that exist on Facebook. A consequence of these differences in application, when speaking of modes of communication delivered by the two types of communities, is how people tend to respond to media contents and to other members'/ subscribers' participation. Since a page is often less interactive and tend to function more like an information conduit on Facebook, people, too, tend to interact less with each other, or at least to avoid engaging in larger discourses within the page-communities.

As an example, although the page of RZC has about seventy more subscribers than the

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114 People who are associated with a page will be referred to as subscribers, while group members are referred to as members. These terms will help in separating the group from the pages.

115 See the webpage “Facebook Tips: What’s the Difference between a Facebook Page and Group?” for an emic description of the two types of communities that can exist on Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook/facebook-tips-whats-the-difference-between-a-facebook-page-and-group/324706977130/ [read: 06.09.16.]

116 This is said while being aware that there is a lack of adequate scientific research to substantiate the reasoning, and I do not assert that this is always the case. However, as a result of the lack of scientific research concerning this particular topic, I make this distinction in order to point out differences between the adherent’s reactions to media content and how they participate when speaking of the Zen Buddhists in Norway, within these two modes of communication on Facebook. Cf. the discussion of media as conduits in chapter 1.3.1.
membership of their group, the interaction remains low, which corresponds with the aforementioned discussion of the differences between pages and groups. Note that the page is open for all members on Facebook, while the group is not, which in turn implies that there may be subscribers who are not affiliated with the Rinzai Zen Center in Oslo. In a similar way, and then taking into account that NSZBO’s page has 3625, the interaction among the subscribers remains low. I will return to this when discussing their page in this chapter.

I will now introduce the three categories mentioned in the former subchapter, which are media content, expressions of communication and participation, and modes of sharing on Facebook. These categories will help in understanding the functionality of the media content being distributed, their various forms and how they may be shared.

The first of the categories is *media content*, which essentially denotes the actual media being transmitted. It is a strictly descriptive category, meant to help to describe the type and form of the media that exist and are transmitted on Facebook, without taking the media’s functions and possibilities into account. An example of media content can be texts, pictures, videos, links, shared articles, shared news and other pages deriving from Facebook. Media content as category is, in other words, a tool for specifying the actual form of what is being transmitted and distributed.

When speaking of *expressions of communication and participation*, one moves the perspective away from the descriptive understanding of the media content, and rather focuses on the way the media content is being communicated and reacted to. This perspective induces a slightly more analytical approach, yet the analysis of the media content is not questioned. While media content as a category is strictly related to the actual form of the content being transmitted, expressions of communication and participation, on the other hand, concerns the functionality of the media being distributed. As the term “expression” indicates, it deals with how the media content appears, and how people are able to participate in the discourse provided by the media content, and by the functionality of the media content. A simple example is a picture shared on Facebook. The media content is the picture itself, while expressions of communication and participation concerns functions that are available through the media platforms and/or devices, such as commenting, “liking,” but also the various ways one may
view the picture, and last but not least, the functions of the picture itself, which are altered by possibilities of the Internet.\textsuperscript{117}

The last of these categories are the \textit{modes of sharing}. On Facebook there is a specific application called “share,” which automatically shares the media content to a specific wanted location on the web, and only available to people the Facebook user wants to include. This makes it possible to hide certain media contents from some people, which in turn make it possible to create “discourses” around the media content only available to some people. The sharing application is, however, not the only way of sharing the media content, since copying and pasting on Facebook, not only the specific content but also links which will take you to an already existing discourse, is also possible. The content can also be shared all over the world, by pasting the content or the link on other social networks or web pages of all sorts.\textsuperscript{118}

I will now systematize the different types of media contents, expressions of communication and participation, and modes of sharing that exist on the page and the group associated with RZC, and the page associated with NSZBO.

\textbf{Rinzai Zen Center, Oslo Facebook page}\textsuperscript{119}

This page functions primarily as a conduit of information, and is in many ways an extension of the webpage http://www.rinzai-zen.no/, owned by the group.\textsuperscript{120} While the rinzai-zen webpage seems to be the main medium for the group to distribute information about themselves and what type of activities they provide, the Facebook page is by far more informative and updated.\textsuperscript{121} The Facebook page functions as an extension in terms of making the information on the webpage accessible through Facebook, while informing the members of the page about meetings, \textit{zazen} and \textit{sesshin} sessions, talks and lectures, as well as pictures and book reviews/recommendations.

\textsuperscript{117} It is possible to use the “like”-application on Facebook, which gives the user of Facebook the ability to express affection and approval of all types of media content that is distributed on the Facebook in general.
\textsuperscript{118} The only restrictions to these ways of generating, participating in relation to, and sharing media content are the constraints noted in chapter 1.3. cf. economic, technical, political and social conditions.
\textsuperscript{119} The webpage can be accessed through https://www.facebook.com/rinzaizensenter/. The page is open to public.
\textsuperscript{120} This is the main home webpage of Rinzai Zen Center in Oslo.
\textsuperscript{121} http://www.rinzai-zen.no/index.php?id=12 Last update was in 2012, [read 11.12.16.]
The media content that exists on RZC’s page consists primarily of various posts made by the administrator(s) of the group. These posts are made in order to inform the subscribers of the page when for instance zazen will take place, if there are changes in their schedule, and when sesshins, talks and lectures occur. Frequently, pictures from their Center in Grønland Oslo, are combined with the aforementioned type of posts. Posted is also information about talks by Koshin Cain Osho when he has visited the group from the US. While there is interactive communication between the subscribers and the page itself, it is often restricted to aphorisms, “likes,” questions concerning sesshins and a few sentences expressing enthusiasm.

Although there are many posts on the page, 63 to be exact, from January 2015 until September 2016, they can all be divided into four different types of media contents, and a variation and mixing between them.

The first type of media content on the page is in form of basic text. Posts, constituted by text alone, are the most frequent mediation that exists on their page. This again corroborates the anticipated functionality of the page as a conduit of information; the posts are not submitted in order to create discourses, but rather update and inform the subscribers of the page.

The second type of media content is pictures, which is also the second most posted media content on their page, frequently in combination with the first and third type of media content, i.e., event.

The third type is event, which is an application Facebook provides. It gives the subscribers the possibility to subscribe to the event, and the subscribers will thereby be notified on changes. The subscribers will also be reminded of the event when they are logged in onto their Facebook account.

The fourth is the sharing of links, which if the post is clicked on, will take you to another website on Facebook or anywhere on the web in general. These links may also be book recommendations and articles.

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122 The administrators of the group are not announced. There have been some visitor posts on the page as well, the largest proportion being in 2013, with nine different posts. There have only been five posts from 2014 until 2016. I will address what these posts consist of later on in this section of the subchapter.

123 Koshin Cain Osho is the current teacher of the group, residing in the US.

124 Cf. the administrators.

125 All of the different posts can be “liked” and commented on in the same manner and to the same extent.

126 The “surfing” from Facebook to different webpages is next to limitless when it comes to possibilities. The only restrictions are the ones mentioned in chapter 1.3. cf. economic, technical, political and social conditions.
The modes of expression and participating of the media content on the page facilitates for a higher level of interaction, however the frequency of generating media content and sharing remains low.\textsuperscript{127} From January 2015 until September 2016, there have been three occurrences of sharing, or visitor posts, by other subscribers. Taking into account the way the administrators utilize the functionalities of the page, accordingly the page seems intended to be a means of updating the members of the RZC community. This in turn correlates well with the fact that the community has a closed group for members who participate more frequently.\textsuperscript{128} However, as a result of the functionality of the page, it becomes an important medium for the community to communicate with people who are not necessarily associated with RZC. When taking into account that their webpage has not been updated since 2012, and the Facebook page is updated several times each month, it seems likely that the page functions as the main apparatus for communicating with people interested in Rinzai Zen Buddhism in Norway. While the page has the same functionalities in terms of modes of expression and participation as a group, it is still not being used in the same manner due to the difference of purpose.

Although pages on Facebook in general facilitate for people to share posts, there have, as noted, only been three occurrences of sharing from January 2015 until September 2016. These occurrences have been sharing by the usage of the sharing application; it would be impossible to trace all occurrences of sharing that have been done by members copying and pasting links, sections of text, pictures, and so forth. The low frequency of sharing is an indication that the subscribers of the page, who are associated with RZC in real life, are members of the group as well. Another explanation of few occurrences of sharing may as well be that the page is not regularly used by the subscribers, or that they are only interested in knowing when the next mediation session is scheduled. In order to examine the extent of the subscriber’s application of the page, more thorough research is required.

Altogether, the usage of the page, both by administrators and subscribers, and the low frequency of interaction, suggests that the page is used as a means of updating; the page is a conduit of media content, and particularly in terms information concerning the actual practice that occurs at their center in Grønland. This indicates that the influence of the media is low, beside the fact that the Facebook page has perhaps become the most important provider of information in regards to meetings, mediation sessions and lectures. That fact that the page is

\textsuperscript{127} It should be noted that the modes of expression and participating on the page is equal to that of groups.

\textsuperscript{128} This group will be discussed in the following subchapter.
used to organize all of the aforementioned activates, corroborates the assertion that the page functions as a digital bulletin board. I will be discussing this at the end of this chapter, and then comparing the two pages and the group.

*Rinzai Zen Center, Oslo Facebook group*\(^{129}\)

As mentioned, the Facebook group associated with RZC, although with fewer members then subscribers of the page, is as anticipated more active and with more equal participation among the members. The group is also closed, which means that you need to send a request in order to become a member of the group. This in turn may indicate that the members are more interested in Zen Buddhism in general, and are associated with Rinzai Zen Center in particular, in contrast to the subscriber of the page.\(^{130}\) From January 2015 until September 2016, there have been in total 82 posts. In contrast to their page, the various media contents are generated by different members of the group.\(^{131}\) While some of the media contents distributed and shared in group correlates with what is posted on the page associated with RZC, a proportion of the media contents in the group are open discussions concerning their Zen Buddhist practice, different articles from various Buddhist associated websites, accounts of *sesshins* with pictures, pictures of their regular practice and lectures, journals related to Zen Buddhist practice, and events. All of these various forms of media are interconnected, forming a larger discourse that goes far beyond the one found in the page.

While the page associated with RZC has, as noted, the same functionalities in terms of modes of expression and participation, the group is more interactive. This is related to the functionality of Facebook groups. From a wider perspective, the group appears to be an extension of a regular meeting at the center, where smaller discourses are formed within the larger one. One recent discourse in the group, which I will return to and use as an example, illuminates this and the variety of possibilities the Internet, and in this context Facebook, provides. The many possibilities of the Internet gives people new opportunities for expressing their religiosity within the frames of the media and its logic, which in turn, as suggested, allegedly propels the mediatization of religion.

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\(^{129}\) [https://www.facebook.com/groups/rzs.oslo/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/rzs.oslo/)

\(^{130}\) Making a detailed outline of who is or is not a member of RZC in real life is not possible, due to time and page restrictions.

\(^{131}\) As with social groups outside of the digital world, some people are more active than others, this is also the case in this group as well.
All of the aforementioned media contents, the modes of expression and participation, and possibilities of sharing information, allegedly propel to varying degrees the mediatization of religion. Facebook enables people to share pictures, stories and various other media contents that corroborate their practices, especially in terms of reinforcing the various members’ affiliation to the group. The sharing of various media content may also cause people to be influenced by Buddhist sources that would perhaps not have been available outside of the digital world. Accordingly, the adherents respond to these sources in new and different ways as a result of the modes of expression and participation related to the functionality of Facebook and its related applications. It is possible to read, comment, subscribe to and share these contents, thereby making the recipient of the media content a contributor, and the producers of the content, recipients.

As noted, there is one particular example that sheds light on how the media, at this point in the technological development, may reinforce or alter religious practices. The example is drawn from an ongoing debate which will most likely continue within the frames of Facebook as well as in real life at their location in Grønland. The example, which is a discourse, deals with two aspects of their regular practice, which is to what extent Japanese (and to some extent Chinese) related characteristics and features shall influence their practice. The other aspect is related to the first, but deals specifically with the significance and the application of koan, and to what extent it should be emphasized. As a result of disassociating with Teacher Genro, the group stopped using koan as a pivotal part of their practice.

In order to fully understand the importance of koan application, one needs to add a historical perspective. It is not possible in this thesis to give a detailed account of how and why koan application have played and still plays an important role for Zen Buddhism, however it should be noted that Rinzai Zen, in contrast to Soto Zen, has to a greater extent been associated with koan practice. However, the actual reliability of this conviction is disputed, the variety of usages seems to stem from the Soto school trying to de-emphasize the practice, in order to

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132 While the Internet may facilitate for people to express their religiosity in new and interesting ways, one should not overestimate its influence, at least not at this point in the progress of technological development. The Internet, although a multifunctional tool which enables people to be “all over the world,” has its constraints, as previously discussed. One particular aspect, which I will return to later, is the rate of Internet usage in relation to age.

133 Koan practice includes a word, short story, a question, a haiku poem, a statement, dialogue, or simply a roar. In most cases, koans are not logically deducible, this is in many ways the nature of the koan, either causing confusion or enlightenment for the student. It is also a test the Zen master can use in order to “measure” the student’s progress.

134 See chapter 1.1.
elucidate the differences between Soto and Rinzai, two schools that have for centuries been competing within the Zen tradition in Japan. What is interesting is that this discourse continues till this day, among Zen Buddhists in Norway, on Facebook.

The incorporation of koan practice within a Zen center or institution requires a Zen teacher with an adequate education from a Zen institution. Rinzai Zen Center lacks, at the time this thesis is written, such a teacher. As a result of this circumstance, the whole practice of the group has been questioned, and done so by using Facebook to present the topic and the various opinions. The discourse mainly concerns whether they should strive for a Japanese practice, or a reconfigured and reformulated one, referred to as making a Norwegian practice. Within the same discourse, it has been noted that the Zen community in Norway is small, and that the way to a Norwegian practice must be perceived from a long-term perspective. It has also been noted that the group should perhaps associate to greater extent with a “European” or “American” practice.

While the discourse alone could, without doubt, be the foundation for an independent research work detached from a media perspective, the media perspective provides important aspects related to contemporary Zen Buddhism in Norway. Due to the functionality of digitalized media content published on the Internet, the content will remain there as long as it is not deleted by an administrator or the publisher.\(^\text{135}\) Since the group is closed, its contents, in this context the various posts related to the discourse, will most likely remain in the group.\(^\text{136}\) Because of the modes of expression and participation of the media content and its functionality, there are, however, theoretically no boundaries as to where a whole post, or parts of it, can be shared.\(^\text{137}\)

The media content, its modes of expression and participation, and sharing options give, as shown in this example, the possibility to discuss the individual and collective practice of the group. While Facebook may not change the religious practices dramatically, still it is not difficult to image how media contents, due to their ubiquitous and long-lasting nature, may change or reinforce, over a longer period of time, the religious practice of Zen Buddhists in Norway, or globally. Evidently, the discourse here used as an example, can possibly continue in real life at their meetings, and probably has been and will continue to do so too. Nevertheless,

\(^\text{135}\) Other members can only mark the post as spam.
\(^\text{136}\) There is no trace of the discourse entering the page associated with RZC.
\(^\text{137}\) The share application is not available in this closed group. However, it is still possible to copy and paste any kind of content found on the page to anywhere else on the Internet.
the media facilitate for a larger quantum of people, in this context all the members of the group, to participate over a longer period of time, and at any time. Since the technological development of digital devices and of the Internet is in a continuous progress, within years, media may play an even greater and different role when speaking of religious discourses and practices. I will be returning to the group when summarizing this subchapter, after discussing the page of the Norwegian Soto Zen Buddhist Order.

**The page of the Norwegian Soto Zen Buddhist Order**

As anticipated, the page of NSZBO is functioning similarly as the page of RZC. NSZBO has, as previously mentioned, 3625 subscribers to their page, yet the activity on the page remains low among the subscribers; there have only been 8 posts since January 2015. Their page functions like a conduit of information, in many ways similarly to the page of RZC. There are however important differences.

While the administrators of RZC publish information about upcoming events and accounts in form of texts and pictures of previous meetings, NSZBO, by far, surpasses in terms of number of posts, the posts’ dimension and size, and variation of contents. While much of the content found on NSZBO’s page corresponds largely with that of RZC’s page, NSZBO’s page is also characterized by various contents not found on RZC’s page or group. Before dealing directly with the contrasting content on their page, there are some differences between RZC and NSZBO when speaking of their way of functioning as religious communities that needs to be addressed, in order to give a suitable analytical account of the content that exists on their page.

While RZC is an open religious community that welcomes outsiders into their community, by for instance inviting non-members to their lectures, NSZBO has to a much greater extent emphasized proselytization. This is visible just by visiting their Facebook page, where at the top of their page “bli medlem” is written. Consistently, their posts encourage readers, subscribers of the page and non-members alike, to become members to support their economic growth. The proselytization and aim for economic growth is closely linked to the community’s aspiration for building a monastery in Norway, as noted in chapter 1. NSZBO

138 https://www.facebook.com/sotozennorge/?fref=ts
139 “Become a member.”
140 Each registered religious community in Norway receives an amount of money depending on their number of members.
uses Facebook frequently as a means for posting information about themselves and their practices, as well as for how and why people should become members of their community.

In comparison, while RZC appears as a relatively small community focusing on individual practice, mediation sessions, meetings, lectures and sesshins, NSZBO, on the other hand, makes a great effort in functioning as a well-established religious community that offers weddings and solemn inclusions into their community. A specifically interesting example of this is their confirmation, which is most likely the first one of its kind in Norway.

There have been 108 posts by the administrators of the page since January 2015. All of these can be generalized into five main categories. The first is information about themselves, activities and events, their practices, accounts of weddings and inclusions into their community. The posts regarding their regular practice are similar to that found on the page of RZC; they are accounts made of texts and pictures that describe the basic practice of the community. It should, however, be noted that the modes of expression and participation of these posts appear as more “commercial” than those found on the page of RZC. Many of their posts since January 2015 are comprehensive combinations of pictures, texts, and often links, making the post more conspicuous. The texts are often extensive and complementary, addressing various topics related to their practices, furthermore authenticated by pictures that are often colorful and “exotic.”141 This in turn corresponds with their proselytization agenda. Since Facebook enables the users to share media contents extensively, proselytization too can be done to a larger extent as a result of the functionality of the media. There are also several posts addressing or making reference to news stories related to their practice.

The second type of posts deals with Zen Buddhism and Buddhist teachings in general. These posts contain information about their association with Soto Zen Buddhism in Japan, the eightfold path teaching in Buddhism, and news about ordained members of their community.

The third type of posts is social, cultural and political topics related to the Norwegian society in general. One example of this is their post on the 17th of May, the national holiday of Norway. In this post Sâzen Larsen Kusano, the founding member of their community, questions Buddhists’ relation to the nation of Norway, and to what extent Buddhists are, and to what extent they should celebrate this holiday. In conjunction with the aforementioned question, he shortly addresses Buddhism’s relation to the Norwegian flag, national anthem, and moreover

141 Many of their pictures are taken from their temple, which appears as an authentic replication of a Japanese Soto Zen temple.
the freedom of speech and religious freedom. Furthermore, he addresses the responsibility of each individual living in the Norwegian society and simultaneously adhering to the Buddhist religion. Such posts are not completely absent on RZC’s page, yet they are to a greater extent more visible and emphasized on NSZBO’s page.\textsuperscript{142}

The fourth type of posts is exclusive to NSZBO, at least from January 2015 until September 2016. These posts deal with multi-religious and interfaith dialogue and discourses. Frequently posts are published with accounts from meetings between different religions and advocates of secular philosophical systems. One of the most recent examples of such posts was published on the 7\textsuperscript{th} of September. Besides discussing the position of various religions existing in contemporary Norway, morality and ethics play an important part. Kusano, by using Facebook and frequently appearing on posts concerning such meetings, accordingly gives the impression that NSZBO is ardently striving for peaceful interfaith discourse. He has posted several of his speeches at those gatherings, where he has represented Buddhism, particularly Zen Buddhism, and advocated its associated morals and ethics.

The fifth type of posts deals with daily topics, donations given to the community, and sales of merchandises related to Buddhist religion and practice, such as compiled texts about the Buddha and prayer beads. These are not appearing very often, however interestingly, such posts are more or less absent on RZC’s page or group. Such posting of sales corresponds with the commercial agenda of NSZBO.

By reviewing these posts in relation to the contents that exist on RZC’s, NSZBO’s page appears as a medium which is applied in a broader and more comprehensive way. However, taking into account the deviation in terms of membership numbers, the two pages are being updated and posted on just as frequently. Yet, as we have seen, NSZBO makes an effort to publish various posts with different types of contents, intended for a larger audience. Their posts are also more “commercial,” with examples of posts made to sell Zen Buddhist associated items. The imperative is, however, that NSZBO’ posts on their page in terms of variation of contents, size and dimension, and application of modes of expression and participation, by far surpass RZC’s application. It is apparent that NSZBO uses Facebook extensively to reach potentially new members, while maintaining and updating their already existing members. While their webpage is frequently updated, and much of the information found there

\textsuperscript{142} After searching on Facebook, I have not been able to find a similar group as RZC’s group, administered by NSZBO. The greater variety of posts on NSZBO’s page may be a result of the lack of such a group, where discussions like the aforementioned one could have emerged.
corresponds with their Facebook page, Facebook remains their main medium for communicating with their members and people in general, if considering the frequency of publishing and actively communicating with members.\textsuperscript{143}

Before discussing the second source of the empirical material, I will now summarize the participation that exists on Facebook and how one may analyze the application of this social network.

\section*{2.2 Summary of participation on Facebook}

I have shown in the former subchapter, the mediation of various media contents do not appear in homogeneous forms. Instead they are being shaped and formed in accordance with the demands and requirements of the users. The usage of Facebook, seen from the examples I have provided in the former subchapter, points to a reciprocal influence between the application of media platforms and devices, and the functionality that the media provide. In other words, the modes of expression and participation changes in accordance with the demands of the users, while the users as well are being influenced by the media sources they use. This is an essential part of the mediatization process, as noted in chapter 1.3

Facebook’s various applications, of course, are not altered solely as a result of small religious communities in Norway wanting to use social networks in new and different ways; the various changes that have occurred within the social media platform of Facebook throughout the years since its inception, have materialized due to the long-termed usage of millions of members all over the world. The commercial aspect, evidently, plays an imperative and pivotal part in the continuous reconfiguration of Facebook’s applicability as well. Nevertheless, all of the various modes of participation that exists on Facebook, such as “commenting,” “liking, and “sharing,” have all been used by the subscribers and the members of the pages and the group, respectively.

In chapter 1.4, the macro and micro perspective of the mediatization process was addressed, and these subordinated perspectives give us clues as to how to understand the application of the two pages and the group, seen from a media perspective. From a macro perspective, all of the subscribers and members of the pages and the group respectively, are using, being influenced by, and are relative to a great number of media platforms, networks,

\textsuperscript{143} I will address this when discussing the interviews.
devices and news media sources; accordingly, Facebook is but one of several media sources they utilize and are influenced by. The members are also continuously being influenced by every institution they are relative to, such as family, workplace, social and media networks that exist. Consequently, although Facebook is an important social network in contemporary Norway, it is important to note that its possibilities to have impact on people in general, are relative to other media, social networks, institutions and various restrictions and constraints. As discussed earlier, political, economic and social aspects play a role in how people respond to and interact with each other on Facebook, and to what extent Facebook is available as a media source, and thereby affecting the level of influence Facebook may have. These conditions are, however, most likely not affecting most of the Norwegian users of Facebook, due to the low frequency of censorship, people have freedom of speech, and people in general have financial surplus which can be used to buy media devices. Instead, aspects such as gender and age are more likely to play more imperative roles when speaking of Facebook usage and its possibilities to influence religious practices. Worth noting then is the evident fact that Facebook as a social network, media platform and media source may only have direct influence as long as it is frequently used. Although a Norwegian Zen Buddhist may be surrounded by people using Facebook frequently, daily even, to what extent an indirect influence will have should be questioned. The aspects of gender and age will be discussed in detail when presenting the empirical data generated from the interviews.

Along with the aforementioned conditions, the functions that Facebook provides, in terms of the media content’s modes of expression and participation, at least in contemporary Norway, sets a major limit for media’s influence on religious practice. This is due to the fact that the modes of expression and participation are relative to the technological possibilities that exist. It is the constraint on digital development of interaction, caused by the actual present stage in the progress of technological advancement that in turn causes halting of a more thorough impact of the Internet and Facebook. Seen from a historical perspective, the modes of expression and participation that are related to the digital media surpass by far media forms that were used before the digital revolution. The modes of expression and participation related to the functionality of the media contents, at this point in the progress of development, are not

144 Comparatively, there are striking similarities between for instance news articles published in journals and papers, and articles published on news websites and on social networks. The news articles that were published on paper could be commented on, but only through a new published edition of the same or different paper or journal. Digitalized articles and news however, are ubiquitous as long as there are no restrictions and constraints, and Internet access.
innovations per se, but should rather be understood as advancements and improvements of earlier media forms.

When discussing the practice of the members of RZC and NSZBO seen from a media perspective, it is important to note that their contemporary practice is essentially modern, highly based on the practice of contemporary Japanese, European and American Buddhism. As discussed in chapter 1.2.1, this way of practicing has its origin in several discourses and tendencies that were in progress during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Although NSZBO makes an effort, as noted, to establish and appear as a functioning religious community more similar to larger religious institutions, their way of functioning as a religious institutional community has much in common with RZC. Here, the facilitation for the laity to participate in daily meditation, religious ceremonies and administrating and organizing the community are important factors. There is, especially in regards to the facilitation for laity practice, an important emphasis on individual practice of zazen. The emphasis on the individual practice is coherent with the question of affiliation addressed by members of RZC group. As noted, a member of the group questioned whether thinking of Zen as more international phenomenon is better, listing American or European Zen in the group.

Since RZC is a smaller community than NSZBO, it is not conspicuous why RZC to a lesser extent is consolidated and “institutional,” yet there is (as suspected) an active inner social core. RZC differs from NSZBO in the sense that RZC does not proselytize to the same extent as NSZBO, and they have a greater emphasis on each member’s individual progress as Zen Buddhists. In other words, RZC functions more as a group where the members regard their affiliation to the community as a means for developing their own personal progress as Zen Buddhists. If it is possible to state so, there is to a greater extent an aspect of detraditionalization in relation to RZC; NSZBO, on the other hand, is reconfiguring a tradition, making an effort to be coherent with the Norwegian culture and tradition.

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145 Especially NSZBO.
146 This conclusion is drawn from the analysis of the content that exist on their pages and group, and outcomes of the interviews.
147 In relation to the example that was given concerning the discourse about the development of RZC’s way of functioning as a religious community and specifically concerning the application of koan practice, on the 7th of September one member stated in RZC’s group that the most imperative is to focus on one’s own practice, while strengthening the sangha. The emphasis on the sangha, however, was in a context of “doing something for others,” and for the development of one’s own practice.
148 When addressing the interviews, I will discuss how the members regard their own religiosity, their affiliation to their respective community, and how they view their own application of the media.
149 This is a bold statement, and the assertion needs further documentation and research. It is however possible, by taking into account the way the media are utilized by the two groups, especially by NSZBO, to see an
To what extent do the media, in form of the social network Facebook, influence the practice of Zen Buddhists in Norway? The answer is multifaceted, and since the media and the two Zen Buddhist communities are in continuous progress, the answer is most likely going to change several times in the future. However, Facebook gives the adherents of the two communities the possibility to associate with their religion in new ways, through sources that would not have been provided without the presence of the Internet. This is for instance Buddhist related articles, comments on such articles, videos,\textsuperscript{150} and by communicating in social networks.

Although Facebook as a form of media has subsumed several other media forms, such as the aforementioned, along with live streaming of videos, the application of making events and forums in form of groups and pages, the adherents of the two communities are only applying some of these applications, and to small extents. As we have seen, the Facebook pages of the two groups are essentially used as digital bulletin boards, with some posts containing accounts of the activities the two communities provide.\textsuperscript{151} The group of RZC is special due to the functionality of groups on Facebook, and is perhaps the most interesting aspect of digital social network application by Zen Buddhists in Norway. While the pages may provide the adherents with religious Zen Buddhist related contents that may alter their religious practice, the group facilitates for a broader discourse, were the actual practice of the group is questioned. As explained previously, by relocating the discourse from real life into the digital society, the opinions in form of media contents are becoming relative to new conditions.\textsuperscript{152} The discourse becomes extended, long-term lasting and ubiquitous as long as there is Internet access. There are therefore two simplified and diverging answers to question as to the extent to which the media, in form of the social network Facebook, influence the practice of Zen Buddhists in Norway. The usage of the pages indicates that the influence is most likely propelling a reinforcement of the already existing practice. This is due to the fact that the form and content inclination to incorporate Buddhist practices in a Norwegian cultural “frame,” that is e.g., the configuration of a Zen Buddhist confirmation.

\textsuperscript{150} Especially through the video channel YouTube. Interestingly, there have few published videos about or related to Zen Buddhist practice from January 2015 until September 2016. There are, however, several videos published on YouTube that concerns Zen Buddhist practice, especially \textit{zazen} and the reason for doing the practice and its associated methods. Most of these videos are made by American Zen Buddhists, but videos from Japan and France exist as well. See for instance https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oo4QbiYQhs there is also a video in Norwegian, published by NSZBO, where Sæzen Larsen Kusano explains “Zen-meditation,” i.e., \textit{zazen}. The video is called “Zen meditation – we sit together.” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nnzIIJGWueU [both viewed 11.12.16].

\textsuperscript{151} There are, as we have seen, a more extensive application by NSZBO, in terms of dimension, size and contents of the posts.

\textsuperscript{152} Cf. the logics of the media.
of the published media are digitalized representations of the real-life practice that occurs at their center/temple. The posts are often accounts of their practices in forms of “digital journals,” or means of organizing future meetings. Their practice, such as zazen, chanting and so forth, are only assuming media forms in terms of videos about the practice, not the practices per se. The possibilities of digitalizing a religious practice are again relative to the technical development of media devices and the Internet, and to what extent these possibilities are exploited. One example of how religious practices could have assumed media forms is through streaming on Facebook, other social networks, or by Skype, of the zazen practice. By utilizing media application in such a way, the practice occurs in real life, while also being digitalized and spread to all subscribers or participators in the live video streaming.

As a result of the constraints of the technological possibilities of the media devices and the Internet, and the lack of utilization of the already existing possibilities, the pages frequently function as disseminators of religious contents, while being a unifying means of communication, which in turn strengthens the already practice that occurs at their temple/center. The process of mediatization is, however, relative to how the members of the two communities use the pages. NSZBO has by far a larger number of subscribers, which in many ways can be understood as a result of the frequent uploading of posts with an obvious proselytization agenda and with an apparent commercial aspect. Since Facebook functions as one of the most important disseminator of information about people, a distributor of news, and helps people to get in touch with other people and various groups, businesses, religious communities, and so forth, the higher number of subscribers on the NSZBO page helps to further propel the increase of membership numbers. The higher number of subscribers can also be understood as result of frequent application of the media, by the proselytization on Facebook. As Facebook enables people to reinforce the social connection between the members of the religious community, communication through Facebook can reinforce the religious practice that is initially performed at the center/temple. By emphasizing, discussing, sharing and elaborating on practices that are being practiced at the center/temple, Facebook may substantiate and reinforce the affiliation to the communities and the practices.

Because of the possibilities provided by Facebook in terms of functionality, the group associated with RZC on Facebook can facilitate for more continuous and cohesive discourses. While the group as a social platform enables people to share articles that question the already existing practice, I have arrived at a conclusion after systematically reviewing each post in the
group, that the posts are more often substantiating the already existing practices of the community instead of initiating critical discourses. This is a recurring characteristic on the pages as well. Discourses about their daily practice and the practice that occurs at the center may change due to these digitalized discourses. The group, as a function Facebook provides, has a propensity of enabling an alteration of the practice. Since the discourse which was used as an example earlier in this text, is occurring at the time this thesis is written, it is not possible to determine the exact results. Nevertheless, that fact that Facebook is used as an imperative and pivotal social platform for discussing the actual practice of the community indicates the growing importance of the media among religious institutions. Moreover, the discourses which have previously been restricted to real life social meetings, are now assuming media forms by being shared and discussed in social networks. When social discourses are being reshaped due to the influence of the media, are assuming media forms, and are being altered as a result of media’s influence, it is possible to speak of the mediatization process.

While the alterations, at this point, are not highly visible and are not dramatically altering the practices of the two communities, there is a tendency to utilize Facebook in order to spread information, connect with people, and to various extents, discuss the practice. The functionalities of the media contents, in terms of modes of expression and participation, are reshaping the performance of communication. As Facebook and other social networks are increasingly becoming more important and powerful within several social, religious, and cultural discourses, Facebook also provides the rules and the platforms for how the social reality is to develop. In other words, while Facebook is not the only, or perhaps the most important platform for the members of the communities to communicate, it still influences their discourses, has impact on how the groups define themselves, and how they share and are being influenced by the global and comprehensive community of Zen Buddhists.

2.3 The interviews

The actual usage of the media, as manifested on Facebook, constitutes an important part of the empirical data for this thesis. These data can help us understand how the Internet, and especially how Facebook, enables Zen Buddhists to meet, discuss, share and practice together. As we have seen, these data can help us understand how the media, due to its logics, reshape and influence Zen Buddhist practice in Norway. However, these data cannot tell us anything about how the practitioners of Zen Buddhism regard and understand their own application of the Internet and
Facebook. Furthermore, they cannot tell us anything about how the practitioners understand their own application of devices and platforms, and to what extent the Internet and especially Facebook are important for the practitioners. It is at this point that the interviews, done with a selected number of members from the two communities, become a crucial part of the empirical data.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the interviews with Norwegian Zen Buddhist practitioners are meant to complement the data generated from Facebook. This entails that the interviews have been implemented in order to answer a set of questions related to the empirical data from the Facebook pages and the group. However, this does not mean that I have questioned the informants regarding various posts they have commented on or made on a page or the group. Instead, the questions were designed in order to produce a wider perspective on their Internet use.

The interviews were conducted with a set of pre-structured questions, and all questions can be categorized within two topics related to participation and affiliation, along with sources of knowledge about Zen Buddhism and usage of media sources. I did not find it necessary to ask each informant all the questions, as long as the topic related to the overall theme was dealt with.

The first topic relates to the extent of participation within the Zen Buddhist community. Initially, questions concerning the affiliation to the respective community of the informant were asked. I also questioned how often the informant participated at various events such as meditation, gatherings, sesshins and talks at the temple/center. I also asked the informants about their daily personal practice. Concerning the question of affiliation, the lack of feeling affiliated with one specific (Zen) Buddhist community and/or branch was emphasized.

The second topic can be divided into sources of knowledge gathered from the center and from various media sources. I wanted to know to what extent the center plays an important part in the religious life of the informant. I also wanted to know if conversations with other center members or with one or several teachers were important to the informant. Concurrently, I asked what other sources the informant used to obtain knowledge about Zen Buddhist teachings and practices in particular and in regards to Buddhism in general. This was done in order to understand to what extent the informants felt that there was a conflict between

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153 Concerning usage of media sources, I chose to incorporate any kind of media the informant mentioned, such as books, papers and journals.
the digitalized sources and other media sources obtained at the center or elsewhere. Although I was interested in any type of media source, such as books, journals and papers, I emphasized the usage of the Internet, and I especially asked if the Internet was used in interrelation with other media sources. An example of this is the usage of dictionaries found on the Internet, as well as discussions concerning different terms, teachings or practices related to (Zen) Buddhism in social networks and forums. There are also occurrences of YouTube usage, where the informants watched documentaries, educational videos or talks on YouTube concerning practices, teachings or different (Zen) Buddhist related terms. At the end, I asked if it was important that the information found on the Internet was related particularly to Zen Buddhism, or if it could have been generated from other Buddhist or non-Buddhist sources.

All questions were put together in order to understand media’s alleged potential to alter or reinforce the practice of the Zen Buddhists in Norway. It was also important to understand in what ways the informants were associated with Zen Buddhism, because, as I will return to, some of the members were not as active as others. The questions related to sources of knowledge were asked in order to find out how the media in the form of the Internet influences not only the practice, but also their usage of other media sources. Finally, the empirical data generated from the interviews will provide new perspectives on how media, especially the Internet, are related to what McMahan emphasizes as important features of Buddhist modernity, namely the individualization (privatization), detraditionalization, demythologization and psychologization of religious practices. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

At the end of this chapter, I summarize how the informants described their Zen Buddhist practice, their affiliation to the center/temple, frequency of practice and use of media sources. I organize my discussion in three subchapters: one dealing with practice, especially meditation, the second with Internet usage’s influence on other media sources, and the third with Internet and its impact on social dimensions.

I will first present each of the informants, how they responded, their age and gender, and which community he or she is associated with. Although the informants come from two different religious communities, several experiences were similar and shared, something that became evident during the interviews. Obviously, dissimilarities will be pointed out and described.

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Before the interviews were conducted, my hypothesis was that the Internet, especially in terms of social networks, forums, videos and dictionaries, plays an imperative role in the formation of contemporary and modern Zen Buddhism in Norway. I assumed that the adherents of the two communities frequently use the Internet to obtain information about Zen Buddhist practice, teachings and concepts. However, it became apparent that there are many other aspects that influence their practice, as well as the frequency and importance of Internet usage among Zen Buddhists in Norway.

I interviewed four members from RZC and three from NSZBO. This is a small number of informants and will not provide a detailed and comprehensive account of how the communities apply the Internet and other media sources. The fact that there are six male informants and only two females makes it difficult to give an analysis of broader tendencies within the communities, seen from a gender perspective. However, since I have chosen to focus specifically on the usage of media sources, i.e., analyzing the actual posts being shared, the interviews are intended, as previously explained, as complementary to the first part of the empirical data. While the interviews will not offer a comprehensive understanding of media usage and influence among Zen Buddhists in general, they will give an indication of tendencies that characterize modern Zen Buddhist practice in Norway. I will therefore use the interviews as a supplement in order to point out aspects of Internet usage among Zen Buddhists in contemporary Norway, and compare them with the empirical data generated from the Facebook pages and group. At the end of the thesis, in chapter 3, I will discuss the empirical data in light of the analytical frame described in chapter 1, and provide a conclusion. I will start the next section by presenting each of the informants from RZC, and then NSZBO, before I will discuss similarities and variances in their responses to my questions.

An imperative reason for the higher number of male informants, especially when speaking of RZC, is due to the fact that most of the active members are men, with an average age spanning from 40 to beyond 60 years. After attending several meetings and meditation sessions at the Rinzai Zen Center between autumn 2015 and spring 2016, I asked four of the most active members to participate as informants for the interviews. While there are female members as well, they are to a visible extent less active, and I chose to focus on the members that constitute the inner core of the community.
2.3.1 Rinzai Zen Center – interviews

Henry

The first informant is Henry, a 28-year old PhD student in Oslo.

Henry is above average active within the community. He explains that he meditates twice every week at the center and attends meetings monthly. Besides the practice and discussions at the center and at home, he is a member of a study circle not directly associated with RZC, yet dealing with Zen Buddhist related topics. Apart from daily individual meditations at home, and meditation practices at the center, he attends sesshins hosted by RZC annually. Although he expresses a strong fondness towards the community, referring to it as his sangha, Henry notes that he could have adhered to other Buddhist communities or branches as well. “If NSZBO had been established in Oslo,” he explained, “I would have considered joining them.”

The reason why he chose to become a Zen Buddhist in the first place was his strong interest in Japanese culture. Since Zen Buddhism, as it is commonly interpreted today, is understood to be a Japanese religion, he felt it was natural for him to become a Zen Buddhist. He explained that he respects other branches of Buddhism, and that he utilizes media sources from non-Zen Buddhist movements as well. Still he did not consider other Buddhist branches due to his fondness of Japan. Another aspect of his fascination of Zen and Japan is the esthetics associated with Zen Buddhism, and especially Zen Buddhism’s influence on Japanese art and culture, which, he argued, had definitively influenced his choice of becoming a Zen Buddhist.

When I asked Henry, which sources he used to gain knowledge about Buddhism, he pointed out that he frequently uses books written by modern Buddhist authors. He named Shunryu Suzuki’s Beginner’s Mind (1970) and various compilations of Master Linji’s writings as important works. He also mentioned Thich Naht Than as an inspiration figure.

Henry explained that he has an ambivalent relationship to the usage of the Internet, since he regards the Internet as a disturbing obstacle to his meditation practice. He stresses that the Internet tends to take too much of his time and attention, which in turn makes it more difficult to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness, he describes, is a pivotal aspect of his Zen Buddhist

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156 Interview conducted 04.11.15. All quotes are from the interview.
157 Cf. the discussion in chapter 1 concerning the Meiji-restoration’s influence on contemporary Zen Buddhism, and how this “altered” Zen Buddhism was transmitted to and disseminated in the West. Due to the strong influence the Meiji-government had on Zen, and how the government utilized its teachings, institutions and practices during the Meiji-years, Zen has in many ways become an epitome of “Japeneseness” in modern times. As Zen became popularized during the post Second World War years, the connection between Zen and Japan has continued until today. See Finney (1991) and Sharf (1993).
158 Master Linji was the founder of the Rinzai Zen School in Japan.
practice. The usage of the Internet and its “drawing of attention,” he states, can be understood as directly in opposition to fundamental characteristics of Zen Buddhism, as he understands it. In spite of his reluctance towards digital media application, he recalls that, ironically, it was through the Internet that he became associated with Rinzai Zen center in Oslo.

Although Henry is skeptical towards Internet usage, he stresses that it is useful, especially for searching for terms on Wikipedia, reading Zen Buddhist related articles, books and watching various YouTube videos describing practices.\(^{159}\) He also likes to stay updated by reading posts on RZC’s group and page on Facebook, and a group on Facebook called “Secular Buddhism.”\(^{160}\) He explains that by following such groups, pages and forums, he can stay up-to-date with articles, texts and books related to Zen Buddhism and Buddhism in general.

While Henry stresses that he uses these sources from time to time, he aims to be less online, referring to the Internet as “a great everyday distraction.” The interview ends with him summarizing that he will not stop using the Internet, instead try to reduce the time spent online. He summarizes his Internet usage in terms of orientation, obtaining sources, organizing and as a means for practical help.

\textit{Mark}\(^{161}\)

Mark, the second informant, is a 62-year old man, and a member of the inner core of the Rinzai Zen center community. He did not make a reference to his profession or occupations outside of the community in Oslo.

When I asked him about his Zen Buddhist practice, he explained that he meditates about two times each week at the center and attends meetings ca. four times a year. He meditates at home about two or three times every week.

In a strikingly similar manner as Henry, Mark emphasized that the most important aspect of his interest in Zen Buddhism, is its connection with the Japanese culture. There is also another similarity in Henry and Mark’s responses. Like Henry, Mark, too, explains that although he is more familiar with the Rinzai tradition, he has no difficulty to imagine himself as a Soto Zen Buddhist.

\(^{159}\) He makes, for instance, a reference to a video called “Zen Master Eido Roshi on the benefits of meditation. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHPgaVQoCJ4 [viewed 18.10.16].

\(^{160}\) https://www.facebook.com/groups/1477432645835685/?fref=ts [viewed 18.10.16].

\(^{161}\) Interview conducted 06.12.15. All quotes are from the interview.
Mark’s interest in Japan, and his interest in Zen Buddhism in general, began during the 1970s. Although he is familiar with other branches of Buddhism that exist in Japan, he states that he “has a problem with the concept of salvation,” and makes a specific reference to the Nichiren and Pure Land traditions, both popular Buddhist traditions in Japan. Although he stresses some fascination for the Tibetan tradition, he thinks that “they are taking it a bit too far,” speaking specifically about rituals, icons and beliefs in supernatural beings. Mark understands Zen Buddhism as a more down to earth and reasonable, in comparison to the Tibetan tradition. He explains that he likes that the Zen Buddhism is serene and concrete, moreover adding that the belief in reincarnation “originates from an Indian worldview from the times when the Buddha was alive.” He summarizes this section of the interview by emphasizing that he has always been interested in Japan, Japanese culture and cuisine, such as for instance tea ceremonies.

He explains that he knows the community well, yet his interest in Zen Buddhism in general is more important than the group. Instead of emphasizing the sangha, he points out that sharing personal experiences is more important for him than belonging to a particular community. He emphasized that on many matters he has different understandings of Zen Buddhism than the rest of the members. His perspectives, he thinks, are the results of his university studies. For instance, books on Buddhism should have an academic standard.

Regarding sources of knowledge, especially in relation to rituals and practices, he considers listening to the teacher Koshin Cain Osho as pivotal, in order to develop his individual practice.

When asked about his application of digitalized media sources, he states that he uses the Internet to look up words, articles and texts. He provides an example, in the case when Koshin Cain Osho may be talking about a text or a writer, he can use the Internet to search for the topic, the writer or the text. Besides using the Internet for solving terminological issues and as a means for searching for information, he subscribes to blogs and uses YouTube. Mark explains that he can be inspired by people on the Internet, and find new books and topics to look up. On YouTube, he is most interested in talks, similar to the ones held by Koshin Cain Osho, which

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162 Without going too much into detail it is worth noting that the Nichiren and the Pure Land traditions are both centered, in various ways, on the concept of salvation. In contrast to contemporary Zen Buddhist practice, the mediation, commonly understood as sitting-meditation within the Zen tradition, is largely absent within these traditions. The emphasis in the Pure Land tradition is placed on Bodhisattva devotion, especially towards the Amida Buddha, while the Nichiren tradition is strongly associated with the chanting of “Nam Myoho Renge Kyo,” a combination of Japanese and Sanskrit, exalting the Lotus Sutra.

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have been filmed and posted on YouTube. In most cases, he adds, he has found the YouTube videos on various pages and groups, for instance on Facebook.

Related to all the aforementioned digitalized media sources, he refers to Facebook as an expedient tool to find new information and share sources. He did not want to explain his profession; however, he explained that he is familiar with using the Internet as part of his daily work.

James

The third of the informants is James, who is a 62-year-old professor in art, specializing in visual arts. Along with Mark, James is a member of the inner core of the community. He mediates every morning and evening at his home, once every week at the center, while he also tries to attend meditation sessions that are a bit longer like zazenkai and zesshins.

Contrary to what Mark and Henry state, for James it is not important whether he practices Zen Buddhism or any other type of Buddhism. Instead, the affiliation and belonging to a specific spiritual community is important. He adds that he participates in a Christian mediation circle, and he is interested in the religious practice of the Desert Fathers, known from ancient Christian history. For him the sangha, or his broad sense of community, therefore include non-Buddhist traditions. In other words, his relationship to the center becomes a main part of his Zen Buddhist practice. He states that he likes that the community is small, and that there is no hierarchical system or authoritative “leader” of the community. However, he considers some of the members as more influential than others, and he more frequently asks them for help.

The sources of knowledge he uses for developing his practice are mostly books that he has found at the Rinzai Zen Center. He explains that books are his main source of knowledge of Zen Buddhism. Furthermore, he emphasizes that if he has any questions regarding a topic, term or practice he goes to the community and asks a teacher or another member. The books he mentions as most influential are Shunryu Susuzki’s Beginner’s Mind (1970), D. T. Suzuki’s Japanese Culture (1938), Robert M. Pirsig’ Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values (1974), and Zen Flesh Zen Bones (1957), a collection of Zen koans. Besides these sources, he mentions that he enjoys reading various haiku poems.

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163 Interview conducted 12.11.15. All quotes are from the interview.
164 Zazenkai is a mediation session that is similar to a sesshin, however, shorter in terms of duration and less intensive.
When I asked him about different digitalized media sources, he explained that he is fond of YouTube, and mentioned that he searches for videos about Shunryu Suzuki. These videos are often inspirational short documentaries that include discussions of different topics related to Zen Buddhism. James’ openness towards other religious traditions is apparent when taking his Internet application into consideration. Among the sources on YouTube, he specifically mentions Mooji, (born in 1954), a spiritual teacher from Jamaica. Mooji’s philosophy is strongly based on the Hindu philosophical system of Advaita Vedanta, which in turn emphasizes the unity of the self with the highest reality, Brahman. In other words, it is a system based on the notion of non-duality, which can, in some respects, be found in Zen Buddhism as well. The notion of Brahman is, however, absent in Zen Buddhism, which in turn indicates that James combines elements from several traditions, reshaping them into a religious belief for himself. Although there are several dissimilarities between Rinzai Zen Buddhism and the Advaita Vedanta tradition, James argues that they have a lot in common and can be combined on several levels, philosophically as well as in practical terms. Along with Mooji, James also refers to Ramana Maharshi (1879-1960) who was an Indian sage. James argued that Ramana Maharshi provided the foundation for Mooji’s teachings and practices. According to James, Ramana frequently discussed Zen Buddhism, both in terms of practices and teachings.

Furthermore, James thinks Christian meditation has many similarities with Zen, arguing that Zen is “affirmed in all possible contexts,” and that “Christian mysticism is strongly related to Zen.” He understands his own practice in terms of “mixing the cards,” stating that he often uses practices from both the Christian and the Zen Buddhist tradition at the same time.

James’ Internet usage is in many respects similar to Henry’s and Mark’s. Although James more frequently uses Internet sources such as YouTube videos, he nevertheless emphasizes that these sources are searched for in order to illuminate concepts and practices described in books that he has read.

Luis

Luis is the last of the Rinzai Zen Center informants, he is 42 years old, and a member of the inner core of the community.

Luis has been interested in the concept and practice of mindfulness for many years, but has only been associated with RCZ for a couple of years. He tries to participate at every meeting

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165 Interview conducted 08.03.16. All quotes are from the interview.
at the center, meditates about 2-3 times a month at the center, and a couple of times each week. However, for Luis, a strict practice schedule is not important; he rather emphasizes “being awake and present in every moment at all times.” He accentuates daily practices, such as being conscious of his own breath, his movements and especially when he pursues his hobbies.

Like Henry and Mark, Luis states that he could have been a member of another community or different tradition than Rinzai Zen Buddhism. He associates with members from other Buddhist branches as well. For Luis, it is the practice that is imperative, especially in terms of techniques, and he specifically mentions breathing and sitting techniques. He stresses the importance of being a secular Buddhist, deemphasizing traditional supernatural concepts related to Zen Buddhism, such as karma, reincarnation and Bodhisattva devotion. It is important for him that Zen Buddhism is not dogmatic, or in his own words, one “should not believe in anything in particular.” He uses the term ‘informal’ to describe his practice, or being “spiritual in an undogmatic way.”

When explaining the importance of secularism, he mentions “insight” as a key element in his practice, being mindful in regards to his emotions and feelings. Moreover, Zen Buddhism is regarded as anti-intellectual, he claims, with an emphasis on practice and techniques along with an instrumental approach. This, he states, is one of the most important aspects of his Zen Buddhist practice.

Although Luis states that he could have been a member of other branches of Buddhism or a different community, he nonetheless argues that the social aspect in the Rinzai Zen center is important for his own practice. He regards conversations with other Buddhists as particularly important, especially when speaking of practices and reading Zen Buddhist texts. He benefits greatly from discussing his own methods and various teachings found in books and articles with other members.

Among the sources of knowledge Luis uses, he specifically mentions three books, *Zen Essence: The Science of Freedom* (1989) by Thomas Cleary, Shunryu Suzuki’s *Beginners Mind* (1970), and *Buddhism Without Beliefs* (1997) by Stephen Batchelor. Concerning the application of textual and digital media sources, Luis expresses different views than Henry, Mark and James. While all four of them frequently use books as sources of knowledge and as means for developing their practices, Luis stresses that he uses Internet and books more or less equally. Yet, his usage is in many respects similar to the usage of the three other informants, i.e., he looks up terms and concepts in order to deepen his understanding of the books that he reads.
Luis’ application of media sources, however, and especially digitalized media sources goes a bit further. He is more frequently active in Facebook groups and on pages. He also subscribes to the Buddhist journal and online magazine *Tricycle*, and a Norwegian secular Buddhist group on Facebook. When addressing the Facebook groups and pages, he explains that he is in most cases interested in being updated, mentioning books, articles and videos. In accordance with Luis’ particular interested in secular Zen Buddhism, it is within the secular Zen Buddhist group that Luis is the most active. He also watches YouTube videos, yet he seldom searches for videos himself. Instead he watches videos that have been published in groups and on pages, out of curiosity he explains. Regardless of which page or group, he states that he participates in various discussions, shares perspectives and experiences, something that he regards as important.

At the end of the interview he stresses that the sources he may find can be related to Zen Buddhism, but he is also interested in other Buddhist branches and other religions. This is moreover related to his emphasis on practices, wanting to be inspired by techniques from other traditions as well.

Luis mentions that he is fond of the word *sangha*, and explains that he considers the social aspect particularly important, whether it is with Zen Buddhists, Buddhists in general, or with people from other religions. By sharing viewpoints and experiences, he argues that his practice can develop by discussing and learning from others. This in turn makes Internet an important source of knowledge and an arena where he can communicate with people and develop social relationships with other Buddhists, and people who are interested in religious practices and techniques.

### 2.3.2 The Norwegian Soto Zen Buddhist Order in Kristiansand – interviews

I will now present the interviews with the informants from the Norwegian Soto Zen Buddhist Order in Kristiansand. At the end of this chapter, I will discuss the various tendencies that shape the practice of the informants from the two communities, and then offer a comprehensive analysis of their practice and application of media sources.

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167 [https://www.facebook.com/groups/1477432645835685/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1477432645835685/) [read 24.10.16.]
Lisa168

The first of the informants I interviewed from the Norwegian Soto Zen Buddhist Order is 30 years old Lisa. She states that she was initiated into the Soto Zen Buddhist Order about five years ago, but she had been associated with the community for about six years.169

Lisa explains that she is not particularly active as a Zen Buddhist. She says that the reason for not being so active is because she lives far away from the temple. During the interview, she stated that she lives about 290 miles away from Kristiansand, where the temple is located and many of her friends associated with Zen Buddhism live. For some time, she was a member of a smaller meditation group associated with NSZBO in Bergen. She recalls that she has not been particularly active as a Zen Buddhist since 2015.

Despite the fact that Lisa is no longer active within the community, and is not actively practicing Zen Buddhism at home, she explains that it is still important for her to consider herself a Zen Buddhist. Interestingly, Lisa argues that she would have considered joining the Rinzai Zen Center if she lived in Oslo. For her, it is the philosophical aspects of Zen that fascinates her, making a distinction between Zen and Buddhism. She explains that it is Zen philosophy that captivates her and not Buddhism in particular. Lisa associates rituals, the belief in reincarnation, whether good or evil spirits exist, everything esoteric in general, with Buddhism. Zen, on the other hand, she considers more philosophical and related to morals and ethics.

Lisa has a somewhat similar approach towards Zen as with Luis from RZC. She emphasizes using the practices and techniques from the tradition in an instrumental way, describing that she takes various teachings and practices out of their original context, in order to use them in a more practical way. However, for Lisa, it is the ethical and moral values of Zen Buddhism that are specifically important, along with techniques she uses in order to, as she explains, “be in the present.” She claims that these techniques will help her do good things and make the right choices. Furthermore, she claims that one of the reasons she became a member of NSZBO is to be able to discuss moral and ethical values with other members.

Although Lisa was initiated into the order, she could not recall going through extensive studies of Zen Buddhism and its associated practices and teachings before converting. However, she explains that the monks at the temple have been helpful, especially Sâzen Larsen.

168 Interview conducted 26.09.16. All quotes are from the interview.
169 In NSZBO it is possible to be initiated into the order, which is a more formal way devoting oneself to the Soto Zen tradition and to the community. This is, however, not a mandatory ceremony.
Kasuno. Lisa recalls that she relied heavily on the temple when she lived in Kristiansand, where she initially was initiated into the order. Nowadays, media sources play an important part, she explains.

Lisa says that due to her location, there are few sources of knowledge for her to learn about Zen Buddhism besides Internet or digitalized textual sources, such as downloaded books or articles. Since she lives far from a community of Zen Buddhists or a library where books or texts on Zen Buddhist teachings, commentaries and practices are available. She considers that Internet gives her access to the most important sources of knowledge to develop her practice.

While textual digitalized sources are important for Lisa, she moreover uses YouTube, but only to a limited extent. She points out that she has found these videos on various pages, such as on the Facebook page of the community, or other forums associated with Buddhism. While she is a member of various groups and subscribes to various pages related to Zen Buddhism, she admits that she has never discussed her own practice with others through the Internet. Instead she wants to be influenced by others, especially when it comes to textual sources. One reason, she claims, for not being particularly public about her religious affiliation is because her family members know nearly nothing at all about Zen Buddhism. She thinks that her family, which is Christian, would not appreciate her being outspoken about her religion. Although they know that she is a Zen Buddhist, she has chosen not to be public about it.

Besides using the Internet as a means to download textual sources, stay updated through forums, groups and pages, and watching videos related to Zen Buddhism, Lisa frequently uses the Internet as tool for looking up various terms and concepts. Although she is affiliated with Soto Zen, she explains that the sources she uses do not necessarily have to be related to Zen Buddhism. She points out, however, that she “feels more at home in the Soto Zen tradition.”

**Nicolai**

The second informant is Nicolai, a 53-years old active member of the NSZBO. He meditates about 45 minutes each day and participates at the temple on a regular basis, sometimes daily. Besides his interest in Zen Buddhist practice and teachings, he explains that he is interested in interfaith communication. He has worked actively to establish relations between different religious communities in Kristiansand, and elsewhere in Norway.

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170 Interview conducted 07.03.16. All quotes are from the interview
Nicolai admits that he has not been thinking a lot about why he became a Zen Buddhist, saying that it was a “natural choice” for him. However, since he encountered Zen Buddhism while living in Japan for long periods of time, becoming a Zen Buddhist became an “apparent choice,” he states. While he is aware of other Buddhist traditions, he has never felt interested in knowing more about them, although he has studied some of them for some time while living in Japan.

When asked about the sources of knowledge he uses, Nicolai is quick to point out that conversations with other Buddhists may not lead to further knowledge, rather he emphasizes that conversations with Zen masters can be positive for the development of one’s own practice. He notes that he is also fond of attending lectures and presentations on various Zen Buddhist related topics.

For Nicolai, there is a distinction between a subjective and objective understanding of the Zen teachings. He explains that “a subjective description of Buddhism from a Zen master can illuminate the objective teaching.” While Nicolai stresses that conversations with other Buddhists are less useful for the development of one’s Zen Buddhist practice, he nonetheless argues that the fellowship between the members of the community is important. He points out that adhering to a community can give inspiration.

Nicolai makes it clear when asked about media sources that he in most cases uses the Internet in order to look up words, or “obtaining knowledge about the etymology of a term.” He notes that several canonical Buddhist books are available on the Internet, such as the *Tripitaka*. Besides using the Internet to search for the etymological significance of various terms, Nicolai explains that he does not have much use for online sources. He claims that there is a magnitude of misinformation about Zen Buddhist practice and teachings on the Internet.

Although Nicolai remains critical towards the Internet, he nonetheless emphasizes that Facebook has opened a new dimension by altering the social reality. He argues that Facebook makes it possible for him to keep in touch with members of NSZBO all over the country; he states that “before and after Facebook is a whole new world.”

Among other sources of knowledge, Nicolai is sparse in his response, however he does mention two books, *Zen in the Art of Archery* (1953) by Eugen Herrigel, and like members from the RZC he specifically mentions *Beginner’s Mind* (1970) by Shunryu Suzuki. He also explains how these books have played important roles for the establishment of Western Zen Buddhism,
and how they continue to play an important role in contemporary Norwegian Zen Buddhist practice.

**Alina**

The last informant is a 21-year-old woman, Alina. She started practicing *zazen* when she became associated with a small group of students mediating together weekly in Bergen. Although the meditation group was not formally a part of the Norwegian Soto Zen Buddhist Order, several persons in the group were members or considered themselves as Soto Zen Buddhists, she recalls. She explains that she did not become a member of the order after having participated in the *zazen* practice. She still, however, considers herself a Soto Zen Buddhist and makes it clear that for her it is important to adhere to that specific tradition. It is for her not only a religious question but also a question related to her personality. After she became interested in the tradition, she has not been interested in other Buddhist branches. Concurrently, she regards the Soto Zen Buddhist tradition as an important part of her personality; stating that “being a Zen Buddhist was an individual choice I made.”

Although Alina considers herself a Soto Zen Buddhist, she admits that she rarely practices at home. She lives too far away from any mediation group or temple connected with the Soto Zen Tradition, to go there regularly. She claims that the social aspect, i.e., associating with other Zen Buddhists, was particularly important for her and inspired her to meditate frequently. Now, when she has no community related to the Soto Zen Buddhist tradition nearby, she has more or less completely stopped mediating, she explains.

When asked about her affiliation with the Soto Zen Buddhist tradition, she makes it clear that although she is not a member of NSZBO, for her “it is more important to be a part of the larger, global, and transcendental *sangha*.” This includes, she claims, that it is not necessary to be member of any local community in order to be a Zen Buddhism. She admits, however, that in order to keep up with the practice, being a member of a community is an advantage.

Since Alina was not a member of NSZBO or any of the small communities associated with NSZBO, she could not answer if the community or the leaders there influenced her practice. However, she was quick to point out that when she was meditating with the group in Bergen, she usually stayed a while after the meditation to listen to talks on various Zen Buddhist

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171 Interview conducted 15.05.16. All quotes are from the interview.
172 It is not known if this was the same group as Lisa attended.
topics. If, she asserts, such a group or larger community of Soto Zen Buddhists had existed closer to her home, she would have gone there to meditate and learn more about Zen Buddhist practice.

In conjunction with her low frequency of practice, Alina rarely uses any type of media, whether digital media or regular books or journals, to study Zen Buddhism. She points out that she enjoys reading various collections *koans* and Japanese poetry are related to Zen Buddhism. Although she does not use media sources frequently to learn about Zen Buddhism, she explains that she would use the Internet in order to look up various books and videos. Since she lives far away from Soto Zen Buddhists in Norway, she asserts that using the Internet would be the most advantageous.

### 2.3.3 Summary of the Interviews

In order to provide a unified frame based on the interviews, I will present the various similarities and varying tendencies in the information the informants provided, with the question of the potential influence of the Internet as a point of departure. This means that all the information gathered about affiliation to and participation in the temple/center will be analyzed in light of Internet usage and its influences. The focal point of this thesis is how the Internet may alter or reinforce the practice of the informants. The practices being referred to are a) meditation, individually as well as at the center/temple, b) application of other media sources, especially books, articles and journals, and c) the communication between Zen Buddhists on the Internet in terms of sharing experiences and developing individual and social practices, as a result of the functionalities made possible by the logics of the digitalized media. In order to answer these questions, the empirical data generated from the Facebook group and pages will constitute a backdrop of this unified frame.

**Meditation**

It is an obvious fact that meditation cannot be executed online *per se*. However, the example provided in chapter 2.2 concerning live streaming of mediation practices, gives an indication as to how practices can assume media forms. While the practice is not *assuming* a media form in the strict sense of the term, it can nonetheless be said to absorb important characteristics and
features of the digitalized media, such as being ubiquitous and available for a greater amount of people.

Among the informants, none of them mentioned subscribing to live streaming videos. YouTube videos, a static equivalent to the live streaming, were mentioned being used by several of the informants. However, it is important to question to what extent these videos are being watched, and how the informants find and use them. Frequently, the videos are not searched for but rather found on pages, groups and blogs. In other words, while there is an extensive amount of video materials concerning Zen Buddhist teachings and practices online, these are seldom used by the informants unless they have been found in a group, on a page, blog or a different digitalized forum. This in turn correlates with the frequency of videos found on the two Facebook pages of the two communities and the RZC’s group, which as explained in chapter 2, remains low. If the members of the community in most cases watch videos they find on other pages, for instance out of curiosity, as Luis explained, they cannot be characterized as an imperative media source. Following this argument, while taking into account the small number of videos found on the pages and in the group, videos may not play an important part when discussing the influence of the Internet. Instead, as discussed earlier, on the pages and in the group, there is plenty of information about the practice at the center in the form of texts, often in combination with photos, along with recommendations of and posts containing links to books and articles.

Since the Internet, and especially digitalized media in the form of Facebook, may only influence people to the extent it is being utilized, it is worth questioning to what extent Facebook can constitute an influence on the meditation practice of Norwegian Zen Buddhists. Although there exist videos and texts on the Internet that can potentially alter the practice of the members of the two Zen Buddhist communities in Norway by creating debates on various topics related to practice and teaching, such media forms are rather rare. The two Facebook pages of the communities often contain, besides records of gatherings, mediation sessions, sesshins and talks, updates of upcoming meditations sessions, as well as on retreats and talks.

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173 For instance, on the 16th of September, the administrators of NSZBO published a video called “Meaning of Zazen.” While this video directly deals with the topic of Zen meditation, it is however important to note that the content in the video does not differ much from the content on the group. In other words, the administrators of the NSZBO page has not published the video in order to start a debate in regards to how one may understand and practice zazen, rather it substantiates the already established perception of what zazen is.

174 While this applies to both communities, note, as discussed in chapter 2, how the records on the NSZBO page also contain interfaith dialogue and advertisements.
The RCZ Facebook group has, much due to the functionality of groups on Facebook, a higher rate of broader discussions within the greater discourse related to the practice of Rinzaiz Buddhism in Norway. Still, posts related to upcoming events are the most frequent. Yet, none of the informants mentioned using the pages in order to stay updated on such news. While this does not indicate that none of the members actually use the pages as digitalized bulletin boards, informants instead emphasized the importance of the Internet as a digital encyclopedia. All of the informants, except Alina, explained that when reading books related to Zen Buddhism, the Internet can function as an extended encyclopedia. While the Internet can provide new information of various Zen Buddhist practices such as meditation, it seems unlikely that this way of using the Internet will alter the practice of the informants over time, or Zen Buddhism in Norway in general.

While all of the informants, except Alina, use the Internet to subscribe to various pages or be active in groups, using the Internet as an encyclopedia was the most common use among the informants. When the Internet is mainly used as an encyclopedia, the greater number of various digitalized media forms are not influencing Zen Buddhist practice in Norway. In other words, if the Internet is mostly used in order to look up words, it will most likely not alter the practice of the adherents of the two communities in any visible way. What is more likely is that the Internet will reinforce already established practices. An example of this is the various authors the informants mentioned, Shunryu Suzuki being an important and recurring figure. If the Internet had played a greater role in the formation of the informants’ practice, perhaps a more diversified selection of books and authors would have been mentioned. However, this can to some extent explain how the Internet functions, taking into account that algorithms constitute a substantial part of its functionalities, especially when speaking of search engines, forums and social networks, such as Facebook. Ironically, while there are numerous sources that deal with various topics related to Zen Buddhist practices, like meditation, everywhere on the Internet, there is a risk that most of these sources will never be read or watched by the adherents due to the algorithms of the Internet. The social life aspect should also be taken into account as an important indicator of how the members find and select various sources. There is an evident difference here between the two communities, since RZC is much smaller than NAZBO, and

175 Nicolai was as noted skeptical towards using Internet sources due to the risk of misinformation. He, on the other hand, as shown, emphasized the social aspect. I will return to this when discussing communication and the Internet.
therefore the social dynamics are different. This is, however, something that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

All of the members, except Alina, mentioned that they subscribe to various pages and that they are active within groups. It is therefore possible to argue that Internet sources, although to varying degrees, will have direct influence on each of the informants. However, taking into account how the sources are found, used and shared, it is more likely that these sources will reinforce the practice and teaching that already occurs, individually and collectively speaking.

When the members of RZC in Oslo participate in discourses in the Facebook group, they are extending the participation that occurs at the center on the Internet. The regular meetings at the center thereby assume media forms. As discussed in chapter 2.1 and 2.2, the “statements” of the adherents, in the form of posts, are altered when published on the Internet as a result of the ubiquitous and long-lasting characteristics of the media. The media logics therefore directly influence the discourses concerning Zen Buddhist teaching, practice and the future of the community. In other words, while sources such as YouTube videos, books and article recommendations do not seemingly alter the practice of the communities, the social platforms Facebook provides may do so. The example from chapter 2 concerning the discourse related to how Rinzai Zen Buddhism should be practiced in Norway, especially related to a Norwegian Zen Buddhism, provides a suitable indication. When social platforms are used in this way, discussing the practice and the future of the community, the logics of the media can enhance, or at least strengthen the process of altering the practice.

When the members of the community use Facebook to discuss how the practice at the center is performed, the digitalized media are the platform on which these discourses take place. The logics of the media directly influence the discourse, which makes it possible for all the members of the group to participate on equal ground. In other words, while the Internet may not radically alter the individual practice of each member, it is possible that it can alter the collective understanding of their meditation practices and teachings, and subsequently influence the individual practice as a result. Since this thesis concerns a specific period of time, it is impossible today to indicate how the Internet will eventually play a role in the formation Zen Buddhism in Norway. Nevertheless, the Internet continues to be an important tool and platform for discussing various topics related to religious practices, within such areas as the group and pages discussed in this thesis.
**Other media sources**

While other media sources have already been dealt with in the former section, I will now focus more in depth on the actual usage of Internet sources by my informants based on their responses in the interviews, and the direct influence the Internet (can) have on the utilization of other sources.

As shown and argued in chapter 2.1 and 2.2, articles and various recommendations of articles and books appear on the two pages of communities and in the group of RZC. It is, however, important to note that the frequency of such posts varies between the two pages; various articles are less often shared on the page of RZC than on NSZBO’s page. However, the posts concerning articles, longer texts and books on NSZBO’s page differ from RZC’ page, since NSZBO often publishes posts that are more similar to advertisements, as mentioned previously. While there are not many posts related to books and articles on RZC’s page, such posts instead occur more frequently in the group. This in turn corresponds with the functionality of the groups on Facebook, providing a platform for prolonged and in-depth debates and discourses. The various books, digital articles or recommendations of various articles and books available elsewhere are often posted in the group in order for them to participate within the ongoing discourse, which characterizes the functionality of groups on Facebook.

As there are textual sources on the Facebook pages and in the group and elsewhere on Internet, these sources are being used, although to varying extents. Among the informants, Nicolai, Luis, and to some extent Henry differed in their usage. Henry explains, as we have seen, that the Internet can be an obstacle for his practice; he therefore uses it with some reluctance. Luis is the only informant explaining the he uses Internet forums and digital articles regularly. Nicolai is perhaps the most skeptical, noting that there may be errors. As previously discussed, all informants emphasized the suitability of the Internet as an expanded encyclopedia, except Alina. Instead of searching for texts, Henry, Mark and James explained that they have found much of their textual sources at the center. While there are differences in regards to their affiliation to the center, all of the informants from RZC asserted that the center...

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176 What I am referring to is the function of the group as an ongoing conversation or discourse which is ubiquitous and long-term lasting. This entails that various articles and book recommendations are published within a larger discourse that includes the practice at the center, Zen Buddhist teachings and practices, the social aspect of the group itself in real life as well as the digital forum, and other posts related to Buddhism, which can often be pictures and jests.
influences their usage and choice of textual sources. Luis is the only informant from the RZC asserting that he uses Internet sources equally with books and articles found outside the Internet.

The Internet is, in other words, not necessarily the main source of information; it is mostly used as a substitute, or additional and complementary. Clearly, there are dissimilarities, for instance between Luis’ and Henry’s use. James stands out from the other informants, as he makes a special reference to various YouTube videos, using them frequently. While the other members watch YouTube videos as well, James’s usage is more frequent and he often searches for various people and topics, mentioning Mooji and Shunryu Suzuki, among others. For instance, while Mark uses YouTube, he states that he in most circumstances finds videos that other people have posted.

Nicolai, Lisa and Alina are all different when it comes to their usage of sources in general. Nicolai, along with Henry, is critical towards Internet usage, yet based on other reasons, especially noting the risk of errors that he has discovered in teachings and doctrines. Nicolai furthermore states that he has not much need for the Internet.

Although there are obvious dissimilarities between Alina’s and Lisa’s relation to Zen Buddhism, and moreover their relation to sources from which to obtain knowledge about Zen Buddhism, they both stated that a lack of a community has impeded their practice. Yet, it is important to note the differences: while Alina is no longer active in any particular way, be it practicing meditation, studying doctrine or within a Zen Buddhist community, Lisa still continues to use various sources to learn about Zen Buddhism, sources she often finds on the Internet. Albeit, if she was going to learn about Zen Buddhism she would have used the Internet, Alina asserts. In other words, it is not a question of lack of sources, rather the need for them. Still the Internet appears for Alina to be the easiest and quickest choice for learning about Soto Zen Buddhism.

In all the interviews, I asked about the informants’ affiliation to a center and tradition. In the globalized and digital society, these informants live, the Internet can, if used to a great extent, possibly alter the members understanding of Zen Buddhist practice and sources. This is due to the large number of sources that deal with diverging topics, and which contain contrasting viewpoints on such matters. This is, as discussed in the former section about meditation, based on the level of usage and how the Internet is being used. Interestingly, all members of the RZC, along with Lisa, stated that they could have adhered to another Zen
Buddhist community. For instance, Henry, if NSZBO had been established in Oslo, he could easily have become a member of that tradition and community.

Initially, openness towards other traditions, especially in terms of meditation techniques, and doctrines from other traditions, is strongly related to Buddhist modernism.\textsuperscript{177} This openness can, in turn, be described by the categories dealt with in chapter 1, i.e., individualization, detraditionalization and psychologization. However, as stated earlier, the Internet only influences faith and practice to the extent it is being used, and the influence may not develop in a similar way. For instance, since Nicolai is skeptical towards sources on the Internet in general, he will therefore not react to them similarly as Luis does, who uses Internet sources equally as he does with books.\textsuperscript{178}

Among my informants, only Nicolai and Alina are less active on the Internet in their search for Zen Buddhist sources. The other informants are subscribing to various sources, looking for texts, and watching videos to varying degrees, depending on their specific Zen Buddhist interests. While the usage may vary, when the members use the Internet in order to communicate with each other and other people about their religious practices, the Internet affects their preference of books and articles, and thereby possibly affect their Buddhist practice. However, these influences may be subtle, especially among the members of RZC, since it is such a small community. And as discussed in the former section in regards to mediation, the algorithms of the Internet play a role in this formation.

All the informants from RZC mentioned Shunryu Suzuki’s \textit{Beginner’s Mind} (1970) as an important source to Zen Buddhist teaching. While this is due to the Suzuki’s great influence on Western Zen Buddhism, it is also interesting in relation to Internet usage. James notes that he specifically searches for Shunryu Suzuki on the Internet, mentioning watching YouTube videos with his speeches and talks. Although seven informants are too few in order to provide a detailed understanding of this particular book’s influence on Zen Buddhism in Norway, it nonetheless indicates that the book has been important for the Zen Buddhists in Norway. As noted, Nicolai mentioned that it has been important in the formation of Zen Buddhism in Norway. If \textit{Beginner’s Mind} is commented on and recommended on social platforms like the Facebook pages and the group, the Internet helps in reinforcing the importance of the book in Norway.

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\textsuperscript{177} McMahan 2008: 19.
\textsuperscript{178} I will address the influence of the Internet in relation to the categories presented in chapter 1, in chapter 3.
As a summary of this section, it is important to note that it is not possible today to precisely describe the outcomes of the influences the Internet will have on the usage of various other media sources in the future. As long as there are differences in terms of usage and as long as the Internet and digital devices continue to change, the answer to whether the Internet alters or reinforces the usage of other media sources remains unknown. However, when it comes to the logics of the media, the Internet may not solely alter or reinforce the established practice among Zen Buddhists; it can do both, depending on how the Internet is used and the frequency of the application.

Communication between Zen Buddhists online

The last of the practices I will discuss is the communication that exists between Zen Buddhists in Norway on the Internet. Since this is a large topic, I will restrict myself to discussing how the informants explained their usage of digitalized communication and their opinions about it, as well as the potential functionalities of the Internet that can facilitate such contact, for broader and prolonged discourses.

When addressing the usage of the Internet as a means of extending social contact between fellow practitioners, one should keep in mind that the possibilities by far surpass the actual application by the informants. While all of the informants, except Alina, subscribe to and are active on the respective pages of the two communities, none of them, except Luis, emphasized the usage of these digitalized social platforms as a means of extending communication. However, Nicolai stated that Facebook has made it possible for him to keep in touch with members of NSZBO all over the country. On Facebook, this is referred to as “chatting,” while there is also an option of having private live Skype conversations. This entails that within a social community on the Internet, such as the NSZBO page, new private conversations can start from public discourses, creating a subordinated social digitalized dimension. Within this dimensions new social relations can develop, creating new contact between members, or simply strengthen the social dynamic that exists in real life. This can result in new virtual religious communities outside of the real-life community. Luis addressed this briefly at the end of the interview when he explained that the Internet provides an arena where he can communicate with people and develop social relationships with other Buddhists or people who are interested in religious practices and techniques. For Luis, who mentions his fondness of the sangha, the Internet makes communication with a global sangha possible, and
the *sangha* is furthermore constituted by people not necessarily adhering to the same religious traditions. On social platforms, like groups and pages on Facebook, it is not possible to know who is or is not a Buddhist, based only on the appearance of the profile, unless the person behind the computer addresses her- or himself as a Buddhist. However, the group maintains their discussion of (Zen) Buddhist topics. This results in a diversion from the traditional understanding of the *sangha*, extending it, making the digital *sangha* non-localized and independent of time. When the concept of *sangha* gets extended in such ways, not only is the definition of *sangha* altered, but also the very function of the *sangha* as well. The *sangha* is no longer linked directly to a religious institution. Instead it has become a part of a global web or a global *sangha* made possible by the result by the logics of the media. In other words, the *sangha* and its functions have become detraditionalized, which in turns places the Internet in a key position when discussing Buddhist modernism. It is important to note that it is not the Internet *per se* that accelerates this process, but is heavily dependent on the ways it is being used. This means that the Internet provides the foundation for this process to occur and accelerate. If the Internet is solely used as a means of looking up words, it is difficult to imagine how the Internet can alter the social reality in any drastic way.

While the informants in general did not place a particular emphasis on social groups on the Internet, besides subscribing to various pages and webpages in order to stay updated, there is nevertheless frequent activity on the pages of the two communities, and especially in the RZC Facebook group. This is important, since how the informants regard their own application in terms of functions on the Internet, may not necessarily correspond with their actual application. Based on the informants’ right to anonymity, I cannot mention specific occasions when they have been active on the pages or in the group, however many of the informants are active several times each month.

One aspect that sheds light on the usage of social platforms is related to age. As stated earlier, the inner core members of the RZC are males, many in the age spanning from 40 and to over 60. According to the Norwegian Institute for Information and Media Science, in 2015, 90% of men in Norway used the Internet on an average day, while the percentage for women was 87. However, the usage among persons, regardless of gender, between 35-45 years to 67-79 shows a greater difference. For persons between 35-45 years, there was an average usage of

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94% each day, while persons between 67-79 years old had an estimated usage of 52%. While these numbers cannot fully explain the usage of Norwegian Zen Buddhists in Norway, it nevertheless illuminates the Internet usage among the members from RZC. While all the informants from RZC subscribe to and are active on the page and in the group to some extent, it is nonetheless to a lesser degree than what I had initially anticipated. However, taking into account that the core of the most active members of RZC are seniors one should anticipate a less frequent Internet usage. Following this argument, had RZC been constituted by a greater number of younger members, the activity on the social group and page associated with the community, would have had a higher level of Internet usage. This is of course relative to a number of other aspects, taking for instance into account Henry’s reluctance towards Internet application in general. Henry, who is 28 years old, should, according to the figures provided by the Norwegian Institute of Information and Media Science, have been using Internet sources to a greater extent.

I will now head on to the concluding chapter where I will discuss to what extent the analytical perspectives, concepts and categories deriving from Buddhist modernism and the mediatization theory are useful for explain Internet’s influence on Zen Buddhist practice in Norway.

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180 People between 45-54 had an average usage of 92%, 55-66 estimated to 80%. http://www.medienorge.uib.no/statistikk/medium/ikt/315 [read 11.12.16].
3 Conclusion

In this chapter I will discuss, in light of the empirical data, how the influences of the Internet on Zen Buddhist practices in Norway, can be understood within the analytical framework described in chapter 1. A detailed discussion of the usage of the Internet and how it influences Norwegian Zen Buddhist practice was provided in the last section of chapter 2. However, a broader understanding of how the Internet plays a role in the formation of a modern and contemporary Zen Buddhism in Norway is needed. I will therefore now discuss the results of the empirical data within the framework of Buddhist modernism, applying the mediatization analytical framework. At the very end, I will briefly discuss the quality of the empirical data, as well as the functionality of the analytical framework.

Buddhist modernism and the mediatization process

A characterization of Zen Buddhist practice in terms of the process of mediatization presupposes that Zen Buddhism is modern. Mediatization cannot be the starting point for modern Zen Buddhism; mediatization accelerates rather than inaugurates the processes we associate with modern. When discussing modern, I refer to the tendencies and categories related to the analytical framework of Buddhist modernism, addressed in chapter 1, particularly individualization (privatization), detraditionalization, demythologization and psychologization, categories and processes discussed by McMahan in The Making of Buddhist Modernism (2008).

As discussed in chapter 1.3, mediatization is a framework that can be applied in order to understand how the media are becoming gradually more important, especially in terms of communication between institutions and people. However, as noted, mediatization is only visible in already modern post-industrial societies. The mediatization process can only occur in societies where a set of preconditions, such as a high level of technical development, economic stability and growth, and freedom of speech, are present. Since Norway possesses all these characteristics, I expected to find all the essential features of the mediatization process here. The media are playing an important role as a disseminator of information and as a fundament for social discourses in nearly all (social) spheres in society.

181 Hjarvard 2013:18.
In the two Zen Buddhist communities studied here, all of the informants and most of the adherents of the two communities have lived in Norway for many years, albeit all of them are not Norwegians. Since the adherents are a part of this mediatized society, they are influenced by the media. The empirical data collected shows that the influence is not static, and is relative to the level of usage and social dynamics.

In order to address the results of the empirical data presented in this thesis in light of the analytical framework of mediatization and Buddhist modernism, it is important to address the influences of the Internet from a micro as well as a macro perspective. As discussed in chapter 1.3, while mediatization mainly concerns the reciprocal influence between media institutions and other societal institutions, it is possible to address the process from a micro perspective as well. In this thesis, the two different Zen Buddhist communities represent two different and independent institutions, providing what I call a macro perspective. The influence the media, in this thesis the Internet, have on each adherent, constitutes the micro perspective.

The mediatization theory functions as a model for describing, classifying and analyzing how the media, in various forms, play a role in the development of cultural, social, political and religious process. Zen Buddhism, which is a global phenomenon, may not necessarily be characterized by mediatization. For instance, Zen Buddhist practice in developing countries will not be influenced by the to the same extent as in the West. Moreover, as explained in chapter 2, the influence of the media is relative to the extent it is being used. In other words, it is not only Buddhists living in remote monasteries that are influenced to a limited extent of the media. However, the media gradually conquer larger geographical areas, which entails that the media are becoming more influential on a global scale. Several social institutions such as schools and hospitals are becoming more dependent on the media to function. As noted in chapter 1, mediatization occurs and accelerates in concurrence with other processes in society, locally as well as globally. For instance, mediatization is related to the process of globalization, and is, among other things, dependent on the development and substantiation of a highly sophisticated financial system. The media become an important platform for institutions and people to communicate, and as we have seen, the media are reshaping the communication of religious communities as well.

The Facebook pages and group examined are examples of how the communities assume digitalized forms, which in turn is can be understood as a digital transformation of the real Zen Buddhist institutions. In many ways, the discourses that occur on these Facebook pages and in
the group, are similar to real-life discourses, yet characterized by the logics of the media. These
digitalized communities are furthermore made possible by the functionalities of the digitalized
social media. They represent how social and religious institutions can assume media forms, by
digitalizing the discourses that exist within these institutions.

There are two important aspects one needs to take into account when addressing how
religious communities assume media forms. Firstly, the digitalized community is not a single
“entity.” The community is constituted by a number of members, who all relate to the media,
other institutions and the members in different ways. Secondly, it is therefore not the community
itself that is being influenced by the Internet. Instead, the ongoing discourses that exist within
the community are being subjected to the influence of the Internet. Seen from a long-term
perspective, these influences the Internet have on these discourses will eventually characterize
the community. The example provided in chapter two elucidates this in a significant way. I am
referring to the discourse about how the RZC should develop their future practice, and if they
should consider creating a “Norwegian” Zen Buddhism. As stated in chapter 2, the discourse
could just as likely have occurred in real life, not necessarily conditioned by digitalized media
forms. Since the discourse is not directly dependent on the usage of any media form, it
becomes even easier to detect the influences of the Internet; the influences appear as a layer,
characterizing and forming the discourse instead of inaugurating it.

Mediatization is strongly linked to communication. Accordingly, one should address the
influence of the Internet on religious practices in Norway mainly as a result of prolonged
communication between the adherents, the communities, institutions, online and related to real
life. Since the media, in the form the Internet, is a hyper-effective and global network of
communication existing in various forms, the adherents do not necessarily have to
communicate with each other in order for the Internet to influence their Zen Buddhist practice.
Private conversation online is an example of such communication, which is nearly impossible
to trace, discover and research. As the empirical data suggests, there are variances in use and to
what extent the adherents apply media sources from the Internet.

The interviews, which shed light on how the informants themselves understand their
own application of the Internet, provide important perspectives on the contents that exist on the
Facebook pages and in the group as well. The interviews show that the influence of the media

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182 Make page/ chapter reference
183 Reference
184 Such as forums, social platforms and networks, articles, journals, comments and news, and so forth.
are relative to the extent they are being used, and related to social dynamics, i.e., the affiliation to the respective community and to adhere to a local community of Zen Buddhists. Social dynamics, such as the affiliation and connection to the local Zen Buddhist community, thereby play an important role for the Internet to influence. The dynamics within the community can diminish as well as accentuate the level of usage, depending on age, gender, education and interests in relation to Zen Buddhism.

**Individualization, detraditionalization, demythologization and psychologization**

There are a set of ways the Internet can have impact on and accelerate the individualization, detraditionalization, demythologization and psychologization of Zen Buddhist practices. Over a prolonged period of time, as a result of the growing importance of the media, mediatization contributes to these processes to varying degrees. I will now address the relation between mediatization and individualization, detraditionalization, demythologization and psychologization, drawing on the empirical data provided in this thesis.

It is important to note, as previously argued, that the individualization, detraditionalization, demythologization and psychologization of Zen Buddhist practices are in no way dependent on the media or the process of mediatization in general. However, in societies where the media play an imperative role in the formation of religious discourses, the media can have major impact on how adherents of religious communities perceive their own practice and their relation to their respective religious institution(s). I will now address each of these processes systematically.

**Individualization**

First and foremost, as described in chapter 1, in short, individualization (privatization) is the process where the traditional religious institutions lose their power to define religious practices and doctrines. This entails that each individual person can define the religious practices and beliefs in their own terms.

There are at least two apparent ways the Internet influence the individualization of Norwegian Zen Buddhist practice. Firstly, the Internet is gradually becoming one of the most important ways of communicating in the Norwegian society. This applies to communication between people, as well as institutions. The empirical data generated from the two Facebook pages and the group dealt with in this thesis do not just indicate but also illuminate how the
Internet, in the form of social digital platforms, relocate real life debates to the digital sphere. Within this social sphere, the resources of knowledge about various concepts, religious texts, practices, and so on, are close to limitless and continuously expanding, as a result of people using the Internet globally.

Secondly, the Internet influences their perception of what a “community” is.\textsuperscript{185} Applying the micro and macro perspectives of the mediatization theory proves to be useful in order to understand how the Internet influences differently, depending on the perspective of the level of communication.

Henry, Mark, James, Luis and Lisa described how they did not feel a specific connection to the Rinzai Zen tradition. For instance, according to both Henry and Mark, they would have considered joining the NSZBO, if the community had been established in Oslo. Among the informants, only Nicolai, and especially Alina, felt a specifically strong connection to their respective tradition. Besides Nicolai and Alina, the other informants emphasized that they were applying all kinds of sources in order to develop their Zen Buddhist practice. While looking up concepts and terms were perhaps the most frequent application of the Internet described by the adherents, other kinds of usages were often related to non-Zen Buddhist sources. An apparent example is James, who watches YouTube videos featuring religious figures not directly related to Zen Buddhism. While this is an evident example, the other informants as well described that they choose their sources as result of their interests,\textsuperscript{186} or by being influenced by other people publishing sources online.

While there is a general receptiveness towards other sources, all the members described the importance of adhering to a specific community. Henry, Mark, James, Luis and Lisa were all receptive towards using various sources deriving from other traditions. Still, belonging to a specific local community was regarded important. Evidently, there are differences in what ways the community is important for each of the informants. Nevertheless, for all of them, there is a difference between the real social community and the extended community that exist on the Internet in terms of where they obtain sources of knowledge about Zen Buddhism.

The Internet accelerates the accessibility of sources not necessarily related to Zen

\textsuperscript{185} When discussing Zen Buddhism, \textit{sangha} is the most common way of referring to a Zen Buddhist community. As described in chapter 2.2, the Internet in the form of social platforms and networks, have the possibility alter the social dynamics of the \textit{sangha}, reconfiguring its functions, as well as relocating it from the institution to the digitalized sphere. This in turn can alter or reinforce the already established social dynamics that exist in the Zen Buddhist community.

\textsuperscript{186} For instance Japanese culture.
Buddhism. Over a prolonged period of time, due to the magnitude of information posted on various social platforms, the Internet will provide a larger sphere for the adherents to obtain and implement sources. However, it depends on whether the Internet continues to develop in a similar manner so that it becomes one of the main social mediums for people to communicate. This in turn can make it possible for people not to rely on religious institutions in order to develop their religious practices. Yet, as the empirical data show, while the adherents are not dependent on a religious community (or institution) in order to develop their practice, a social (and often local) community still plays a major role for the adherents. Alina and Lisa are examples of how the practice can diminish if not nurtured by a real-life community.

Understanding community as the interlinked web of communities that exist on the Internet, the Internet has the capacity to accelerate the process of individualization in that the adherent is capable of finding sources independent of the religious institution. In addition, the social platforms that exist on the Internet provide a foundation for people to define doctrines and practices and thereby develop competing views of religious doctrines. In turn, people, with or without training and education from any traditional Zen Buddhist institution, can influence each other. In other words, the Internet proves to be a tool for the adherent to define and configure her or his own practice, independent of any Zen Buddhist community or institution. Yet, the adherent, at least as shown by the interviews, is still dependent on a real life social community, which is not necessarily linked to the digital sphere. The Internet, in other words, can accelerate individualization, but does not necessarily do so in relation to all aspects of the adherent’s religious life. While it provides the material needed to break loose from institutions, the local religious communities are still important, on the Internet as well as in real life.

Detraditionalization

As referred to in chapter 1, detraditionalization is closely related to individualization. However, detraditionalization entails how traditions are being reshaped. The media play an important part in this process. There are at least two ways the Internet can be related to detraditionalization of Zen Buddhism in Norway, in particular.

Firstly, as described in the former section, the Internet enables people to detach themselves from religious institutions. This is especially true when they search for sources. It is also possible for adherents to become teachers on the Internet, without any formal education from a Zen Buddhist institution.
Secondly, as McMahan points out, “[d]etraditionalization embodies the modernist tendency to elevate reason, experience, and intuition over tradition and to assert the freedom to reject, adopt, or reinterpret traditional beliefs and practices on the basis of individual evaluation.”\textsuperscript{187} This statement is not necessarily true, since the empirical data generated from the interviews show that my informants, such as James and Mark, are influenced by, and apply sources found at the center.

Luis’ use of Internet, on the other hand, is an example of how the nearly boundless amount of information can contribute to the process whereby he is detached from traditional practices and institutions. With Luis, the micro and macro perspectives are combined, in conjunction with his fascination for the concept of the sangha. Luis' understanding of Zen Buddhist practice differs somewhat from the other informants', especially in terms of how he comprehends the underlying foundation for the practice itself. He explicitly stresses the importance of the practice, heavily de-emphasizing concepts related to traditional Zen Buddhism, such as karma, reincarnation, bodhisattvas, and so forth. He goes on to explain how the Internet can function as an extended arena for discussing teachings and practices. As previously mentioned, the Internet creates a new arena which competes with traditional sangha, altering the power balance between the adherents and the institution. Moreover, since the Internet is not solely a means of communicating but also of distributing, downloading and sharing recommendations and books, the Internet can also alter or reinforce the structure of a community. In other words, there is no simple answer to the question of how the Internet plays a role in the detraditionalization of Zen Buddhism in Norway. Since the functionalities of the Internet is continuously developing, it is possible that the Zen Buddhist institutions will gradually lose their power to define practice and in Norway. Thereby accelerating the process of detraditionalization of Zen Buddhist practice in Norway.

\textbf{Demythologization and psychologization}

I will address the demythologization and psychologization of Zen Buddhist practice concurrently, due to their mutual dependence and influence.

As described in chapter 1, demythologization denotes the way religious teachings and practices are reconfigured in accordance with a modern, and especially Western perception of

\textsuperscript{187} McMahan 2008: 43
the world and human nature. As the concept indicates, it entails a reversal or disparagement of convictions based on supernatural and mythical claims. Within the context of Zen Buddhism, convictions strongly characterized by mythology are for instance the concepts of karma, reincarnation and supernatural entities such as Bodhisattvas.

Psychologization, on the other hand, concerns how religious practices, such as for instance zazen, have become detached from their original institutional contexts. Instead of understanding zazen as a means for attaining a certain religious state or liberation, such as satori in Zen Buddhism, zazen is used by both Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike in order to live life more calmly and relaxed. Mindfulness is perhaps the most common concept related to this shift of emphasis when discussing the therapeutic psychologization of Zen Buddhism. Although the concept has its origins in traditional Zen Buddhism, it has been redefined in order to suit the needs of the Western practitioner.

Among the informants, Luis is the best example of how the Internet can play a role in the demythologization and psychologization of Zen Buddhist practice. All of the informants gave different reasons for practicing Zen Buddhism. However, Luis in particular, described his Zen Buddhist practice in a way that can easily be related to the concepts demythologization and psychologization. In his Zen practice the two processes are interrelated, and the Internet plays a role in the formation and acceleration of each process.

Firstly, Luis emphasizes practice, but he uses the word “technique.” And techniques are particularly important in Zazen, especially breathing and sitting techniques. Such techniques are furthermore important practices in relation to mindfulness, which is perhaps one of the most popular Zen Buddhist practices in the West. The practice of Zazen, apart from what happens in the mind, can, for Western practitioners, often be reduced to a technique of sitting and breathing in order to calm the mind. By deliberately using the word ‘technique’ instead of ‘practice’, Luis indicates how zazen (the practice) has become a means of attaining goals that are not necessarily related to the goals of traditional Zen Buddhism.

Secondly, Luis heavily de-emphasizes dogmas. Not only does he practice a Zen

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188 In chapter 1, psychologization was divided into the psychological and the therapeutic turn. Since the therapeutic turn is to a greater extent more related to the contemporary practice of Zen Buddhism, I will be focusing on how psychologization is influencing Zen Buddhism in terms of altering the significance of practices (mainly meditation) and religious beliefs.

189 Satori is an emic concept within traditional Zen Buddhism, used to describe the state of complete tranquility. It is often referred to as a calmness of the mind, and is furthermore related to the state of enlightenment. It achieved after ardent meditation practice.

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Buddhism deprived of traditional and institutional beliefs, he emphasizes the importance of keeping the practice secular. This in turn indicates how he uses the word “technique” as part of an instrumental approach, something that is a conscious choice made by himself.

Furthermore, Luis explains how he uses various Internet sources, mentioning *Tricycle*, but perhaps most importantly, emphasizing various groups, pages and forums. As described when discussing individualization and detradditionalization, the functionalities of the Internet and the mechanics of the social reality found on the Internet, can provide texts, comments and recommendations that conflict with the already established practice. Along with these sources, the Internet also provides other types of information which in turn can characterize the individual understanding of the adherent's practice. These types of information are for instance about science, politics or movements, that are to varying extents related to Buddhism.

None of the informants besides Luis addressed dogmas in detail. This indicates that it is not important for my informants to interpret Zen beliefs or Buddhists’ faith in supernatural entities in psychological terms. Instead, it is the practice that is emphasized. Moreover, taking into account how the Norwegian society is heavily secularized, meditation is more likely to be accepted among Norwegian Zen Buddhist than beliefs in supernatural entities deriving from Japan. One reason for this is how the media, both prior to the inauguration of the Internet and after, have played a role in the promulgation of the functionality of meditation.

Last, but not least, taking this argument a bit further and drawing on the example of the discourse regarding the forming of “Norwegian Zen Buddhism”; a Norwegian Zen Buddhism would most likely appear as a loose structure with a strong emphasis on the therapeutic functionality of the mediation practice. Although not necessarily completely deprived of symbolic rituals deriving from the Japanese tradition, the rituals would most likely have been given new properties and significances. The way the NSZBO are reconfiguring weddings and confirmations, combining elements from Japanese Zen Buddhism and the Norwegian cultural traditions, are examples of how, at least to some extent, this is already in process. By frequently uploading stories, comments and pictures concerning such occurrences, the media, in the form of the Internet, are constituting an important part of this process. The Internet, in the form of social platforms, becomes the sphere where these stories are told and where the discourses can develop.

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190 Note that Mark stated that reincarnation was a belief deriving from the days of the Buddha, and was not necessary to believe in, in order to be a Zen Buddhist.
191 See chapter 2.1 and 2.2
Concerning the Internet’s possibilities for influencing beliefs in supernatural entities and meditation practices, it is worth questioning to what extent the Internet can alter or reinforce the understanding of these phenomena. Using meditation as a means of calming the mind and living more mindfully, has been practiced longer than the Internet has been around. Today, however, the Internet is full of information about meditation that is both characterized by demythologization and psychologization. While Norwegian Zen Buddhists use digital social platforms in order to discuss topics that are directly or indirectly related to the reason for practicing, the empirical data suggest that the frequency of Internet usage is too low in order to heavily characterize this aspect of the Zen Buddhist practice in Norway. Yet, as the Internet continues to develop and gradually becomes more prominent in the public and private sphere, it is possible to speak of a stronger influence in the future. However, it is difficult to predict the outcomes, since the Internet develops rapidly and often in unexpected directions.

**Alteration or reinforcement - empirical data and mediatization**

As the empirical data indicate, there is not one answer to whether the Internet alters or reinforces the practice of Zen Buddhists in Norway. As we have seen, it largely depends on what perspective one looks at it from. If one chooses to view the results from a macro perspective, the Internet evidently alters the social reality over a prolonged period of time. It is visible in every institution in highly technically developed countries. As we have seen in this thesis, both Rinzai Zen Center and the Norwegian Soto Zen Buddhist Order use media, and especially the Internet, in order to update their members and to communicate. The members as well contribute in this process, discussing and sharing various viewpoints, books, articles, videos, and so forth, rapidly and extensively, as a result of the functionalities and logics of the media. The Internet is also described as an important encyclopedia for all of the informants besides Alina, which in turn suggests the great capacity the Internet has for developing the adherents understanding of concepts, as well as distributing teachings and exploring new works and concepts. However, seen from a micro perspective, there are many other aspects that play crucial roles, such as individual interests, the frequency of Internet usage and especially social dynamics. The mediatization theory and its associated analytical concepts and categories have proved to be helpful in order to grasp and make the influence of the Internet tangible. Still, the theoretical framework works best when applied on larger institutions and communities. This is because the theory predicts alterations or reinforcements that occur after prolonged influence by the Media.
Moreover, the influences of the media are more visible when compared between larger institutions, and researched for a longer period of time. Then the outcomes become more apparent, and it is easier to draw more detailed conclusions.

The results of the empirical analysis have provided us with important indications as to how the Internet shapes social behavior, individually and socially. Moreover, it has been possible to point out important characteristics of how the Internet, as an imperative media form, influences Zen Buddhists practices in Norway. Finally, this thesis provides a foundation for further discourse and research.
Bibliography


Internet sources


Internet sources – videos


Appendix

Alina Interview conducted 15.05.16.

Henry Interview conducted 04.11.15.

James Interview conducted 12.11.15.

Lisa Interview conducted 26.09.16.

Luis Interview conducted 08.03.16.

Mark Interview conducted 06.12.15.

Nicolai Interview conducted 07.03.16.