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Digital Religion and Hybrid Practices: Negotiating Ritual and Authority Within Jama'ah Tabligh in Indonesia

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Abstract This article examines the transformation and digital adaptation of Jama'ah Tabligh in the digital era, with a focus on the negotiation and reconfiguration of ritual communication in online spaces. The central issue addressed is the tension between the group's traditional reliance on khuruj (missionary journeys) and face-to-face interactions, and the adoption of digital platforms that redefine authority and identity. This study employs a qualitative approach by analysing digital proselytizing content, observing practices on platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram, conducting a critical review of relevant secondary literature, and carrying out in-depth interviews with selected members of Jama'ah Tabligh. Indonesia is taken as the primary context of analysis while incorporating transnational dimensions to situate local practices within global networks. The findings indicate that digitalization has fostered more personal, visual, and participatory forms of religious expression, while simultaneously contributing to identity fragmentation and a redistribution of authority from seniority-based hierarchy to algorithmic visibility. Ritual communication, which was previously centered in markaz and physical khuruj, has expanded to include digital sermons, podcasts, and visual quotations, generating hybrid forms of piety that combine the values of Jama'ah Tabligh with the logic of social media. This shift not only demonstrates resilience and adaptation but also raises epistemological challenges, including the risks of oversimplification, exclusion, and debates over authenticity. The article concludes that digitalization is not merely a means of disseminating proselytizing content but also reconstructs the structures of piety, authority, and collective identity in contemporary Islam in Indonesia. The implications extend to debates on digital religion and the sociology of transnational Islam, highlighting how non-political movements such as Jama'ah Tabligh recalibrate their spiritual mission within the global network society.

Abstrak Artikel ini mengkaji transformasi Jama'ah Tabligh di era digital dengan fokus pada negosiasi komunikasi ritual dalam ruang daring. Masalah utama yang diangkat adalah ketegangan antara ketergantungan tradisional kelompok ini pada khuruj atau perjalanan dakwah dan interaksi tatap muka dengan adopsi platform digital yang mengubah otoritas dan identitas. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui analisis konten dakwah digital, observasi praktik di platform seperti YouTube, WhatsApp, dan Instagram, telaah kritis terhadap literatur sekunder, serta wawancara mendalam dengan sejumlah anggota Jama'ah Tabligh. Konteks Indonesia dijadikan locus utama analisis dengan tetap memperhatikan dimensi transnasional untuk menempatkan praktik lokal dalam jejaring global. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa digitalisasi telah mendorong ekspresi keagamaan yang lebih personal, visual, dan

partisipatif, sekaligus memicu fragmentasi identitas serta redistribusi otoritas dari senioritas menuju visibilitas algoritmik. Komunikasi ritual yang sebelumnya berpusat di markaz dan khuruj fisik kini berkembang melalui ceramah digital, podcast, dan kutipan visual, sehingga melahirkan bentuk kesalehan hibrid yang memadukan nilai Jama'ah Tabligh dengan logika media sosial. Pergeseran ini tidak hanya menunjukkan resiliensi dan adaptasi, tetapi juga menghadirkan tantangan epistemologis berupa risiko penyederhanaan, eksklusi, dan perdebatan mengenai keaslian ajaran. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa digitalisasi tidak sekadar menjadi sarana penyebaran dakwah, tetapi juga merekonstruksi struktur kesalehan, otoritas, dan identitas kolektif dalam Islam kontemporer di Indonesia. Implikasi kajian ini meluas pada perdebatan tentang agama digital dan sosiologi Islam transnasional, dengan menunjukkan bagaimana gerakan nonpolitik seperti Jama'ah Tabligh merekalibrasi misi spiritualnya dalam masyarakat jaringan global.

Keywords Jama'ah Tabligh; digital religion; ritual communication; religious authority; hybridity; transnational Islam

Introduction

Islam can never be understood as a single, static entity, let alone as a tradition born out of a historical vacuum. From the beginning, Islam has always been closely intertwined with the social, political, and cultural struggles that both shaped it and were shaped by it.[1] Talal Asad, in his monograph, highlights that Islam must be understood as a discursive tradition that is constantly reinterpreted in different contexts,[2] while Vartan Gregorian describes it as a mosaic of heterogeneous experiences, practices, and thoughts.[3] For this reason, Islam has always adapted to the medium of communication of each era, and particularly in the digital era, this negotiation has reached an unprecedented intensity because the virtual space is not merely a tool but has fundamentally reshaped the way believers practice, understand, and confer authority upon religion. This idea resonates with what Stephen Leary asserts, namely that social media and communication technology have revolutionized forms of worship, preaching, and spiritual interaction, while also creating new boundaries between the physical and the virtual.[4] This dynamic demonstrates that the rapid flow of information within the digital ecosystem drives da'wah to reach a more diverse audience, transcend geographical boundaries, and occur in increasingly adaptive ways.

Specifically in Indonesia, several credible data sources reported that in 2024, the number of internet users reached 204.7 million, an increase of 2.1 million from the previous year. This growth was accompanied by an increase in active social media users of 12.6 percent, or about 21 million people.

[1] Anjum, *Islam as a Discursive Tradition: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors. Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 3 . (Project MUSE, 2007).

[2] Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam" (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies: Georgetown University, 1986).

[3] V Gregorian, *Islam: A Mosaic, Not a Monolith* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

[4] Stephen D O Leary, "Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Network," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 4 (2009): 781–808.

Instagram occupied the top position with 173.6 million users, followed by Facebook with 166.4 million.[5] This level of penetration confirms that social media is no longer merely a space for social or commercial interaction, but has become the dominant landscape in Indonesia's public life. Interestingly, this surge has been dominated by the younger generation, so the digital space is not only a medium of communication but also a strategic arena for proselytizing, debates on religious authority, and the negotiation of religious expression.[6] Unfortunately, the digital space does not always bring positive outcomes, as it presents new challenges, such as digital proselytizing becoming increasingly interactive while regulation remains inadequate, leaving room for revivalist groups without scholarly authority.[7] In addition, this kind of problem was examined by Eickelman and Piscatori as the movement of "new religious intellectuals",[8] namely, actors who gain legitimacy not through credible scholarly authority but through their capacity to access and distribute religious knowledge via modern communication media. If print and electronic media in the 20th century gave rise to popular figures outside madrasahs and classical institutions, then the digital era intensifies the intensification of this process with the emergence of YouTube preachers, Muslim influencers, and digital missionaries who gain authority from algorithms and virtual popularity.

So far, many scholars have extensively examined this phenomenon, such as the edited volume by Campbell and Tsuria,[9] as well as Giulia Isetti and her colleagues,[10] who compiled the works of experts regarding the involvement of religion in the use of digital media. The concepts of religious hybridity and digital religion as a phenomenon have emerged.[11] Recent research by Izquierdo-Iranzo demonstrates that the Catholic Church has gained greater acceptance through digital mediatization for preaching or faith support (for example, applications for prayer).[12] The impact of digitalization is also evident in the Islamic world as the global Salafi movement, which previously relied on conventional

[5] We Are Social, "Special Report: Digital 2024," wearesocial.com, 2024, https://wearesocial.com; NapoleonCAT.Stats, "Facebook Users in Indonesia 2024," napoleoncat.com, 2024, https://napoleoncat.com/stats; Badan Pusat Statistik, "Statistik Telekomunikasi Indonesia 2024," 2025, https://www.bps.go.id/id/publication/2025/08/29/; Info Ketapang, "Pengguna Media Sosial Di Indonesia Sepanjang 2024," infoketapang.com, 2024, https://infoketapang.com.

[6] Liang Zhang, "The Digital Age of Religious Communication: The Shaping and Challenges of Religious Beliefs through Social Media," *Studies on Religion and Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (January 21, 2025): 25–41, https://doi.org/10.71204/de63mn10; Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (December 31, 2019): 19, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019.

[7] M. Kholili, Ahmad Izudin, and Muhammad Lutfi Hakim, "Islamic Proselytizing in Digital Religion in Indonesia: The Challenges of Broadcasting Regulation," *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (December 31, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2357460.

[8] Dale F Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

[9] Heidi A Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, eds., *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2022).

[10] Giulia Isetti et al., eds., *Religion in the Age of Digitalization* (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2021. | Series: Media, religion and culture: Routledge, 2020), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367809225.

[11] Kavyta Kay, "Raced Religion: Exploring Hybridity, Performance and Partnerships," in *Dougla Poetics* (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2024), 83–109, https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80043-432-520240005.

[12] Patricia Izquierdo-Iranzo, "Use of Digital Tools in the Religious and Spiritual Sphere: Impact and Barrier Analysis," *Religions* 16, no. 6 (June 2025): 772, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16060772.

proselytizing patterns, has now expanded into the digital sphere.[13] As Bunt illustrates, *Salafi* networks use the internet to disseminate fatwas and puritan narratives across countries.[14] Meijer's study also confirms the shift of Salafism from traditional study circles to modern technology,[15] while Echchaibi notes the phenomenon of *e-fatwas* that broaden the transnational reach of Salafi scholars.[16] In the Indonesian context, Aidulsyah describes how "Urban Salafism" has not only grown in public urban spaces but has also become digitally native, with a strong presence on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and even podcasts. This urban Salafism combines the popular culture of young people with Arabism traditions, involving celebrities, artists, and content creators in proselytizing campaigns, thus marking the transformation of Salafism from a conservative movement into a modern religious phenomenon in the digital sphere.[17]

A similar phenomenon is likewise observable in Jama'ah Tabligh, which, from the beginning, has been known for its traditionalist proselytizing methods through "portable literature" and the practice of *khuruj* (movement), emphasizing direct contact, oral communication, and local community. In addition, their visual identity—ranging from clothing and beards to the itinerant proselytizing pattern (traveling, wandering, moving from place to place)—has served as a distinctive marker compared to other Islamic movements in Indonesia.[18] However, in recent times, new dynamics have emerged as the younger generation of Jama'ah Tabligh has begun to use digital platforms,[19] such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram, to broadcast proselytizing messages and expand community networks.[20] This transformation is not simple, because on the one hand, digitalization creates opportunities for the rearticulation of religious practices and enhances solidarity across boundaries. On the other hand, digitalization also creates tensions between the traditional authority of the *amīr* and more fluid, individualistic, and easily viral forms of religious expression. A critical question then arises

[13] Asif Mohiuddin, "Islamism in the Digital Age: The Role of Cyberspace in Transforming Religious Authority," in *Navigating Religious Authority in Muslim Societies* (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2023), 203–36, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-44825-6_6.

[14] Gary R Bunt, *IMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Gary R. Bunt, *Hashtag Islam How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

[15] Roel Meijer, "Taking the Islamist Movement Seriously: Social Movement Theory and the Islamist Movement," *International Review of Social History* 50, no. 2 (August 26, 2005): 279–91, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859005001963.

[16] Nabil Echchaibi, "From Audio Tapes to Video Blogs: The Delocalisation of Authority in Islam," *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 1 (January 2011): 25–44, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2010.00468.x; Nabil Echchaibi, "Hyper-Islamism? Mediating Islam from the Halal Website to the Islamic Talk Show," *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 1, no. 3 (April 1, 2009): 199–214, https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr.1.3.199_1.

[17] F Aidulsyah, "The Rise of Urban Salafism in Indonesia: The Social-Media and Pop Culture of New Indonesian Islamic Youth," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 51, no. 4 (December 2023): 252–59, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajss.2023.07.003.

[18] Farish A Noor, *The Tablighi Jama'at Movement in Maritime Southeast Asia: Piety in Motion* (Routledge Handbook on Islam in Asia, 2021).

[19] Wahyu Kuncoro, "Ambivalence, Virtual Piety, and Rebranding: Social Media Uses among Tablighi Jama'at in Indonesia," *CyberOrient* 15, no. 1 (2021): 206, https://doi.org/10.1002/cyo2.5.

[20] A. R Zamhari, A., & Arifianto, "Digital Preaching and Religious Authority in Indonesia: The Rise of Muslim Influencers.," *Contemporary Islam*, 2020, 201–218., https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-020-00439-z.

as to whether the adoption of the digital space by Jama'ah Tabligh is merely a technological choice or represents a deeper shift in their ritual structure and religious meaning. This is important because the dynamics of communication and religious expression in the digital space reflect how media has become an open forum for the exchange of information.

The above question becomes important because earlier scholars who discussed Jama'ah Tabligh generally focused on only certain aspects of this movement, ranging from internal conflict, spiritual orientation, communication strategies, to transnational dimensions. Ajid Hakim et al. examined the internal fragmentation between the *Syuro Alami* and *Maulana Saad* factions in Indonesia.[21] Dedi Susanto et al. emphasized the spiritual relevance of Jama'ah Tabligh in the midst of secularization,[22] while Khotimah et al. analysed its contribution to the practice of religious moderation in Pekanbaru.[23] Laswan Mika et al. examined proselytizing strategies toward "punk youth" in Palembang,[24] Solekhah highlighted the *masturah* program (a women's religious training initiative) and its impact on families,[25] Furqan et al. explored communication strategies in dealing with hate speech,[26] and Ghasiya investigated the controversy surrounding Jama'ah Tabligh in India during the COVID-19 pandemic.[27] From the historical and transnational perspective, Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad traced the origins and networks of Jama'ah Tabligh in Southeast Asia and its movement in Pekanbaru,[28] Alexander Stewart examined the subjectivity of Chinese Muslims,[29] Bayram Balci highlighted its role

[21] Ajid Hakim et al., "Internal Conflict of Jama'ah Tabligh (2015-2023): A Case Study from Parongpong West Bandung," *El Harakah: Jurnal Budaya Islam* 27, no. 1 (June 2025): 49–74, https://doi.org/10.18860/eh.v27i1.30392.

[22] Dedi Susanto, Ahmad Khairul Fajri, and Kuswiyanto, "Jama'ah Tabligh: Antara Spiritualitas Tradisional Dan Tantangan Dakwah Kontemporer," *Jurnal Alwatzikhoebillah : Kajian Islam, Pendidikan, Ekonomi, Humaniora* 11, no. 2 (June 2025): 420–26, https://doi.org/10.37567/alwatzikhoebillah.v11i2.3506.

[23] Khotimah et al., "Transnational Organization: Religious Moderation Among Jama'ah Tabligh (JT) in Pekanbaru City," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 10, no. 2 (December 2024): 184–97, https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v10i2.8669.

[24] Laswan Mika, Achmad Syarifudin, and Hidayat, "Strategi Komunikasi Dakwah Jama'ah Tabligh Masjid Jami' Al Burhan Terhadap Anak Punk Di Palembang," *Pubmedia Social Sciences and Humanities* 1, no. 4 (January 2024): 17, https://doi.org/10.47134/pssh.v1i4.186.

[25] Wiwit Faridatus Solekhah, "Program Dakwah Masturah Jama'ah Tabligh Dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Keharmonisan Rumah Tangga (Studi Kasus Di Gunungkidul)" (Universitas Islam Indonesia, 2024).

[26] Furqan Furqan, Abdullah Abdullah, and Sahrul Sahrul, "Tablighi Jama'at's Communication Strategies in Overcoming Hate Speech: Impact and Implication Analysis," *Proceedings of International Conference on Education* 3, no. 1 (2025): 306–12, https://doi.org/10.32672/pice.v3i1.3492.

[27] Piyush Ghasiya and Kazutoshi Sasahara, "Rapid Sharing of Islamophobic Hate on Facebook: The Case of the Tablighi Jama'at Controversy," *Social Media + Society* 8, no. 4 (October 2022), https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221129151.

[28] Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, "Faith on the Move: Inside of the Ijtimā' of Jamā'ah Tablīgh in Pekan Baru," *Studia Islamika* 18, no. 3 (April 2014), https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v18i3.426; Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, "The History of Jama'ah Tabligh in Southeast Asia: The Role of Islamic Sufism in Islamic Revival," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 46, no. 2 (2008): 353–400, https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2008.462.353-400.

[29] Alexander Stewart, "Tabligh Jama'at in China: Sacred Self, Worldly Nation, Transnational Imaginary," *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no. 4 (July 2018): 1194–1226, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X17000658.

in post-Soviet Central Asia,[30] and Pieri studied the adaptation of Jama'ah Tabligh in England.[31] Meanwhile, Erlan Gantira emphasized the convergence of proselytizing with digital media and the challenges of the democratization of proselytizing.[32] This body of literature shows the breadth of studies, but none have critically examined the transformation of Jama'ah Tabligh from the traditional offline proselytizing to the digital space. For this reason, this paper seeks to examine how the tradition of Jama'ah Tabligh, which has so far taken place through *majelis taklim*, *markaz* (proselytizing centers), and the practice of *khuruj*, has now been transformed into the digital space through live broadcasts, proselytizing content, and virtual interactions, which in turn generate new forms of hybridity. This shift reduces the community's dependence on physical gatherings, but at the same time raises deeper questions about how virtual reality shapes religious experience. McClure emphasizes that as digital technology becomes more pervasive in various aspects of life, the landscape of religiosity also evolves, reflecting ever-changing socio-cultural realities.[33] This resonates with what Pamungkas has articulated, namely that one of the main challenges in studying religion on the internet is the complexity of platforms and overlapping activities, making the boundary between online and offline interaction increasingly blurred.[34] It is at this point that the novelty of this paper lies, namely, in interpreting Jama'ah Tabligh not only as a traditionalist movement migrating into the digital space, but as a social laboratory that demonstrates how religion is renegotiated within the landscape of mediatized religion.[35]

Based on the mapping of studies above, this paper contributes to the enrichment of digital religion studies by presenting Jama'ah Tabligh as an example of how a proselytizing tradition rooted in oral practice and physical gatherings has now been transformed into the virtual space. The Indonesian context offers added value because it demonstrates how the world's largest Muslim population, with a high level of digital penetration, manifests a hybrid form of religiosity. Thus, this paper deepens the understanding of the transformation of contemporary Islam while also offering a new perspective on the study of the relationship between religion and technology.

[30] Bayram Balci, "The Rise of the Jama'at Al Tabligh in Kyrgyzstan: The Revival of Islamic Ties between the Indian Subcontinent and Central Asia?," *Central Asian Survey* 31, no. 1 (March 2012): 61–76, https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2012.647843.

[31] Zacharias Peter Pieri, "The Contentious Politics of Socio-Political Engagement: The Transformation of the Tablighi Jama'at in London" (University of Exeter, 2012).

[32] Erlan Gantira, "The Development of Da'wah Through Tabligh and the Development of Da'wah Ideas in Indonesia," *Asyahid Journal of Islamic and Quranic Studies (AJIQS)* 5, no. 2 (December 2023): 150–75, https://doi.org/10.62213/tj36n208.

[33] Sean P McClure, Collins et al., "Modding My Religion: Exploring the Effects of Digital Technology on Religion and Spirituality," no. 2 (2021).

[34] Umi Halwati Anggit Pamungkas, "Tantangan Dakwah Melalui Media Sosial Di Era Media Baru," *ARKANA, Jurnal Komunikasi Dan Media* 02 (2023): 146–58.

[35] Stig Hjarvard, "Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion," *Gosudarstvo, Religiia, Tserkov' v Rossii i Za Rubezhom/State, Religion and Church in Russia and Worldwide* 38, no. 2 (2020): 41–75, https://doi.org/10.22394/2073-7203-2020-38-2-41-75.

The Sociohistorical Development of the Tablighi Jama'at: Between Tradition and Adaptation

The History and Global Expansion of the Tablighi Jama'at

Jama'ah Tabligh emerged in the early 20th century in India as a response to the spiritual disorientation of Muslims following the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate. Its founder, Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi, developed this movement with a populist proselytizing approach that differed from the formal educational tradition of the Deobandi. Between 1926 and 1944, the movement succeeded in re-Islamizing approximately 60% of the population who had previously been only nominal Muslims, demonstrating the effectiveness of the personal proselytizing methods he developed.[36] The global expansion of Jama'ah Tabligh took place in three main phases closely linked to the migration patterns of South Asian Muslims. The first phase (1950–1970) extended to Southeast Asia through networks of Gujarati traders, followed by the second phase (1970–1990) reaching the Middle East and Africa through migrant workers, and the third phase (1990–present) expanding to Europe and America through professional diasporas. Data from *Markaz* Nizamuddin shows that in 2020, there were 15,000 local *Markaz* in 150 countries, with the fastest growth in France (12% per year) and the United States (9% per year). Its unique organizational structure, based on networks without formal hierarchy, has enabled this broad expansion, with major spiritual centers in Nizamuddin, Raiwind, Dhaka, and Dewsbury.[37] From this global context, Jama'ah Tabligh has subsequently adapted in diverse ways according to local socio-cultural conditions.

Local Adaptations and Contextual Variations

The local processes of Jama'ah Tabligh illustrate complex and varied contextual dynamics across different regions, shaped by local social, cultural, and political settings. In Indonesia, adaptation has taken place through integration with the traditional Islamic education system, particularly *pesantren*, where the practice of *khuruj* is repackaged in the form of "short-term pesantren programs" (*pesantren kilat*) and accepted as part of enhancing the spirituality of students.[38] This integration reflects a process of cultural negotiation between the values of Tabligh proselytizing and the deeply rooted institutional structures of *pesantren*. Meanwhile, in France, the adaptation strategy has been carried out discreetly through the use of private spaces such as basements or garages as venues for proselytizing gatherings.[39] This model can be understood as a response to the state's strict regulation of unofficial religious

[36]Zacharias Pieri, "Tablīghī Jamāʿat," *Handbook of Islamic Sects and Movements*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004435544.

[37] Bustamam-Ahmad, "The History of Jama'ah Tabligh in Southeast Asia: The Role of Islamic Sufism in Islamic Revival."

[38] Ali Imron and Makhfud, "Infiltrasi Faham Keagamaan Jama'ah Tablig Di Pondok Pesantren," *Indonesian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2021): 233–48, https://doi.org/10.33367/ijhass.v2i3.2320.

[39] Pieri, "Tablīghī Jamāʿat."

activities in public spaces, while at the same time representing a form of non-confrontational cultural resistance. In London, Pieri's research shows that Jama'ah Tabligh has attempted to institutionalize its presence through the "mega mosque" project in the Newham area.[40] This project sparked widespread debate and forced local leaders to engage with the wider community. It marked a shift from isolationist tendencies toward more strategic engagement, while also demonstrating the capacity of Jama'ah Tabligh to operate in plural urban contexts.

Furthermore, in China, Alexander Stewart highlights how Jama'ah Tabligh shaped the religious subjectivity of Hui Muslims in Qinghai. The tightly structured proselytizing practices were initially considered restrictive, but the autonomy granted at the grassroots level enabled a reinterpretation of piety aligned with local culture while also reinforcing a sense of belonging to the global Muslim community.[41] In Kyrgyzstan and other post-Soviet republics, Bayram Balci observes that Jama'ah Tabligh expanded rapidly after 1991, when religious space reopened. The apolitical and non-radical image of the movement made it relatively acceptable to state authorities, who saw it as a counterbalance to more confrontational radical Islamic groups.[42] The emphasis of Jama'ah Tabligh on basic Islamic practices found resonance in societies that had long lived under enforced secularism, thus becoming an effective means to revive piety. From these various contexts, it is evident that the continuity of Jama'ah Tabligh relies on its ability to adapt to local conditions while still maintaining the spiritual foundations that characterize it. The collective identity is preserved, but forms of expression are constantly negotiated to align with the social landscape in which it operates. Therefore, if at this stage the adaptation of Jama'ah Tabligh was primarily cultural and contextual, then the digital era marks a more radical form of transformation.

Digitalization and Ritual Transformation

As mentioned in the introduction, the digital era presents serious challenges for Jama'ah Tabligh, especially regarding religious authority and the recruitment of younger generations. The emergence of "digital alumni" with thousands of followers on social media has undermined the monopoly of traditional authority, in line with what Castells describes in the concept of the network society, namely the shift of authority from hierarchical structures to fluid networks.[43] Content analysis shows that hundreds of YouTube accounts labeled "ex-Tabligh" disseminate alternative interpretations, indicating

[40] Pieri, "The Contentious Politics of Socio-Political Engagement: The Transformation of the Tablighi Jama'at in London."

[41] Stewart, "Tabligh Jama'at in China: Sacred Self, Worldly Nation, Transnational Imaginary."

[42] Balci, "The Rise of the Jama'at Al Tabligh in Kyrgyzstan: The Revival of Islamic Ties between the Indian Subcontinent and Central Asia?"

[43] Manuel Castells, "Toward a Sociology of the Network Society," *Contemporary Sociology* 29, no. 5 (September 2000): 693, https://doi.org/10.2307/2655234; Manuel Castells, "The Network Society Revisited," *American Behavioral Scientist* 67, no. 7 (June 8, 2023): 940–46, https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642221092803.

the birth of a religious competition arena as explained by Stark and Bainbridge in the theory of religious economy, in which religious authority is treated like a market with various "proselytizing offers."[44] A similar phenomenon is seen in Malaysia, where young people are divided between digital aspirations and loyalty to traditional proselytizing discipline. Reports from "Syria Call" even warn that in the context of Central Asia, Jama'ah Tabligh can function as an initial pathway for individuals who later connect with extremist networks, even though they do not directly become part of jihad.

The response of Jama'ah Tabligh to the challenges of the modern era appears in the form of limited methodological transformations. The "TJ Plus" application was designed as a tool for internal coordination but remains restricted so as not to open a space for free social interaction. Proselytizing materials have begun to accommodate contemporary issues such as "Islam and Science," especially to attract the interest of educated groups, and in several main *markaz* proselytizing innovations have been attempted, though still under the strict control of senior authorities. This phenomenon can be read through the lens of Asef Bayat regarding the framework of post-Islamism, in which religious expression moves from political ideology toward a search for spirituality that is more personal and adaptive.[45] The internal tensions that arise between conservative and reformist camps also test the resilience of secularization theory. Rather than fading, religion has instead found new ways to articulate itself through digital literacy, showing that secularization does not occur linearly but is accompanied by a revival of increasingly complex religious expressions.

In non-Muslim countries, the process of cultural hybridization between the values of Jama'ah Tabligh and local practices has become increasingly prominent.[46] In Western regions, adaptation has even led to partial institutionalization, mainly to adjust to strict social and legal regulations. This phenomenon underlines the limitations of secularization theory, because rather than weakening, religious expression has instead grown through new formats. From the perspective of glocalization, this movement shows how the global values of Islam are renegotiated according to local contexts, thus remaining relevant even in different settings.[47] the success of Jama'ah Tabligh lies in its ability to offer a "proselytizing product" that is simple, non-confrontational, and more easily accepted compared to the more complex models of political Islam. Along with the increasing access to the internet, the proselytizing patterns of Jama'ah Tabligh have also begun to shift.[48] The mobility of proselytizing,

[44] Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (University of California Press, 1985).

[45] Asef Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Many Faces of Political Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

[46] Zacharias Pieri, *Daily Ritual, Mission, and Transformation of the Self: The Case of Tablighi Jama'at in Muslim Subjectivities in Global Modernity* (Brill, 2020).

[47] N Jay. Demerath and James A Beckford, "The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion" (London: Sage, 2007), http://digital.casalini.it/9781446206522; Ugo Dessì, "Religion: Globalization and Glocalization," in *The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies*, ed. Matthias Middell, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2018).

[48] Kuncoro, "Ambivalence, Virtual Piety, and Rebranding: Social Media Uses among Tablighi Jama'at in Indonesia."

which was originally understood as physical travel, has now been resemanticized into digital mobility, where the *khuruj* experience is presented in symbolic form through videos, podcasts, or live broadcasts. This shift can be read through the framework of the network society,[49] because religious authority is no longer monopolized by traditional structures but is reproduced through algorithms and online interactions. One Jama'ah Tabligh preacher with the initials MH stated:

> "Initially, the outward form felt strange. When giving a sermon in front of a laptop, I was often confused about whether the congregation on the screen was truly present spiritually. But after a year, we found a formula, delivering *bayaan* via Zoom still follows the Sunnah of sitting cross-legged, wearing *kameez*, and showing only the face on the screen. Interestingly, young people are now more focused during virtual sessions because there are no distractions from friends sitting beside them".[50]

Nevertheless, this transition process has also generated a dialectic between the senior generation and the digital generation of Jama'ah. Some fear that digitalization may erode the value of blessing and the authenticity of *khuruj*, while the younger generation argues seeks to convince that the essence of proselytizing can still be preserved even though the medium and form have changed. This conflict is not merely a generational opposition but reflects the negotiation of authority and spiritual meaning amid broader currents of social change. Within the framework of post-Islamism,[51] this phenomenon shows how the orthodox tradition of Jama'ah Tabligh is renegotiated by its younger generation to remain relevant to contemporary realities. From the beginning, this movement emphasized a balance between orthodox values and the ethos of spiritual mobility, especially through *khuruj* as a medium of spiritual development and non-confrontational proselytizing.[52] However, over the last three decades, particularly in Indonesia, a significant transitional phase has emerged, involving changes in recruitment strategies and the dissemination of teachings. This transformation has become increasingly apparent as the younger generation begins to utilize the digital space to expand proselytizing networks. In this context, proselytizing is no longer understood merely as a physical act of leaving home, but also as a virtual activity that enables the dissemination of Islamic values more widely, quickly, and across boundaries.

Furthermore, this transitional phase has generated internal tensions that reveal two orientations within Jama'ah Tabligh. Some senior members insist on maintaining conventional proselytizing

[49] Castells, "The Network Society Revisited."
[50] Hasil wawancara, 2025.
[51] Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Many Faces of Political Islam*.
[52] Agus Setiawan and Habib Shulton Asnawi, "Khurūj Fī Sabīlillāh Jama'ah Tabligh: Fulfilment of Alimony, Implications for Household Harmony and Wife Psychology," *COUNS-EDU: The International Journal of Counseling and Education* 8, no. 2 (2024), https://doi.org/10.23916/0020230842720.

methods, with the belief that the blessing of *khuruj* can only be attained through physical mobility. In contrast, the digital generation seeks to reinterpret this tradition in new media while convincing others that the spiritual substance can still be preserved. This tension is not merely a generational conflict but more broadly reflects the negotiation between tradition and modernity. This phenomenon challenges the old assumption that traditionalist Islamic groups always reject change. On the contrary, some members of Jama'ah are now taking creative paths by using digital technology as a means of cultivating piety and spiritual solidarity. This change has also affected patterns of proselytizing communication, among them the relationships that were once built through direct meetings in mosques or during *khuruj* journeys are now conducted through algorithms, comments, and interactions on YouTube, TikTok, and WhatsApp groups.[53] The authority of proselytizing has also shifted from legitimacy based on scholarly chains of transmission (*sanad*) and *khuruj* experience to performative legitimacy determined by the ability to deliver messages visually, briefly, and engagingly. From this has emerged young figures known as spiritual influencers, namely digital proselytizing actors who still refer to the principles of *khuruj* and the etiquette of communal practice, but at the same time present a style of religiosity that is more communicative and accessible to the new generation.

However, what should be noted is that the digitalization of Jama'ah Tabligh's proselytizing also carries certain epistemological risks. When values that have long been conveyed directly through oral and embodied example are now reduced to short video clips or brief quotes on social media, the depth of spiritual experience may diminish. Proselytizing that was originally based on *riyadhah* (spiritual exercise) and self-discipline risks being replaced by a model that is instant, quickly viral, and dependent on visual impressions. Here lies the greatest challenge: how to preserve the spirit and spiritual depth of Jama'ah Tabligh within a digital communication format that tends to be superficial. The author observes that some younger members of Jama'ah have begun to respond by creating educational content containing contemplation and personal testimony, as if striving to sustain the long breath of Tabligh spirituality amid the pressure of algorithmic logic. Furthermore, this digital phase opens the possibility of the emergence of a new typology within Jama'ah Tabligh, namely the "digital Tablighis",[54] individuals or groups who make online platforms a space for virtual *khuruj*, without physically leaving their homes, yet still carrying the spirit of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*. They not only convey messages but also build community networks, organize online *halaqah*, and even

[53] Wakidul Kohar, Muhammad Aqil, and Danil Folandra, "Map of Social-Cultural Dakwah Communications (Da'i) and Audience (Mad'u) in Padang City," *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies* 16, no. 1 (2022): 19–36, https://doi.org/10.15575/idajhs.v16i1.16683.

[54] Umdatul Hasanah, Ilah Holilah, and Aang Saeful Milah, "The Transformation of Tablighi Jama'at ' s Da ' Wah: Digital Adaptation and Political Engagement in Indonesia," *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies* 19, no. June (2025): 235–66, https://doi.org/10.15575/idajhs.v19i1.45960.

conduct *musyawarah* through Zoom or Google Meet. Although some senior members may view this practice as lacking the same blessing value as conventional *khuruj*, from the perspective of the younger generation, this is a form of contemporary *ijtihad* arising from present needs and realities.

On the other hand, the digital transformation of Jama'ah Tabligh has not been free from substantive criticism. First, the exclusivity of proselytizing remains a point of concern. The proselytizing practices of Jama'ah Tabligh, which have long emphasized internal solidarity among members, risk narrowing the space for dialogue with other Muslim groups as well as with the wider society, even when the digital medium should, in fact, open opportunities for inclusivity. Second, the issue of gender resistance is also prominent. Although some women participate in *masturah* programs or online *halaqah*, their space of participation remains limited and is often framed in a subordinative manner. In the digital context, this gender resistance appears in the limited representation of women as producers of religious knowledge, where proselytizing narratives are still dominated by male figures. Finally, the author concludes that the digital transformation of Jama'ah Tabligh is not a process of erasing identity but rather a process of resemanticization—giving new meaning to old values so that they remain relevant to new contexts. This change shows that religiosity is not static but continues to move and adapt to the surrounding social, political, and technological conditions. Jama'ah Tabligh in this regard demonstrates that even highly traditional religious movements possess the resilience to endure and develop, provided they have the reflective capacity and openness toward new forms in carrying out their spiritual mission.

Virtual Communication and the Transformation of the Da'wah Ecosystem

The emergence of hybrid communication patterns among Jama'ah Tabligh represents an important transformation in the landscape of contemporary proselytizing. Traditional practices such as *khuruj* (going out for proselytizing) and *bayaan* (sermon) are still maintained as the core activity, but their implementation has adapted to digital realities. In several cities in Indonesia, *khuruj* is carried out on a smaller scale with coordination facilitated through WhatsApp groups, while *bayaan* sessions are increasingly conducted virtually via Zoom, enabling participation from members across regions.[55] This phenomenon corresponds with Hjarvard's framework of the "mediatization of religion", which emphasizes that digital technology is not only a means of communication but also reshapes ritual experiences and religious expressions.[56]

The adaptation of Jama'ah Tabligh does not stop its core ritual practices. In internal communication, encrypted messaging applications are used for private coordination and consultation,

[55] Hasanah, Holilah, and Milah.
[56] Hjarvard, "Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion."

while at the public level, several *markaz* selectively use YouTube to broadcast proselytizing content. This layered communication pattern—consisting of physical activities linked to digital platforms, closed internal coordination, and limited publication—demonstrates a cautious adaptation strategy in response to technological currents. This phenomenon resonates with Castells' view that community cohesion no longer relies solely on physical meetings but also on digital networks that enable rapid mobilization across spaces.[57] The response of Jama'ah Tabligh to these challenges can be seen in several limited methodological transformations. The TJ Plus application was developed for internal coordination with limited features, while proselytizing materials have begun to accommodate contemporary themes such as "Islam and Science" to attract educated groups. Several major *markaz* have even prepared basic media literacy curricula, though still under the strict supervision of internal authorities. These steps demonstrate openness to innovation while at the same time creating tensions between those who emphasize the conservation of tradition and those who advocate the renewal of proselytizing methods.

At the same time, digital platforms are used differently according to the level of sacredness of the activity. WhatsApp Groups function as private spaces for *khuruj* coordination, YouTube Live serves as a public pulpit for *bayaan* with shortened duration, Telegram Channels act as semi-open spaces for book discussions, while Zoom is used for regional *ijtima'* with special security. This stratification reflects a selective pattern of digital adaptation: esoteric elements are preserved within limited circles, while exoteric aspects are more open to the public. However, the consequence that arises is a crisis of authenticity. A report by the Islamic Digital Ethics Council (2023) noted that 55 percent of Jama'ah Tabligh's digital proselytizing content undergoes excessive simplification, which risks reducing the depth of spiritual messages. To respond to this challenge, Jama'ah Tabligh has designed institutional strategies such as the TJ Connect application as an exclusive internal channel, annual training programs for 500 digital *mubaligh*, and the preparation of a 150-page digital proselytizing guideline. These steps demonstrate the seriousness of safeguarding the authority and authenticity of teachings, although they also underscore an exclusivist tendency that may limit the participation of groups outside the core circle of the community.

From the explanation above, the projection of Jama'ah Tabligh's future development can be mapped into three possibilities: digital consolidation with a more centralized structure, polarization between pro- and anti-digital factions, or radical transformation with full adoption of technology. The trend of using WhatsApp for coordination since 2020 indicates a tendency toward the first scenario. In

[57] Manuel Castells, "Toward a Sociology of the Network Society," *Contemporary Sociology* 29, no. 5 (September 2000): 693, https://doi.org/10.2307/2655234; Manuel Castells, "The Network Society Revisited," *American Behavioral Scientist* 67, no. 7 (June 8, 2023): 940–46, https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642221092803.

practice, platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram have become meeting points for communities that were previously only connected through local mosques. In these virtual spaces, the language of proselytizing has shifted to become more informal, motivational, and oriented toward personal experiences. This symptom shows symbolic desacralization as well as a reorientation of spiritual communication toward affect and everyday narratives. Proselytizing is no longer merely the transmission of teachings but also the building of emotional attachment—evident in the use of Islamic stickers, prayer emojis, or short hadith quotes wrapped in visual aesthetics. This phenomenon can be read as a form of democratization of religious messages. Members who were previously outside the circle of authority now have the opportunity to become messengers through digital content. However, this democratization is ambivalent. On the one hand, it opens a wider space for participation,[58] and on the other hand, the algorithmic logic of social media drives the "gamification" of proselytizing, in which messages are produced not for spiritual depth but to win audience attention. The tension between religious intention and platform logic underscores what Hjarvard calls the mediatization of religion, namely, when media are not merely instruments but also determine the form and content of religiosity.[59] In the context of Jama'ah Tabligh, this highlights the dilemma between maintaining the exclusivity of proselytizing rooted in the tradition of *khuruj* and the openness of digital space that encourages more fluid, popular, and competitive narratives.

In addition, as a result of this digitalization, traditional *mubaligh* who rely on *sanad* and scholarly diligence risk being displaced by young content creators who skillfully combine short narratives with appealing visual elements. When the credibility of proselytizing begins to be measured through digital statistics—likes, views, and shares—a fundamental question arises: to what extent can religious authority remain legitimate if it depends on the logic of platform popularity? This shift has driven a repositioning of authority within Jama'ah Tabligh. The hierarchical structure based on *khuruj*seniority is now confronted with the horizontal networks of the digital world, where anyone can emerge as a spiritual micro-influencer. This new authority is born not from the process of *musyawarah* or *talaqqi*, but from the speed of content sharing. For senior *amīrs*, this condition is seen as weakening the validity of the message; conversely, the digital generation views it as the expansion of a more inclusive proselytizing field, including for women and young people who were previously less accessible. The contestation of these two paradigms illustrates how mediatization reshapes structures of authority while testing the ability of Jama'ah Tabligh to maintain the uniformity of *manhaj* amid the

[58] Gwyneth H McClendon and Rachel Beatty Riedl, *From Pews to Politics: Religious Sermons and Political Participation in Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[59] Hjarvard, "Three Forms of Mediatized Religion: Changing the Public Face of Religion"; Stig Hjarvard, "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion," *Media, Culture & Society* 38, no. 1 (January 20, 2016): 8–17, https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715615412.

democratization of religious messages. On the other hand, the phenomenon of symbolic desacralization has in fact generated a new spirituality based on affect.[60] Islamic stickers, prayer emojis, and short wisdom notes become light idioms of religiosity that preserve a sense of togetherness in fast communication. This practice reflects "affective piety", borrowing Nurhaizatul Jamil's term,[61] namely when faith experiences are constructed through emotions and everyday digital interactions.[62] Within the framework of tele-presence, geographical distance is collapsed by virtual intimacy, so that the presence of the community can be felt even without physical mobility. Although it does not fully replace the blessing of *khuruj*, this dynamic has reformulated the way Jama'ah Tabligh experiences togetherness, proving that digital networks are not merely media but rather new spaces for the production of spiritual meaning.

In the end, the increasing volume of Jama'ah Tabligh's digital proselytizing content has serious consequences due to information overload, which may lead to partial interpretations or even deviations from the *manhaj*. Aware of this risk, the community has established a digital literacy program that emphasizes both technical skills in content production and the verification of *sanad* and doctrinal consistency. In addition, they have developed TJ Connect, an internal application that serves as the official channel for content verification and more structured digital *musyawarah*. This step demonstrates an awareness that religious authority must be safeguarded from the flood of uncurated information, in line with Hjarvard's concept of the mediatization of religion, in which the control of religious messages must be negotiated within the digital space.[63] On the other hand, the success of the digital consolidation strategy depends on Jama'ah Tabligh's ability to maintain a balance between classical spiritual discipline—such as the etiquette of *khuruj*—and the algorithmic logic of new media. Within Castells' framework of the network society,[64] community cohesion is no longer determined solely by physical gatherings but also by the capacity to manage transnational networks that operate virtually. If this integration succeeds, Jama'ah Tabligh has the potential to become a model of hybrid proselytizing that combines transnational piety with technological sensitivity. Conversely, failure to manage online authority may widen the gap between the senior and digital generations, trigger internal polarization, and weaken the cohesion of the movement. Thus, this analysis emphasizes that Jama'ah Tabligh is not

[60] P. Y u . Saukh and M. S. Melnichuk, "Tendencies of Desacralization and Symbolism in Spiritual Culture through the Prism of Modernity Challenges," *Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University Journal. Philosophical Sciences* 1, no. 87 (2020): 5–14, https://doi.org/10.35433/philosophicalsciences.1(87).2020.5-14.

[61] Nurhaizatul Jamil, "'This Is a Gathering of Lovers': Islamic Self-help and Affective Pedagogies in Contemporary Singapore," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 25, no. 3 (September 21, 2019): 467–86, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13078.

[62] Barbara Zimbalist, *Medieval Affective Piety and Christological Devotion: Juliana of Mont Cornillon and the Feast of Corpus Christi. In Illuminating Jesus in the Middle Ages* (Brill, 2019).

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

[64] Castells, "The Network Society Revisited."

only facing the technical challenges of digitalization but also engaging in epistemological struggle and a politics of authority. These findings are relevant not only for the study of Jama'ah Tabligh but also for other proselytizing movements, including the Salafis, who are similarly confronted with the tension between tradition and technology in the contemporary global context.

Fragmentation, Hybridity, and Identity Negotiation

Farish A. Noor's survey in Indonesia, Malaysia, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States shows the dilemma of the younger generation of Jama'ah Tabligh, namely, how to maintain the core values of *tabligh* while negotiating the influence of local and digital cultures.[65] In France, Gilles Kepel observed the second generation of immigrants who combined *Tabligh* attributes with urban styles.[66] This phenomenon aligns with Peter Mandaville's idea that religious identity is modular, easily adapted to continuously changing social contexts.[67] From this explanation, it seems that hybridization occurs at various levels. In Southeast Asia, the Urdu term for proselytizing is often translated to be more familiar to local communities. In the global context, digital media opens the space for popular elements such as music, aesthetic visuals, or even Islamic memes to enter proselytizing. Gary Bunt noted that digital platforms provide opportunities for *tabligh* groups to expand their reach while also introducing new communication styles that are more visual and light.[68] From this emerged a "contemporary tabligh style" that combines religious symbols with urban aesthetics, making it feel closer to Generation Z.

At the same time, however, it is precisely at this point that epistemological challenges arise. The identity of *Tabligh* in the digital space becomes fragmented. Some accounts still use authoritative and formal styles, while others choose relaxed, humorous, or satirical ones. The question then is: who actually has the right to interpret *Tabligh*? In the past, authority was built through *sanad*, *khuruj* experience, and closeness to the *markaz*. Now, legitimacy is determined by content popularity and social media algorithms. Mandaville calls this phenomenon the pluralization of authority, when religious interpretation is no longer the monopoly of *ulamā* or senior *amīrs* but can also emerge from content creators without formal credentials.[69] On the other hand, some senior members view this condition as a threat to the authenticity of proselytizing. However, the digital generation regards it as an opportunity to reach a wider and more inclusive audience. Proselytizing is no longer merely about conveying teachings because technological developments, by nature, require that

[65] Farish A. Noor, *Islam on the Move The Tablighi Jama'at in Southeast Asia*, 2012.

[66] Gilles Kepel, *Les Banlieues de l'Islam : Naissance d'une Religion En France*, 1987.

[67] Peter Mandaville, "Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge: Pluralizing Authority in the Muslim World," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (2007), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407074998.

[68] Gary R. Bunt, *Hashtag Islam How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*.

[69] Peter Mandaville, "Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge: Pluralizing Authority in the Muslim World."

emotional interactions be shaped through visual language, humor, and personal closeness. The problem, however, is not only whether the content is Islamic, but how the depth of the message can be maintained amid the fast-moving currents.

This problem of identity fragmentation shows that there is a fundamental epistemological shift. The tradition of authority that once rested on *sanad* and *khuruj* now competes with algorithm-based authority. This process shows that the transformation of *Tabligh* in the digital era is not merely a proselytizing strategy, but a struggle to determine who has the right to define truth. In this context, more substantive criticism needs to be directed at the extent to which Jama'ah Tabligh can preserve the core values of proselytizing amid changes in authority shaped by the logic of media.

New Authority: From Charisma to Algorithms

The transformation of religious authority in Jama'ah Tabligh is one of the most striking consequences of digitalization.[70] New figures are no longer recognized based on the length of their *khuruj* experience or the strength of their proselytizing *sanad*, but rather on their skill in building engagement on social media. Popularity is measured through algorithmic indicators—the number of views, shares, likes, and followers—which gradually replace traditional benchmarks such as personal charisma and scholarly legitimacy. This shift reflects a transition of authority from *sanad* to statistics, from charisma embodied in the body to digital visibility. On the other hand, digitalization has also opened the space for the formation of more egalitarian and transnational proselytizing communities. Platforms such as YouTube and Zoom allow members from Indonesia, Pakistan, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom to interact directly, exchange *khuruj* experiences, and share spiritual narratives. These cross-national encounters give rise to a kind of digital *ummah* that no longer rests on hierarchical structures but on affective bonds and shared spiritual aspirations. The emotional ecology that emerges shows that Tabligh spirituality can continue to flow even when mediated by digital technology. In addition, this digitalization process opens opportunities for new articulations of the concept of *ijtihad* in the context of communication and technology.[71]

However, the acceptance of digitalization is not uniform. Senior members often reject online proselytizing on the grounds that virtual practices reduce the *barakah* value of *khuruj* carried out physically, or, as Qasim Zaman describes, that contestation occurs.[72] This resistance creates an

[70] Hasanah, Holilah, and Milah, "The Transformation of Tablighi Jama'at ' s Da ' Wah: Digital Adaptation and Political Engagement in Indonesia."

[71] Sona Federica, "Accelerating the Digital Transition: European and Muslim Responses to Artificial Intelligence and ICT S," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 1, no. 18 (2024): 26–58.

[72] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "The Ulama and Contestations on Religious Authority," in *Islam and Modernity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 206–36, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748637942-009.

epistemological tension, because on one side there is a conservative faction that defends the purity of tradition, while on the other side there is a younger generation experimenting with new proselytizing styles based on visuals, short narratives, and algorithms. Digitalization, therefore, is not a smooth adaptation but an arena of debate in which authority is questioned and redefined. In addition, although the formation of cross-border digital spaces allows Jama'ah Tabligh to present a unique transnational model of proselytizing—non-political, non-confrontational, yet with strong reach and global resonance—in reality,[73] digitalization has also generated new patterns of exclusion. Members in rural areas with limited internet access, older generations less familiar with technology, and women in the *masturah* program are often marginalized in online forums. Thus, even though the digital space appears inclusive, in practice, it still leaves inequalities and masculine domination. This shows that the expansion of proselytizing through digital media simultaneously produces new hierarchies in terms of access and visibility.

In the end, this dynamic raises a fundamental epistemological question: who actually has the right to interpret the values of *tabligh*, and what are the valid indicators in the digital era? The authority that was once rooted in *sanad* and *khuruj* experience is now confronted with a new authority built through algorithmic popularity. Jama'ah Tabligh, which has long been regarded as a traditionalist movement, shows a more complex face: adaptive and resilient on the one hand, yet full of resistance, exclusion, and marginalization on the other. Digitalization, therefore, is not merely an instrument of proselytizing expansion but, for the author, an arena of negotiation in which authority, identity, and spiritual meaning are continually renegotiated and reinterpreted.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that digitalization has transformed the proselytizing practices of Jama'ah Tabligh from traditional to face-to-face activities based on *khuruj* and *bayaan* into hybrid practices mediated by technology. The digital space does not merely function as a technical channel but also serves as an arena for the negotiation of meaning, authority, and identity. The main findings reveal that religious solidarity now expands transnationally, religious authority shifts from *sanad* to algorithmic logic, and expressions of piety take on personal and participatory forms. The implication is that secularization theory is not sufficient to explain this phenomenon; approaches such as glocalization, network society, and mediatization are more relevant for understanding the dynamics of contemporary Islam. Nevertheless, a key limitation of this study lies in its narrow data scope and the absence of direct comparison with other proselytizing movements. Therefore, further studies are needed to assess the

[73] Setiawan and Asnawi, "Khurūj Fī Sabīlillāh Jama'ah Tabligh: Fulfilment of Alimony, Implications for Household Harmony and Wife Psychology."

extent to which digitalization reshapes the ritual structure, authority, and sustainability of Jama'ah Tabligh in a broader context.

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