

Islamic Preaching: Using Digital Media to Approach Pakistani Users

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Abstract

Advancement in media technology has immensely changed the ways of disseminating information across the globe. Today, almost every religion has realized the significance of digital media to spread their religious ideology. Studies in the past have mostly looked at the function and effects of using digital media to promote Islam. The use of digital media to promote Islam in the modern world, however, needs to be explored further. Therefore, exploration of the opportunities and specific features which digital media offers to promote Islam among Pakistani users is the primary goal of this study. Including a mixed methodological approach, this study has analyzed and interpreted the data. This study has encompassed several possibilities, specific facets and features of digital platforms that can be used to promote Islam. The study findings have suggested for the religious scholars to utilize appropriate digital media platforms to spread Islamic teachings to a larger number of Pakistani users.

Keywords: preaching Islam, Internet, digital media, Pakistan, social media

Introduction

Preaching or da'wah (Arabic term for preaching) always remained an important element of Islam. According to Abdurrahman (cited in Aini & Husna, 2018), preaching is a matter of reshaping the belief, attitude, and thoughts of the people. Thus, to enhance the effects of religious messages, the key is to modify preachers' preaching strategy. Ishak and Sohlin (2012) has investigated the benefits of media usage for preaching Islam and found that media is a highly significant tool for disseminating Islamic teachings and emphasized on utilizing this useful instrument.

Technological advancements have accelerated social transformations, as a result the late 20th century has witnessed new forms of "preaching" (Meuleman, 2011). Some social change experts are of the view that technology and technological progress are the key players of social change (Lewis, 2014, p.1). According to Vogt (2011), in the fifteenth century invention of the printing press influenced the way Christians were used to communicate religion. The advent of printing press helped them to produce, copy and circulate the religious text around the world. This invention shifted people from listening to religious

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information to reading them and from groups to individuals. While studying the global effects of the Internet, Ferguson (2018) and Hempton (2022) found that the Internet was more impactful than the printing press as the computers and smartphones have strengthened networking more than the books and pamphlets did. Sheryl Sandberg (cited in Hempton, 2022) is of the view that social media and faith organizations are compatible because both focus on connections. Therefore, it is expected that people will provide religious services in the spaces of virtual reality, or they will use augmented reality to teach faith to their children. McLuhan (1964), who is famous for his theory 'The Medium is the Message', has also highlighted the important role of medium in propagation of a message and placed the importance of a message in means of conveying the message.

According to Chapell, (cited in, Jeffress, 2008, p.6), now audio video media have been identified as a sensory wallpaper for Americans' everyday life. The growing use of the Internet is known as a life changing point, people can use several networking sites such as communication apps and social media using their devices. The author noted that several beneficial features of the Internet encouraged numerous organizations and companies to take advantage of Internet based networks to promote their products. Tagliacozzo and Toorawa (2016, p.12) have emphasized that understanding of relatively recent innovations is crucial because of their impact on societies. For instance, there is massive growth and huge development in social media, access to the Internet through small devices such as mobile phones, smartphones, and tablets, as well as increasing internet literacy and a digital generation who are brought up using the Internet. These factors have a huge impact on Muslim communities (Tagliacozzo & Toorawa, 2016). Accordingly, it is necessary to investigate solutions to meet current needs because these cultural shifts are unavoidable. In fact, adaptation of digitalization in numerous fields of life is forcing religious figures to revise their media choices and utilize digital technology to provide better religious services. According to Zaid et al. (2022, p.1), digital age has disrupted the traditional preaching style and offered new ways to communicate, consume, and share religious content. In traditional settings, religious information was conveyed by religious authorities in ritualized and formal settings. But now, digitalization has enabled users to consume, produce, and share religious content on several online platforms. (Ibahrine, 2014, p.737). Hence, digitalization facilitates individuals, who have acquired religious knowledge from traditional Islamic centers, to provide religious services in modern settings. In another study, Tagliacozzo and Toorawa (2016, p.12) reported that for developing better understanding of present-day issues and for presenting Islam's

stance on those issues, utilization of modern technology is very important. Bunt (2004) admits that a small group in Muslim-majority countries use digital technology. He states that usually Muslims use the Internet as a networking tool to chat with each other and for research purposes. Like other countries, digitalization has gained popularity in Pakistan, now different social groups are actively using social media (Rashid, 2019).

In the nutshell, it is generally agreed that traditional ways of preaching have lost their effectiveness, therefore, new ways to disseminate Islamic teachings must be welcomed. Therefore, this study has been initiated to investigate the opportunities digital media offers to preach Islam and to identify specific features of digital forums that can be utilized to promote Islam among Pakistani audiences. Relying on the report released by Data Report al, namely Digital 2023 (Kemp, 2023), this study limits its focus on investigating the specific features of only those digital platforms that are popular among Pakistani users. Understanding the opportunities and features of popular digital forums will enable Islamic scholars to choose and use appropriate media to approach Pakistani audiences.

Literature Review

Digital technology enables users to communicate with others at individual, group, organizational and societal level. Today adoption of modern media is widespread, even the trend of embracing digital media in Muslim societies is increasing day by day. Despite the widely adoption of digitalization at individual or collective level, the use of digital media for Islamic activities, in particular preaching Islam is limited (Nurdin & Rusli, 2013, p.2).

The significance of modern media for preaching purposes has widely been reported; for example, Mustafa (2009) emphasized on the significance of modern means of mass communication and views them as powerful tools in the modern world. Conceptually similar work has also been carried out by Islam (2019) in which he examined the social effects of social media in Islamic perspective and found that social media has both positive and negative effects on Muslim societies. In fact, when people are exposed to advanced modes of communication, they either assume that their personal relations are under threat, or they feel excitement for newer connections. Shan-A-Alahi and Huda (2017) identified the positive role of information technology for preaching purposes and highlighted the weaknesses of this technology and how it negatively influences people. Haque (2016) reported the importance, problems, and potential of utilizing information technology and mass media for the promotion of Islam.

The challenges to preaching posed by the digital age are another well studied area. Lewis (2014) investigated the digital age, perceiving it a challenge to Christianity and found that numerous Christian disciples have their presence in online spaces with the concern that how they are being impacted and they can impact. The author has concluded that the digital age suggests a huge range of online voices and Christian disciples must do more to contribute to these ongoing debates. No doubt, the Internet has changed the world. Laurence (2016) investigated dangers to preachers in the digital age and reported that in the digital age a preacher's words are eternal because they are recorded and transmittable, so they seem to last forever and might lead to several stress points. For instance, a sermon in digital form is permanently accessible therefore a preacher may experience stress that if the sermon is not delivered perfectly and the message delivered is inaccurate or faulty then the preacher's words are permanent. Laurence (2016) argued, delivering a sound and complete message plays an important role in preaching therefore it must be framed carefully. When a message is expected to remain forever then a preacher desires to make it comprehensive, experiencing the anxiety to cover all key points of the topic (Laurence, 2016).

According to Lewis (2014, p.5), fears related to the digital age include consumption of hours of time, less control over digital communication, in a secular social environment fear of disclosing their faith, permanency of content - and it may haunt users later, therefore, it poses privacy concerns. Dyikuk argues that media and communication experts are aware of the power of marketing and advertising; the packaging and finishing of a product plays a significant role in attracting the customers. Therefore, the religious institutions must actively utilize what the emerging media is offering. The author has argued that the powerful advent of new communication technology with its features such as information sharing, enhancing scholarships and commerce as well social networking have challenged the traditional settings. The religious institutions, therefore, must understand this change to better reflect on (Dyikuk, 2017, p.44).

Several studies have examined the preaching style of Islamic scholars in the digital age. Zaid et al (2022) noted that religious figures who had acquired Islamic knowledge in ritualized setups, when such types of religious figures use digital media i.e., YouTube, they deliver their message in traditional style sitting behind a desk delivering the same knowledge which they had acquired in their Islamic schools, with a focus on rituals rather than describing everyday matters and issues. Wise (2004) highlighted hybrid forms of preaching that combine preaching with entertainment such as the phenomenon of televangelism. Zaid et al. (2022)

reported that digitalization has encouraged individuals to become social media influencers who focus on storytelling as a religious practice. The authors have investigated digital Islam and Muslims' Islamic practices, employing the case study approach, they analyzed the role of social media celebrities in reshaping religious beliefs and practices of youth in the Arab world. The researchers found that growth in digital platforms and growing number of social media influencers have encouraged individuals to reimagine the notions of religion and religious authorities. In addition, social media influencers are successfully reimagining Muslim personalities and posing a challenge to religious authorities by promoting global lifestyle (Zaid et al., 2022).

Digital forms of Islam related information have also been examined actively. Bunt (2004) examined Islam with reference to the digital age and discussed the phenomenon of online fatwas, e-jihad and cyber-Islamic environment. The author is of the view that Jihad and fatwas both the areas have seen integration of religion with electronic activity. Bunt outlined various ways that have been used to represent Hajj online since the 1990s with the emergence of the Web. In addition, with the advancement in media technology, the textual descriptions on early websites have been replaced with visuals, graphics, film clips and other interactive features. Now, social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube provide the Hajj related material online including some of the experiential content. Similarly, several products have been introduced and many Hajj applications have reduced the digital divide such as, advice on all aspects of hajj in numerous languages and mapping advice, GPS tools and technology etc., are available to facilitate effective pilgrimage. In another study, Chawki (2010) studied Islam in the digital age and examined how counseling and fatwas of Muslim scholars posted on Islamic sites influence decision making and construct Islamic knowledge in Muslim world. The author found that websites with specific understanding of Islam, ignore state boundaries of interest and sometimes affiliate themselves with globalized ideas and concepts. Dissemination of user's generated content is another form of understanding Islam in the digital age. Eickelman (2018) investigated mainstreaming of Islam in the digital age and found that other factors along with the rise of communication media have encouraged many digital users to contribute to public Islam. Social media debates have participants from different walks of life, which can help in comprehending religious concepts while also having the potential to distort religious ideas and concepts.

Past studies have examined the role of modern means of communication for preaching Islam. The literature has extensively

discussed the contemporary use of digital media (including information technology and social media), for the purpose of preaching Islam. Although the impression that digital media can play a significant role in preaching Islam is acknowledged largely, the opportunities and specific features which prominent digital platforms offer for the distribution of Islamic messages are yet to be explored.

Methodology

This study aims to examine digital media with reference to preaching Islam among Pakistani users. For this purpose, employing a mixed methodological research approach, this study has conducted a systematic review of literature. Related books, research articles, conference papers, magazines and websites were consulted to get a theoretical concept of the topic under study. A comprehensive search of electronic databases such as Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, and ProQuest, was conducted and the content of the relevant literature was reviewed to extract relevant data.

The search was limited to studies published between 2000 and 2023, written in English. Moreover, this study limits its focus on investigating the specific features of only those digital platforms that are popular among Pakistani users.

Adoption of Digital Media for Preaching

Digital media is defined as “the media that are encoded in machine-readable formats”, this form of media enables user to create, view, communicate, modify, and preserve digital content (Abraham, 2020, p.2743), using electronic media, computers, mobile phones, and applications etc. (Skool, 2022). Digital media has not only made it easier for people to communicate on a worldwide scale, but it has also helped to distribute knowledge in a variety of ways that people had never heard of before.

Furthermore, digital media has provided new platforms different from previous ones such as websites and social media, email and SMS, mobile apps and blogs etc. Soon, due to rapid technological advancements and human dependence on machines, the use of digital media will also increase.

The experience of online learning on higher level education presents strong similarities to present religion digitally, as Hutchings (2013) reported that studying the Bible with more people in an online community was most likely to give participants more encouragement to explore the Bible. In this scenario, scholars keen to disseminate Islam in

the digital age should have a clear idea of how to listen, read, speak, and exist in the digital world, acting as a social change agent immersed within that digital culture (Hutchings (2013).

Preaching Opportunities

Digital media enables people to socialize, communicate, deliver, or access information; people can even get entertainment despite being anywhere. Therefore, majority of young people like to use digital media and prefer to access information, including religious guidance, via the Internet (Yahya et al., 2021). Murthado (2017, p.90) appreciated modern media and emphasized that now preaching of Islam is not limited to mosques only, now because of the Internet, a preacher has several online opportunities. He is of the view that as a medium of preaching (da'wah) the Internet is a great means for contemporary preachers. Thus, religious authorities should prefer to disseminate mediated messages to reach people across the globe. Realizing the significance of the phenomenon, Dyikuk (2017) emphasized that religious institutions must not make lame and usual excuses about digital media that these media platforms have been polluted, in case if they have become polluted then who would clean them. In addition, avoiding using digital platforms can neither purify their pollution nor stop young people from using it. Therefore, scholars must come forward and impart the Islam's message to people, particularly young ones who are identified as active users of digital media.

In the digital age religious institutions are encouraging religious entities to present religious information digitally. For instance, researchers from Durham University have suggested several schemes for Christianity to present their religious lives digitally (Lewis, 2014, p.4). Hutchings noted that presenting religious information online is like an instrument to encourage more religious reading, as reading a religious text with others in online community motivates participants to explore religion (Hutchings, 2013; Lewis, 2014). Following section presents an overview of the opportunities that digital media offers to promote Islam.

Wider Reach: Because of digitalization now people are not limited to their geographical lives, rather they are actively engaged with ongoing activities in the world. People are listening and responding to what is happening in regional, national and international level communities. Realizing the significance of the phenomenon in the twenty-first century, Lewis (2014, p.1) reported that for churches, now websites and online networks such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Pinterest are like the main doors to engage billions of digital users. Hence, digital platforms

provide the opportunity for a larger number of voices to participate in the conversation. Several online users may get attracted to join the Islamic forums through their online community or social circle. The internet makes it possible for the preachers to reach a vast majority of audience and share their message with people from all around the world (Mubarak, 2022). By utilizing digital media, preachers can reach people around the world who may not have had access to their teachings otherwise. Thus, digital media provides an opportunity to reach a wider audience than traditional methods of preaching.

Increasing Productivity: Digital media makes it accessible for the preachers to reach individuals worldwide. For instance, in sermon preparation, now a preacher can hear other preachers' views on a topic or issue under study, to get a better idea or understanding of how they have handled it. Ultimately, this practice would enrich the appropriateness of the present message. Digital media also offers online resources, e-libraries and apps (Kumar, 2018) that enable preachers to search, extract and utilize the required information quickly. As a result, a preacher can do much more in less time and can focus on more initiatives. Furthermore, digitalization also has various other benefits for preachers such as the possibility of recording and sharing sermons farther and faster than ever before.

Better Financial Management: Many digital media platforms are free to use and creating content can be done with minimal equipment and resources. The expenses associated with the organization and management of the preaching event are typically viewed as a major budget drain. But now due to the utilization of digital media, several expenses are easily manageable (Williamson et al., 2010). For example, digital preachers can avoid expenses of printing event flyers and costs of audience sitting arrangements. Digital media can be a cost-effective way to reach a wider audience. Digital media also offers methods to generate revenue, for instance circulation of messages on a larger scale provides financial benefits to the producer of that message. Hence, large circulation of Islamic messages on digital platforms such as social media will ultimately bring back financial benefits for preachers. Wibowo (2019), also highlighted that digital media brings significant money impact therefore, preachers should utilize social media such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and TikTok (cited in Dewi & Aisa, 2021, p.1).

Greater Engagement: In the digital age people around the world can be engaged in various effective modes of preaching. For instance, in terms of creativity and participation, the natural style of mosque sermons, especially Friday mosque sermons, is close to the social media pattern. Participants of the sermon can be encouraged to engage others with sermons through tweeting, sharing photos of the mosque activities, texting

the notes, or reflecting upon the content of the sermon via vlogging. Moreover, Islamic scholars can be invited as guest speakers, using online platforms such as Zoom, Skype, and thousands of people can be welcomed to attend the event, using live streaming tools. Thus, digital media provides opportunities to create engaging and interactive content, such as videos, images, and social media posts, that can help capture the attention of listeners. Sermons or teachings can be recorded and shared at any time, making it accessible for listeners to engage with the content at their own pace.

Guidance Forums: Since faith is an integral part of human's lives, therefore, those who study and follow Islam digitally may have more questions about Islamic teachings. Hill (2012) noted that people digitally in touch with Christians are expected to ask more questions about Christian Faith. Phillip et al. (2013) argued that digital engagement should be interesting, relevant, and truthful. If people are trying to find some guidance and we are not online then what they will go find instead? Thus, it is important to note that the invention of digital media has not only created new opportunities for preaching Islam rather it has also shaped the expectations of audiences. Therefore, it is important for Islamic scholars not to overlook the fact that when people are searching for Islamic guidance then Online platforms should cater their needs; theological concerns of individuals must be addressed, and Islamic scholars must contribute to ongoing discussions and debates. Through social media, email, or live streaming, followers can interact with preachers in real-time and ask questions or share their thoughts.

Discovering and Targeting Audience Interest: Millions of people use digital platforms such as Google and YouTube for searching answers to their questions. These searches also include spiritual and religion related questions. So, it is essential to teach what the audiences are actively looking for. Instead of creating and uploading hourly long debates on a topic, preachers can find what people are heavily searching for online. Domm and Khoe (2021) reported that approaching audiences by targeting their interest is much beneficial to approach more audiences. Digital platforms provide the opportunity to determine audiences' interest. In this regard, Khoe introduced a tip, open YouTube using 'incognito tab' (offered by Chrome) and type different phrases like, Does God ..., why does God... etc. Then pay attention to the dropdown menu, which appears automatically, it will present the most typed questions by users from across the globe (Domm & Khoe, 2021, p.46). This is one of the methods by which Islamic scholars can discover audience interests and provide them with required information.

Online Religious Communities: Due to the Internet and digital networking, now people can find online religious communities to get connected with likeminded people. Digital media facilitates people to benefit at any time without worrying about traveling expenses, physical location and busy schedule. They may follow digital Islamic platforms that are more harmonious and compatible with their personal beliefs. Cheong et al. (2009) noted that interactivity between users or between users and interfaces (such as in online forums) is one of the key characteristics of new media. Online communities also provide the opportunity for preachers to share their ideas and thoughts and ultimately influence community members. Moreover, online communities allow its members to boost well known, respected voices and collaborate to address existing problems. Digital media provides an opportunity for two-way communication between preachers and their followers.

Overall, digital media provides preachers with a wide range of opportunities to share their message and connect with their followers. By leveraging these opportunities, preachers can reach a broader audience and engage with people in new and meaningful ways.

Use of Digital Media for Preaching Islam in Pakistan

The trend of using digital media to share Islam related information is growing in Muslim world. Similarly, the number of Islamic scholars disseminating Islamic knowledge using digital media is also on an increasing trend in Pakistan. Although, there are no scholarly studies available about digital media usage for preaching purposes in Pakistan. However, a few commonly noted names who are making great use of this technology include: Tahir ul Qadri, Farhat Hashmi, Javed Ahmed Ghamdi, Nouman Ali Khan, Muhammad Ali Mirza, Mufti Tariq Masood, and Tariq Jamil etc.

Leading Digital Platforms in Pakistan

Modern media and means of mass communication, especially the internet, are identified as highly important in the contemporary world, and in Pakistan as well. The internet offered new opportunities for the development of Pakistan and opened new doors for academia, entertainment, business, politics, and religion (Haque, 2021, p.4).

According to the report released by DataReportal, namely Digital 2023 (Kemp, 2023), in terms of access and usage, Pakistan showed accelerated growth in recent years. Statistics show that at the start of 2023, out of 238.1 million Pakistan's total population, there were 87.35 million users of the Internet, equating to 36.7% of the total population. In addition,

between 2022 and 2023, an increase of 4.4 million Internet users has been recorded.

The internet has a plethora of features and tools that can be utilized for preaching and sharing religious teachings. For instance, websites can be designed to include sermons, articles, and other resources that users can access any time. Moreover, preachers can create blogs to share their teachings and thoughts on various topics; Blogs can be updated regularly and can include multimedia content such as images and videos. Also Email newsletters can be used to share updates and teachings with followers who have subscribed to receive them.

Since the internet has generated new opportunities for social networking and presented several digital platforms for users, social media is now recognized as the most popular digital platform today. Statistics show that, in January 2023, there were 71.70 million users of social media which stood at 30.11% of Pakistan's total population. These numbers are continuously on an increasing trend. Given below is a glimpse of social media platforms popular in Pakistan and the number of users who utilized these digital services in early 2023 (Kemp, 2023).

SN	Media	Users	Percentage
1	YouTube	71.70 million	30.11%
2	Facebook	37.30 million	15.7 %
3	Snapchat	25.70 million	10.8%
4	TikTok	16.51 million	7.0%
5	Instagram	12.95 million	5.44%
6	LinkedIn	9.30 million	4.0%

7	Twitter	4.65 million	2.0%
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Social Media Adoption in Pakistan in Early 2023 (Kemp, 2023)
 Source: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-pakistan>

The data presented above reflects that YouTube stands first, the most accessible media acquiring a percentage of 30.11%. Followed by Facebook with 15.7%, Snapchat with 10.8%, TikTok with 7.0%, Instagram with 5.44%, LinkedIn with 4%, and Twitter with 2.0%.

Features of Leading platforms

Statistics (presented above) reflect the importance of social media in people’s lives today. Moreover, it provides a better sense of, where the audiences are? Following is a brief description of specific features of Pakistan’s leading media platforms that can be utilized to promote Islam among Pakistani audiences.

YouTube: YouTube has grasped first place with the highest number of active users in Pakistan. In early 2023 there were 71.70 million YouTube users, equating to 30.11% of the total population of Pakistan (Kemp, 2023).

YouTube is identified as the most popular website around the world after Google and continues to expand vastly. The main reason is the potential of YouTube to attract a huge audience by establishing a unique role as a video repository (Arthurs et al., 2018, p.2). Islamic scholars can also attract and engage YouTube users by producing informative videos. YouTube presents a huge quantity of professional and amateur content with a larger influence, studies have identified that user generated content has retained its popularity (Welbourne & Grant, 2016). Hence, active participants or members of Islamic organizations can be encouraged to circulate footage shots of Islamic programs or other Islamic activities or practices. YouTube is the only communication medium that facilitates users, even with less know how of technical things, to communicate their ideas in a nearly uncensored environment (Theobald, 2009, p.329). Islamic organizations or preachers can create YouTube Channels to share their teachings with their followers. They can upload videos of their sermons or teachings and interact with their audience through comments and direct messages. YouTube is a platform where numerous people come to learn and seek answers for their problems. Islamic scholars can be the voice to answer and provide guidance for people’s questions and challenges. Visual content enhances the weight of spoken or written words, therefore, certain topics which need to be viewed practically such

as the method of performing ablution or bathing a dead Muslim etc., can be described well through visual demonstration on YouTube.

Additionally, YouTube has a video editor. YouTube's multifaceted video editor facilitates users to easily create and edit their own videos (Mercer, 2011). It offers almost all editing features that a pro video editing software offers. So, preachers can easily edit and trim their videos. Another interesting feature of YouTube is to build a playlist of a video series (Saurabh & Gautam, 2019). Islamic scholars can build playlists of several videos to organize and group videos together, based on themes or topics, making it easier for viewers to find and watch specific teachings, which facilitates the learning process. Furthermore, YouTube cards enable creator to share clickable links (Schaffer, 2023). So, by utilizing this feature preachers can direct their viewers to other related content by using the YouTube card feature. Hence, preachers can add cards to promote other relevant resources. YouTube's Community tab allows preachers to share updates with their subscribers, including announcements about upcoming events, new teachings, and other relevant information. Preachers can use YouTube ads to reach a wider audience and promote their teachings to people who may not be familiar with their organization.

Live Streaming is another asset which has become increasingly popular on YouTube, allowing creators to interact with their audiences in real-time (Pires & Simon, 2015). Live video can help preachers to expand their reach to larger audiences by broadcasting their sermons or religious sessions in real-time to their followers. During a live video the chat window provides participants a real time engagement. Live chat moderation option is another tool that provides users a safe and less stressful environment. Furthermore, Video spotlight is another interesting feature that enables a featured video to automatically play when users go to a channel. It enables preachers to engage viewers as they scroll the channel and helps in building views and watch time. YouTube shorts, a form of shorts videos, is another engaging tool (Khleif, 2021). This feature allows preachers to create a feed of sixty seconds or less and engage the audience. YouTube offers powerful analytical tools such as 'channel dashboard' and 'Studio'. Preachers can get a view of the comments, performance of their latest videos as well as other helpful sections for instance, 'ideas for you', including tips and news and more (Hill, 2022). YouTube's monetization options have also evolved, rewarding creators and enabling them to earn revenue from their content (Kopf, 2020). Monetization features can facilitate preachers to manage expenses while preaching. In short, YouTube provides a variety of features that can support religious preaching and outreach efforts.

Facebook: Facebook the meta-owned platform has the second highest user base in Pakistan. In January 2023 there were 37.30 million Facebook users, equating to 15.7% of the total population in Pakistan. Facebook restricts people aged 13 or above to use this platform, therefore it's vital to note that as per the eligibility criteria 23.0% people used Facebook in Pakistan (Kemp, 2023).

Facebook is recognized as a preferred platform to connect people across the globe and a widely used application that is identified as the most influential and commonly used medium for social purposes. Facebook has become an important tool for marketers to market and promote their products (Nelson-Field et al., 2012). People prefer to use Facebook because of its several useful features e.g., socializing with people, obtaining and sharing information, advertisement purpose, and comment posting (Mas'od et al., 2019). Furthermore, Facebook pages provide users a special place to interact with online community (Bushelow, 2012). Islamic scholars can create Facebook Pages to share Islamic teachings with their followers. They can also use Pages to post updates about their events and activities and interact with their audience through comments and direct messages. Research has found the effectiveness of Facebook Groups, particularly in the teaching learning process (Yunus & Salehi, 2012). So, preachers can create private or public Facebook Groups to facilitate discussions and conversations among members. Group members can share their thoughts and opinions on various religious topics, ask for advice or support, and connect with like-minded individuals.

According to Rehman et al. (2014) Facebook's advertisement feature is a useful option to create awareness and attract people in the target area. Islamic scholars can use this feature to advertise their ongoing services and upcoming events. Moreover, Facebook enables its users to present their opinions regarding different issues (Richard & Guppy, 2014), people can share their ideas and experiences on products and services. Posting a comment or writing review for products or services is in fact like electronic word of mouth (Henning-Thurau, 2004; Masood et al., 2019). Facebook enables its users to share their opinion on a post or recommend it to other friends by mentioning or tagging the names of their friends in the comment section or simply reposting the desired post (Mas'od et al, 2020, p.3). When a post or page is being shared extensively by users then it appears in the newsfeed and recommendation list. In addition, Facebook Live streaming is a useful tool to bring events and happenings from around the globe to people's computerized gadgets (Haimson & Tang, 2017). Facebook Live allows preachers to broadcast their religious messages in real-time to their followers. This feature can be

used to reach a wider audience, including those who are unable to attend events in-person.

Facebook Events is an important medium to promote social events (Paris & Seery, 2010). For preaching it can be used to promote religious gatherings, such as conferences, or religious sessions. Preachers can invite their followers to attend these events and use the platform to share information and updates. Moreover, Facebook Messenger can be used to provide one-on-one support or counseling to individuals who are seeking spiritual guidance or assistance. Overall, Facebook provides a variety of features that can support religious preaching and outreach efforts.

Snapchat: Snapchat is the third most highly trafficked social media platform in Pakistan. Statistics show that in January 2023, there were 25.70 million Snapchat users in Pakistan, equivalent to 10.8% of Pakistan's total population (Kemp, 2023).

According to Martin (cited in Mangla, 2016) pastors should remember that people use apps, and since they will keep on using it, therefore constructive ways to use it should be considered. Snapchat is recognized as a fastest growing app around the world (Khan & Carroll, 2017). Islamic preachers may use snapchat in a variety of ways to reach Pakistani audiences and guide them to devote more time to their religion. The stories feature of this app provides a different perspective, limited to twenty-four hours availability, for sharing pictures and videos (McRoberts et al., 2017). Preachers can use Snapchat Stories to share inspirational messages with their followers. They can also post updates about their Islamic events or activities and interact with their audience through direct messages. Preachers can also use Snap Stories to share short video snippets of their teachings or to provide behind-the-scenes glimpses of their Islamic activities.

Snapchat can be used to connect people and encourage them to join Islamic forums, post inspirational thoughts, and share snapchat stories featuring various Islamic practices. For instance, Suhaib Webb, an American Islamic scholar, initiated a snapchat channel to post snippets of his work and life. With increasing following, Webb's relatable stories got popularity among Snapchat users (cited in Mangla, 2016). Furthermore, Snap Map allows preachers to share their location and connect with other users who are nearby. This feature can be used to organize impromptu preaching events or to connect with other believers in the area. Moreover, Snapchat's chat feature can be used to provide one-on-one support or counseling to individuals who are seeking spiritual guidance or assistance.

Overall, while Snapchat may not have as many features that can be used for religious preaching as other platforms such as Facebook or

YouTube, it can still be utilized to share information about religious teachings and connect with followers.

TikTok: TikTok is recognized as the fourth popular app in Pakistan. Figures indicate that in January 2023, the TikTok users aged 18 and above were 16.51 million, equating to 7.0% of the total population in Pakistan, as the tools are restricted to show users' data for audiences aged 18 and above (Kemp, 2023).

TikTok is a platform for short-form video content, so preachers can create short videos that share a specific message or teaching. These videos can be as short as 15 seconds and can be edited with effects, and filters. With its unique features TikTok users can create and post interesting videos. The app can be used as an excellent preaching platform to spread Islamic content in an interesting manner. Dewi and Aisa (2021, p.4) have emphasized that preachers should utilize TikTok applications to spread religious knowledge. TikTok is not only for entertainment purposes, rather it can be used to share Islamic knowledge. Many people, especially youth, don't like listening to long lectures, rather they like brief and concise messages. Thus, TikTok offers Islamic preachers to share Islamic teachings in a light, interesting and in an easy way. For instance, with the following in millions, Ahmad Adnin Roslan, shared his videos answering different questions on multiple religious issues and received very positive feedback from TikTok users (Lumpur, 2021). Furthermore, research has reported that TikTok Duet can be used to facilitate learning purposes (Kaye, 2022). Duets on TikTok allow users to create a video alongside an existing video. This can be useful for preachers to create a response to a particular message or to collaborate with other users on an Islamic message. Moreover, TikTok Live allows users to stream in real-time, so preachers can use this feature to host live Q&A sessions or to deliver a message to their followers. Moreover, TikTok challenges are popular on the platform and can be a fun way for preachers to connect with their followers and spread authentic Islamic teachings. They can create a challenge that aligns with their teachings and encourage their followers to participate. Research findings indicate that TikTok challenges can be fruitful for promotion of a product (Ahlse, Nilsson & Sandström, 2020). Overall, while TikTok is primarily a platform for entertainment, there are a few features that can support religious preaching and outreach efforts.

Instagram: Instagram is another platform gaining popularity among people, in early 2023, there were 12.95 million users of Instagram in Pakistan, equivalent to 5.44% of the total population (Kemp, 2023).

Instagram has the potential to be a fruitful means for preachers, if preachers are not using this platform effectively, they are missing out on a huge audience (Vanco, 2021). However, users also use Instagram to

discover new products and services. Primarily Instagram is used for sharing visual content, such as photos and videos. According to a study by Pew Research Center, 63% of Instagram users report sharing photos and videos on the platform (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). So, Instagram can help preachers to build connections with people, as it offers visual space to showcase life, culture and other Islamic activities such as images or videos of Islamic practices, Quranic verses or quotes of Islamic scholars, volunteer or community services, advertising upcoming preaching events, and sharing inspirational and spiritual thoughts etc. Religious organizations or preachers can use Instagram Posts to upload photos or videos of their sermons or teachings and use captions to provide additional context or insights. Furthermore, Instagram Stories allows users to share short-term content that is visible for only 24 hours. Research has shown that Stories can be an effective tool for increasing engagement and driving traffic to a user's profile or website (Fondevila-Gascón, 2020; Nagy & Csepregi, 2020). Islamic preachers can use Instagram Stories to share short video snippets of their teachings or to provide behind-the-scenes glimpses of their organization. Instagram Live allows preachers to broadcast their sermons or teachings in real-time to their followers. This feature can be used to approach a wider audience, including those who are unable to attend in-person events. Preachers can use IGTV to upload longer videos of their teachings, such as full-length sermons or lectures.

Hashtag is another important feature of Instagram that serves as an indicator for the content related to a specific topic and makes the content discoverable in searches. Instagram uses hashtags to facilitate users to discover and get in touch with content related to specific topics or themes. Hashtags are words or phrases preceded by the "#" symbol, which categorizes content and makes it easier to search for and find. Research has shown that the use of hashtags can increase the visibility and engagement of Instagram posts (Heaslip, 2020; Frias-Martinez et al., 2018). Islamic scholars can use hashtags to increase the visibility of their content and reach a wider audience. They can create custom hashtags for their organization or events, or use popular hashtags related to their teachings. Preachers can use Instagram Ads to reach a wider audience and promote their teachings to people who may not be familiar with their organization. Overall, Instagram provides a variety of features that can support religious preaching and outreach efforts.

LinkedIn: LinkedIn is recognized as the world's largest professional network and offers users the ability to connect with several other field experts and learn. Statistics show that in January 2023, there were 9.30 million LinkedIn members, equating to 4% of total population in Pakistan. It is significant to note that the data on LinkedIn users does

not include monthly active users, but just those who have registered on the platform (Kemp, 2023).

Preachers can use this platform to connect with organizational consultants, like-minded preachers and other Islamic leaders. As the research has reported this platform as a standard way for personal networking (Peterson & Dover, 2014). Making connections with subject matter experts might lead to additional speaking engagements and chances for collaborative efforts. Furthermore, preachers can join or create LinkedIn groups related to their areas of expertise. This can help them connect with a wider audience and engage in discussions with like-minded individuals. In short, while LinkedIn is primarily a professional networking platform, there are a few features that can support religious preaching and outreach efforts.

Twitter: Twitter is another option for Islamic preachers that can be used to engage users. Figures show that in January 2023, there were 4.65 million Twitter users in Pakistan, equivalent to 2.0% of Pakistan's total population (Kemp, 2023).

Twitter is a powerful platform that can be effectively used for preaching Islam to a wider audience. Research has reported a positive impact of using Twitter for Preaching Islam (Hidayatullah & Hamzah, 2017; Hew, 2018). For instance, an Arab Muslim preacher used Twitter for preaching Islam and his account was identified as the most followed account (MEGARI, 2022). Twitter enables preachers to network and circulate content in a way to attract and engage people. For instance, Twitter can be used for event announcements, photos of relevant activities, links to useful sources and teasers of relevant events etc. People appreciate Tweets with cool content so preachers should ensure that their Tweets are short, concise, easy to comprehend and thought provoking, in particular, a good tweet can go viral in seconds.

Twitter uses hashtags to group related content. Islamic scholars can divide their long messages into group by using hashtag (#) (Hidayatullah & Hamzah, 2017). Using relevant hashtags related to Islamic teachings can help reach a wider audience and make it easier for people to find required content. Retweets allow users to share Islamic content with their followers, increasing preachers' reach and visibility. It is crucial to create productive and informative content that will encourage retweets and sharing. In addition, Twitter allows users to post images and videos, which can be used to convey messages in a more interactive and engaging way. Sharing images of Quranic verses or videos of Islamic teachings can be effective in reaching a wider audience. Moreover, Twitter offers a live streaming feature that can be used to broadcast sermons or religious events to a vast audience. This feature can be used to engage with

followers in real-time and allow them to participate in the event from anywhere in the world.

Twitter's direct messaging option allows users to interact with each other in private space. This feature can be used to provide guidance and support to those seeking advice, counseling or help regarding religious matters. Twitter polls also provide an easy infrastructure to determine public sentiment (Rosenkrantz & Hawkins, 2017). Twitter's polling feature can be used to gauge people's opinions on various issues related to Islam. This can be beneficial to engage followers and encourage discussion. Overall, Twitter's features provide numerous opportunities to connect with a broad audience and spread the message of Islam. By utilizing these features effectively, Twitter can be a powerful tool for preaching and promoting Islam.

Conclusion

Digital age has provided opportunities for many voices to contribute to religious conversations, notably, a present-day powerful tool which can disseminate Islam's message removing time and geographic limitations. Present study has reported the opportunities and specific features of digital platforms that can be utilized to promote Islam. The study findings show that preaching in the digital age can be performed in a better manner by utilizing digital media, enabling people to access required information easily, even in their comfort zone. Considering the wider adoption and vast opportunities offered by digital media for preaching, contemporary Islamic scholars in Pakistan should adapt it for approaching Pakistani audiences. Digitally sharing of Islamic messages through Pakistan's leading digital platforms would allow preachers to gain widespread accessibility and following among Pakistani audiences. This study recommends that Islamic scholars should modernize their contributions and take advantage of the digitalization in religion to stay connected and involved actively with Pakistani online users from anywhere across the globe. Islamic preachers must utilize digital media because this is how they are going to reach not only the current Pakistani audience but the next generations as well. When multiple mass communication channels will be used continuously to approach, engage, and remind Pakistani audiences, it can be hoped that these continuous reminders will enable them to resist worldly inappropriate desires, temporary negative pleasures and entertainments and to get more connected and focused with Islam.

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