

RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION IN DIGITAL ERA: MEDIATIZATION IMPACT ON RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly advanced modern era and growing communication technology, mediatization is present in every aspect of people's lives, including in the context of religiosity. The transition to the use of new media in supporting religious activities to keep running faces challenges that are not easy with the issue of the sacredness of religious activities that are communal in nature at first and are forced to change formats. This research was conducted with a qualitative approach and supported by a literature review method and complemented by supporting data obtained from researcher observations of related phenomena that occur today. In the end, mediatization in the religious context is like a double-edged sword with all its advantages and challenges, especially for conventional religious leaders who are increasingly eroded in power and reach by influencers who are able to reach a stronger and wider audience.

KEYWORDS

Mediatization, Religion, Digital Media, Religious Transformation



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INTRODUCTION

Today, the study of communication is widely viewed as an interactive message delivery process emphasizing the message's sender and receiver. This model often views media as a tool or channel for delivering messages. As time passes and the science of education develops, the emergence of mediatization threatens this viewpoint. Media is no longer seen as only a communication channel; nowadays, it also plays an essential and significant role in determining the essence

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of communication (Happer & Philo, 2013). So, today, the media is also a determining factor in how communication occurs and is interpreted by others.

The concept of mediatization highlights the pervasiveness of media forms, routines, and futures in various social domains. This approach emphasizes concise, engaging material that provokes a sense of urgency and blurs the boundaries between the public and private spheres (S. et al., 2005). The implications for communication techniques are significant. Digital platforms have an increasingly important role in social interaction, algorithmic curation in influencing public discourse, and the debate over the definition of information due to the sheer volume of online material.

In addition, mediatization has become an accepted term in communication science, describing the pervasive and influential impact of media on several aspects of society and culture. It also explains the correlation between media technologies and institutions and their mutual influence on social, political, and cultural behavior. In this era, when people are becoming increasingly media-saturated, it is essential to understand the process and impact of mediatization to fully understand the changes in today's society.

Research in communication studies examines several aspects and facets related to mediatization. The analysis of the extent to which media logic is based on the standards and behaviors inherent in media creation and consumption extends to other areas of society, such as politics, religion, and education. Political communication has become closely tied to media techniques that require political actors to adhere to the rules and patterns of media creation to successfully convey messages to the public (S. Livingstone & Lunt, 2014). The same is true for other fields.

Mediatization And Communication Science

The realm of mediatization touches on the chronological investigation of the development of media functions in society. At this stage, it is necessary to understand the impact of various media technologies, from the early days of print media to the digital platforms used today, on cultural development and the formation of social frameworks. This understanding emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between media and societal change, where media influences and is influenced by social transformation (Hjarvard, 2013), resulting in a dynamic interaction between media development and social change.

Further to the idea of mediatization, it was found to offer a structured approach to studying modern digital change. The proliferation of digital and social media platforms has accelerated mediatization, giving rise to new ways of mediated interaction and communication practices. These changes have significant consequences for developing self-awareness, interpersonal relationships, and public conversations that require an understanding of media's influence on everyday life (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). Nowadays, the media can be said to have penetrated everyday life.

It is undeniable that mediatization also triggers essential questions about power and agency in cultures that are heavily influenced by media. It encourages researchers to reflect on individuals or entities with authority over narratives, the

media's influence on public perspectives, and its consequences on democratic procedures and societal justice. It offers a comprehensive perspective to analyze its complex and diverse impact on modern society.

In modern societies, mediatization, which is the widespread influence of the media on aspects of society, has had a significant impact on religious rituals and beliefs in society. The influx of media into religious life is seen through several places and activities. Media representations of the supernatural world can be said to be increasingly concerned and detailed. Amidst the emergence of religion and the media agenda, there is also a strong tendency towards the secularization of society. Hjarvard (2008a) argues that the media affects how individuals interact with religion and change religious institutions' authority. Media has become essential in religious activities and the spread of beliefs.

The mediatization phenomenon that has penetrated the religious sphere has unwittingly resulted in a significant shift in conventional religious activities. Toron and colleagues (2023) indicate that many have adopted digital platforms to spread religious messages and educational content. However, this is suspected to bring new challenges, such as the potential for interfaith conflict and other challenges. In addition, it must be accepted that digital media offers various innovative ways to engage in religious activities, including disseminating religious teachings. It can be seen that there is still a gap in the utilization of media in supporting the improvement of spiritual and moral education, which is the center or central value for religious values.

The use of communication technology as a means of conveying messages and information has influenced changes in religion and belief itself since the 20th century. Lundby's (2014) research sought to overcome the overly simplistic approach to social and cultural change that dominated previous research on religion and found that a new approach was needed that recognized that the media is not only a place to convey messages but also a place where people's culture and beliefs are reflected. Years later, a new challenge emerged regarding contemporary religious change in Europe that highlighted increased religious diversity due to globalization and migration. The emergence of new religions alongside the previously dominant Christian churches has given rise to new forms of political conflict and state regulation of religion.

At the same time, church membership and activities in Western Europe are slowly declining. This calls for a theory that evaluates the existence of various trends of religious change, especially with the emergence of new media. Mediatization theory emerges as a new perspective in understanding the role of media and religious and social change.

More specifically, in Indonesia, the entry of media into the life of religious activities is seen through several places and activities. It is undeniable that currently, various religions with their denominations have used many media in carrying out their religious activities. This transition to the use of digital platforms involves more than just content creation with its ease of access; it also involves a fundamental change in the character of religious authority and participation. It can be found that conventional religious figures now coexist with digital influencers

who often garner larger audiences due to their ability to be approachable and connect with others (Fakhruroji, 2015).

Existing apps or platforms are prime examples of how mobile technology provides new methods of religious engagement. Moreover, it increases the customization and interactivity of religious teachings (Fakhruroji, 2019). Not only that, but the mediatization process in Indonesia also involves transforming religious material into commodities, where religious teachings are packaged and promoted like commercial commodities. Promoting religious activities has a clear pattern of using religious symbols and messages to attract specific target audiences, thus creating a blend of religious observance with commercial power (Putri & Sunesti, 2022). The emergence of digital channels has also facilitated changes in religious authority. The hierarchical and conventional paradigm of religious education has begun to be challenged by decentralized and democratic online religious materials (Campbell, Altenhofen, Bellar, & Cho, 2014). This highlights broader changes in the production, distribution, and consumption of religious knowledge in this digital age.

The mediatization of religion in Indonesia indicates a broader pattern worldwide in which digital media profoundly transforms religious rituals and beliefs. The transition presents prospects and obstacles regarding religious communities managing the intricacies of maintaining doctrinal purity while capitalizing on the benefits of digital engagement. This article focuses on the culture of religion, specifically the use of online platforms in religious practice and interaction. While research on the mediatization of religion is limited, this study aims to answer several essential questions: What are the changing patterns of online religious videos, what are user interaction trends in such videos, and how are the interaction indicators interconnected? As such, this study explores how religion adapts to modern media and how media shapes and directs religious experiences and practices in an increasingly secularized society. The research question of this study is: How does mediatization play a role in penetrating and changing society, especially in the field of religiosity or religion?

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was organized using a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach is a process of learning and understanding based on methodology with an exploration of social phenomena and human concerns (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research emphasizes describing phenomena based on the point of view of the individuals and groups involved. To support the qualitative approach, the researcher uses the literature study method, which includes a series of activities regarding collecting and obtaining data from the library by reading and recording, which ultimately processes the research material (Zed, 2008). The data obtained from this method will be the primary data of this research. In this study, in addition to the use of primary data obtained, researchers also collected supporting data obtained from direct observation through social media and platforms that exist and are related to this phenomenon. This research process is expected to provide a relevant picture of mediatization and its implications for religiosity and religion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Mediatization And Digital Media

Mediatization is a comprehensive theoretical framework in communication and media studies that investigates how media impact and change human life in many aspects, including social, cultural, political, and other fields. The issues that arise are not only significant media influences but also include the significant transformations that occur in society's functioning due to the widespread presence and use of media technology.

Mediatization emerged from the viewpoint of communication science and media studies as a development of the term mediation, which sees the media only as a tool for conveying a message. Mediatization emerged and became a central concept in media studies in the 2000s. It generated critical discussions among researchers in media studies, one of which discussed its relevance to media history (Kortti, 2017). One of the researchers, Hjarvard (2008b), provides mediatization, which is understood as a process where the media becomes an integral and dominant agent in socio-cultural processes. The emphasis on how the media shapes socio-cultural institutions and interactions through specific “media logic” determines the social reality that is constructed and understood. The evolution of “media logic” is a concept that initially refers to the influence of mass media on the political system and other social institutions that develop into mediatization, which then embraces the media and has a vast influence on society (Finnemann, 2011). The development of media logic, which in its course transformed into mediatization, became a separate concept related to the influence of the media on society.

In addition, mediatization is a terminology that views the media as more than just a tool. Mediatization is seen as a meta-process that describes social change due to changes in media communication, which is not only seen as a means of transmitting information but also as a force that shapes structures in society (Krotz, 2007). The complexity of the interaction of media and other social components changes and is shaped by the social and cultural context in which a society exists (Couldry et al., 2010). The shift towards digital media, accelerated by the internet and mobile devices, has radically changed the logic of such media. Digital media enriches the media landscape and fundamentally changes how media interacts with and influences society. What Finnemann describes makes the “media matrix” move from its traditional focus on television to a new matrix centered on digital media. This matrix offers unprecedented levels of connectivity and integrates diverse forms of communication. Mediatization, in this context, is considered a meta-process that captures the extended interplay between media evolution and social and cultural transformation, placing it on par with global phenomena such as globalization and modernization.

Mediatization In The Realm Of Religiousness

The emergence of digital media has profoundly altered conventional religious authority. Some researchers have examined how digital platforms promote equal access to religious information, allowing religious leaders and non-experts to share

understandings of religious teachings. Through digital media and mass media, how religious people practice their faith affects religious structures and the doctrines they teach (Lundby, 2014). In this sense, the media provide new platforms for expressing spiritual and religious activities that are more personalized and less tied to traditional institutions. It is also emphasized that religious mobile apps and social media platforms allow individuals to have customized and participatory religious experiences that, in turn, disrupt conventional hierarchical systems of religious authority (Campbell et al., 2014). Furthermore, media facilitate the formation of new communities that may not be bound by geographical boundaries but rather by shared interests and beliefs.

Mediatization also significantly influences the formation of religious identities that are subsequently communicated. Andreas Hepp highlights the importance of digital media in forming virtual religious groups that transcend geographical boundaries. These platforms then facilitate the cultivation and continuous reinforcement of religious identity, allowing people to participate in religious rituals and discussions regardless of location. This phenomenon is significant in multi-religious countries like Indonesia. In this context, digital media is essential in preserving and navigating religious identity in a pluralistic environment.

The media provides a platform for religious expression and changes how religious institutions maintain authority and teach religious doctrines. This leads to a transformation of how religious beliefs and practices are carried out in modern societies. Media has been integrated into almost all cultural and religious practice aspects, influencing how people consume and interact with religious content (Hjarvard, 2008a). Digital media, more specifically social media, has created a new ecology where individuals can interact with religious elements in a more accessible and personalized way, which can reduce the traditional role of religious institutions. Mediatization is a tool for information dissemination and a significant catalyst for cultural change. Media influences what people consume about religion and how adaptations of values, norms, and behaviors change over time.

It is not uncommon for the media to portray religion through a highly stereotypical or commercialized lens, which can influence public perceptions of religion and religious practices. Lövheim (2011) outlines some important aspects that highlight changes in how religion is represented and experienced in the digital age, such as how religion is represented in various media, especially digital media. One important implication of this mediatization is the emergence of a more personal and individualistic form of religion. Digital media, with its broad access and ease of content personalization, allows individuals to explore and construct their own religious experiences outside of traditional structures. Regarding social interaction, digital media facilitate the formation of religious communities that are not only limited to face-to-face interactions but also cross geographical boundaries, expanding the reach and influence of religious practices. In reality, the commercialization of religion and the potential for greater surveillance and control is an unavoidable challenge.

Mediatization And Religious Practice

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in early 2020, has undeniably affected many aspects of people's lives. In line with technological developments and new media's entry into people's lives, people's lifestyles have changed drastically. With restrictions on leaving the house and doing group activities, implementing religious activities, which are primarily communal, has experienced significant challenges, especially for conventional churches that previously had not maximally utilized the media in conducting religious activities and disseminating religious teachings.

The phenomenon of mediatization in religion, especially Christianity in Indonesia, shows the reciprocal influence between media and religious activities. In a predominantly Muslim country, Christians make up around 7.4% of the population (Statista Research Department, 2024), with the largest populations in North Sumatra, North Sulawesi, and Papua (Aritonang & Steenbrink, 2008). The influence of media on Christian religiosity brings both opportunities and challenges. Digital evangelism and community building are becoming more prevalent in churches today due to the use of digital platforms in building relationships with congregations and expanding outreach. Such activities include the use of streaming platforms, the development of social media profiles that are not static, and the utilization of mobile apps that are beginning to be developed for engagement in Bible study and participation in prayer groups (Giorgi, 2019). In limited physical gatherings, using existing digital platforms allows for broader engagement.

The emergence of digital platforms has brought about significant changes in religious authority, shifting from conventional, structured church leaders to new digital influencers who can connect with a broad audience through an online presence. This transition threatens conventional ecclesiastical organizations but provides equal access to disseminating religious teachings that promote democratization (Campbell et al., 2014). It can now be seen that the media has also taken part in shaping the religious identities and practices of Indonesian Christians, contributing to the mediatization of religious identities. Some media formats often emphasize Symbols and teaching flows to strengthen communal identification and togetherness. This is especially important in regions where Christians are a minority, as it helps preserve and strengthen their religious identity in a diverse and sometimes divided religious environment (Mishol-Shauli & Golan, 2019a). Thus, through the media, the Christian identity of a particular denomination can be easily identified.

Furthermore, the process of religious commodification occurs. This includes using symbols and messages in Christian teachings in the media with other purposes that can eliminate the sanctity of faith and turn it into a commodity (Putri & Sunesti, 2022). Religion is no longer a sacred thing anymore but has become a marketing commodity that has crossed the boundaries of the religious context itself. Undeniably, the mediatization process in Indonesia has resulted in a complex interplay between the reinforcement and transformation of religious practice and identity in Christianity. An essential consequence of this has been the expansion of religious outreach and community development using digital methods. Streaming services and interactive live interactions through social media have also increased

the accessibility of religious rituals, especially for congregants who are geographically limited or experience conditions that make it impossible to be physically present.

The change in ecclesiastical authority due to the mediatization poses difficulties. Traditional religious leaders are now faced with the challenge of navigating the territory where internet influencers have the power to influence religious discussions more freely. In this case, it is necessary to balance preserving the fundamental principles and values of a doctrine while recognizing the inclusive and democratic use of the capabilities of digital platforms (Hjarvard, 2013). In addition, the shift to commoditizing religion through media coverage has a double-edged sword effect. On the one hand, it increases the visibility and integration of religious symbols and messages in everyday life, extending their reach to a broader audience. On the other hand, there is the potential danger of reducing the sacredness of Christianity to a simple consumeristic component (Giorgi, 2019) that allows for the erosion of the deep spiritual essence of existing religious rituals.

Mediatization, Media, And Religious Practice

More specifically, spiritual or religious-related content with the influence of mediatization that occurs today reflects how the role of media, especially digital media, reflects how the role of media, more specifically digital media, has changed the way religion and religious messages are disseminated. Through digital media, Anderson (2023) states that the existing church can reach a wider congregation and create a new form of religious community that is not limited by geographical boundaries, as has been the case so far. However, it is suspected that this raises questions about the essence of religious communication and the solemnity of religion, which has traditionally been more communal with more face-to-face experiences that can be maintained in virtual formats. The mediatization of religion allows for expression in religious contexts that are less tied to traditional institutions. The media becomes a tool beyond message dissemination to become a platform for religious believers to interact and shape their spiritual experiences.

The news about a pastor who went viral on social media with an invitation to Christians to participate in the “takjil war” during Ramadan reflects one of the phenomena of religious mediatization. In his sermon quoted from the Instagram account @lambe_turah, Pastor Marcel suggested that Christians participate in the takjil sharing activities, which Muslims usually carry out. This shows how social media can be an effective medium for spreading messages of religious tolerance and harmony. Pastor Marcel, a Motivational Speaker, and Content Creator utilize digital platforms to get closer to various religious communities and show his support for Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).



Figure 1. *The figure of Pastor Marcel Saerang on Viral Social Media*
Source: Suara.com

The transformation highlights the role of technology in democratizing religious practice and how religious actors are active in negotiating and adapting technological platforms for their purposes. This approach is known as the religious-social shaping of technology, which examines how understanding the history, traditions, and values central to religion influences negotiation strategies in religious communities. The study also highlights the importance of balancing offline and online spaces in religious practice. Interactive, dynamic, and personalizable new technologies present unique opportunities and challenges, creating tensions between cultures related to the presence of old and new media.

In a multi-site church incorporating space, it becomes an essential concept in worship and part of the new culture. The process involves creating worship experiences consistent with the group's theological understanding, paying attention to the nuances of informed imaginative reference, and how the church accommodates cultural differences in celebrating the Eucharist when traditional elements such as wine and bread may not be familiar in some cultures. It offers a theological lens that expands understanding of how religious communities interact with technology, demonstrating the theological motivations behind technological design decisions for online worship experiences.

In the case of Pastor Marcel Saerang, the mediatization of religion clearly shows how religious messages can be delivered through social media, creating widespread impact and strengthening the values of tolerance and togetherness in a plural society. It also confirms that social media can be a powerful tool for promoting interfaith harmony and understanding in this digital age. Finally, the mediatization process of Christianity in Indonesia demonstrates how media can significantly impact religious practices and identities. Technology provides opportunities for increased participation and communication but also poses challenges to established religious institutions and the potential to turn sacred themes into commercial products. These dynamics emphasize the need for religious

groups to undertake ongoing introspection and adjustment in response to the changing media environment.

This research highlights the significant impact of mediatization on religious practice, identity, and authority systems in Indonesian culture. This transformation has enabled ordinary individuals and digital influencers to become more critical alongside conventional religious leaders, which has changed how religious authority is perceived and understood (Campbell et al., 2014; Fakhuroji, 2019). Digital media platforms have made religious information accessible to a broader audience, encouraging more inclusive and diverse participation in religious teachings.

The influence of mediatization is particularly evident in the development and manifestation of religious identities. Digital media enables the continued expression and reinforcement of religious identity, encouraging virtual communities that transcend physical limitations. In Indonesia's multi-religious culture, digital media is vital in preserving and managing religious identity in a diverse environment (Hepp, 2013; Mishol-Shauli & Golan, 2019). These virtual communities foster a sense of membership and unity, allowing people to participate in religious discussions and rituals that match their beliefs and principles.

However, the process of making religion more accessible through the media also poses difficulties, especially in the commercialization of religious material. The commodification of religious symbols and messages can result in the erosion of their sacred and spiritual nature as they are modified to align with the market economy's principles. The commercialization process poses a threat of reducing religious activities to mere consumer goods, thus eroding the depth and authenticity of religious experience (Putri & Sunesti, 2022). Religious leaders and groups must carefully negotiate this, ensuring that their religion's fundamental principles and teachings are maintained in the face of the demands of commercialization.

In Indonesia, the mediatization of religion is characterized by a multifaceted interplay of advantages and difficulties. It provides new opportunities for religious engagement and community building while requiring careful analysis of how the media impacts religious practices and beliefs. Further investigation is needed into these processes to provide a deeper understanding of the growing correlation between media and religion in an increasingly digitized society.

CONCLUSION

The implications of the religious mediatization phenomenon in Indonesia highlight significant changes in the discussion and determination of religious practice, identity, and religious and church authority in the current era of digital technology. The influence of the media on the religious field, including Islam and Christianity, has become more significant and complex, touching all aspects of life. The results show that digital platforms have facilitated the democratization of religious knowledge, enabling broader engagement and interaction. This transition enables the dissemination of religious teachings to a wider audience, encourages ongoing religious instruction through mobile apps, and fosters active, highly engaged religious communities. However, this process presents challenges for conventional religious leaders by indirectly competing with digital influencers with

a more remarkable ability to influence religious discussions (Campbell et al., 2014; Fakhruroji, 2015). The mediatization trend has also resulted in commercializing religious materials, where religious symbols and stories are used in a commercial setting. While increased exposure and accessibility to religious teachings may seem beneficial, there may also be adverse effects (Putri & Sunesti, 2022). It risks turning sacred aspects into commercial goods, which may ultimately undermine the spiritual character of religious rituals.

Mediatization in Indonesia has strengthened the religious identity and solidarity of Christian communities, especially in areas where Christians are a minority. Digital platforms provide opportunities for expression and community building but also need help in maintaining doctrinal purity in a vast and uncontrolled digital environment (Giorgi, 2019). In Indonesia, the mediatization of religion demonstrates the complex relationship between media and religion. The media-filled world presents a range of possibilities and problems for religious groups, highlighting the need for adaptation and ongoing contemplation to manage its intricacies. The influential impact of media on religious practices and identities requires better understanding and deliberate engagement by religious leaders and communities to leverage their strengths while minimizing their weaknesses (Hjarvard, 2013).

Religious transformation in the digital era of mediatization can be seen in the various roles of the media in promoting religious messages. This discussion reflects how social media can be a powerful medium for disseminating inclusive religious messages and strengthening religious values and tolerance in a plural society. This research found that mediatization in the religious context not only changes religious practices but also provides opportunities to expand understanding and tolerance between religious communities. Through social media platforms, religious messages can be delivered quickly and widely, significantly impacting the dissemination of religious messages or teachings and building positive values in an increasingly plural society. This confirms that in this digital era, media is not only a communication tool; more than that, it is a space where values can be strengthened and actively promoted.

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