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

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Sociocultural Interactions and Playful Citizenship:

Investigating Ramadan Memetic Videos on TikTok

This chapter argues that Ramadan memetic videos on TikTok function as sites of playful citizenship, where intra-Muslim differences, particularly between Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, are negotiated through humour, repetition, and participatory remixing rather than doctrinal debate.

It is important to note that TikTok Ramadan content in Indonesia is not limited to memes addressing NU–Muhammadiyah differences. During the data collection period, a wide range of Ramadan-related memes circulated on TikTok, including content about fasting struggles, takjil hunting, sahur challenges, charitable acts, humorous religious advice, and interfaith participation. These memes form a broader cultural ecology of Ramadan on TikTok, where humour, piety, and everyday life intersect.

However, this chapter focuses specifically on NU–Muhammadiyah memetic videos because these differences are historically entrenched, socially recognisable, and widely legible across Indonesian Muslim communities. Unlike lifestyle or devotional memes, NU–Muhammadiyah memes directly engage with questions of religious authority, group boundaries, and doctrinal distinction, making them analytically productive for examining playful citizenship and the negotiation of intra-Muslim diversity. These dynamics become particularly visible in viral TikTok videos circulated during Ramadan 2024, where doctrinal difference is rendered through everyday humour.

A widely circulated memetic video on TikTok, uploaded by the account @MenujuRamadan2025 with the caption “*NU santai dulu ga seb* (NU, should we relax for now)”, received a high engagement, with 1.3 million likes, over 21,000

comments, and almost 60,000 shares. The video was then replicated and imitated by many other accounts, such as @bintang_sarung, @Kikifofficial, @r2archives, @csaarrrr, and @wekzy_24, among others, expanding its reach and making it even more viral. Set on 11 March 2024 at noon, the video contrasts a visibly weak and hungry man, representing Muhammadiyah members who had begun fasting, with another figure enjoying a full meal, symbolising NU members who would only start fasting the following day.

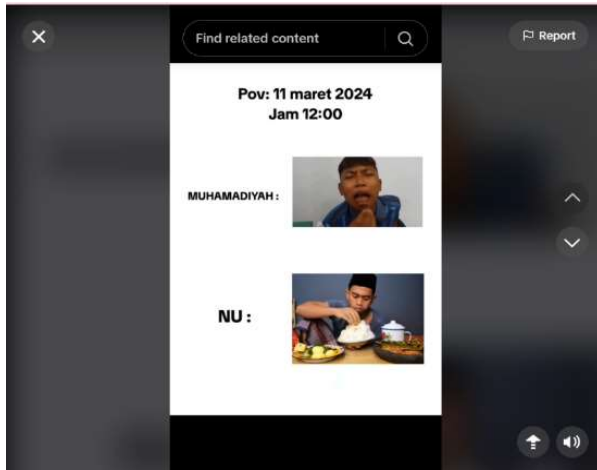


Figure 4.1. POV Meme post on 11 March 2024
Source: TikTok @MenujuRamadan2025 (TikTok.com, 2024b)

Despite its apparent simplicity, the memetic video touches on longstanding theological and institutional dynamics between the two organisations. Historically, disagreements between NU and Muhammadiyah over the determination of the start of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr have gone beyond ritual differences. These tensions have often reflected deeper theological, institutional, and political divides within Indonesian Islam. During the New Order era, such differences even escalated into physical conflict. A notable example is the “*Tragedi Idul Fitri 1969*,” where clashes between supporters of the *rukyat* (moon sighting) and *bisab* (astronomical calculation) methods resulted in violence and casualties (Panji Masyarakat, 1989 in Azhari, 2006). Although such extreme incidents have become rare, the recurrence of “*Lebaran Kembar*” (twin Eid) moments in various years continues to symbolise division and provoke public debates over religious authority and legitimacy.

However, the nature of these tensions has changed over time. Several factors have contributed to this shift, including broader public awareness and acceptance of religious diversity, growing digital access, and increased institutional accommodation. This chapter examines an emerging factor that has not yet been fully explored in academic literature: the role of digital memes and humour in reframing and softening religious differences. On TikTok, memetic videos about

Muhammadiyah fasting a day earlier than NU do more than entertain, they open new spaces for reflexive engagement, negotiation, and playful dialogue.

Humour becomes an entry point into what scholars describe as playful citizenship: a mode of participation in which users engage sensitive religious issues through creativity, irony, and everyday digital play. Rather than deepening divisions, such humour enables moments where differences between NU and Muhammadiyah become more negotiable and publicly discussable. On TikTok, this shift is particularly visible, as viral memetic videos translate doctrinal disagreement into shared, playful interaction rather than formal religious debate.

The widespread imitation of the MenujuRamadan2025 video demonstrates how a single memetic format can trigger participatory engagement, inviting users to respond through remix, parody, and repetition. In doing so, the video functions less as a standalone joke than as a catalyst for collective reflection on religious differences.

The concept of memetic video is central to this study because it captures not only the rapid spread of video content but also the ways users actively transform, replicate, and adapt it through remix, parody, and reinterpretation (Shifman, 2013b, p.73). Rather than circulating passively, memetic videos evolve through collective participation, making them particularly useful for analysing sociocultural interaction and digital religious expression.

In this context, NU–Muhammadiyah Ramadan memes illustrate how playful citizenship operates through short-form video, where humour, repetition, and remixing enable everyday negotiations of religious difference.⁵² While humour and parody also circulate on platforms such as Facebook and twitter, TikTok offers a particularly dynamic visual environment in which these practices are intensified through short-form video and algorithmic visibility. Such expressions not only entertain but also invite audiences to reinterpret socio-cultural norms through participation. As Abidin (2020) notes, playful and performative practices on TikTok often become channels for negotiating social hierarchies and cultural expectations. Humour in short-form videos can further soften critique and lower

⁵² Regarding the disparity at the start of Ramadan between NU and Muhammadiyah on TikTok, memetic videos are being shared extensively, featuring the propagation and duplication of cultural aspects such as religious customs (for example, determining the position of the earth vs. heavenly bodies, *ruk'yat* and *hisab*), symbolism (for example, that of *hلال* or crescent moon), comedic and satirical content (in this case, parodies of Ramadan preparations), communal stories (here conversations between NU and Muhammadiyah members), and religious music. TikTok users generate their renditions of the initial videos, incorporating ingenuity and individualisation, thereby generating fresh iterations and understandings, enhancing the digital culture surrounding the disparities in approaches to determining the commencement of Ramadan between NU and Muhammadiyah.

barriers to engagement Cervi & Divon (2023), while memetic participation more broadly fosters new modes of everyday civic engagement (Mortensen & Neumayer, 2021)

TikTok has emerged as one of the most prominent social media platforms in Indonesia, particularly in terms of user engagement. According to the *Digital 2024 Indonesia* report by We Are Social and Meltwater, as of January 2024 TikTok ranked fourth in overall platform usage, following WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook, with 73.5% of Indonesian internet users reporting active use. More notably, TikTok stands out in terms of time spent, with users spending an average of 38 hours and 26 minutes per month on the platform, exceeding the average time spent on YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram. This high level of engagement highlights TikTok's significance as a daily digital environment rather than merely a supplementary entertainment platform.

The rapid replication and circulation of memetic videos on TikTok reflect how the platform has become a key space for negotiating religious and cultural meanings. In Indonesia, where Islam is both dominant and internally diverse, TikTok functions not only as entertainment but as a venue for expressing difference, affirming identities, and engaging in playful critique. This is evident in the widespread circulation of memetic videos about differing Ramadan start dates between Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah in 2024, which used humour and repetition to reframe doctrinal differences as everyday digital interaction.

Through this case study, which focuses on a TikTok video that went viral and later inspired many user-made variations, this chapter explores how the platform becomes a space for discussing the diversity of religious practices in Indonesia. These playful videos do not stand alone but are built upon one another, cultivating a flowing dialogue that demonstrates how online communities navigate religious differences in the digital sphere. Therefore, this chapter will investigate how these videos reflect cultural and spiritual diversity while shaping public discourse on such issues.

Data Selection and Analytical Scope

To begin the analysis, I searched for videos using the hashtag #Ramadan2024 on TikTok to see how these differences appeared in memetic formats. Although the hashtag #Ramadan2024 is used globally, the videos that appeared during data collection were overwhelmingly tied to the Indonesian context. This is consistent with TikTok's recommendation system, which tends to prioritise content based on a user's language, interaction history, and inferred location. While the scraping process did not apply a manual location filter, all selected videos featured Indonesian-language captions, Indonesian creators, and themes specific to local phenomena related to Ramadan in Indonesia. These characteristics confirm that

the dataset reflects Indonesia's digital environment. Between March 9 and April 10, 2024, which coincided with Ramadan that year, 4,176 videos were identified using the hashtag. From this dataset, the ten videos with the highest number of likes were selected for further analysis.

Among the ten videos with the most likes, two explicitly discussed the differences between NU and Muhammadiyah at the start of Ramadan. The first video was uploaded by the account @menujuRamadan2025 with the caption "*NU santai dulu nggak sebh* (Is NU taking it easy first?)", while the second video came from the account @Miracle.Shann with the caption "*Kamu puasa mulai hari apa nich* (Which day are you starting your fast?)". Their presence among the most popular content demonstrates that religious differences, especially the start of Ramadan, are not confined to formal religious debates but have become accessible topics for playful and reflective discussion on TikTok, reaching a broad and diverse audience. This trend also reflects a broader cultural shift, where differences once reserved for scholarly and institutional settings are now reinterpreted and negotiated through everyday digital interactions, particularly among younger generations.

Table 4.1. Ten TikTok Videos with the Highest Engagement under the #Ramadan2024 (9 March – 10 April 2024)

Creator	Upload Date	Content Description (Shortened)	Likes	Comments
bagaskorosaja	10 April 2024	Replying to user comments using humorous Ramadan references	250,244	4,073
bro536864u756886gf	8 April 2024	Light-hearted Islamic humour responding to comments	1,415,691	1,795
menujramadhan2025	8 April 2024	NU santai dulu nggak seh (Satirical take on fasting practices during Ramadan)	1,300,000	25,800
wibuexe_	10 April 2024	Commentary on prayer and everyday Ramadan experiences	1,060,068	8,522
yahaaaaaja	8 April 2024	Greeting Ramadan with reflective and humorous tone	803,934	15,539
indra_yntks	10 April 2024	Ramadan humour using trending audio and hashtags	422,650	28,424
Miracle.Shann	8 April 2024	Personal reflection on beginning fasting	397,800	12,700
anggik_maem2	8 April 2024	Humorous depiction of breaking the fast	252,552	769
anggriyani277	8 April 2024	Expressing end-of-Ramadan emotions through satire	249,142	19,379
haraliscvt	8 April 2024	Responding to current social issues during Ramadan	238,527	234

Source: Author's dataset derived from TikTok data scraping (March–April 2024).

Note: Video descriptions have been shortened and paraphrased for readability. The complete dataset, including full captions, timestamps, and engagement metrics, is archived by the author.

Based on these initial findings, further observations were conducted using specific search queries related to the differences in the beginning of Ramadan between NU and Muhammadiyah. These included simple phrases such as “*NU vs Muhammadiyah*,” “*perbedaan awal puasa NU dan Muhammadiyah*,” and “*perbedaan NU Muhammadiyah*.”

This search revealed dozens of replication and modification videos with the same theme, showing that this phenomenon is not just a topic of conversation but has developed into a pattern of content production typical of memetic videos. Thus, this study not only highlights how religious issues have become part of the evolving digital culture landscape but also how TikTok users play an active role in shaping and disseminating narratives about differences in religious traditions through video formats that are easy to adapt and share.

Additionally, this section will examine how the concept of *playful citizenship* is enacted through memetic videos on TikTok, particularly in shaping the relations between NU and Muhammadiyah. These memes render boundaries between the two groups either salient, stable, or porous within public discourse. Rather than being mere expressions of entertainment, such videos serve as cultural artefacts that foster a broader understanding of diversity in digital religious life. The interplay between lighthearted clips and more reflective pieces illustrates not only the complexity of faith-related discussions online but also the potential for communal dialogue across differences when approached with creativity and openness. To complement the analysis of memetic content, this chapter includes responses from interviews with NU and Muhammadiyah youth, offering deeper insight into the reception and interpretation of religious humour on TikTok.

Playful Citizenship and Groupness: Humour as a Tool for Religious Dialogue

To understand how digital interactions on TikTok mediate religious expression and community dynamics among members of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, it is essential to draw upon Brubaker’s (2004) concept of groupness. Rather than assuming groups as static entities, Brubaker invites us to view group identities as fluid and situational, formed through discursive practices, emotions, and shared symbolic repertoires. In the context of Indonesian Islam, where distinctions between NU and Muhammadiyah have long been defined through doctrinal, institutional, and historical frameworks, TikTok introduces a playful and participatory arena where those boundaries are softened and continually renegotiated.

One of the central facets of this negotiation lies in playful citizenship, a concept introduced by Glas et al. (2019) to describe modes of public participation that emerge through humour, creativity, and playful digital engagement. Rather than relying on seriousness or formal political intent, playful citizenship highlights how

users participate in communal and identity-related dialogues through parody, remix, and light-hearted interaction. In digital environments such as TikTok, this mode of participation enables cross-group engagement without requiring persuasion or confrontation.

In a religious context, playful citizenship offers a fresh perspective on how Muslims, especially younger generations, engage with Islamic discourse. On platforms like TikTok, this is manifested through memetic videos that blend humour, religious knowledge, and cultural expression. In Indonesia, digital communities such as NU Garis Lucu, Muhammadiyah Garis Lucu, and Katolik Garis Lucu exemplify how humour is used as a medium to bridge differences. On TikTok, playful responses to religious issues, like the difference in the start of Ramadan between NU and Muhammadiyah, serve not only to entertain but also to invite reflective and inclusive dialogue. Memetic videos with captions such as *Is NU taking it easy first?* (TikTok @MenujuRamadan2025) or *What tim are you, NU or Muhammadiyah?* (TikTok @ummijihad) exemplifies how users bring lightness to long-standing doctrinal debates.

Another example is the trend often labelled under the hashtag #GombalanSantri (santri-style romantic banter), where users incorporate terms from the science of *tajwid*, the set of rules governing proper recitation of the Qur'an, into romantic or poetic expressions. One such phrase that has gained traction is: *"Aku selalu berdoa dan berharap cinta kita seperti waqaf لازم, terhenti sempurna di akhir hayat kita."* Translated, it means: *"I always pray and hope that our love is like a waqaf لازم, ending perfectly at the end of our lives."* The term *waqaf لازم* in *tajwid* refers to a mandatory stop in recitation, marked with the letter *mim* (م), indicating a complete pause at the end of a perfect sentence. By using this term metaphorically, users demonstrate religious literacy while embedding Islamic knowledge into everyday digital expression.

TikTok accounts such as @pondokpesantrensunni and @Daarul Huffadz Indonesia have popularised this format, which others have since replicated. This phenomenon reflects how Islamic teachings, particularly those related to the proper reading and appreciation of the Qur'an, are re-contextualised in digital spaces, making them more relatable and engaging for a broader audience without losing their reverence.

This approach aligns with Sicart (2014)'s perspective, which emphasises that play is not only a form of entertainment but also a complex strategy of social and cultural reflection. In this context, humour and symbol play become tools for Muslim communities to navigate their religious identities in the ever-changing digital landscape, also in Indonesia. For example, the #GombalanSantri trend shows how young Muslims play with religious language in everyday contexts, turning *tajwid* terminology into light, creative exchanges. Such moments illustrate

Sicart's point that play can function as a mode of reflection, allowing Islamic ideas to circulate in ways that feel familiar and socially engaging.

In this sense, humour becomes more than just comic relief and becomes a mode of dialogue. Cervi and Divon (2023) argue that humour in memetic videos facilitates communication across social boundaries, thereby reducing tensions surrounding sensitive topics. This is aligned with Vijay and Gekker (2021)'s findings on how humour and digital challenges on TikTok can increase engagement in broader sociopolitical discourses. This includes engaging theological differences without escalating conflict within religious discourse.

Some scholars prefer the term "playful activism" to describe such practices, but this often implies a more goal-oriented, change-driven approach. In contrast, playful citizenship more accurately captures the participatory, identity-affirming, and often non-confrontational nature of digital interactions among NU and Muhammadiyah members. These users are not seeking to persuade each other or advocate for doctrinal revision, but rather to construct a space of mutual recognition and humour-based solidarity. Thus, playful citizenship serves as a conceptual lens through which TikTok's religious content can be analysed, not as activism, but as a means of nurturing groupness while embracing intergroup differences in a non-threatening way.

This distinction invites us to consider Keane's concept of *semiotic ideologies* (2003, 2018), which refers to the assumptions people hold about what religious signs are, how they should be used, and what moral weight they carry. These underlying beliefs shape how individuals judge religious humour. For some, imitation or parody is a form of affectionate commentary and part of everyday negotiation of faith. For others, religious symbols demand strict seriousness, making such memes seem improper or offensive. This difference in semiotic expectations explains why the same memetic video can be read as either friendly teasing or a violation of sacred norms.

This framing prepares us to explore further how TikTok's affordances, such as its duet and stitch features (see below), enable such participatory interactions. It also sets the stage to examine how algorithmic visibility and content virality contribute to cross-group engagement during the Ramadan period.

TikTok's Affordance in Facilitating Playful Citizenship

In the digital era, religious expressions have undergone significant transformation. Social media platforms, especially TikTok, enable individuals to negotiate and express their religious identities in interactive and dynamic ways. While playfulness has long been part of religious practices through humour, storytelling, and community celebrations, digital forms of play introduce new scales and modes of interaction, making the negotiation of religious identity more visible

and participatory.⁵³ The platform's architecture, defined by its affordances, plays a crucial role in shaping these expressions. As Bucher and Helmond (2018) emphasise, platform affordances determine how users interact, access information, and express themselves. In this context, TikTok's affordances fall into three main aspects: technical, algorithmic, and participatory.

Technical Affordances: Duet, Stitch, Short-Form Videos, Filters, and Audio Reuse

TikTok's technical affordances, especially duet, stitch, short-form video, filters, and audio reuse, shape how religious content is responded to, recontextualised, and circulated. Duet enables side-by-side commentary, while stitch supports sequential response by inserting a clip into a new narrative. These features lower the threshold for users to participate, not only consuming religious content, but extending it through humour, explanation, or light teasing.

As noted by Zhao and Abidin (2023), the integration of playful visual and audio elements significantly affects how users interpret content. This dynamic is also present in TikTok videos about NU–Muhammadiyah differences, where humour often softens doctrinal tensions and turns them into approachable, relatable moments. As I show in the ethnographic findings later in this chapter, users frequently respond to these videos not with hostility but with playful commentary, reflections on their own practices, or light teasing across organisational lines.

While TikTok in Indonesia is used across age groups, the platform's Ramadan memes are especially visible among younger users who turn doctrinal differences into shared cultural play. A clear example of this dynamic appears in a stitched video where a user explains the difference between the *hisab* and *rukyyat* methods after watching the viral “POV 11 March 2024” meme by @MenujuRamadan2025,⁵⁴ which contrasts NU and Muhammadiyah starting Ramadan on different days. These interactions illustrate a pattern that recurs across the dataset, where users move beyond passive viewing and take part in shaping how religious issues are discussed on the platform.

⁵³ Historical traces of playfulness in Islamic traditions in Indonesia can be found in various cultural practices. For example, pesantren communities have long used humour and storytelling (a humorous remark by a kiai or humour *santri*, particularly NU *kiai*, such as Gusdur) as part of religious education to make learning more approachable. Similarly, religious festivities such as *Lomba Takbir Keliling* (Takbir Procession Competition) during Eid al-Fitr often involve creative and playful competitions, combining religious devotion with communal joy. These examples show that play and creativity elements were integral to religious life well before the advent of digital media.

⁵⁴ *Rukyyat* refers to the direct visual observation of the hilal (new crescent moon), following a literal interpretation of Islamic texts that instruct Muslims to start fasting when they “see” the new moon. In contrast, *hisab* relies on astronomical calculations to predict the moon's position, aligning religious observance with modern scientific advancements.

TikTok's short-form video format, typically ranging from 15 to 60 seconds, encourages users to share concise and digestible messages. As Divon points out, this brevity is ideal for transmitting ideas quickly and widely (Divon, 2022). During Ramadan, it enables users to post quick prayers, comedic takes on fasting struggles, or time-lapse videos of iftar preparations, turning everyday rituals into shareable cultural content.

Ramadan-themed filters, visual overlays such as crescent moons, lanterns, and Islamic calligraphy stickers, are often used to visually anchor content within the festive and religious atmosphere of the season. Although these features may seem superficial, they play a vital role in fostering emotional engagement and signalling cultural belonging. TikTok's technical affordances, therefore, can support feelings of seasonal belonging, making religious moments more visible, inclusive, and reflective of Indonesia's diverse society.

These visual features still carry cultural value by contributing to situational groupness, moments where users, regardless of their religious background, come together through shared digital rituals and cultural participation. For example, the "*takjil war*" phenomenon during Ramadan 2024 gained traction on TikTok, with non-Muslims participating and sharing their experiences.⁵⁵ The tradition of *buka puasa bersama* (bukber), originally a religious observance, has evolved into a cultural event that is now embraced by broader communities, often captured on TikTok videos.⁵⁶ Videos titled "*The First Time I Break My Fast with My Muslim Friends*" captured moments of waiting for the adzan, tasting iftar food, and enjoying the spirit of togetherness. These were complemented by culinary reviews, often made by non-Muslim creators, featuring restaurants that offer themed iftar packages (e.g., Javanese, Moroccan, Middle Eastern), further contributing to temporary yet meaningful moments of intergroup *groupness* online.

⁵⁵ *Takjil* is a light food or drink consumed when breaking the fast before eating the main course. In Indonesia, takjil usually consists of kolak, fruit ice, fried foods, or dates, which aim to restore energy after a day of fasting. The word "takjil" comes from the Arabic *ajjala*, which means "to hasten," referring to the recommendation not to delay breaking the fast. The term "takjil war" emerged on TikTok during Ramadan 2024 to describe users' playful documentation of searching for, competing to buy, or comparing *takjil* offerings in different neighbourhoods. The phrase does not imply actual conflict; it is a humorous framing of the lively rush and social excitement surrounding *takjil* hunting in Ramadan.

⁵⁶ *Bukber* is breaking the fast together, a tradition often held during the month of Ramadan. This event is not only a moment of worship but also an event to strengthen social relationships, both in the family, community, workplace, or reunion of old friends. In Indonesia, *bukber* is often held in mosques, restaurants, or cafes with a variety of breaking the fast menus according to taste and regional traditions.

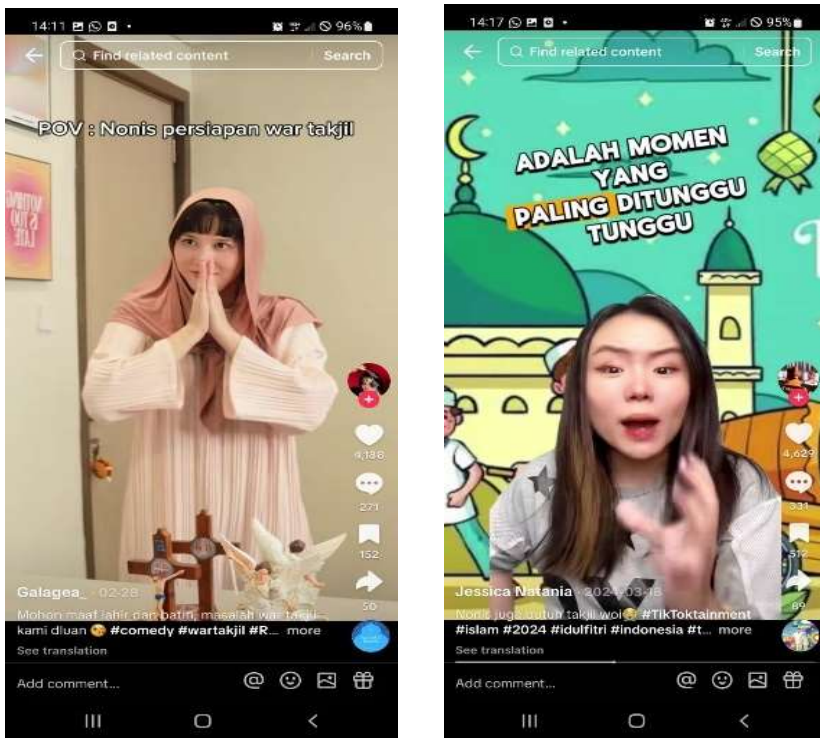


Figure 4.2: Intercultural groupness on TikTok: non-Muslim creators participating in Ramadan “takjil war” memes through humour and religious visual symbols
Source: TikTok @Galagea @Jessica Natania

This dynamic is particularly evident in two TikTok videos that go beyond mere digital play, offering moments of intercultural *groupness* that arise from shared online practices. During Ramadan 2024, a notable trend emerged in which *Nonis* (a colloquial term for non-Muslims) participated in the so-called “war takjil”, a playful popular expression referring to the collective rush to buy inexpensive snacks for breaking the fast before sunset, often in crowded street markets. The term “war” here is used humorously rather than literally, signalling excitement and shared anticipation rather than conflict.

One viral video by TikTok creator @Galagea shows a Christian user wearing a Muslim-style hijab and greeting viewers with a respectful gesture, accompanied by the caption: “POV: *Nonis persiapan war takjil*.” The video subtly juxtaposes Christian symbols, such as crosses and angel figurines in the background, with Islamic customs, creating a scene of playful hybridity. Although humorous in tone, the video conveys a sincere sense of cultural engagement and mutual respect.

Another widely shared video by @Jessica Natania humorously presents “three reasons why Nonis also need takjil,” using a background of Islamic visual motifs (mosques, crescent moons, lanterns) while emphasising inclusivity in Ramadan culinary culture. Her caption “*Nonis juga butuh takjil woi* 🌈” received overwhelmingly positive responses, suggesting a welcoming reception from Muslim audiences.

These examples show how TikTok’s technical affordances facilitate not only religious self-expression but also intercultural solidarity, all while making religious moments more visible, inclusive, and reflective of Indonesia’s diverse society.

While some trends reflect intergroup solidarity, others demonstrate how young users engage with religious differences in playful and casual ways as part of their everyday digital routines. This combination of short-form video, audio reuse, and creative filters makes the platform a space where religious themes appear both through intentional searches and through casual browsing.

This pattern is echoed in users’ everyday engagement with TikTok during Ramadan. Dea, a high school student I interviewed, described scrolling through TikTok while fasting after school, alternating between watching humorous sermons, browsing *takjil* recipes, and viewing relatable fasting content. Her account illustrates how religious themes appear alongside leisure, blurring the boundary between entertainment and light religious engagement.

A similar participatory logic can be observed in responses to the viral NU–Muhammadiyah meme discussed earlier. Rather than debating theological positions, users stitched, duetted, and remixed the video to explain, joke about, or soften doctrinal differences. These interactions transformed potential division into instances of shared play, exemplifying how technical affordances enable religious difference to become repeatable, discussable, and socially navigable.

This dynamic reinforces the argument of this section: that memetic expressions on TikTok tend to blur rather than harden group boundaries. Through humor and everyday participation, TikTok users construct a shared cultural space in which religious diversity can be navigated with warmth, curiosity, and mutual respect.

Taken together, TikTok’s technical features do not simply “host” religious expression; they structure how religious difference becomes repeatable and discussable. Through remixable formats, users turn doctrinal distinctions into everyday interaction, sometimes within a single community (NU–Muhammadiyah), and at other times across religious lines through shared Ramadan routines and humour. The next section examines how these practices gain traction through TikTok’s algorithmic visibility logic, especially the For You Page.

Algorithmic Affordance: For You Page (FYP) and Visibility Logic

Beyond technical tools, TikTok's most influential affordance lies in its algorithmic architecture, particularly the For You Page (FYP). Unlike platforms that depend on follower networks, TikTok promotes content through an algorithm-driven discovery system. This performance-based visibility logic means that videos with high engagement, such as likes, watch time, comments, and shares, are pushed to a wider audience, regardless of how many followers a creator has, effectively making them highly visible on the platform. At the same time, this visibility logic does not eliminate user agency but reshapes how religious content is encountered and interpreted.

TikTok remains a platform where user agencies and algorithmic curation intersect. While the system recommends content aggressively, users still decide whether to engage, ignore, or swipe past the videos that appear on their feed. This selective engagement means that religious videos, though accessible and often informative, are not always read through a spiritual lens. For many viewers, they function more as entertainment than as material for religious reflection. The recurrence of NU–Muhammadiyah memes during both the start of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr illustrates how TikTok's algorithm amplifies seasonal humour. By responding to spikes in engagement around ritual moments, the platform enables cyclical religious debates to resurface precisely when they become socially salient, extending their visibility across the religious calendar. This pattern shows how TikTok's visibility logic responds to time-specific religious rhythms, allowing recurring debates to gain renewed traction at key ritual moments.

This dynamic is crucial in understanding how religious content spreads during Ramadan. As explained by Zeng & Kaye (2022), videos on TikTok are amplified not on the basis of who posts them, but on how users interact with them, via view counts, likes, shares, and engagement, emphasising the platform's "visibility moderation" logic. This explains why Ramadan memes, ranging from "*Gombalan Santri*" (as previously discussed) to NU Vs Muhammadiyah moon-sighting jokes, can cross the doctrinal boundaries that typically separate NU and Muhammadiyah. They gain visibility through humour, shared experiences, and remix culture, rather than being confined to any single religious community.

The logic of spreadable media (Jenkins et al., 2013) is clearly reflected here, as users not only consume but remix and adapt content to their cultural contexts. Hashtags like #Ramadan, #Ngaji, and #Gombalansantri enhance discoverability, especially when paired with trending sounds or styles. These algorithmic tools enable content to transcend religious and social boundaries, facilitating accidental encounters with religious content among non-Muslim users.

However, TikTok's algorithm is not value-neutral. It privileges content that triggers curiosity, amusement, or emotional response, regardless of its religious

accuracy or theological depth. This creates a form of algorithmic mediation where what appears as “religion” on the platform is shaped less by doctrinal substance and more by how well a video captures attention. In this sense, TikTok functions as a digital attention machine: it selects, amplifies, or sidelines religious content based on engagement performance rather than spiritual or theological significance.

Participatory Affordance: Ramadan Challenges and Campaigns

Alongside algorithmic visibility, TikTok’s design supports a participatory culture, visible in Ramadan-themed challenges and campaign-based engagement. While participatory culture is not an affordance in itself, it is enabled and shaped by the platform’s participatory affordances, such as duet, stitch, hashtag trends, and user-generated sounds, which turn everyday acts into performative expressions of religious values and social solidarity.

TikTok challenges are typically user-driven trends that encourage imitation or creative reinterpretation. During Ramadan, several challenges emerged organically or through influencer promotion, such as the #RamadanTiba Dance Challenge, which utilised Opick’s song “Ramadan Tiba” (2008), or the *Membangunkan Sabur* Challenge, where users recorded humorous or inventive ways of waking friends and family for the pre-dawn meal. In this challenge, participants often staged exaggerated wake-up calls, using loudspeakers, drumming on household objects, shouting playful rhymes, or mimicking the style of traditional *patroli sabur* groups found in many Indonesian neighbourhoods. Others offered gentler variations, such as using trending audio tracks, personalised greetings, or affectionate pranks tailored to siblings or partners. These videos capture the everyday social choreography of *sabur*: the mix of care, mischief, and communal responsibility that characterises the early-morning ritual. The challenge spread widely because its format was simple to imitate, culturally familiar, and easily adapted to different household contexts.

The trend evolved organically into a participatory meme ecology, meaning a space where content does not simply circulate but mutates, adapts, and accumulates through user-generated variations. Reusing shared audio, like “Ramadan Tiba” or sermon snippets, combined with visual gags and captions, allowed the trend to be continuously adapted. This flexibility empowered users to embed religious commentary within participatory play, deepening communal interaction during the holy month.

Beyond humour and celebration, campaign-style participation also gained prominence. Digital charity initiatives like #*SedekahRamadan* and #*BerbagiBerkah* in 2024 encouraged users to post videos of giving to the less fortunate, ranging from distributing food to motorcyclists during iftar traffic, to organising food drives for orphanages or street vendors. One widely circulated video under the

#Sedekah # Berbagi # Ramadan hashtag came from the account @Jessicafire (TikTok.com, 2024e).⁵⁷ The clip shows a foreign man walking through Malioboro, Yogyakarta, handing out takjil to *andong* drivers (horse-carriage drivers common in Yogyakarta) and small street vendors. The video received 11.4K likes and generated more than 800 comments, reflecting how acts of generosity resonate deeply with viewers. Comment sections were filled with emotional and appreciative responses such as “setiap lihat vt orang berbagi dengan ikhlas seperti ini ko tiba tiba berkaca-kaca mataku” (every time I see videos of sincere giving like this, my eyes suddenly well up), “berkah selalu rezekimu mister” (may your sustenance always be blessed, mister), and “MasyaAllah semoga bertambah rizkinya” (MasyaAllah, may his fortune increase). These reactions show how participatory Ramadan content on TikTok blends visual appeal with affective engagement, turning simple acts of charity into shared emotional moments within the platform’s wider Ramadan culture.

These participatory practices do not replace formal religious authority. Instead, they reconfigure how religious values are enacted, made visible, and collectively felt within TikTok’s platformed publics. Through short videos, hashtags, and affective responses, acts of charity become socially shareable moments, allowing piety to circulate as an everyday, emotionally resonant practice rather than a purely institutional one.

Taken together, the playful and philanthropic engagements observed during Ramadan illustrate a broad spectrum of digital religious expression, ranging from lighthearted mimicry to deeply emotional acts of kindness. These practices align with what Glas et al. and Schmidt conceptualise as playful citizenship (Glas et al., 2019; Schmidt, 2012), where participation in religious discourse emerges through creativity, affect, and shared moral sensibilities rather than doctrinal rigidity or formal authority.

During Ramadan, this sense of digital publicness, the way social media creates shared spaces for collective visibility and interaction, both mirrors and expands the cultural spirit of the holy month in contemporary Indonesia. What once occupied urban public spaces, such as lantern displays, *nasyid* performances, and community banners, now circulates across TikTok’s FYP and hashtags, inviting users of all backgrounds to remix and reflect on shared cultural moments.

While scholars such as Bail et al. (2018) note that identity cues in digital environments, such as religious symbols, group labels, or cultural markers, often reinforce polarisation in Western contexts, the Indonesian TikTok sphere may operate differently. Here, identity-based engagement frequently takes playful

⁵⁷ TikTok video by @Jessicafire, posted during Ramadan 2024, showing the distribution of *takjil* to *andong* drivers and street vendors in Malioboro, Yogyakarta. Accessed 5 July 2025, Original link: https://www.tiktok.com/@jessicafire_/video/7350129209571855637?_r=1&_t=ZG-91w20JE4Wwr

forms. For example, the widely circulated “takjil war” videos show non-Muslim users participating in Ramadan food-sharing culture, while NU–Muhammadiyah memes turn doctrinal differences into light, humorous exchanges. These practices suggest that, rather than deepening boundaries, identity cues on Indonesian TikTok often become points of shared cultural humour and everyday solidarity.

This playful spirit of religious engagement also extends to interfaith settings, where humour becomes a bridge for mutual understanding and shared reflection. For example, a viral TikTok video posted by @JabarEkspres captures a sermon from a Christian pastor at Gereja Tiberias Indonesia. In his sermon, he jokingly says (TikTok.com, 2024d):⁵⁸

Our religion is tolerant, when it comes to takjil, we are ahead. At 3 p.m., they are still tired from fasting, but we are already ready. However, my friends said, ‘Okay, you can win for now, but when Easter comes, we will take our revenge. We will buy up all the eggs, so you will have to celebrate Easter with Kinder Joy instead!

The congregation responds with laughter, and the video has garnered over 70,000 likes, been shared almost 5000 times, and received more than 2,400 comments. The comment section itself reflects how viewers interpret the moment as a gesture of humour-based solidarity. Responses such as “dipecah belah oleh politik, dipersatukan oleh takjil” (divided by politics, united by takjil), “masyaa Allah takjil pemersatu bangsa” (Masyaa Allah, takjil unites the nation), “sampai keluar air mata aku ketawa” (I laughed until I teared up), and “bahagianya hidup di Indonesia, damai itu indah” (how joyful it is to live in Indonesia, peace is beautiful) show how audiences frame the clip as a reminder of social harmony.

These reactions highlight how religious identity becomes a site for humorous reciprocity and mutual recognition. They also exemplify the emergence of bridging groupness on TikTok during Ramadan, where digital interactions cultivate cross-religious empathy and shared play.

Playful Citizenship in Addressing Religious and Cultural Differences

On TikTok, playful exchanges around NU and Muhammadiyah practices appear less as doctrinal debate and more as everyday digital interaction. Users riff on familiar contrasts, fasting dates, tarawih length, or rukyat versus hisab, turning them into quick visual jokes, short skits, or light teasing in the comments. These formats circulate widely not because they resolve the differences, but because they translate them into recognisable, low-stakes moments that invite participation. In

⁵⁸ https://www.tiktok.com/@jabarekspres/video/7347593312213208322?_r=1&_t=ZG-91w3TNn5d7B

this sense, the emphasis falls on how users take up these memes, through mimicry, duet, stitch, and commentary, rather than on the doctrinal content itself.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Indonesia's Islamic landscape is shaped by a wide range of organisations, from NU and Muhammadiyah to groups such as LDII and Salafi networks. Yet on TikTok, memetic humour tends to gravitate almost exclusively toward NU and Muhammadiyah. Their long-standing cultural visibility and familiar doctrinal contrasts make them highly legible to a broad audience, which in turn makes their differences easy to adapt into playful digital commentary. While these portrayals often appear in humorous, light-hearted forms, it is important to note that theological or organisational differences have also, at times, given rise to tensions, especially in offline or institutional contexts. Yet, within the memetic realm, these differences are more often softened through humour, enabling a form of public engagement that emphasises familiarity rather than friction. This pattern speaks directly to playful citizenship, where people interact across group boundaries through creative, easily accessible forms rather than through formal argument.

The popularity of NU–Muhammadiyah memes reflects this dynamic. Variants of the “team that started fasting with NU and celebrated Eid with Muhammadiyah” joke, the “POV 11 March 2024” clips, and short contrasts between *hisab* and *ruk'yat* circulate widely because they draw on well-known ritual differences that shape everyday Muslim life. These formats invite recognition rather than division, offering users a shared cultural script through which they can laugh at, and reflect on, their differences.

Smaller groups such as Salafi or LDII receive far less attention not because they are insignificant, but because their practices are less publicly visible and less embedded in the everyday rhythms of Indonesian Muslims. By contrast, the NU–Muhammadiyah divide permeates domestic life, work schedules, public holidays, and even family negotiations, making it fertile material for memetic play and commentary.

Humour, remixing, satire, and mimicry thus become tools through which TikTok users negotiate cultural and religious identity. This engagement is not limited to doctrinal issues; it often overlaps with political themes, social critique, or even populist narratives circulating on the platform.

In the meme showing contrasting NU and Muhammadiyah reactions, for example, viewers did not simply laugh at the joke, they responded with reflections that turned the meme into a form of meaningful commentary. This pattern mirrors the responses found in other videos within the dataset, such as the *takjil*-sharing memetic video discussed earlier. Comments like *dipecah belah oleh politik, dipersatukan oleh takjil* (divided by politics, united by takjil), or *damai itu indah* (peace is beautiful), show how users often use humour as an entry point into broader

reflections on harmony, coexistence, and the everyday negotiation of religious difference.

Playful citizenship on TikTok frequently uses humour and satire to make serious topics more accessible. Humour can relieve tension and create a common ground for discussion, whereas satire can highlight contradictions and spark thought.⁵⁹ Additionally, remixes and mimicry are popular methods for creating content. Remixes involve technological manipulation, such as editing an image with Photoshop or adding a new soundtrack and have become popular due to user-friendly applications that allow people to download and re-edit content. Conversely, mimicry is the practice of "redoing," or re-creating, a specific text using other people and methods (Shifman, 2013b). Together, these components enable users to explore and negotiate their religious and cultural identities in a creative, engaging, and accessible manner.

On TikTok, emulating religious figures has become a popular method for users to replicate or adjust certain expressions. The phenomenon can manifest in various forms, from recapturing the style of renowned clerics' sermons to adopting their gestures and emotions in digital format. For example, a recent TikTok video features a child, estimated to be around 10 years old, parodying the preaching style of Ustadz Abdul Somad (UAS), one of Indonesia's most prominent clerics. In another clip posted by the account @novicantika4, a youngster lip-syncs to a UAS sermon, synchronising his mouth movements with the original audio while imitating UAS's signature gestures (TikTok.com, 2024a).⁶⁰ His mouth motions match the original audio played in the background as he mimics the cleric's trademark gestures. In the age of social media, impersonations like those in the videos aim to attract attention, garnering up to 72,500 likes and over 1,461 comments, demonstrating how this type of emulation can garner widespread attention on digital platforms.

Similarly, Indonesian comedian Wendi Cagur impersonated one of Indonesia's famous preachers, Ustadz Maulana. Not only does Wendi copy the way he talks, his intonation, his similar costume, but also how Ustadz Maulana also moves when giving a sermon. In this case, mimicry is received not as mockery but as lighthearted homage, a practice that echoes the English saying, "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery."

⁵⁹ It is worth noting the difference between humour and satire. For example, humour is widely used to reduce tension and establish common ground in debates, while satire draws attention to inconsistencies and can be a strong instrument of social critique (Shifman, 2013b). This difference is further examined in the analysis of the Borobudur Stupa meme in chapter 5, explaining the Roy Suryo case, where satire triggers a controversial discourse of religion.

⁶⁰ https://www.tiktok.com/@novicantika4/video/7337976870685723909?_r=1&_t=ZG-91x44UjZwPp

Audience responses reinforce this reading. Comments such as “Lucu banget, bisa pas banget ngikutin UAS” (So funny, he nailed the impression of UAS perfectly) and “Ini UAS pasti ngakak banget lihat ini” (UAS himself would probably burst out laughing watching this), suggest that viewers understood the mimicry as affectionate rather than derogatory. Several users even encouraged the child to impersonate other preachers such as Ustadz Zainuddin MZ, while reactions like “Masyaa Allah Tabarakallah” and laughter or thumbs-up emojis further indicate that audiences framed the performance as light-hearted admiration, not mockery.

These reactions reveal how Indonesian digital publics often interpret religious parody as playful respect (*hormat yang bersenda gurun*), echoing cultural norms in which humour and piety are not necessarily opposed. In such contexts, TikTok becomes more than a site for imitation; it transforms into a communal space where religiosity is performed with joy, creativity, and a sense of relational intimacy. This resonates with Beatty (1999)’s observations that Indonesian religious life is deeply shaped by *rasa*, an embodied sensitivity to social harmony and emotional attunement, because the positive, affectionate tone of these comments reflects forms of closeness, ease, and warmth that Beatty associates with Javanese modes of religious experience.

These forms of mimicry subtly reshape how young Indonesians relate to religious authority. Instead of differences mediated through institutional settings, users approach religious figures through humour, emotional resonance, and shared digital play. In a media landscape where clerics function partly as celebrities, this dialogic and affective engagement becomes especially potent. Such practices open informal spaces where religious identity is reimagined not through instruction but through imitation, comedy, and everyday digital rituals that elicit laughter, empathy, and recognition from diverse audiences.

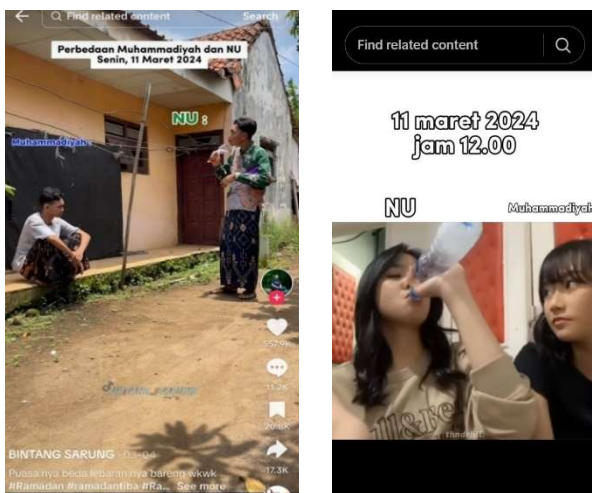


Figure 4.3. Screenshots of POV memetic videos posted on 11 March 2024
Source: TikTok @bintang_sarung and @csaarrrr

As discussed earlier, these memes playfully contrast NU–Muhammadiyah ritual differences, functioning as a familiar entry point rather than a theological confrontation. This dynamic echoes Beatty (1999) ’s observation that religious difference in Javanese Muslim life is negotiated through everyday interactions rather than doctrinal debate. For some, practices remain flexible and fluid; for others, they carry a stronger scriptural authority. Tensions surface not because of the differences themselves, but when questions of legitimacy and authenticity are felt to be at stake.

This ethnographic framing is vital to understanding the everyday tensions between NU and Muhammadiyah, two of Indonesia’s most influential Islamic organisations, which are at the centre of this chapter. Their long-standing differences over religious authority, ritual practice, and public visibility are increasingly mediated through humour and digital expression, especially during moments of heightened religious observance, such as Ramadan.

By reimagining difference through exaggeration and parody, these memes foster a form of peaceful negotiation. They offer a way to engage with intra-Muslim diversity that is emotionally resonant, culturally grounded, and socially constructive, suggesting that humour, far from trivialising belief, can create room for dialogue, recognition, and coexistence in Indonesia’s complex religious terrain. These memes do not seek to resolve doctrinal disagreement; instead, they translate it into every day, low-stakes interaction that invites participation rather than confrontation.

This humour echoes a broader Indonesian tendency to address sensitive issues through satire and light commentary. Everyday frictions, such as recurring debates over whether food stalls should remain open during fasting hours, are often reframed as playful content rather than moral confrontation. In this way, memes about NU–Muhammadiyah differences similarly become relaxed digital spaces where doctrinal variation is acknowledged with humour rather than hostility.

Thus, although the historical tension over the Islamic calendar has not disappeared, its expression has shifted. If “*Lebaran kembar*” was once a source of theological and social division, it is now increasingly treated as a cultural phenomenon, often discussed in a lighthearted manner rather than in an antagonistic manner. TikTok and other social media platforms have become spaces where these religious differences can be dynamically engaged, enabling new modes of dialogue that are both humorous and meaningful.

This shift is particularly visible despite the continued role of the state. Although the government's *isbat* meeting⁶¹ aims to standardise the determination of Ramadan and Eid, plural religious authority persists. Muhammadiyah, for instance, continues to follow *hisab*-based calculations even when these diverge from NU or state decisions. Rather than producing overt conflict, such differences are commonly lived as part of Indonesia's everyday religious plurality, especially when reframed through humour and memetic circulation on platforms like TikTok.

The memes enable a more open and inclusive discussion of differing religious practices in a way that is understandable and appealing to a larger audience. They also allow for the creative and fun exploration of cultural and religious identities, many expressed through memetic video content on TikTok. This is seen in one of the memetic videos posted by the TikTok account @ummijihad.



*Kalian Tim yang mana...?
Tim NU...?
Tim Muhammadiyah...?
Atau tim yang awal puasa ikut NU dan lebarannya ikut Muhammadiyah?*

Translate:
Which team are you on...?
NU team...?
Muhamadiyah Team...?
Or did the team that started their fast join NU and for Eid join Muhammadiyah?

Figure 4.4. Tim NU vs. Muhammadiyah meme
Source : TikTok @ummijihad

The humour lies in its subtle social critique. By invoking the idea of “starting late, finishing fast,” the meme satirises those perceived to take the most convenient route in navigating doctrinal difference. Rather than attacking belief, it playfully surfaces a familiar moral tension surrounding convenience, commitment, and religious consistency in everyday life.

⁶¹ The *Isbat* meeting is an official meeting held by the Indonesian government, specifically the Ministry of Religious Affairs, to determine the beginning of the month in the Hijri calendar, which includes the start of Ramadan, *Syawal* (Eid al-Fitr), and *Dzulhijjah* (Eid al-Adha). Scholars, representatives of Islamic mass organisations, astronomers, and other interested parties are among those attending this meeting. The *Isbat* meeting is usually held as the crucial months approach, and the results are publicised.

Humour has long served as a social lubricant in Indonesia, easing tension and facilitating dialogue across religious and cultural lines. On TikTok, this tradition continues in digital form, where creators use humour to bridge differences and express critique in relatable ways. Humour opens up space to convey criticism and discuss issues that are considered sensitive, particularly in Javanese and broader Indonesian settings (Beatty, 1999; Geertz, 1960).

Novrita Widiyastuti, CEO of the Indonesian Humour Institute (IHIK3), also notes that jokes made by comedians often reflect the condition of society (Widiyastuti in *kompas.id*, 1 September 2022 (Kompas.id, 2022), such as comedy shows on television, *Lapor Pak* on Trans TV and the *Sketsa Komedi Main Hakim Sendiri* on NET.TV. These shows use humour not only to entertain but also to comment on political, social, and cultural issues. In this way, humour can become a subtle yet impactful tool of social critique.

While humour is often framed by scholars and practitioners as a means of fostering social harmony in Indonesia, this view warrants critical reflection. Rather than accepting humour as inherently unifying, this study examines its dual potential, to both bridge and highlight religious and cultural differences, depending on how it is framed, circulated, and interpreted on platforms like TikTok.

This dual role of humour echoes longer Indonesian traditions, including *wayang kulit*, where Punakawan figures use comedy to mediate tension and offer critique.⁶² As Victor Turner (1969) argues, liminal characters, those who occupy an in-between position, not fully inside nor outside social hierarchies, soften conflict by translating sensitive issues into culturally palatable forms. This cultural logic helps explain why digital humour today can operate simultaneously as critique and cohesion, making sensitive religious differences easier to negotiate.

The role of the puppeteer in inserting humour is not only a source of entertainment but also a strategy to reduce social tensions. With a relaxed and humorous style, criticism of *wayang* performances becomes more acceptable without causing conflict.

In the digital context, the role of “dalang” is no longer singular. While TikTok creators visibly shape the narrative through humour, mimicry, and satire, the platform’s algorithm also acts as an unseen puppeteer, deciding which content

⁶² The Punokawan, consisting of Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong, are clown-servant characters unique to Javanese wayang traditions. Unlike the noble heroes of the Indian epics, these figures were locally developed and are known for their comic behaviour, sharp wit, and subversive wisdom. They often act as intermediaries between the audience and the main narrative, using humour, satire, and vernacular language to comment on contemporary social and political issues (Mrázek, 2019).

gains visibility and when it circulates. Audiences, through comments, duets, and remixes, further redirect the storyline, collectively reshaping meaning. This distributed form of agency contrasts with the traditional *dalang*'s singular control, but it echoes the same cultural logic: humour becomes a vehicle through which tensions are mediated, reframed, and made socially manageable.

Against this backdrop, Indonesian values of *rukun* (togetherness) and mutual cooperation shape expectations of social harmony, even amid religious disagreement (Koentjaraningrat, 1985). Within this ethos, humour becomes a socially acceptable way to acknowledge differences without escalating tension. Memes contrasting NU and Muhammadiyah fasting schedules operate precisely in this register. The viral “POV: 11 March 2024, 12:00 PM” meme, for instance, depicting a Muhammadiyah follower already fasting beside an NU member still eating, reframes doctrinal divergence as an everyday quirk rather than a theological fault line. Audience responses frequently echoed this tone, with comments such as “*divided by politics, united by takjil*” or “*peace is beautiful*”, signalling relief and recognition rather than antagonism. In this way, humour supports the broader cultural expectation of harmony, reinforcing social cohesion in a light and non-threatening manner. This aligns with theories that understand humour as a mechanism for preserving equilibrium in communities where unity is deeply valued (see also Chapter Five).

Yet these findings do not suggest that humour is inherently harmonising. The widespread assumption that humour naturally smooths over tension requires critical scrutiny. While many TikTok memes function as tools for fostering togetherness, humour can also intensify division, particularly when religious differences intersect with political sentiment or circulate within emotionally charged digital environments. In Indonesia, which often presents itself as tolerant and pluralistic, social and religious tensions persist, and humour may either soften or sharpen ideological boundaries depending on context, framing, and audience reception.

This ambivalence reflects the dual nature of digital spaces. As Lim (2002) demonstrates in her analysis of Laskar Jihad's online mobilisation, digital media can be used to escalate religious tensions rather than mitigate them. Although such movements did not rely on memes or humour, they illustrate how online infrastructures can reinforce sectarian divisions. Similarly, Wijayanto and Sastramidjaja (2021) show how cyber troops strategically weaponise religious and political sentiment to polarise public discourse. These cases underline that humour and playfulness operate within broader media ecologies that are not value-neutral.

As Andrew Beatty (1999) shows in his ethnography of Javanese Muslim communities, religious difference is rarely a fixed binary; instead, it is negotiated through everyday social interactions, shaped by local traditions, doctrinal

interpretations, and perceived threats to religious legitimacy. Applying this insight into the digital realm, we can see how humour in TikTok memes reflects a similar negotiation: tensions between NU and Muhammadiyah are neither fully resolved nor openly contested but instead reimagined in culturally resonant and humorous forms. In contrast to past moments of conflict, such as the 1969 Eid al-Fitr incident, today's digital expressions suggest a shift toward softer, more performative ways of managing religious diversity, informed both by social norms and legal frameworks like SARA (an Indonesian term referring to issues of ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations) and ITE (Electronic Information and Transactions Law), which formally emphasise social harmony and mutual respect, but are also widely debated due to concerns over their impact on freedom of expression and human rights. From a sociological perspective, this shift can be seen as a process of informalization (Elias, 2000), whereby formal authority and confrontation give way to more subtle, humorous, and socially negotiated expressions of difference. On platforms like TikTok, these long-standing differences are now reinterpreted through irony, parody, and playful commentary.

Memes, therefore, negotiate religious identity, suggesting that divergences in worship need not result in schism. TikTok users turn doctrinal differences into comedic material, thereby contributing to a more extensive discussion of Indonesian Islamic identity, which is not a static group identity but one that is constantly produced through everyday life and digital culture.

However, the reception of such humorous content is not solely determined by the intention of the creator. As Keane (2003) suggests through the notion of *semiotic ideology*, the meaning of a sign, such as a meme, is not fixed but shaped by underlying assumptions about how signs relate to intention, truth, and authority. Consequently, a meme intended as lighthearted or unifying can still be perceived as offensive or provocative, depending on the viewer's interpretive framework, religious background, or ideological stance.

These semiotic ideologies are not static; they vary across religious communities, generational cohorts, and communicative settings, and can shift over time. In the context of digital platforms such as TikTok, processes of informalization (Elias, 2000) contribute to this shift by loosening rigid expectations around religious authority and expression, allowing humour, irony, and parody to become more acceptable modes of engaging with religious differences. As a result, what counts as respectful, offensive, or playful is continually renegotiated through everyday digital interaction rather than determined by fixed doctrinal boundaries.

A clear illustration of this dynamic can be seen in the meme text “the team that started their fast with NU and celebrated Eid with Muhammadiyah.” While framed humorously, it also functions as social commentary on perceived

convenience-seeking in religious practice (*mau enak nya sendiri*). Some viewers read it as light satire; others interpreted it as judgmental or divisive.

Choosing to follow NU or Muhammadiyah is not merely a theological decision; it reflects a form of lived religious identity shaped by loyalty to particular methods and communal traditions. As Schielke (2015) and Kloos (2017) note, religious life is negotiated through everyday practices rather than doctrine alone, influenced by social environment, habit, and personal orientation. Decisions about when to begin Ramadan or celebrate Eid thus express how people inhabit their faith in daily life, whether through *ruk'yat*, *hisab*, or the playful debates that appear on TikTok.

Seen in this light, the “Islam KTP” meme operates as a gentle satire of perceived inconsistency, using humour to surface the tension between convenience and religious commitment in everyday practice.



*Jadwal puasa 1445H,
Muhammadiyah, senin, 11 Maret 2024
NU, selasa, 12 Maret 2024
Sedangkan untuk yang Islam KTP, bebas waktunya yang penting ikut
sahur dan buka puasa di rumah... ???*

Translation:
1445H fasting schedule,
Muhammadiyah, Monday, 11 March 2024
NU, Tuesday, 12 March 2024
Meanwhile, for those Islam with ID cards, Free to choose, the important thing is to participate in *sahur* and break the fast at home...???

Figure 4.5. Fasting schedule meme
Source: Tiktok@aretero20

Audience reactions to this meme varied. While some responded with amusement, “Enak ya jadi orang bebas” 😄 (Must be nice to live so freely), others perceived it as judgmental or divisive. Comments such as “Jangan saling hina, kita cuma beda pendapat, bukan beda agama” (Do not insult each other, we just have different opinions, not different religions) or “Belum tentu lo lebih baik dari mereka” (You are not necessarily better than them).

Viewed as a whole, these findings suggest that humour on TikTok should not be understood as inherently unifying. Rather, it is a culturally embedded practice whose effects depend on circulation, interpretation, and platform dynamics. In the case of NU–Muhammadiyah memes, humour often enables a form of peaceful negotiation by translating difference into shared cultural reference

points. Yet this same mechanism can also expose fault lines, reminding us that playful citizenship remains contingent, situational, and open to contestation.

The Role of TikTok in Reconstructing Religious Groupness

In an era when digital platforms mediate much of public life, TikTok has become a crucial site where Islamic identities in Indonesia are not only expressed but actively reshaped. Memetic videos, brief, humorous, and highly shareable, operate as more than entertainment; they participate in redefining group belongings. Yet, this renegotiation no longer unfolds solely within communities themselves. Increasingly, it is filtered through the infrastructure of a big tech platform whose algorithm decides what becomes visible, amplified, or forgotten. The issue is not only how NU and Muhammadiyah define themselves, but how moments of religious groupness are activated, circulated, and made visible through algorithmic mediation.

Traditionally, narratives surrounding NU and Muhammadiyah have been shaped by religious institutions, leaders, and formal education channels, often emphasising their doctrinal distinctions, such as differences in ritual practices, religious authority, and theological interpretation (Burhani, 2013; Fealy, 2003). While these differences do not always imply conflict, they have historically defined the two as distinct streams within Indonesian Islam, with distinct institutional and symbolic boundaries. On TikTok, however, these boundaries become publicly negotiable through memetic formats that invite playful participation rather than formal arguments. In Brubaker's terms, what we often see is not stable "groups" but an activated *sense of groupness*, a situational, affective, and performative belonging that emerges in particular moments, interactions, and media settings (Brubaker, 2004). As will be elaborated further throughout this chapter, this concept helps us understand how religious identity is not merely inherited but negotiated through social and technological contexts.

Digital Reinterpretation of Group Identity

On TikTok, the differences between NU and Muhammadiyah, which were once discussed through rigid theological debates, are now reinterpreted in a more flexible and participatory manner. Rather than being caught in the dichotomy of "Us vs. them," TikTok enables communities to negotiate differences collectively, using humour not just as a reconciliatory tool but also as a medium that reshapes how these groups are perceived in digital spaces.

One example is a memetic video from the TikTok account @miracle.shann, which humorously compares the differences in religious practices between NU and Muhammadiyah. The video highlights distinctions in rituals such as *tahlil*, *qunut*, the number of *rakaah* during *tarawih*, *ziarah* (pilgrimage), *Maulid Nabi* (Prophet Muhammad's birthday celebration), and *tujuh bulanan* (rituals for

pregnant women)⁶³. With 397.4K likes and 12.7K comments, the video illustrates how religious differences are transformed into accessible and reflexive digital content, fostering understanding rather than deepening divisions.

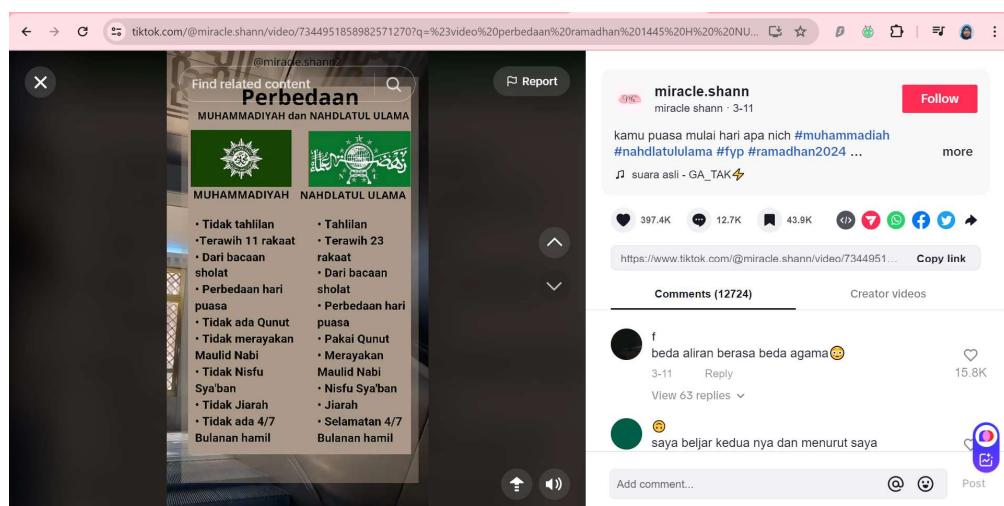


Figure 4.6. Screenshot of a TikTok meme addressing NU–Muhammadiyah differences
Source : TikTok @Miracle.shann

The original video analysed during fieldwork is no longer publicly accessible, and the account has since shifted to fashion-related content, a common occurrence in digital ethnography where posts are frequently deleted, privatised, or repurposed. The analysis presented here is based on archived fieldnotes and screenshots collected during the research period. To illustrate the same memetic pattern, I refer to a comparable video from the account @ Gerald Vincent which received 483.3K likes and 16.3K comments (TikTok.com, 2023).⁶⁴ This video employs a similar humorous contrast between NU and Muhammadiyah ritual practices. The

⁶³ The term seven monthly events for pregnant women refers to a local tradition known as "*tingkepan*," especially among Javanese and Sundanese communities in Indonesia. This ritual is usually performed in the seventh month of pregnancy. The purpose is to pray for the safety of the mother and the baby and ask for blessings and protection for the family. In the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) community, this event often involves the recitation of prayers, *tahlil*, and the *siraman* ritual, where the pregnant woman is symbolically bathed as part of a ceremony filled with spiritual and cultural nuances. This ritual reflects a combination of Islamic teachings and local traditions that emphasise the importance of togetherness and social support for pregnant women.

Meanwhile, among Muhammadiyah, events like this are often considered part of a tradition not required by Islamic teachings. They avoid cultural elements with no basis in *sharia* and prefer simplicity in praying alone or in a community without many additional rituals. In the context of meme videos on TikTok, this difference in practice is often used as a source of humour, such as in the video by @miracle.shann. The video highlights the differences between NU and Muhammadiyah in carrying out religious traditions and invites viewers to reflect on how far culture can or may be integrated with worship.

⁶⁴ https://www.tiktok.com/@geraldvincentt/video/7223621548136041754?_r=1&t=ZG-91z8bAXyVUm

example does not replace the original dataset, but it demonstrates the broader circulation of the meme format across multiple TikTok accounts.

TikTok users from NU and Muhammadiyah circles responded to the meme video about the differences at the start of Ramadan in various ways. Usually, the identity of the user can be assumed based on the context of the comment, the language used, or previous interactions with related content, or the affiliation of the meme creator or account that posted the meme can be seen from the hashtags they included, for example, #NU or #Muhamadiyah, or others. However, this assumption is not always accurate. Therefore, it is essential not to rely too heavily on the explicit identification of religious affiliation when analysing comments on social media unless there are clear clues. To further investigate affiliations, a more comprehensive approach could include analysing recurring themes in the comments, such as references to specific religious practices (e.g., *tahlilan*, *qunut*, *tarawih*) or direct mentions of religious groups or figures associated with NU or Muhammadiyah. Additionally, examining the user's profile, bio, and interaction history with similar content may offer further insight into their religious affiliation. Cross-referencing comments with hashtags or observing the tone, whether playful, defensive, or corrective, provide insight into how viewers position themselves in relation to the meme without requiring precise affiliation to be established.



Figure 4.7. Screenshot of user comments responding to a TikTok meme
Source: [TikTok@Miracle.Shann](#)

This screenshot of the comments highlights how TikTok's memetic videos create a space where people can openly talk about religious differences and similarities. For example, NYZ's comment, "*Keluargaku Muhammadiyah tapi tablilan kok, ziarah juga*" (My family is Muhammadiyah, but we also perform *tablilan* and *ziarah*), illustrates how family and social contexts often override strict organisational divides. This response highlights that, despite theological differences, personal and communal practices remain fluid, reinforcing a more pragmatic rather than doctrinal understanding of religious identity.

The video demonstrates how religious practices can blend within families, transcending strict labels like "Muhammadiyah" or "NU." This interaction reveals that the boundaries between these groups are not always rigid, and people also adapt traditions to meet personal or familial needs. The fact that these ideas are discussed so openly in the comments mirrors how TikTok's algorithm brings diverse perspectives into user's feeds, encouraging encounters with practice, that may differ from their own. While scholars such as Bail et al. (2018) have shown that exposure to opposing views on social media can intensify polarisation, the interactions observed here suggest that, when mediated through humour and everyday religious practice, such exposure can also open space for reflection and negotiation rather than outright confrontation.

TikTok's Algorithm and the Exposure to Cross-Group Interactions

As discussed by Campbell and Tsuria (2021), digital spaces like TikTok also create opportunities for cross-group engagement, fostering conversations that transcend traditional boundaries of religious identity. TikTok's algorithm introduces content based on behaviour rather than pre-existing connections, allowing users to engage with perspectives outside their social networks. This means that even users who primarily follow content from one religious group (e.g., NU) will still be exposed to perspectives from the other group (e.g., Muhammadiyah). This exposure fosters a digital ecosystem (not in the broad, metaphorical sense, but as a dynamic environment shaped by algorithmic curation, user participation, and memetic circulation) where both agreement and contestation occur, creating new opportunities for interaction between members of different religious traditions.

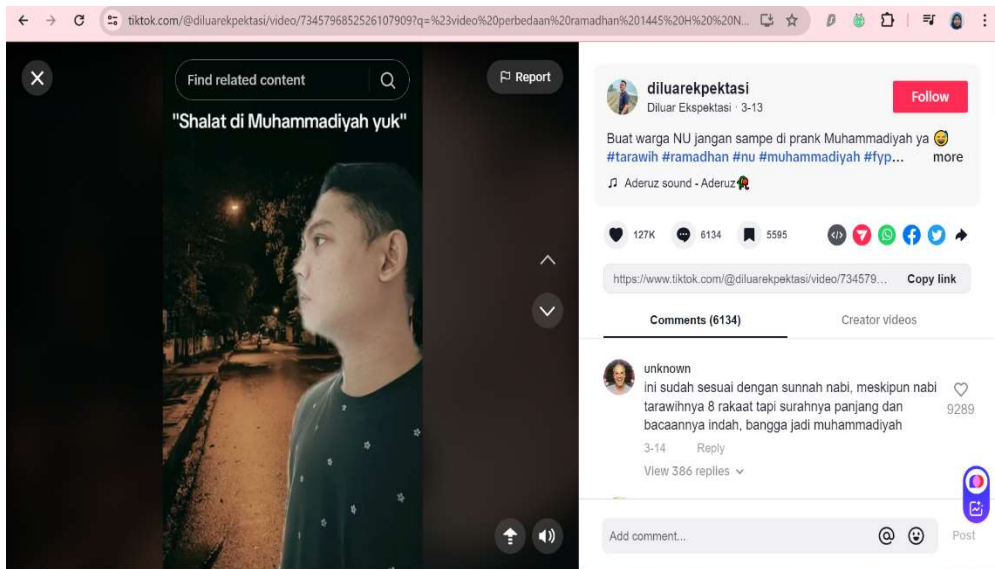


Figure 4.8. Screenshot of the TikTok meme “Sholat di Muhammadiyah Yuk”
Source: TikTok@diluarekpektasi (TikTok.com, 2024c)

The video plays on a well-known difference: NU typically performs 23 rakaat during tarawih, while Muhammadiyah performs 11. This contrast is a familiar cultural reference for Indonesian Muslims and therefore becomes fertile ground for humour on TikTok. Because such content is pushed beyond its immediate audience through TikTok’s FYP, users from both NU and Muhammadiyah, regardless of who they follow, encounter and respond to the same humorous depictions. The humour lands precisely because the audience already recognises the ritual stereotype, allowing the meme to circulate across groups with ease.

This video demonstrates the use of humour to highlight differences and encourage inter-community dialogue. Users responded overwhelmingly, with 127K likes and 6,134 comments. Observations of meme video posts and user comments on the TikTok platform reveal several critical points about various community responses, including emotional responses and acceptance, as well as criticism and discomfort.

The video humorously depicts a Muhammadiyah member inviting NU members to a mosque with fewer *rakaah*, only for them to discover that the surahs are much longer, turning the perceived convenience into an unexpected twist. Although only being 11 *rakaah*, the surah chosen was long and read in full, with the caption, “buat warga NU awas jangan sampe di prank oleh Muhammadiyah” (NU members must be careful not to be pranked by Muhammadiyah).

The humour in the @diluarekpektasi video hinges on a classic incongruity: the expectation of convenience is suddenly overturned. Muhammadiyah’s tarawih is

popularly perceived as “shorter” because it consists of fewer rakaah, and this stereotype is widely recognised among Indonesian Muslims. The joke plays on this cultural script. An NU member accepts an invitation expecting an easier, faster prayer, only to find that the surah recitations are unexpectedly long. The punchline rests in this reversal, the prayer becomes just as long, or even longer, despite having fewer rakaah. This mismatch between expectation and outcome is what makes the situation funny and relatable, especially to viewers familiar with these ritual differences.

The joke “Watch out, do not get pranked by Muhammadiyah” contains elements of satire. “Prank” means “trap,” where they thought the prayer would be shorter because the number of *rakaah* was fewer, but it turned out not to be because of the extended reading. For someone unfamiliar with the practice of tarawih prayer, this humour may be challenging to understand without knowing the context of the differences in how the two groups perform this prayer. This illustrates how slight differences in ritual can be the subject of jokes that strengthen the sense of togetherness and humour between groups without neglecting the spiritual essence of the prayer itself. The caption, *Buat warga NU, awas jangan sampe di prank oleh Muhammadiyah* turns a theological distinction into a lighthearted humorous moment.

Most comments showed acceptance and appreciation for using humour to highlight these differences. For example, many comments contain laughing emojis or praise for the video creator’s creativity, such as:

“akhirnya lewat fyp lagi ni meme 😂” (Finally via fyp again with this meme 😂 @Vinnz Vallencia)_

“jokes sudah mulai muncul kembali” (jokes have started to appear again @deqdit)

“jokes setahun sekali 🤡 🤡” (jokes once a year 🤡 🤡 @maikel).

Although commenters’ specific religious affiliations cannot always be identified, the tone and volume of engagement suggest that the joke resonated across different communities. Rather than reinforcing group boundaries, humour around NU–Muhammadiyah differences becomes a shared cultural script that enables users to participate without explicitly naming their affiliation.

However, some users voiced criticisms and concerns, highlighting that humour might trivialise critical religious practices and create unnecessary debates, for example comments like:

“Kenapa org2 ribut masalah kek gini?” (“Why are people making a fuss about something like this?” @24Kboy)

“Apaan dh komen ny 🗨 beda organisasi kek beda agama” (“What are you commenting about? different organizations, like different religions.” @Alamsyah)

"*Bukannya itu ga tuma'ninah*⁶⁵ ya? *Tuma'ninah* *bukannya rukun sholat*. Beneran nanya 🙏." ("Isn't that *Tuma'ninah*?" *Tuma'ninah* is a pillar of prayer? I'm really asking 🙏)" @Hi_Kidz)

These reactions emphasise the centrality of TikTok's algorithm in enabling cross-group interactions, broadly exposing users to content from different communities regardless of initial group affiliations. While positive engagement can foster inclusive participation in satirical discourse, critical feedback reveals the relational tensions and contradictions involved in negotiating religious identity online. By curating diverse perspectives through the FYP, TikTok's algorithm creates a space where agreement and contestation coexist. In this sense, the algorithm does not merely distribute content; it structures the conditions under which religious difference becomes visible, discussable, and emotionally charged.

Humour as a Vehicle for Religious Negotiation

The comment section under TikTok memes related to NU and Muhammadiyah rituals reveals a diverse spectrum of user responses. While many users engaged with the humour lightheartedly, others offered more reflective or even critical takes on the issues raised. Rather than presenting a unified stance, these conversations unfolded across a continuum, from pragmatic and flexible interpretations of ritual to more rigid or doctrinally concerned perspectives. The following examples serve to illustrate some of the more reflective and inclusive responses, without suggesting that they represent the dominant or only voice in the discussion.

Several users responded in ways that foreground sincerity and pragmatism in religious practice. One example comes from @babang_tamvan, whose profile, typical of many TikTok users with minimal biographical information and a mix of humorous and everyday-content posts, offers no explicit religious affiliation. His comment nevertheless reflects a widely shared sentiment: "Mau tahlilan atau tidaknya, niatnya dan tujuannya ke mana, semua nya sudah ada di hati dan niat yang ikhlas" (Whether to do tahlilan or not, it's about the intention and purpose, it's all in the heart and sincerity). Others, like @Rendi, take a pragmatic approach, noting that "Sama, yang penting tidak membebankan" (The same; what matters is that it does not become a burden). These comments were part of a broader thread responding to humorous TikTok content that compared religious rituals. While these quotes reflect individual viewpoints rather than collective positions,

⁶⁵ *Tuma'ninah* is one of the pillars of prayer in Islam, which refers to calmness and steadfastness in every movement of prayer. *Tuma'ninah* means pausing for a moment in every movement, such as when bowing, prostrating, and rising from bowing so that the body is completely calm and not in a hurry. According to some scholars, *tuma'ninah* is a state in which a person gives enough time for all parts of his body to be calm, at least for a moment before continuing to the next movement. The existence of *tuma'ninah* is essential because it is included in the pillars of prayer, which means that if it is not carried out, the prayer is considered invalid.

they illustrate how sincerity, intention, and flexibility are recurrent themes in the discussion. In line with Markham (2013)'s emphasis on contextual integrity in digital research, these interpretations are framed with sensitivity to the setting in which they were shared.

The tone of many comments suggests a willingness to engage playfully rather than defensively. Users acknowledge differences without escalating them into confrontation, often responding with humour or casual remarks instead of doctrinal argument. This shows how TikTok, primarily through memes, can spark relatively respectful and thoughtful conversations about issues that might otherwise trigger tension. In other online spaces, similar discussions, for example debates on Facebook over *qunut*, *tablilan*, or the “Lebaran kembar” controversy, often become heated or moralising, with accusations of *bid'ah* or insufficient adherence to scripture. Against this backdrop, the light, humorous exchanges on TikTok offer a distinct and more flexible mode of negotiating religious difference.

These contrasting modes of interaction show how humour can function not only as entertainment but also as a social mechanism for managing differences. Shifman (2014) notes that memes gain traction because they draw on widely recognised cultural cues, making them effective tools for reframing sensitive issues. On TikTok, this quality is especially visible: NU–Muhammadiyah differences are not simply repeated but reshaped through irony and exaggeration.

Additionally, many comments demonstrate flexibility in interpreting religious practices. @dena-de's commented: “*Jangan ribet soal cara ibadah, yang penting hati kita bersih. Mo tablil mo enggak ya nggak da masalah*” (Do not be complicated about how to worship, what is important is that our hearts are clean. Whether you do *tablilan* or not, it does not matter.) or comment like @raka_19 “*Tablilan atau tidak, yang penting kita selalu berdoa untuk orang yang sudah meninggal*.” (*Tablilan* or not, what is important is that we always pray for the deceased).

In TikTok context, this quality becomes particularly visible. NU–Muhammadiyah differences are not simply copied into digital form; they are reshaped through irony, exaggeration, and the playful tone that characterises much of the platform.

Memes in this context act less like passive reflections and more like small interventions in how people talk about religious practice. As outlined in the discussion of distributed agency in Chapter 1, this perspective is not new in media studies; scholars such as Bennett (2010); and Latour (2005) have noted how objects and technologies can influence social relations, but TikTok gives this agency a distinct texture. Humour, remix, and repetition allow these videos to redirect conversations, soften disagreement, or turn a sensitive distinction into something easier to discuss. Seen in this way, TikTok memes take part in the ongoing negotiation of religious life in Indonesia. They do not replace doctrine

or formal authority, but they open a lighter, more flexible space where differences can be approached without the weight of confrontation.

While user comments illustrate how TikTok fosters spontaneous public discussions around religious difference, more in-depth interview responses reveal a deeper layer of meaning-making. To better understand how memetic videos are internalised and interpreted, the next section explores how young Muslims from NU and Muhammadiyah communities respond to these memes, not only as viewers but as active participants in defining and defending their religious identities.

Affirming Religious Identity Through Reflexive Memetic Responses

This section draws on interview excerpts with NU- and Muhammadiyah-affiliated youth who were shown selected Ramadan-themed TikTok memes during fieldwork sessions. Their reactions show how and where memetic humour becomes meaningful: in small group discussions during interviews, in their everyday browsing practices, and in the emotional responses triggered when they recognise their own traditions being referenced playfully on screen. These moments reveal how digital humour becomes a site where young Muslims affirm religious belonging, negotiate differences, and articulate pride in their traditions. Rather than seeing memes as trivial or disrespectful, participants often described them as helping them recognize, sometimes with amusement, sometimes with reflection, what matters in their communities. In this way, the material demonstrates Brubaker (2004)'s idea of *groupness* as something activated in specific situations and shows how playful citizenship operates as a lived digital practice rather than an abstract concept.

One example of how humour can reinforce religious identity comes from Syafii, an 18-year-old student at a pesantren in Central Java.⁶⁶ Raised in a village by parents and grandparents embedded in NU tradition, Syafii expressed deep pride in the practices he grew up with, such as tahlil and qunut. He explained:

“As a member of NU, I believe that tahlil and qunut are essential to our religious identity. Although some see them as controversial, we believe they are an integral part of our heritage that must be preserved. This sense of

⁶⁶ After graduating from *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) in one of the rural villages in Central Java, his birth city, his parents sent him to this boarding school to study the *Al Quran*. Ahmad Syafii was raised by his parents, had been members of the NU congregation since his grandmother and great-grandfather. Syafii's parents desired that he become a preacher who had memorised the *Al Quran* and would bestow upon his parents a sparkling crown. According to a hadith about memorising the *Al Quran*, specifically from Buraidah radhiyallahu 'anhu, the Prophet sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam said, "Whoever memorises the Quran, studies it, and puts it into practice, Allah will give crowns to his parents from its bright light like the sun. Syafii continued his education from Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Mts) to Madrasah Aliyah (MA), where he is currently studying.

humour about differences helps us appreciate and celebrate our traditions more”.

Syafii’s opinion shows how humour, when aligned with community values, becomes a medium of pride rather than ridicule, allowing youth to maintain a connection with inherited traditions through a playful digital lens.

A different dynamic appears in the account of Roudhatul Jannah, a 20-year-old from a mixed NU–Muhammadiyah household. The memes she encountered, particularly those comparing tarawih lengths or greeting styles, allowed her to hold both traditions without feeling torn between them. Reflecting on her own practice, she said: “I frequently attend tarawih at Muhammadiyah mosques for variety, and despite the differences, I believe it enriches my religious experience. However, I remain proud of NU’s traditions, which have their spiritual depth”.

For her, TikTok memes became a gentle reminder that differences in ritual or belief need not be divisive. Instead, they created a space where ambivalence and hybridity could be acknowledged with humour, allowing her to navigate plural traditions without the pressure to choose sides.

From the Muhammadiyah side, a similar expression of pride and affirmation can be seen. A 21-year-old student and member of HMI in Surakarta reflected on a meme that referenced tarawih practices.⁶⁷ He explained how these humorous videos not only entertained but also validated his commitment to Muhammadiyah’s understanding of sunnah:

“For me, adhering to the Prophet’s sunnah of eight rakaah is an essential part of my identity as a Muhammadiyah member. These meme videos are entertaining but confirm my belief that our actions are deeply rooted in Islamic tradition”.

A similar sentiment was echoed by a 19-year-old Muhammadiyah medical student:

“The humour in this meme allows us to view differences more positively. Regardless of our differences, I am proud to be part of a community that directly follows the Prophet’s teachings”.

Here, the humour he refers to is the recurring meme format that exaggerates the difference between NU’s 23 rakaat and Muhammadiyah’s 11 as explain before,

⁶⁷ The Islamic Student Association (HMI) is an independent Islamic organization that is still active and developing at universities in Indonesia to this day. This is a youth organization with the tagline *Merenung bagai gunung, bergerak bagai ombak* (Contemplate like a mountain, move like a wave)

and the accompanying jokes about “choosing the shorter one.” These playful contrasts made him feel that his group’s choices were visible and valued.

These responses indicate that humour does not dilute religious commitment but instead offers a mode of expression that reinforces one’s identification with core values. Through light-hearted contrasts, young people express pride in their ritual distinctiveness while affirming the integrity of their religious identity. Even anonymous interactions on TikTok’s comment sections reflect this sense of communal affirmation. One user wrote, “*Ini sudah sesuai dengan sunnah nabi, meskipun nabi tarawihnya 8 rakaah tapi surahnya panjang dan bacaannya indah, bangga jadi Muhammadiyah.*” (This follows the sunnah of the Prophet. Although the Prophet’s tarawih was eight rak’ahs, the surahs were long and beautifully recited. Proud to be Muhammadiyah.)

These examples show that memetic engagement is not merely performative or entertaining, it is emotionally compelling and deeply tied to identity-making processes. Humour becomes a gateway into a more profound articulation of faith, bridging tradition with modern digital expression. Rather than reinforcing division, TikTok memes enable users to celebrate distinctiveness with mutual recognition, where laughter becomes an expression of understanding.

In doing so, these users exemplify what Brubaker (2004) calls an “activated sense of groupness”, a situational and performative engagement with collective identity that is shaped by context, emotion, and participation. Memes, then, become tools for reflexive self-definition, where young Muslims affirm their communal values while actively participating in digital culture. This affirmation is not rooted in exclusion but in the celebration of religious diversity, and in the capacity to laugh with, not at, each other.

Viewed collectively, these interview accounts suggest that the identities negotiated through Ramadan memes are more complex than a simple opposition between NU and Muhammadiyah. For some participants, the memes reaffirm organisational belonging by expressing pride in particular ritual traditions, such as *qunut*, *tahlilan*, or differing approaches to determining the beginning of Ramadan. For others, however, the memes create space for more flexible forms of religious self-understanding. Some participants described combining practices commonly associated with different Islamic traditions without seeing these practices as mutually exclusive. Rather than presenting these combinations as contradictions, participants often treated them as ordinary aspects of everyday religious life.

These findings suggest that the identities emerging through TikTok memes operate at multiple levels simultaneously. Memes may reinforce organisational affiliations, affirm everyday religious practices, and at the same time reveal broader forms of Indonesian Muslim belonging that extend beyond formal institutional boundaries. In this sense, religious identity is not simply reproduced through digital humour; it is continually enacted through everyday interactions,

personal experiences, and the shifting contexts in which memes are created, circulated, and interpreted. This also helps explain why Brubaker's notion of groupness is particularly useful here: rather than reflecting fixed and bounded groups, the memes reveal situational forms of belonging that become more or less salient depending on the topic, platform, and social interaction

Conclusion

This chapter reveals how Ramadan meme videos on TikTok play a significant role in social and religious dynamics in Indonesia through socio-cultural interactions and playful citizenship. Here, humour and creativity become practical tools for navigating doctrinal differences, easing tension, and fostering moments of shared reflection. Rather than functioning only as entertainment, humour allows users to approach sensitive issues lightly, without turning them into confrontation.

User participation, particularly among NU and Muhammadiyah communities, demonstrates how TikTok becomes a space for both enjoyment and quiet critique. Many users engage with digital humour in ways that reaffirm or gently reinterpret existing values, rather than dismantling them. TikTok's role in this process differs from platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, which rely heavily on pre-existing networks that encourage homophily and closed-group interaction as discussed in Chapter 3. TikTok's algorithmic curation pushes content beyond familiar circles, generating accidental encounters between different groups. This chapter builds on that analysis by showing how such encounters often take shape through humour. Even so, further research is needed to understand when and how memes move beyond their initial clusters and whether this circulation consistently contributes to inclusivity.

Playful citizenship, as an approach to social interaction, emerged as a response to shifting modes of participation in contemporary societies, where traditional forms of communication and activism often appeared too rigid or confrontational. In socio-political movements, this approach aims to reduce tensions while conveying criticism in a light-hearted manner through humour, satire, and creativity. Rather than directly engaging in clashes or confrontations, playful citizenship adopts a more fluid approach, one that is readily accepted by various levels of society, including those who may be less interested in more aggressive or formal forms of engagement.

In the Indonesian setting, particularly within the long-standing NU–Muhammadiyah relationship, playful citizenship appears in the use of memes that highlight ritual differences without moralising them. These humorous depictions ease social tension by framing distinctions as familiar, negotiable, and non-threatening. At the same time, it is important to recognise the limits of this dynamic. The ease with which NU and Muhammadiyah interact is linked to their shared acceptance as mainstream Islamic organisations. In contrast, groups such

as the Ahmadiyah, who face significant institutional marginalisation and whose legitimacy is frequently contested in Indonesia, do not occupy the same social position as NU or Muhammadiyah. Because their public visibility is shaped by stigma and securitisation rather than everyday ritual differences, humour does not circulate around them in the same playful and reciprocal way. This example is mentioned only to illustrate the limits of playful citizenship, not as an analytical focus of the chapter.

The chapter's contribution lies in showing how playful citizenship operates not only as a bridge to social harmony but also as a way of understanding how religious diversity is lived and negotiated in everyday digital practices. Rather than assuming harmony as an inherent cultural trait, the analysis traces how humour becomes one of the mechanisms through which people maintain social cohesion amidst difference. This does not replace conflict or doctrinal debate, but it creates a parallel space where diversity can be approached more lightly and creatively than in formal religious discourse. While playful citizenship has largely been applied to social and political participation, this chapter demonstrates how its logic also maps onto religious life, where users navigate ritual differences through similar modes of creativity, lightness, and collective engagement.

Finally, the chapter sets up the transition to a more critical examination of digital humour. While Ramadan memes illustrate the unifying potential of playful citizenship, the next chapter examines a contrasting case: the Borobudur Stupa meme. Here, humour does not merely amuse, it provokes moral anxiety, exposes boundaries of religious sensitivity, and challenges norms of public expression. Moving from comedy that unites to comedy that divides reveals the delicate balance digital platforms must navigate in religiously diverse societies. This shift underscores the broader theme of this dissertation: humour in the digital age is never neutral. It can soothe or agitate, include or exclude, depending on who receives it and under what conditions.