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PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF ZERO CULTURALITY IN THE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION SPACE

Abstract

The maxim: *Quod principi placuit, legis habet vigorem*,¹ deemed foundational in Roman law, has exerted influence on the evolution of legal systems throughout history. Contemporary considerations prompt an analysis of this dogma in both historical and current political contexts, the latter discerning sovereignty in the voice of the people and democratic structures. The author posits that, instead of solely adhering to historical interpretations, scrutiny of this principle is warranted from the perspective of dynamic communicative processes and media. Undoubtedly in the era of Marketing 5.0, the viewer/reader/consumer of online content becomes a peculiar sovereign, possessing not only significant evaluative power but also the potential to influence a paradigm shift.

In today's world, the consumer of online content plays a decisive role, imposing styles and narrative preferences on the content creator. Recognizing this, brands actively strive for content personalization, seeking alignment with the variable tastes and needs of the audience. This fact alone inevitably gives rise to numerous challenges, including the loss of control over the communication process and the necessity to consider various parameters effective in capturing the consumer's attention. In the face of this dynamic context, the question arises: what are the consequences for communication and marketing strategy posed by emerging phenomena such as zero culturality? Will the observed trends of selective identification with specific demographic, linguistic, or cultural traits among audiences in recent years impact the future shape and efficacy of brand communication?

The aim of this article is to draw the reader's attention to a new phenomenon observed in the public sphere, which is highly likely to impact the mechanisms of political and business communication with audiences. The author identified this phenomenon during her research and provisionally named it "zero culturality." The results of the observations, which are discussed in detail in her monograph, will be presented here in a condensed form necessary to lay the foundation for further considerations. Zero culturality refers to a growing trend in which traditional cultural boundaries and identifiers become increasingly fluid and fragmented, leading to a more individualized and less culturally

¹ Translated as: *What pleases the ruler has the force of law.*

rooted form of identity. This concept may prove crucial for understanding how some contemporary audiences analyze content, and thereby assist brands and political entities in developing more effective communication strategies based on content targeting.

Keywords: social media, zero-culturality, multiculturalism, political science, digital communication, AI

Introduction

In the dynamic world of business, a widely held belief is that effective management requires measurable insights. Interestingly, despite its hands-on nature, marketing has found itself entangled in theoretical webs, viewed through the ever-shifting prisms of trends and paradigms. It weaves together consumer behaviors, technological changes, and the intricate dance between businesses and their audiences. Philip Kotler, a luminary in marketing, embarked on a comprehensive exploration, not just to understand the pulse of consumer behavior but to navigate the unpredictable terrain of technological progress. He took a step back to trace the evolutionary path of marketing, designating the present era as the modern marketing 4.0.

Kotler's journey commenced with the acknowledgment of a seismic shift from traditional to digital domains. As digital media and the internet took center stage, businesses grappled with the need to redefine strategies. Kotler's insights emphasized not just adaptation but proactive shaping of approaches to align with the evolving landscape of consumer decision-making. The essence of the consumer also underwent a profound metamorphosis in the era of modern marketing. No longer passive observers, consumers assumed an active role, prompting Kotler to advocate for a dynamic exchange, where businesses engaged in active listening and responsiveness to evolving consumer needs.

The concept of customer trust no longer follows a vertical orientation but a horizontal one. In the past, marketing campaigns had a significant impact on consumers. They also sought the opinions of authorities and specialists. The latest research indicates that currently, the majority of customers trust friends, relatives, Facebook fans, and Twitter followers rather than marketing messages. Most people ask questions to strangers on social media and trust them more than experts and advertising campaigns [...]. In this context, a company can no longer perceive customers as a mere target market [...]. Customers should be regarded as equals to the brand [...]. (Kotler, Kartajaya, Setiawan, 2017, p. 27)

As a result, personalization took center stage as a guiding principle in this digital era, with Kotler emphasizing the necessity for brands to finely tune their offerings, aligning with individual preferences, behaviors, and values. This shift meant that communication, too, had to undergo a paradigm change, where content rose to paramount importance. Kotler's framework asserted that content, enriched with

both value and engagement, not only seized the fleeting attention of consumers but also formed the bedrock for lasting relationships. To make it possible and effective, Kotler's vision extended to the unification of online and offline marketing endeavors. Recognizing the fluidity with which consumers traversed diverse communication channels, he advocated for a seamless, cohesive brand experience across all touchpoints.

These transformations posed significant challenges for numerous brands, compelling them to reevaluate their communication strategies and relinquish outdated, one-size-fits-all models. The underestimated role of social media added a layer of complexity to this landscape, as some viewed these platforms merely as sources of entertainment rather than recognizing their pivotal role as strategic channels. Adding to the intricacy was the continuous evolution of marketing, caused by the emergence of the artificial intelligence. Consumer behavior also underwent a shift, accompanied by the introduction of new targeting requirements and cultural trends – notably, the phenomenon of zeroculturality, which will be expounded upon later in this article, and which will be used to seek answers to the following questions:

RQ1. What are the current communication domains and the associated challenges?

RQ2. What are the key features of zeroculturality?

RQ3. How may they affect the interaction between cultural values and individual identity in the context of communication?

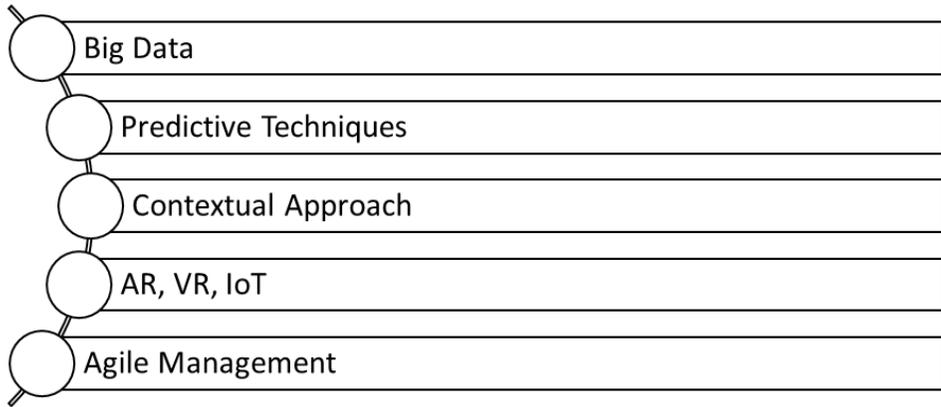
RQ4. How can brands adapt their content strategies to align with the trends observed in zeroculturality, particularly in terms of content personalization and audience engagement?

Current Communication Domains: Marketing 5.0 and the New Communication Model

Collaborating with Hermawan Kartajay and Iwan Setiawan, Kotler envisions current era of marketing (named 5.0) as a groundbreaking approach, aimed at enhancing consumer experiences through dynamic, technology-driven interactions. At its core, it acknowledges the pervasive influence of technology on consumers, urging marketers to view it not merely as a tool but as a gateway to establishing more profound and responsive relationships with their audience.

The goal of every business is to guide the customer from awareness to brand advocacy by providing outstanding interactions throughout the entire journey. To achieve this, companies must carefully design every touchpoint and decide when to leverage automation and when to rely on human interaction. Automation proves effective where customers simply expect fast and efficient service [...]. However, it is essential to remember that people still excel in tasks requiring flexibility and contextual understanding. (Kotler, Kartajaya, Setiawan, 2021, p. 134)

As we delve into this realm, it becomes evident that a comprehensive understanding of Marketing 5.0 involves not only recognizing the potential of new technologies but also discerning when to apply different components.



Graphic 1. Five Pillars of Marketing 5.0

Source: author's original work (based on data from: Kotler, Kartajaya Setiawan, 2021).

As demonstrated in the Graphic 1, the contemporary strategic decision-making finds its cornerstone in the use of Big Data. This pivotal aspect transcends conventional information collection, advocating for a meticulous analysis of extensive datasets. The objective is clear: to craft bespoke and optimized solutions that precisely align with the unique interests and preferences of individual consumers.² Data analysis can also prove essential for Predictive Marketing, which emerges as a guiding light within Marketing 5.0. This approach provides nuanced forecasting, dispelling uncertainties surrounding marketing investments. Companies can construct intricate models of potential markets, moving beyond the age-old dilemma of investment wastage and gaining insights into the efficacy of different marketing strategies.

Transitioning further into this tech-infused paradigm, Contextual Marketing, another pillar of Marketing 5.0, transcends conventional boundaries by advocating for a nuanced analysis of the consumer's physical environment. Beyond digital interfaces, this approach delves into the tangible surroundings of the consumer,

² The vast potential of data collection provides clever insights into customer behavior, allowing for personalized recommendations and targeted advertisements. However, treading carefully is crucial, as consumers often react negatively to the misuse of personal information, considering it intrusive or inappropriate. Striking a delicate balance between leveraging data for tailored solutions and safeguarding privacy becomes imperative, fostering a relationship of trust with consumers who, when delighted by recommendations, may offer more flexibility in data utilization (John, Kim, Barasz, 2018).

offering a holistic understanding that shapes marketing efforts to align seamlessly with the user's contextual reality. It proves to be essential especially as Augmented Marketing gracefully enters the scene, by introducing cutting-edge technologies that empower marketers with tools to elevate customer interactions. Beyond the oft-discussed Metaverse, this pillar encompasses a spectrum of innovations, including chatbots, virtual assistants, Artificial Intelligence (AI), natural language processing to robotics, sensor technology, Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), the Internet of Things (IoT), and blockchain.

All of the above suggests that the narrative and communication patterns need to evolve and embrace the ethos of agility, seamlessly transitioning into the paradigm, characterized by highly flexible and adept methods of interacting with the client. This agility becomes a linchpin in crafting marketing campaigns that are not only fast but also exceptionally effective, acknowledging the fluidity of the contemporary business landscape. In practice, however, this approach may give rise to numerous problems.

One significant challenge is the potential for information overload. The accelerated pace of communication in an agile paradigm may overwhelm both marketers and consumers, making it difficult to process and absorb the abundance of messages. Maintaining consistency across diverse communication channels poses another hurdle. Achieving a unified message and brand identity while adapting to different contexts and platforms demands careful management. A delicate balance must be struck between the need for speed in communication and the preservation of message depth and quality.

Adapting to the swift pace of technological changes stands as yet another challenge. Marketers need to continually update their skills and strategies to ensure alignment with the latest tools and platforms, and to find innovative ways to keep the audience engaged without overwhelming them.

The solution falls apart without compelling, relevant, content that connects to each customer's needs and preferences to develop a personalized experience. It requires an equal combination of strategy, creativity, and technology to find the quality of customer insights, thereby contributing to consumer and firm-based brand equity development (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

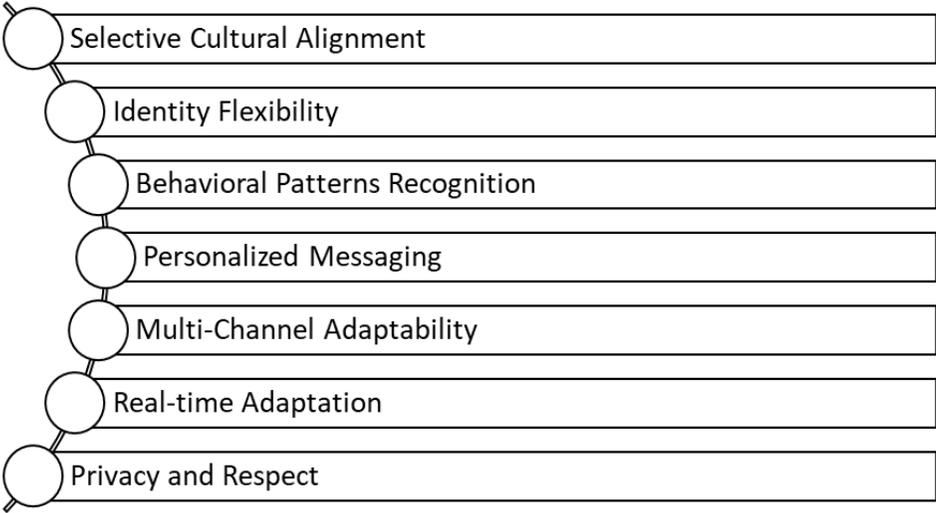
In this rapidly changing landscape, precise targeting emerges as the ultimate challenge, requiring marketers to tailor their messages with surgical precision to resonate with specific audience segments.

Associated Challenges: To Target or Not to Target?

Is that a question? Not exactly. The correct one should sound: how to do so. In the ever-evolving narrative of consumer-brand interactions, the historical trajectory of targeting consumers unfolds through various criteria, intricately woven into the fabric of societal, technological, and cultural progress. Traditionally, brands relied on classic targeting criteria, with demographics holding a pivotal role. Age, gender, income, education, and location formed the bedrock upon which strategies were crafted. Geography played its part, influencing adaptations based on regional nuances, local cultures, and market-specific preferences. The psychological landscape of consumers, encompassing personality traits, lifestyles, values, and preferences, became a focal point for brands aiming to understand and resonate with their target audiences. Observing behavioral patterns in consumers' interactions with products or services also provided insights, crucial for tailoring marketing strategies. The advent of the digital era ushered in a new dimension, where demographic data interwove seamlessly with technological insights, including internet usage, social media engagement, and mobile app preferences.

Interest-based targeting emerged as a strategy, with brands seeking to engage consumers based on their hobbies, cultural affinities, or sporting preferences. Ethnic and cultural considerations gained prominence, especially in diverse markets, prompting brands to align messages with the specificities of each ethnic or cultural group. Lifestyle became a lens through which brands aimed to understand consumer habits, dietary choices, and leisure pursuits, facilitating the creation of more personalized contributions. The evolving landscape also witnessed a shift towards targeting consumers based on shared values, aligning brands with specific ideals or missions. However, this narrative takes a transformative turn as we contemplate the paradigm shift from perceiving consumers as collective entities to recognizing them as unique individuals.

This shift, while reflective of the evolving nature of consumer-brand dynamics, introduces a myriad of challenges for targeting and marketing communication strategies. Each consumer emerges as a complex, unique entity, with preferences, needs, and purchasing behaviors varying significantly. Crafting a universal communication strategy becomes a daunting task, necessitating a nuanced understanding of a broad spectrum of individual factors. Content customization, heralded as a cornerstone of effective communication, demands substantial time and financial investment to tailor messages to individual preferences.



Graphic 2. Fundamental criteria for effective targeting 5.0

Source: author’s original work.

The effective targeting of individual consumers hinges on the meticulous collection, analysis, and management of substantial volumes of data. Without the right tools and processes, companies may grapple with the challenge of harnessing this information effectively. The delicate balance between personalization and privacy also emerges as a critical concern, with the escalating significance of personal data requiring companies to navigate this terrain with caution and adherence to data protection regulations.³

While advanced technologies and data analysis remain crucial, understanding the nuanced and evolving nature of individual identity choices becomes paramount. Consumers no longer conform to predetermined cultural norms, challenging brands to navigate a landscape where the once-effective strategies anchored in collective cultural consciousness are met with resistance. This paradigm shift underscores the need for companies to not only invest in cutting-edge technologies but also cultivate a deep understanding of the fluid and selective nature of individual selves.

³ Certain countries or communities already have robust regulations in this matter. The European Union (EU) data protection rules, for instance, ensure the safeguarding of personal data during various interactions, such as online purchases, job applications, or loan requests. These regulations extend their reach to both EU-based and non-EU-based companies and organizations that offer goods or services within the EU, encompassing entities like Facebook or Amazon (European Commission, 2023).

Preliminary Conclusions from the Observations: Zeroculturality and Its Consequences in the Field of Communication

As mentioned above, in the past an effective method of targeting involved appealing to shared cultural traditions and values, deeply internalized in the collective consciousness of specific groups. However, the landscape has shifted, and today people are increasingly rebelling against established patterns, perceiving them as imposed by external entities. A notable transformation is unfolding as individuals selectively choose elements of their identity, making targeting actions even more intricate. Technological challenges, though significant, pale in comparison to the complexities arising from this shifting cultural dynamic. I identified these in 2021 and initiated research to determine whether they constitute a constant trend and, if so, what characteristics define them.

At the core of my research was the acknowledgment that culture, far from being static, undergoes continual evolution, shaped and preserved by the individuals ensuring its survival. Throughout history, culture has served as a source of self-identification, providing security, and defining community belonging (Sharma, 2014). While empowering those who harnessed it to unite society around specific ideas, culture remained vibrant only as long as it met the individual needs of its adherents. Social dynamics, global shifts, technological advancements, scientific progress, heightened awareness, and evolving human expectations inevitably exert influence on cultural phenomena. Despite the inclination to perceive culture as an immutable foundation of social life, it must be acknowledged that it, too, undergoes change, development or dissolution.

It appears, however, that an alternative trajectory may be pursued, as individuals are increasingly leaning towards discarding established cultural patterns and essentially “zeroing out” only certain cultural elements from their lives. This reflects an observable attitude where people let go of specific aspects of their cultural identity, like behaviors, traditions, customs, or stereotypes, without necessarily rejecting the values associated with them. In simpler terms, people embracing this phenomenon may choose not to adopt certain cultural practices while still holding onto the underlying ideas or values connected to those. An example of such “zeroing out” (in the sense of retaining values while rejecting traditional carriers) can be seen in the way individuals engage with religious or ethical principles in contemporary society. For instance, many people continue to uphold core values like compassion or social justice, but they often do so outside of traditional religious institutions or community frameworks. Similarly, individuals may adhere to principles of environmental conservation but choose to express and act on these values through social media campaigns, personal lifestyle choices, or collaborations with non-governmental organizations, rather than through established environmental groups or religious teachings. Here, the values remain central to the individual’s identity, but

the traditional ways of expressing them are effectively removed, reflecting a shift towards more personalized and diverse expressions of belief systems.

This trend is notably visible on social media platforms, prompting my selection of these platforms as the primary tools for conducting research spanning the years 2021 to 2023.⁴ I analyzed publicly available content on select profiles⁵ that consistently referenced specific cultural values, while also questioning traditional expressions of those values. The study group included diverse individuals in terms of gender, age, and professional backgrounds, both within and outside of Poland. The initial research phase involved a comprehensive analysis of published texts, photos, graphics, videos, and interactions with users. The objective was to gain insights into how authors presented their values and their nuanced relationship with culture. Through systematic comparison of content and community reactions, efforts were made to identify consistent trends signaling shifts in the understanding and shaping of culture.

The amassed data underwent qualitative analysis, contextualized within the current theoretical landscape, and ultimately formed the basis for defining a novel phenomenon termed “zeroculturality” (zero-culture). As I suggested in my book, this term could be understood as:

[...] an attitude manifested by individuals abandoning specific carriers of cultural content (*lieux de mémoire*), such as behavioral patterns, traditions, customs, or stereotypes, not necessarily negating the values themselves. In other words, individuals embracing zeroculturality may reject adopting specific modes of behavior while still sharing the ideas or values associated with those patterns. (Grzechynka, 2023, p. 149)

The observations allowed me to formulate a hypothesis, that frequently, this phenomenon emerges from a critical viewpoint on culture, approached through the lens of individualism, freedom, and self-realization. The term employed, zeroculturality, doesn't signify a rejection of culture *per se*. Instead, it implies a metaphorical “zeroing out” of its external manifestations that no longer benefit the individual and appear at odds with their sense of identity. The underlying concept

⁴ I employed a non-participatory observational approach due to the sensitive nature of the investigation.

⁵ In consideration of the sensitive nature of the subject matter, the study employed a methodology involving non-participatory observation of 32 profiles. These accounts consistently featured content marked by the simultaneous referencing of specific cultural values and the critical evaluation of conventional bearers of said principles. The analytical framework was designed to comprehend how authors articulated their values and their relationship with culture. The study did not aim to assess the scale of the phenomenon but rather to verify its existence and determine whether it can be considered a trend. While extensive research involving a larger sample of profiles might reveal that many individuals do not exhibit such behaviors, it is important to emphasize that the observed phenomenon does not negate traditional models of behavior and forms of cultural identification. The objective of this research was solely to provide a preliminary characterization of the emerging trend. Further studies with broader datasets will be necessary to gauge the extent and impact of this trend within the larger context of cultural and behavioral patterns.

suggests maintaining values while adapting the cultural expression's form to align with the changing dynamics of time and place.⁶

The culmination of the research process highlights that zeroculturality poses challenges not only for numerous sectors, including politics and business, but particularly for entities reliant on creating and implementing communication strategies based on targeting. Crafting messages that are both personalized and resonant becomes a formidable task in a scenario where cultural patterns are intentionally discarded. For businesses and political entities, this demands a paradigm shift in how they perceive and engage with individuals and which tools they can use to do so.

The Practical Dimension: A Novel Approach to Communicative Strategies

Having analyzed the mentioned phenomena and being a practitioner in the marketing industry, I suggested that Artificial Intelligence assumes a pivotal role in adapting communication strategies to the phenomenon of zeroculturality, providing businesses with advanced tools for better understanding and effectively interacting with individual consumers. AI's key contribution lies in content personalization, employing intricate processes to customize messages based on individual preferences, purchasing behaviors, and consumer values. Through learning algorithms, AI analyzes customer data, identifies patterns, and delivers personalized content, significantly improving the likelihood of effective communication in the context of zeroculturality.

Another vital aspect is AI's proficiency in data analysis, capable of processing vast amounts of information encompassing online behaviors, social interactions, and purchase history. Advanced algorithms empower AI systems to extract meaningful insights, identify trends, and offer valuable information regarding consumer preferences. AI's efficient data indexing facilitates the swift retrieval of pertinent information about individual customers, contributing to an immediate response to changing needs and preferences, thereby enhancing business agility (Russell, Norvig, 2023). At the same time sentiment analysis, driven by AI algorithms, aids

⁶ For example, a person adopting zeroculturality might reject traditional gender roles while still valuing concepts like femininity, masculinity, love, and nurturing. Similarly, an agnostic wouldn't feel discomfort kneeling before a statue of Christ or Buddha, understanding that the act isn't directed towards a bronze figure but the ideas it symbolizes. Conversely, a religious individual wouldn't prioritize defending symbols or ideas over the well-being of others, recognizing these as expressions of a fundamental value: love for fellow humans. My observations highlight that the rejection of cultural patterns predominantly concerns the cultural "containers" rather than their "contents." What individuals resist are the outdated carriers of cultural content, whose meanings and significance have long been distorted (Grzechynka, 2023, p. 149).

companies in comprehending how customers perceive their brand, products, or campaigns. This capability enables a prompt response to potential negative feedback and the proactive building of a positive brand image, aligning with the challenges posed by zeroculturality.

AI's ability to anticipate trends stands out as well. Through the analysis of data from various sources, AI identifies emerging trends, empowering businesses to foresee consumer preferences and adjust their marketing strategies proactively. Creating detailed consumer profiles using machine learning, algorithms ensures a more precise and targeted approach in the context of zeroculturality. These profiles, encompassing preferences, values, and purchase history, contribute to a more accurate targeting strategy (Haleem et al., 2022).

One more significant advantage of AI lies in the automation of communication processes (Verma et al., 2021). The systems mentioned can automate communication, delivering personalized content at the right time and on the appropriate channels, significantly enhancing the efficiency of marketing efforts, especially when dealing with zero-cultural consumers. Real-time interactions facilitated by AI dynamically respond to consumer behaviors, allowing businesses to provide more timely and contextually relevant messages, ultimately contributing to a more engaging CX (consumer experience).

However, the integration of Artificial Intelligence in marketing strategies to address the challenges of zeroculturality is not without potential dangers. The reliance on AI-driven algorithms for content personalization raises concerns about privacy and data security. As businesses gather and analyze vast amounts of consumer data, there is an inherent risk of misuse or unauthorized access, potentially leading to breaches of sensitive information (Netter, Herbst, Pernul, 2013, pp. 2–27). Moreover, the automated nature of AI communication processes may inadvertently contribute to the amplification of misinformation or the creation of algorithmic echo chambers, limiting diverse perspectives. The potential for biases within AI algorithms is another critical concern, as the algorithms may inadvertently perpetuate or amplify existing cultural stereotypes, adversely affecting the intended personalization efforts. It seems, therefore, that striking a balance between leveraging AI's capabilities for enhanced communication and mitigating these potential risks is imperative for businesses and political communication navigating the landscape of zeroculturality.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the question emerges: Is technology driven by AI sufficiently equipped to thrive in the zerocultural communication model? Let's examine the case study of an entity closely tied to a highly traditional religious framework – the Buddhist Society of Western Australia. Religions are generally deeply entrenched

in tradition and frequently exhibit resistance to alternative approaches or questioning individuals (Seul, 1999). Nevertheless, Ajahn Brahm, the abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery in Serpentine, Western Australia, and the spiritual director of the Buddhist Society of Western Australia, challenges this conventional perspective.

He asserts that the mere fact that something is passed down through generations does not automatically translate to its validity. He encourages individuals to question traditions using a mind free from prejudices, the desire to prove a thesis, or fear of what they might discover. Ajahn Brahm emphasizes kindness as the foundation of the religion, highlighting that rituals, often blindly participated in, hold less significance than the fundamental values they represent (Brahm, 2010). He welcomes people of all traditions, religions, cultures, and minorities to participate in his talks without the need to bow to statues or formally join the Buddhist tradition. This approach aligns with the awareness and acceptance of the concept of zeroculturality, wherein individuals selectively adopt elements of their identity without adhering to traditional patterns.

As a result, the regular weekly broadcasts via YouTube, offering live meditation sessions and Dhamma talks, prove to be an impressive communication success. The charismatic monks, engaging interactions with viewers, and preparation of lectures on important and practical topics have extended the reach of the entity far beyond the borders of Australia. Each recording is watched by tens of thousands of people, and, due to demand, translations into numerous languages are provided (Buddhist Society of Western Australia on YouTube, 2023). The organization has successfully engaged citizens of Australia, which historically lacks such strong Buddhist traditions, and hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. During live broadcasts, questions come in from the farthest corners of the globe, and followers of various cultures and religious traditions actively participate in discussions. The bond among participants is so strong that some choose to welcome the New Year together, connecting online for group meditation.

This case demonstrates the potential effectiveness of embracing zeroculturality and accepting the fact that people may try to build their identity using elements of different traditions or values. Ajahn Brahm's approach challenges the conventional assumption that religious entities are resistant to change, adaptation and tolerance. By advocating for an open-minded examination of traditions and emphasizing universal values, he showcases how entities deeply rooted in tradition can not only coexist with a zerocultural approach but also thrive by embracing diversity.

However, this case also underscores that although the concept of zeroculturality has the potential to unify, and new technologies can play a pivotal role in facilitating this process, a critical prerequisite is not to overlook the human factor, encompassing empathy and emotional intelligence. While technological advancements offer innovative ways to connect individuals globally and foster a sense of shared identity, it is imperative to recognize and prioritize the essential human qualities that underpin meaningful interactions. The success of the Buddhist Society of Western

Australia serves as a reminder that, despite leveraging cutting-edge technologies, genuine human connection remains paramount in bridging diverse cultures and traditions.

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