

## CULTIVATING ONLINE FUN *FATWA* IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA: Millennial, Piety, and New Religious Authority

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**Abstract:** The digital culture has made the internet a significant source of knowledge for millennials. The fast access to information has made them associated with instant culture and bandwagon effect: they behave and adapt to popular trends and demand instant pleasurable activities. In this case, the phenomenon influences how they seek religious advice (*fatwa*). Pleasure and piety become parts of millennials' religiosity: they want to look pious yet casual and trendy. This article closely examines a millennial *hadrami*-descent preacher, Habib Ja'far. It investigates how he builds his religious authority among millennials and the youth by cultivating his online and fun *fatwas*. Habib Ja'far's YouTube channel is the main data source in this case. Employing qualitative research with netnography method and Slama's theory on "mediated intimacy", This study found that a *mufli* (a man who gives religious advice) must adapt to the changes in how people seek religious advice (*fatwa*) to gain authority. The more skilled he is at adapting, the more authoritative he will be. In Habib Ja'far case, his adaptability to youth culture and social media has made him a new religious authority. His *da'wa* model using social media by collaborating with various speakers from different perspectives can engage a wider audience and make *da'wa* more entertaining, accepted, and informative toward the fun and easy side of religion without hurting its sacredness.

**Keywords:** Millennials; piety; religious authority.

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## Introduction

The term millennial refers to the generation born around the year 2000.<sup>1</sup> Based on a survey conducted by PPIM UIN Jakarta, the millennial generation spends 3-5 hours per day accessing the internet and social media. 85% of them access all information they need via the internet, including religious content.<sup>2</sup> In November 2017, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) released a nationwide survey report about the prevalence of internet users in the country. The data show that 81% of millennials use Facebook, the most accessed site in the country, followed by Twitter. The same survey also shows that 54,3% of millennials read online media daily.<sup>3</sup> The data above indicates millennials are attached to the internet, especially social media.

Moreover, in 2009, the Alvara Institute showed that millennials accessed religious knowledge mainly on the following subjects: *fiqh* with a percentage of 58.2%, *muamalah* 54.6%, *tarikh* 28.3%, and *nabwu shorof* 6.3%.<sup>4</sup> This data indicates the significant need of the youth for religious knowledge especially the law issues (*fiqh*). The internet has also changed how people seek religious advice (*fatwa*), especially for millennial Muslims. They have made the internet one of the main sources for accessing all information, including religious knowledge. In his book *Hashtag Islam*, scholars such as Bunt have researched changing patterns in seeking religious advice (*fatwa*) online. In this book, Bunt observes the proliferation of online *fatwa* media after the emergence of the internet. This phenomenon has also indirectly changed the religious authority that

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<sup>1</sup> PDSI KOMINFO, "Mengenal Generasi Millennial," Website Resmi Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika RI, accessed April 8, 2023, [http://content/detail/8566/mengenal-generasi-millennial/0/sorotan\\_media](http://content/detail/8566/mengenal-generasi-millennial/0/sorotan_media).

<sup>2</sup> PPIM, "Api dalam Sekam: Keberagaman Muslim Gen Z di Indonesia" (Tangerang Selatan: PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Abraham Zakky Zulhazmi and Dewi Ayu Sri Hastuti, "DA'WA, MUSLIM MILLENNIALS AND SOCIAL MEDIA," *LENTERA*, December 28, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.21093/lentera.v2i2.1235>.

<sup>4</sup> "Indonesia Muslim Report 2019 - Alvara Strategic Indonesia Muslim Report 2019," accessed April 10, 2023, <https://alvara-strategic.com/indonesia-muslim-report-2019/>, <https://alvara-strategic.com/indonesia-muslim-report-2019/>.

exists in society.<sup>5</sup> In the Indonesian context, mainstream Muslim organizations are struggling to disseminate their legal opinion even to their members as people prefer to seek all information via internet, including religious topic.<sup>6</sup>

The instant access to all kinds of information from the internet has made millennials think that the internet is a significant source of knowledge, including searching for religious advice. Moreover, culture also shapes the millennials to depend on the internet for their entertainment and trend needs. Mansfield figured out that young people continue practicing their piety without abandoning trends, as seen in the *ngabuburit* (a gathering before the breakfast meal), usually located near the mosque. However, millennials today prefer to hang out in malls, cafés, or cozy places with the same goal.<sup>7</sup>

Responding to this, Habib Ja'far, actively using social media for da'wa, realizes an emerging trend in the millennial generation: they want to look pious, trendy, and modish simultaneously. Having a religious education background and good social media management skills, he became a digital preacher or a new religious authority. He uses his digital platform to preach, give religious advice, and answer questions his viewers and subscribers ask.

The Q&A mechanism on his platform reminds us of the fatwa making (*futya*). However, using social media is a different circumstance. In this context, we can reasonably call him a *mufti* (a scholar who gives religious advice) and his subscribers a *mustafti* (people who seek advice).

In the following discussion, the study addresses the making of what I called the online fun *fatwa* by employing the netnography method, which takes the main data from the internet and social media platforms. This article takes the Q&A session from Habib Ja'far's YouTube channel as the main data. In addition, this study

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<sup>5</sup> Gary R Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*

(United State of America: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Nadirsyah Hosen, "9. Online Fatwa in Indonesia: From Fatwa Shopping to Googling a Kiai," in *Expressing Islam*, ed. Sally White (ISEAS Publishing, 2008), 159–73, <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789812308528-013>.

<sup>7</sup> Pam Nilan and Michelle Mansfield, "Youth Culture and Islam in Indonesia," *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia* 15, no. 1 (April 1, 2013): 1, <https://doi.org/10.17510/wjhi.v15i1.102>.

employs Slama's mediated intimacy theory to observe the phenomenon.

### Transforming Authority

*Fatwa* is a legal opinion issued by a *mufti* related to religious issues. It involves several branches of science to come to any legal conclusions. A *mufti*, the person who gives a *fatwa* (legal issues), has to have certain scientific requirements. In the classical Islamic tradition, several conditions must be met by someone to be *mufti*, including being a *Muslim*, an *'adil* adherent (accustomed to doing things ordered by religion and avoiding its prohibitions and not being a liar), a *faqih* person (having a perfect understanding of religion), a *mujtahid* character (mastering and memorizing the rules of *ushul fiqh* or ethics of jurisprudence, the arguments, and understanding social facts.<sup>8</sup>

The requirements show that the *mufti* is not an ordinary title. It requires higher dedication and intelligence to possess the title. Therefore, the *mufti* position is crucial among the Muslim community regarding legal decisions. In other words, the *fatwa* is the product of legal expertise and advanced legal knowledge. The more a *mufti* is learned, the more authoritative his *fatwa* is for the court and the public. In this regard, the scholarly level of a legal expert had been determined through practice, not degrees or diplomas. The measure of a jurist was, among other things, the quality of his writings and *fatwas* and his ability to win debates with distinguished scholars.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the *fatwa* is a ruling on the point of Islamic law or dogma issued by authorized religious scholars such as *ulama*, *kyai*, *imam*, *mufti*, or *mujtahid* based on questions posed by an individual inquirer (*mustafti*), a judge (*qadi*), a government authority, or corporate entity. The *fatwa* is usually published or disseminated to the broader Islamic community as a response to the question.<sup>10</sup> In the second half of the tenth century, the collection of *fatwas* was compiled into a product of law and has been produced to the

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<sup>8</sup> Ahmad bin Hamdan Al-Harrani, *Sifat Al-Fatwa Wa Al-Mufti Wa Al-Mustafti* (Damaskus: Mansyurat Al-Maktab Al-Islami, 1380).

<sup>9</sup> Wael B Hallaq, *An Introduction Islamic Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Hosen, "9. Online Fatwa in Indonesia."

present day. In addition, each group of *fatwa* is mainly identified with a particular school of legal thought (*madhab*).<sup>11</sup>

Three Islamic organizations in Indonesia hold authoritative fatwas: Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, and the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI). They have responded to problems and issued *fatwas* for the Indonesian Muslim community for approximately 70 years.<sup>12</sup> The collections of the fatwas from these three organizations are also enshrined in canon form to make them easy to find when the community needs them. Nahdlatul Ulama's *fatwas*, known as *Rulings of the Legal Experts Based on the Congresses of NU*, was first published and edited in 1997 by KH. Azis Masyhuri. Muhammadiyah's *fatwas* are published in *Himpunan Putusan Tarjih* (Compilations of *Tarjih* Decision). Meanwhile, MUI's first fatwa compilation was published in 1984.<sup>13</sup> However, the canonization makes *fatwas* less accessible due to high printing and distribution cost. Thus, the organizations are struggling to find ways to disseminate their fatwa even to their members.

The internet is changing how Indonesian Muslims seek religious guidance. Plenty of internet cafes in 1996 became the initial foothold of its accessibility for Indonesian society. Indonesian Muslims use the internet to seek religious advice, *fatwa*, and things related to religious affairs, what as so-called "shopping a fatwa" and "googling a Kiai" phenomenon.<sup>14</sup> The easy access to all information enables anyone to relate to anything, including religion. Bunt noted that after the advent of the internet, what he called "*fatwa* machines" mushroomed in various parts of the world, among which he mentioned are OnIslam.net in 2010, IslamQA.info in 1997, Darul Ifta Deoband in 2007, Sistani.org, Astan Quds Razavi in 2017, e-Shaykh.com, etc.<sup>15</sup> Other than the major organizations, Akmaliah showed that many Islamic groups have popular websites such as

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<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Khalid Masud, *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwas* (Cambridge:Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> M. B Hooker, *Indonesian Islam: Social Change through Contemporary Fatawa* (Australia: TheIslamic Foundation, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Hosen, "9. Online Fatwa in Indonesia."

<sup>14</sup> Hosen.

<sup>15</sup> Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*.

portal-Islam.id, eramuslim.com, hidayatullah.com, voa-islam.com, dakwatuna, and arrahmah.com.<sup>16</sup>

The conventional way to get a *fatwa* is by hearing religious messages in an oratory speech where the scholar and the audience meet.<sup>17</sup> The occasion is traditionally available in certain places such as mosques, *majlis taklim*, *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), and other religious institutions.<sup>18</sup> The *da'wa* is a way for Muslim scholars to gain authority and always demands transformation as society changes.<sup>19</sup> In the beginning, the actors of *da'wa* (*muftis*) are dominated by *Ulama* (Muslim scholars who have strong roots in Islamic education)<sup>20</sup>, conveyed orally on Friday sermons or any religious gatherings,<sup>21</sup> and need a specific place and time.<sup>22</sup> The popularity of a preacher was initially measured by his knowledge and ability to address the religious questions posed by common Muslims in such circumstances.<sup>23</sup> Unlike the conventional manner, the actors of digital *da'wa* are mostly millennial Muslims as digital natives. They make use of social media as a means of *da'wa* and engage the youth culture.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the millennials do not limit the *da'wa* to oratory or monologue form. They offer a variety of creative *da'wa* models, such as visual *da'wa*, videos, podcasts, memes, comics, and

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<sup>16</sup> Wahyudi Akmaliah, "The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (2020): 1–24.

<sup>17</sup> A Basit, *Filsafat Dakwah* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Jajat Burhanuddin, "The Fragmentation of Religious Authority: Islamic Print Media in Early 20th Century Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 11 (2004): 23–62.

<sup>19</sup> Andree Feillard, *Varieties of Religious Authority: Changes and Challenges in 20th Century Indonesian Islam*, ed. C. van Dijk et al., IIAS/ISEAS Series on Asia (Singapore: Leiden, Netherlands: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies; International Institute for Asian Studies, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Eva F. Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia," *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5, no. 1–2 (February 14, 2018): 68–99, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340085>.

<sup>21</sup> Feillard, *Varieties of Religious Authority*.

<sup>22</sup> Burhanuddin, "The Fragmentation of Religious Authority: Islamic Print Media in Early 20th Century Indonesia."

<sup>23</sup> Nico J.G Kaptein, "The Voice of the 'Ulamâ': Fatwas and Religious Authority in Indonesia," *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions*, no. 125 (January 1, 2004): 115–30, <https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.1038>.

<sup>24</sup> Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa"

animation.<sup>25</sup> The more creative and attractive the *da'wa* content, the more engaged the preacher with the audience.

Slama argues that digital platforms have helped form “mediated intimacy” between Islamic preachers and their followers. The preachers use it to interact with their followers and introduce them to a trendy and effective embodiment of Islamic piety in everyday life. Moreover, Slama focuses his analysis on “filling the heart”, a popular concept used by preachers and their followers to characterize their intimate personal *da'wah* engagement. He argues that direct communication is an act of manifesting piety.<sup>26</sup> Existing studies show that digital platforms are a significant medium for expanding the popularity of Indonesian preachers and authoritative forums. The internet enables them to deliver teachings and interact better with a wider audience. They can provide the materials to the whole country without minding serious time and place. However, the popularity of a preacher is measured not by knowledge but by the number of followers. Hence, this phenomenon causes a fragmentation between conventional and digital *da'wa* and creates a new religious authority like celebrity ustadz, Muslim influencers, and social media preachers.

### **Husein Ja'far and His Style of Da'wa**

Husein Ja'far Al Hadar, known as Habib Husein, is a writer, an academic, and a preacher. His popularity has recently increased among Indonesians for promoting peaceful Islam on his social media account. He was born on June 21, 1988, in Bondowoso, East Java. Ja'far was educated in a traditional Islamic background. Graduated from his junior and senior high school in Bondowoso. He continued his education at the Al-Ma'had Al-Islami Islamic Boarding School in Bangil, East Java. He majored in Islamic Faith and Philosophy at the University State Islam Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and earned his master's in Quranic Studies at the same university. Habib Ja'far is also the author of Islamic books published by Gramedia & Mizan, a writer for mass media, and a speaker on

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<sup>25</sup> Hei Wai Weng, “THE ART OF *DAKWAH*: Social Media, Visual Persuasion and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siau,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (January 2, 2018): 61–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416757>.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Slama, “9. Social Media and Islamic Practice: Indonesian Ways of Being Digitally Pious,” in *Digital Indonesia* (ISEAS Publishing, 2017), 146–62, <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814786003-015>.

some National TVs.<sup>27</sup> Unlike other Habib preachers who use Arabic attributes such as a turban and robe, Ja'far has a distinctive appearance. He wears a T-shirt, jeans, and a white cap on his head. He said that in conveying Islam as a flexible religion, a preacher should not create a distance between the preacher and the audience in various aspects, including the style.<sup>28</sup>

### 1. Promoting Islam as a Religion of Love

The task of a preacher is to convey good news to humankind. Islam came to bring glad tidings, not sorrow or fear. Islam provides an easy solution to life. In the video entitled "How to preach like the Prophet", he said when Islam had not yet arrived, women **were** only used as objects. They did not get proper recognition. He argued that Islam came and raised the status of women as equal to men. He also showed the case of a minority named Bilal Bin Rabbah. He was appointed as a caller of *adzan* (*muazzin*). However, Ja'far sees many Muslims today have made the religion exclusive, where many Muslims use violence and spread fear.<sup>29</sup> In addition, he set two categories of preachers: First, those who preach to people who are already Muslims. Second, those who preach to those who are non-practising Muslims and Non-Muslim. Habib Ja'far sees himself as a preacher to the second group. He sees teaching Islam not only in the recitation and podium but it should reach anyone who wants to learn the religion. He argues that a preacher should treat himself as equal to everybody and not try patronizing them. He should try to understand people who want to learn Islam no matter what their background is.<sup>30</sup>

### 2. Tolerance in Islam

Many Muslims live in various places. Some of them are minorities in certain areas and some others are majority. In the video

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<sup>27</sup> Cariustadz.id, "Profil Ustadz Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar," accessed November 16, 2022,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20201202184222/https://cariustadz.id/ustadz/detail/Husein-Ja%E2%80%99far-Al-Hadar>.

<sup>28</sup> Husein Ja'far, "Husein Ja'far's Lecture on the Commemoration of the Prophet's Birthday" (Cafe Basabasi Nologaten, February 2022).

<sup>29</sup> Husein Ja'far, "Islam Itu Agama Cinta," Youtube, Jeda Nulis, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxwlsOjPMHs>.

<sup>30</sup> Husein Ja'far, "Etika Dakwah Agar Tidak Tersesat," Youtube, Jeda Nulis, Oktober 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCtPHXe0-yc>.



“Becoming a Muslim Minority in Europe,” the speakers, Gita Savitri and Paulus Partohap, talked about how they live in Germany as a Muslim minority. They shared an experience of tolerance. According to Habib Ja’far, a good generation of Muslims are intellectuals, modernists, Islamic, and friendly. He said that before Muslims were Muslims, they were first called human beings.<sup>31</sup> His tolerant attitude was also exposed when discussing tolerance with stand-up comedians, Coki, and Muslims. When Coki, a Christian, asked about fasting, he explained that fasting is not only in Islam. Fasting has been around since the first human, and many religions have it in their ways. Furthermore, Ja’far argues that it is not permissible to force the stalls to close during the fasting day to respect the fasting Muslims because they must also respect them.<sup>32</sup> His explanation is a form of tolerance. In this case, Coki understands the tolerant values of Islam and feels comfortable talking to him.

### 3. Making *Da’wa* Easy and Simple

According to Gus Mus, a prominent Muslim scholar, *da’wa* is an invitation. He said preaching must be no worse than how a bus driver invites passengers. Furthermore, he explained that a preacher must convey not to force. He believes the prophet Muhammad gained many followers because he taught Islam through his behavior and character.

A hadith of the Prophet Muhammad expresses Muslim idealism: “A good Muslim is one whose right and left neighbors are not disturbed by his hands or his tongue.” This teaching shows behavior as a significant way of preaching as it is practical, not theoretical. I also argue that good behavior and tolerance are crucial as a religious mindset for millennials amidst uncontrolled information, technology, and its impacts.

According to Ja’far, the most important teaching is morality to people who have no morals by showing good behavior as mandated by Islamic education. He gave the example of the Prophet Muhammad. When the Quraish disbelievers hated him, he did not grow hatred. As Islam is the majority in Indonesia, they should not

<sup>31</sup> Husein Ja’far, “Becoming a Muslim Minority in Europe,” Youtube, Jeda Nulis, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAtRkgDxrjc&t=18s>.

<sup>32</sup> Husein Ja’far, “Kultum Pemuda Tersesat Eps 14: Bagaimana Hukum Puasa-Nya Orang Yang Murtad?,” Youtube, Majelis Lucu, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUJLnPtg8v0>.

oppress the minorities like the Quraish did. Habib Ja'far stated that morality affects our worship. A Muslim who worships but has bad morals, such as oppressing others, lying, and deceiving others, all worships are useless.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, talking with musician Vikri Rasta, he said that preaching could be done through many media, including music. It is permissible to use music as a medium of *da'wah*. He views it as a shame for musicians who want to preach and leave the music world when he could use the platform to preach.<sup>34</sup> He further argued that emigration, as the prophet did, aims to go in a better direction. However, the place we emigrated from cannot be considered wrong.

From this explanation, we see that he speaks in an easy-to-understand way and has rich perspectives. He underlies his arguments mainly on fundamental values. He also adapts to the popular style of speech and appearance. In addition, his moderate argument and stylish appearance have gained numerous viewers.

### **Cultivating Online and Fun Fatwa in Indonesia**

The digital era provides challenges and opportunities for young preachers as many of them in Indonesia are active users of various social media platforms.<sup>35</sup> The media have been integrated into the workings of almost all social institutions, where it exerts influence and brings about transformation, including religion.<sup>36</sup> It allows the preachers to carry out the *da'wa* broadly and exercise religious authority around moral, political, and cultural conversation. The digital encounter between the preacher and the majority of Muslims is the factor of fast and massive *da'wa* transformation as Barendregt stated, Indonesian Muslims have embraced social media in their daily religious lives, as seen in great creativity and variety in

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<sup>33</sup> Husein Ja'far, "Berakhlak Pada Yang Tak Berakhlak," Youtube, Jeda Nulis, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8xDN25\\_myE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8xDN25_myE).

<sup>34</sup> Husein Ja'far, "Ngobrolin Musik dan Dakwah," Youtube, Jeda Nulis, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8xDN25\\_myE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8xDN25_myE).

<sup>35</sup> Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa."

<sup>36</sup> Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatisation of Religion: Theorising Religion, Media and Social Change," *Culture and Religion* 12, no. 2 (June 2011): 119–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2011.579719>.

the use of smartphones and apps.<sup>37</sup> As Muslims increasingly turn to online *da'wa* content for religious and moral guidance, Islamic preachers have a greater possibility to build intimacy in their *da'wah*.

Habib Ja'far is one of the preachers who can combine a fun approach and piety that appeal to the millennial and younger generation. As mentioned above, the millennial Muslims have a unique *character*. They want a fun approach while maintain piety. To reach out younger generation, the preachers today should present a nice-to-read, nice-to-see, and heart-touching *da'wah*.<sup>38</sup>

In this case, Habib Ja'far understands that attachment to social media benefits Islamic *da'wa*. His YouTube channel, Jeda Nulis, is a form of innovation as he discovers that the conventional *da'wa* is becoming less effective. However, this kind of *da'wa* is directly segmented to the younger generation. According to McLuhan, we need a medium so humans can be bound or influenced by information, so we use whatever can be used.<sup>39</sup> In this regard, Ja'far uses his channel to attract the younger generation and use younger style, popular slang, and their general culture. He also optimizes the media algorithm system in his YouTube channel to boost the views.

## 1. Using the Right Keyword or Hashtag

Keywords are the main capital to make a video easy to find for new viewers. It gives subscribers a kind of feed where they can directly access the channel.<sup>40</sup> In uploading videos, Ja'far does not use keywords but rather the hashtag #KultumPemudaTersesat. The hashtags can help viewers find videos when they search for specific hashtags.

## 2. Frequent and Consistent Video Uploading

Consistent uploading of videos is a step to optimize YouTube's algorithm for more viewers. Consistency, schedules, and

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<sup>37</sup> Heather A. Horst and Daniel Miller, eds., *Digital Anthropology*, English ed (London; New York: Berg, 2012)

<sup>38</sup> Wai Weng, "THE ART OF *DAKWAH*."

<sup>39</sup> Batubara, "Media Ecology Theory," *Journal Iqra*, 2014, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Araghadana, "Cara Riset Keyword Youtube Paling Jitu," Domainsia, 2021, <https://www.domainsia.com/tips/cara-riset-keyword-youtube>.

themes can help build professionalism in viewers' minds.<sup>41</sup> Ja'far's videos are tied into a consistent theme. Thus, his channel gets the following benefits:

- a) The viewers perceive Jeda Nulis as a credible channel for its consistent theme.
- b) Jeda Nulis becomes a reference for discussing the *da'wa* in the digital era.
- c) The viewers search for the names Habib Ja'far, *Pemuda Tersesat*, and Jeda Nulis as keywords.
- d) The viewers explore other video content on Jeda Nulis channel and add number of views for each of the videos.
- e) Youtube recommends content from the channel as the best video sections and thus attracts more viewers.

### **3. Being Interactive with Viewers or Subscribers**

Interaction with subscribers will build intimacy and attract new viewers to see the positive value of the content.<sup>42</sup> Habib Ja'far interacts with viewers verbally through video content. He accepts questions in the comments sections of his YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter accounts. Habib Ja'far does not advertise his *da'wah* content, ensuring viewers can enjoy videos without interruption. By asking viewers to comment and apologizing about music issues, the viewers feel valued and cared. His attitude helps him build what Slama termed "mediated intimacy" between Islamic preachers and their followers. Slama's intimacy theory, by which a preacher uses a digital communication app to connect directly to his followers,<sup>43</sup> is manifested in his attitude promoting a trendy and effective form of the everyday embodiment of Islamic piety.

### **4. Interesting Themes and Actual Issues**

Combining *da'wa* with modern things is not new among the Indonesian Muslim community. Rakhmani, in her research about mainstreaming Islam in Indonesia, shows that the development of entertaining *da'wa* began as private television stations emerged

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<sup>41</sup> Wijayanti, "Belajar Algoritma," Niagahoster, 2020, <https://www.niagahoster.co.id/blog/algoritma-youtube/?amp>.

<sup>42</sup> Wijayanti.

<sup>43</sup> Slama, "Social Media and Islamic Practice."

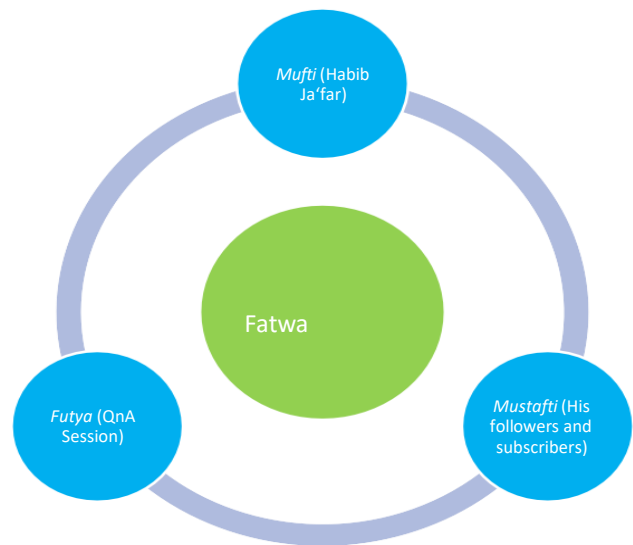
around the 2000s. She called it the supermarket *da'wa*,<sup>44</sup> referring to a time when TVs opened up commercial space to promote goods with creative and entertainment ways to attract consumers' attention. Similarly, religious leaders and preachers use the space to widen their popularity and increase their *da'wa* viewers. Then, *da'wa* has been transforming into creative models like *da'wa*tainment, reality shows, and *da'wa* competition shows. In addition, there are also *da'wa* music and *sinetron religi* (religious soap opera)

Recently, the transformation has widened the space and accessibility. Social media platforms are becoming the new space to reach a greater audience. In this case, Habib Ja'far mainly uses YouTube for *da'wa*. In addition, he adapts to youth culture by making his *da'wa* entertaining and engaging to all viewers, including younger people and non-Muslims. He arranges his videos' themes, titles, materials, and guest speakers. Furthermore, his ability to see the opportunity for themes reachable by youth and non-Muslim community causes increasing viewers on his YouTube channel. Thus, his religious education background and effective social media management make him popular as a new religious authority.

Moreover, the Q&A mechanism in his social media is similar to the conventional fatwa process (*fatwa*) but different regarding social media utility. In this context, we can position Habib Ja'far as a *mufti* (the scholar who gives religious advice) and his subscribers as a *mustafti* (the people seeking religious advice).

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<sup>44</sup> Inaya Rakhmani, *Mainstreaming Islam in Indonesia: Television, Identity, and the Middle Class* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54880-1>.



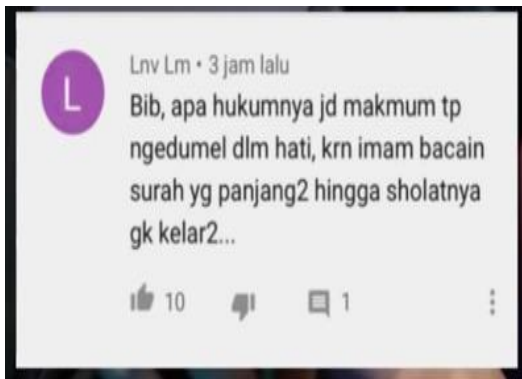
The pictures below are examples of how online fun-*fatwas* take action:



Picture. 1



Picture. 2



Picture. 3



Picture. 4



Picture. 5

In picture 1, some people pose questions in his YouTube comment section. The first question reads: “If merit and sin are balanced in the afterlife, will there be extra time?” He analogizes merit and sin to scoring in a football match. If the result is a draw, then there will be extra time to know the winner. The second question reads: “If we breathe next to the corpse, are we considered arrogant?” The two questions above show that the youth likes a *da’wa* model combining piety, pleasure, and rationality. These questions are a combination of jokes and ignorance of religious issues. For this reason, the preacher must have a good sense of humor, religious comprehension, rationality, and understandable analogies. In picture 2, someone asks: “When a Muslim gives alms, he is sincere (*ikhlas*), but when he is broke, he regrets. Does the good deed make him a sincere Muslim?”

Then, the picture 3, picture 4, and picture 5 are about law (*fiqh*). In picture 3, his follower asks, “Am I right or wrong to grumble when being a *makmum* because the *imam* recites long verses during prayers?” Meanwhile, picture 4 is a kind of dark joke: “Am I right or wrong to win a soccer betting and donate the money to orphans?” Picture 5 poses a satirical joke “Bib, we know that the government has a lot of debts. Will the citizens be responsible for these debts in the afterlife?”



Based on the Q&A analysis, Habib Ja'far has successfully built "mediated intimacy".<sup>45</sup> He succeeded in being a new religious authority among the younger generation and the millennials by providing a free space to express their questions without fear of being judged. He effectively showed a rational and casual side of religion. He presented the legal issues (*fiqh*) in a fun way. His humorous and logical answers do not reduce faith and law's sacredness (*fiqh*).

## Conclusion

The combination of pop culture, youthfulness, and trends in *da'wa* is relevant for urban middle-class Muslims and youths.<sup>46</sup> In Habib Ja'far's case, his adaptability to youth culture and social media has made him a new religious authority. His good management of theme decisions and speakers' selection significantly contributes to the wider dissemination of religious teaching. His *da'wa* model using social media by collaborating with various speakers from different perspectives can engage a wider audience and make *da'wa* more entertaining, accepted, and informative toward the fun and easy side of religion without hurting its sacredness.

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<sup>45</sup> Slama, "Social Media and Islamic Practice."

<sup>46</sup> Yanwar Pribadi, "Pop and True Islam in Urban Pengajian: The Making of Religious Authority," in *The New Santri Challenges to Traditional Religious Authority in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2020).

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