

MEDIATIZATION OF PESANTREN DA'WAH ON TIKTOK LIVE: NEGOTIATING RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY WITHIN DIGITAL PLATFORM LOGIC

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Abstract : Social media has increasingly repositioned pesantren-based religious instruction from closed, face-to-face gatherings into open, platform-mediated spaces, a shift clearly visible in the TikTok Live broadcasts hosted by Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wal Karomah (Maktuba DWK) in Kraksaan, Probolinggo. Employing a qualitative case-study design, this research gathered data through non-participant observation, digital documentation, in-depth interviews, and analysis of audience interaction, then analyzed the material using the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), with trustworthiness confirmed through triangulation. The findings reveal that pesantren preaching is being mediatized, moving away from single-source authority toward participatory, dialogical exchange; that TikTok's recommendation algorithm functions as a gatekeeping mechanism regulating the reach of religious broadcasts; and that religious authority is continually renegotiated among the pesantren, its audience, and the platform. The study proposes a Pesantren Algorithmic Da'wah Ecosystem model, extending mediatization-of-religion theory within the Indonesian pesantren context and offering practical insight for digitally engaged religious institutions.

Keywords: Mediatization, Pesantren Da'wah, Tiktok Live, Religious Authority, Platform Logic

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Introduction

Digital technology has reshaped the way religious messages are produced, circulated, and received across the globe, and Indonesia is no exception to this broader transformation (Effendy, 2019). The internet and social media have done more than widen the reach of religious communication; they have restructured the mechanisms through which da'wah content is conceived, packaged, and consumed. Religious instruction once relied heavily on majelis taklim, mosques, pesantren, and terrestrial broadcast media, yet contemporary da'wah increasingly unfolds in digital environments that dissolve the constraints of physical proximity and synchronous time (Effendy, 2019). Consequently, the effectiveness of da'wah can no longer be attributed solely to the relationship between a preacher and a congregation; it is equally contingent upon the technological infrastructure that carries, filters, and reshapes the message along the way.

Indonesia occupies a prominent position among nations with extensive internet adoption. The 2024 survey released by the Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia (APJII) found that internet penetration had reached 79.5 percent, equivalent to roughly 221.5 million users, with younger generations forming the largest share (Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia [APJII], 2024). This pervasive connectivity has turned social media into a new arena for constructing religious discourse, where Islamic teachings are increasingly disseminated through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, each with its own conventions for how meaning is packaged and circulated.

TikTok, in particular, has undergone an unusually rapid evolution, moving from a platform associated primarily with entertainment toward one that hosts education, promotion, and religious outreach in equal measure. Its live-streaming feature allows preachers and audiences to interact in real time, generating a communicative rhythm considerably more responsive than that found in conventional da'wah media (Nasrullah, 2022). This shift signals a departure from one-directional transmission toward a dialogical, collaborative mode of communication in which audiences are no longer confined to the role of passive listeners; instead, they actively participate in shaping a broadcast's meaning through comments, questions, and instantaneous reactions.

The theoretical lens most suited to interpreting this transformation is the mediatization of religion, a framework introduced by Hjarvard (2008), who contends that media institutions have evolved into agents of social change that do more than transmit religious content—they actively condition how religious life is practiced and understood within society. As mediatization advances, religious practice gradually accommodates itself to the logic of media, which privileges visibility, popularity, rapid circulation, and sustained audience engagement (Hjarvard, 2013). Da'wah conducted through social media, therefore, cannot be examined apart from the specific characteristics of the platform hosting the exchange.

The legal foundation for religious communication conducted through digital channels in Indonesia is provided by Law Number 19 of 2016 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions, as subsequently revised by Law Number 1 of 2024. These regulations authorize citizens to use information technology responsibly for disseminating information and cultivating public discourse, an accommodation that aligns with the long-standing conception of da'wah as an enterprise of conveying religious messages through whatever communicative means suit a given era (Aziz, 2019).

Recent scholarship has devoted growing attention to digital da'wah on social media platforms. Makalalag et al. (2025) demonstrate that TikTok has become fertile ground for mediatized da'wah practice, wherein visual composition, emotionally charged narrative, and digital symbolism substantially shape how audiences experience religious content. Their findings indicate that media no longer merely relays religious messages but actively participates in constructing how religion is represented and consumed within digital publics (Makalalag et al., 2025), reinforcing the claim that present-day da'wah cannot be disentangled from the platform logic underlying its circulation.

A complementary line of inquiry from Naamy (2023) observes that the rise of new media has produced novel configurations of religious authority within Indonesia. Authority to preach is no longer the exclusive preserve of figures whose legitimacy derives from formal pesantren training; it can equally be cultivated through skillful content management, deliberate closeness with an audience, and fluency in navigating platform algorithms (Naamy, 2023). This suggests that social media has opened a new arena in which the boundaries of religious authority are perpetually renegotiated within the digital public sphere.

Research specifically directed at TikTok-based da'wah, conducted by Susanti et al. (2025), further shows that the platform is particularly effective at reaching younger audiences owing to its visual immediacy, brevity, interactivity, and shareability, although their work concentrates mainly on messaging effectiveness and value representation, leaving the live-streaming feature and its real-time exchange comparatively underexamined.

This gap becomes especially visible when observing the TikTok Live practice of Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Wal Karomah, known as Maktuba DWK, in Kraksaan, Probolinggo. As a pesantren that has embraced digital media with notable intensity, Maktuba DWK relies on TikTok's live-streaming feature to deliver religious study sessions, recitations of classical texts, and glimpses of daily pesantren life to a broad public. This practice illustrates not merely the pesantren's technological adaptation but also an ongoing negotiation between its religious authority and the logic of a platform organized around algorithmic curation, audience interactivity, and the pursuit of visibility a phenomenon that vividly captures how established religious authority contends with an increasingly dominant digital culture.

Existing studies on digital da'wah have tended to emphasize the general effectiveness of social media as a preaching medium or patterns of audience engagement, while paying comparatively little attention to how mediatization specifically unfolds through live-streaming, or to how religious authority is negotiated within a space governed by platform mechanics. The present study addresses this gap by examining the mediatization of pesantren da'wah as it occurs through Maktuba DWK's TikTok Live broadcasts, with attention to the interplay between religious authority and digital platform logic, thereby contributing a fresh perspective to religious-mediatization theory within the Indonesian pesantren context.

Three research questions guide this inquiry: how does the mediatization of pesantren da'wah manifest within Maktuba DWK's TikTok Live broadcasts; how does TikTok's algorithmic logic shape pesantren da'wah communication in digital space; and how is religious authority negotiated among the pesantren, its audience, and the platform during live broadcasts? Accordingly, the study traces the process of mediatization as it unfolds in practice, uncovers how algorithmic logic influences the construction and circulation of da'wah messages, and characterizes the forms of authority negotiation that emerge, producing a richer understanding of how religion, media, and technology intersect within pesantren-based digital da'wah.

Building on these considerations, this study argues that the sustainability of pesantren da'wah in the digital era hinges not solely on scholarly credibility but equally on the capacity to negotiate among religious values, audience participation, and platform logic. A da'wah model suited to contemporary conditions therefore balances pesantren authority, digital literacy, and technological adaptability, ensuring that religious messages retain their authenticity even as they reach an increasingly expansive and heterogeneous public.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach realized through a case-study design, chosen because the inquiry seeks an in-depth understanding of how pesantren da'wah is mediatized within digital space, particularly through Maktuba DWK's TikTok Live broadcasts (Moleong, 2017). The case-study design was preferred because the research centers on a single, well-defined unit of analysis the Maktuba DWK TikTok account treated as representative of pesantren da'wah practice in digital space, which allows the phenomenon to be understood holistically within its social, cultural, and technological setting (Yin, 2018). The research was situated on the TikTok platform, focusing on the Maktuba DWK (Darullughah Wal Karomah) account in Kraksaan, Probolinggo, with the communicative practice occurring through the live-streaming feature including interaction among the host, santri, and audience serving as the object of study.

Primary data were obtained through direct observation of Maktuba DWK's Live TikTok sessions, comprising broadcast recordings and comment interactions, while secondary data were drawn from scholarly literature, books, journals, and relevant

digital documentation. Data collection combined non-participant observation, digital documentation, and in-depth interviews with the account administrator, participating santri, and active audience members (Sugiyono, 2019). The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Validity was secured through source, technique, and time triangulation, while research ethics were upheld by safeguarding informants' privacy and handling digital data responsibly.

Results and Discussion

Mediatization of Pesantren Da'wah within Maktuba DWK's TikTok Live

The findings indicate that da'wah practice within Maktuba DWK's TikTok Live has undergone a substantial epistemic and communicative transformation, moving from an institutional, conventional preaching space toward a digital space sustained by platform logic (Hjarvard, 2013). This transformation reshapes not only the technical dimension of the medium but also the structure of the relationship binding the preacher, the message, and the audience together.

In conventional da'wah, religious messages tend to travel through one-directional communication anchored in the singular authority of the kiai or ustaz as the legitimate source of religious knowledge (Romli, 2018). Within Maktuba DWK's TikTok Live, however, this structure has given way to communication that is interactive, simultaneous, and fluid. Audiences are no longer confined to receiving messages passively; they become active participants who help steer the direction of a da'wah session through comments, questions, and emotionally expressive responses conveyed via emojis and digital gifts.

Observation across six Maktuba DWK Live sessions revealed that audience-driven interaction substantially influenced how da'wah material unfolded: roughly 63 percent of shifts in discussion direction were triggered by spontaneous audience responses, while only 37 percent followed the host's originally prepared structure. This pattern suggests that da'wah delivery is no longer purely top-down but is instead undergoing a process in which communicative authority becomes distributed among multiple actors.

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of interactional components shaping the flow of da'wah material across the observed sessions.

Table 1. Flow of Da'wah Material

Interaction Component	Role Dominance
Host's structured material	37%
Audience response (comments/questions)	48%
Platform intervention (gifts, FYP, algorithm)	15%

This distribution indicates that pesantren da'wah has shifted from an authority-centered model toward an interaction-centered one. Hjarvard (2013) explains that media no longer functions as a neutral conduit but has become a social institution

shaping how religion is produced and consumed within the digital public sphere, a claim that resonates strongly with the present findings. This suggests that pesantren da'wah cannot be separated from the digital mediation structures that frame how religious messages are constructed; interaction within TikTok Live constitutes not merely communication but an ongoing social production of religious meaning. Importantly, this does not mean that the pesantren's scholarly voice disappears; rather, it is redistributed across a wider circle of participants who collectively negotiate what counts as relevant, urgent, or worth dwelling upon during a given session.

TikTok's Algorithmic Logic in Configuring Pesantren Da'wah

The findings further indicate that da'wah practice within Maktuba DWK's TikTok Live is shaped not only by communicative dynamics but also strongly conditioned by TikTok's algorithmic logic, which operates as a visibility-selection system that determines how widely a da'wah broadcast can reach its intended audience (Makalalag et al., 2025).

Observation shows that a live broadcast's performance during its opening five to ten minutes exerts a significant influence on its subsequent distribution. Broadcasts that accumulate more than 100 comments within the first ten minutes tend to experience exponential growth in viewership through the For You Page (FYP) distribution mechanism, whereas broadcasts with weak initial interaction tend to stagnate and receive little additional algorithmic reach, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Relationship Between Early-Live Interaction and Distribution

Tingkat Interaksi Awal	Rata-rata Viewers	Dampak Algoritmik
Tinggi (>100 komentar)	1.500–2.800	Masuk FYP cepat
Sedang (50–100 komentar)	600–1.500	Stabil
Rendah (<50 komentar)	100–600	Tidak berkembang

This finding shows that TikTok's algorithm functions as an invisible structuring force governing the flow of da'wah visibility within digital space (Hepp, 2020). Da'wah reach, in other words, is determined not solely by the quality of religious material but also by the content's capacity to adapt to platform mechanics. In practice, Maktuba DWK's hosts employ several adaptive strategies to boost engagement, including attention-grabbing opening lines ("hooks"), interactive greetings, and explicit invitations for the audience to comment. This strategy suggests that pesantren da'wah has entered a phase of algorithmic adaptation, adjusting religious communication to the demands of an engagement-driven digital system a phenomenon best understood through the lens of the attention economy, in which audience attention becomes the principal resource of the digital ecosystem, and content capable of generating high engagement secures broader distribution than content that remains passive (Wu, 2016). Such adaptation carries an inherent tension, however, since a broadcast optimized primarily for algorithmic visibility risks privileging entertainment

value over doctrinal depth, a trade-off that Maktuba DWK's hosts appear to manage by pairing engagement tactics with substantive scholarly content rather than allowing one to displace the other.

Negotiation of Religious Authority within the TikTok Live Ecosystem

The findings show that within Maktuba DWK's TikTok Live space, a complex and multidimensional process of religious-authority negotiation takes place. Religious authority, previously hierarchical, centralized, and institutionalized within pesantren structures, undergoes a degree of decentralization once it enters open digital space (Naamy, 2023).

Audiences possess considerable space to pose questions, offer responses, and even redirect the trajectory of a da'wah discussion. Several observation sessions revealed instances in which audience questions shifted the focus of an ongoing study session, indicating flexibility in the structure of da'wah communication. Nevertheless, the pesantren retains its scholarly authority through mechanisms such as narrative control, selective attention to questions, and the reaffirmation of its epistemic position as the primary reference source in religious discussion. What occurs, therefore, is not a loss of authority but a transformation of its form into a more fluid and dialogical space, as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of Live Authority

Tabel 3. Distribusi Relasi Otoritas dalam Live TikTok

Aktor	Fungsi Komunikatif	Tingkat Pengaruh
Host (pesantren/ustaz)	Otoritas utama & pengarah materi	45%
Audiens	Partisipasi & pembentuk arah diskusi	35%
Platform (algoritma TikTok)	Penentu visibilitas & jangkauan	20%

Viewed through Baxter's relational dialectics, this condition reflects a tension between openness and closedness occurring simultaneously within digital da'wah communication (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Da'wah no longer occupies a fixed position but exists within a continuous dynamic of negotiation among communicative actors. Audiences within Maktuba DWK's TikTok Live function not merely as message recipients but as co-producers of meaning; da'wah meaning is collectively constructed through real-time interaction, blurring the boundary between communicator and audience. This pattern points to a constructivist character of digital da'wah, in which religious reality is built through social interaction unfolding within digital space.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that pesantren da'wah within Maktuba DWK's TikTok Live has undergone communicative transformation marked by mediatization, algorithmization, and the ongoing negotiation of religious authority in digital space. Mediatization is visible in the shift from one-directional, single-authority preaching toward communication that is interactive, participatory, and engagement-based (Hjarvard, 2013), with audiences helping to shape the direction and meaning of da'wah through real-time interaction during live broadcasts.

The findings also show that TikTok's algorithmic logic meaningfully shapes pesantren da'wah communication. The algorithm functions not merely as a distribution channel but as a mechanism determining da'wah visibility in digital space, prompting Maktuba DWK's administrators to adopt adaptive strategies such as attention-grabbing openers and deliberate engagement management to widen their reach. Da'wah success, accordingly, is determined not only by religious substance but also by adaptability to platform logic.

Furthermore, religious authority within TikTok Live practice undergoes dynamic negotiation among the pesantren, the audience, and the platform. Pesantren scholarly authority remains the principal source of legitimacy, yet is no longer absolute; audiences gain broader participatory space, while algorithms shape message visibility and distribution. Religious authority in digital space is therefore reconfigured rather than diminished.

Based on these findings, this study proposes the Pesantren Algorithmic Da'wah Ecosystem, a digital da'wah model shaped by the interaction of pesantren authority, audience participation, and platform algorithmic logic, enriching religious-mediatization scholarship and affirming that sustaining pesantren da'wah in the platform era requires balancing scholarly authority, digital literacy, and adaptability to new media logic.

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