

# The Mediatization of Religion: A Netnographic Study of Habib Husein Ja'far's *Da'wah* on YouTube

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**Abstract:** This study aims to examine how the mediatization of religion takes place in Habib Husein Ja'far's *da'wah* through YouTube channel *Jeda Nulis*. Based on the framework of mediatization theory, religion is increasingly being incorporated into the logic of media. This study used a qualitative approach with the netnographic method. The findings show that the mediatization process of *da'wah* on YouTube *Jeda Nulis* occurs through adjustments to the *da'wah* method and its content format. Habib Ja'far displays a millennial persona and carries topics based on trends in society as his *da'wah* method approach. His *da'wah* is formed in popular content formats such as vlogs, podcasts, and talk shows. He also collaborated with popular figures who played an important role in increasing the engagement rate. From the perspective of the audience, the content of *Jeda Nulis* builds narratives about representing peaceful Islam and strengthening tolerance. At this phase, mediatization shows the potential transformation of *da'wah* in the digital era. At the same time, the mediatization of *da'wah* facilitates religious expressions which have implications for the emergence of hate speech in the digital space.

**Keywords:** *Da'wah*, digital media, mediatization theory, netnography.

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi mediatisasi agama pada dakwah Habib Husein Ja'far Al Hadad melalui kanal YouTube *Jeda Nulis*. Berdasarkan teori mediatisasi, agama semakin menyatu ke dalam logika media. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode netnografi dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan proses mediatisasi dakwah di YouTube *Jeda Nulis* terjadi melalui penyesuaian pada metode dakwah dan format konten. Habib Ja'far menampilkan persona milenial dan mengusung topik-topik berdasarkan tren di masyarakat sebagai pendekatan metode dakwah. Pengemasan dakwah menggunakan format konten sesuai tren di antaranya vlog, podcast, dan talkshow. Kolaborasi bersama figur-figur populer berperan penting dalam meningkatkan *engagement rate*. Dari perspektif audien, konten *Jeda Nulis* membangun narasi tentang representasi Islam yang damai dan penguatan toleransi. Pada tahap ini, mediatisasi menunjukkan transformasi dakwah yang potensial di era digital. Namun demikian, di saat bersamaan, mediatisasi dakwah juga memfasilitasi ekspresi-ekspresi keagamaan yang berimplikasi pada munculnya ujaran kebencian di ruang digital.

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## Introduction

The study of deradicalization is a fresh subject in the domain of knowledge, causing multiple academic definitions and their practical needs to be debated among academics and practitioners because there is no consensus among them. In substance, deradicalization is a process of changing one's beliefs and thoughts and releasing one's radical ideologies. John Horgan, an American academic, said that deradicalization is a social and psychological process in which a person's radical commitment, involvement, and violence can be reduced to the point that a person is no longer involved in or has sympathy for acts of violence (John & Braddock, 2010). Angel Rabasa from the RAND Corporation, defines deradicalization as the process of changing a person's beliefs and their recognition of general values that apply by rejecting radical ideas or those oriented towards violent ideology (Rabasa, et al, 2011). Meanwhile, an academic from Exeter UK, Omar Ashour, defines deradicalization as a process of accepting the values of pluralism in politics and economics (Ashour & Omar, 2011). From various understandings of deradicalization, all academics believe that deradicalization is a strategic way to fight terrorism.

As a consequence of globalization, the connection between media and society in the contemporary era has become increasingly inseparable. One of the implications is a shift in the relationship between media and religion, which was originally a dichotomy and was independent, to become an entity that is experiencing convergence. Initially, religious studies were considered exclusively the realm of religious scholars, preachers, and religious educators. In its development, religious studies are increasingly entering the realm of other studies to be studied seriously about its relationship with the media (Morgan, 2008).

The shift in the relationship between media and religion shows how media technology changes the way people live their lives, especially in the religious aspect. Religion is a fundamentally important dimension of Indonesian society. Concretely, internet technology and media have implications for how people acquire religious knowledge and study it, how religious preachers or preachers, religious leaders,

and religious institutions deliver religious messages, disseminate policies related to religious people.

In essence, Islam encourages the progress of its people, including in terms of the use of information technology and media to benefit the people. *Da'wah* (Islamic proselytizing) practices are no longer limited to pulpits in rooms with a certain number of worshippers. *Da'wah* transforms into digital space through channels from new media with the widest possible access for various groups of people. *Da'wah* experiences contextualization which manifests itself in packaging through interesting content following formats and trends in new media. At this stage, media and religion have an intertwined relationship to complement each other simultaneously. This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of mediatization, namely the process in which the core elements of social or cultural activities, including religion, become influenced and dependent on the media (Hjarvard, 2012a).

Based on survey results regarding internet usage behavior among Indonesian people, the content most frequently accessed by the public is social media with a score of 3.3 (maximum score 4). The most accessed social media application is YouTube with 65.41% (APJII, 2023). In addition, as many as 54.37% of students and students learn knowledge about Islam from the internet including YouTube (Nisa et al., 2018). With this level of internet user penetration, social media is a potential access for today's *da'wah* and broadcasting practices.

However, there are various criticisms for mediatization which are considered to pose a threat to religion and people's behavior in religion. Social media as a public space has facilitated everyone so that anyone can talk about religion. This has an impact on the emergence of religious authorities through this mediatization creating disruptions such as the emergence of various changes that change the old order with the presence of innovations in various fields. For example, spreading hoaxes, algorithms that reinforce identity, ideology, and religion enclaves, politics of hatred through twisting, and new methods of recruiting terrorism on social media (Rastati, 2018). In addition, there are consequences of the mediatization of religion, namely the

banalization of religion. The term refers to a phenomenon in which mediatization has succeeded in creating new patterns of religious practice and interaction that are combined with things other than religion, but are contextualized as part of religion (Hjarvard, 2011).

Habib Husein Ja'far Al Hadar (hereinafter written as Habib Ja'far) through the YouTube platform uses the *Jeda Nulis* channel since May 4 2008. Jeda Nulis has 872,000 subscribers (as of July 2022). On his channel, Habib Ja'far shares video uploads with the themes of Islam, peace, and tolerance. Habib Ja'far, an Indonesian citizen of Arab descent, is a young habib figure who is known to be close to the millennial generation so his preaching approach adapts to young audiences.

Some previous research has highlighted the movement and dynamics of *da'wah* on social media from various perspectives. Fiardi (2021) identifies Habib Ja'far's preaching practices through YouTube as a concept of propaganda, namely the packaging of *da'wah* with a combination of elements of entertainment in it. The *dakwahtainment* approach is intended as an effort to get closer to the younger generation as *mad'u* (audience) targets. Zaman & Assarwani (2021) examines Habib Ja'far's *da'wah* content on YouTube through an analysis of the circuit of culture concept, namely efforts to build a new pattern of identity that is different from visualizing oneself as a contemporary habib. More fundamentally, other research reviews and examines the Islamic idea of rahmat li al-'alamin which is shared by Habib Ja'far on social media, namely prioritizing love as the foundation of Islamic teachings. This concept influences the formation of a millennial mindset about tolerance (Ummah & Irama, 2021).

Habib Ja'far's *da'wah* has become a separate phenomenon for *da'wah* studies and its relation to the media. This study observed the mediatization of religion that occurs in Habib Ja'far's *da'wah* practices through the *Jeda Nulis* YouTube channel. Then, exploring how Islam is represented and elaborating the audience's meaning and interpretation of *da'wah* on the *Jeda Nulis* channel.

This qualitative study used a netnography method to explore how mediatization takes place of religion takes place in Habib Husein Ja'far's *da'wah* through YouTube *Jeda Nulis*. Qualitative research involves researchers so that they will understand the context of the situation and setting of natural phenomena according to what is being studied. Each phenomenon is something unique and different from the others because of the different context (Fadli, 2021). In this research, the text in the *Jeda Nulis* YouTube videos and the interaction of netizens that builds up in the comments column is a unique phenomenon, especially from a mediatization perspective.

This research used the netnographic method because it seeks to understand how an activity of conveying messages that contain *da'wah* values takes place in a large online community. Netnography is participant-observational research based in online fieldwork that uses the information publicly available in online forum (Kozinets, 2010). Kozinets (2020) defines netnography as a form of qualitative research that seeks to understand the cultural experience that encompass and are reflected within the traces, practices networks and system of online traces. The online traces that used for this study are textual and audiovisual.

The data collection was obtained from primary sources, namely videos on the *Jeda Nulis* YouTube account. The data collection process used Ncapture and data analysis process used Nvivo12. The data analysis technique used is to categorize and classify all data into several categories, noting, and providing conclusions.

Of all the videos uploaded since 2018, there are 17 videos with high engagement rates and a minimum number of views of one million views. This study then selected five videos based on the number of engagement rates, the uniqueness of the topics, and the diversity of the sources.

Tabel 1: Research Samples

Video Titles	Engagement Rate			Link
	Views	Likes	Comments	
Kultum Pemuda Tersesat	3.535.811	96k	5.276	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DaBeDe-n3w">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DaBeDe-n3w</a>
Boris Belajar islam, Tak Takut Mualaf?	2.760.620	55k	3.279	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n01Z1_EBjes">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n01Z1_EBjes</a>
Azan Subuh Bisa Bangunkan Orang Mati?	2.414.337	79k	6.190	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMnIP84GNms">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMnIP84GNms</a>
Kultum Pemuda Tersesat: Masjid Pakai Penglaris?	1.912.093	75k	3.571	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sC15WqVUD1U">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sC15WqVUD1U</a>
Tuhan, Agama, dan Tata Krama Mbah Sujiwo Tejo	1.824.247	28k	1.492	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrxP8ofXnLE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrxP8ofXnLE</a>

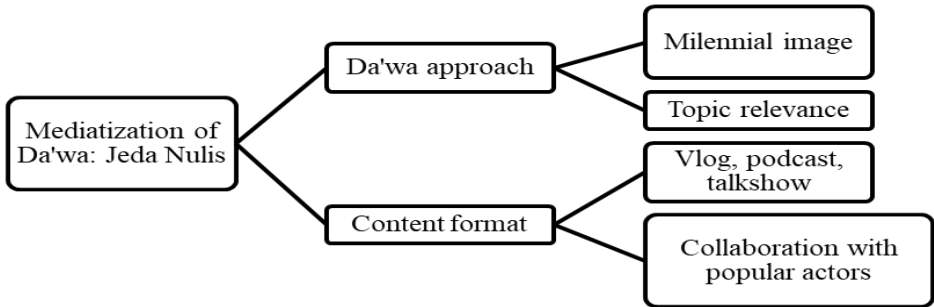
Source: Author's calculation (2021)

## Results and Discussion

### *Da'wah* Transformation on *Jeda Nulis* YouTube Channel

*Jeda Nulis* is a YouTube channel managed by Habib Jafar which contains Islamic-themed content. Since joining YouTube on May 4, 2008, the number of videos that have been uploaded on *Jeda Nulis* channel is more than 200 videos with a total number of views of 56,306,441 views (as of July 2022). In the *Jeda Nulis* channel description column, Habib Ja'far describes his profile as follows: "I am a young writer on Islamic themes in the mass media since more than 10 years ago. Currently, while continuing to write, during breaks, I make videos about cool Islam. Because now, especially the millennial generation, video delivery is more in demand. Also so that I can express my ideas more freely with visual media" (*Jeda Nulis* Channel, 2018).

**Figure 1:** Two Main Dimensions of Mediatization Da'wah of Jeda Nulis



Based on a mediatization perspective, Habib Ja'far's *da'wah* through the *Jeda Nulis* YouTube channel can be seen from two main dimensions, namely the *da'wah* approach and content format. The *da'wah* approach is a way of conveying Habib Ja'far both through verbal and non-verbal communication and selecting the issues discussed. The content format is a form of *da'wah* through video content that is interesting, entertaining, and involves popular figures as collaborators.

The interesting thing about Habib Ja'far as a *habib* figure is his approach to preaching through the YouTube platform with a relaxed demeanor and being close to young generations so that he is nicknamed the millennial *habib*. This approach was used because Habib Ja'far targeted young generations as *mad'u*.

Habib Ja'far's efforts in targeting young generations in his *da'wah* are shown through two dimensions, namely the method of delivering *da'wah* and the format of *da'wah* content. First, from the point of view of conveying *da'wah*, Habib Ja'far in some videos displays a millennial persona through symbols such as the use of slang or slang, for example the Epronunciation of Gue-Elu (Indonesian slang for pronunciations of I-You), and casual clothing that does not highlight religious attributes, such as wearing a hoodie, t-shirts and jeans.

Figure 2: Habib Ja'far's Appearance in One of the Jeda Nulis Content



Second, the format of da'wah content adapts to trends on social media to attract engagement. Initially, the uploaded content was in the form of a da'wah video or lecture by Habib Ja'far delivered in monologue with a relatively short video duration of 4-12 minutes. Starting at the end of December 2018, Jeda Nulis channel developed the packaging of da'wah into a more varied and creative format in the form of vlogs, podcasts, and talk shows. In addition, Habib Ja'far also collaborated with other sources from various backgrounds, ranging from religious leaders (across religions and beliefs), practitioners and academics, as well as popular figures from celebrities and stand-up comedians, both muslims and non-muslims.

One of the videos with the highest number of views, reaching 3,550,707 views, is content with the title Pemuda Tersesat (Lost Youth Cult). This content is a collaborative video with stand-up comedians, namely Tretan Muslim and Coki Pardede who are also known as agnostic adherents. The term Pemuda Tersesat itself is a term for

young people as *mad'u* from Habib Ja'far who needs enlightenment regarding Islamic knowledge. In this content, mediated interactions occur between netizens who submit questions to Habib Ja'far through social media.

Figure 3: Jeda Nulis Video with the Most Number of Views



The millennial *habib* persona displayed in the *Pemuda Tersesat* content appears prominent in the issues discussed originating from netizens' questions. The questions chosen to be answered imply the anxiety of the youth regarding the problems of everyday life but are wrapped in unique and eccentric dictions. In the video entitled "Kultum Pemuda Tersesat: Masjid Pakai Penglaris?" for example, Tretan Muslim read out questions from netizens for Habib Ja'far namely "Can the mosque use *penglaris* (supernatural help) so that the congregation continues to be crowded?". This question caused laughter because it was strange and not the type of *jama'ah* questions asked in general forums for Islamic studies. However, Habib Ja'far still provides solutions or answers based on the provisions of Islamic teachings. In

this session, the da'wah process was conveyed with various adjustments.

The packaging of da'wah combined with elements of entertainment or comedy and in a format that adapts to trends on social media has succeeded in increasing the engagement rate of Jeda Nulis content. Of all the videos uploaded since 2018, there are 17 videos with high engagement rates and a minimum number of views of one million views. All of these videos are videos in podcast and talk show formats as well as videos involving other sources to collaborate with Habib Ja'far.

Based on the search results, Habib Ja'far brings up topics related to Islamic teachings such as *sharia*, creed, worship, Islam based on love such as tolerance, religious moderation, to topics that depart from phenomena that are close to the younger generation or millennial issues. Overall, the Islam represented by Habib Ja'far is the Islamic concept of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. Through the content on Jeda Nulis, Habib Ja'far promotes messages of peace, Islam based on love and tolerance.

Peaceful Islam is represented through narratives and discussions with sources from non-Muslim circles. Habib Ja'far deepened the conversation with the speakers by discussing their spiritual experiences, how they understood the concept of God, and how Islam was in the eyes of the speakers. At the same time, Habib Ja'far introduced the Islamic concept of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.

### **Audience Meanings for *Jeda Nulis* Contents**

The representation of Islam conveyed by Habib Ja'far through his contents on *Jeda Nulis* also builds meaning, interpretation and interaction for audiences or netizens. This can be seen from the comments column on the YouTube page.

Based on observations of comments from the three videos with the most views on Jeda Nulis, comments are classified into several categories. *First*, the value category (values), namely the audience's meaning and assessment of the content of *Jeda Nulis*. The audience interpreted what Habib Ja'far conveyed as a true representation of

Islam, namely an Islamic narrative that is peaceful and based on love. Many assessments about strengthening tolerance are aimed at the contents of Jeda Nulis which present sources from non-Muslim circles. This is one of Habib Ja'far's efforts in spreading tolerance and a peaceful Islamic narrative.

*Jeda Nulis* content is not only watched by Muslims but also by various other religions. Habib Ja'far with his preaching approach is able to present an understanding of peaceful Islam. For example, a netizen with the username Syaa Hsyaa shared his comments on the video entitled "Islam Jadi Asyik (feat: Coki Pardede)" (Jeda Nulis, 2019), expressing a change in his views on Islam after watching Habib Ja'far's podcast video.

*"Thank you Habib, I'm a Christian watching this, my views have changed about Islam. In the past, I used to think the same as Coki about Islam being harsh, radical, and pushy. Now I understand that this religion is peaceful and teaches goodness just like what other religions teach. Hopefully Habib is always healthy and continues to teach Islam like this"* (Netizen).

Habib Ja'far's personal and character aspects are also an attraction for Jeda Nulis audiences. Habib Ja'far's character is known as a millennial habib but is still in accordance with Islamic values that should exist in a habib. In addition, Habib Ja'far's way of preaching is considered easier to understand, especially for the millennial generation. Based on comments from a netizen with the account name Taufik Hidayat, he said that the millennial concept of Habib Ja'far's preaching fits the current conditions of society.

*Second*, the cognitive category, namely comments that show the audience's cognition of the content. The audience interprets Habib Ja'far's content with responses that show reinforcement (reinforcing) of what Habib Ja'far conveys by providing personal opinions or other sources to strengthen messages from sources as a form of unanimous opinion or supporting the sources. The audience also quoted the statements submitted by the sources to show the most emphasized part of the entire content material. Comments in the form of questions (questioning) show the audience's interpretation of the YouTube

platform as a means of gaining knowledge and forming a space for interaction. Apart from that, discussions are also formed through expressions of disagreement (negation) by the audience towards the content of *Jeda Nulis*, both in terms of substance and technical aspects.

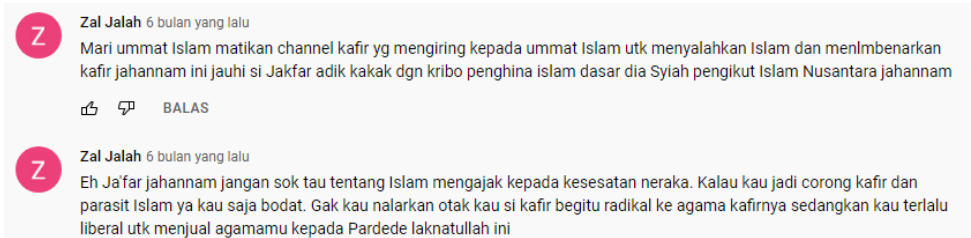
*Third*, the audience's perception of the *Jeda Nulis* content illustrates how the audience views the content. Through this category, the audience's responses to *Jeda Nulis* content include providing them with knowledge and understanding, that *Jeda Nulis* content is entertaining, what Habib Ja'far conveyed is the answer to life's problems, and considers this content useful for increasing spirituality.

*Fourth*, the categories of input and suggestions show the nature of the active audience in mediated *da'wah*. Audiences make it possible to provide good suggestions regarding topics, video techniques, to content formats. In other words, *da'wah* through YouTube can direct the interests and needs of the audience. Audience feedback can be an opportunity for Habib Ja'far to develop further content so as to further increase the number of views.

*Fifth*, the category of hate speech shows the dark side of mediated preaching, which allows expressions of hatred to emerge because YouTube facilitates the audience to comment anonymously. The hate speech conveyed by the audience directed Habib Ja'far personally with negative dictions or nicknames, considering Habib Ja'far and what he said to be liberal, religious blasphemy, to heretical teachings.

The following is an example of hate speech in the content comment column in the *Jeda Nulis* video. An account called *Zal Jalab* spreads hatred by inviting Muslims to turn off the *Jeda Nulis* channel. He even labeled Habib Ja'far as an infidel and Shia who insulted Islam and traded Islam.

Figure 4: Hate Speech Comments



### Habib Ja'fars and *Jeda Nulis* in a Mediatization Perspective

The transformation of *da'wah* on *Jeda Nulis* YouTube channel shows the changing role of the media in society as an implication of mediatization. The mediatization of preaching on *Jeda Nulis* channel shows this change as described by Schulz (2004). *First*, as an extension, *Jeda Nulis* YouTube channel has expanded the reach of *da'wah* to the wider community. Not only the dimensions of space and time, but also expanding audience segmentation, namely that they are no longer limited to Muslims. However, non-Muslims can also access *Jeda Nulis* content, and share their thoughts through the comments column.

*Second*, YouTube is able to replace (substitute) *da'wah* which was originally carried out from pulpit to pulpit or majlis halls into mediated interactions. This is also an option for the public to make *Jeda Nulis* YouTube channel a means of acquiring Islamic knowledge. *Third*, forms of interaction through various media are combined with one another. For *Pemuda Tersesat* content, for example, the topics discussed depart from netizens' questions sent via Instagram and YouTube itself.

*Fourth*, the implications of mediatization for Habib Ja'far as an actor to be able to accommodate the logic of the media in order to attract public interest in accessing *Jeda Nulis* *da'wah* content. Media logic consists of various operational modalities in which media enable, constrain, and structure human communication and action (Hjarvard, 2011). This was carried out according to the research results, namely Habib Ja'far's approach in preaching by displaying and using symbols

that show millennial personas, raising topics that are relevant to the millennial generation, as well as packaging da'wah in content formats that are in line with YouTube trends.

According to Fakhruroji (2021), in mediatization there is an amalgamation of religious messages with things other than religion but contextualized as something religious in nature indicating that it is not something that is entirely derived from religion but rather the result of religious adjustment within the logical framework of the media. Habib Ja'far's strategy of bringing religious knowledge by displaying entertainment attributes was carried out as an effort to bring religious content closer to the community, especially the millennial generation. This is proven by the high attention and participation of young audiences in Jeda Nulis contents. When viewed from the perspective of religious mediation, in the long run this can put religion at risk for the reality and true meaning of religion (Fakhruroji, 2021).

The results of a survey by PPIM UIN Jakarta (2021) show that the popularity of religious programs is highly dependent on the figure of the ustadz and program channels, rather than religious content and narratives. This also indicates a tendency that a person's religious authority is no longer seen from their religious knowledge but rather from their popularity (Halimatusa'diyah et al., 2021). In the context of this research, apart from the popularity of Habib Ja'far himself, Jeda Nulis' engagement rate has also increased, supported by the popularity of several figures he collaborated with in his videos. For example, Muslim Tretan and Coki Pardede which are popular with many younger generations, Deddy Corbuzier who is popular on YouTube, Boy William who is also a popular celebrity, and so on.

On the other hand, YouTube facilitates netizens to express differences, rejection, even expressions that lead to hate speech. Bonotti (2017) assesses the complexity of the relationship between religion and hate speech lies in the defense of hate speech actors in the name of religious freedom. In this case, the potential for hate speech to arise in mediated preaching is triggered by new media features that support this act (Brown, 2018).

The anonymous feature allows someone to hide or even manipulate their real identity and not show it in public spaces on social media. Then, there is a physical distance between the communicator and the communicant which means they cannot see each other clearly (invisibility) so that the impact of hate speech actions cannot be directly seen by the perpetrators. In contrast to traditional preaching (face-to-face), the potential for hate speech to emerge at that moment is of course very small compared to mediated preaching.

The choice of media and actor approach in preaching in the digital era is an essential factor in addition to the contents of the message or *da'wah* material delivered. Technically, every social media has characteristics and features that must be adapted to the format of the content loaded. For example YouTube, in simple terms, is a video sharing website that facilitates interaction between users through the comments column. YouTube is a platform that can support *da'wah* activities because it contains videos whose duration can be adjusted to the *da'wah* messages. Another important factor, namely the actor's approach, can be seen from the character of the *da'wah* delivery and the persona shown to the audience. Social media trends introduce the concept of influencers, a term for figures known to many people in cyberspace, where actors in content play an important role in influencing audiences, so that the actor's approach to preaching in the digital era is also a significant consideration.

## Conclusion

The mediatization of religion changes the way people acquire and learn religious knowledge and how preachers deliver religious messages. The mediatization of religion that occurred in Habib Ja'far's *da'wah* occurred through adjustments to *da'wah* that were increasingly unified and moved according to the logic of the media. The mediatization process of *da'wah* takes place both in the actors and in the packaging of the *da'wah* itself. The mediatization of *da'wah* on *Jeda Nulis* YouTube channel can be seen from two aspects: the *da'wah* method and content format. Habib Ja'far uses a humanist approach, relaxed, and has a millennial character in conveying his *da'wah*. This is done through

choosing topics that are relevant to trends in society and the younger generation, and using symbols to show the millennial persona. As for the aspect of content format, the packaging of *da'wah* is adapted to YouTube trends such as *da'wah* in the form of vlogs, podcasts, and talk shows. Habib Ja'far also collaborated with popular figures from various circles who managed to increase engagement rates.

*Dakwah* through YouTube opens a space for interaction for netizens or audiences and builds meaning for Habib Ja'far's *da'wah*. From the audience's perspective, Habib Ja'far's *da'wah* message is interpreted as a representation of real Islam, namely *rahmatan lil a'lamiin* and strengthening inter-religious tolerance. On the other hand, YouTube with all its features has implications for opening up various religious expressions, both constructive and potentially expressions of hate speech.

In conclusion, the mediatization of religion has a big role for religion and society. In the process, mediatization brings both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, the media broadens people's access to religious information. On the other hand, the role of actors in mediating religion which determines people's interests makes people more dependent on the media so it has the potential to reduce people's critical thinking power.

### **Acknowledgments**

The authors would like to thank all parties who were involved in the research. Thanks to the Institute of Research and Community Outreach Lembaga (Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat/LPPM) Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta for funding to complete this research.

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