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Laughing through difference: Islamic-inspired memes in Indonesia's digital culture — humour, platform affordances, and the negotiation of religious difference

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"Behind the laughter of a meme lies more than amusement. It is a space where religious life is performed, differences become visible, and identities are continually reworked."

Islamic-inspired memes have become a familiar part of everyday digital life in Indonesia. Shared across Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok, they entertain, provoke, and sometimes offend. Yet beneath the laughter lies something more: memes have emerged as spaces where Muslims express religious belonging, navigate differences, and reflect on the boundaries of acceptable speech.

Drawing on digital ethnography, interviews, and cross-platform observation, this dissertation traces the evolution of Islamic-inspired memes from earlier cultural traditions to contemporary social media. It explores how humour shapes interactions between different Muslim communities, how platform dynamics influence what becomes visible and shareable, and why some memes foster dialogue while others spark controversy.

From playful Ramadan TikTok videos to the controversy surrounding the Borobudur Stupa meme, this dissertation reveals how humour has become a powerful medium through which Indonesians navigate religious diversity in the digital age.

Bringing together digital anthropology, media studies, and the anthropology of religion, this dissertation offers a nuanced perspective on how humour mediates religious life in contemporary Indonesia



Laughing Through Difference

ISLAMIC-INSPIRED MEMES
IN INDONESIA'S DIGITAL CULTURE

*Humour, Platform Affordances, and the Negotiation
of Religious Difference*

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