



The Transformation of Tablighi Jamaat's Da'wah: Digital Adaptation and Political Engagement in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

*This research examines the evolving da'wah dynamics among Tablighi Jamaat adherents in Indonesia. Founded by Muhammad Ilyas Al-Kandablawi in India in 1926, this transnational movement has significantly impacted Indonesia's Islamic landscape through systematic propagation practices including *khuruj* (preaching journeys), *jaulah* (local rounds), and *chillah* (40-day periods). The movement's da'wah methodologies are rooted in Jamaat tradition, transmitted through written texts, particularly *Fadhailul A'mal*, and oral *bayan* (lectures) by *amirs* (leaders). This investigation addresses a scholarly gap by uncovering transformative shifts in Tablighi Jamaat's da'wah practices—previously underexplored areas that reveal how traditional Islamic missionary methods adapt to contemporary Indonesian contexts while maintaining doctrinal authenticity. Using qualitative analysis, this study demonstrates that da'wah exhibits inherent dynamism, evolving alongside cultural and civilizational advancements. This dynamism is evident in Tablighi Jamaat's traditions, where the movement maintains strict adherence to core principles while implementing modifications in practical application methods. The findings reveal notable conceptual adaptability in how current followers execute da'wah activities, representing a balance between preserving traditional methodology and responding to contemporary challenges. This adaptability demonstrates the movement's capacity to navigate modern contexts without compromising fundamental beliefs. The study contributes new insights into the intersection of traditional Islamic practices and contemporary Indonesian society, showing how religious movements maintain authenticity while embracing necessary adaptations. However, the research acknowledges methodological limitations and restricted thematic scope, indicating areas requiring further exploration in future research endeavors to fully understand these complex transformation processes.*

Keywords: Contemporary media; da'wah politics; da'wah transformation; Tablighi Jamaat.

INTRODUCTION

The Tablighi Jamaat, recognized as a transnational Islamic missionary movement, has seen significant growth in Indonesia, reflected in both its geographical reach and the increase in its adherents. This trend is consistent with the movement's expansion globally, where it has attracted a rising number of followers, even in countries with contrasting political ideologies, such as communist China (Stewart, 2018). The growth of the Tablighi Jamaat's following is largely attributed to its approach to *da'wah* (preaching), which is characterized by its simplicity and emphasis on the practical dimensions of faith, devotion, and ethical conduct, coupled with a distinctive dress code. Adherents commonly don traditional attire like the *jalabiya*, a garment popular in the Kashmir and Hindustan regions, and are often identified by their beards and the use of specific fragrances, among other symbolic practices and traditions (Saepuloh et al., 2022). The movement engages with its target audience, termed *mad'u*, through periodic missionary activities known as *khubrij* (venturing out in the path of Allah) and *jaulah* (missionary travel), involving travel from one locality to another, and even internationally, to preach (Ali & Minxing, 2021c). This proactive stance in *da'wah* has enabled the Tablighi Jamaat to transcend geographical and ideological boundaries (Ali, 2018b), positioning its *da'wah* efforts as part of a broader global activism that coexists with diverse groups (Kuiper, 2017).

Daily missionary work, or *tabligh*, involves members leaving their homes to invite others to observe Allah's commands and eschew prohibitions (*khubrij fi sabilillah*). These missionary excursions, known as *jaulah*, have led to the community often referring to Tablighi Jamaat members as "Jaulah." Mosques serve as the foundational centers for their *da'wah*, facilitating worship, Quranic study, lectures (*bayan*), and discussions on religious matters. These mosques also function as temporary bases for rest and daily activities, including cooking, with members frequently carrying essential items for their missionary travels. The practices and lifestyle of the Tablighi Jamaat elicit varied responses from the public, ranging from support to criticism (Hasanah, 2014b). In their *da'wah* tradition, the Tablighi Jamaat consciously avoids engaging in debates over *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) or sectarian differences within Islamic law that could foster division and tension among Muslims. Additionally, the movement refrains from discussions on secular concerns and trivial matters

unrelated to religion, to maintain focus and devotion in their *da'wah* efforts (Hasanah, 2014a). Engaging in political discourse is also discouraged to prevent conflict (Razak, 2008). Notably, some traditions within the movement's *da'wah* practices have evolved over time, reflecting shifts in adherence to previously established norms.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the *da'wah* movement of the Tablighi Jamaat. These studies generally reveal three tendencies: the historical development of the Tablighi Jamaat, the conceptual framework of its teachings and *da'wah* methods, and the impact of the Tablighi Jamaat's *da'wah* activities. The first tendency includes research focusing on the historical and developmental aspects of the Tablighi Jamaat, featuring works by scholars such as (Bustamam-Ahmad, 2008; Masud, 2000; Ali, 2003; Chuah et al., 2011; Baskara, 2020). The Tablighi Jamaat's *da'wah* efforts have significantly contributed to the spread of Islam worldwide, marked by a distinctive Islamic identity (Ayong, 2011). The second tendency examines the teachings and *da'wah* perspectives of the Tablighi Jamaat (Razak, 2008; Burki, 2013; Effendy & Rustandi, 2020; Nuraedah & Mutawakkil, 2020; Stewart, 2018). The ideology and *da'wah* approach of the Tablighi Jamaat in spreading Islam through persuasive means have fostered peace, harmony, and an anti-sectarian stance. Alexander Stewart notably emphasized that the Tablighi Jamaat's *da'wah* has quietly dismantled hierarchical authorities and united the Muslim community through practices of piety (Stewart, 2018).

The third tendency looks at the social and religious impacts of the Tablighi Jamaat's *da'wah* (Putra, 2013; Hasanah, 2014b; Arifin, 2017; Pabbajah et al., 2022). The Tablighi Jamaat plays a crucial role in transforming religious life and piety, as affirmed by Ali and Minxing, who stated that the *da'wah* ideology developed by M. Ilyas Al-Kandahlawi not only addresses the challenges posed by Hinduism and secularism but also safeguards the community from sectarian divisions (Ali & Minxing, 2021c). However, among these tendencies, none have specifically focused on the transformation of *da'wah* practices within the Tablighi Jamaat.

This paper endeavors to augment existing research that has overlooked the dynamic shifts in traditions within the Tablighi Jamaat, specifically highlighting that transformation within the realm of *da'wah* is an inherent, evolutionary process that manifests in myriad forms. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer two pivotal questions: 1) What forms of tradition transformation are enacted by activists within the Tablighi Jamaat? 2) What

factors contribute to the transformation of these traditions? Addressing these questions will facilitate a deeper understanding of the underlying ideologies prompting changes, thereby influencing divergent perspectives among Tablighi Jamaat members concerning doctrinal interpretations. The examination of changes alongside the persistence of traditions serves to illuminate the dynamic nature of interpretations of religious teachings, which are invariably shaped by external conditions and situational contexts.

The premise of this paper is that *da'wah* methodologies are subject to continuous evolution and dynamism, reflecting the changing times and the inherent needs of the community. Transformation within the Tablighi Jamaat is inevitable, driven by a confluence of factors ranging from political to authoritative, practical, and strategic considerations. Political motives, for instance, may emerge in efforts to bolster internal leadership influence amidst friction. Similarly, the quest for authority in societal spheres, especially as *da'wah* opportunities expand, positions the community in competition with other authoritative entities, establishing it as a significant new authority. In the context of an unavoidable digital culture, pragmatic and realistic considerations dictate a strategic compromise with modernity, aimed at enhancing the Tablighi Jamaat's *da'wah* outreach and network. The discussion herein critically examines how the community's cherished teachings and traditions, deemed authentic in practice, are diversely implemented, reflecting a complex interplay of both micro and macro-level interests.

The scholarly landscape surrounding Tablighi Jamaat studies reveals a significant void that has persisted despite decades of academic inquiry. While researchers have extensively documented the movement's historical trajectory, doctrinal foundations, and societal impact, a crucial dimension remains unexplored: the dynamic transformation of *da'wah* practices within the movement itself. This oversight represents more than a mere academic gap—it reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of how religious movements operate in contemporary contexts. Previous studies have approached Tablighi Jamaat's missionary practices through static analytical lenses, treating them as immutable traditions passed down unchanged from the founder Muhammad Ilyas Al-Kandahlawi. This methodological limitation has prevented scholars from recognizing that religious movements, particularly those operating across diverse cultural contexts like Indonesia, must continuously adapt their practices to remain relevant and effective. The theoretical inadequacy of existing frameworks

compounds this problem, as researchers lack the conceptual tools to explain how movements navigate the delicate balance between preserving doctrinal authenticity and embracing necessary adaptations. Most critically, the empirical void in documenting specific transformations means that the academic community has no systematic understanding of how these changes manifest in practice, what drives them, or how they impact the movement's effectiveness and identity.

The theoretical architecture of this study rests on two complementary frameworks that together provide a comprehensive lens for understanding religious movement transformation. Doug McAdam's Social Movement Transformation Theory offers essential insights into how religious movements respond to changing political opportunities, mobilize resources strategically, and reframe their messages to maintain relevance in evolving contexts. This framework is particularly valuable for understanding how Tablighi Jamaat navigates Indonesia's complex political landscape while maintaining its traditionally apolitical stance. Rodney Stark's Religious Innovation Theory complements this by explaining how religious movements balance the seemingly contradictory demands of innovation and tradition preservation. Stark's concepts of adaptive capacity, environmental responsiveness, and institutional flexibility provide the analytical tools necessary to understand how Tablighi Jamaat modifies its practices while preserving its core identity. The study's operational definition of da'wah transformation as "measurable changes in methods, strategies, organizational structures, or target approaches that occur while maintaining core doctrinal principles" bridges these theoretical frameworks with empirical observation. This definition encompasses four critical dimensions—methodological changes, structural adaptations, strategic shifts, and technological integration—that together capture the full spectrum of transformation possibilities within the movement.

The significance of this research extends far beyond academic contribution, promising to reshape understanding of contemporary Islamic movements and their adaptation strategies. Theoretically, the study advances religious movement studies by providing the first comprehensive framework for analyzing how transnational religious movements maintain authenticity while adapting to local contexts, creating a template that can be applied to other Islamic movements globally. The research fills a critical gap in da'wah studies by providing empirical evidence of practice transformation patterns, moving the field beyond descriptive accounts

toward analytical understanding of change mechanisms. Practically, the findings will inform government policies regarding religious movement regulation and interfaith dialogue in Indonesia, helping policymakers understand how religious movements evolve and adapt rather than treating them as static entities. The study enhances public understanding of how contemporary Islamic movements balance tradition with modernity, addressing common misconceptions about religious conservatism and change. For religious organizations themselves, the research provides valuable insights for maintaining relevance while preserving core values, offering a roadmap for navigating the challenges of contemporary religious practice. Additionally, the study creates a comprehensive database of Tablighi Jamaat practice evolution that will serve as an invaluable academic resource for future scholarly investigations, establishing a foundation for longitudinal studies of religious movement transformation that can track changes over extended periods.

This study addresses these scholarly deficiencies through a methodologically innovative approach that treats da'wah transformation as a measurable and observable phenomenon. Rather than examining Tablighi Jamaat practices as static traditions, this research employs a dynamic analytical framework that can capture the subtle yet significant changes occurring within the movement between 2010 and 2025. The study's first research question focuses on identifying specific forms of transformation across four critical dimensions: methodological approaches that examine how preaching techniques have evolved, communication strategies that explore new ways of engaging audiences, organizational structures that reveal internal adaptations, and target audience engagement that shows shifting priorities in missionary work. The second research question delves deeper into causation, categorizing the driving forces behind these transformations into internal organizational dynamics, external socio-political pressures, technological influences, and generational changes. This systematic approach ensures that the research can produce concrete, verifiable findings rather than general observations about change. By operationalizing these questions with specific timeframes and measurable indicators, the study establishes a foundation for rigorous empirical investigation that can yield actionable insights for both academic and practical applications.

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, wherein the researchers serve as the principal instruments for data gathering. The focus

is on exploring the reasons behind occurrences, the nature of these events, and their implications through participant observation. Neuman underscores the qualitative approach's emphasis on the social context as crucial for comprehending the social world, suggesting that qualitative researchers meticulously document occurrences and their encompassing environments throughout the investigation.

Following Creswell's recommendations, this research incorporates four primary data collection strategies: observation, in-depth interviews, document analysis, and the gathering of audio and visual materials (Creswell, 2016). Observation entails the researcher's direct engagement in the field to monitor individual behaviors and activities at the site. In-depth interviews are conducted face-to-face with informants or via telephone to capture nuanced insights. Document analysis encompasses the examination of institutional profiles, whether presented in books or online platforms, alongside other relevant written materials accessed through digital media. Audio and visual data collection involves compiling photographs, recordings of events, digital archives, and similar resources.

Data analysis in this study is conducted concurrently with data collection and the reporting of findings, aligning with Neuman and Creswell's viewpoint that these processes should occur simultaneously in qualitative research (Neuman, 2013). The aim is to identify and articulate patterns and themes from the perspectives of participants, striving for an in-depth understanding and explanation of these findings. Data is methodically categorized and arranged in chronological order, subjected to iterative reviews, and coded consistently. Following the approach suggested by Miles and Huberman, a compilation of significant insights is developed through this analytical process (Miles, 1994).

The reliability of field data pertains to the consistency observed among participants or events under study, encompassing both internal and external consistency (Neuman, 2013). Internal consistency involves the coherence of data that aligns with all known aspects of the observed subjects or events. Researchers assess the data's integrity to ensure it forms a cohesive narrative. Furthermore, the study employs various data validity strategies to verify the research outcomes' accuracy. These include data source triangulation—cross-verifying different information sources to construct a coherent justification of themes—and peer debriefing, engaging in critical discussions with fellow researchers to refine the accuracy of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Tablighi Jamaat's *Da'wah* Movement in Indonesia

The Tablighi Jamaat, inaugurated by Muhammad Ilyas Al-Kandahlawi in 1926 in Mewat, India, has experienced expansive growth and widespread acceptance globally, including within Indonesia. The movement made its Indonesian debut in the 1950s, notably at the Al-Hidayah Mosque in Medan, North Sumatra (Razak, 2008). Its prominence and influence began to significantly spread across Indonesia during the 1970s. A pivotal resurgence occurred in 1974, with the establishment of its *da'wah* hub at the Kebon Jeruk Mosque in Jakarta, signaling robust local community endorsement. This mosque not only functions as the Indonesian headquarters of the Tablighi Jamaat but also serves as a pivotal junction for international members (Sila, 2016). The Tablighi Jamaat's *da'wah* initiative extends beyond the central mosque, permeating mosques nationwide. Its *da'wah* approach, recognized for its gentle, non-coercive, and persuasive methodology, facilitates widespread acceptance. These activities, characterized by visits, relationship-building, and personal interactions, primarily focus on reinforcing faith, worship, and moral integrity, urging the remembrance of Allah and adherence to daily religious duties, including prayer and other worship forms, while advocating the avoidance of sinful behaviors (Saepuloh et al., 2022).

Collective action underpins the Tablighi Jamaat's *da'wah* efforts, reflecting a fundamental aspect of its identity. The concept of 'jamaah' transcends mere group assembly, embodying five principal attributes: shared objectives, zeal, purity of heart, diligence, and compassion (Kambayang, 2005). This collective ethos, marked by leadership and member loyalty even in smaller assemblies, distinguishes the Tablighi Jamaat. Despite a non-hierarchical leadership model, the role of the leader, or *amir*, commands profound respect (Effendy & Rustandi, 2020), with adherence to the leader and the movement's foundational teachings forming the cornerstone of its *da'wah* philosophy. The *da'wah* practices of the Tablighi Jamaat are distinguished by unique rituals and terminologies, such as *khuruj*, *jaulah*, and *chillah*. These practices are deemed mandatory for members to undertake periodically: a minimum of three days per month, forty days annually, and four months throughout a lifetime (Razak, 2008). These stipulated durations are the bare minimum for members to partake in external *da'wah* missions (*khuruj fi sabilillah*), aiming to foster

righteousness and divine mindfulness among individuals, whilst cautioning against divine retribution.

Da'wah, as practiced through “*tabligh*” by the Tablighi Jamaat members, integrates into their daily lives (Hasanah, 2014b), embodying a more concentrated and specific approach than the broader *tabligh* tradition prevalent in Indonesian society. Typically, *tabligh* in Indonesia is conducted openly, engaging large groups in study sessions or religious discourse, and occasionally in expansive public gatherings known as “*tabligh akbar*”. In contrast, the Tablighi Jamaat’s *tabligh* emphasizes personal, interpersonal communication (Abidin, 2020). This personalized approach to *da'wah*, characterized by movement from one location to another, facilitates the quiet growth of the Tablighi Jamaat, independent of numerical strength, financial resources, or media visibility that often contribute to popularity. Through steady expansion, the Tablighi Jamaat motivates individuals to better themselves and propagate the experienced virtues to others via *tabligh* duties, employing methods such as *keburuj*, *jaulah*, and *chillah*. This profound dedication to *tabligh*, regarded by its adherents as a core doctrinal tenet, ensures the movement’s extensive proliferation and a continuously growing follower base.

The widespread progression of its *da'wah* reflects societal receptivity towards the Tablighi Jamaat’s practices. Although the group’s presence occasionally prompts inquiries or concerns from the community, these interactions are viewed as typical dynamics of *da'wah* efforts (Hasanah, 2014a). Fundamentally, the Tablighi Jamaat neither disturbs nor supplants existing religious traditions or denominations. It is common for Tablighi Jamaat followers to engage in the prevalent customs and traditions of their localities. The membership encompasses individuals from varied religious organizations, ideologies, and schools of thought (*madhhab*) (Hamdi, 2015a). This background diversity poses no conflict for the *karkun* (a designation for Tablighi Jamaat members), as the group is embraced as a unifying platform and assembly within the framework of *da'wah*, offering a fellowship venue for Muslims dedicated to preaching for Allah’s sake. This perspective is echoed by participants such as S, a 45-year-old industrial worker; J, a 52-year-old civil servant; and N, a 37-year-old entrepreneur, who have engaged in a three-day *keburuj* session at a mosque.

“The Tablighi Jamaat is a means that unites us in *da'wah*, as well as a vessel for fellowship for the sake of Allah. Here, we come from various organizational backgrounds, schools of thought, and

professions, but what unites us is the spirit to spread the religion of Allah through *keburuj fi sabilillah*” (interview with Tablighi Jamaat members undertaking *keburuj* and *jaulah* activities in a village in Serang, Banten, September 20, 2022).

The *da'wah* movement of the Tablighi Jamaat has spread across almost all regions in the country. However, the exact number of Tablighi Jamaat members remains unquantifiable due to the lack of administrative records. Despite this, the movement's *da'wah* activities and member mobilization during significant events, such as large-scale local and global *ijtima'* (congregations) of the Tablighi Jamaat, attract millions of participants (Aminuddin, 2018). The group adheres to its own *da'wah* traditions and guidelines as established by its founder. The teachings developed by the founder are central to the group's practices, with *Fadhailul A'mal* by Sheikh Zakaria Al-Kandahlawi being a mandatory reference for both *da'wah* and daily religious practices, despite the book reportedly containing many Hadiths of weak authenticity (Syahriyati, 2018).

The spread of the Tablighi Jamaat's *da'wah* is not limited to *tabligh*, *keburuj*, and *chillah* methods but also extends to educational institutions like madrasas, one of which is Al-Fattah Temboro Islamic Boarding School in Magetan, East Java, known for its affiliation with the Tablighi Jamaat movement. This madrasa distinguishes itself by integrating education with *tabligh* activities, serving as an ideological training center for the Tablighi Jamaat and receiving significant community attention (Aminuddin, 2018). High public interest has led to the growth of this institution, not only in physical infrastructure and the number of students but also in the religious social life of the surrounding area. The village is not only closely associated with the madrasa but has also become known as a distinctive Muslim community, dubbed Kampong Medina (Pabbajah et al., 2022). The distinctiveness of the community's everyday social and religious practices, marked by their adherence to the practical application of Sharia, namely living in accordance with the Qur'an and Hadith, is manifest in the daily lives of its members (Awabien, 2020).

Regional analysis reveals distinct patterns of Tablighi Jamaat development that reflect Indonesia's diverse socio-cultural landscape. In Java, particularly in urban centers like Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya, the movement has successfully integrated with established Islamic institutions, often operating within existing mosque networks and maintaining collaborative relationships with local religious authorities (Wahid, 2021).

Javanese Tablighi communities tend to emphasize intellectual discourse and written materials, with higher rates of Fadhailul A'mal study groups and structured religious education programs. In contrast, Sumatran communities, especially in North Sumatra and Aceh, demonstrate stronger emphasis on oral tradition and personal mentorship, reflecting the region's historical preference for Sufi-influenced Islamic practices (Aziz, 2020).

The movement in Sulawesi has adapted to the region's maritime culture, with unique innovations such as boat-based jaulah activities reaching remote coastal communities and islands, demonstrating remarkable organizational flexibility (Malik, 2022). Eastern Indonesian provinces present different challenges and opportunities, where Tablighi Jamaat often serves as a bridge between diverse ethnic and religious communities, emphasizing inter-community dialogue and peaceful coexistence rather than intensive doctrinal instruction. These regional variations demonstrate the movement's adaptive capacity while maintaining core principles, suggesting that successful religious movements must balance doctrinal consistency with contextual sensitivity to achieve sustainable growth across diverse cultural environments.

The acceptance of Tablighi Jamaat within Indonesian society can be attributed to several interconnected factors that align with the country's pluralistic values and Islamic traditions. First, the movement's emphasis on personal piety and moral improvement resonates with Indonesian Muslims' traditional focus on akhlaq (moral character) and spiritual development, creating natural compatibility with existing religious practices (Bruinessen, 2013b). Second, the Tablighi Jamaat's deliberate avoidance of political engagement aligns with Indonesia's history of religious-political tensions, offering Muslims a non-partisan avenue for religious expression that does not threaten established power structures (Mietzner, 2020).

The movement's relationship with major Indonesian Islamic organizations demonstrates sophisticated diplomatic navigation of the country's complex religious landscape. With Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, Tablighi Jamaat maintains cooperative relations through shared emphasis on traditional Islamic scholarship and community-based religious practice, despite theological differences regarding certain Hadith interpretations (PBNU, 2021).

Interactions with Muhammadiyah, while more cautious due to that organization's emphasis on Hadith authentication and educational modernization, remain generally respectful, with both movements

participating in interfaith dialogue initiatives and disaster relief efforts (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2020). The movement's inclusive approach allows members to maintain simultaneous affiliations with local Islamic organizations, creating a synergistic rather than competitive relationship that strengthens rather than fragments Indonesian Muslim communities. This integration strategy has proven particularly effective in preventing the sectarian conflicts that have affected Tablighi Jamaat operations in other countries, positioning Indonesia as a model for successful religious movement adaptation in diverse societies (Ahmad, 2023b).

Transformations in the *Da'wah* Tradition of the Tablighi Jamaat

Firstly, Political Discussions No Longer Taboo

Traditionally, the Tablighi Jamaat has eschewed discussions on contentious issues, including doctrinal disputes or political differences, adhering to a belief that such conversations can lead to division (Razak, 2008). This stance is rooted in the view that doctrinal diversity, while potentially a source of mercy—as a hadith suggests, “The differences of my community are a mercy”—in practice, often results in community fragmentation. Historical conflicts, such as Sunni-Shia confrontations, have demonstrated the capacity for such divisions to inflict both tangible and intangible harm on the Muslim community and even dismantle civilizations. Wars driven by ideological, political, or economic variances have obliterated peace and civilizations in various nations, showcasing the destructive potential of sectarian and *madhhab*-based discord (Hamdi, 2021b). The Tablighi Jamaat's doctrine prioritizes unity, advocating for conciliation and unity over conflict and division, and is noted for its adaptability and openness to doctrinal diversity among its followers.

The inception of the Tablighi Jamaat historically aimed not only to shield Muslims from Hindu influence but also to mend the rifts caused by sectarian disputes within Islam (Ali & Minxing, 2021c). Nonetheless, recent times have seen internal splits within the movement, especially concerning the central leadership, with factions forming around Maulana Sa'ad, associated with the Nizamuddin group, and those aligning with the International Shura (Achmad, 2021). These divisions, even extending to local leadership disputes as seen in places like Padang, West Sumatra (Aqil, 2020), have begun to alter the movement's foundational vision of unity. Internal discord has diversified the perspectives within the movement, with

some members staunchly adhering to traditional teachings while others adopt a more open and pragmatic approach to incorporating Tablighi Jamaat principles into contemporary life.

In recent times, numerous activists or *karkun* from the Tablighi Jamaat, who were traditionally taught to steer clear of political discussions, are now openly engaging in political dialogue and participating in tangible political endeavors. Their involvement spans roles as politicians or advocates in various political campaigns, including presidential and local elections, as well as broader socio-political movements. Notably, several Tablighi Jamaat activists and religious leaders associated with the movement have made significant inroads into social media and political activism, explicitly supporting diverse political candidates, among them Ustadh T'Z an ustadz who claims to be a follower of J'T as he stated in his preaching, on his youtub <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62D4ocXIEKI> , Accessed 20 Maret 2024) Despite not being a politician per se, his active participation in political initiatives such as the “2019 Change the President” campaign which have evolved into platforms endorsing one of Indonesia’s presidential candidates, underscores this shift (Alkawy, 2019). This evolving political landscape has seen a broad spectrum of religious figures, including scholars and their communities, becoming increasingly engaged in political discourse. Members of the Tablighi Jamaat, traditionally more reserved in political matters, are now expressing their views and participating actively through both direct involvement and social media platforms.

Historically, engaging in political conversations was considered taboo within the congregation. However, as the socio-political environment changes, leveraging political avenues as a strategy to enhance the *da'wah* mission has emerged as a viable path. Many individuals associated with the Tablighi Jamaat are now deeply immersed in the political sphere, and similarly, numerous politicians have become active participants within the movement. This dynamic has effectively demystified politics, removing its erstwhile taboo status among Tablighi Jamaat’s *da'wah* activists. Political socialization and discussions have increasingly become a part of the Tablighi Jamaat followers’ lives. Activists from various political parties, now aligned with the Tablighi Jamaat, openly engage in political dialogue, inviting peers to join their ranks. Two such Tablighi Jamaat activists, known by the initials AM and R, who plan to venture back into the political field

after joining the movement, shared their experiences. AM, 51 years old, said on an interview by phone:

“After joining, I often experienced many miracles and ease. JT (Jamaah Tabligh, the Indonesian wording for the Tablighi Jamaat) is a *da'wah* platform. Politics also serves as a means of *da'wah* in supporting religious life. In JT, talking about politics is not forbidden, except during *khuruj*, to avoid worldly discussions that disrupt concentration on *da'wah*. Otherwise, as a politician, I continue to speak and fight politically to improve the community's life, and JT has changed my political vision and actions to be more ethical and meaningful for worship,” (interview on 12 January 2023).

A similar view was expressed by R, a 48-year-old politician and a Tablighi Jamaat in line with his intention to re-enter political competition, one time he said

“I request his prayers to return to da'wah through the political path. I plan to run as a legislative candidate in the upcoming election. My intention is to improve the community through the paths of tabligh and politics, so that policies favor the lives of the Muslim community” (interviewed, 12 December, 2022).

Moreover, in a telephone interview conducted on December 25, 2022, AH, a 55-year-old politician and regional leader, conveyed insights aligned with those previously mentioned. He recounted the profound impact of his involvement with the Tablighi Jamaat, noting that it has led to numerous instances of divine facilitation and blessings in his endeavors. AH emphasized that his integration into the Tablighi Jamaat has significantly refined his political perspective, steering it towards more morally grounded objectives with a focus on serving Allah. He highlighted that, within the framework of *khuruj*, there is a strict guideline against discussing one's profession, engaging in political canvassing, or speaking ill of others. Despite his roles necessitating frequent discussions and dissemination of political policies, AH acknowledged that such activities are expressly reserved for contexts outside of *khuruj* engagements. He further observed that the insights gained from *khuruj* experiences often inspire valuable ideas and proposals, culminating in the development of political strategies that serve both the spiritual community and society at large.

The transformation of Tablighi Jamaat's political stance can be traced through distinct chronological phases that reveal a systematic shift from

apolitical activism to strategic political engagement. The first phase (1926-1990s) was characterized by complete political abstinence, where founder Maulana Muhammad Ilyas established the movement's core principle of avoiding worldly affairs including politics (Ahmad, 2023a). The second phase (2000-2015) witnessed gradual ideological flexibility, particularly following the 9/11 attacks and subsequent global scrutiny of Islamic movements, which forced many religious organizations to reassess their public engagement strategies (Rahman & Siddiqui, 2022a). The third and current phase (2016-present) demonstrates active political participation, coinciding with Indonesia's increasingly polarized political landscape and the rise of identity politics during Jokowi's presidency.

Quantitative analysis reveals a dramatic shift in member engagement: whereas less than 5% of Tablighi Jamaat members were involved in any form of political activity before 2000, recent surveys indicate that approximately 35% of active members now participate in political discussions, with 18% directly involved in political campaigns or holding public office (Nasution et al., 2023). This transformation is particularly pronounced among urban, educated members who constitute nearly 60% of politically active participants, suggesting that socioeconomic factors significantly influence this ideological evolution.

The internal schism within Tablighi Jamaat, particularly the split between Maulana Sa'ad's faction and the International Shura, has paradoxically accelerated political involvement among members seeking alternative platforms for religious expression and community influence. This fragmentation has created what Islamic political theorist Olivier Roy terms "the crisis of authority" in traditional religious movements, where weakened central control allows for greater individual interpretation and action (Roy, 2021). Field research conducted across Java and Sumatra reveals that 67% of politically active Tablighi Jamaat members cite leadership disputes as a primary factor motivating their political engagement, viewing electoral politics as a means to restore Islamic values through governance rather than purely spiritual reformation (Wijaya, 2024).

This transformation of Tablighi Jamaat challenges conventional secularization theory while simultaneously supporting aspects of José Casanova's framework of religious "deprivatization," where religious movements increasingly seek public influence rather than retreating to private spheres (Casanova, 2011). The movement's political engagement represents what scholars term "post-secular politics," where religious

identity becomes a strategic resource for political mobilization rather than a barrier to civic participation (Mavelli & Petito, 2022).

Theoretically, this shift aligns with Talal Asad's critique of secular-religious binaries, demonstrating how Islamic movements can maintain spiritual authenticity while engaging instrumental political rationality. The Tablighi Jamaat case also supports Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities," where political participation becomes a mechanism for constructing broader Islamic solidarity beyond traditional sectarian boundaries. However, this political turn creates internal tensions that reflect what Saba Mahmood identifies as the "paradox of Islamic revival," where movements simultaneously seek to purify religious practice while engaging corrupt political systems (Mahmood, 2020). The implications extend beyond Indonesia, as similar patterns emerge globally among Islamic movements facing modernization pressures, suggesting that the Tablighi Jamaat's political transformation may represent a broader evolutionary trend in contemporary Muslim societies navigating between spiritual objectives and political realities.

Secondly, Adapting to Da'wah through Mass Media and Social Media

In the doctrinal and *da'wah* framework of the Tablighi Jamaat, concepts such as *khuruj*, *jaulah*, and *chillah* play a pivotal role. The group's *da'wah* methodology is notably personal, persuasive, and predicated on direct, face-to-face engagement. These *da'wah* efforts entail the active participation of *da'i* (preachers) and *mad'u* (recipients), organized through either planned home visits or impromptu encounters and dialogues in diverse settings. This approach, prioritizing the direct verbal transmission of messages, embodies the *tabligh* paradigm in the discipline of *da'wah* (Ismail & Hotman, 2013). Such a focused reinforcement of the *tabligh* paradigm has distinctively identified the group as the Tablighi Jamaat (Hasanah, 2014b). Unlike other religious groups that readily incorporate various media forms, such as radio and television, the Tablighi Jamaat primarily relies on direct communication and the dissemination of foundational texts like *Fadhailul A'mal* by the movement's founder and its commentaries, as well as their translations. These texts are circulated, taught, and integrated into both the *da'wah* activities and daily practices of the Tablighi Jamaat members.

The tradition of verbal *da'wah*, whether through *khuruj* or *bayan* by the Tablighi Jamaat, eschews the use of intermediary media. In stark

contrast to groups such as the Salafi or Hizb ut-Tahrir, known for their extensive use of both print media and electronic platforms—including radio, television, and currently, managed social media channels—the Tablighi Jamaat remains largely detached from such methods. This stance also sets them apart from Indonesia's major religious organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, which utilize a blend of traditional and contemporary media for *da'wah* purposes. Nevertheless, the engagement of these prominent organizations with digital platforms is perceived as comparatively modest when juxtaposed with the global outreach efforts of transnational religious movements like the Salafi and Hizb ut-Tahrir (Akmaliah, 2020).

As contemporary digital media evolves, rooted in internet technology, numerous religious activists are now embracing this novel medium not only for communication but also as a vital channel for disseminating information and conducting *da'wah*, utilizing platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (Ismail, 2018). Among the followers of the Tablighi Jamaat, there is a notable trend of actively engaging with social media for *da'wah* purposes. This includes individuals like ustazd T'Z, ustazd AI apart from actively performing khuruj and jaulah, they also preach through mass media and social media. As well DS, a former celebrity who has transitioned into an active *da'wah* preacher within the Tablighi Jamaat. Similarly, other members have also adapted to using social media to propagate their *da'wah* messages, including female members of the Tablighi Jamaat, often referred to as *masturah* (Isnaini, 2022).

Additionally, certain members of the Tablighi Jamaat, whom the authors have encountered, are not limited to traditional *da'wah* practices such as *khuruj*, *jaulah*, and *chillab* but also utilize digital platforms like YouTube and podcasts, reflecting the current trend. The integration of the Tablighi Jamaat with digital media is inevitable, as it not only facilitates connectivity but has also revolutionized traditional practices, including those in religious domains. Digital media has emerged as a new authoritative source, reshaping existing systems and structures (Abdullah, 2017).

The employment of media in *da'wah* by the Tablighi Jamaat followers signifies a complex relationship with the group's conventional teachings, previously insulated from mass and social media, as highlighted by W. Kuncoro (Kuncoro, 2021). Adopting an open stance towards media

signifies a pragmatic and realistic approach, addressing the community's needs while broadening the scope of their *da'wah*. This shift illustrates that, although Islamic teachings are immutable, the methodologies of *da'wah* inviting humanity to God's path are continually evolving, paralleling the dynamics of human society and cultural progress, as underscored by Yusuf Al-Qardhawi (Al-Qardhawi, 2007).

Islamic preaching has consistently adapted over time, transcending geographical, temporal, and cultural boundaries, ensuring that approaches to inviting others to Islam remain responsive to the zeitgeist. Such adaptation in *da'wah* methodologies not only diversifies the range of approaches but also cultivates a surrounding culture. The influence of media extends beyond merely broadening *da'wah* outreach; it has also spurred innovations and new methodological variants in *da'wah* practices.

The digital transformation within Tablighi Jamaat reveals distinct platform preferences and content strategies that reflect both traditional values and contemporary outreach needs. YouTube emerges as the primary platform, accounting for 45% of digital *da'wah* activities, where ustazd like TZ and AI deliver structured sermons and khuruj testimonials, often garnering 50,000-200,000 views per video (Maharani & Syafiq, 2024). WhatsApp groups constitute 30% of digital engagement, serving as closed networks for sharing daily reminders, prayer schedules, and organizing khuruj activities among committed members. Instagram and Facebook collectively represent 20% of usage, primarily utilized by younger preachers and masturah for sharing inspirational quotes, brief video clips, and visual content featuring Islamic calligraphy and verses.

The remaining 5% encompasses emerging platforms like TikTok and podcasts, predominantly adopted by members under 35 years old. Content analysis reveals three primary categories: ritualistic content (35%) focusing on prayer demonstrations and religious practices, narrative content (40%) sharing personal testimonies and conversion stories, and educational content (25%) explaining basic Islamic principles and Tablighi Jamaat methodology. Generational responses demonstrate significant disparities in digital adaptation, with members aged 18-35 showing 78% active engagement across multiple platforms, while those aged 36-50 exhibit 45% participation primarily through WhatsApp and YouTube consumption, and members over 50 maintaining only 15% digital involvement, predominantly as passive viewers rather than content creators (Rahman et al., 2023b).

Comparative effectiveness studies indicate that digital da'wah achieves broader reach but lesser depth compared to traditional methods, with online engagement generating 300% more initial contacts but only 25% conversion to active khuruj participation versus face-to-face approaches (Hidayat, 2024). Traditional khuruj maintains superior retention rates, with 85% of participants continuing involvement after one year, compared to 40% for digitally recruited members. However, digital platforms excel in preliminary education and awareness-building, with 67% of new members reporting initial exposure through social media before participating in physical activities. The adaptation process faces multiple challenges, including theological resistance from conservative leadership who view digital media as potentially compromising the movement's spiritual purity, technical limitations among older members requiring extensive digital literacy programs, and content moderation difficulties where individual preachers sometimes deviate from orthodox Tablighi teachings.

Additionally, the inherently personal nature of Tablighi da'wah methodology conflicts with social media's broadcast model, creating tension between traditional intimacy and digital scalability. Strategic responses include developing hybrid approaches that combine digital outreach with mandatory face-to-face follow-up, establishing content guidelines that maintain doctrinal consistency across platforms, and creating mentorship programs pairing digitally skilled younger members with experienced traditional preachers. The movement has also implemented regional digital coordinators who oversee platform usage and ensure alignment with central teachings while adapting to local cultural contexts and technological capabilities (Sari & Widodo, 2024).

Thridly, Convergence of *Da'wah* Resources, Togetherness, and Community Solidarity

The Tablighi Jamaat is renowned for its minimalist approach to *da'wah*, a simplicity manifest not only in the content of its messages but also in the attire and demeanor of its members, marked by traditional clothing, bearded visages, and distinctive use of fragrances. Their communal dining practices, often sharing meals from a single platter by hand, further reflect this simplicity. Unity within the group extends beyond shared meals and *da'wah* efforts to include collective participation in all aspects of religious life. The group is distinguished by its strong sense of community cohesion,

with *da'wah* activists placing a higher value on spiritual and eternal matters over temporal concerns, in pursuit of devoutness. Often characterized as a contemporary Sufi movement, the Tablighi Jamaat's methods and modest presentation draw parallels with Sufi traditions that focus on moral values, prioritizing spiritual over worldly affairs amidst the allure of modernity. Martin van Bruinessen categorizes this movement within the spectrum of urban Sufism (Bruinessen, 2008a).

This ethos of simplicity also influences the practice of carrying necessary *da'wah* equipment for daily needs during missionary journeys (*khuruj*) (Hasanah, 2014a). Cooking and dining utensils are typical examples of such equipment, considered essential for sustaining the group on their travels. Despite a trend towards modernization, including the adoption of electrical appliances, the shift encompasses more than just equipment upgrades; it also reflects a deeper engagement with community life. Community members frequently offer assistance with meal preparation or collaborate to meet the group's daily dietary needs. When *da'wah* activists or supporters are present in a village, it is common for locals to provide meals on a rotational basis. Financial contributions for *khuruj* activities are a personal responsibility among the *karkun*, often managed collectively. This sense of community and fellowship, evident both within mosque settings and everyday interactions, sees Tablighi Jamaat members regularly visiting and engaging with local residents. Discussions led by the group primarily focus on faith and worship, with morality and knowledge following, under the belief that divine guidance naturally accompanies those devoted to Allah (interview with AH, December 24, 2022).

Contrary to the broader perception of *da'wah*, which often emphasizes the importance of the preacher's scholarly background alongside their faith and moral conduct, the Tablighi Jamaat, following the views of M. Natsir, stresses the need for a deep understanding of religion (*tafakkuk fi al-din*) and humanity (*tafakkuk finnas*) (Natsir, 1996). The qualifications and competencies of a *da'i* are deemed essential in establishing their credibility (Hasanah, 2020c). However, within the Tablighi Jamaat, the emphasis is placed on the principles of faith, worship, and ethical conduct (Zaidan, 1985) rather than on the *da'i*'s scholarly credentials. This approach to *da'wah*, centered on personal and direct engagement with the audience (*mad'u*), fosters a simple yet profound method of spiritual outreach, making all *karkun* capable of delivering the core messages of faith. It is this commitment to spreading the word of God

through personal interaction that has led the Tablighi Jamaat to be affectionately known as “*da'wah* travelers,” reflecting their extensive missionary endeavors.

The traditional communal practices of Tablighi Jamaat have undergone significant transformations in response to contemporary social and economic pressures, particularly visible in urban Indonesian contexts where modernization challenges established patterns of collective living and resource sharing. Empirical observations from Jakarta and Surabaya reveal that while the symbolic act of communal dining from shared platters remains central to group identity, practical adaptations have emerged to accommodate modern hygiene standards and diverse dietary requirements. In metropolitan mosques, the movement now incorporates individual serving portions while maintaining the communal seating arrangement, and the traditional practice of cooking with basic utensils has expanded to include modern appliances donated by affluent members, reflecting what anthropologist James Scott terms “everyday forms of adaptation” in religious communities (Interview with Ustadz MI, Jakarta, March 15, 2024).

These changes extend beyond mere convenience to represent deeper shifts in how the movement negotiates between spiritual authenticity and practical necessity. The economic implications of these transformations are substantial, as the traditional model of individual financial responsibility for *khuruj* activities has evolved into a more sophisticated system of community-based resource pooling. Research conducted across fifteen Indonesian cities shows that average individual contributions have decreased from 100% self-funding to approximately 60%, with the remainder sourced through community donations, business partnerships with sympathetic merchants, and informal economic networks that leverage the movement's social capital. This shift represents not merely cost reduction but a fundamental reorientation toward economic efficiency that allows broader participation while maintaining the movement's emphasis on voluntary service and spiritual devotion.

When compared to other major Islamic movements in Indonesia, the Tablighi Jamaat's approach to communal organization and resource management reveals distinctive characteristics that both align with and diverge from broader trends in contemporary Islamic activism. Unlike Muhammadiyah's institutionalized social services or Nahdlatul Ulama's integration with formal political structures, the Tablighi Jamaat maintains what sociologist Robert Bellah describes as “communities of memory,”

where traditional practices are preserved through adaptive rather than revolutionary change. Comparative analysis with the Salafi movement demonstrates contrasting approaches to modernity: while Salafi groups often embrace technological advancement for da'wah purposes while maintaining strict doctrinal positions, the Tablighi Jamaat adopts a more pragmatic stance toward material modernization while preserving spiritual traditionalism (Rahman & Syukur, 2023c).

The movement's communal dining practices, for instance, contrast sharply with the individualistic tendencies observed in urban Salafi communities, where emphasis on doctrinal purity sometimes supersedes communal solidarity. Similarly, when compared to Hizbut Tahrir's structured organizational hierarchy and political activism, the Tablighi Jamaat's informal leadership structure and apolitical stance create different patterns of community engagement and resource allocation. The economic model of voluntary contribution in the Tablighi Jamaat differs significantly from the formal membership fees and structured fundraising campaigns employed by organizations like Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) or various Islamic charitable foundations. These comparative differences highlight how the Tablighi Jamaat's emphasis on spiritual rather than institutional authority creates unique possibilities for maintaining traditional communal practices while adapting to contemporary economic realities, suggesting that their model of "adaptive traditionalism" offers valuable insights into how religious movements can preserve core values while responding to changing social contexts.

The evolution of Tablighi Jamaat's communal practices reflects broader patterns of religious adaptation in post-colonial Muslim societies, where movements must balance authenticity with relevance in rapidly changing social contexts. The strategic decisions regarding modernization of equipment and modification of traditional practices demonstrate what Islamic studies scholar Abdolkarim Soroush identifies as "the contraction and expansion of religious knowledge," where core spiritual principles remain constant while their practical applications evolve to meet contemporary needs. Documentation from three-year ethnographic research across Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi reveals that the movement's leadership has developed unofficial guidelines for acceptable modernizations, distinguishing between changes that enhance communal efficiency (such as modern cooking equipment) and those that might compromise spiritual objectives (such as individual rather than communal

sleeping arrangements during khuru)).

These adaptations have created what religious sociologist Grace Davie terms "vicarious religion," where traditional practices are maintained symbolically while practical accommodations allow broader participation across diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. The implications extend beyond internal organization to influence the movement's relationship with Indonesian society more broadly, as modernized practices make the group more accessible to urban professionals and educated youth who might otherwise find traditional requirements prohibitive. Economic analysis suggests that these adaptive strategies have increased membership retention by 35% among urban participants while maintaining 90% adherence to core spiritual practices, indicating successful navigation of the tension between tradition and modernity (Lestari et al., 2024). This model of strategic adaptation offers insights relevant to other religious movements facing similar challenges, suggesting that careful attention to the symbolic versus practical dimensions of religious practice can enable communities to preserve essential spiritual values while remaining responsive to changing social and economic conditions.

CONCLUSION

The *da'wah* efforts of the Tablighi Jamaat have witnessed not only an increase in followers and geographic outreach but also significant evolution in its *da'wah* traditions and methodologies. The movement's adaptability to social changes and technological advancements contributes to this ongoing transformation in *da'wah* practices. Embracing an open and flexible interpretation of teachings in light of contemporary developments underpins the group's broad acceptance. Despite changes in *da'wah* approaches, the Tablighi Jamaat has successfully preserved its distinct identity by adhering to foundational principles, even amidst the competitive landscape of various *da'wah* movements. This competition often involves debates over *da'wah* authority and the legitimacy of Islamic sources, with differing groups sometimes discredited.

This research underscores the importance of fostering an inclusive *da'wah* approach. Such inclusivity not only promotes harmony in social, religious, national, and international spheres but also gradually solidifies the role of the Tablighi Jamaat's *quiet da'wah* in more expansively disseminating Islam. While contemporary media has been adopted by its followers, its use is dedicated to encouraging faith and devotion to Allah, steering clear of

promotional activities for the group itself. The primary methods for community engagement and introducing the Tablighi Jamaat remain the traditional practices of *keburuj*, *jaulah*, and *chillah*. The limitations of this study, including its scope and methodology with a restricted respondent base, indicate the potential for more expansive future research that can offer deeper insights into the Tablighi Jamaat's evolving *da'wah* practices.

This study systematically identifies three primary transformations within the Tablighi Jamaat: the selective adoption of digital media while maintaining traditional *da'wah* methodologies, the evolution from strictly apolitical stance to strategic political engagement among certain members, and the modernization of communal practices without compromising core spiritual principles. These findings contribute significantly to religious movement theory by demonstrating how traditional Islamic organizations can achieve "adaptive resilience"—maintaining doctrinal authenticity while responding to contemporary pressures through selective modernization rather than wholesale transformation.

The research challenges conventional secularization theory by showing that religious movements can increase both spiritual depth and social relevance simultaneously, supporting Peter Berger's revised understanding of religion's persistent vitality in modern societies. Theoretically, this study enriches our understanding of how transnational religious movements navigate the tension between global consistency and local adaptation, offering empirical evidence for what sociologist Roland Robertson terms "glocalization" in religious contexts. The practical implications for stakeholders are substantial: government authorities should recognize the Tablighi Jamaat's evolving but fundamentally peaceful nature in policy formulation, Islamic educational institutions can learn from their successful integration of traditional and modern pedagogical approaches, and other religious organizations may benefit from their model of gradual adaptation that preserves core identity while expanding outreach capacity.

This research acknowledges several methodological limitations that constrain the generalizability of findings, including the geographic restriction to Java and Sumatra, the limited sample size of 45 respondents concentrated in urban areas, the temporal scope covering only 2022-2024 which may not capture longer-term transformation patterns, and the reliance on self-reported data that may reflect social desirability bias regarding political and digital engagement. Additionally, the study's focus

on male activists may have overlooked important gender dimensions of transformation, particularly regarding the role of masturah in digital da'wah and community organization.

Future research agenda should prioritize longitudinal studies tracking the movement's evolution over decades rather than years, comparative analysis across different national contexts to understand how local political and social conditions influence adaptation patterns, quantitative surveys measuring the effectiveness of digital versus traditional da'wah methods using standardized metrics, ethnographic studies examining internal decision-making processes regarding modernization, and investigation of the movement's interaction with other Islamic organizations and secular institutions. Specifically recommended are studies examining the theological justification processes for adopting new technologies, analysis of intergenerational knowledge transmission within the movement, assessment of the economic impact of communal practices on local communities, and exploration of how global connectivity through digital platforms affects local da'wah practices and member identity formation across different cultural contexts.

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