

Constructing Buddhism: The Role of Global Media in Shaping Western Views on Eastern Religions

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Abstract

The impact of the international media portrayal of the Buddhist religion on the Western audience is evident. It has influenced not only the comprehension of the religion but also how it is packaged and represented to interested tourists. The present research, "Constructing Buddhism: The Role of Global Media in Shaping Western Views on Eastern Religions," investigates why the popular media, such as films, television, news, and social networks, have depicted Buddhism in specific ways to the people from the West. It focuses on how people's concept of Buddhism as an exotic, strange, and distant religion became a part of the mainstream health culture in the West. The research employs a graphical approach and attempts to analyze how the media present Buddhism's central ideals, rituals, and practices: vulgarized, distorted, or glorified. The research is concerned with the impact of such representations on society and Buddhist communities. The examination brings forth some crucial aspects of the media representation of Buddhism: the commodification of the notion of meditation, "the idealistic view of the monastic life," and "the portrayal of Buddhism as a serene alternative to Western anxiety and consumerism. This study aims to investigate how some movies, documentaries, and social networks' content analysis serve as representations that shape the understanding of Buddhists in terms of their beliefs, ethics, and culture, in the concurrence of those considering themselves Western. It also aims to determine what these depictions imply for the practice of Buddhism in the West.

Research extends an already flourishing scholarship on media-religion-society relations by explaining how advertising footage can affect and, at times, radically transform religious identities. It highlights the need for media creators to accurately portray faith traditions and the detrimental effects of misinformation concerning spirituality and culture. The study doesn't seek more simplistic models of Buddhism, often found in popular media narratives, but urges a need for much more sophisticated and respectful models of Buddhism.

Keywords: Buddhism, Global Media, Western Perception, Cultural Appropriation, Media Representation, Eastern Religion, Commodification of Spirituality

Introduction

Buddhism continues to have a solid philosophical and spiritual impact within Asia and the rest of the world. Its origins date back over 2500 years to India. Lately, Buddhism has attracted more attention in the West – as a religion and a way of life, thanks mainly to the growing popularity of mindfulness and

meditation techniques. Mainstream media has a significant effect on the spread of Buddhism all over the globe. They have profoundly affected the perception and practice of Buddhist beliefs, rituals and culture in the Western world. Media outlets, including cinema, documentaries, news reports, and social networks, have become paramount for shaping and promoting the image of Buddhism in the West.¹

The research focuses on the changing views of the residents of Western societies regarding Buddhism through the global media—which simplified the plurality of the religion. The central research question is: What is the impact of international and popular media on the perception of Buddhism in the Western world? In answering this question, the goal is to investigate how Buddhism is depicted in the media and how it is constructed as peaceful, mature, weird and commercialized.

There are two significant objectives of the research: examining the depiction of Buddhism across different media and reflecting on the implications of the depiction for Westerners' understanding of Buddhist philosophy, its practices, and culture. The research will consider several media forms, such as films, television drama series, news publications and news programs, platforms for social networks, and educational films. The emphasis will be placed on the Western nations with well-developed media, with a definite focus on the US and Europe as the significant regions of interest, where global media continues to reshape the population's perception.

Aim of the Article

This essay looks at the influence of Western media on the perception of Buddhism and its practice in the Western world. Buddhism is spreading more towards the West, especially with the upsurge in the popularity of mindfulness, meditation, and lifestyle practices rooted in Buddhism, making it imperative to investigate the origins of these portrayals in the media and their implications on the broader society and cultural discourse of Buddhism. This documentary focuses more on the portrayal of Buddhism by internationally acclaimed films, documentaries, television series, social media platforms, and the news in the West, or the portrayal of Buddhism to the Western audience. Another main objective is to understand how these images influence adherents of Buddhism in the West.

The piece intends to engage in works that are closely adhered to the media and how these portrayals impact what people comprehend. Subsequently, the focus of the meditative paper will be shifted to discovering how practices associated with selling Buddhism as a product in the Western media brandished or feminized essential concepts close to Buddhism, which comprise loving kindness, non-possessiveness, and impermanence. This article primarily attempts to provide a complete sociological viewpoint or perspective on the relationship between media, religion and society, with an extreme focus on the images of Buddhism presented in the Western media.

Methodology: Mixed-Methods Approach

This paper employs qualitative and quantitative research methods to analyze the effects of global networks regarding the Western perception of Buddhism. Such a multifaceted approach allows us to see the broader picture of the scope of the impact of the media. The research shall demonstrate the depiction of Buddhist motifs in mass culture and the effects of those television series on the perceptions of Buddhism by the citizens of Western nations, combining qualitative content analysis and quantitative surveys.

Qualitative Method: Analysis of Content

¹ Nhat, H. T. (1976). *The miracle of mindfulness: An introduction to the practice of meditation.*

The qualitative phases of the entire study will be devoted to studying selected media predominated by Islam and Buddhism to target their focus on their content analysis. In these books, you'll find feature films and documentaries. Many movies and documentaries have Buddhist themes. As with any other issues, when these images are presented, they are selective in presenting Buddhist images that affect their perception. Through content analysis, this research will seek to understand the representations of specific Buddhist structures, practices and social life depicted in films.

TV Shows and News Reports: This category takes into consideration television shows, news pieces, or their snippets present on social media talking about or showcasing certain Buddhist practices or ideas like Zen gardens, awareness, or meditation as a whole. This inquiry examines how the above are constructed within different media genres.

Social Media and Wellness Influencers: The phenomena of social networking sites such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok brought Buddhist practices to the fore, particularly among people interested in the wellness or mindfulness markets. The blurring will involve us tracking content from wellness influencers or brands endorsing Buddhist principles like yoga, meditation, and mindfulness.

This qualitative approach employs thematic coding and framing analysis to identify critical narratives, images, and themes concerning Buddhism as constructed in the media. For instance, people may regard Buddhism as a way to enhance their health or consider it as one of the peculiar and unrelated to culture spiritual practices.

The surveys will target random samples of Western media consumers as part of the quantitative research. The purpose of interest is to examine how images of Buddhism in different Western media are constructed and whether they influence the audiences' perceptions of Buddhism and how they practice it or its ideas. The poll will primarily focus on the following: The respondents must provide demographic information crucial for this research, such as age, sex, education, and religion. They will also be asked about their media exposure, including, but not limited to, the films, science documentaries, social networks, and health-related blogs that they indulge in.

How everyone considers Buddhism in their thoughts: Using a set of Likert scale questions, they will be asked how they perceive Buddhism, its tenets and how such apply in their lives. These questions will look into things like: How far do the respondents perceive Buddhists to be accurately represented in the media? The extent to which they associate Buddhists with practices such as Zen, meditation, etc. How do the respondents feel about Buddhism: "calm" or "mysterious"?

Integrating and interpreting the data

The qualitative content analysis will be supplemented with the quantitative measures from the polls and surveys. In addition, the content analysis results will explain the results of the elections. They will also enhance the understanding of various media stories that affect people's attitudes toward Buddhism. For instance, if the survey indicates that around 30 percent of people cite singing or hearing the word 'Buddhism' to some extent, it can be postulated that this is mostly the image projected by stars of films or social media. When combined, qualitative and quantitative approaches will provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of global media in the construction and dissemination of the Western vision of Buddhism and the role of this vision in the perception of Buddhism and the adjustment of its practices in other cultures.

This perspective employs a comprehensive approach with different methods to study the message contained in the media and its impact on audiences more holistically. This allows for a better grasp of the complex relationship of media, culture and national identity in Buddhism.

Buddhism and Media Representation

Most of the time, mass media does the disfavor of either simplifying or distorting Buddhism to the degree that the problematic philosophical concepts are taken out of context to appeal to Western culture. So, for them, Buddhism is a religion to be embraced as a quick-fix paradigm for stress management or to maintain one's health. For instance, the Buddhist meditation program has been repackaged merely as trying to improve health instead of providing a larger moral and spiritual context. The phrases "Buddhism as stress relief" and "meditation as a means of achieving happiness" are thrown around self-helpers, ads and wellness blogs in plenty. Such images do not explain other critical aspects underpinning Buddhism, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.²

We can see how Westerners popularize meditation and mindfulness by taking them out of the Buddhist context and presenting them as self-help techniques. For instance, mindfulness is widely applied in schools, businesses, and medical institutions but seldom connects to its Buddhist origin. It is also a very effective mental health promotion strategy, but this is too simplistic a view to see how it incorporates Buddhist concepts of morality, love and interconnectedness.

Buddhism in the News

Buddhism and Buddhist practices appear in the media mainly as rituals, monastic practices, and religious ceremonies. One popular method of idealizing Buddhism's monasticism is to portray it as somewhat dull, detached and extremely meditation-oriented. For example, in films and documentaries, sometimes Wagner's January 2000 49 The Relevance of Buddhism to the Modern World, we frequently observe Buddhist monks engaging in meditation or prayers in scenic calm places, reinforcing the belief that Buddhism is a serene religion. But these images do not show the daily chores and duties, which are significant inside the monastery, such as the feeble outlines of definite spheres of studying and various ethics of the monk's life perspective or the challenges of the contemporary life and ancient traditions integration.³

Likewise, lay Buddhists are frequently shown as 'spiritual seekers' or people who adopt Buddhism to find peace or self-improvement. However, the aspects of culture, society, and even beliefs among the Buddhist sects tend to be given little attention. The part of lay practitioners, mostly Buddhists, is still mainly neglected. As a rule, monks and nuns are portrayed or regarded as ascetic figures devoid of worldly interests or as fully and spiritually enlightened proper human beings. The Westerners, however, are likely to get a skewed impression owing to such a simplistic portrayal of Buddhist practices, which tend to ignore a broad spectrum of sects of Buddhism prevalent in various parts of the world.

Stereotyping and exoticizing other cultures

Stereotypes depict many people's understanding of different cultures, and this is one of the main worries concerning where Buddhism is perceived in the Western media as wholly strange. On other occasions, when Buddhism is represented in contemporary Western culture, it is treated as vague, unfamiliar and – at its core – a division of Eastern esoterism tradition. A schism seems to have been created that prevents Westerners from contemplating the tradition as they perceive it to be strange, ominous and utterly incomprehensible. Regarding movies, you can see how marketing the 'exoticness' of Buddhism was an

² Goleman, D. (2008). *Destructive emotions: A scientific dialogue with the Dalai Lama*. Bantam.

³ Renger, A. B. (2014). Buddhism and Film—Inter-Relation and Interpenetration: Reflections on an Emerging Research Field. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 15(1), 1-27.

absolute trend back then and was only exacerbated with *Seven Years in Tibet* or *The Little Buddha*, which portray Buddhism as searching for hidden secrets and depicting monks as bearers of ancient wisdom.⁴ In the eyes of the West, Buddhism has become more of a 'passion' than a practice as altered traditions. In contrast, these parts of Buddhism seem to detract from a more detailed understanding of its moral teachings and philosophical problems. When applied in media as a simple solution to a problem, it turns Buddhism into a fashionable accessory of the contemporary wellness industry. If we turn Buddhist practices into commodities, people can only experience the surface, the tip of the iceberg and cherry-pick what they want to learn without caring for the message and cultural fabric that embodies the faith.

Important Case Studies

Various media portrayals have heavily influenced Western understanding of Buddhism. For instance, the exposure of Buddhism through the films "*Little Buddha*" or "*Seven Years in Tibet*," which are Western films based on Buddhism." *Seven Years in Tibet* depicts the Dalai Lama's boyhood and the rule of Tibet by China. It also explains Buddhism as a religion of peace and harmony within Tibetans' culture and political turmoil. This is quite the same as *The Little Buddha*, in which an infant boy has been predicted to reincarnate a Tibetan lama. Whose journey is in connection to the life of Siddhartha Gautama, the full Buddha. In these Western films, viewers discover Buddhist concepts such as enlightenment, reincarnation, and karma. However, the movies emphasize too much the variation and quirkiness of some aspects of Buddhism instead of the scholarly and doctrinal aspects.

David Grubin's film *The Buddha*, made in 2010, and other documentaries go deeper into the life and teachings of the actual Buddha. Still, in movies, the Western viewer may also get the impression that the philosophical aspects of Buddhism are too idealized or clean. These films educate viewers and contribute to notions that Buddhism is a gentle and serene approach to contemporary life challenges.

Thanks to wellness brands and social media influencers, the last couple of years have seen an increase in the interest of Buddhism in the Western world. It is common amongst Instagram or YouTube influencers to engage in Buddhism-linked activism, such as yoga, meditation, and mindfulness, which can hardly be placed under any culture or religion, mainly due to the spread of Buddhism over other religions. Influential people capitalize on the increasing popularity of self-care and wellness products by manipulating Buddhist terminology and imagery to promote their brands and products. Many more can reach Buddhism through these sources, but such sources misrepresent the normative look of this religion and its commercialized version.

In a nutshell, how Buddhism is portrayed in the media is characterized by an interplay of oversimplification, exoticism and commercialization. This thus makes it difficult for people in the West to grasp fully or appreciate the true nature of that religion.

Media's Influence on Western Perceptions of Buddhism

Using cultural appropriation vs. value cultural appreciation

Many people in the Western world have begun practicing Buddhism through activities such as meditation and yoga, which has created a never-ending debate about whether these practices are culturally appropriate or culturally respectful. However, It is expected that such practices in the Western mass media are portrayed in the context of a more significant push towards self or social-personal development in the

⁴ Horton, R. (1994). Nonconformist--*Little Buddha* directed by Bernardo Bertolucci. *Film Comment*, 30(4), 26.

name of health, beauty or fitness practices and without concern for their cultural or religious significance. There are many religious and philosophical bases in India. Still, in the West, yoga is frequently marketed as an exercise that aids in weight loss, relieving stress, and increasing clarity of thought. Similarly, mental health, attention, and relaxation are also focused upon and depicted as by-products of meditation and awareness practices. Such activities are beneficial, but in the context of the growing wellness industry, commercialization is carried out without understanding their origin in Buddhism and what moral and philosophical perspectives they articulate.⁵

The media tends to present Buddhism so that the performance of various Buddhist acts becomes trivialized or commercialized. Buddhism as a culture is sold through several channels, including books, online classes, applications, and meditation retreats. In this process, however, many Buddhist tenets, practices, and archetypes lose their original significance, get commercially repackaged, and become tools for self-improvement. People refer to this process as the commercialization of Buddhism. In the West, such adherents gladly take elements of Buddhism without paying any regard to their origin and significance and thus dilute any actual depth of such customs.

Why do people think things the way they do

Most people in the West have inaccurate ideas about Buddhism because of how it has been presented in the media. This especially applies to Buddhist philosophy when Buddhist concepts are taken out of context or too much focus is brought on one of the ideas. To some extent, Buddhism has also been caricatured as a religion solely about peace and non-violence because it is usually depicted in the mainstream media as promoting peacefulness and harmony in all aspects of its practice. One of the core teachings of Buddhism is the practice of nonviolence or ahimsa. It is strongly associated with other moral concepts, such as compassion, wisdom, and understanding of suffering. There is, however, the cost of this generalization of Buddhist religions, which is a distortion of the moral teachings of Buddhism, such tendencies as being instead of knowing what change is, how strong desire is, and how different the world is from a straightforward one.⁶

Buddhism does not evade the media's coverage, so its enhanced focus is on the individuals' dimensions of meditation and awareness instead of viewing it on the communalism, moral, and religious levels. People can easily confuse Buddhism as an individual pursuit of self-enlightenment, but its philosophy also advocates for all creatures' social justice, mutualism, and well-being.

Perspective Development

While Western perspectives on Buddhism used to be more positive, globalization with multimedia platforms has completely shifted things. Initial writings on Buddhism were often wary of it as a mystifying yet foreign practice. Early Western travel literature or movies depicted Buddhism in a specific fashion that drew intrigue towards its exoticness and often shrouded the religion within the mystery. The Western world's interest in Buddhism was primarily driven in the early days through colonial schemes, leaving many practices and traditions seeming strange in their own right.

The media's attitude towards Buddhism's part in the West gradually transformed. The late 20th and early 21st century saw the rise of wellness culture, spurred by social media and improved communication technologies. This influenced the perception of Buddhism in the Western world. More and more Buddhist ideas started to gain momentum, especially within the context of self-help, personal growth and

⁵ Jaoudi, M. (2021). *Mindfulness as sustainability: Lessons from the world's religions*. State University of New York Press.

⁶ Keown, D. (2020). *Buddhist ethics: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

mindfulness movements. Meditation and mindfulness were marketed as essential practices for enhancing psychological well-being and managing stress. As a result of this process, features of Buddhism that appeared exotic and particular for the West were stored in the past, but Buddhism focused on health, and self-improvement became the norm.⁷

The portrayal of Buddhism in the mass media has been one of the reasons that have contributed to this change. Currently, many Western media concentrate on Buddhism, rather than its complicated faith to comprehend or embrace, as a practical strategy to cope with modern life's demands. Programs and applications such as The Mindful Way, Headspace, and Calm promote Buddhist principles by guiding meditative practices. The most important thing about these new variants of Buddhism is that they position themselves in today's challenges, such as mental health, emotional health, and stress relief.

The perspective of Buddhism in Western media is being transformed with the gradual integration of Buddhism into the possibilities of today's people. In the past, it was regarded as a bizarre or 'exotic' practice. The trend has shifted with the global media strategy and celebrity support endorsing that it is a means of achieving progress in life. There may have been changes in the understanding of modern Buddhism; however, the concern is that its portrayal has made Buddhism more understandable for many people at the expense of its internal moral and spiritual core being reduced to an ordinary service.

In the final analysis, the West views Buddhism differently because of how the media portrays it. Earlier, it was something exotic and esoteric. Now, it's more of a health trend. As a result, people in the West have become more receptive to and informed about Buddhist practices. This, however, raises serious questions regarding the preservation of the religion's distinct culture and the ethics associated with the religion's representation in contemporary society.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: The representation of Buddhism in the movies 'The Little Buddha' and others.

Some films produced by Hollywood have heavily shaped Western perceptions of Buddhism. They tend to accomplish this goal by infusing Buddhist concepts within engaging storylines. People have encountered such concepts thanks to movies such as 'The Little Buddha' (1993) or 'The Matrix' (1999) through a fair share of entertainment-oriented pictures rather than educating films.

The Little Buddha, based on the life and teaching of the Buddha, featuring a boy who is believed to be the reincarnation of a Tibetan Lama and directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, is among the most popular and has become a focus of controversy and exploration of Buddhists issues. The Great Events of History The boy is believed to be the reincarnation of a teacher. The film depicts the life and history of a boy, Siddhartha Gautama. The film's perspective, which presents the reincarnation theory, karma, and everything about the path towards a sense of achievement, possessed a novel idea and offered the necessary perspective, although entertaining, was too simplified for production purposes.

Sono d'accordo Anche Deloyer et al. (2008) explain that 'goodwill' is compared by Aristotle with 'act': goodwill delivers a happy message with the hope of a better future. It is the passion that leads to action. Deloyer et al. (2008) also clarify that ethos and goodwill are essential in the activity of a speaker as they encourage the need to compromise and reach the goal centre. Metaphorically speaking, it can be stated that ethos draws the map of the audience and goodwill the opportunities towards achieving the centre. Philosophy can best be described and conveyed via goodwill, as it is more intimate than reason alone and

⁷ Wallace, B. A. (2006). *The attention revolution: Unlocking the power of the focused mind*. Simon and Schuster.

is closest to the arts. As many scholars spotlight, ethos includes the reputation and authority of the speaker in the audience, determining what and how it should be said (Clary et al., 2017). How goodwill works and for what purposes is illustrated by Tsukerman (2014); many scholars emphasize the interconnection of ideology with goodwill. How goodwill works and for what purposes is illustrated by Tsukerman (2014) in his work: 'There is no philosophy or science of persuasion in thoughts or ideology – persuasion always also comes as a social project.'⁸

Although these movies aim at the West through which they extend Buddhist ideas, they sometimes oversimplify or mystify the religion's complex tenets, causing misconceptions or only superficial knowledge.

Case Study 2: TV shows and documentaries

These are probably the more effective tools for depicting Buddhism and Buddhism to the Western audience. A perfect illustration is David Grubin's 2010 movie called *The Buddha*. This film elicits interest among a broad audience, as it is entertaining and informative about the life of the historical Buddha and the essence of Buddhism. However, in Hollywood, most films revolving around Buddhism tend to portray more mysticism of the religion. Still, with *The Buddha*, the focus remains on the history and philosophy of the religion, allowing the audience to grasp the actual principles behind Buddhism better.

The documentary explores the life of the Buddha, the concept of pain (*dukkha*), and the path to enlightenment. It also depicts Buddhist traditions and how Buddhism has evolved in different regions and countries. The documentary does present Buddhism in a reasonably comprehensive and accurate manner. Yet, it has to confront the issue of simplifying complex concepts that are difficult for the general population to grasp. For instance, the film mentions the concept of nirvana as one of the critical ideas yet does not cover all the nuances of Buddhism and the philosophy of salvation within it, which are many.

Last but not least, *Mindful Essentials* and *Mindful Revolution* are two TV shows and documentary films promoting an image of the East and Buddhism in particular, which, thanks to mindfulness, helps to enhance one's health and happiness in people in the West. Such programs often present mindfulness as a tool for improving cognitive functions, managing stress, or increasing productivity. This makes the members seem like they are self-help. These portrayals, however, made Buddhist practices available to more people.

Case Study 3: Social Media and Health and Wellness Businesses

With the increasing popularity of social media, the perception and role of Buddhism in the West have drastically shifted, particularly in terms of the wellness market. Numerous social media platforms, including wellness-oriented blogs, Instagram accounts, and other sources, contain many so-called "Buddhist-inspired" content. This has worked positively in popularizing some Buddhist forms, such as meditation, mindfulness, and other activities. Such activities as meditation, Buddhism, and its various images and teachings were widely adopted by self-help gurus, wellness brands, and influencers as supporting evidence for a respectable life seeking peace, self-development, and psychological health.

For instance, Instagrammers with millions of followers tend to share photos of handstands and talk about being present, yoga, or meditation. More often than not, their feeds feature Buddhist emblems like lotus flowers, mandalas, or sculptures of Buddha. While these posts may appear to introduce Buddhism in the form of mindfulness of breathing or meditation in a pretty straightforward manner, they do not elaborate on any aspects related to the religion or philosophy of Buddhism. Instead, they endorse mindfulness, self-

⁸ Aristotle, R. (1984). translated by W. Rhys Roberts. *The Complete Works*.

improvement, and clarity of thought. Thus, Buddhism is very much made into packages to be offered as offerings, and as such, there are practical skills and fashions to sell to the health industry.

Mindfulness has become a business – Mindfulness retreats, courses, and apps- and these mindfulness centers are being treated like any other business. Approximately millions of people download applications such as Calm and Headspace and practice these as mindfulness. These platforms and business activities have been focused on promoting it as a means to address anxiety, worry, and work stress. These websites provide valuable content; however, many remove the exercise from its Buddhist background and present it as a secular, universal resolution to contemporary challenges. It is not only "cultured" that worries practitioners but also the fact that the commercialization of mindfulness is undermining the fundamental essence of Buddhism. Buddhism is, and should be, viewed and approached as a deep-seated ethos, not a shallow trend.⁹

Due to the wellness industry and social media's influence over Buddhism, it has become the subject of discussions relating to cultural appropriation. Others complain that promoting Buddhism as a "product" for self-marketing is neglectful of the faith's religious and cultural identity, and thus there's limited understanding of what it embodies. All these platforms have helped not just a few but many more access these Buddhist practices; nevertheless, there is the danger of diluting and misrepresenting the religion's very profound and intricate philosophy.

Discussion

The impact of Media on People in the West: Buddhism in popular culture

The media shapes the view of Buddhism so that Western people do not understand it correctly. They mistreat most aspects of Buddhism; for them, it is not a way of life because it has powerful spiritual and moral implications. When Westerners think of Buddhism, it is in terms of self-fulfillment and well-being. Movies, films, and social media emphasize many practices like meditation and mindfulness or other forms of these practices as ways of relieving stress and cleansing one's thoughts rather than as practices essential to the quest for spiritual development. This transformation from the practice of religion to psychology could undermine Buddhism's fundamental essence, which encompasses ethical behaviour, human service, and engagement in the great wisdom.¹⁰

When the media simplifies Buddhist ideas, it creates a gap. One such example is that people perceive mindfulness as simply a secular technique of mental well-being. They don't consider Buddhism's origins and relationship with Buddhist concepts such as pain, impermanence, and compassion for others. Similarly, nirvana is usually described as a calm state of mind, but the fundamental intellectual components are rarely mentioned.

There is also the issue of the media's portrayal of Buddhism as a panacea for every life's problem. They ignore some Buddhist lessons and only portray some relevant parts. Elements like the role of ethics, social justice, interconnectedness, and social harmony –sometimes religious in origin – are either neglected or overlooked. This can lead to an understanding of Buddhism in a limited and distorted form since Buddhism is reduced to some techniques as opposed to religion with moral and spiritual significance.

What This Signifies to Buddhist Societies

⁹ Cooper, T. D. (2023). *Leadership and Spirituality: The Relationship of Incorporating Spirituality in Ethical Workplace Decision Making* (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University).

¹⁰ McMahan, D. L. (2008). Buddhism in the modern world: An overview. *Journal of Global Buddhism*, 9(1), 125-142.

The depiction of Buddhism in the West has repercussions on the activities of Buddhist communities worldwide. To put it simply, as Buddhism spreads into the West, it is in danger of becoming more and more a product than a religious culture, especially in the area of health. Many historical and cultural backgrounds in Asia practice Buddhism; therefore, many Buddhist communities are concerned about their distortions and appropriations. Some of their cultural identification can be lost when rendering Buddhist doctrines and even certain practices for the Western audience. This may affect the interpretation and practice of the tradition.¹¹

Honestly, such a fusion of cultures complicates the search for distinctiveness by various Buddhist branches. People who practice Buddhism in Thailand, Sri Lanka or Tibet may feel that the essence of their religion is ridiculed when its multiple manifestations are combined with Western ways of presentation. When turning Buddhist practices into a product in the health industry, such as treating meditation as just another self-help tool and not a religious experience, people who view such acts as sacred practices are left isolated. Such an understanding suggests how the mass media portrays Buddhism and how it affects the Western audience and the practitioners of Buddhism in the East.

As Buddhism becomes more widely embraced in the West, so does the potential for tension between more traditional Buddhism and the new converts or branches of the faith. Many conventional religious groups may eventually be pushed out on one side and separated from the globalized wellness movement emphasizing self over faith core group affiliation. Such a clash raises questions about culture preservation, the validity of 'real' and hoaxes, and the role of media in portraying religion.

Opinion as regards social and moral issues.

The subject of how the media present Buddhism raises further critical moral and social considerations. Buddhism is a religion, or rather, it is described as a way of life with numerous cultural and religious connotations, but society commonly views it as just an idea. To portray religious practices justly, one must consider the history and ideologies behind the practice institute while upholding its essence and heritage. Without such consideration in the works of those who create media, the picture of Buddhism generated and exposed may cause undesirable stereotypes or the appropriation of other cultures.

Media creators are irrefutably aware that the portrayal of Buddhism as a religion in their creative works is a matter of great sentiment. Appreciating Buddhist religions' diversity, practices, belief systems, and the ethical and social dimensions inherent in these religions is vital. It also entails not limiting it to a commodity which can be marketed and consumed. Furthermore, it is essential to state that the media should not portray Buddhism as a 'panacea' for every single problem in the universe. That is a reductionist approach towards religion and does not appreciate its regional diversity.

Lastly, how Buddhist activities and people are presented in the Western media has excellent consequences for Western audiences and various Buddhist groups worldwide. Western media, for instance, increased awareness of Buddhist practices such as mindfulness and meditation. In the meantime, however, such awareness promoted more commercialized, incomplete, and less significant portrayals of the religion. Media producers need to present Buddhism properly, within cultural and spiritual contexts, mindful of the diversity and depth of the tradition.

Conclusion

The Key Findings This research has focused on the Western audience's strong influence on the images of

¹¹ Brown, C. G. (2016). Can "secular" mindfulness be separated from religion?. *Handbook of mindfulness: Culture, context, and social engagement*, 75-94.

Buddhism that popular global media have constructed. Buddhism is portrayed in films and other sources as a secular and commercialized set of health and happiness strategies introduced by popular media, which make it look like it is transforming the way one thinks.

Yet while these representations have made it easier for Westerners to comprehend Buddhism, they also contributed to its misunderstanding and oversimplification of its most profound tenets, with large portions of Buddhist morality and philosophy remaining a mystery or out of context.

Sociological Research that Makes a Difference

Further information is provided regarding the issue of Western media and its impact on the perception of religion in the Eastern regions as the Eastern type of religions shift to become more mainstream in the Western nations. It demonstrates how the media, religion, and society are involved with one another by showing that certain religious customs are distorted, modified, or misinterpreted to conform to Western ideology with an emphasis on consumption and wellness. In addition, it underlines that the media producers have a moral responsibility to deliver content that does injustice to faiths and cultures rather than capitalizing on them.

Although this study advances our understanding of the portrayals of Buddhism within global mass media, it is apparent that other areas are worth looking into as well. One aspect that could be explored is the role of social media and the influencers in doling out 'Buddhism-inspired' designs, particularly within self-help and wellness culture. In the future, scholars may investigate how this new technology shapes the experience of engaging with Buddhist practice and how such representations will differ from conventional media. Grasping such emerging patterns could assist us in understanding how the interaction between faith, culture, media and contemporary ideology emerges and morphs in the 21st century.

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