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Digital Engagement Among the Jamā'ah Tablīgh in Nigeria and Indonesia

A Comparative Analysis of Social Media Usage

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Abstract

The Jamā'ah Tablīgh, a transnational movement built on physical missionary work, increasingly navigates digital spaces in ways that challenge its traditional ethos. This article compares how the movement engages social media in Nigeria and Indonesia through a systematic review of ethnographic studies and media reports. Findings reveal significant divergence: Nigerian Tablīghīs employ closed platforms like WhatsApp and memory cards for internal coordination, prioritizing audio to minimize visual distraction and maintain the movement's oral tradition. Indonesian Tablīghīs cultivate public presences on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube for transnational coordination, community documentation, and strategic rebranding against negative stereotypes. Despite these differences, both communities share fundamental orientations—treating digital tools as instruments for da'wah rather than alternatives to embodied practice, maintaining wariness of *fitna*, and prioritizing internal community building. The article argues these patterns represent local adaptations of a shared transnational ethos, revealing digital engagement as active appropriation rather than passive adoption. The study contributes to digital religion scholarship by complicating secularization narratives and showing how conservative movements creatively integrate technology to preserve—rather than abandon—traditional commitments to *khurūj* (missionary journeys) and face-to-face preaching.

Keywords: Jamā'ah Tablīgh, digital da'wah, social media, Nigeria, Indonesia

Introduction

In an unexpected turn for a movement traditionally defined by its apolitical stance and face-to-face missionary work, the Jamā'ah Tablīgh in countries like Nigeria and Indonesia are increasingly navigating the digital realm. Members who once restricted their interactions to mosque courtyards and door-to-door preaching now maintain WhatsApp groups, share sermons on Facebook, and coordinate preaching tours through Telegram channels. This shift represents a significant departure from the movement's historical identity, raising important questions about how conservative religious movements adapt to technological change while maintaining their core commitments to embodied religious practice.

The Jamā'ah Tablīgh, founded in 1926 in Mewat, North India by Mawlānā Muḥammad Ilyās al-Kāndahlawī (1885–1944), has long been characterized by its distinctive ethos of physical presence (*khurūj*) and its suspicion of worldly distractions. As Jan Ali (2003) notes, the movement emerged from the Deobandi tradition as a response to both the perceived decline of Islamic practice among Indian Muslims and the missionary challenges posed by Hindu revivalist movements like the Arya Samaj. Followers are expected to leave their homes, families, and occupations for periods ranging from three days to four months, dedicating themselves entirely to preaching tours that take them from mosque to mosque. This embodied practice of mobility and face-to-face interaction stands at the core of the movement's identity. Yet, the same members who embark on these physically demanding journeys also log onto Facebook, share audio sermons via Bluetooth, and coordinate logistics through encrypted messaging apps. This turn towards digital platforms presents an analytical puzzle: how does a movement built on the premise of physical presence negotiate the shift towards virtual interaction?

This tension between the Jamā'ah Tablīgh's non-digital ethos and its members' growing digital practices is not merely a technological adaptation but a profound renegotiation of religious practice itself. When a preacher shares a *bayān* (sermon) on WhatsApp, does that constitute legitimate da'wah (proselytization)? When a follower listens to a sermon on a memory card rather than in the mosque, has he fulfilled the spiritual purpose of listening? When photographs of preaching tours are posted on Instagram, do they serve as documentation or veer into self-promotion (*riyā'*)? These questions are not abstract; they are actively debated within Tablīghī circles in both Nigeria and Indonesia, and the answers vary significantly across contexts. As Farish A. Noor (2012) demonstrates in his comprehensive study of the movement in Southeast Asia, such negotiations are central to how the Jamā'ah Tablīgh maintains its coherence while adapting to diverse local environments.

Nigeria and Indonesia offer a uniquely illuminating comparison for examining these local adaptations of a transnational movement. Both countries have large Muslim populations and vibrant Jamā'ah Tablīgh presences that trace their origins to the same South Asian missionary networks. Pakistani and Indian preachers arrived in both nations during the mid-twentieth century—reaching Indonesia in 1952 and Nigeria in the late 1950s—establishing *marākiz* (centres) that would eventually become fully indigenized movements.

Yet despite this shared genealogy, Nigeria and Indonesia present starkly different cultural, political, and technological landscapes. Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, has a highly developed digital infrastructure and a public religious sphere where organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah actively cultivate online presences. Nigeria, by contrast, has more uneven internet access, a competitive religious marketplace marked by intense Salafi–Sufi contestations, and a Tablīghī community that has historically maintained a lower public profile. These differences shape how the same transnational movement adapts to digital possibilities.

This study asks three interconnected questions. First, how do Jamā'ah Tablīgh members in Nigeria and Indonesia engage with digital media, and what strategies do they employ to adapt Islamic values to these spaces? Second, what policies—whether formal or informal—govern their use of digital platforms, particularly in relation to their offline da'wah activities? Third, how do they navigate internal and external criticisms of their online presence, and what narratives do they construct to justify their digital engagements? By pursuing these questions, the article moves beyond describing what Tablīghīs do online to analyze how and why they do it, and what these practices reveal about the negotiation of religious tradition in the digital age.

In addressing these questions, this article makes both empirical and theoretical contributions to the study of Islam and digital religion. Empirically, it provides one of the first systematic comparative analyses of Jamā'ah Tablīgh digital practices across West African and Southeast Asian contexts. While studies of the movement in Indonesia have begun to explore its online dimensions (Kuncoro, 2021; Noor, 2012; Nisa, 2014), and Nigerian scholarship has documented its organizational development and offline structures (Balogun, 2014; Danmole, 2012), no existing work has placed these two cases in direct analytical comparison. This gap is significant because comparison reveals how a shared transnational ethos can generate divergent local practices when filtered through different cultural environments, technological infrastructures, and religious fields.

Building on this comparison, the article proposes the concept of contextual technological appropriation, showing how conservative Islamic movements selectively reshape digital technologies according to local religious risks, infrastructural conditions, and reputational pressures. Rather than treating digital media as external forces that inevitably transform religious life, the study demonstrates how religious actors actively reinterpret, discipline, and domesticate technology in ways that sustain core practices of embodied da'wah while adapting them to contemporary digital environments. This framework builds on insights from scholars of the movement such as Yoginder Sikand (2002), who emphasizes the Jamā'ah Tablīgh's remarkable ability to maintain coherence across diverse contexts through its focus on six core principles (*ṣifāt* sitt), and Marloes Janson (2005), who shows how the movement adapts to local gender dynamics in West African settings.

This article proceeds in seven sections. The following literature review examines existing scholarship on the Jamā'ah Tablīgh in both countries and situates the study within broader debates on digital religion, lived religion, and religious authority. The methodol-

ogy section then outlines the comparative qualitative approach, data sources, and analytical techniques employed. To provide necessary context, the subsequent section traces the historical development and organizational characteristics of the Jamā'ah Tablīgh in Nigeria and Indonesia. The core of the analysis follows, presenting findings through three thematic lenses: platform choice and function, negotiation of religious norms, and management of digital–physical tensions. A comparative analysis then synthesizes these findings to explain the observed divergences through contextual factors. Finally, the conclusion summarizes key contributions and suggests directions for future research.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Existing Studies on Jamā'ah *Tablīgh*

Scholarly attention to the Jamā'ah Tablīgh has historically focused on its origins, organizational structure, and missionary methodology. Foundational work by Metcalf (1993, 2002) and Sikand (2002) established the movement's identity as a transnational, apolitical revivalist movement emerging from the Deobandi tradition, emphasizing the centrality of *khurūj* (preaching tours) and the six principles (*ṣifāt* sitt). Metcalf illuminated how the movement cultivates a distinctive "living Hadith" through embodied practice, while Sikand provided comprehensive cross-country comparative analysis. However, this early scholarship largely treated the movement as existing outside modernity, focusing on traditional methods rather than engagement with contemporary technologies.

More recent work has complicated this picture. In Indonesia, Noor (2012) provides essential historical grounding, documenting the movement's arrival in 1952–1955, its gradual indigenization, and the establishment of national *marākiz* at Kebon Jeruk (Jakarta) and Temboro (East Java). His extensive ethnographic work across Southeast Asia reveals how the movement adapts to local contexts while maintaining transnational identity. Kuncoro (2021) offers the most detailed examination of Indonesian Tablīghī digital practices, documenting ambivalence toward technology: members restrict smartphone use during *khurūj* yet widely use Facebook and Instagram. His analysis of the "Jamā'ah *Khurūj*" group (over 27,000 members) reveals how Tablīghīs share religious content, develop gendered image norms (men's photographs permitted, women's discouraged), and deploy technological metaphors like "nge-charge iman" (recharging faith). Kuncoro also documents strategic rebranding through documentation of prison visitations, countering accusations of extremism.

Nisa's (2014) groundbreaking study of Indonesian female Tablīghīs adds another crucial dimension, examining how women's participation is shaped by pesantren affiliated with the movement. She demonstrates that while women's mobility is restricted by *maḥram* (male guardian) requirements, exposure to foreign female Tablīghīs during nusra (visiting) activities creates belonging to a global imagined community—a finding with important implications for understanding how digital media might similarly facilitate transnational

imagination.

Nigerian scholarship has taken a different trajectory. Balogun (2014) traces the movement's entry through Kano in the late 1950s and expansion to Ilorin, Ibadan, and Lagos, observing that Nigerian Tablīghīs integrate mobile phones selectively—curating audio recordings of *bayān* and replacing non-religious content. Balogun highlights digital technology's function as a literacy bridge for Yoruba-speaking members. Olawuyo (2014) identifies challenges: fear that recorded sermons might create "armchair *du'āt*" (preachers) and exposure to *fitna* through visual content. In response, Nigerian Tablīghīs developed restrictive policies: limiting digital engagement to administrative functions, preferring audio over visual media, and maintaining strict boundaries during *khurūj*. Kperogi (2018) adds that Nigerian Tablīghīs practice "narrowcasting"—using strictly moderated WhatsApp groups with distinctive religious code-switching that keeps communication focused on the mission.

What emerges is a clear gap: while Indonesian and Nigerian Tablīghī communities have been studied separately, no work has placed them in systematic comparative perspective. Existing studies suggest intriguing divergences—Indonesian Tablīghīs appear more comfortable with public-facing social media, while their Nigerian counterparts emphasize closed, administrative usage—but these differences remain unexplored analytically. This article addresses that gap.

Scholarship on Digital Religion

The study of religion and digital media has developed rapidly over the past two decades. Bunt's (2018) foundational work on "cyber-Islamic environments" (CIEs) examines how digital spaces transform religious authority, noting the emergence of new figures like "Shaykh Google" who provide guidance outside traditional institutional frameworks. Importantly, Bunt emphasizes that these transformations vary across Muslim contexts and generations, providing theoretical justification for this article's comparative approach.

The concept of "lived religion" offers a complementary framework, emphasizing how ordinary people enact religious meaning in everyday life rather than measuring practices against official doctrine. This perspective is particularly valuable for studying the Jamā'ah Tablīgh, a movement with minimal formal structure and significant interpretive variation. Campbell's (2010) work on "religious-social shaping of technology" further illuminates how religious communities actively negotiate technological meanings based on community values—crucial for understanding how Tablīghīs extend embodied practices of travel and face-to-face interaction into new configurations combining physical and digital presence.

Analytical Framework: Three Dimensions of Digital Engagement

Drawing on the scholarship reviewed above, this article develops an analytical framework organized around three interconnected dimensions of Tablīghī digital engagement:

the negotiation of norms, the reconfiguration of religious authority, and the meaning of everyday practice. Each dimension provides a lens for examining how Jamā'ah Tablīgh members in Nigeria and Indonesia adapt to and appropriate digital technologies.

The first dimension concerns how members adapt core Islamic values to the online environment. The movement's traditional ethos emphasizes embodied and ethical norms: lowering the gaze (*ghaḍḍ al-baṣar*), sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*), avoidance of idle talk (laghw), and prioritization of collective practice. Each norm encounters new challenges in digital spaces—how does one "lower the gaze" when scrolling through image-saturated feeds, or maintain sincerity when religious posts accumulate likes? This framework attends to both explicit strategies (community policies like Nigerian preferences for audio over video, Indonesian prohibitions on women's images, or phone deposits during *khurūj*) and implicit strategies through which members reshape digital environments to align with religious values, such as Indonesian technological metaphors ("nge-charge iman") that Islamize digital language. Comparing how these negotiations unfold across contexts reveals how local conditions shape normative adaptation.

The second dimension examines how digital engagement affects religious authority within Tablīghī communities. Traditional authority, while diffuse, remains structured: elders with extensive *khurūj* experience command respect, *shūrā* councils make collective decisions, and South Asian preachers carry particular weight. Digital platforms potentially disrupt this structure in several ways: digitally savvy members may gain influence rivaling traditional elders; platforms facilitate access to transnational content that may supplement or challenge local authority; and visual platforms like Instagram introduce new forms of influence based on production quality rather than traditional credentials. This framework asks how these potential disruptions are managed across contexts—whether Nigerian and Indonesian Tablīghīs develop different strategies for channeling new forms of digital authority, and how younger members navigate between respect for established authority and their own digital fluency.

The third dimension focuses on the everyday practices constituting Tablīghī digital engagement. Drawing on lived religion approaches, this framework attends to what members actually do with digital media—which platforms they use and for what purposes, when they post or refrain from engaging, and how digital practices intersect with the rhythms of *khurūj* and daily life. At platform level, we ask why Nigerian Tablīghīs favor WhatsApp and memory cards while Indonesians use Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. At content level, we examine what material is shared—audio sermons, photographs, Qur'anic verses—and how it circulates. At temporality level, we consider how digital practices fit into the movement's distinctive structures: the daily 'amal, weekly mashwarah, and extended *khurūj* periods when phone use is restricted.

These three dimensions—norm negotiation, authority reconfiguration, and everyday practice—are analytically distinct but empirically intertwined. Their comparative application across Nigerian and Indonesian contexts moves beyond description to explanation, identifying how cultural, political, technological, and organizational factors shape Tablīghī

digital engagement in each setting.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative approach to examine digital engagement among Jamā'ah Tablīgh communities in Nigeria and Indonesia, combining systematic literature review with the authors' observational insights gained through direct exposure to Tablīghī communities in both contexts (Bryman, 2016).

The research draws on four categories of sources. Ethnographic studies form the empirical foundation: for Indonesia, Noor's (2012) comprehensive historical ethnography across Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and West Papua; Kuncoro's (2021) study of social media practices among Indonesian Tablīghīs; and Nisa's (2014) groundbreaking research on female Tablīghīs at two major pesantren. For Nigeria, sources include Balogun's (2014) doctoral dissertation tracing the movement's development in South-Western Nigeria; Olawuyo's (2014) study of ICT impact on da'wah in Kwara State; and Danmole's (2012) analysis of the movement's activities. Peer-reviewed journal articles supplement these foundations, including Sikand's (1998) study of the Jamā'ah Tablīgh in Britain, Janson's (2005) analysis of the movement in The Gambia, and studies of Indonesian Islamic movements (Bruinessen, 2008; Slama, 2018). Media reports provide contemporary illustrations, particularly Kperogi's (2018) analysis of WhatsApp usage in Nigerian religious discourse. Observational insights from one author—a Nigerian scholar studying in Indonesia—inform the comparative framing through informal observations of WhatsApp interactions, sermon circulation, and online documentation of preaching activities.

Literature was identified through systematic searches in Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, and Index Islamicus (January–June 2023) using combinations of terms including Tablighi Jama'at, Jamā'ah Tablīgh, digital religion, social media, da'wah, Nigeria, and Indonesia. Inclusion prioritized empirical studies based on original fieldwork, peer-reviewed publications, and sources explicitly addressing the movement in either country, yielding approximately 15 relevant Nigerian sources and 20 Indonesian sources.

Data analysis employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, with attention to both manifest content (explicit statements about digital practices) and latent content (underlying assumptions shaping those practices). Analysis focused on three analytical dimensions: negotiation of religious norms in digital environments, reconfiguration of authority structures through digital media, and everyday practices of technology integration.

This study has several limitations: reliance on secondary sources precludes verification of original observations; temporal asymmetry between Nigerian (primarily 2014) and Indonesian (extending to 2021) sources may reflect temporal change rather than national variation; observational insights are not systematic enough to constitute primary ethnographic evidence; and limited engagement with non-English sources may introduce linguistic bias. Despite these limitations, the comparative framework reveals how the same

transnational movement generates different digital practices across distinct local contexts, identifying broader patterns to inform future research.

Empirical Context: Jamā'ah Tablīgh in Nigeria and Indonesia

Understanding how the Jamā'ah Tablīgh engages with digital technologies requires first situating the movement within its local historical and organizational contexts. While the Jamā'ah Tablīgh is a transnational movement with shared origins and core practices, its development in Nigeria and Indonesia followed distinct trajectories shaped by local conditions. This section provides concise histories of the movement in both countries, drawing on foundational scholarship (Balogun, 2014; Noor, 2012; Sikand, 2002), before noting similarities and differences that will inform the comparative analysis.

Historical Development of the Jamā'ah *Tablīgh in Nigeria*

The Jamā'ah Tablīgh's da'wah activities began in Nigeria during the late 1950s, with the northern city of Kano serving as the primary gateway into the country. Small groups of Pakistani preachers arrived in this historic city, drawn by its long-standing reputation as a centre for Islamic learning and commercial activity. Unlike other religious missionaries who built schools or engaged in politics, these early preaching visitors moved from one neighbourhood mosque to another, inviting local Muslims to join them in da'wah activities and spiritual renewal based on the six principles (*ṣifāt* sitt). This simple, on-site approach allowed the movement to grow organically within the local community.

From Kano, the movement expanded southward, particularly to southwestern cities with significant Muslim populations. Ibadan, Ilorin, and Lagos became key nodes in the movement's Nigerian network. The expansion into the southwest led to the establishment of a national markaz (centre) in the Eiye Nkorin district of Ilorin, Kwara State (Balogun, 2014). Ilorin's recognition as a major Islamic centre with a strong clerical presence provided strategic foundation for the movement. This centre evolved into a vital crossroads where itinerant preachers from across the globe could congregate and coordinate activities.

Following the establishment of the Ilorin centre, the movement witnessed unprecedented expansion into Ibadan and Lagos. In Ibadan, a regional markaz was established around Monatan/Iyana Church to provide accessible space for city residents and travelling traders from neighbouring areas to engage in da'wah. In Lagos, Nigeria's primary commercial hub, Masjid Bilal in Oluti was established as a significant state markaz. This centre serves multiple functions: supporting the national centre in Ilorin by coordinating regional da'wah and *khurūj* activities, and receiving and coordinating logistics for foreign preaching travellers entering the country.

The Nigerian religious landscape is characterized by intense competition between various Islamic orientations. As Danmole (2012) notes, the country's Islamic field is marked by sharp contestations between Salafi reform movements, established Sufi orders (particularly

the *Qādiriyya and Tijāniyya*), and various Islamist groups. This competitive environment has shaped the Jamā'ah Tablīgh's strategy of maintaining a low public profile and avoiding theological polemics—a pattern that, as we shall see, extends to their digital practices.

Historical Development of the Jamā'ah *Tablīgh in Indonesia*

The Jamā'ah Tablīgh's da'wah activities in Indonesia began in the 1950s through two distinct entry points, as meticulously documented by Noor (2012). In 1952, a small group of preaching travellers from India and Pakistan arrived in Medan, a major port city on the island of Sumatra. These men travelled simply, moving from mosque to mosque to encourage local Muslims to return to foundational Islamic practices. From this starting point in Medan, the movement gradually spread across the sea to Java. A separate group arrived in Jakarta in 1955, establishing a second entry point that would prove crucial for the movement's national development.

The spread to Java led to the establishment of a national markaz at the Kebon Jeruk Mosque in Jakarta. This central location allowed preaching travellers from across the archipelago and around the world to meet and coordinate. What began as small groups of foreign visitors eventually transformed into a massive local movement, as Indonesian santri embarked on educational journeys to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and South Africa for religious training. Upon returning home, they assumed leadership of the movement's organizational structure, effectively indigenizing what had begun as a foreign import.

Following the establishment of da'wah activities in Jakarta, the Jamā'ah Tablīgh experienced unprecedented expansion in Temboro, East Java, often referred to as the "Medina of Indonesia" (Noor, 2012; Arifianto, 2020). This location evolved into a major national centre garnering international recognition. The Indian headquarters of the movement selected a mosque belonging to Shaykh Al-Fatah as one of the national centres, functioning alongside the Jakarta markaz to organize da'wah and *khurūj* activities. As Nisa (2014) documents, Pondok Pesantren Al-Fatah in Temboro has become the largest Tablīghī educational centre in Indonesia, with thousands of students and significant influence on the movement's development.

The movement in Indonesia maintains a loose organizational structure. Membership is open to any Sunni Muslim who intends to participate in *khurūj* or is interested in joining *bayān* sessions. The movement draws not only from rich and poor, lay and religious Muslims, but also includes members from other Indonesian Islamic movements, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah (Kuncoro, 2021). This porousness contrasts with the more bounded identity of the movement in some other contexts. As Noor (2012) observes, this flexibility has been key to the movement's success in Indonesia's crowded Islamic landscape.

Local Characteristics: Similarities and Differences

This brief historical overview reveals both shared patterns and significant divergences

between the Nigerian and Indonesian cases. Similarities include: both movements arrived through South Asian preaching travellers in the mid-twentieth century (Indonesia 1952–1955, Nigeria late 1950s); both established national *marākiz* that became hubs for transnational coordination (Ilorin in Nigeria, Kebon Jeruk in Indonesia); both underwent processes of indigenization as local members trained abroad and assumed leadership roles; and both communities maintain the core practices of *khurūj*, *bayān*, and mashwarah that characterize the movement globally.

Despite these shared foundations, the movements differ significantly in their relationship to the broader Islamic landscape. In Indonesia, Tablīghī membership overlaps substantially with mainstream organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, suggesting more fluid boundaries between the movement and other Islamic groups. As Nisa (2014) notes, this integration extends to educational institutions, with Tablīghī pesantren adopting national curricula while maintaining distinct religious practices. Indonesia has also developed multiple significant centres, with Temboro achieving international recognition alongside the national markaz in Jakarta.

In Nigeria, by contrast, the boundaries between the Jamā'ah Tablīgh and groups like the Muslim Students' Society or the Muslim Congress appear more distinct, and the religious field is marked by sharper contestations between Salafi and Sufi orientations. The movement's structure is also more hierarchical, with Ilorin serving as the primary national centre and Ibadan and Lagos functioning as subordinate regional hubs. These contextual differences—particularly the degree of integration with mainstream Islam and the nature of the broader religious field—will prove important for understanding the divergent patterns of digital engagement that emerge in the two countries.

Forms of Digital Engagement: A Thematic Analysis

This section presents the core empirical findings of the study through three thematic sub-sections that integrate the dimensions of strategy, policy, and criticism. Rather than treating these as separate categories, each theme examines how Nigerian and Indonesian Tablīghīs navigate a particular aspect of digital engagement, revealing both shared patterns and significant divergences.

Platform Choice and Function

The most immediately visible difference between Nigerian and Indonesian Tablīghī digital engagement lies in their platform choices, which reflect deeper orientations toward the purpose of digital media in religious life. Among Nigerian Tablīghīs, WhatsApp dominates, supplemented by physical memory cards for audio distribution. This preference reflects a deliberate orientation toward internal community coordination rather than public outreach. As Balogun (2014) documents, Nigerian Tablīghīs use mobile devices primarily to share recorded sermons (*bayān*) among themselves, not to broadcast activities to the wider world. The function is fundamentally administrative: coordinating da'wah activities,

reminding members of daily practices, and facilitating weekly consultations.

Kperogi (2018) sharpens this characterization by introducing "narrowcasting" as opposed to broadcasting. Nigerian Tablīghīs use digital platforms to communicate specific information to existing members, not to attract new audiences or engage in public debate. Their WhatsApp groups are closed spaces where logistical information—coordination details, departure times for *khurūj*, updates on visiting preachers—is efficiently disseminated. This preserves the movement's traditional emphasis on face-to-face interaction while harnessing digital tools to make it more efficient. This pattern resonates with Sikand's (1998) observation of the Jamā'ah Tablīgh in Britain, where closed networks among South Asian migrants similarly prioritized internal cohesion over public outreach during the movement's early development.

A distinctive feature of Nigerian practice is the preference for audio over visual media. Olawuyo (2014) explains this as a deliberate strategy to minimize visual distraction and avoid spiritual risks associated with images. By circulating MP3 files and voice notes rather than videos or photographs, Nigerian Tablīghīs maintain the oral character of their tradition while adapting to digital formats. Memory cards function as portable libraries of *bayān* recordings, allowing members to build personal sermon collections. This practice aligns with the movement's oral culture, where spoken words carry greater authority than written texts. As Metcalf (1993) notes, the Jamā'ah Tablīgh's emphasis on "living Hadith" privileges oral transmission and embodied practice over textual study alone. Memory cards also serve as a literacy bridge. Balogun (2014) observes that members more fluent in oral Yoruba than Arabic or English find it easier to access religious content in their indigenous languages via audio files. These digital tools facilitate memorization and mastery of da'wah tenets regardless of formal education, democratizing access to religious knowledge within the community.

Indonesian Tablīghīs have adopted markedly different platforms. Kuncoro's (2021) investigation reveals active presence on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube—platforms designed for public visibility. When Kuncoro searched "Jamaah Tabligh" on Facebook and Instagram, he immediately found numerous accounts, including individual profiles and group pages. This public-facing orientation contrasts sharply with Nigeria's closed WhatsApp groups. The function of these platforms extends beyond internal coordination to public proselytization and image management. The private Facebook group "Jama'ah Khuruj," which Kuncoro analyzed, had over 27,000 members. This digital community shares photos, videos, Qur'anic verses, Hadith quotes, and activity updates daily, transforming social media into a space for da'wah outreach.

A significant function is strategic rebranding. Kuncoro (2021) documents how members upload documentation of social outreach—particularly prison visitations and sermons to convicts—to counter negative stereotypes. The movement has faced accusations of deviance and extremism in Indonesia, and these posts construct a counter-narrative presenting Tablīghīs as socially engaged, peaceful Muslims. This rebranding function is entirely absent from Nigeria, where the movement faces different public perceptions. Indonesian Tablīghīs

also differ in content format. While Nigerians prefer audio, Indonesians readily share photographs and videos. The "Jama'ah Khuruj" group regularly posts visual documentation of preaching tours, reflecting different technological infrastructures and cultural attitudes toward image use. As Nisa (2014) observes, this visual documentation extends to female Tablīghīs' activities, though with careful attention to gendered norms of modesty.

Negotiating Religious Norms in Digital Spaces

Both Nigerian and Indonesian Tablīghīs actively work to adapt core Islamic values to the digital environment, but they do so through different mechanisms and emphases. Indonesian Tablīghīs have developed explicit norms around image-sharing that represent a direct negotiation of modesty principles. According to Kuncoro (2021), a gendered consensus has emerged: while uploading men's photographs is generally permitted, women's images are strictly discouraged. This prohibition is rooted in interpretations of Qur'anic and Hadith teachings concerning female privacy and modesty (*ḥijāb*, *ghaḍḍ al-baṣar*). Members argue that unrestricted visibility exposes women to unwanted attention, including excessive friend requests and private messages, threatening their well-being and violating ethical boundaries.

This negotiated norm represents a creative adaptation of traditional values to new technological circumstances. Classical Islamic discussions of modesty developed when visual exposure meant physical presence in public space. Indonesian Tablīghīs extend these principles to digital visibility, treating photographs as forms of presence that carry similar risks and require similar protections. The policy is a considered judgment about how modesty should operate in visually saturated online environments. Nisa's (2014) research on female Tablīghīs provides crucial context here. She documents how women's participation in the movement is shaped by norms requiring *maḥram* accompaniment and modest dress, including face-veiling (cadar) for many adherents. The extension of these norms to digital spaces represents continuity rather than rupture—women's images are restricted online for the same reasons they are restricted in physical space.

Another striking example is the Indonesian Tablīghī use of technological metaphors for spiritual concepts. Kuncoro (2021) documents the phrase "nge-charge iman" (recharging faith), which has become common among members. When their hearts feel spiritually weak, they explain, they need to "recharge" by listening to *bayān* or attending religious gatherings. This metaphor appropriates battery technology language to express traditional spiritual concerns, effectively Islamizing a digital concept. The irony is notable: a movement cautious about digital distractions employs technological terminology to articulate the need for spiritual renewal. This linguistic adaptation suggests Indonesian Tablīghīs are incorporating digital ways of thinking into their religious imagination, bridging traditional language and contemporary experience.

Nigerian Tablīghīs negotiate religious norms through different strategies focused on linguistic practice and environmental control. Kperogi (2018) documents how members maintain linguistic purity in digital communications. Rather than using casual language

common in ordinary Nigerian WhatsApp groups, Tablīghīs employ distinctive religious code-switching that marks their digital spaces as sacred. Phrases like "Insha Allah, the *tashkīl* for the Jamā'ah is ready" blend Arabic terminology with administrative content, creating a unique digital register that reflects the movement's proselytizing identity. This linguistic practice serves multiple functions. It continuously reminds participants of the religious purpose underlying administrative communication, distinguishes Tablīghī digital spaces from secular online environments, and reinforces group identity. The effect is a digital environment that feels continuous with the mosque and *khurūj* journey, rather than an intrusion of worldly communication.

A second strategy involves strict moderation to eliminate content that does not serve the movement's purposes. Kperogi (2018) contrasts Tablīghī WhatsApp groups with ordinary Nigerian groups filled with chit-chat, jokes, or political debates. In Tablīghī groups, such content is rigorously excluded. The groups are maintained as focused spaces dedicated to coordinating da'wah activities and disseminating religious content. This environmental control extends the traditional emphasis on avoiding idle talk (laghw) into the digital realm. The preference for audio content also represents a negotiation of norms around sensory engagement. By privileging audio over video, Nigerian Tablīghīs adapt the value of lowering the gaze to digital conditions. While one cannot physically look away from a screen as in physical space, one can choose formats that minimize visual stimulation, extending the ethic of visual restraint into media choices. Balogun (2014) highlights how memory cards for *bayān* recordings align with the movement's oral tradition. Tablīghī knowledge transmission has always privileged spoken words from living authorities. Digital audio files, while not identical to live sermons, preserve the oral character of this tradition more faithfully than written texts, supporting rather than undermining traditional epistemological values.

Digital vs. Physical Tensions and Internal Policies

The integration of digital tools into a movement built on physical presence generates inevitable tensions. Both Nigerian and Indonesian Tablīghīs have developed policies to manage these tensions, though their approaches differ significantly. Nigerian Tablīghīs have established clear, enforced policies governing technology use, particularly during *khurūj*. Olawuyo (2014) documents leadership's fear that easy access to recorded sermons might create "armchair *du'āt*" who believe sharing digital content substitutes for physical sacrifice. This reflects the conviction that da'wah requires embodied presence. The most striking policy mandates that participants deposit mobile devices with the *tashkīl* section before *khurūj*, enforcing the priority of physical over digital presence.

More broadly, Nigerian Tablīghīs maintain restrictive policies limiting digital engagement to administrative functions. "Narrowcasting" over broadcasting is a policy orientation: digital platforms coordinate existing members, not public outreach. The preference for audio over visual files similarly minimizes spiritual risk. These policies are maintained through rigorous WhatsApp moderation, with the *shūrā* (consultative council) regular-

ly reviewing guidelines during mashwarah sessions. This formal infrastructure contrasts sharply with Indonesia's diffuse norm development.

The Indonesian case presents a different picture. Kuncoro (2021) states there is no clear policy on technology use during *khurūj* from movement leaders. Rather than centralized rules, Indonesian Tablīghīs operate through emergent norms and individual negotiation. Clear norms have developed around image-sharing—particularly the gendered prohibition on women's photographs—but these emerge through community discussion and consensus rather than formal *shūrā* decisions. Members evaluate digital behaviors through principles of *amr bil-ma'rūf* wa nahy 'anil munkar (enjoining good and forbidding evil), suggesting decentralized normative development. This less formalized environment allows more individual negotiation and contextual adaptation. Indonesian Tablīghīs navigate digital engagement with less explicit guidance than Nigerians, creating space for innovation—such as technological metaphors—but also greater variation in practice.

A striking feature of Indonesian practice is members' explicit justification for social media use. When criticized, they analogize to the Prophet Muhammad's letters to distant leaders, framing social media as a contemporary equivalent for transmitting religious messages. This discourse integrates digital engagement into Islamic history, identifying precedents for mediated communication. The Prophet's letters become a template for understanding Facebook posts, effectively Islamizing digital da'wah. This narrative work is less visible in Nigeria, where restricted engagement generates less need for external justification. As Janson (2005) observes in the Gambian context, such narrative justifications are crucial for how the movement negotiates tensions between traditional practices and contemporary realities.

The contrast illuminates different modes of adaptation. Nigeria's centralized, restrictive approach prioritizes protecting traditional practice from digital disruption, mobilizing institutional structures (*shūrā*, mashwarah) to maintain boundaries. Indonesia's decentralized, emergent approach allows creative appropriation but potentially greater ambiguity. These differences reflect broader contexts: Nigeria's contested religious field with sharp group boundaries creates pressure for clear positional statements, while Indonesia's integrated landscape with Tablīghī membership overlapping mainstream organizations allows fluid norm development. The perceived threats also differ—distraction from physical da'wah in Nigeria versus negative public stereotypes in Indonesia.

What both share is ongoing negotiation between the ethos of physical presence and digital possibilities. Neither community simply rejects or embraces digital tools; both actively shape technology to their purposes while protecting essential practices. This shared dynamic of selective appropriation, manifesting through different policy mechanisms, is this study's central finding.

Comparative Analysis: Synthesizing and Explaining the Patterns

Having documented the forms of digital engagement among Nigerian and Indonesian

Tablīghīs, this section shifts from descriptive analysis to explanatory interpretation. Rather than introducing additional empirical data, the discussion synthesizes the preceding findings to address a central analytical question: why do the digital practices of Tablīghī communities in Nigeria and Indonesia diverge in such noticeable ways? The argument unfolds in three stages. It begins by identifying the shared orientations that unite both cases as part of a single transnational movement. It then examines the contextual conditions that generate different patterns of digital engagement. Finally, it interprets these differences as locally shaped adaptations of a common religious ethos rather than as fundamentally distinct approaches to technology.

Shared Orientations: The Transnational Ethos

Despite the divergences observed in their digital strategies, Nigerian and Indonesian Tablīghīs share several foundational orientations toward digital media. Recognizing these shared patterns is crucial, because they reveal that the variations between the two cases do not represent opposing models but rather different expressions of a shared ideological framework. In both contexts, digital technologies are consistently framed as instruments for da'wah, not as substitutes for it. This distinction is central to the Tablīghī understanding of religious practice. Online engagement is never presented as a replacement for the embodied practice of preaching, particularly the tradition of *khurūj*, in which members leave their homes for periods of missionary travel.

Among Nigerian Tablīghīs this hierarchy is made especially explicit. During *khurūj*, members are often required to deposit their mobile phones, temporarily disconnecting from digital communication in order to prioritize spiritual discipline and face-to-face preaching. Indonesian Tablīghīs, although more active on social media platforms, maintain a similar conceptual distinction. They frequently emphasize that digital media functions primarily as a support mechanism—facilitating coordination, communication, and documentation—rather than as the core medium of religious activity. The analogy sometimes invoked by Indonesian members compares digital communication with the Prophet's letters sent to distant communities: these written messages supported the expansion of Islam but did not replace the importance of physical presence and direct interaction.

This instrumental understanding of technology reflects the foundational ethos of the Jamā'ah Tablīgh. At the centre of the movement lies the practice of *khurūj*, which emphasizes physical mobility, personal sacrifice, and interpersonal contact. The spiritual transformation sought by participants emerges through embodied experience: travelling, interacting with strangers, and engaging in collective worship. Digital tools may assist organizational coordination, disseminate sermons, or maintain networks among members, but they cannot replicate the transformative dimension associated with leaving one's home to preach in the path of God. Both Nigerian and Indonesian communities maintain this hierarchy between embodied religious practice and mediated communication.

Another important similarity concerns the shared concern about the potential of digital media to produce *fitna*—moral temptation, distraction, or social disorder. While the spe-

cific concerns expressed in each context differ, the underlying sense of caution is common. Nigerian Tablīghīs frequently emphasize the dangers associated with visual media. Images and videos, they argue, may encourage inappropriate viewing or expose believers to morally questionable content. For this reason, many Nigerian Tablīghī networks prioritise audio formats such as voice notes and recorded sermons rather than visual platforms.

Indonesian Tablīghīs express comparable concerns, although these often focus on issues related to gender and public exposure. The sharing of photographs online, particularly images involving women, is often regulated through informal norms intended to minimise unwanted attention. Both communities also worry that excessive engagement with digital platforms can lead to wasted time or distraction from religious obligations. Digital environments, saturated with entertainment and commercial content, are perceived as spaces that can easily divert believers from more meaningful spiritual pursuits. Consequently, Tablīghī communities in both countries attempt to regulate digital participation through various practices and expectations designed to preserve moral discipline.

A further shared characteristic is the primarily internal orientation of Tablīghī digital communication. Even when platforms appear publicly accessible, their primary function is not mass outreach but community maintenance. In Indonesia, for example, Facebook groups that document *khurūj* activities serve as spaces where members share experiences, maintain connections across regions, and reinforce a sense of collective identity. Although outsiders may view these platforms, their content largely addresses existing members rather than attempting to convert new audiences. This internal orientation is even more pronounced in the Nigerian context. WhatsApp groups used by Nigerian Tablīghīs are typically closed networks restricted to known members. Their function is largely administrative, facilitating coordination of preaching tours, sharing logistical information, and circulating recorded sermons. Rather than building virtual religious communities independent of physical practice, these digital networks strengthen the organizational infrastructure necessary for offline activities. In both countries, therefore, digital media primarily sustains an already existing community of practice rather than creating new forms of online religiosity.

Explaining Divergence: Contextual Factors

If these fundamental orientations are shared, how can the divergences between Nigerian and Indonesian digital practices be explained? The answer lies in several interrelated contextual factors, including differing perceptions of risk, contrasting traditions of religious communication, and variations in the broader religious environment.

In Nigeria, concerns about visual media are particularly pronounced. Many Tablīghīs emphasize the Islamic principle of *ghaḍḍ al-baṣr*—the injunction to lower one's gaze and avoid morally inappropriate visual exposure. In a digital environment where smartphones provide constant access to image-based content, this principle becomes especially relevant. Nigerian Tablīghīs therefore adopt an intentionally restrictive approach, minimising engagement with visual platforms and favouring audio communication. Voice recordings and audio sermons preserve the spoken character of religious instruction while avoiding

the risks associated with visual imagery. This preference is also connected to the historical oral orientation of Tablīghī teaching. Within the movement, religious knowledge has traditionally been transmitted through sermons delivered by respected preachers rather than through written texts or visual media. Audio recordings therefore represent a natural extension of established pedagogical forms. A recorded *bayān* retains the authority and intimacy associated with oral communication, even when transmitted digitally. Visual media, by contrast, introduce aesthetic and performative elements that do not easily align with this established tradition.

The structure of Nigeria's religious field also shapes Tablīghī digital strategies. The country's Islamic landscape includes multiple competing orientations, including Salafi reform movements and established Sufi orders. Public religious debates are common, and digital platforms frequently become arenas for polemical exchange. In such a contested environment, public visibility carries significant risks. A social media post could attract criticism, invite theological dispute, or expose the movement to hostile commentary. By restricting their digital activities to closed networks, Nigerian Tablīghīs minimise the possibility of being drawn into these controversies, maintaining the movement's long-standing commitment to avoiding sectarian debate.

Indonesia presents a different configuration of opportunities and pressures. As one of the largest Muslim-majority societies in the world, the country serves as a major node within global Tablīghī networks. Indonesian centres such as Kebon Jeruk in Jakarta and Temboro in East Java regularly host international preaching delegations and send Indonesian members abroad. This transnational circulation of participants requires extensive coordination across regions and countries, making digital communication particularly valuable. Platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp allow Indonesian Tablīghīs to maintain connections across vast geographical distances. In addition to logistical coordination, Indonesian Tablīghīs face a reputational challenge that encourages greater public visibility. In recent years the movement has occasionally been associated in public discourse with extremism or radicalism, despite its explicitly apolitical orientation. In response, some Indonesian Tablīghīs use digital platforms to present alternative narratives about their activities. Posts documenting prison visits, community service initiatives, and preaching sessions portray the movement as socially engaged and constructive. This form of digital communication functions as a strategy of reputational management, seeking to counter negative stereotypes and foster broader social acceptance.

Indonesian Tablīghī digital practices also intersect with a wider culture of online religious expression. Major Indonesian Islamic organisations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah maintain active digital presences, producing religious content across multiple platforms. In this environment, digital engagement has become a normal feature of contemporary Islamic communication. Some Indonesian Tablīghīs adopt stylistic elements from this broader digital culture, including the creative use of technological metaphors such as "charging one's faith" (nge-charge iman). Such expressions translate traditional spiritual concepts into language that resonates with younger, digitally literate audiences.

Visual media also play a greater role in Indonesian Tablīghī communication. Photographs from *khurūj* activities and short videos documenting preaching events are commonly shared online. Rather than rejecting visual culture entirely, Indonesian Tablīghīs have developed informal norms—such as gender-sensitive image policies—to regulate its use. This approach allows them to participate in contemporary digital culture while maintaining religious ethical boundaries.

Appropriation as Adaptation

Viewed through this analytical framework, the differences between Nigerian and Indonesian Tablīghī digital practices appear less as ideological divergences and more as contextually shaped adaptations. The same underlying values—commitment to embodied preaching, concern about moral risk, and emphasis on community cohesion—generate different practical responses depending on local conditions. In Nigeria, the primary perceived risk lies in public religious contestation and the moral dangers associated with visual media. The movement responds by limiting visibility and privileging audio communication. In Indonesia, the main challenge involves managing public reputation and coordinating a large transnational network. Here, digital visibility becomes a strategic resource rather than a liability. Both responses emerge from attempts to preserve the movement's core principles under different social circumstances.

Ultimately, what unites both cases is the active process of technological appropriation undertaken by Tablīghī communities. Rather than passively adapting to digital change, Nigerian and Indonesian Tablīghīs interpret new technologies through the lens of their religious commitments. They develop norms, practices, and strategies that allow digital tools to serve the purposes of the movement while protecting its core values. Digital engagement thus becomes a negotiated extension of tradition rather than a departure from it. The comparative perspective offered by these two cases illustrates the flexibility of religious traditions in the face of technological transformation. The Jamā'ah Tablīgh's engagement with digital media demonstrates that even movements strongly oriented toward embodied practice can incorporate new forms of communication without abandoning their foundational principles. Instead, technology becomes another arena in which the ongoing work of maintaining religious coherence is carried out.

Reimagining Tradition in the Digital Age: Theoretical Reflections

The case of the Jamā'ah Tablīgh in Nigeria and Indonesia offers important correctives to prevailing assumptions in the study of digital religion. Rather than confirming simple narratives of either technological determinism or traditionalist resistance, the findings reveal a more complex process of negotiation that challenges several key concepts in the field.

Complicating Secularization Narratives

A persistent assumption in some scholarship on religion and technology is that digital engagement inevitably leads to secularization or religious transformation in a "modernizing" direction. The logic is intuitive: exposure to diverse viewpoints, immersion in global media flows, and the individualization of religious consumption should erode traditional authorities and practices. The Tablīghī case complicates this picture. Neither Nigerian nor Indonesian Tablīghīs show signs of secularization through their digital engagement. Their online activities do not lead them to abandon traditional practices or adopt more individualized, less communal forms of piety. On the contrary, digital tools are used to strengthen communal bonds, coordinate collective activities, and reinforce traditional values. The Nigerian policy of depositing phones during *khurūj* explicitly subordinates digital connection to embodied religious practice. The Indonesian use of social media to document *khurūj* activities reinforces the value of physical presence even while creating virtual representations of it.

What we observe is not modernization in the sense of movement toward some presumed secular endpoint, but something closer to what scholars of media and religion have called "mediatization"—the process by which religious practice adapts to the logics of media environments while maintaining its fundamental commitments (Hjarvard, 2013). Tablīghīs in both countries learn to work with digital platforms, but they do so on their own terms, shaping platform use to religious purposes rather than allowing platforms to reshape their religion. This finding aligns with Bunt's (2018) emphasis on the diversity of cyber-Islamic environments. The Tablīghī case represents one specific mode of digital engagement—conservative, communal, instrumental—that differs markedly from the individualistic online piety Bunt also documents. Digital Islam is not a single phenomenon but a spectrum of possibilities shaped by different movements' orientations and strategies.

Negotiation as Analytical Lens

The concept of negotiation has emerged throughout this analysis as central to understanding Tablīghī digital engagement. Members do not simply transfer offline practices online or replace physical activities with digital alternatives. Instead, they engage in ongoing work to determine how digital tools can appropriately supplement, support, and extend their religious lives. This negotiation operates at multiple levels. At the level of norms, communities work out how traditional values apply to new circumstances—whether lowering the gaze applies to screen images, whether modesty requires limiting women's photographs, whether sharing recorded sermons constitutes legitimate da'wah. At the level of authority, groups determine who has the right to make these determinations—the *shūrā* in Nigeria, emergent consensus in Indonesia. At the level of practice, individuals navigate the tension between digital convenience and traditional expectations, deciding when to use phones and when to set them aside.

Understanding digital religion as negotiation rather than replacement has important analytical implications. It directs attention away from questions about whether online practice is "authentic" and toward questions about how communities manage the bound-

ary between physical and digital, how they adapt norms to new contexts, and how they maintain coherence across different modes of practice. These are empirical questions answerable through careful observation, not abstract judgments about religious authenticity.

Authority Reconsidered

A second common assumption in digital religion scholarship is that new media erode traditional religious authority by democratizing access to religious knowledge and enabling new voices to compete with established scholars (Bunt, 2018; Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). The Tablīghī case offers a more nuanced picture. In both Nigeria and Indonesia, traditional forms of authority remain robust. Elders with extensive *khurūj* experience continue to command respect. The *shūrā* in Nigeria sets policies that members follow. Visiting preachers from South Asia carry weight based on their connection to the movement's origins. Digital platforms have not displaced these authorities.

What digital platforms have done is create new sites where authority is exercised and new roles through which it operates. The WhatsApp group administrator who enforces content moderation policies exercises a form of delegated authority. The member who shares a *bayān* recording makes a judgment about which sermons are valuable, effectively curating religious content for others. The Facebook user who posts photographs of *khurūj* activities shapes public perceptions of the movement, potentially influencing its standing in the national religious landscape. These are not replacements for traditional authority but extensions and re-embeddings of it. The authority of the WhatsApp admin derives from the *shūrā*'s policies. The value of a shared *bayān* depends on the elder who delivered it. The impact of a Facebook post about prison visitation rests on the actual charitable work being documented. Digital platforms create new channels for authority to operate without fundamentally transforming its sources.

This finding suggests that digital religion scholarship should attend not only to challenges to traditional authority but also to the ways established authority structures adapt to and incorporate digital media. The Tablīghī case shows that conservative religious movements can integrate digital tools while maintaining traditional authority patterns—indeed, can use digital tools to reinforce those patterns by making coordination more efficient and community boundaries clearer.

Tradition as Dynamic Continuity

The Jamā'ah Tablīgh's digital engagement also offers an opportunity to reconsider one of the most persistent binaries in religious studies: the opposition between "traditional" and "modern" forms of religious practice. This dichotomy, often implicit rather than explicit, positions traditional religion as resistant to change, oriented toward the past, and suspicious of innovation, while modern religion is adaptive, future-oriented, and comfortable with new technologies. The Tablīghī case reveals tradition as anything but static. The movement's digital practices are genuinely new—no one in 1926 India could have

imagined WhatsApp groups or Facebook pages. Yet these practices are shaped by and express the movement's traditional commitments. The preference for audio over video in Nigeria extends the oral character of Tablīghī transmission. The gendered image policies in Indonesia apply classical concerns about modesty to new visual environments. The use of digital tools to coordinate *khurūj* strengthens the very practice that defines the movement's traditional identity.

This is tradition as dynamic continuity, not static repetition. Tablīghīs maintain core commitments—to *khurūj*, to oral transmission, to communal practice—while adapting the means through which these commitments are realized. The tradition provides resources for evaluating new technologies and incorporating them in ways that serve its purposes. It is precisely because the tradition is strong and coherent that it can engage with change without losing its identity.

From Adoption to Appropriation

The language of "adoption" suggests passive acceptance of externally generated technologies. Tablīghīs, however, do not simply adopt digital tools; they actively appropriate them, reshaping their use to align with religious values. This appropriation operates at multiple levels. Technological appropriation involves choosing audio over video, WhatsApp over more visually oriented platforms, memory cards over streaming services. Normative appropriation includes developing rules for image-sharing, creating religious language for digital communication, and using technological metaphors for spiritual concepts. Narrative appropriation frames social media use as analogous to the Prophet's letters, positioning digital da'wah within Islamic history. Through these appropriative practices, Tablīghīs transform digital technologies from potential threats into useful tools. The same smartphone that could expose them to *fitna* becomes a library of *bayān* recordings. The same Facebook platform that could distract from religious practice becomes a space for documenting and celebrating *khurūj*. Technology is not accepted on its own terms but remade to serve religious purposes.

The Tablīghī case suggests a reversal of the conventional narrative about tradition and modernity. Rather than a traditional movement reluctantly becoming more modern, we see a movement actively working to make modernity more Islamic. The goal is not to adapt Islam to digital culture but to adapt digital culture to Islam. This orientation is evident in the Indonesian practice of "nge-charge iman." Here, a thoroughly modern technological concept—battery charging—is appropriated to express a traditional spiritual concern—the need for periodic religious renewal. The direction of adaptation is from technology to religion, not the reverse. Technology provides a metaphor, but the meaning and purpose remain Islamic. Similarly, the Nigerian practice of using memory cards to store *bayān* transforms a generic storage device into a sacred object, a portable repository of religious knowledge. The technology is not changed physically, but its meaning and use are redefined within an Islamic framework. What emerges is not a hybrid that blends tradition and modernity into something indistinct, but a clear assertion of Islamic priorities within

technological environments. The technology remains recognizable, but its significance is reoriented. This is not tradition surrendering to modernity but tradition engaging with and shaping modernity on its own terms.

Conclusion

This study examines how the Jamā'ah Tablīgh, a transnational movement historically rooted in face-to-face preaching, navigates digital engagement in Nigeria and Indonesia. Through comparative analysis, it identifies both shared orientations and significant divergences in their digital practices, interpreted through local contextual factors.

The findings reveal contrasting digital strategies. In Nigeria, Tablīghī engagement remains limited, cautious, and internally focused—using WhatsApp and memory cards for coordination and sermon circulation while prioritizing audio over visual media, reflecting the movement's oral tradition and concerns about moral risks. During *khurūj* (missionary journeys), mobile phones are deposited, reinforcing the primacy of physical presence. In Indonesia, by contrast, Tablīghī communities maintain a more visible public presence through Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to document activities, strengthen solidarity, and counter negative stereotypes, while remaining shaped by gendered norms that extend traditional modesty requirements to digital spaces.

Despite these differences, both communities share fundamental orientations: digital tools support—rather than substitute for—traditional da'wah, with wariness of *fitna* (moral temptation) and prioritization of internal community building over mass outreach. Divergences stem from socio-religious contexts—Nigeria's contested religious landscape encourages restrained engagement, while Indonesia's need for transnational coordination fosters more open social media use. In both cases, Tablīghī actors actively appropriate technology rather than passively adapt, demonstrating capacity for local variation while maintaining transnational coherence.

Theoretically, this study challenges deterministic narratives linking digital engagement to secularization, showing instead that tradition is dynamic: religious movements can integrate new technologies to reinforce core values. Future research should pursue longitudinal studies of generational change, comparative analysis across Pakistan, Britain, and other African countries, gender-focused investigations of female Tablīghīs' digital navigation, and ethnographic platform studies to distinguish the Jamā'ah Tablīgh's instrumental approach from other modes of religious technological engagement.

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