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Leiden
The Netherlands

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

Murfianti, F.

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Digital Divergence: Unravelling The Local Dynamics of Islamic-Inspired Memes at Two Global Platforms

Following the historical journey of meme-like forms described in the previous chapter, in this chapter I investigate the dynamics of two prominent and popular platforms: Facebook and Twitter. Unlike TikTok, which centres on video-based content and visual performativity, Facebook and Twitter offer different affordances that shape how Islamic-inspired memes are produced, circulated, and consumed among Indonesian Muslims.

This chapter focuses on how platform-specific features, such as Facebook's community groups and sharing functions, and Twitter's retweet mechanism and trending topics, generate distinct patterns of engagement. These differences reflect what Van Dijck (2013) calls the logic of connectivity, referring to the technical and algorithmic structures that mediate user interaction and content circulation across platforms.

To further understand this dynamic, I introduce the concept of a *meme ecosystem*, defined as the digital environment in which memes are produced, circulated, and interpreted, shaped by technical affordances, user agency, and sociocultural context (Jenkins et al., 2013; Shifman, 2014).

In this dissertation, *meme ecosystem* refers to the interconnected set of elements that enable memes to emerge, circulate, and acquire meaning within specific platform environments. These elements include platform affordances and architectures, the actors involved in meme production and circulation (such as page administrators, meme creators, and ordinary users), shared cultural and religious references that give memes their recognisability, and the interactional dynamics

through which memes are interpreted, contested, or normalised. Rather than operating in isolation, these elements sustain one another: platform features shape patterns of visibility, actors mobilise familiar cultural repertoire, and user interactions determine whether a meme remains marginal, becomes communal, or escalates into controversy. Seen this way, memes are not standalone artefacts but outcomes of an ecosystem in which technology, agency, and sociocultural context are continuously entangled.

By unpacking these elements, this chapter explores the roles played by various actors, from meme creators and page administrators to ordinary users, fueling platform-based debates around religious identity and social norms. This analysis aims to reveal how different digital ecosystems shape the boundaries of online religious expression, community formation, and interfaith interaction in Indonesia

Moving beyond technical design alone, this chapter highlights how digital engagement with Islamic-inspired memes affects and is affected by religious and cultural identities. Facebook's emphasis on community and long-form content often supports normative, motivational, and educational Islamic memes. In contrast, Twitter's fast-paced and brief format encourages satire and critique, fostering dynamic conversations about religion and society. These platform-specific environments both enable and constrain online religious expression, interfaith dialogue, and community formation in Indonesia.

These different modes of engagement prompt essential questions about how the platforms shape the production, dissemination, and interpretation of religious memes and the kinds of audiences they attract. Although both platforms are widely popular in Indonesia, they each cultivate distinct interaction and religious expression styles. This, in turn, influences how memes circulate and resonate with Indonesian Muslim communities. Significantly, these distinctions do not merely shape expressions of Islamic identity but also affect religious experiences themselves, that is, how users come to feel, perform, and reflect upon their faith within the architecture and logic of different platforms. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for grasping how socio-technical factors, the interplay between technological design and social practice, shape not only the circulation of religious content but also the lived experiences of online religiosity (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021).

Islamic-inspired memes on Facebook: What's Trending

This section explores how Islamic-inspired memes have been used, consumed, and circulated globally on Facebook, the largest social media platform worldwide. Facebook ranks third in Indonesia after WhatsApp and Instagram (We Are Social

& Meltwater, 2024).³⁸ With the increasing popularity of memes as a form of communication, Islamic-inspired memes are now frequently encountered on Indonesian Facebook accounts.

By examining the patterns of meme use on Facebook, we can gain insight into the creation and dissemination of this content and its role in shaping digital discourse and online culture. In the following sections, I will examine the various dimensions of Islamic meme culture on Indonesian Facebook accounts, particularly focusing on thematic elements, content formats, dynamics of dissemination, and their significant impact on heterogeneous audiences

As Miller et al. (2016) argue in *How the World Changed Social Media*, social media platforms have not merely facilitated communication but have fundamentally reshaped the ways communities express, negotiate, and perform their cultural and religious identities. Building on this perspective, the following sections will explore how these transformations manifest specifically through Islamic-inspired memes on Facebook.

Themes: Faith-Nurturing and Value-Promotion

Observing and mapping Islamic-inspired memes shared on Facebook in Indonesia reveals a dominant thematic pattern centred on faith-nurturing and value-promotion. This is particularly evident in pioneering groups like Meme Comic Santri, which serves as a hub for the Islamic meme community, alongside other groups such as *Meme Dakwah Islam* (Islamic Da'wah Memes), *Meme Dakwah Islam Indonesia* (Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Memes), and *Meme Dakwah Kebutuhan Iman* (Memes Da'wah Needs for Faith).

These groups predominantly revolve around a shared thematic orientation towards faith-nurturing and value-promotion, expressed through da'wah-oriented and educational content. These memes are designed to instruct and motivate, foster a more profound comprehension of faith, disseminate ethical principles, and promote constructive conduct. Within this overarching theme, the memes address a wide range of topics related to everyday Muslim life. For instance, some memes encourage the practice of daily prayers (*shalat*) by illustrating its benefits in humorous yet relatable ways, while others promote ethical values such as honesty (*kejujuran*) and respect for parents (*birrul walidain*) through easily shareable motivational quotes embedded in Islamic imagery. Additional topics include discussions of hijab, fasting, Qur'anic verses, and contemporary events interpreted through an Islamic lens. Taken together, these topic variations operate within a largely consistent thematic framework that reflects the normative and educative character of Islamic-inspired meme culture on Facebook, as well as broader moral expectations within Indonesian Muslim society.

³⁸ Digital 2024: Indonesia

Misbah, the owner of the *Meme Dakwah Kebutuhan Iman* (Meme Da'wah Needs for Faith) account, is a Law student at a university in Malang, East Java. In an interview, he explained that there is a greater tendency on Facebook, compared to other platforms like Twitter, to use memes as an educational and inspirational tool, combining Islamic teachings with the contemporary context. Islamic-inspired memes on Facebook often aim to educate and inspire viewers by presenting religious teachings in a relatable and humorous way. For example, memes may provide practical tips for daily religious practices or share motivational quotes from Islamic scholars.³⁹

One notable development is the use of memes as motivational and pedagogical tools. Facebook Islamic-inspired memes frequently bridge traditional doctrines and challenges of modern life in which their followers find themselves. These memes serve a dual purpose by combining motivational quotes from Islamic scholars, practical advice for daily religious practices, and religious messages sprinkled with humour. As a result, they are both entertaining and informative.

The Content Format: Unleashing Creativity

Examining the creative forms that translate Islamic-inspired memes into life helps one appreciate their appeal and reach on Facebook. Meme creators, whether independent individuals, community administrators, or members of larger Islamic-themed pages, deliver material that appeals to various audiences and fits the platform's technical affordances using a range of media forms. Creators can visually engage users by experimenting with animated GIFs, image macros, short videos, and captioned photos, weaving humour and religious messages into easily shareable forms.

However, the various roles in meme production and distribution are not always distinct. Sometimes, the same individual can be an owner (who owns or runs a Facebook page), a moderator (who curates and approves memes inside a group), and a creator, who designs the meme. In other cases, several actors play these roles separately, which helps to create a dynamic and fluid meme ecosystem whereby users constantly remix and reinterpret current material. This adaptability allows meme producers and digital communities to create relevant and essential content for the Muslim online community.

The various components used in Facebook Islamic-inspired memes indicate the ingenuity and flexibility exhibited by those who generate such content. Among the most active contributors observed across multiple Facebook meme groups

³⁹ Interview with Misbahul Hidayah, the owner of the *Meme Dakwah Kebutuhan Iman* (Meme Da'wah Needs for Faith) group account on Facebook in Malang, East Java, 15 September 2023. This Facebook group was created on 13 August 2020, when he was still enrolled in vocational high school in his hometown. This group currently has 201,000 members and receives an average of 10-14 posts per day.

was Bang Fir Art, an Islamic-inspired meme creator from Pematang Siantar, North Sumatra.⁴⁰ He shared several examples of the formats these internet memes commonly used to incorporate Islamic elements, including animated GIFs, image macros, videos, and captioned photos. He explains that GIF is an acronym for Graphics Interchange Format, usually animated, called Animated GIFs. They are a collection of images or frames that play in a loop, resulting in a brief animated sequence. Animated GIFs are popular in memes because they allow the creator to convey a short, humorous message or reaction. They can capture short, repetitive actions or expressions, giving the meme a dynamic and engaging quality. Related to an image macro, it is a photo or image that has text overlaid on it. The text is typically a bold caption or catchphrase superimposed on the image. He argues that memes commonly use image macros to convey a specific message, joke, or cultural reference. Combining an eye-catching image and concise text results in a visually appealing and easily shareable meme.

Memes can also be composed of videos, varying in length and complexity. They thus can be short clips or longer sequences that communicate humour, commentary, or storytelling. Video production provides an engaging technique for meme creators to express more complex ideas. They are appropriate for conveying subtle humour, mimicking popular trends, and even creating parodies. In addition to Facebook, this video meme format is also very much present on YouTube and TikTok. Regarding caption images, Bang Fir Art explains that they differ from image macros. Caption image entails adding captions to a static image/ photo/illustration containing text that may be less prominent or bolder than image macros. Captioned images are versatile and frequently serve as the foundation for numerous memes. The added text can clarify the intended message, provide context, or add to the humour. These memes are widely shared on social media and are simple for users to create and customise.

Although Bang Fir Art mainly uses caption images in his work, he also observed that meme creators sometimes vary their material across other memes rather than within a single meme. This approach helps them keep their audience interested, through using aspects of comedy, criticism, and cultural references. Offering a range of formats, such as image macros, GIFs, and short videos, within their accounts, creators want to inspire users to return often, ensuring ongoing interaction and visibility.

This approach to diversification uses multiple methods and modalities at the account level, enabling creators to establish a recognisable style while keeping the audience's attention, rather than overloading individual memes with too many visual or media elements. Creators often employ creative strategies that combine elements from local religious contexts with globally recognised meme formats

⁴⁰ We communicated using the Messenger feature on the Facebook platform, 17 September 2023

and aesthetics. They not only adapt popular meme structures or templates, such as those found in meme generators or from images on Pinterest that are then edited and added to with text but also rework their visual style to better suit particular cultural and religious contexts, such as by adding Islamic symbols (see the example below).

Global Forms, Local Faith: Cultural Hybridity in Meme Practices

To better understand the creative interplay between global meme formats and local Islamic expressions, this section draws on two key theoretical perspectives on global internet culture: *cultural imperialism* and *cultural hybridity*. The *cultural imperialism* thesis, advanced by scholars such as John Tomlinson (1991) and further discussed by Noh (2013), suggests that global, particularly Western, cultural flows tend to dominate and homogenise local cultures through media and technological influence. In contrast, the *cultural hybridity* approach, developed by Marwan Kraidy (2002), highlights the agency of local actors in adapting and transforming global cultural forms into something uniquely their own. It views globalisation not as a one-way imposition, but as a dynamic process of local creativity and co-creation.

Islamic-inspired memes in Indonesia are a compelling example of such hybridity. While these memes often adopt popular global meme structures (image macros, GIFs, and viral formats) they simultaneously incorporate local religious teachings, symbols, and humour. This reflects the broader tension and negotiation between global Islam and local Islam (Roy, 2004), where universal Islamic principles are interpreted and expressed through culturally specific forms.

This process aligns with what Barendregt (2012) calls digital diversity, particularly in Southeast Asia, where users creatively appropriate global technologies to reflect their own cultural and religious identities. Rather than being passive consumers of Western internet culture, Indonesian Muslim communities engage in what Miller & Slater (2000) describe as *digitally grounded localism*, blending global platforms with context-specific values, historical memory, and aspirations.

A clear illustration of this hybridisation is found in the adaptation of the globally popular *Drakeposting* meme. Originally based on a 2015 image of Canadian rapper Drake from his “Hotline Bling” video, this meme format uses two contrasting panels to signal approval and disapproval. In its Indonesian Islamic reinterpretation, Drake is edited to wear a *peci*, a traditional Muslim cap, and the meme contrasts negative behaviours such as doing drugs, smoking or consuming alcohol with positive religious practices like *ngaji* (reciting the Qur’an), *zikir* (remembrance of God), and *sholat* (prayer).



Figure 3.1. Original *Drakeposting* Meme
Image Picture Source: Pinterest.com



Figure 3.2. Modified *Drakeposting* Meme
Image Source: Facebook.com

This adaptation not only localises a meme visually but also recontextualises its meaning to serve da'wah purposes. It bridges a global meme language with regional Islamic values, inviting audiences to engage with humour while reinforcing moral and religious norms.

In this way, Islamic-inspired memes are not simply derivative of global internet culture. Instead, they constitute a hybrid digital vernacular that speaks to local religious sensibilities while remaining accessible within broader global meme circuits. Through such adaptations, Indonesian Muslim netizens assert cultural agency, making the meme not only a medium of entertainment but also a vehicle for religious expression and identity negotiation in the digital age. This dynamic is central to the argument of this chapter, as it demonstrates how platform-specific meme ecosystems on Facebook and Twitter are shaped by the interplay between global meme forms, local religious norms, and user practices, rather than by technical affordances alone.

Features of the Facebook Platform

Facebook's affordances play a significant role in the creation and dissemination of Islamic-inspired memes in Indonesia. Its visual orientation, viral potential, interactivity, and capacity for long-form and threaded discussions, features less prominent on fast-paced platforms such as TikTok and Twitter, allow for more sustained exchanges around religious topics. However, while Facebook can facilitate extended dialogue, it is also a space marked by polarisation, misinformation, and heated debate (Lim, 2017; Tapsell, 2021). These ambivalent dynamics make Facebook both an enabling and a contested arena for online religious expression.

Such differences across platforms highlight the need to view digital religious engagement not as tied to a single medium but as part of a broader ecology of communication. This is consistent with the polymedia theory developed by Madianou & Miller (2012) which stresses how users negotiate several digital platforms depending on their communicative affordances. Facebook is chosen for in-depth conversations, archival material, and community development, even if TikTok may be used for quick bursts of religious expression and Twitter for fast arguments. Miller et al.'s (2016) concept of *scalable sociality* further helps to explain this phenomenon. It captures how users move fluidly between private and public interactions, such as shifting from personal chats to large Facebook groups when discussing religious issues online. In this sense, Facebook enables a spectrum of engagement that accommodates both intimate and collective forms of religious expression.

Misbahul Hidayah, owner of Meme Dakwah Kebutuhan Iman on Facebook, noted in an interview that the platform's features, particularly its sharing and comment functions, help facilitate the circulation of Islamic-inspired memes and make religious information more accessible to users.⁴¹ Facebook emphasises visual content, such as images and videos, which can help improve the user experience. This graphic element is critical because, in the meme practice images and text are used to convey messages in a humorous or satirical manner. This makes Facebook an ideal platform for meme distribution, as the appeal of visual content can provide users with a richer and more engaging sharing experience.

Facebook also has viral potential. Facebook's sharing algorithms and features promote viral content, including memes. Algorithms also play a significant role in inducing similarity across the platform, contributing to the spread of similar content within the network (Caplan & Boyd, 2018). In this context, Facebook's algorithms are designed to personalise users' experiences so that they are more likely to connect with relevant or interesting content. These algorithms attempt to match users' preferences and interests so that they can interact more actively with similar content.

However, as Tania Bucher points out, although many users think they know how Facebook's algorithm operates, in truth, few really do (Bucher, 2018). To make sense of the system, users, content creators, and even researchers may rely on anecdotal evidence or platform-released data; nonetheless, the precise processes remain mainly hidden and a "black box". Often experimenting with several forms and interaction strategies in an effort to "game the algorithm," this opacity affects how meme creators and religious content producers plan their postings. Whether accurate or not, how Islamic-inspired memes travel depends on how the algorithm performs; authors change their material to maximise visibility and reach.

⁴¹ Personal interview, 15 September 2023.

How does the algorithm work? Facebook users may not always find the way content is shown transparently. As Taina Bucher notes, many users feel they have control over their social media experience, yet the platform's opaque algorithmic design mainly shapes this sense of assumed agency (Bucher, 2018).

Misbah claims that the algorithm will consider the material relevant and may appeal to a larger audience if an Islamic meme gets many likes, comments, or shares.⁴² This presumption, however, captures what Bucher refers to as the illusion of control, where consumers believe they can affect the distribution of content (Bucher, 2018), while in fact, the algorithm keeps control over what is observed and by whom. The platform allows interaction, but the actual agency is limited by unseen systems that prioritise advertising income.

Moreover, Facebook uses an algorithm to customise users' homepage views depending on their interests and activities. Should users regularly interact with Islamic content or related memes, the algorithm might be more likely to include them in their home feed. This results in what Tarleton Gillespie describes as algorithmic curation, where the content is selectively displayed to maximise engagement at the expense of openness (Gillespie, 2018). Users hardly know why they view particular posts, which creates an environment where potentially extreme opinions or false information can flourish free from control.

One main result of this selective attention is the reinforcement of echo chambers. Facebook's algorithm limits exposure to many points of view, even while it personalises the user experience. As van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal contend, platforms shape public conversation in ways that might either increase or decrease democratic participation (van Dijck et al., 2018). Regarding Islamic-inspired memes, this raises a broader analytical question: are users really interacting with fresh ideas or are they mostly consuming material that supports their current views?

Meanwhile, based on my interview, Misbah also feels that friends interacting with a meme is crucial. Facebook's design guarantees that material appearing relevant to a user's social network is given top priority, supporting ideological clusters. Typically, posts that attract engagement from a user's friends are surfaced more prominently, thereby amplifying social validation loops. Rather than being the product of a fixed or transparent system, this visibility is shaped by constantly evolving algorithmic processes designed to leverage social ties and maximise participation (Kitchin, 2017).

No less crucial is the timing of material release. Algorithms give content uploaded during times of maximum interaction top priority, so influencing user

⁴² Chat through WhatsApp, 18 January 2024, a mix between chat and sound recording

interactions. Users actively strategise when and how to post to maximise visibility, a tactic also evident in the Facebook meme ecosystem, as noted by Sophie Bishop in her study on YouTube (Bishop, 2019). Not necessarily because they "understand" the algorithm, but rather because they see patterns they believe will increase engagement, meme creators meticulously time their posts to coincide with when their audience is most active.

In terms of the best time to post memes in the Facebook group, Misbah tailored the posting time to the characteristics of the users and their online habits when he first created the Group *Meme Da'wah Kebutuhan Iman*. It is essential to consider the user's free time. Because much of the audience for this Islamic meme is still in school, some are studying and working. He believes the best time is during school breaks or when they return home from school, also at night, after finishing their studies until bedtime. According to interviews I conducted with several informants, they also reported frequently checking their Facebook home page before bed at night.

This pattern suggests that Misbah, whether consciously or not, primarily targets a younger audience, high school and university students, whose daily routines align with these peak engagement times. It indicates how meme group strategies are subtly shaped by the demographic characteristics of their most active users.

Misbah understands the importance of posting at the right time. However, he is currently ignoring it due to the large number of memes sent by members of his group. The admin will then curate this work and post it in the group. On average, his admin posts 6 to 10 memes per day. From the standpoint of one user, timing posts improve interaction. From a moderator's perspective, timing is important for playing into Facebook's algorithm. Even if the underlying mechanics remain hidden, platform users, including group administrators, strategically change their behaviour depending on their perceived knowledge of the algorithm, as Taina Bucher explains (Bucher, 2018). Moderators and administrators maximise posting plans to ensure their group's content stays visible, engaging, and a top priority in members' news feeds. Facebook's algorithm favours content that produces high initial interaction. Therefore, postings submitted during peak hours are more likely to be amplified by the platform, so raising the group's visibility.

Posting times should also be tailored to specific days and dates; for example, users could have more time to interact with material, influencing their engagement with it. When planning and selecting meme releases, administrators consider these elements to guarantee maximum reach and preservation of group activity levels.

The Facebook Group Ecosystem

While the previous section outlined Facebook's platform affordances, such as tagging, long-form posts, and threaded interactions, this section shifts the lens

toward how those affordances are activated, interpreted, and adapted in the context of Facebook groups focused on Islamic-inspired memes. These groups are not merely content-sharing spaces; they operate as semi-structured communities where meme creation and circulation are governed by social norms, theological sensitivities, and the relational labor of moderation.

Facebook Groups operate in an ecosystem with a clear role structure, but the dynamics within it are often more flexible in practice. Each group has an owner, administrator (admin), and moderator, each of whom contributes to maintaining the community's activity and order.

The group owner possesses complete authority and control over the group. They can manage members, change group settings, and make strategic decisions for the group. The owner has full control over group administration, including permanently deleting the group if necessary. Owners can select administrators and moderators. Facebook Groups provides features that help with group management, monitoring, and interaction. These features are essential in determining what affordance to use because they provide specific capabilities or facilities for managing and maintaining group continuity.

Administrators are individuals assigned by the owner to help manage and oversee the group. They can help keep things in order and perform specific administrative tasks. Administrators can delete or deactivate member posts, set group rules, and manage join requests, but they do not have the same rights as owners. Moderators perform a similar role to administrators but with greater emphasis on monitoring content and member behaviour and ensuring compliance with group rules. Moderators can monitor discussions, delete or hide posts that violate the rules, and impose warnings or sanctions based on group policy. They do not have the same rights as administrators or owners.

Facebook also provides various features that support group management, such as interaction monitoring tools, post-approval features, and member engagement analysis. All of this is part of the mechanism that allows a group to remain active and relevant amidst the competition for content on this platform. More than just a space for sharing information, Facebook groups also function as a dynamic social ecosystem, where the rules, interactions, and platform algorithms help shape communication patterns and the dissemination of information within them.

In the context of the Facebook Group *Meme Da'wah Needs of Faith*, Misbah, the owner, selects administrators and moderators who are well-versed in the group's rules and values, mostly experienced users. They are in charge of maintaining a positive environment, ensuring regulations are followed, and resolving conflicts or rule violations by group policy. The varying levels of authority among owners,

administrators, and moderators form a hierarchy that aids in group management and maintenance.

So, the technical affordances allow owners and admins to effectively manage their communities, such as post-approval features, member activity monitoring, and access controls. With a hierarchy of owners, administrators, and moderators, this structure provides social affordances that create mechanisms for controlling and distributing responsibility within the group. Combining these technical and social affordances helps shape more structured community dynamics, ensuring a positive member experience and keeping the group environment healthy and well-managed (Bucher, 2018; Davis & Chouinard, 2016; Treem & Leonardi, 2012).

During our discussion regarding the spread of Islamic-inspired memes in Indonesia, Misbah also explained that the process is cyclical, contrasting with the spread of linear or one-way processes. This means that the spread of these memes follows a recurring cyclical pattern in which content is constantly generated, shared, and adapted by the user community. Meme groups on Facebook allow users to create and share memes that can be seen by friends, followers, and other group members. They can then share the meme with their networks, increasing circulation.

This process is not only visible to moderators and administrators, who often have greater access to group analytics and member interaction patterns but is also recognisable to ordinary users. Users who are active in these communities often notice how certain memes reappear in modified, adapted, or recontextualised forms. In addition, the same meme is often found in different meme groups, either because the creator uploads it in several groups at once or because other users repost it. This reposting can occur with or without modification, depending on the user's strategy in re-sharing the meme. This phenomenon shows that the cycle of spread occurs not only within a closed community but also across communities, where a meme can move from one group to another, strengthening its visibility within Facebook's digital ecosystem. This cycle continues to repeat itself, expanding memes' exposure to new audiences across multiple groups. Although reaching new audiences does not automatically result in virality, the repeated circulation enhances the memes' visibility and potential for broader resonance within Facebook's digital environment. Thus, this pattern of spread can be identified not only by those who manage the group but also by community members involved in the production and redistribution of memes.

Facebook's "tag friend" feature allows users to tag or mention their friends in posts, photos, and status updates. When someone is mentioned or tagged in a post, they will be notified. This tagging allows friends to interact and engage with our posts. They may be likelier to comment, like, or share the content as they feel invited. Friends and friends with the tagged person will see the post in their feed, increasing its visibility. The "tag friend" feature can provide similar benefits when

disseminating Islamic-inspired memes. For example, suppose a meme is relevant to a specific friend or a group of friends who share similar interests.

Facebook, however, does not allow users to tag an entire group directly in a single post. Only specific individuals can be tagged in a post. Additionally, Facebook has introduced a mass-mention feature called “@everyone” that allows group admins and moderators to tag all group members at once in a post or comment. By typing “@everyone” in a post or comment, all group members will receive a notification about the post. This feature is helpful for important announcements or information that all group members need to know. However, this feature should be used wisely not to annoy group members with excessive notifications (Facebook.com, n.d.).

In this context, tagging becomes a practical strategy to entertain, signal familiarity, or initiate conversation within a known audience. Circulation inside these groups is rarely random. It is shaped by an unspoken understanding of shared values, boundaries, and sensitivities. Many Islamic meme groups on Facebook attract users who already share similar religious and cultural orientations, producing relatively cohesive environments. This cohesion reduces, though does not entirely remove, the risk of misinterpretation or offence.

The decision to post or engage within a particular Facebook group is therefore not merely technical. It is also social and relational. In a polymedia environment (Madianou & Miller, 2012), where users move easily across platforms and groups, choosing a specific Islamic meme group reflects an expectation of shared religious references and communicative norms. Content creators can, to some extent, anticipate how humour will be received and adjust their expressions accordingly.

However, this relative homogeneity has limits. Memes that touch on political alignments, such as support for or criticism of Islamic organisations backing particular candidates, often generate tension even within like-minded groups. The same applies to memes addressing gender roles, for example those advising women to remain at home or criticising public behaviour. While intended as humour, such content frequently provokes disagreement, revealing that shared religious affiliation does not guarantee uniform interpretations of social and political issues.

When creating these memes, content creators must convey the complexities of expressing a viewpoint while remaining mindful of the various interpretations and opinions within the Indonesian Muslim community. What some people consider to be lighthearted humour may be offensive or inappropriate to others. For example, the meme may inadvertently bring up a theological or cultural

nuance that divides the Muslim community. If the content is not carefully crafted to account for these nuances, it risks alienating some viewers or causing unnecessary discomfort.

In a group like *Meme Dakwah Kebutuhan Iman*, not all content creators are moderators, admins, or group owners. However, admins and moderators are also active players in meme production. Most memes come from community members who submit their work to the group. Moderators and admins then have a role in selecting, curating, and ensuring that the memes posted follow the values and rules of the community. In other words, while content creators are responsible for the creativity in meme production, moderators and admins act as the primary filters in distributing their content. Facebook's affordances, its viral potential, interactivity, and emphasis on community engagement, make it a particularly conducive yet contested space for the creation and circulation of Islamic-inspired memes in Indonesia.

Who is the Target Demographic?

Facebook users exhibit greater diversity in age, background, and interests, resulting in a more heterogeneous audience than other contemporary social media platforms, such as TikTok, which focuses on short video content and may be more popular among young users. One of the main reasons Facebook attracts a more diverse user base is its older age as a digital platform. Launched in 2004, Facebook has been building its ecosystem long before platforms like TikTok or Instagram, allowing more generations of users, from teens to seniors, to engage with the platform over time. In addition to its age, Facebook also offers more flexible communication formats than TikTok, including text, images, videos, and community group features that allow users from different backgrounds to engage in discussions. This keeps Facebook relevant to various demographics, including those looking for community-based discussion spaces rather than just the quick entertainment that is common on TikTok.

This diversity on Facebook enables the content to reach a wider audience, encompassing different generations, social groups, and communities in Indonesia. Based on Internetworldstats data, Usage and Population Statistics, until Q2 2021, Facebook users in Indonesia reached 176.5 million or an increase of 1.2 million users from Q1 2021 (175.3 million). This figure is equivalent to 63.4 per cent of the total population of 276.36 million people (2021 estimate) or 76.8 per cent of internet users in the country (Good News from Indonesia, 2021).⁴³ That number is rapidly increasing. According to NapoleonCat⁴⁴, as of October 2023, Indonesia

⁴³ <https://www.goodnewsfromindonesia.id/2021/10/30/pengguna-facebook-indonesia-dalam-bingkai-statistik>, last accessed 4 January 2025

⁴⁴ NapoleonCat is a social media analytics and marketing platform that offers insights and analytics across various social media platforms, including Facebook. It allows users to monitor and analyse their social media performance, engagement, and audience demographics.

had 198.3 million Facebook users, representing roughly 70% of the total national population. The majority of domestic Facebook users are recorded as coming from Generation Z, which is around 18-24 years old (32.1% of the total domestic users), followed by the generation of 25-34-year-olds (30.9%) (databooks Metadata.co.id).

However, this number does not necessarily reflect the number of unique individuals active on the platform. Several factors can affect this data's accuracy, such as duplicate accounts, accounts owned by deceased users who are still registered in the system, and accounts that are no longer active. In addition, Facebook also faces problems with automated bot accounts or fake accounts, which, in some cases, can increase the number of users counted. So even taking these factors into account, the number of users who actually interact actively may be lower than the number of registered accounts, but Facebook is still one of the largest social media platforms in Indonesia.

According to interviews I conducted with members of Facebook communities that centre around Islamic-inspired memes, such as Meme Comic Santri, Meme Indonesian Islamic Da'wah, and *Meme Dakwah Kebutuhan Iman* (Meme Da'wah Needs of Faith), these members are generally between 16 and 22 years old. One of the informants, Nindy, who hails from Yogyakarta, is 16 years old and is in her first year of high school. Other participants include Rakhmat, aged 20, coming from Magelang; Faiz, aged 19, from Sidoarjo; and Dimas, aged 18, from Pematang, Ilham Tawakal, 17 years old, from Bogor; Muhammad Ihsan, 22 years old, from Bandung; Vin Dista, aged 20, from Palembang; Bang Fir Art, 21 years old, hailing from North Sumatra. Some of these individuals are currently enrolled in educational institutions. In contrast, others have entered the workforce upon finishing high school or vocational training, and others are in their initial semester at a university. Additionally, my interlocutors come from diverse regions within Indonesia, reflecting the platform's wide geographic reach and the cultural plurality that characterises its user base. The presence of such a varied audience enables a wide range of interpretations and viewpoints to be conveyed through Islamic-inspired memes, resulting in a vibrant and engaging online community.

Dynamics of Production: Collaborative Innovation

Islamic-inspired memes in Indonesian Facebook Groups are primarily created by individuals or communities with a creative flair for seamlessly blending relevant images with text. The creation of these memes on Facebook represents a dynamic process of cultural participation in which individuals actively shape and reinterpret Islamic values through the art of meme crafting. These meme creators bring their perspectives to Islam by drawing on personal experiences, cultural

NapoleonCat has researched or compiled data to provide statistics on Indonesia's Facebook users and demographic information such as age distribution

references, and religious teachings. During my interviews with several meme creators, I heard various perspectives.

One such creator is Kevin, known as Vin Dista on Facebook, a 20-year-old from Palembang, South Sumatra. In November 2022, while juggling responsibilities at the fish market with his father, he began creating memes using the *Pixellab* application. Vin makes memes in his spare time, usually in the afternoon or evening after a trip to the market. The time invested varies according to complexity; a text-only meme takes 2 minutes, whereas those with visuals and text that require the search for a template can take up to 30 minutes.

Even though he has no formal Islamic education and attended a state school, Kevin chooses to share his creative work on platforms like *Meme Da'wah Kebutuhan Iman* and *Meme Da'wah Islam Indonesia*. His initial inspiration came from seeing a friend share Islamic-inspired memes, which motivated him to contribute to spreading knowledge and goodness through his work. Receiving a 'reward' from Allah SWT is one of his motivations. "*Pahala jariyah*" is an Islamic concept that refers to rewards or kindness that continue to benefit someone after their death. The term "*jariyah*" derives from Arabic and means "continuous". *Jariyah's* rewards can be obtained by performing various deeds that benefit others or society. Bang Fir Art believes that if his meme work positively impacts those who enjoy it, he will be rewarded even after his death. This belief in ongoing rewards may also influence his choice of platform. Compared to faster-moving platforms like TikTok or Twitter, Facebook offers a more enduring archive where posts can remain visible for years, allowing the religious messages contained in memes to continue reaching audiences long after their initial posting.

In the digital context, this belief is further reinforced by the nature of social media and the internet, which enables content to persist for extended periods. Memes created and shared online are not easily deleted but can continue circulating across platforms, be re-uploaded, or be referenced by other users. In other words, the digital nature of memes that persist on the internet contributes to his belief that his works can continue to provide benefits even after he is gone. This also reflects how the traditional Islamic concept of *amal jariyah* is translated into the digital ecosystem, where content can continue to spread and be accessed indefinitely.

One noteworthy creation he posted on Meme Da'wah Islam received over 2300 likes, 139 comments, and 439 shares, reaching an audience of 258,000. Kevin's creative process for this particular meme begins with coming across an Al Habib Salim Asy Syathiri quote on Instagram. Following that, he envisions the visual representation, frequently searching for appropriate visuals on platforms such as Pinterest, Google, or YouTube if needed.



Figure 3.3. Meme created by Vin Dista

Source: *Meme Dakwah Islam* Group Facebook, 19 August 2023⁴⁵

Vin explains the behind-the-scenes of meme-making.⁴⁶ The visual used is a screenshot from another expression of global pop culture. Here is a video game, the "Grand Theft Auto" series, known for its open-world gameplay and depiction of urban life, including criminal activity. The image shows three characters: one in the foreground, observing two others in the background, and one who seems to be wielding a weapon. The text overlay in Indonesian, attributed to "Al-Habib Salim Asy-Syathiri," translates to: "One of the reasons for the loss of shame in women is going out of the house too often." He chose the content contrast type. The video game imagery is typically associated with themes of crime and violence, which contrasts with the moralistic tone of the text about modesty and the behaviour of women. The cultural message he wants to suggest is a conservative perspective on gender roles within certain societies, indicating that women should be more homebound to maintain 'shame' or modesty. It is worth noting that such views are subject to criticism and debate within various social and religious communities, as well as in Indonesian Muslim ones.

This meme can be interpreted in a variety of ways, not always in line with the moral message it wants to convey. The use of visuals from games such as GTA can give the impression of an implied threat to women in public spaces, mainly when associated with certain digital cultures that often contain misogynistic sentiments. Several studies show that antifeminist online communities within the manosphere mobilise misogynistic and violent narratives as expressions of social

⁴⁵ This meme got 2300 likes and 134 comments and was shared 439 times.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/183806310303581/permalink/694983002519240/>

⁴⁶ Chatting with Kevin (Vin Dista) through messenger on Facebook, 6 September 2023

and gender frustration (Rothermel, 2023). In this context, the meme can be read as moral advice and as an illustration that points to darker dynamics in the representation of women in digital spaces.

This interpretation and others can depend very much on the audience and their cultural background. In Indonesia, this meme may be read more in the context of digital *da'wah* with a sarcastic or satirical tone without having an explicit violent connotation. This shows how memes can have ambiguous meanings, depending on who sees and shares them.

This meme received 139 comments reflecting divergent views on women's roles in public space. While the meme appears to resonate with more traditional or conservative interpretations of gender norms, it also provoked discussion and critique from users who questioned its relevance to contemporary social realities. The juxtaposition of a serious moral message with a casual video game scene further opened space for ironic or satirical readings, rendering the meme potentially controversial.

The diversity of responses in the comment section illustrates that the meme does not generate a single, fixed interpretation. Instead, users actively negotiate its meaning by drawing on moral reasoning, personal experience, and contemporary understandings of gender roles. Many commenters reinterpreted the message by distinguishing between “going out” for work, education, or religious activities and “going out” for leisure or morally questionable purposes. As one user remarked, *Keluar rumahnya ke mana dulu? Kalau kerja ya beda cerita* (It depends on where she is going. If it's for work, that's a different matter). Others openly challenged the relevance of the message by questioning the applicability of older norms to women's current social and economic roles.

At the same time, several comments employed humour and self-irony through the use of the slang term *nolep* (derived from “no life”), commonly used in Indonesian online culture to describe someone who rarely leaves the house. This expression functions as a playful way of aligning with or distancing oneself from the meme's moral stance. A smaller but significant number of users also expressed scepticism toward the religious authority of the quote itself, questioning its status as a hadith or emphasising the need for contextual interpretation. Taken together, these reactions demonstrate how the meme functions as a site of interpretive negotiation rather than moral instruction, where religious norms, gender expectations, and everyday experience are actively debated.

As mentioned earlier, Bang Fir Art, a 21-year-old from Pematang Siantar, North Sumatra, began making memes in early 2023 after completing *Madrasah Aliyah* (high school-level education). Starting with random themes, he gradually shifted his focus to Islamic-inspired memes during the middle of the year. He told me how to work in producing Indonesian Islamic-inspired memes. Many creators

make their memes, but others collaborate with other meme creators to create more impactful and relatable memes. This collaboration allows for exchanging ideas and pooling creative talents to produce memes that resonate with their target audience. Regarding content circulation, Bang Fir Art states that it tends to be slower than Twitter and TikTok, which has an algorithm based on For You Page and real-time trends that accelerate virality. However, although it is slower, meme circulation on Facebook is often structured through tagging, sharing in groups, and utilising the share button.

Although Twitter and TikTok also have share features, their distribution mechanisms differ. Twitter allows retweets to spread content quickly, but tweets have a short lifespan on the timeline. Meanwhile, TikTok uses the For You Page (FYP) algorithm that can make videos go viral quickly. However, its virality cycle ends faster than memes on Facebook, which tends to last longer in community groups. Thus, although the speed of virality is lower, Islamic-inspired memes on Facebook have a greater chance of reaching a specific audience and creating deeper discussions.

This structured circulation allows memes to reach specific target audiences and initiate conversations on various topics, making them an effective tool for engaging with and disseminating Islamic teachings in Indonesia through humour and relatability.

My examination elucidates the complex strands of Islamic-inspired meme culture practised on the Facebook platform within an Indonesian context. Every aspect of the platform, including its distinctive attributes, audience dynamics, religiously motivated themes, and a wide range of content formats, eventually contributes to the dynamic fabric of Islamic-inspired memes, their reception, and the following discussions.

However, it is not only the production and distribution process that is important but also the agency of the audience in interacting with the meme. On Facebook, the audience is not only a passive recipient but also participates in the circulation and reinterpretation of the meme's meaning. User responses vary, from liking, commenting, sharing, and tagging friends to expanding the meme's reach to their social circle.

Moreover, some users actively remix or reinterpret memes, either by adding new text, changing the visual context, or adapting the format of an already popular meme to make it more relevant to their own experiences. This phenomenon shows that the audience not only consumes memes but also participates in creating new, more contextual versions.

Actors Shaping and Circulating Islamic-inspired Memes on Facebook

Based on the previous explanations, I argue that various players shape and spread Islamic-inspired memes in the Facebook ecosystem: meme consumers, creators, administrators, and moderators. Regarding meme creators, people like Kevin (Vin Dista), Bang Fir Art, and other creators are at the forefront of creating memes that mix humour, Islamic teachings, and cultural icons. Driven by personal religious values, these creative practices sometimes seek to start conversations on social concerns, morality, and faith.

The material shared in meme groups, such as Meme Da'wah Kebutuhan Iman, significantly influences the administrators and moderators of these groups. They are responsible for selecting memes that align with the group's values, ensuring that the content does not provoke excessive controversy, and maintaining a balance between humour and da'wah. From my observations and informal conversations with group owners, such as Misbah from *Meme Da'wah Kebutuhan Iman*, I asked them how they understood the group's values. Misbah explained in simple terms, "*Kami ingin berdakwah dengan cara yang santun, tanpa menyinggung, dan tetap menjaga adab, meskipun lewat media seperti meme.*" His statement reflects a broader principle that runs through the community: the desire to promote Islamic teachings with respect, modesty, and kindness, even within the fast-moving world of social media.

These values are not only expressed in interviews but are also made clear in the group's official rules, which I observed directly. In the description set by the administrators, members are reminded to uphold *adab* and *akhlak baik* (good manners and ethics) towards both Muslims and non-Muslims, to foster a welcoming environment, to avoid hate speech, hoaxes, and provocations, and to respect privacy as citizens of Indonesia. Pornographic content, offensive language, and divisive behaviour are strictly prohibited. Debates are allowed, but only within the limits of mutual respect. Rather than simply managing posts, the group administrators act as cultural curators, carefully filtering which memes align with their vision of a positive online Islamic space. Their role, therefore, extends beyond administration to maintaining a particular ethos of digital religious engagement, one that is both educational and socially responsible.

Finally, meme users (the audience) are not merely passive recipients but active participants in the cultural life of Islamic-inspired memes. Community engagement plays a vital role in interpreting and spreading these memes. Through their likes, shares, comments, and responses, users offer valuable input that subtly guides future meme creation and adaptation. Sometimes, consumers remix or repost material, adding their own interpretations or modifying it to fit their local cultural setting.

For example, in memes about Surah Al-Mulk and the concept of *siksa kubur* (divine punishment experienced in the grave in Islamic belief), although the core idea remains, depicting someone being protected by reciting Surah Al-Mulk, creators adapt different visual templates to make the message more engaging and relatable to a digital audience. This dynamic reflects what George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson (2010) describe as *prosumption*, a condition in which the boundaries between production and consumption increasingly collapse in digital culture.

In the context of Islamic-inspired memes, this means that users do not merely consume religious content but actively reinterpret, remix, and redistribute it, shaping religious messages in line with their own experiences and cultural understandings. This process resonates with Henry Jenkins et al. (2013) notion of participatory culture, in which meaning emerges through circulation, adaptation, and collective engagement rather than through top-down transmission alone.



Figure 3.4. Meme referencing Surah Al Mulk and the “punishment of the grave.”
Source: Facebook.com

In Islam, it is believed that after death, a person will face the accountability of their deeds in the grave. Reciting Surah Al-Mulk before going to bed is often associated with protection from the torment of the grave, as mentioned in various hadiths. These memes visualise this concept with superhero icons, such as Spider-Man and Superman, who are metaphorically depicted as protectors from a significant threat, in this case, the “punishment of the grave.” Although most current memes still rely on adapting popular images like Spider-Man or Superman, the growing use of generative AI tools such as DALL-E and Midjourney points to the possibility of producing more locally inflected and context-sensitive visual styles for Islamic messages. Rather than creating entirely original imagery in a strict sense, these tools may enable creators to experiment with new

combinations and visual idioms that resonate more closely with Islamic symbols and cultural references.

This meme exemplifies a common pattern in the Islamic-inspired meme community on Facebook, where a single humorous concept can be reworked into various visual forms. Creators often modify text elements to suit the context while still maintaining the narrative structure familiar to the audience. This reflects how the digital community participates in remixing and adapting memes, creating new versions that remain relevant to the user experience but still have a familiar resonance.

This pattern illustrates how Islamic-inspired memes on Facebook develop through a collective process of reinterpretation, remixing, and adaptation rather than through individual creativity alone. Users participate not only by consuming memes but also by modifying, recirculating, and recontextualising them within their own social environments. The visibility of humour drawing on pesantren traditions and everyday Islamic practices across several Facebook communities suggests that these forms of religious humour occupy a prominent place within Indonesia's digital meme ecology. This visibility should not be taken to imply that individual creators share the same organisational affiliation. Rather, it reflects the familiarity of these religious and cultural references among Indonesian Muslim audiences, enabling them to be remixed, adapted, and circulated by creators from diverse backgrounds. In this sense, Islamic-inspired memes on Facebook function not only as humour or light entertainment but also as collaborative forms of religious communication through which everyday Islamic values, cultural references, and social experiences are continually shared, reinterpreted, and circulated.

Islamic-inspired Memes on Twitter in Indonesia

As a continuation of the comparative framework outlined in the previous chapter, this section examines Twitter alongside Facebook as part of the same text- and image-based meme ecosystem, before the analysis turns to TikTok's video-centred affordances in Chapter 4.

This segment examines creating, distributing, and consuming Islamic-inspired memes on Twitter.⁴⁷ This microblogging platform significantly influences real-

⁴⁷ As of October 2023, Indonesia has approximately 27 million Twitter users. This figure places Indonesia among the top four countries worldwide regarding Twitter use (Mutia Annur, 2023)(Mutia Annur, 2023), see <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/media-sosial/statistik/>, last accessed 30 November 2024. In Indonesia, social media usage is also otherwise high, influenced by the extensive adoption of mobile internet access. WhatsApp is the most popular messaging app, with 88.7% of the country's internet users actively using it. Facebook and Instagram are also widely used, with around 81-85% of the country's internet users engaged on these platforms. TikTok has seen significant growth, reaching about 63.1% of the population (The

time (often global) conversations and holds a prominent position in the social media landscape in Indonesia. Compared to Facebook, Twitter has a more public discussion-oriented user base, with a higher propensity towards trends, politics, and social issues. Twitter users in Indonesia are generally active in shaping discourse, while Facebook tends to have a broader community with more engagement in community groups and private social network-based discussions. As a result, Islamic memes on Twitter are more likely to appear in a satirical format, are reactive to current issues, and quickly go viral, while on Facebook, the spread is more structured and community-based, with a more extended discussion cycle.

As memes have long served as a mode of cultural communication in Indonesia, Islamic-inspired memes have increasingly become visible on Twitter. This phenomenon most likely began on other platforms, such as Facebook, where communities already actively share Islamic-inspired meme content before transforming it into the popular meme format on Twitter. This study focuses on comprehending the intricate dynamics involved in the creation, distribution, and reception of memes on Twitter within Indonesian Muslim and non-Muslim communities.

By analysing the usage patterns of these memes on Twitter, I aim to understand the mechanisms behind their creation and distribution and reveal their influence on shaping digital conversations and cultural representation in online environments. In this context, usage patterns refer to how Twitter users create, spread, and respond to memes. This includes the frequency with which Islamic-inspired memes appear in a particular trend, how users participate in remixing or modifying memes, and how retweets and comments influence their spread. Unlike other platforms such as Facebook, which are more community-based, on Twitter, memes often evolve through real-time trends and conversations, allowing Islamic memes to adapt to current social and religious issues.

This section analyses different facets of Islamic meme culture on Twitter, encompassing thematic elements, content formats, distribution dynamics, and their significant influence on diverse audiences. By understanding how these memes are produced and disseminated, we can see how they function as a medium of digital expression that shapes Islamic discourse in the online environment.

Global Statistics, 2024/The Global Statistics, 2024, source: <https://www.theglobalstatistics.com/indonesia-social-media-statistics/>, last accessed 30 November 2024).

Demographic Characteristics of the Muslim Community on Twitter

One of Indonesia's most influential Twitter accounts featuring Islamic-themed satire is NU Garis Lucu (literally translated as "NU Funny Line", as discussed in the previous chapter). Twitter user demographics can change over time and vary by geographic region. However, according to an interview with one of the NU Garis Lucu administrators who had previously conducted a survey to find out the characteristics of his audience, several demographic characteristics can be distinguished from the NU Garis Lucu audience. Most of the users are aged 25 to 45. It is quite similar to the worldwide average demographics of Twitter users: 72.7% are men, and only 27.3% are women. That represents a huge gender bias and raises questions about what type of interactions occurs on the platform. What is it like that men dominate NU Garis Lucu conversations? Or could it be that women are participating, but not as visibly, enjoying a more passive role in the interaction? While this question remains open, it highlights the need to explore further how gender influences online engagement, particularly in religious and satirical digital spaces.

Demographic statistics indicate that the largest share of Twitter (X) users falls within the 25–34 age group, with a substantial portion of the user base also in the 18–24 cohort, while users under 18 constitute only a small minority of the overall audience (Exploding Topics, 2024; Hootsuite, 2024). These patterns align with We Are Social and Meltwater's findings, which show that the platform is predominantly used by adults aged 18 and above rather than adolescents or children (We Are Social & Meltwater, 2024).

Twitter is a global platform with users from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, naturally adding to the content's richness and multiplicity of viewpoints. While it provides a space for inclusivity and freedom of expression (Papacharissi, 2015), it is also known for fostering vitriolic debates and the spread of hate speech (Gillespie, 2018; A. Marwick & Boyd, 2011). This dual nature highlights both the platform's potential as an arena for open discussion and its challenges in moderating harmful interactions. In Indonesia, these tensions are especially visible during moments of heightened political or religious sensitivity, when Twitter becomes a key site for contestation, satire, and at times, polarization.

It is important to note that demographic data can change over time, and Twitter is a dynamic platform with increasing participation from various groups. With the majority of users aged 25 to 40, memes produced tend to reflect their interests, experiences, and perspectives. For example, many memes explore social challenges, government policies, or even reflections on current political phenomena. In addition, the higher educational background of most Twitter users also influences the characteristics of memes circulating on this platform. Because many memes on Twitter are satirical, understanding them often requires multiple

interpretations. Not only for the audience but also for the creator, creating sharp and effective satire requires special skills. In addition, users must always follow the development of current issues to understand the intent of the satirical post. Without the proper context, the message in the meme can be misinterpreted or lose its relevance.

Amongst Indonesian Muslim communities, the presence of users from East Java who have attended Islamic boarding schools (*Pondok Pesantren*) has a significant impact on meme production on Twitter, both in terms of content and terminology. Like the following meme, the meme uses Javanese terms such as *manaqiban*, *brokohan*, and *Kupengan*. However, this meme is more related to the reality of life in the NU community, which includes various traditional religious activities.

Pesantren, or Islamic boarding schools, are traditional religious institutions in Indonesia where students, known as *santri*, live and study Islamic teachings under the guidance of a *kyai* (religious teacher). This culture deeply shapes not only their religious knowledge but also their distinct sense of humour and everyday expressions. The influence of *pesantren* culture in memes is not only seen in the language used but also in the way students understand and convey their unique humour. For example, *tajwid* and *qira'ah* science are often used as metaphors in everyday conversations, including in unique romantic expressions. For instance, the sentence "*Aku selalu berdoa dan berharap cinta kita seperti waqaf lazim, terhenti sempurna di akhir hayat kita*" (I always pray and hope that our love is like a *waqaf lazim*, stopping perfectly at the end of our lives" uses the term *waqaf lazim*, the law of reading that requires a perfect stop, as a symbol of love that lasts until the end of life. Or expressions such as "*Setelah kau terima cintaku nanti, hatiku rasanya seperti qalqalah kubra. Terpantul-pantul dengan keras*" (After you accept my love later, my heart feels like *qalqalah kubra*, bouncing loudly" which uses the concept of *qalqalah kubra*, a strong resonance of sound in the reading of the Qur'an. In addition to terms in reading the hijaiyah letters, the Arabic alphabet letters used in the Qur'an, central to Islamic education and Quranic recitation practices, the typical humour of *santri* is also often rooted in their daily lives at *pesantren*.

Simple daily practices, such as wearing *bakiak* (wooden sandals) to the bathroom, following the Sunnah of drinking while seated, or studying the Qur'an while enjoying coffee, are not inherently humorous. However, these routines become rich material for jokes among *santri*, who creatively draw on their daily experiences to produce lighthearted humour. In the digital context, this humour has also developed by linking contemporary phenomena to the stories of the prophets. One popular example is the meme posted on NU Garis Lucu, "Why do women answer '*terserah*' (whatever you want) when asked what she wants to eat? Because they know that in the past, they were expelled from heaven just because they chose the wrong food." This joke clearly refers to the story of the

Prophet Adam and Eve (Hawa), who ate the forbidden fruit (*Quldi*), but is delivered in a lighthearted style that is relevant to everyday experiences.

This humorous approach demonstrates that the santri meme is not merely entertainment, but also a means of reinforcing the identity of the pesantren in digital culture. By using references that are close to their lives, this meme is not only interesting to santri or alumni of the pesantren, but also to the broader Muslim community, which understands the religious context more deeply. This creates a space where traditional values remain relevant in modern digital conversations, showing how religion-based humour can effectively communicate on social media.

Understanding the demographic characteristics of the Islamic community's Twitter audience allows meme creators to tailor their content to user preferences and interests better. This understanding can potentially influence the creative direction and distribution of Islamic-inspired memes on Twitter.

Can Humorous Tweets Be Considered Memes?

Rather than reopening the definitional debate on memes outlined in Chapter 2, this section addresses a platform-specific question that emerges from Twitter's textual and conversational architecture: can humorous tweets function as memes? This question becomes relevant not because tweets visually resemble memes, but because they circulate, gain traction, and invite reinterpretation through mechanisms similar to memetic processes.

At the same time, recognising memetic dynamics on Twitter requires a careful distinction. Not all viral humour on the platform can be categorised as memes. As Jenkins emphasises, while some content spreads widely, it does not necessarily undergo significant transformation or reinterpretation by users. Internet memes are distinct because they are not only disseminated but also modified and adapted in meaningful ways by online communities (Jenkins et al., 2013). This distinction between viral content and memes is therefore crucial when analysing how Islamic-inspired humour circulates on platforms like Twitter.

However, in the digital ecosystem, what is imitated in memes is not only the physical form (form) but also the content (including the idea) and position (stance) (Shifman, 2014). In other words, even if a humorous tweet does not undergo any changes in visual format, it can still be considered a meme if its content is reinterpreted, adapted to a new context, or used to convey a different point of view by the online community.

This theoretical perspective helps explain why humorous tweets, even in their brevity, can function as memes. Their popularity often stems from their relatability and adaptability in digital spaces. Humorous tweets are engaging and

frequently prompt users to like, retweet, and share with their followers. Due to their concise and easy-to-digest format, tweets spread quickly across platforms. Furthermore, humour's universal appeal allows such content to cross cultural and linguistic boundaries, increasing its potential for broader dissemination. Other users frequently adapt and transform tweet content, particularly humorous ones. This phenomenon reflects media's spreadability and content evolution, both of which are core characteristics of meme culture. These points lend credence to the idea that certain types of tweets, especially humorous ones, can be classified as memes within Twitter's digital culture.

Although humorous tweets and memes share similarities in how they spread and impact, the main difference lies in whether the content is modified by the digital community or replicated in the same form. Therefore, in this analysis, it is important to distinguish between memes that develop in the digital ecosystem and simply viral humour that spread without undergoing substantial changes.

What is a humorous tweet? according to interviews with one of Garis Lucu's account administrators⁴⁸, the humour in a tweet can be determined by various factors, including individual preferences, perceptions, culture, and background. In general, humorous tweets have several characteristics, including the sharpness of humour. It refers to how directly and effectively a tweet delivers its punchline or witty observation, often using satire, irony, or clever twists that leave a quick and strong impression on the reader. Creativity also determines how to use creative language and think outside the box. This could include using an intriguing metaphor, a humorous simile, or clever wording. The next factor is relevance, as funny Tweets are typically related to current popular, controversial, or relevant topics or events. This enables readers to respond quickly, feel connected to the discussed context, and have the courage to explore sensitive or taboo topics. However, it is critical to remember that humour should be delivered with sensitivity to avoid offending others' feelings; what one person finds funny may not be the same for another. Furthermore, Tweets with humour typically receive positive feedback from other users through retweets, likes, or responses.

Short, sharp, and memorable tweets are often the most appealing. In this sense, tweets are like memes, short words or sentences used rapidly and precisely to transmit a message. Like captions in memes, which provide context and guide interpretation, the character restriction in tweets functions as a structural constraint that determines how humour or satire is presented.

Although most tweets contain words or short sentences, visual elements such as images or gifs are crucial in creating funny tweets. These visual additions improve

⁴⁸ Interview with one of the administrators of NU Garis Lucu in his house, in Nganjuk, East Java, 13 September 2023

the power of the message and add an artistic dimension to a fun story. Images or GIFs in tweets can be considered a form of content modification or "remix," similar to memes. However, it is essential to note that not all tweets contain remix elements; most are single, unmodified texts.

Although tweets, whether textual or accompanied by images, often inspire interactions with other Twitter users, virality alone does not make a tweet a meme. A tweet qualifies as a meme only if it is widely circulated (e.g., through retweets) and undergoes some degree of alteration or reinterpretation by an online community. Users referencing the tweet in various contexts, including meme designs or customising its message for new situations, also fit this criterion. While retweets, likes, and replies contribute to rapid spread, the defining characteristic of a meme is its ability to evolve through user interaction rather than mere reposting.

Furthermore, tweets featuring humour or satire also play a significant role in shaping Twitter's digital culture. Internet culture includes memes, and amusing tweets contribute to its dynamism. Active user participation, where people share, reply, remix, and reinterpret tweets akin to the proliferation of memes, drives this dynamic. Users actively shape internet debates using humour rather than merely acting as viewers.

While humour remains a dominant mode of engagement, many influential tweets derive their impact from politically charged or emotionally provocative content, including moral outrage, religious rhetoric, and disinformation. Tweets that employ abusive language, false information, or ideological propaganda can also influence digital society by reinforcing prejudices, increasing divisiveness, or normalising destructive language. Hence, Twitter's viral nature pertains to light-hearted content and posts that promote negativity.

Therefore, even though humour plays a major role in shaping online interactions, it is important to recognise that all types of viral content, regardless of their intentions, contribute to the broader digital environment. Understanding the mechanics behind humour-driven tweets provides valuable insights into how digital discourse evolves; yet the exact mechanisms can equally be harnessed to amplify polarising or negative narratives. Recognising this dual potential reminds us to approach digital culture critically, acknowledging both its creative vitality and its more troubling aspects.

Tweets and memes share several communicative dynamics, particularly in how humour and satire circulate, attract attention, and invite audience response. On Twitter, such content can spread rapidly, granting visibility and influence to users whose posts resonate with broader conversations. However, similarity in circulation alone is insufficient to treat tweets as memes.

Recognising these overlaps allows for a more precise analytical stance. In this chapter, humorous tweets are approached as memes only when they are collectively taken up, recontextualised, or iterated upon by users, rather than merely achieving virality as isolated jokes. This distinction helps clarify how Islamic-inspired humour on Twitter operates not simply as fleeting entertainment, but as part of a participatory process through which religious meanings and social commentary are negotiated.

Theme: Where Humour Meets Actuality

Based on observations made on some popular Islamic Twitter accounts, including *NU Garis Lucu* and *MubammadiyahGL*, it becomes evident that the Muslim community in Indonesia is responsible for a wide range of expressions through memes, highlighting their variation and diversity. Notable recurring themes in Islamic-inspired memes on Twitter include Humour and Satire, Responses to Real-life Events, Tolerance and Inter-religious Dialogue, and Political Memes. One of the administrators of *NU Garis Lucu* said that the type of content he often creates is to satirise someone or respond to certain phenomena, including social and political phenomena, as well as dialogue with other Islamic groups or religions, like the Catholic or Buddhist Community, which is usually framed as making fun of each other.⁴⁹

It is essential to remember that these themes can intersect, and creating memes often involves amalgamating multiple elements. Examining and dissecting these themes can lead to a comprehensive understanding of how various religious communities on Twitter utilise memes for self-expression and communication. While this study focuses on Muslim communities, similar trends can be observed in other groups, such as *Katolik Garis Lucu*, *Buddha Garis Lucu*, and others, which use humour and satire as tools for digital engagement. For example, one of the tweets posted by *NU Garis Lucu* on 19 January 2024.

“Asal mau Jumatan, Insya Allah dapat makan siang gratis, Gak usah nunggu Selesai Pemilu” (If you just show up for Friday prayers, you’ll get free lunch anyway, no need to wait for election season handouts). The humour here relies on local political irony and everyday social commentary, which are difficult to fully translate into English.

This tweet was seen by 68,500 people and received 110 comments, 318 reposts, and 1,223 likes. The tweet appears to insinuate or draw a comparison by highlighting the promises of a free lunch program that is part of the political campaign program of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka in the 2024 presidential election. The Free School Lunch Program is a crucial focus for

⁴⁹ Interview with one of the administrators of *NU Garis Lucu* in his house, in Nganjuk, East Java, 13 September 2023

this candidate (Liputan6, 2024). At every opportunity to meet with the public, both frequently state that the program is being implemented to improve the nutritional quality of schoolchildren and stimulate the national economy. Prabowo believes that the complimentary breakfast and milk programs reflect his commitment to improving the welfare of children and the larger community. Rather than simply distributing free meals, the program is designed to create a structured economic ecosystem by sourcing food supplies, such as eggs, rice, and milk, directly from local farmers, breeders, and dairy cooperatives. This approach is expected to catalyse local and national economic development. This program is estimated to cost the state more than 450 trillion annually (Kompas, 2024).

The main satirical point is that a person does not need to wait for the election to be over to receive benefits, such as free lunches, because followers of the Islamic faith already do so; there is *Jumat Barokah* (Barokah Friday). Many mosques in Indonesia practice *Jumat Berkah*, where free meals are provided for Friday prayer congregants, funded either by mosque donations or individual contributions from the community. This initiative aligns with the Islamic tradition that recognises the significance of Friday and considers Friday prayers obligatory. While the extent of this practice varies, some mosques provide food regularly, while others depend on available donations. The broader concept of giving free meals on Fridays as an act of charity is widely embraced. In Islamic tradition, free food is distributed at mosques every Friday as a form of charity and social good unrelated to election agendas or political campaigns.

NU Garis Lucu next varies upon this theme with a follow-up tweet: "*There are tablilan, manaqiban, brokohan, kupengan, and other free lunch programs.*"⁵⁰

The tweet employs Javanese terms and intends to convey that various religious or traditional activities in Javanese society already involve providing free food. What is interesting is that, in addition to receiving a large number of comments, this tweet was also taken up by other accounts, including those from non-Muslim communities, Catholics Funny Line (Katholik Garis Lucu) with a photo of *sego berkat*⁵¹ and tweet:

⁵⁰ *Tablilan* is an activity in the form of dhikr and prayers performed by Muslims, particularly in Indonesia, to remember and pray for the spirits of the deceased. This event is frequently held on a series of death anniversaries or seven days after a person dies. *Manaqiban* is a Javanese tradition or event in which food or meals are distributed to visitors or gatherers. In this context, manaqiban refers to reading a person's life history or biography, particularly that of a scholar. The famous manaqiban is reading Sheikh Abdul Qadir's manaqib Jailani. Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jailani is a saint of Allah known as Sulthanul Auliya, or the leader of the saints. *Brokohan* is a Javanese social event or activity in which food is distributed to a large number of people, typically celebrating the birth of a baby. *Kupengan* is a Javanese tradition in which food is cooked and distributed to a large number of people. Kupengan is frequently associated with religious ceremonies or commemorative events.

⁵¹ *Sego berkat* (Rice blessing) is synonymous with the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world's largest Islamic organization. Every traditional religious event such as, *walimatul aqiqah* (birth), *tablilan*



Figure 3.5. "Nasi Berkah" meme
Source: @Komunitas Katolik Garis Lucu

"Cukup berteman dengan NU Garis Lucu, ternyata sudah dapat makan malam gratis, nggak perlu menunggu pilpres"
(Just be friends with @NUgarislucu; it turns out that you can get free dinner, so you don't need to wait for the presidential election).

This tweet showcases a variety of expressions, emphasising their variation and diversity. The theme alternates between humour and satire, responses to real-life events, tolerance and inter-religious dialogue, and political memes.

First, the tweet "Just be friends with @NUgaris Lucu. You can get free dinner; there is no need to wait for the presidential election" ultimately demonstrates the humorous skills of its makers and users. In response to the 2024 presidential candidate's campaign program, this tweet cleverly scrutinises political promises while conveying a critical message through humour.

Secondly, the tweet responds to real-life events but in a way that differs from most tweets. While it is true that many Twitter users react to trending topics, NU Garis

(death), *walimatul khitam* (circumcision), *walimatul urs* (wedding), *Maulid Nabi* (the Prophet Muhammad's birthday), *Isra Miraj*, *haul*, and so on includes blessed rice. Blessing rice is also known as *besekek* rice because it is served in a basket made of plastic or paper. Previously, it was made from bamboo baskets. Blessed rice has a long history dating back to the time of Wali Songo, the archipelago's Islam spreader. Meanwhile, the word blessing is derived from Arabic and means *zayyadatul khair* (increasing goodness). So blessed rice has *berkah* (blessings), specifically something good when taken home and eaten (lampung.nu.or.id).

Lucu's approach stands out because it does not just participate in digital conversations; it reframes them through a distinctly Islamic perspective, using humour to bridge religious and social discourse. The inclusion of Islamic elements in these memes is not merely a decorative touch but rather a way to reinterpret events within a cultural and religious framework familiar to many Indonesian Muslims. These references, whether to Islamic traditions, figures, or common expressions, not only add relatability but also reshape how specific issues are perceived and discussed.

Instead of simply making a topic 'seem religious', these memes often function as lighthearted commentary on the intersection between daily life, politics, and faith. By doing so, they provide an accessible medium for engagement with religious discourse in an online setting, reinforcing both collective identity and humour-driven critique. The result is a digital space where humour and religion are intertwined, fostering discussion, solidarity, and shared cultural understanding among Indonesian Twitter users (see Chapter 5).

Thirdly, because of the amicable relationship between the accounts "NU Garis Lucu" and "Katolik Garis Lucu," this tweet reflects the values of tolerance and interfaith dialogue. Humour serves as a bridge to foster positive relationships between religious communities. This interaction exemplifies how diversity can be celebrated and respected in social media.

Rather than engaging in profound theological debates, these accounts use humour to acknowledge each other's presence and shared values, creating a space where lighthearted interactions replace potential tensions, such as those that might arise from doctrinal differences or sensitive inter-religious issues. The exchanges demonstrate that interfaith dialogue is not always about intellectual discourse but can also take the form of casual, relatable interactions that promote mutual respect. The follow-up tweet emphasises how humour can effectively reduce tensions and promote understanding among religious communities. This fosters an environment where differences are valued, and interfaith dialogue is seen as a natural and positive part of everyday life.

Fourthly, this tweet illustrates how memes can also address political issues despite Islamic-inspired ones being rich in religious and cultural elements. This tweet subtly injects political criticism in a comedic way. By comparing the campaign promise of free school lunch with the current *Jumat Berkah* practice, the meme gently questions how political incentives are presented as innovative ideas while, in fact, religious and social traditions have long fostered acts of compassion and communal well-being.

Incorporating Islamic elements into this meme serves as both a moral critique of political narratives and a design choice. The meme highlights that charity acts are already embedded in religious practice, separate from political ambitions, thereby

challenging political opportunism. This aligns with a broader tendency in Indonesia, where political performance is frequently assessed and scrutinised through religious language. Consequently, the meme not only parodies campaign commitments but also endorses a moral standpoint that resonates with viewers who regard faith as a guiding principle in public life.

Twitter's Affordances

In this section, I explore the affordances of Twitter, those possibilities for action that are shaped by the platform's design and perceived by users (Gibson, 1979; Hutchby, 2001). Rather than merely listing features, I focus on how Twitter enables and constrains particular communicative practices, especially in the context of Islamic-inspired memes. These affordances not only influence the way religious humour and messages are produced and shared but also shape the strategies used by creators to connect with their audience.

According to an interview with one of the Garis Lucu administrators, tweets often receive quick responses due to Twitter's features, such as retweeting and quote-tweeting. Retweeting enables users to repost other people's tweets to their own timelines, which helps amplify memes with Islamic messages or contexts. Quote tweeting, meanwhile, allows users to add commentary or context to existing tweets, enabling the creation of remix-like content that adds new meaning to Islamic memes. These affordances empower users not only to circulate but also to reinterpret messages, facilitating dynamic digital conversations.

Another affordance is the use of hashtags, which allow users to categorise tweets under specific topics, enhancing discoverability. Hashtags are widely used in digital activism and religious outreach, as they can connect like-minded users and create thematic threads of discussion (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Sinpeng, 2021; Xiong et al., 2019). Through hashtags, Twitter users can join broader conversations or initiate new ones, contributing to public discourse within and across religious communities.

However, in the case of the NU Garis Lucu account, I observed an interesting phenomenon: even without using hashtags, their content still spreads effectively. According to one administrator, the key factors are content quality, which refers to contextual relevance, and timeliness in responding to social and political issues. They believe humour and relevance are more crucial in maintaining engagement than relying on hashtags. This strategy reflects a certain pride in their established audience, valuing organic interaction over algorithmic reach.

Furthermore, tweets can mirror the communication style meant for their target readers. For example, personal opinion-based tweets might not call for hashtags since they already appeal to readers from similar backgrounds. Although this might strengthen the feeling of community, by mostly distributing materials

among people who already hold the same opinions, it could create echo chambers. This raises questions about the broader goals of digital da'wah: Is the aim to reach new audiences or to strengthen bonds within a like-minded group?

Despite avoiding hashtags, NU Garis Lucu often attracts engagement from other religious humour accounts, like Katholik Garis Lucu, Buddhis Garis Lucu, and Hindu Garis Lucu, demonstrating interfaith interaction facilitated through shared comedic expression. This shows how much comedy still is a powerful affordance for advancing cultural dialogue and forging unexpected relationships even without applying traditional visibility strategies. From this vantage point, NU Garis Lucu functions not just as an account but also as a digital space where comedy becomes a means of ongoing commentary, conversation, and modest interfaith participation.

Another key affordance is brevity. Twitter's 280-character limit compels creators to craft concise, impactful messages. This shapes how Islamic memes are presented, often through punchy, tongue-in-cheek formats that deliver religious or ethical reflections in a digestible form. The character limit does not just restrict expression; it also encourages a form of creativity well-suited to satire and quick engagement.

Trend visibility is another crucial affordance. Twitter's "Trending Topics" feature shows what subjects are being discussed most widely in a given moment. This allows meme makers to interact with live chats and include Islamic ideas into more general debates. NU Garis Lucu depends on topicality and relevancy to make sure its material appeals even if it does not necessarily follow trends. The account's administrator emphasised that their focus is on authenticity and humour, rather than on exploiting the algorithm. This shows a smart navigation of platform affordances: employing tools like trending topics not as ends in themselves but as entrance points into meaningful, usually funny digital conversation.

Ultimately, Twitter's affordances shape not only how Islamic memes are produced and circulated, but also how communities grow around shared humour and values, demonstrating that digital da'wah can unfold through authenticity and organic interaction, rather than algorithmic manipulation.

Actors Shaping and Circulating Islamic-Inspired Memes on Twitter

Compared to Facebook's community-based structure, where admins curate content, enforce norms, and shape circulation, Twitter operates through a far more open, fluid, and conversational ecosystem. Yet this does not mean the flow of Islamic-inspired memes is random. Instead, several types of actors, creators, curators, ordinary users, and public figures, jointly determine what becomes visible, what turns into a shared joke, and what quietly disappears. The absence

of formal moderators intensifies the role of these human actors, making Twitter a dynamic site of negotiation where humour, religion, and politics constantly intersect.

Creator–Curator Accounts: The Case of NU Garis Lucu

Among the many actors shaping Islamic humour on Twitter, *Garis Lucu* accounts occupy a central position. NU Garis Lucu itself emerged as a playful counter to more conservative voices such as NU Garis Lurus, responding not through confrontation but through satire. This origin explains its characteristic tone today: light, quick, and aimed at lowering rather than escalating tension. Hoesterey (2021) describes such collectives as humour “brigades”, groups that use playful critique to mediate religious authority in digital publics. Although NU Garis Lucu is the most visible, it represents only one node in a broader ecosystem of “Garis Lucu–style” accounts that later appeared across Islamic and even non-Islamic communities. This wider humorous genre helps explain why NUGL’s commentary often becomes a reference point in religious meme conversations on Twitter.

The most prominent is NU Garis Lucu (@NUGarislucu), run by a small team of anonymous admins who collectively produce and curate satire around everyday religious and political life. Unlike Facebook’s pages with admin-visible profiles and rule-based moderation, the admins behind NU Garis Lucu work quietly in the background, monitoring trending topics and responding almost in real time.

During fieldwork, one admin explained informally that their goal was *ngasih komentar yang kena tapi tetap enteng* (dropping comments that hit the point but still feel light), to frame social and religious issues lightly without escalating tensions. This aligns with Hoesterey’s (2021) argument that humour is increasingly used by Indonesian Muslim publics to soften critique and maintain social harmony, functioning as a “cultural lubricant” in contested digital spaces. In this sense, NU Garis Lucu does not act as a hegemonic authority but as one influential node in a larger constellation of actors producing religious humour online.

A clear illustration of how these accounts operate, as creators and curators at once, can be observed from one of their posts on 19 January 2024, *Asal mau Jumatan, InsyaAllah dapat makan siang gratis, Gak usah nunggu Selesai Pemilu* (If you just show up for Friday prayers, you’ll get free lunch anyway, no need to wait for election season handouts). Although this tweet has been analysed earlier for its commentary on political actuality, here it matters for a different reason, its circulation pattern.

The tweet reached 68,500 views, with 110 comments, 318 reposts, and 1,223 likes. The high engagement demonstrates how creator-curator accounts like NU Garis Lucu serve as starting points for broader conversations. Yet it was the *comment*

thread that revealed the platform's participatory dynamic. Users did not simply laugh; they *added* meaning, such as *Di musholla kampungku tiap Jumat juga dapat snack, Mas. Relate banget* (At my neighborhood prayer hall we also get snacks every Friday. Super relatable), *Politik nasi bungkus emang nggak ada matinya* (Rice-box politics really never dies), *Ini kalau lewat FYP politik bisa panas* (If this showed up on political FYP, things would've gone heated fast).

These interactions reflect what Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) describe as spreadable media, where audiences do not passively consume content but reinterpret it in ways that extend its cultural life. The tweet became a template for broader discussions about mosque culture, populist politics, and the blurred boundary between religious and economic life. NU Garis Lucu functioned not as a gatekeeper but as a catalyst, its humour gaining traction because ordinary users transformed it into a collective, playful conversation.

Ordinary Users: Everyday Participants Whose Visibility Depends on Amplification

Unlike Facebook communities where users often interact within semi-closed groups, Twitter places ordinary users in a much more fluid environment. In my observations from 2022–2024, the replies to Islamic-themed humour, such as NU Garis Lucu's tweets, also came from small accounts with limited followers. Their comments rarely go viral on their own. Likes, retweets, and impressions tend to remain modest.

However, these ordinary users become visible when their posts are amplified by larger accounts, particularly NU Garis Lucu. A reply that initially receives only a handful of interactions can suddenly reach thousands of viewers once quoted or retweeted by a high-follower actor. In that sense, ordinary users act less as spontaneous agenda-setters and more as co-authors whose visibility is contingent upon the curatorial power of bigger accounts. For instance, in the NU Garis Lucu tweet discussed earlier (19 January 2024), most replies were small-scale, light jokes, brief comments, or personal anecdotes that typically receive only a handful of likes. However, once NU Garis Lucu *reposted* one of these everyday comments, the visibility of that reply shifted noticeably. Its impressions increased far more than its likes or replies, showing that amplification mainly expands reach, not necessarily conversation volume. After the repost, several users from different regions began to add their own comments or photos in a similar tone, not in large numbers, but enough to create a small pattern of regional variation. What appears at first glance to be a spontaneous, organic thread is often sparked by a modest act of amplification: a prominent account elevating an ordinary user's voice, making it visible to a much wider audience.

This pattern supports existing scholarship on algorithmic visibility: platforms do not simply reward “good jokes,” but amplify content through relational dynamics between large and small accounts (Bucher, 2018; Gillespie, 2018). Ordinary users contribute the cultural material, local humour, personal stories, small sarcastic observations, but the trajectory of their content depends heavily on whether bigger actors pick it up.

Ordinary users also help shape interpretive meaning, but again, often as participants in a conversation already framed by larger accounts. When a user posts a simple anecdote, such as receiving free snacks after Friday prayers, other users quickly join in, adding their own regional experiences. Their contributions enrich the joke and diversify its cultural resonance, even if the initial push comes from a high-follower account.

In short, ordinary users are indispensable to the ecosystem, not because they independently drive virality, but because they provide the raw, grounded, everyday humour that larger accounts like NU Garis Lucu curate, amplify, and circulate. Their role is collaborative rather than central, and their visibility is relational rather than autonomous.

Public Figures as Amplifiers and Reframers

While ordinary users provide spontaneity, public figures often determine when a meme “breaks out” beyond its niche. Their retweets can shift a meme’s meaning from playful banter into political commentary or institutional critique. The Borobudur Stupa meme, analysed in Chapter 5, is the clearest example of how a meme posted by an ordinary user can transform into a national controversy once taken up by a political figure.

Although accounts like NU Garis Lucu are not among the biggest players on Indonesian Twitter, their follower base and cultural visibility are still large enough to amplify the reach of smaller tweets. A single retweet or quote-tweet from NU Garis Lucu can push an otherwise modest post into wider circulation. In this sense, their role mirrors that of public figures, ustadz celebrity, entertainers, or politicians, who regularly shape the trajectory of religious humour simply through the weight of their online presence.

This pattern is consistent with Marwick and boyd’s (2011) argument that visibility on social media is structured through hierarchies of attention: who engages with a piece of content often matters as much as the content itself. When a bigger account interacts with a tweet, whether through a like, comment, or retweet, it implicitly “anchors” how the post is understood and who ends up seeing it. Baym and boyd (2012) further note that amplification depends not just on the status of

the account but also on how closely the content resonates with ongoing cultural or political conversations. Religious humour that taps into familiar experiences, shared grievances, or widely recognised tropes tends to travel farther once picked up by influential actors.

Together, these dynamics show that meme circulation on Twitter emerges from the interplay of ordinary users who create the initial spark and larger accounts, whether organisational or individual, whose selective attention turns small jokes into broader public conversations.

Cross-Account Banter: Humour as a Networked Mode of Circulation

Although the example of NU Garis Lucu discussed earlier was used to illustrate religious, political humour, the same interaction can be read differently here: as evidence of how meme circulation on Twitter is co-produced across accounts. When @KatolikG and @NUgarislucu exchange playful jabs, such as the well-known Deddy Corbuzier conversion tweet and its humorous handover remark, they are not simply entertaining their followers. They are performing a kind of *networked collaboration* in which each reply expands the interpretive space for others to join in. Users respond with their own jokes, riffs, or local references, creating what Meyer (2000) describes as humour's "dual capacity": it softens intergroup tension while still allowing social critique to surface.

In this context, the value of the exchange lies not in the specific punchline but in the relational dynamics it sets in motion. These interactions create a shared discursive arena where Islamic and non-Islamic accounts participate in the same thread, normalising cross-religious engagement through everyday banter. Importantly, the visibility of such exchanges is not predetermined by content alone. As Marwick and Boyd (2011) argue, influential accounts help structure hierarchies of attention on social media by anchoring how a post is interpreted and by expanding its audience beyond its initial reach. Even when the initiating joke comes from an ordinary user, the moment a high-visibility account replies, quote-tweets, or reframes it, the conversation shifts, often becoming more public, more political, or more socially consequential.

Taken together, these dynamics show that Islamic-inspired meme circulation on Twitter is never driven by a single actor. It emerges from an ecosystem of (1) creator-curators such as NU Garis Lucu and other Garis Lucu accounts, (2) ordinary users who supply local humour and personal narratives, (3) public figures whose amplification reframes meaning, and (4) interfaith humour communities whose banter normalises cross-group interaction. Here, the meme does not function as a one-way message. It becomes a conversation, a constantly shifting,

multi-actor process in which humour anchors, challenges, or renegotiates religious meaning in real time.

Structural Comparison

Social media has become central to how religious messages and humour are created, circulated, and consumed in the digital age. Facebook and Twitter are the two most dominant platforms in Indonesia's digital landscape. While both support Islamic-inspired memes, their technical affordances differ significantly, Facebook with its community-based group features and comment-driven discussions, Twitter with its brevity, real-time flow, and viral mechanisms like retweets and hashtags.

These contrasts reflect more than just technical affordances, they shape the tone and purpose of Islamic meme practices. On Facebook, religious humour is often intertwined with pedagogy, togetherness, and moral instruction. Twitter, by contrast, encourages satire, irony, and immediacy, allowing for public critique and spontaneous da'wah. These distinctions matter because they shape not only how Islamic messages are framed and delivered, but also who engages with them, how humour is constructed, and how religious discourse circulates in different online publics

Table 3.1. Structural Comparison of Islamic-inspired memes on Facebook and Twitter in Indonesia.

	Facebook	Twitter (X)
Creation	Blends humour, satire, and religious symbolism for community-building. Utilises group-based architectures to target specific communities.	Characterised by brevity and immediacy. It uses trending hashtags and concise messages.
Dissemination	The "Share" feature amplifies the spread within and beyond (if set to "all") groups. The algorithm prioritises content from friends and liked pages, creating echo chambers.	The "Retweet" function allows rapid dissemination beyond the follower base, and the hashtag system enables viral spread across diverse audiences. However, in this case, the appeal of humour, the relevance of the content to the social and political context, and the timeliness of responding to current events may have more influence on the appeal of the meme and create a viral moment even without a hashtag.
Engagement	High levels of engagement (likes, comments, shares) in specific groups. In-depth discussions and debates in comments.	Quick and widespread interaction (retweets, likes, replies). Shorter, more public interactions contribute to broader engagement.
Structural Effects on Cultural Expression	Reinforces religious identity and cultural values within communities. Supports detailed discussions on religious and cultural topics.	Contributes to intercultural dialogue and global spread of Indonesian Islamic culture. Brief but impactful exchanges that can challenge or reinforce norms.

Source: Author's analytical synthesis based on platform affordance and meme studies.

Differences in Meme Creator Motivations

Facebook meme creators are typically motivated by the desire to build community and foster a shared sense of identity. This motivation results in memes that emphasise didactic messages, encourage moral conduct, and deepen religious understanding. As one administrator from Meme Dakwah Kebutuhan Iman noted, “Kami ingin bikin meme yang bisa jadi pengingat kebaikan. Biar lucu tapi tetap ada pesannya” (We want to create memes that can serve as reminders of goodness, funny, but still carrying a moral message). In contrast, Twitter creators tend to prioritise humour and speed, using satire and sharp commentary to provoke thought or critique social issues. An administrator of NU Garis Lucu explained, “Kalau di Twitter, kita lebih bebas bercanda, kadang nyelekit, tapi tetap ada niat dakwah” (On Twitter, we have more freedom to joke, sometimes it can be biting, but the intention of *da’wah* remains). These differing motivations result in distinct tones of Islamic memes, Facebook’s being more nurturing and communal, while Twitter’s often reflect playful critique or even resistance through religious humour.

Content of Generated Memes

Meme content on Facebook emphasises community identity and social relationships in various formats, including images and videos. Facebook memes convey complex messages through lengthy discussions and interactions, particularly when compared to platforms like Twitter. According to Ilham, a 17-year-old member of a Facebook meme group, “*Saya suka karena bisa belajar hal baru dari meme dan diskusi yang muncul setelahnya.*” (I enjoy it because it allows me to learn new things through the memes and the subsequent discussions).

On the other hand, Twitter meme creators are motivated by trends and current events. Twitter’s fast-paced nature encourages creators to respond quickly to current events, dominating social conversations. Twitter memes are immediate, direct, and preferably concise. Characteristics include the number of characters, which requires the meme creator to convey the message concisely and directly. Twitter memes are primarily text-based and rely heavily on sharp humour, which helps to capture attention quickly and align with current trends.

Facebook memes focus on community identity and social relationships. Discussions in Facebook groups enable longer and more in-depth interactions, allowing members to share their experiences and understanding of religion. The group feature also allows for forming communities with closer ties, where members feel more connected to shared values. Facebook memes facilitate in-depth discussions and educational exchanges by offering a diverse range of content formats, including images and videos. In contrast, Twitter memes are distinguished by their responsiveness and brevity. Memes on Twitter take a

concise and direct approach, relying on sharp humour and quick contextual understanding.

Circulation and Response to Current Issues

Facebook supports sustained discussions over time, making it well-suited for conveying religious messages that require reflection, interpretation, and repeated engagement. Its group-based architecture allows memes to circulate within specific communities where ideas can be debated and contextualised. One informant from the group Meme Dakwah Kebutuhan Iman noted, “*Kalau di Facebook, biasanya saya bikin meme yang ngajak diskusi, kadang bisa rame di kolom komentar sampai seminggu masih dibahas.*” (On Facebook, I usually create memes that invite discussion, sometimes the comment section stays active for up to a week). This highlights how Facebook enables meme creators to foster ongoing discourse within digital religious spaces.

Twitter, on the other hand, thrives on real-time engagement and instantaneous reactions. Its retweet and quote-tweet functions promote rapid circulation of content, often linked to trending events. As an administrator of NU Garis Lucu described, “*Kami biasa nge-tweet waktu ada isu panas, kayak RUU baru atau komentar tokoh publik, biar cepat viral.*” (We usually post tweets in response to hot issues, such as new legislation or remarks by public figures, to increase the chances of going viral quickly). This immediacy makes Twitter effective for reactive da’wah and social commentary that aligns with current political or cultural conversations, even when the message is satirical or critical.

Platform Usage Distinctions

These differences in platform logic shape how Islamic memes are produced and received. Facebook enables more layered content, such as videos, lengthy captions, and educational posters that can be discussed in depth, particularly within closed or interest-based groups. Twitter, in contrast, prioritises brevity and wit, memes are often short textual posts or captioned images that demand quick cognitive impact.

This explains why memes on Facebook tend to take the form of didactic narratives or community-based reflections, while Twitter memes are more likely to rely on satire, irony, or humorous provocation. For example, a meme on Facebook might elaborate on the virtues of sholat dhuha with scriptural references and encouragement, while on Twitter, a similar topic may be rendered with a punchline like: “*Sholat dhuha? Gue sih nunggu reminder dari emak dulu,*” (Dhuha prayer? I just wait until my mom reminds me) blending humour with mild moral messaging.

In sum, the differences between Facebook and Twitter go beyond technical affordances. they reflect broader shifts in how Islamic humour and da'wah are imagined and practised. Facebook cultivates a pedagogy of togetherness, where moral instruction and religious identity are nurtured within community settings. Twitter, meanwhile, promotes immediacy and critical voice, facilitating a more dynamic and responsive form of Islamic expression. These digital platforms become not just channels but shapers of religious communication, where humour serves as a mode of engagement, negotiation, and critique in contemporary Indonesia.

A thorough understanding of the differences between Facebook and Twitter in spreading Islamic-inspired memes benefits meme creators, social media users, and researchers by allowing for more effective content strategies, personalised engagement experiences, and insightful research results.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how Facebook and Twitter, two dominant platforms in Indonesia, offer distinct digital affordances that shape the production, circulation, and reception of Islamic-inspired memes. Rather than merely cataloguing technical features, this analysis has demonstrated how these affordances mediate broader questions of religious communication, humour, and community building in the digital age.

Facebook affords sustained, community-driven interactions where memes become part of a community-based digital learning space. Within groups like *Meme Dakwah Kebutuhan Iman*, memes are often designed to foster shared values and deeper engagement, supported by features like long-form comments and closed-group discussions. Meme creators here act as both educators and cultural curators. In contrast, Twitter emphasises speed, brevity, and trend responsiveness. On this platform, Islamic memes often take the form of satirical critiques, enabling rapid engagement with political or social issues through concise and witty formats.

These divergent logics show that digital da'wah is dynamic and adaptive. On Facebook, it unfolds through collective reflection and moral storytelling. On Twitter, it emerges via humour, spontaneity, and public critique. Ultimately, Twitter's affordances shape not only how Islamic memes are produced and circulated but also how communities grow around shared humour and values, demonstrating that digital da'wah can thrive through authenticity and organic interaction, rather than algorithmic manipulation.

Understanding this requires attending not only to platform structure but also to *user agency*, how creators and audiences actively shape content. While affordances provide possibilities, it is users who determine what is made meaningful. At the

same time, these affordances also shape the conditions under which questions of responsibility and moderation emerge, particularly when religious humour escalates into public controversy. Memes are therefore not merely technical outputs but social acts: created, curated, circulated, and sometimes contested by communities with specific values and concerns.

Reframing this within the concept of a *meme ecosystem*, we see how various actors, creators, admins, and audiences interact dynamically. An ecosystem in this sense refers to an interconnected digital environment where content flows, mutates, and accumulates meaning. Within this ecology, meme creators like Vin Dista and Bang Fir Art produce visual narratives inspired by Islamic teachings; moderators act as cultural gatekeepers; and audiences participate as *prosumers*, remixing or reinterpreting memes in new contexts.

Here, it is helpful to clarify *reinterpretation* refers to users giving new meaning or framing to an existing meme, often through quote tweets or comments. *Remix*, on the other hand, involves a more substantial alteration, such as modifying images, inserting new captions, or hybridising meme formats, to create an entirely new version. Both practices illustrate how Islamic memes are part of a *spreadable media* culture (Jenkins et al., 2013), where content circulates not passively but generatively. Importantly, this chapter also cautions against romanticising digital interaction. The same affordances allowing for playful da'wah and interfaith exchange can also reinforce echo chambers, limiting cross-group engagement.

Ultimately, this chapter argues that platform differences are not cosmetic. They structure how Islamic humour is produced, how authority circulates, and how religious publics take shape. Facebook nurtures slow, communal, and pedagogical forms of da'wah, while Twitter amplifies speed, satire, and real-time negotiation of religious meaning. These divergent logics show that Islamic-inspired memes are never platform-neutral, they are shaped, constrained, and reimagined through the socio-technical environments in which they circulate. Recognising this is essential for understanding how digital infrastructures mediate contemporary forms of piety, humour, and Muslim sociality in Indonesia.

The next chapter explores TikTok, a platform whose participatory and remix-driven culture invites different forms of humour, mimicry, and inter-religious dialogue. TikTok may offer new possibilities for inclusivity and cohesion in Indonesia's pluralistic digital landscape, expanding the scope of how Islamic humour travels, connects, and transforms online.