

## **Mediating Algorithm Mediating Da'wa: The New Preacher and Optimization of Social Media for Da'wa in the Case of Habib Ja'far**

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### ***Abstract:***

*Habib Husein Ja'far, a famous hadrami preacher, is well known for his da'wa which promoting Islam Cinta and his style of da'wa which is readily accepted by various circles for his activeness in using various social media platforms to spread his message. As of 2019 when Covid 19 raising his followers on social media is also increasing, he had 1.1 million followers on Instagram, one million followers on Tik-Tok, and also one million subscribers on his Youtube channel named "Jeda Nulis" making him one of the leading social media preachers in Indonesia today. Based on online research and digital observation, this research argues that the algorithms and technical limitations of social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Tik-Tok, and Youtube impact to optimization da'wa on social media. This research will re-question the argument that da'wa in social media considered superficial and pragmatic due to being conducted by youth Muslims with no religious credential background. This research will focus on how Habib Husein Ja'far, a Hadhrami preacher, descendants of the prophet and has good religious educational background who preaches the da'wa over all social media platforms optimizes his da'wa on social media by utilizing logic, algorithms, and the technical limitations of each platform.*

**Keywords:** *digital da'wa, social media, religious authority*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The digital era provides both challenges and opportunities for preachers to be more sensitive to new technologies and media. In the case of contemporary Indonesian da'wa many actors have emerged marked by the active presence of Indonesian Muslim youth on various social media platforms (Nisa, 2018). The media have been integrated into the workings of almost all types of social institutions while having as much importance in society as in communication in private settings. Through this process of social integration, the media exerts influence and involvement in the transformation of social institutions, including religion (Hjarvard, 2011). It phenomenom also made a new fragmentation of

*da'wa*, any activities that are related to spread Islam and Islamic messages now can be classified as a *da'wa*. Internet platforms and social media have opened up opportunities for preachers in Indonesia to carry out *da'wah* broadly and exercise religious authority in defining moral, political, and cultural expectations for Muslims. Barendregt state that Indonesian Muslims have embraced social media in their daily religious lives, where we find great creativity and variety in the use of smartphones and apps (Horst & Miller, 2012). As Muslims increasingly turn to online *da'wa* content for religious and moral guidance, Islamic preachers, as a result, have a greater capacity to influence the inner emotions and ethical beliefs of their pious Muslim subjects.

Recent studies on the use of social media in the preaching of *da'wa* mostly focus on the idea of how social media makes it easy for free speaking to make young people as digital natives who have an attractive outlook, an attractive appearance or an attractive voice, creative on using social media and have not strong credentials on religious education conducting *da'wa* over the digital society. Weng, for example studied about How Felix Siau, the convert preacher, creatively uses social media and visual images to propagate radical ideology among young Indonesian muslim. He said instead of having credential religious background, social media preacher need to equip themselves with attractive communication skills and media strategies (Wai Weng, 2018). While, Nisa in her article focused on Instagram *da'wa* mostly conducted by youth muslim considered that the creativity of Instagram *da'wah* content creators in producing soft or light *da'wah* is accompanied by how they practice what they share and believe. The combination of their gradual mastery of basic religious knowledge, their inspiring journey of hijrah, and their ethical disposition empowered them to attract followers (Nisa, 2018).

To date, no scholarly work focuses on how the algorithms and technical limitations of social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Tik-Tok and Youtube impact to optimization *da'wa* on the social media. This research will re-question the argument that is *da'wa* in social media that is considered to be superficial and pragmatic due to being conducted by youth Muslims with no credential religious background? Then, what if there is a social media preacher who has a religious education credential that preaches on the same platform? Could there be other factors such as technical limitations on certain social media platforms that make *da'wa* content on social media more general, superficial and pragmatic? What if a platform that has limited algorithms is used as a first step to attract attention, then is given a more complete understanding by providing the full version of the content on a larger platform like YouTube?.

As his activeness in using social media for preaching the *da'wa* now Habib Ja'far had one million followers on Instagram, five hundred thousand followers on Twitter, one million followers on Tik Tok, and one million followers on his Youtube channel named *Jeda Nulis*. This research uses qualitative method based on online research and digital observation to gain the data by taking Habib Husein Ja'far as representative a social media preacher who active to promoting *da'wa* over all social media platform. This article aims to completes the previous studies regarding the definition and construction of social media

preacher and how of the good understanding to the logics of media, algorithms, and technical limitations make a significant improvement towards *da'wa*.

## DISCUSSION

### Transforming Authority: Between Pre-Digital and Digital Da'wa

Da'wa is the most common term to define the activities relates to preaching delivered by muslim scholars. The conventional model of da'wa is conveying the religious messages or advices oratory face to face with the audiences (Basit, 2013). Usually this activity happen at certain places such as mosque, *majelis taklim*, *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), and others religious institution (Burhanuddin, 2004). Considering da'wa is one way for Muslim scholars to gain authority (Feillard, 2010) this activity also continues to undergo transformation from time to time according to the context and trends that arise in society. At the beginning the actors of da'wa are dominated by *Ulama* (Muslim scholar who have strong roots in Islamic education) (Nisa, 2018), conveyed orally on Friday sermons or any religious gatherings (Feillard, 2010), need a specific place (Burhanuddin, 2004) and the popularity of preacher is measured based on expertise on Islamic knowledge and capability to answer the question on religious affairs from the society (Kaptein, 2004).

One thing we can't deny is the role of technology (in a broad sense) accompanying the development of human civilization. The long history of humans is always read through technological developments in their time, for instance, the people who use stones as life aids are referred to as stone age people, as well as the bronze age, iron age, and until now what we call the digital era. From this we can see that the development of human civilization is always related to the technology which used by human. Likewise in the context of the spread of religion. Technology is often the gateway for religious missionaries to enter and spread them religious though. This is as stated by Lim on his introduction about *charismatic technology* in the late 18th century. Christian missionaries benefited from the entry of trading ships between important centers surrounding the Indian Ocean and the South China. This is also the same as the process of entering Islam into Indonesia, according to most anthropologists through trade routes (Lim, 2009).

This phenomenon also occurs in the realm of da'wah, the emergence of internet cafes in 1996 became the initial foothold of accessibility for Indonesian society. Indonesian muslim use the internet for seeking religious advice, fatwa, and things relates to religious affairs so called as fenomena "shopping fatwa" and "googling a Kiai" (Hosen, 2008). Apart from the easiness to access all information including religion, the internet also makes it easy for anyone related to anything including religion. Da'wa which was previously conveyed by Ulama (Muslim scholars) regarding Islamic knowledge after the presence of social media is transformed into everything if it contains goodness then it is called as da'wa.

Different with previous da'wa, the actors of digital da'wa mostly are muslim youth as a digital native who are mostly youth without a traditional Islamic boarding school background. They conduct the da'wa by creatively using social media to present their religious agenda with youthful taste and expressions related to youth culture (Nisa, 2018).

In addition, the da'wa that is carried out is not only limited to in the form of oratory or monologue from the preacher to the audience. This kind of da'wa offers a variety of da'wa models that are packaged creatively such as visual da'wa such as videos, podcasts, memes, comics and animation (Wai Weng, 2018). The more creative and attractive the da'wa content is given, the more engagement the preacher gets.

Slama argues that digital platforms have helped form "mediated intimacy" between Islamic preachers and their followers, where preachers use digital communication apps to directly contact their followers and introduce them to trendy, affective concepts to promote the everyday embodiment of Islamic piety. Slama focuses his analysis on the idea of "filling" the heart," a popular concept used by preachers and their followers to characterize their intimate personal da'wah engagements, where direct communication is itself considered an act of manifesting piety (Slama, 2017). This shows the power of digital platforms in expanding the influence of forums and da'wa figures in Indonesia, especially the internet enabling them to promote religious teachings on a mass scale and connect more closely with a wider audience. Apart from that, one of the conveniences provided by the digital world into the da'wa sphere is the ease of doing da'wa anywhere at any time and no need for a specific place or time. However, it is different from conventional da'wa, in digital da'wa popularity is not measured based on expertise on Islamic knowledge but is measured by the number of followers. This phenomenon then led to the fragmentation of the da'wa sphere and emerge the new religious authorities as we know them as celebrity ustadz, influencer ustadz, and social media preacher (Akmaliah, 2020).

The virtual da'wa activism also challenge the traditional authority. Based on research conducted by Noorhaidi, young people born in the last 25 years range are very close to digital culture (Hasan, 2018) . In addition, these millennial generations, especially students are vulnerable to exposure to radicalism, extremism and terrorism that are not only dispersed through the digital world, but also the literature consumed, both in the context of formal education and popular reading. The ideology of Islamism that is embraced in books and religious reading material is widespread among students and students. Millennial generations are more vulnerable to the ideology of extreme or radical Islamism in the textbook. The rise of religious content content in social media is also very influential on the direction of the development of Muslim generations, the impact can be seen in the last two years how the Muslim community is involved in issues of political issues that are mostly disseminated through social media. Da'wa on social media also creates a new habitus of the Indonesia muslims, namely the tendency of go beyond boundaries. In a sense, the Muslims (social media users) have autonomous authority in determining their religious tastes and political choices (Said, 2020).

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

Husein Ja'far Al Hadar well known as Habib Husein is a writer, academic and also a preacher whose popularity has recently increased among the Indonesian people due to he is very active for promoting peacefull Islam on his social media account. He was born in June

21, 1998 at Bondowoso, East Java. Husein Ja'far was organically educated on traditional Islamic background, after completing his junior and senior high school at Bondowoso, then he continued his education at the Al-Ma'had Al-Islami Islamic Boarding School Bangil, East Java, then graduated as a Bachelor of Islamic Philosophy at the University State Islam Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta by majoring in Islamic Faith and Philosophy. Then in 2020 he earned his master's degree majoring in Quranic Studies at the same university. Habib Ja'far is also the author of Islamic books published by Gramedia & Mizan, writer for the mass media around Islam and he also a speaker on Islam in some National TV (n.d.). Unlike others Habib preacher who uses Arabic attributes such as a turban and robe, Habib Husein has a distinctive appearance using a t-shirt, jeans, and a white cap on his head. According to him, to convey Islam in a relaxed and flexible way must begin by not creating a distance between the preacher and the audience in various aspects, including the performance of style (Ja'far, 2022b).

### ***Promoting Islam as Religion of Love***

The task of a preacher is to convey good news to mankind. Islam came to convey glad tidings not sorrow or fear. Islam makes it easy for its people, not to make it difficult for its people. In the video entitled how to preach like the Prophet, Habib Husein gave an example of when Islam had not yet arrived, women were only used as objects, they did not get proper recognition, then Islam came and raised the status of women as equal to men. Appointed Bilal Bin Rabbah a minority as a *muazzin* (elected person on duty in the mosque to for prayer) But what often happens now is that Islam is an exclusive religion, at its truest, uses violence and spreads fear (Ja'far, 2018a). There are two categories of preaching according to Habib Husein, namely, first those who preach to people who are already Muslim. Second, those who preach to those who are Muslims but only a formality and to those who are not yet Muslim. Habib Husein positioned himself as a preacher to the second group. Spreading the teachings of Islam not only in the recitation and on the pulpit but also closer to those who want to learn religion, positioning themselves as equal to that person and not trying to be patronizing. Trying to understand the position of people who want to learn Islamic teachings no matter what their background is (Ja'far, 2022a).

### ***Tolerance in Islam***

In the video, entitled "Becoming a Muslim Minority in Europe", the speakers are Gita Savitri and Paulus Partohap, who currently live in Germany. Talking about how the two of them live in Germany being a minority because they are Muslims. The main key is mutual tolerance, respect for each other's religions. Living in Indonesia as a Muslim is a luxury because being the majority, carrying out worship has many facilities. If you are abroad, especially if the majority of the population is not Muslim, you just have to struggle to find a decent place to worship. According to Habib Husein, a good generation of Muslims is idolizing intellectuals, Muslims who are modernist, Islamic but also live in a social sphere. Because before being referred to as Muslims, they were first called human

beings (Ja'far, 2019a). The attitude of tolerance was also seen when Habib Husein discussed with stand-up comedy sources Coki and Muslims about tolerance during the month of Ramadan. Coki, a Christian, asked about fasting. Habib explained that fasting is not only in Islam but has started since the time of the prophet Adam. Even in other religions, there is fasting even though the procedure is different, but this can be the basis of tolerance between religions. Then it is not permissible to force the stalls to close during the day during the month of Ramadan to respect the fasting Muslims, because the fasting Muslims must also respect those who are not fasting (Ja'far, 2018b). Hearing Habib Husein's explanation made Coki Pardede gain new knowledge about Islam, that's the reason why he was comfortable when talking with Habib Husein.

### ***Making Da'wa Easy and Simple***

Conveying the truth of religion (da'wah) basically invites, like Gus Mus said, preaching must be no worse than the way a bus driver invites passengers. In a good way, beautiful, not in a bad way let alone violence. Prophet Muhammad invites in a good way there are still many who oppose. The task of the *da'i* (preacher) is to convey after that it is up to the *mad'u* (audience) to follow or refuse. At the time of the Prophet Muhammad people were interested in studying Islam not because of the words but the behavior and character of the Prophet. As the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad which reads: "A good Muslim is one whose right and left neighbors are not disturbed by his hands or his tongue." A belief is not held in a short time but through a long process of contemplation. Everything is instant, then the effect is also only that time and does not last a long time. In fact, noble character is not static but dynamic, because it always expresses itself in human activities and dynamics, which are harmonious or harmonious in relation to the overall scope of life. According to Habib Husein, the most important character is morality to people who have no morals. To show a positive example, to provide correct information that Islamic teachings are good. Like when Prophet Muhammad was spat on and hated by the Quraish disbelievers but the prophet did not retaliate with hatred. Muslims in Indonesia are the majority group, it is natural to protect those who are minorities instead of asking for privilege and oppressing minorities. The importance of good morals can affect our worship, it is best to worship but have bad morals such as oppressing others, lying, deceiving others, betraying then all the deeds of worship that are done are useless (Ja'far, 2019b).

In the Qur'an, Allah not only mentions Islam is a religion by His side but also teaches to keep asking Him for guidance and to be humble and not stop looking. When Habib Husein talked with musician Vikri Rasta, he said that preaching could be done through many media, one of which was through music. There is a wrong assumption about music that it is forbidden and forbidden to listen to it. It is permissible to use music as a medium of da'wah. It's a shame that those who were originally musicians because they wanted to preach instead left the music world, he should have used the platform he had to preach (Ja'far, 2019c). Emigration is indeed to go in a better direction, but that does not

mean that before the emigration is considered all wrong. One of the reasons why videos are watched a lot is because of the way they convey the message in an easy-to-understand way. When he talked with sources with different backgrounds, Habib Husein tried to see from the sources' point of view. Using an approach according to the background of the informant. Habib Husein did not hesitate to go to a new place and adjust the clothes he wore so he could communicate comfortably without anyone feeling intimidated.

### **Mediating Da'wa with Algorithm, Logic, and Technical Limitation of Social Media**

Since the media is something that cannot be separated from people's lives today a popular preacher needs to equip himself with communication skills and media strategy. In other words, apart from knowledge and substance, form and appearance are an inseparable part of the growing Islamic da'wah sector in Indonesia. Different forms of media and shaped by various Muslim discourses, practices and figures. While electronic media such as television and radio first gave rise to celebrity speakers, social media such as Tik-Tok, Twitter, Instagram and Youtube now provide additional ways to become popular. In this case by taking Habib Husein as a model of da'wa we look that more expertise preacher with the algorithm of social media more influence they are over the society.

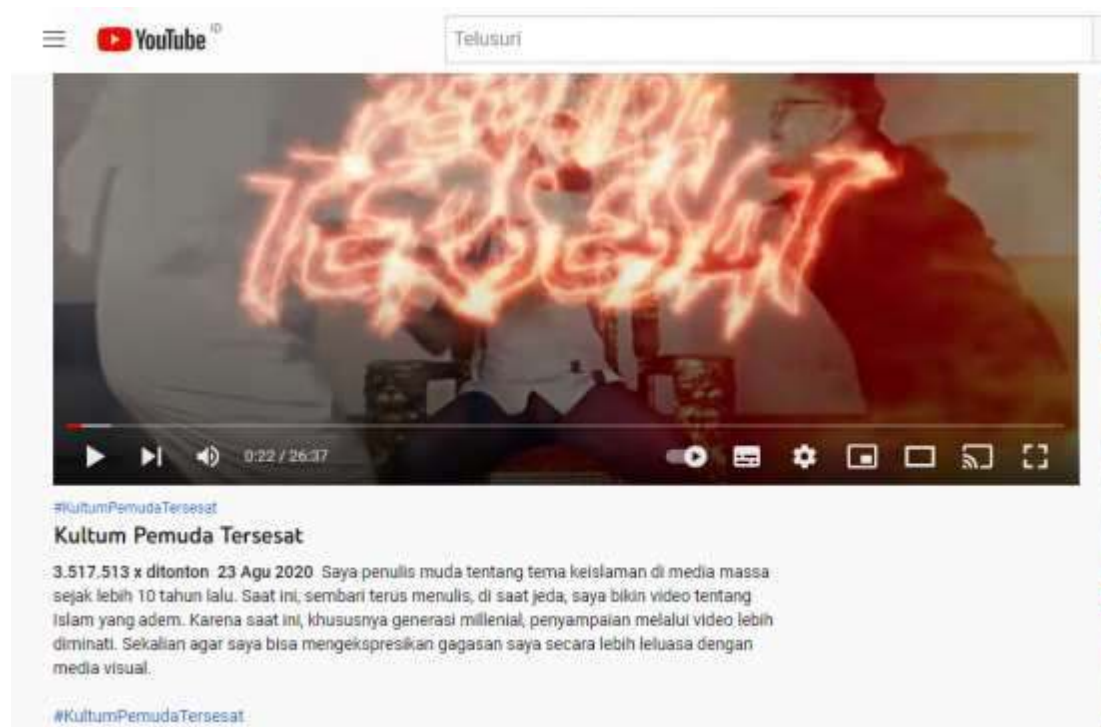
Habib Ja'far understands that society's attachment to social media brings benefits to spreading Islamic da'wa. Being active on using social media for preaching the Islamic messages Habib Ja'far created Jeda Nulis account because according to him the *da'wa* in the conventional way no longer effective. Another problem then arose when it was not only Habib Ja'far who used YouTube as a propaganda medium. The solution from Habib Ja'far is to make da'wah content directly segmented to the younger generation. This segmentation function seeks to attract the younger generation who have been attached to YouTube to their channel, namely Jeda Nulis. According to McLuhan, we need a medium so that humans can be bound or influenced by information, so we use whatever can be used (Batubara, 2014). Habib Ja'far uses a medium to attract the younger generation, namely by dressing like young people, using slang, and being familiar with today's young generation. On the other hand, Habib Ja'far also really studied and optimized the all the social media algorithm system and linking it to his Youtube channel. The Youtube algorithm has a very high influence in determining the number of views on video content. This was exploited by Habib Ja'far so that the viewers on his Youtube channel, Jeda Nulis, achieved quite a lot of viewers and grew significantly.

#### ***Using the Right Keyword or Hashtag***

Keywords or keywords will be included as part of YouTube's Search Engine Optimization (SEO) so that videos are recommended on the main YouTube page. Keywords are the main capital so that videos are easy to find, before viewers know the name of the channel. When a channel already has a community of viewers or fans, they will search directly for the name of the intended channel (Araghadana, 2021). Habib Ja'far in

uploading videos does not use keywords, but uses the hashtag #KultumPemudaTersesat. Using hashtags can help viewers find videos when they search for specific hashtags.

Habib Ja'far's proof did not use keywords, namely the Google Chrome application as a research tool to access videos installed with the existence of Youtube Tags. The result is that Habib Ja'far's video did not find keywords or tags.



### ***Consistent in Uploading Content***

Consistently to continue to upload video works is a step to optimize YouTube's algorithm in achieving high views on each video content. Consistent with video upload schedules and themes can form branding that can be interesting and stick in the minds of viewers (Wijayanti, 2020). Habib Ja'far's content consistently uploads videos with the same theme. The impact of consistently uploading content with the same theme, namely:

- a) Jeda Nulis channel is considered by YouTube users as a credible channel because it focuses on discussing one theme.
- b) Jeda Nulis channel becomes a reference for discussion topics about da'wah in the digital era.
- c) YouTube uses the name Habib Ja'far, the content of the Lost Youth Culture and the Pause Writing channel as keywords.
- d) Viewers can explore other video content from the Jeda Nulis channel so that they can increase viewers on other videos.
- e) YouTube Content Pause Writing is included in the Best of YouTube section, so YouTube recommended content to attract more viewers.



### ***Interactive with Viewers or Subscribers***

Interacting with viewers or subscribers to maintain good relations with subscribers, indirectly new viewers will see the positive value of the interaction of a content creator (Wijayanti, 2020). Habib Ja'far interacted with viewers verbally through video content to ask questions through the comments column or other social media accounts such as Instagram or Twitter. Habib Ja'far tries not to advertise his da'wah content so that viewers can enjoy videos without interruption. Asking viewers to comment or apologize regarding music has an impact on Habib Ja'far's assessment that they feel valued and cared. What Habib Ja'far do is in line with Slama argument about that digital platforms have helped form "mediated intimacy" between Islamic preachers and their followers, where preachers use digital communication apps to directly contact their followers and introduce them to trendy, affective concepts to promote the everyday embodiment of Islamic piety (Slama, 2017).

### ***Interesting Themes and Actual Issues***

The ability to combine da'wah with modern things is actually not a new phenomenon among the Indonesian Muslim community. Rakhmani on her research about mainstreaming Islam in Indonesia shows that the development of entertaining da'wa began with the proliferation of private television stations around the 2000s or what he called the phenomenon of the da'wah supermarket (Rakhmani, 2016). Commercial television stations provided the space to promote goods to a market with creative and entertainment ways to attract consumers' attention, this concept was then used by religious leaders to increase their da'wah capacity. This phenomenon was then followed by new models of da'wah such as da'wahtainment, supernatural reality shows, da'wah competition shows, da'wah music, and *sinetron religi* (Islamic television drama).

The presence of various social media in this case also provides a new way for doing da'wah, Habib Ja'far utilize the Youtube platform for doing his da'wa. In this case he also very concerned for making da'wah more entertaining and engaging to all of circumstance such as youth and even non muslim. He arranges the themes, titles, sources, and guest speaker for the content on his Youtube channel. The high number of views on uploaded videos on the Jeda Nulis Youtube channel is also due to Habib Ja'far's ability to see opportunities for themes that can be reached by almost all groups, including youth generation even non-muslim community.

Theme	Video Title	Guest Star
Islam and Moderation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Islam religion of love</li> <li>• Islam is not religion of war</li> </ul>	Habib Ja'far

Da'wa with Controversial Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jeda Ngobrol (Talking about peace) with Irfan Amalee the founder of peace generation community</li> <li>• “From Drugs to Tarekat” with Abdel Achrian one of famous presenter</li> <li>• Talking about Islam, music, and da'wah</li> </ul>	Irfan Amalee, Abdel Achrian, Fikri Rasta
Da'wa to Youth Generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Islam in west Indonesia</li> <li>• Da'wah of Lost Youth (Kultum Pemuda Tersesat)</li> </ul>	Tretan Muslim, Coki Pardede, Arie Kriting, Kiki Cjr, Uus.
Interfaith Da'wa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tolerance in Preaching and Preaching Tolerance Temu: Islam and Buddha</li> </ul>	Pastor Yerry Pattinasarany, Biksu Suryadi, Hong Tjhin

The combination of da'wah, pop culture, youthfulness and cool trend is one of the strengths of the da'wah method which is very relevant, especially for urban middle class Muslims. (Pribadi, 2020). Habib Ja'far in this case was able to concoct those of things in the da'wa that he conveyed, the accuracy in selecting themes and invited speakers proved to be quite effective in increasing the capacity of da'wah and making da'wah more easily accepted in a wider community. In the future this kind of da'wah model will have great prospects by using social media as a space and by collaborating with various speaker from various backgrounds and prespectives not only from Islamic tradition will engage a wider audience and make da'wa more entertaining and accepted.

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, we can see how Habib Ja'far as a preacher with a credential religious education succeeded in utilizing social media platforms to support his da'wah activities. Instead of using social media as a tool, he also studied and mastered quite well the social media platform logic and algorithms. As evidenced is by the use of hashtags, intense interaction with viewers, the accuracy of selecting actual themes, and the ability to collaborate making his da'wah more effective, entertaining and acceptable to various groups. Therefore, learning from Habib Ja'far case brings us to the conclusion that social media preachers besides should to have a religious credential background also should have the capability and good knowledge in terms of algorithms, logics of media and also technical limitations. In this research, Husein Ja'far proves that with a good understanding of those things, the da'wa conveyed becomes more developed and gets more engagement over the society. This research at least provides a small overview of how social media algorithms are significantly affected to the da'wah sphere, but this article in this case only takes one specific case, therefore to strengthen the argument of this article it is very possible to do further research regarding digital Islam to support or criticize this research.

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