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**MODERN PIETY AND RELIGIOUS REVIVALISM: UNFOLDING THE ROLE
OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TRANSFORMING DAWAH PRACTICES IN
CONTEMPORARY PAKISTAN**

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Abstract: This research article focuses on the Tablighi Jamaat and its relationship with emerging technologies and social media. While much has been written about the Islamic movement—its ideology, history, and role in contemporary Muslim societies—the role of social media in the propagation of its revivalist message has largely remained unexplored in academia until now. Based on Participant observation method and the Mediatization theory, this study examines the emerging relationship between new media and revivalist Islam in contemporary Pakistan. The study argues that although the Tablighi movement has not established any official newspaper, television channel, or online website, its younger activists actively use a variety of social media platforms to spread the message of revivalist Islam in wider society. Numerous YouTube channels and Facebook groups regularly share Tablighi-related content in Pakistan. This indicates that despite the conservative nature of the Tablighi activists, the digitalization of modern society has had a significant impact on the missionary movement. Although the Tablighi Movement continues to rely primarily on face-to-face methods of dawah, recent advancements in digital media have given rise to a new phenomenon, which I term the 'Digitalization of Tabligh' and the 'Dawatization of Digital Media.' University-educated youth belonging to Generation Z have played a significant role in linking digital media with Islamic revivalist movements in Pakistan. This expanding practice of digital da'wah and tabligh is also evident across numerous Muslim-majority societies.

Key words: Dawah, Islamic Identity, Preaching, Social Media, Tablighi Jamaat.

1. Introduction

The decline of Muslim rule in India and the establishment of a new colonial state marked the beginning of a new era for Indian Muslims in the country. It was not merely the decline of their political authority; rather, it marked the beginning of a new era in which the Muslim community encountered a transformed socio-political, religious, and economic environment. The arrival of Christian missionaries in India, the emergence of Hindu revivalist movements, the introduction of the printing press, and the development of new educational and economic systems together constituted a fundamentally new context in which Muslims perceived their distinct Islamic identity to be under threat. During British rule in India, numerous revivalist movements emerged among both Muslims and Hindus and the primary purpose of these revivalist movements was to protect and preserve the distinct identity of their respective communities. Among these revivalist movements, the Tablighi Jamaat, founded by Maulana Mohammad Ilyas (1885–1944), became one of the most influential Islamic revivalist movements of that time. One of Maulana Ilyas's main objectives was to transform ordinary Muslims into "good" Muslims, and it was with this aim that he and his companions established the movement in the 1920s (Sahib 2022; Khan 2024; Ali 2003; Khan 2025). Thus, the emergence of revivalist Islam can be understood as a response to the many challenges faced by the Muslim community in colonial India (Sikand 1998).

Although the missionary movement originated during the British *Raj*, its ideology and *dawah* activities expanded significantly after the partition of India. In particular, during the 1960s and 1970s, large-scale migration of South Asian Muslims to Western countries for education, employment, and business opportunities facilitated the global spread of the movement. This diaspora played a central role in transforming the TJ into a transnational Islamic revivalist network (Metcalf 2003). Pakistan has emerged as one of the principal centers of its revivalist Islam globally. The city of Raiwind is particularly renowned for its annual gathering, known among Tablighi activists as the *Aalami Ijtima* (world congregation). Each year, Tablighi participants from different regions of the country, as well as from other Muslim and non-Muslim countries, converge in Raiwind to attend this religious congregation. Among Tablighi members, the face-to-face method of *dawah* is considered one of the most effective Islamic approaches. They strongly believe it has the power to reform an irreligious and secular society in line with Islamic teachings and traditions (Khan 2016).

However, with the widespread availability of smartphones and internet packages in the country, a new trend has emerged in the

dissemination of religious information and awareness in society. In Pakistan, the widespread adoption of Internet services has significantly altered the socio-political and religious landscape of the country. A substantial portion of the middle-class Muslims now actively engages with emerging communication technologies and new media platforms. According to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), over 217.1 million people have access to the Internet and other social media platforms. The report indicates that approximately 71.7 million Pakistanis are active YouTube users, while Facebook ranks as the second most popular social media platform with over 57.5 million users (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority 2023). According to DataReportal, Pakistan had 87.35 million Internet users in 2023. The report also notes that by early 2023, there were 191.8 million active cellular mobile connections, representing 80.5% of the country's population. In addition, Facebook had 37.30 million users in Pakistan during the same year (DataReportal 2023).

The relationship between media and religion has attracted considerable attention from social scientists in recent years. Scholars have examined various aspects of this relationship and have made significant contributions to the literature on media and religion. Like many other Muslim-majority countries, Pakistan has also witnessed a significant shift in the growing relationship between digital media and religiosity. Sadaf and Siitonen observe that the Internet has created new spaces for marginalized groups, including religious movements, allowing religious leaders and activists to connect with followers in innovative ways (Sadaf & Siitonen 2022). In Pakistan, prominent Islamic scholars such as Tahir-ul-Qadri, Farhat Hashmi, Javid Ahmad Ghamidi, engineer Mohammad Ali Mirza, Mufti Tariq Masood, and Maulana Tariq Jamil are widely recognized for using the Internet and social media to disseminate Islamic teachings and content (Tabassum 2023). Drawing on the theories of Mediatization, which propose that contemporary societies have undergone significant changes across social, political, economic, and religious spheres (Finnemann 2011; Heidi 2010; Nugraha et al. 2019; Gary 2003; Hutchings 2010), this study examines how emerging social media platforms and the Internet have influenced the traditional *dawah* practices of the TJ in Pakistan.

A similar trend of pietism and religiosity can also be observed in other Muslim-majority countries in South Asia and South East Asia. For example, examining the religiosity of Bangladeshi Muslims, Siddiqi (2024) argues that urban youth in Bangladesh increasingly use social media platforms to listen to and engage with contemporary Islamic preachers. Thousands of Bangladeshis follow prominent figures such as Mufti Ismail Menk, Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, and Nouman Ali Khan (Siddiqi 2024, 321). A similar situation can also be observed in Indonesia, where a number of Islamic scholars, such as KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym), Ustadz Adi Hidayat

(UAH), and Das'ad Latif, share and promote Islamic pietism in the rapidly changing socio-religious landscape of Indonesia (Raya 2025, 163). In Pakistan, Timol (2023) explains how Maulana Tariq Jamil uses social media to share his religious messages with people across Pakistan. His two official YouTube channels—Tariq Jamil and AJ Official—together have around 16.4 million subscribers (Timol 2023). Rauf's (2022) study is closely related to the present research, as it explores how the TJ and its members turned to digital platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic (Rauf 2022). The above-mentioned literature highlights a growing relationship between media and Islam in the Muslim world, including Pakistan. Such sources provide an important foundation for this study. However, the works of Timol (2023) and Rauf (2022) are directly relevant to the present research. While Timol (2023) focuses specifically on the role of Maulana Tariq Jamil and his use of media platforms for da'wah purposes, Rauf (2022) examines the use of social media by Tablighi actors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on mediatization theory, the present study examines the broader trend of dawat-i-tabligh through digital platforms and thereby contributes to the ongoing scholarly debate on Islam and media in Pakistan.

2. Media and Religion: A Theoretical Framework

The connection between religion and media has been studied for a long time. Helland (2000) explained this by introducing the ideas of "religion online" and "online religion," showing how religion is shared and practiced on the Internet (Helland 2000). The interplay between media and society has long been a focal point of academic inquiry, with scholars extensively exploring how media shapes diverse facets of contemporary life—spanning politics, economics, education, religion, and beyond (Heidi 2020). Within this discourse, the Mediation and Mediatization theories have emerged as a key theoretical framework, conceptualized as a transformative process wherein communication media drive profound social change (Finnemann 2011; Ampuja et al. 2014). Since the early 2000s, this concept has gained particular traction in analyses of religious and cultural dynamics. European and Western universities have spearheaded this scholarly momentum, hosting conferences and seminars dedicated to the Mediatization of society (Couldry & Hepp 2013).

The prevalence of online religious engagement is rising in numerous countries worldwide. Scholars specializing in social and religious studies have turned their attention to exploring the dynamic relationship between religion and digital media. Their central objectives include examining how religious organizations and movements utilize social media platforms in their operations and analyzing how contemporary digital media portrays

religion across different global contexts (Hoover 1988; Echchaibi 2011). According to Hjarvard, “as a concept mediatization denotes the processes through which core elements of a cultural or social activity (e.g. politics, religion, language) assume media form” (Hjarvard 2007, 3). These frameworks highlight how religious organizations and movements increasingly leverage digital tools not only to disseminate their teachings to a global audience but also to cultivate engagement and foster inspiration (Couldry 2008).

Thus, this theory posits that religious groups and movements are increasingly utilizing new media platforms to convey their messages to a broader audience within society. Building on the arguments of the social scientists mentioned above regarding the deep relationship between media, religion, and religious movements, this article applies the same theoretical framework to the Pakistani Tablighi movement. It explores how the rise of digitalization in the country has impacted this revivalist movement. The Mediatization theory is employed here due to the growing culture of using social media accounts for *dawah* purposes in Pakistan. It has been observed that in the last couple of years, technology and social media platforms have profoundly impacted almost every segment of society, including politics, the economy, the education sector and the missionary movement. This is the reason why the scholar has applied Mediatization Theory in this study.

3. Methodology and Data Collection

In this study, the researcher employed both ethnographic and netnographic methodologies. The netnographic research method was applied due to the nature of the current research paper. As the paper explores the relationship between the Islamic revivalist movement and new media platforms, it was decided to use the netnographic research method. Without this particular approach, it would have been impossible to study revivalist Islam through the lens of technology and media. YouTube and Facebook accounts which are widely popular in the country were used for this purpose. By typing keywords such as *dawah*, *dawat*, *Tablighi Jamaat*, and *Ijtima* into the search engines of Facebook and YouTube, a significant amount of Tabligh-related online content was identified. Numerous images, posts, and videos were downloaded, and content analysis was subsequently employed to understand the impact of digital media on the missionary movement.

Regarding the ethnographic research method, the author chose to apply this approach because studying the Tablighi Jamaat is not possible without participant observation and interviews. The reason is that TJ is a

revivalist movement, and very little has been written about it. Therefore, to understand how the movement operates and how its members perceive the rise of new media and its impact on religion in the country, the author participated in various Tablighi activities and gatherings between July 11, 2023, and September 16, 2023. The Mardan Tablighi Markaz (center) was selected because it is one of the main centers for Tablighi gatherings in the country, where Islamic preachers can be found every day. All participants were fully informed about the aims and objectives of the study, and only those who agreed were contacted and interviewed.

The author adhered to ethical guidelines throughout the research. In addition, a number of Urdu and English secondary sources were collected, which further helped in understanding the connection between religion and media. The author interviewed 15 Tablighis at the Mardan Tablighi Center. These fifteen activists included both older and newer Tablighis. Pashto was used for communication since all the participants were Pakhtuns, also commonly referred to as Pashtuns. The data collected from the interviews were then translated into English and analyzed using the content analysis method. Thus, this study employed three different methods: netnography, ethnography, and the collection of secondary materials.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Opposition to the Digitalization of Dawah

While it is true that digital media platforms have influenced the Tablighi Jamaat and its activists, there is also strong opposition to the use of such innovative platforms for da'wah purposes. Opposition to the use of technology and social media platforms mainly comes from older Tablighi activists. They firmly argue that technology itself represents a serious problem and poses a threat to the identity of the *Muslim Ummah*. They strongly maintain that the traditional prophetic method of *dawah* is the only authentic approach capable of confronting the challenges facing the Muslim community and of laying the foundation for an Islamic society in the Muslim world. However, before examining how these newly educated Tablighi activists strategically employ social media platforms for religious outreach, it is necessary to first explore the underlying reasons for the opposition expressed by their senior counterparts toward the use of modern technology in religious propagation.

In an effort to align digital engagement with Islamic principles, some of the religious scholars have produced theological literature addressing what they call the "ethical" use of modern technology in Pakistan. One

such example is the booklet named “*Da Mobile Phone Shar’ghi Ahqam*” (The Islamic rulings on mobile phones), which outlines ethical guidelines for the “appropriate” and Islamic use of modern social media. For example, Haqqani (2009) acknowledged the potential threats posed by technological advancements to contemporary Muslim society but simultaneously proposed a framework of Islamic principles for utilizing technology in ways that align with religious objectives.

To explore the Tablighi perspective on using the Internet and social media for *dawah* purposes, the author participated in a three-day Tablighi mission led by a senior Tablighi activist. Before setting out on the *dawah* mission, the *amir sahib* (leader of the mission) provided us with essential guidelines that all participants were expected to follow. According to him: “The current world is filled with *fitna*, *fasad*. Present-day Muslims are facing numerous challenges from various directions. However, we must confront these challenges and strive to create an Islamic environment essential for our faith and our Islamic survival. My esteemed brothers, we are truly blessed to have been chosen by Allah to propagate His religion among our fellow Muslims in another village. As we embark on our Tablighi mission, it is imperative that we strictly adhere to the guidelines established by elders of the Tablighi Jamaat. We should avoid using smartphones because they can distract us from our main goal of spreading Islam. Our *dawah* should follow the way of the Prophet” (Yaseen Ahmad, interview by author, July 5, 2023).

The guidelines known as the *hidaya bayan* have been central to the *dawah* methodology of the Tablighi Movement since its founding in colonial India. Despite the instructions of senior members of the missionary movement against social media, younger and educated Tablighi activists were observed using their smartphones. The author noted this both during his participation in the Tablighi mission and at the Mardan Tablighi Center, where many Tablighi Islamists gather to take part in the event known as *Shabbi-Jumma*. The author observed that these Tablighis not only recorded the sermons but also shared the content with friends and family. For example, Tahir Ali, a 28-year-old Tablighi activist, explained that recording and sharing these sermons represents a new form of *dawah* that was not practiced in earlier times. According to Heidi (2010), contemporary religious communities often associate modern technology with modernism, which is frequently perceived as being at odds with religious values. Similarly, several senior Tablighi activists shared this same perspective. They argued that *dawah* could only be effectively conducted by strictly adhering to what Khan called as “the mother of all practices” (*umm-al-amaal*) (Khan 2025, 7).

Another 43-year-old Tablighi activist, emphasized that the Holy Prophet and his companions (*Sahaba*) personally traveled across the

Arabian Peninsula to invite people to Islam, reinforcing the belief that direct, in-person engagement remains the most authentic approach to spread *dawah* in the contemporary world. He explained that it was the Prophetic approach embraced by the Tablighis in the past, rather than the un-Islamic use of the Internet and social media platforms, which has effectively spread the preaching message across the world (Yasir Ali, interview by author, July 13, 2023). Timol (2023) also argues that Maulana Tariq Jamil's use of social media to propagate Islamic awareness in Pakistan was one of the reasons why senior leaders of the reform movement expressed disapproval (Timol 2023).

Similarly, several senior Tablighi activists at the Mardan Tablighi Markaz shared this perspective. Similar to other religious movements, senior Tablighi activists also hold the view that the rise of social media and the Internet presents a significant threat to the *Muslim Ummah*. For example, the author encountered a forty-year-old Tablighi activist, who echoed the concerns of other orthodox Tablighis by asserting that modernism has introduced numerous socio-religious challenges for the entire Muslim community. Tablighi campaigners strongly contend that contemporary technologies are fundamentally incompatible with religious values and traditions and argue that they are inadequate tools for effectively spreading awareness of Islam in the modern world (Umar Ali, interview by author, July 17, 2023).

Other senior Tablighi Jamaat activists contend that media and technology often serve as sources of misinformation about Islam and Muslims. They strongly believe that in contemporary times anyone can present themselves as a religious scholar on social media which may lead to the widespread dissemination of inaccurate or misleading information about the faith. Furthermore, senior Tablighi Jamaat members strongly argue that true peace of mind and heart comes from leaving one's home and traveling to distant areas solely for the cause of Islam and Muslims. They argue that sharing or posting content online can never provide the same sense of peace and fulfillment that offline da'wah activities offer to individuals. This is another reason why senior Tablighi Jamaat members avoid using online content. Dedicated Tablighi activists argue that the rise of social media has negatively impacted people's intentions, fostering a culture in which individuals present themselves as the most devout and good Muslims. Another respondent pointed out that before embarking on a forty-day spiritual tour (*chilla*) or a four-month Tablighi mission (*char mahinay*), some Tablighi activists take selfies and post them on various social media platforms.

The respondent criticized this new "un-Islamic" practice, expressing concerns that it undermines the purity of one's intentions (*ikhlas-i-niyyat*), which is central to the Tablighi mission. He viewed this "un-Islamic"

behavior as a form of *riya* (showing off), which is forbidden (*haram*) in Islam. Like other Tablighis, he also stressed that genuine Islamic awareness cannot be effectively spread through such un-Islamic practices (*ghair sharghi tarekay*) (Moeed Ahmad, interview by author, June 4, 2023). The issue of *riya* was also highlighted by Kuncoro in his study on the Indonesian Tablighi Jamaat (Kuncoro 2021). Kuncoro, in his study of the Tablighi Jamaat in Indonesia, argues that senior Tablighi activists oppose the use of social media for Tablighi activism, as they widely believe that it can corrupt the sincere intentions of Muslims working in the path of Allah and His Prophet.

This shows that senior Tablighi activists oppose the use of new methods for spreading Islamic awareness for a number of reasons. For them, technology has introduced new social challenges for the Muslim community around the world. They argue that technology and media platforms are “corrupting” the true intentions of Tablighi activists. They are also unwilling to alter the traditional method of *dawah*, as they believe it was divinely guided and given to the founder of the movement. For these reasons, they widely regard new technology as incapable of bringing positive Islamic change to wider society. This resistance to using media for *dawah* is not unique to Pakistan. Kuncoro (2021) highlights a similar resistance in Indonesia, where some Tablighi activists view new media as harmful and discourage its use for spreading Islam. This paper argues that across the Muslim world, Tablighi Islamists can be broadly divided into older and newer members. As noted, opposition to social media mainly comes from senior members of the missionary movement, while the vast majority of newer members believe that Islam and media can coexist effectively when used for positive purposes.

4.2. Dawatization of Digital Media: Islamizing Digital Society

My attention was drawn to the term “digital society” during a conversation with a group of young Tablighi activists at the Tablighi Markaz in Mardan. Participants frequently argued that, contrary to the traditional understanding of society, there now exists another form of society that cannot be ignored in the process of spreading the message of *dawah* to Muslims worldwide. According to them, the most effective way to reach members of this “digital society” is through new modes of preaching, namely digital da’wah. As one respondent noted, ignoring the digital sphere and focusing solely on offline communities would entail accountability before Allah. In his view, in a rapidly changing world, it would be a grave mistake to concentrate exclusively on traditional society while neglecting the large population that exists within the digital sphere.

Although many traditionalist activists in the revivalist movement

believe that media networks harm their traditional *dawah* methods, more and more young Tablighi activists see the Internet and social media as useful new tools for communication and for spreading Islamic teachings. For instance, during a conversation with a 30-year-old Tablighi activist, the author discovers that younger Tablighi activists commonly assert that they use their smart phones for “Islamic purposes”. According to a respondent: “I use my smartphone exclusively for religious activities and have never watched films or any drama on my mobile device. I also avoid listening to music or engaging in any other immoral activities. My smartphone contains Quranic verses and religious speeches delivered by Tablighi elders. Whenever I come across an Islamic message on social media, I share it with my friends on Facebook and WhatsApp. I do not see anything wrong with doing this. The advent of the Internet and smartphones has made the practice of *dawat-i-Tabligh* far more accessible and efficient compared to the past days” (Muhammad Ali, interview by author, May 25, 2023).

Just as Judaism and Christianity are now closely connected to digital technology, Islam also cannot be separated from modern digital platforms. The Internet has had a profound and far-reaching impact on the Islamic tradition and its practices. Another dedicated Tablighi activist made a noteworthy observation regarding the evolution of Tablighi *dawah*. He pointed out that prior to the advent of social media, Tablighi activists used audiocassettes in order to disseminate their *dawah* message and spread Islamic teachings in society. According to this respondent, some Tablighi activists would record Tablighi sermons given by senior Tablighi leaders and then distribute or sell these audio tapes to the public (Asif Saeed, interview by author, May 19, 2023). For Saeed and some Tablighi activists, the printing press and audio cassette technology were once the primary tools utilized by the TJ to reach people and disseminate the ideology of *dawah* in the wider society.

This indicates that, despite its conservative nature, the TJ cannot remain insulated from the socio-political and technological changes occurring in wider society. To gain deeper insights, the author expanded the research to include online platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. The first major transformation in *da'wah* activism occurred with the replacement of oral Tabligh by the printing press. As a result, an abundance of Urdu and Pashto literature emerged emphasizing the virtues of engaging in *da'wah* work. These materials have been produced by ideological supporters of the Tablighi Jamaat across the world. The second shift took place with the popularization of audio cassette technology, when Tablighi activists began recording and disseminating their preaching messages in this format. In recent years, this audio cassette technology has been replaced by digital media. This development reveals that socio-religious movements cannot remain unaffected by broader processes of

social and technological change in human society.

The study identified a significant presence of un-official Tablighi-affiliated channels and groups on social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. These digital spaces serve as key hubs where Tablighi activists actively share and disseminate Tablighi-related content. Notably, each group on these platforms has amassed a substantial number of followers who engage with the material by regularly accessing and listening to Tablighi speeches and other related content (see figure 1, 2, 3 and 4. Also see Table 1 and 2).

Figure 1: The unofficial pages of the TJ ask ordinary people to take part in the *Dawah*.



To spread Islamic awareness and to protect Islamic society from *fitna* and *fasad*, Tablighi activists form small groups led by a leader known as the *amir sahib* in Tablighi literature. These small groups travel to different areas and stay in local mosques for a short period. During their stay, they encourage fellow Muslims to leave their everyday routines for some time and devote themselves to the path of Allah (Zakriya n.d). However, posts shared in Tablighi-related Facebook groups show that the missionary movement is now also using online media to support its traditional outreach. These digital platforms are being used to motivate and persuade Muslims to take part in the *dawah* activities. This may not be its official policy, but it still reflects a growing trend of online *dawah* in the country. The followers of these groups on Facebook and YouTube are also sympathizers of the *dawah* of TJ. This is evident from the comments shared by members of these online communities.

Figure 2: The right figure shows how the unofficial pages of the TJ use social media to spread good deeds in society. The left one shows how its activists counter anti-Tabligh propaganda on social media.



Figure 3: Political Posts on the unofficial social media channels.



On social media platforms Tablighi activists also share content related to political events and developments particularly within the Muslim world. This indicates that social media has contributed to a shift in the movement's traditional claim of remaining apolitical. This shift is visible through its various unofficial social media accounts. During the fieldwork, the author asked a Tablighi activist about his online support for the political struggles of Palestinians, Kashmiris, and Afghans. He acknowledged that the Tabligh is not a political organization like Jamaat-i-Islami or other Islam-

based political parties in Pakistan. However, he argued that even with its strong apolitical position, some activists cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of Muslims around the world. According to him: “Alhamdulillah, we are all Muslims and part of one Muslim Ummah. It is our duty to pray for the people of Palestine, Kashmir, and Afghanistan and also to pray for the defeat of oppressors and kafirs. Even if I cannot help them directly, I believe I should at least speak up on social media in their support. I have never voted in any political election, but I feel it is my religious responsibility to stand with Muslims who are suffering under non-Muslim powers” (Ghulam Ali, interview by author, May 5, 2022).

The views of these respondents reflect a common belief among younger Tablighi activists in Pakistan. Many of them feel it is a religious duty to show support for Muslims involved in conflicts with non-Muslims around the world. Sharing openly political posts on social media shows what the author call the “digital politics” of the unofficial online platforms linked to the Tablighi Movement. One of the key challenges for the missionary movement in Pakistan is that while it can convert Muslims into “good” Muslims, but then managing and guiding these individuals can become difficult for the movement (Rana 2009). The same appears to be true for Tablighi activists who regularly use social media to spread their revivalist message. For instance, sharing political posts and openly supporting political movements in other Muslim-majority countries and regions has never been part of the official policy of the movement since its founding in colonial India. The term “digital politics” has emerged as a result of social media. By this term, i mean that Tablighi activists do not necessarily participate in these political movements physically, but they support them through their social media accounts.

Figure 4: This figure shows how Tablighi activists use social media to respond to criticism of their ideology or dawah methods.



Table 1: This table shows unofficial Tablighi channels on YouTube.

YouTube Channel Name	Subscribers in 2023	Total Videos in 2023	Total Views on videos in 2023	Year of Creation
Iqra Media House	114K	930	11,535,589	November 2016
AJ-Official	6. 4M	951	1,489,490,552	December 2014
Tablighi Bayanat Official	106K	992	11,091,721	April 2016
Tariq Jamil	7.84M	1,376	728,596,598	April 2019
Bayanat Clips	109K	217	4,807,017	February 2013
Mufti Tariq Masood Speeches	2.1M	4,293	451,485,981	April 2019
Tabligh ki Mehnat	2K	107	127,484	February 2021

Table 2: Shows unofficial Tablighi Groups available on Facebook.

Name of the Facebook Page	Total Subscribers in 2023	Year of Creation
Raiwind Tablighi Markaz	70 K	May 2019
Tablighi Bayanat	3.1K	May 2020
Tablighi Markaz Raiwind	65.2K	September 2023
Tablighi Jamaat	5.3 K	September 2011
Dawat Tabligh	72.8K	February 2019
Dawat-o-Tabligh	29.4K	January 2020
Tablighi Jamaat	13.6K	June 2020
Tablighi Jamaat Pakistan	22K	November 2016

Heidi (2010) argues that it is misleading to claim that many religious groups among Jews, Muslims, and Christians are inherently opposed to technology and new media. In fact, these new sources of information are regarded as an opportunity to further the religious message to a wider

audience (Heidi 2010). The figures and tables presented in this paper reveal that, despite opposition from older Tablighi activists, educated and middle-class members in Pakistan see no problem in using social media to propagate Islam in wider society. Contrary to the beliefs of senior Tablighis, these educated activists widely believe that using technology for “good” and “noble” purposes does not violate the principles of Islam. They view technology as a necessity of the time that can be effectively used for *dawah* purposes. According to a Tablighi, “I believe that nothing happens in this world without the will of Allah Almighty. Contemporary technology is also the work of God, who has empowered human beings to develop it” (Hafiz Naeem, interview by author, August 18, 2023).

This contrasting understanding on the issue of media and religion reflects a tension among Tablighi activists. However, this tension is not something that can cause a major problem within the missionary movement. There are two reasons for this. First, Tablighi activists are very tolerant when they propagate Islam or seek to transform someone into a “good” Muslim. Whenever they observe someone violating the broader Tablighi principles, they neither become angry nor forcibly stop the person. They always give advice (*nasihat*). Second, even senior members can be seen using mobile phones. In some cases, they use old-fashioned phones such as Nokia brand, and in other cases, they possess smartphones. During the fieldwork, the author noticed that even senior members of the *dawah* movement use their phones not only for personal purposes but also for the cause of *dawat-i-Tabligh*. For example, they use their phones whenever they need to issue instructions to Tablighi missions or when they hold a *mashwara* (consultation) for propagating Islam in a village. This reveals that technology and media have a significant impact on all of them, and they cannot escape such influence.

It should be made clear that despite the rise of online *dawah*, the traditional method of *dawah* remains intact and continues to be strictly followed by the Islamic missionary movement worldwide. In this traditional approach, small groups of missionaries are formed and sent to different villages and cities, where they propagate Islam through the mosque. The mosque continues to occupy a central role in the *dawah* activities of the Tablighi Movement worldwide. At the same time, it is undeniable that technology and new media have introduced a new form of *dawah*, which I call the “digitalization of Tabligh” in Pakistan. This digitalization of *dawah* and Islam is not limited to Pakistan; other studies have identified similar emerging trends in other Muslim-majority countries (Slama 2018; Shukri 2023). It is important to note another interesting feature of the TJ in Pakistan. Even though it is a well-known Islamic resurgent movement, it has not set up an official newspaper, television channel, or YouTube platform in the country. Its senior members still believe that only the

traditional Prophetic method of *dawah* is effective in bringing secular or less observant Muslims back to religion. However, a different picture emerges when we look at younger Tablighi activists, who are increasingly using social media and other online platforms to spread Islam in the wider Pakistani society.

4.3. Main Factors Driving Digital Dawah

The emerging shift from traditional *dawah* methods to digital forms of Islamization has been driven by several key societal changes in the Muslim world, including Pakistan. The missionary work of the Tablighis operates within human society, which is never static and constantly evolves over time. Technological advancements and processes of human development have historically influenced religions and shaped the trajectory of religious movements across different regions of the world. Consequently, any change in human society can have both positive and negative effects on individuals and the religious organizations operating within the same social framework. For example, the introduction of the printing press in colonial India had a far-reaching impact on local religions. Many religious individuals utilized this technology to produce religious literature in large quantities (Arjomand 1986). Thus, first and foremost it was these social changes in broader society that created opportunities for new members to explore and identify areas where they could more easily expand the influence of the missionary movement. Second, technological developments over the past two decades have transformed human interaction, with social media reshaping the social, political, cultural, and religious landscapes. From political parties to businesses and religious movements, there has been a profound transition from established traditional practices to new digitally mediated forms.

Third, this shift from offline to online *dawah* has also been facilitated by the rise of an educated middle class in Pakistan. Unlike previous generations, many younger Tablighi activists now hold university or college degrees and are familiar with rapidly evolving technological and social changes. While discussing the literacy rate and its relationship with religious movements, Arjomand further argues that rising literacy rates and higher levels of education in a Muslim-majority country also expand the sphere of influence of Islamic movements. He illustrates this with the example of Iran, where more educated individuals supported the slogan of Imam Khomeini against the Shah of Iran in the 1970s (Arjomand 1986). Most of the participants engaged in digital Tabligh are highly educated individuals who joined the Tablighi Jamaat after 2000. Most Tablighi Jamaat groups on Facebook and YouTube were established in the 2010s. This suggests that these digital platforms were largely initiated and

managed by a new, educated segment within the missionary movement.

Fourth, the new generation of Tablighi activists is particularly concerned with the Islamization of the “digital society” and its members. They argue that this society is completely different from the traditional one. While members of the traditional society can be reached through the mosque, those in the “digital society” can only be guided through technology and social media platforms. Consequently, spreading Islam among the members of this “digital society” is widely regarded as an essential aspect of *dawah*. Fifth, the use of social media for the cause of Islam and Muslims has also been significantly shaped by Maulana Tariq Jamil, an influential figure in the Tablighi Jamaat who actively employs these platforms for Islamic propagation in contemporary society. He is widely regarded by the new generation of Tablighis as a role model in their efforts to revive religious consciousness within what they perceive as an increasingly “secular” and “irreligious” Pakistani society. These factors together have encouraged the younger generation to use social media as an important way to spread Islamic awareness and promote religious practice in Pakistan’s growing digital world.

The shift from the traditional verbal method of *dawah* to the modern digital form of Tabligh has its roots in colonial India, when the British introduced the printing press. The production of *Fazail-e-Amaal* and many other Tablighi texts serves as a clear example of this transition from spoken word to written text. In recent times, however, this trend has been further transformed by the internet and smartphones. This demonstrates that, despite their opposition to new methods of *dawah*, the Tablighi Jamaat cannot escape the influence of modernity. Like other members of society, Tablighi activists also use smartphones for their daily activities. They travel by modern means such as buses, trains, and airplanes, and similarly benefit from contemporary technological tools in their everyday lives. According to Pool (2021), Tablighis are both modern and anti-modern Islamic revivalists (Pool 2021, 34). Younger and educated Tablighi activists are not opposed to technology or the conveniences of the modern world. Rather, they argue that in contemporary times it is necessary to utilize these modern and innovative tools for “good purposes.” In their understanding, “good purposes” refers to the use of social media for guiding non-practicing Muslims back to an Islamic way of life. In other words, these activists seek to Islamize technology and digital media platforms.

5. Conclusion

Similar to other social, political, cultural and religious movements worldwide, technological innovations and emerging social media platforms have created new spaces for members of the Tablighi movement to

propagate their Islamic messages and maintain contact with social media users in Pakistan. Despite strong opposition from senior members, educated and younger Tablighi activists actively utilize these platforms for the cause of Islam and the Muslim community globally. This indicates that social changes in the broader society can exert profound impacts on all forms of movements, whether social, political, economic, or religious. Movements operate within human society, which is dynamic and continuously evolving over time. The same applies to the Tablighi Jamaat. In the post-9/11 period, a new generation has joined the *dawah* movement, which has further enhanced its popularity but has simultaneously generated tensions between older and younger Tablighi activists, particularly concerning the use of social media for the propagation of Islam in Pakistan. This tension between traditional and newer Tablighis constitutes a significant area for further scholarly investigation in the Muslim world. At the same time, it is evident that social media has facilitated what this study terms the “Digitalization of Tabligh” and the “Dawatization of Digital Media.” This represents a new and emerging feature of the missionary movement in Pakistan.

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