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A CONCEPTUAL PAPER ON DR. ZAKIR NAIK'S CONTEMPORARY DA'WAH: THE POWER OF YOUTUBE IN MODERN ISLAMIC PROPAGATION

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Abstract:

In the digital era, Islamic propagation has surpassed traditional boundaries through platforms like YouTube. This concept paper analyses the substantial influence of YouTube on Dr. Zakir Naik's contemporary da'wah initiatives. This concept paper utilises a qualitative methodology, performing a comprehensive analysis of secondary sources to explore the primary question: to what extent does YouTube play a significant role in Dr. Zakir Naik's contemporary da'wah? The research relies on reference resources compiled by other researchers, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and assessments of digital media. This analysis of secondary data spans the period from 2018 to 2025. Dr. Zakir Naik's digital da'wah via YouTube illustrates various aspects of impact, content strategy, and outreach that collectively characterise a contemporary approach to Islamic propagation. The findings highlight several key themes: (1) Global Accessibility and Audience Reach; (2) Visual and Rhetorical Engagement; (3) Conversion Stories and Transformative Impact; (4) Interfaith Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence; (5) Youth Engagement and Digital Literacy; (6) Algorithmic Amplification and SEO Optimization; (7) Integration with Other Digital Platforms; and (8) Limitations and Criticism. The results further indicate that YouTube plays a vital and intricate role in Dr. Zakir Naik's contemporary da'wah. YouTube functions as an effective, captivating, and extensive medium for the distribution of Islamic teachings. Dr. Naik's narrative illustrates the ability of religious messages to surpass borders through structured, persuasive, and multimedia-enhanced content.

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Audience Engagement, Da'wah, Digital Islamic Propagation, Dr. Zakir Naik, YouTube



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Introduction

In the digital era, Islamic propagation (da'wah) has surpassed conventional limits, utilising platforms such as YouTube to engage worldwide audiences. Dr. Zakir Naik, a distinguished Islamic scholar and the founder of the Islamic Research Foundation (IRF) and Peace TV, has adeptly employed YouTube to propagate Islamic teachings, facilitate interfaith discussions, and tackle modern concerns. As of February 2025, his YouTube channel has over 4.23 million followers and approximately 296 million views, indicating a substantial transformation in the methodology and impact of contemporary da'wah (Zakir Naik, 2025). This study seeks to investigate Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah approach on YouTube by analysing his techniques, audience interaction strategies, and the overall influence of his online presence. This research will elucidate how digital platforms are transforming Islamic propagation in the 21st century.

Literature Review

YouTube As a Dominant Platform for The Dissemination of Information

YouTube, founded in 2005 (Yudha, 2023), has become a dominant platform for social interaction and information dissemination, especially for religious propagation. As a video-sharing platform, it allows preachers to broadcast sermons, debates, and educational content with a global reach. This transformation is evident in the evolving form of cyber media, where graphical enhancements and ease of access have democratized content consumption and creation (Tirta Wibawa, 2021).

Studies have highlighted the platform's effectiveness for da'wah, allowing religious figures to post personal or curated content (Syam et al., 2021). While the medium contains both advantages and drawbacks, its ability to transform traditional da'wah methods into interactive, visually appealing messages stands out (Sendangagung & Syah, 2020). Creators are recognized as educational influencers, contributing significantly to the platform's value (Chao, 2022; Zavyalova & Galvin, 2022).

Da'wah, rooted in the Qur'an, is both a sacred obligation and a dynamic process of inviting others to Islam (Rasyid & Nurdin, 2021). Contemporary scholarship views da'wah as a multifaceted endeavor involving every aspect of human life, economic, cultural, scientific, and artistic (Syarifuddin et al., 2020). YouTube, as a creative media platform, supports preachers in developing innovative ways to teach and engage (Azizan, Lubis, & Muvid, 2020).

The widespread popularity of YouTube among youth and its potential to be a learning platform are well documented (Surandika, 2020). Religious YouTube channels have drawn large audiences, confirming the platform's viability for religious outreach (Shukla, 2021). Effective content creation and quality presentation are vital to gain and retain followers (Nurhadi, 2020). Dr. Zakir Naik's YouTube strategy is marked by scientific reasoning, interfaith dialogue, and rhetorical precision. His persuasive style, backed by references from religious texts and science, appeals to both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences (Saputra, 2020; Lorenzo-Dus, 2018). His videos play a transformative role in conversions and religious reorientation, illustrating the power of digital discourse.

Religious content on YouTube influences decision-making, especially among non-believers. Personalized engagement builds trust, prompting introspection and eventual conversion (Faye et al., 2022). Dr. Naik's structured use of interactive media, videos, debates, and Q&A sessions exemplifies how digital da'wah bridges gaps between belief systems and cultures.

Other studies confirm that YouTube's features, such as time flexibility, accessibility, and video interactivity, enhance the effectiveness of religious communication (Suriati, Faridah, & Damayanti, 2023; Mustofa, 2021; Martini et al., 2021). Visual storytelling, music backgrounds, and creative editing further enrich the audience's experience (Nurbaeti & Iman, 2020).

Furthermore, integration with other platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook expands the digital footprint of da'wah (Hamza & Islam, 2021; Mutmainah et al., 2022). These platforms support interactive, visually stimulating content that complements the structured presentations on YouTube.

As of early 2025, YouTube has over 2.7 billion logged-in monthly users globally, making it the second-most visited website in the world and one of the most powerful digital platforms for communication and outreach (Statista, 2025). This makes it an ideal medium for religious scholars like Dr. Zakir Naik to extend their message beyond geographical and linguistic boundaries.

Dr. Zakir Naik: Well-Known Islamic Preacher in The Digital Age

Zakir Abdul Karim Naik, born on October 18, 1965, in Mumbai, Maharashtra, India, is an internationally recognized Indian Islamic preacher, known for his work in comparative religion and Islamic evangelism. Raised in a Muslim family of medical professionals, Naik followed a scientific and medical educational path before entering the field of da'wah (Islamic propagation). He attended St. Peter's High School and Kishinchand Chellaram College before earning his Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) degree from Topiwala National Medical College and BYL Nair Charitable Hospital, affiliated with the University of Mumbai (Badaruddin, 2016; Sekaran, 2016). His early academic and professional trajectory reflected a conventional medical career, yet his encounter with South African preacher Ahmed Deedat in 1987 profoundly transformed his life direction. Inspired by Deedat's method of defending Islam through logic and interfaith dialogue, Naik transitioned from medicine to Islamic missionary work (Musthafa, 2014).

In 1991, Naik founded the Islamic Research Foundation (IRF) in Mumbai, which served as a center for Islamic education and comparative religious dialogue. The organization established a library, video production studio, and online resources to support Naik's lectures and

publications (Husnia, 2017). His wife, Farhat Naik, became president of the IRF's women's section, reflecting the family's collective commitment to da'wah and Islamic education (Ramanujan, 2004). The IRF later expanded its initiatives to include the Islamic International School and United Islamic Aid, which provided scholarships to underprivileged Muslim students (British and Irish Legal Information Institute, 2010; The Siasat Daily, 2012).

In 2006, Naik launched Peace TV, a non-profit satellite channel based in Dubai under the IRF's supervision. Broadcasting in English, Urdu, Bangla, and Chinese, Peace TV became one of the world's largest Islamic networks, claiming hundreds of millions of viewers worldwide (The Economic Times, 2020). Through the channel, Naik's lectures on Islam, modern science, and interfaith understanding gained immense popularity, particularly among youth and English-speaking Muslims. His YouTube channel, with millions of subscribers and thousands of uploaded videos, serves as a major platform for disseminating his talks to a global audience (YouTube, n.d.). In 2021, he further diversified his digital outreach by launching Al Hidayah, a subscription-based Islamic education platform that hosts thousands of hours of lectures by prominent international scholars. Naik described it as a "halal version of Netflix" aimed at promoting Islamic knowledge through a modern medium (The Week, 2022).

Naik's approach to da'wah is rooted in rational discourse and comparative analysis of religious scriptures. He is widely known for his ability to quote extensively from the Qur'an, the Bible, the Bhagavad Gita, and other religious texts, using these references to highlight perceived similarities and differences between religions. His lectures often focus on topics such as the concept of God in various faiths, Islam's compatibility with science, and interfaith peace. Some of his well-known works include *The Qur'an and Modern Science: Compatible or Incompatible?*, *Concept of God in Major Religions*, *Islam and Terrorism*, and *Women's Rights in Islam: Protected or Subjugated?* (Mustapha & Razak, 2019; Naik, n.d.). Over the years, Naik has delivered lectures across continents, including North America, Africa, Europe, and Asia, drawing large audiences. His logical style, use of English as a medium of instruction, and engagement with current issues have contributed to his global recognition (Sadouni, 2013).

His popularity has also been reinforced by numerous awards and recognitions. Naik was listed multiple times among The 100 Most Powerful Indians by The Indian Express and was featured in The 500 Most Influential Muslims in the World from 2009 to 2015. In 2013, he received the Islamic Personality of the Year award from Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum of Dubai and, later, the King Faisal International Prize for Service to Islam in 2015, one of the most prestigious awards in the Muslim world (King Faisal Prize, 2015). These recognitions underscored his influence as a global Islamic televangelist who successfully leveraged media to expand the reach of Islamic teachings (Mustapha & Razak, 2019).

However, Naik's prominence has been accompanied by considerable criticism and controversy. His detractors argue that his rhetorical methods often appear confrontational and that his selective citation of religious scriptures misrepresents other faiths (Haqqani, 2011; Swami, 2010). Some scholars have accused him of promoting a rigid interpretation of Islam and alienating non-Muslims through polemical discourse. Dinesh, as cited in Mustapha and Razak (2019), contends that Naik's speeches emphasize religious superiority, potentially inciting tension in pluralistic societies. Others have highlighted that his remarks about idol worship and interpretations of Hindu texts, such as the Vedas, have offended certain religious communities (Musthafa, 2014). Despite his repeated assertions that his teachings oppose terrorism and promote peace, critics remain divided over his impact on interfaith relations.

Naik's career faced significant turbulence in 2016 when the Indian government accused him of spreading hate speech and banned the Islamic Research Foundation under anti-terrorism laws. This followed reports that individuals involved in a 2016 terrorist attack in Bangladesh had allegedly cited his speeches as inspiration. Though Naik denied any connection to extremism, his passport was revoked by India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) in 2017, and an arrest warrant was issued (Alkhodari & Habil, 2019). He subsequently relocated to Malaysia, where he was granted permanent residency. However, his remarks in 2019 regarding ethnic minorities in Malaysia prompted public backlash and led several Malaysian ministers to call for his expulsion (Al Jazeera, 2019). Despite these controversies, Naik continues to operate his digital platforms, including Peace TV Online and Al Hidaayah, extending his influence to new audiences across the Muslim world.

Dr. Zakir Naik's public persona embodies both the power and pitfalls of modern religious communication. His digital da'wah model demonstrates how religious authority can be constructed and contested in the age of global media. While his intellectual and media-driven style of preaching has inspired many conversions and renewed interest in Islam, his confrontational tone and legal disputes have simultaneously polarized audiences. His continued presence on digital platforms underscores his adaptability and resilience, confirming his status as one of the most influential and controversial Muslim communicators of the 21st century.

Methodology

This concept paper employs a qualitative methodology, conducting an extensive study of secondary material to investigate the central question: to what extent does YouTube play a significant role in Dr. Zakir Naik's contemporary da'wah? The research depends on reference materials gathered by other scholars, encompassing academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and digital media analyses. This analysis of secondary data encompasses the timeframe from 2018 to 2025. The data for this paper was sourced from academic sources such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science (WoS). These databases were chosen for their extensive collection of academic articles and peer-reviewed journals pertaining to digital media and contemporary da'wah. The utilised search terms were 'Dr. Zakir Naik', 'contemporary da'wah', 'YouTube', and 'digital media'. The articles were sought exclusively from the period of 2018 to 2023 to represent the contemporary literature in the topic. The identified literature was categorised into themes and subjects derived from the data analysis. This data structuring method was beneficial as it offered a clear and cohesive framework for elucidating the substantial role of YouTube in Dr. Zakir Naik's contemporary da'wah. Besides the thematic analysis, a narrative synthesis was performed to evaluate the findings presented in the selected literature. It involved integrating the results of the studies, summarising the results, comparing the results, and relating the results of the studies. To enhance the methodological rigour of the investigation, only published articles from peer-reviewed journals were utilised in the analysis. This criterion was utilised to uphold academic integrity and guarantee that the conclusions and insights presented in this work are founded on credible material. Moreover, the utilisation of many databases and the thematic analysis of the data mitigated potential bias and provided a comprehensive overview of the present research landscape. Hence, since this is a conceptual paper, using secondary data analysis and narrative review research methods provides a fair and inclusive way to present the extent of YouTube's significant role in Dr. Zakir Naik's contemporary da'wah, based on current and relevant literature.

Findings and Discussion

Dr. Zakir Naik's digital da'wah through YouTube reveals multiple dimensions of influence, content strategy, and outreach that collectively define a modern method of Islamic propagation. The findings highlight several key themes:

Global Accessibility and Audience Reach

Dr. Naik's YouTube channel, boasting over 4.23 million followers and approximately 296 million views, exemplifies the exceptional worldwide reach afforded by the site. Audiences across many continents can access information in numerous languages, enabled by translation and subtitling choices (Saputra, 2020). This global accessibility represents a significant transition from conventional in-person da'wah sessions, facilitating a worldwide da'wah initiative with minimum physical presence (Khumaeroh & Susilawati, 2025; Hakim et al., 2024).

Visual and Rhetorical Engagement

Dr. Naik's content generally comprises debates, lectures, and question-and-answer sessions. His rhetorical approach is exact, logical, and supported by textual references from the Qur'an, the Bible, and scientific sources, establishing him as both a preacher and a scholar (Khumaeroh & Susilawati, 2025; Lorenzo-Dus, 2018). This approach of intellectual persuasion particularly resonates with educated young and non-Muslims interested in Islam.

Conversion Stories and Transformative Impact

Numerous evaluations and user testimonials demonstrate the transforming effect of Dr. Naik's content. Converts frequently attribute their reversion to Islam to his rational elucidations, courteous discourse, and empirical foundation. Digital da'wah fosters personal reflection in a private setting, offering a non-threatening path to explore religious questions (Khumaeroh & Susilawati, 2025; Faye et al., 2022).

Interfaith Dialogue and Peaceful Coexistence

A unique feature of Dr. Naik's da'wah is his emphasis on comparative religion and interfaith dialogue. This aspect is critical in promoting peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding, especially in pluralistic societies. YouTube, with its algorithmic capacity to suggest similar content, often leads viewers from one clip to a broader library of religious discussions, fostering interreligious curiosity and interaction (Khumaeroh & Susilawati, 2025; Hakim et al., 2024; Zavyalova & Galvin, 2022).

Youth Engagement and Digital Literacy

Dr. Naik's approach resonates with youth, especially digital natives who prefer interactive and audiovisual content over text-based materials. YouTube analytics show higher engagement in videos that include Q&A formats, where real-life questions are addressed directly. This dialogical method empowers young people to ask, reflect, and engage with Islamic teachings in a contemporary format (Surandika, 2020).

Algorithmic Amplification and SEO Optimization

YouTube's algorithm plays a pivotal role in promoting content. Dr. Naik's consistent use of keywords like "science and Islam," "Qur'an and Bible," and "conversion to Islam" ensures that his content appears in search results and related videos. The strategic use of thumbnails, titles, and hashtags enhances discoverability, further expanding da'wah outreach (Nurhadi, 2020).

Integration with Other Digital Platforms

Cross-platform promotion enhances the outreach of Dr. Naik's da'wah. YouTube clips are disseminated on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, forming a multi-channel digital ecosystem (Hamza & Islam, 2021). This integration strengthens the message among various audience segments and facilitates ongoing interaction.

Limitations and Criticism

Despite the success, digital da'wah is not without criticism. Dr. Naik's content has faced censorship in some countries due to its controversial interfaith critiques. Moreover, the lack of interactive feedback mechanisms on YouTube limits direct pastoral care. Hence, while YouTube is an effective delivery platform, it may not fully substitute personalised religious guidance (Mutmainah et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The findings of this concept paper indicate that YouTube serves a substantial and complex function in Dr. Zakir Naik's contemporary da'wah. YouTube serves as a potent, interactive, and extensive medium for the dissemination of Islamic teachings. Dr. Naik's story exemplifies the capacity of religious messages to transcend boundaries via organised, compelling, and multimedia-enhanced content. The transformation of da'wah into a digital format signifies wider shifts in religious communication influenced by globalisation and technology. Subsequent study may investigate audience reception, interfaith results, and ethical implications of online religion dialogue.

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