

Laughing at religious radicalism: How memes promote interfaith, multiculturalism and nationalism

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: meme religious radicalism anti-radicalism social media Indonesia</p>	<p>Memes have become an important medium for expressing multiple intentions on the internet. Social media has advanced increasingly, making memes a contestation zone, an active hook for delivering information, and an expression of counterradicalism. Memes are a very effective way to take a jab at radicalism in a laid-back or even humorous manner so the public can refreshingly capture the messages. As a part of the digital way, the counterradical group also benefits from the same medium and feature. This research aims to investigate the data on the field on how the memes spreading on social media fight against radicalism in their ways. Therefore, the antiradicalism movement through memes is conducted to look for the patterns, forms, and meanings, especially on X and Instagram accounts of <i>NU Garis Lucu</i> (NUGL) and <i>Muhammadiyah Garis Lucu</i> (MuGL). Using a qualitative approach with the content analysis method, the memes posted in the two accounts were collected between August and December 2022. We found that NUGL and MuGL are actively plotting the antiradicalism movement by criticizing radicalism and fighting against religious indoctrination. Apart from that, for those two accounts, memes function as a medium to raise awareness on multiculturalism and nurture nationalism.</p>

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Introduction

The digital era has allowed a new development which marks the dissolving of physical barriers and the destruction of reality; the social relation has shifted into digital sociality and created a new reality called the digital society (Selwyn, 2019). Social interaction in the digital society keeps developing by benefiting from new features appearing on the internet. This phenomenon is in an extreme step, called by Baudrillard as the precession of simulacra where reality and representation are buried and blurred in the cyber simulation (Baudrillard, 1995). In this situation, social media acts as a contestation zone and the most active magnet for information delivery and communication (Schwarz, 2019). Social media has become a mouthpiece that accommodates the behavior of the actors on the internet (better known as netizens), including those who stand against religious radicalism (Fadhli, 2020). As a part of the digital war, the counter-radicalism group also benefits from the same medium and features (Kusuma & Azizah, 2018).

However, among so many groups and movements identifying themselves as moderate Islam in Indonesia, the humorous expression has not gained close attention, specifically in the latest social sciences studies in Indonesia. This happens despite memes being very effective in taking a jab at religious radical movements in a laid-back or even humorous manner so the public can refreshingly capture the messages. The National Counter Terrorism Agency (*Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme*—BNPT) even once held training for the youth on creating antiradical memes and content as the State's effort in fighting against all forms of radicalism in Indonesia (Wildansyah, 2017). In the meantime, there has been a lot of discussion about the connection between social media and religious radicalism in Indonesia. The topics

have included recruitment and social media operations (Moir, 2017), how social media nurtures terrorism in Asian countries (Jati, 2021), countering terrorism on social media (Caoduro et al., 2021; Huda, 2019; Oktavianus & Davidson, 2023; Sodik & Sujibto, 2019), and the role of film and social media in countering radicalism (Schmidt, 2021).

Studies on memes have been conducted by scholars (Shifman, 2014a, 2014b; Wiggins & Bowers, 2015). Specifically, research on memes related to the maneuver and movements of radicalism on the internet has been spreading extensively (Burroughs & Feller, 2015; Kusuma & Azizah, 2018; Sparkes-Vian, 2018; Wiggins & Bowers, 2015). Religious internet meme has also ignited scholarly works in different topics such as aesthetic aspect (Haden Church & Feller, 2020), religious authority (Richter, 2021), and meme responses during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Campbell & Sheldon, 2021).

Burroughs and Feller (2015) studied the usage of religious memes to preach to the public. This study revealed the existence of the digital religion which has mobilized the participative culture for the creation of everyday diversity with the contribution of religious memes. Sparkes-Vian cited extremist groups such as Britain First which uses Facebook to share memes attacking the Muslim population with propaganda of misinformation, aggression, and hatred. Sparkes-Vian's analysis of the potential of memes is that they facilitate propaganda while emphasizing the maneuver of counter-propaganda groups that can create the counternarrative as a form of network and discourse battle. With a more comprehensive study, Bradley E. Wiggins (Wiggins, 2019) justifies memes as a discursive force that in practice can become a new medium in contesting ideologies more openly and more dynamically.

Conceptually, the internet meme becomes a strategic discursive power of the digital culture that can be seen as an opportunity for discourse in the context of action and praxis. As a discursive power, memes automatically contain agency within which can be involved in constituting and reconstituting social relations in the digital space (Wiggins, 2019). Realizing the power of memes as a constructing factor for movement bases and cyber social interaction, meme creators and many groups have benefited from them to build certain narratives or to create counternarratives on existing issues. In extreme cases, memes can be a tool of propaganda (Sparkes-Vian, 2018) since they can become the locusts for idea dissemination and action with a sporadic approach to the issues. Memes have become one of the products of the digital world that are favored to bring some news or issues into virality. The contents of memes keep evolving and display various issues such as gender, race, and social classes with new strategies where digital sociality is created (Kanai, 2016). Memes have also expanded to the social behaviors of religious actors in the cyber world so the term ‘religious memes’ is created (Burroughs & Feller, 2015). Religious memes may be substantially different from the normative iterations of memes in popular culture, but they articulate special meanings to religious institutions and religiosity (Burroughs & Feller, 2015).

In Indonesia, research on memes and radicalism is developing (Rohmatulloh, 2022; Kusuma & Azizah, 2018) and has become an important map to see how online media fight against radicalism in Indonesia. One of the accounts gaining scholars’ attention is the NU Funny Brigade (hereafter referred to as NUGL). The dominant topics discussed by them are religious issues with humor (Muslim & Arafah, 2022) and memes (Rohmatulloh, 2022), critics of intolerance, preaching memes, humanitarian issues, and

sociopolitics (Ghozali, 2022). The comparison on the ideological aspect between NUGL and the Muhammadiyah Funny Brigade (hereafter referred to as MuGL) are also discussed (Efendi, 2021). An anthropologist from Emory University in the United States of America, James Hoesterey, mentioned that the digital space in Indonesia presents an interesting reality. Specifically on religious issues, many accounts instead present humorous content to fight against hate speech. NUGL has become an alternative space for netizens who want to consume hilarious yet critical content (Hoesterey, 2021). This has become relevant since our digital space was previously filled with statements that may trigger social tension (Kurniawan, 2022).

Radical content produced by propagandist groups adhering to religious radicalism in Indonesia has also become a part of the religious memes phenomenon which should openly be a public concern (Lui, 2017). However, to Peter Mandaville, radicalism cannot be perceived as a monolithic category since the term radicalism itself cannot be related to one certain group or organization. In terms of ideology and doctrine in the context of Islam, radicalism can be traced back to Wahhabism or Salafism that are oftentimes interchangeable nowadays. Salafists and Salafism try to purify Islam from external cultural influences, so it returns to the model of the life of Muhammad and one generation after him (*tabiin*) (Mandaville, 2014). Meanwhile, since Martin van Bruinessen proposed the term conservative turn (Bruinessen, 2013) in reading the Islamism and Islamic extremism phenomenon in Indonesia, the topic of radicalism has increasingly found its momentum.

This research aims to investigate the facts on memes spreading on social media that are against religious radicalism, specifically through the X and Instagram

accounts of @NUGarisLucu and also @MuhammadiyahGarisLucu. The definition and categories of radicalism used in this research refer to Borum, which is "radicalization into violent extremism" to refer to the array of processes by which people come to adopt beliefs that not only justify violence but compel it, and how they progress—or not—from thinking to action (Borum, 2011). Since September 11, the terms "radicalization," "extremism," "terrorism," "fundamentalism," and "violence" have been used interchangeably in political discourse and the media when referring to religious radicalism (Robert & Kaya, 2023). The terms radicalism, fundamentalism, and extremism are not new in socio-political discourse and are often used interchangeably to refer to religious radicalism (Saal, 2021).

These two accounts were chosen for the following reasons: (1) Both have many followers and actively voice the topic of religious tolerance through social media; (2). Neither account officially represent the biggest social/religious organizations in Indonesia, Nadhlatul Ulama (NU) and the Muhammadiyah (Muhammadiyah), but the positions and criticism delivered with humor by both accounts can be perceived as reflecting NU and Muhammadiyah's positions on the diversity of Indonesia, and (3) As unofficial accounts, the positions taken by NUGL and MuGL on the diversity of Indonesia show their neutrality and independence.

Method

This research uses the content analysis method to find out the memes uploaded on NUGL and MuGL's X and Instagram accounts as a medium of fighting against radicalism in Indonesia. Content analysis entails a systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter, not necessarily from an author's or user's perspective (Krippendorff, 2004). Content analysis is used in this research to unravel antiradical memes uploaded in the two accounts. The data collection process was conducted with the data crawling technique (Claussen & Peukert, 2019) between August and December 2022. After investigating the general contents of both accounts, we started collecting data manually based on the hashtag (on X) and captions (on Instagram). The collected data are content uploaded on the X and Instagram accounts of the two accounts between 2018 and 2021. The search and data collection procedure are conducted based on the hashtag and captions with relevance to the topic or containing antiradicalism. Therefore, the sorting process and technique are as follows:

From the obtained data sample above, researchers have conducted the test of data invalidity by using the following techniques manually: (1) Searching for feedback and comments on the memes, (2) collecting and verifying the uploaded memes, and (3) considering the virality of the uploaded

Table 1. *Data collection process*

Account	Amount of content	Initial chosen data	Analyzed data
@NUGarislucu (Twitter)	54,4k	36	8
@Nugarislucu (Instagram)	2638	7	1
@MuhammadiyahGL (Twitter)	299	7	1
@MuhammadiyahGL (Instagram)	205	10	3

Source: *Researcher's processed data, 2022*

memes. With the three tests of data invalidity, it is expected that the collected data can be stronger and more convincing before analysis and conclusion are made.

Results and Discussion

Preaching with flexibility and comedy: A glimpse on NUGL and MuGL

NUGL first appeared after the Nahdlatul ‘Ulama (NU) Assembly 2015 in Jombang which instated K. H. Ma’ruf Amin (Rais Syuriah) and K. H. Said Aqil Siradj (Chief of Tanfidzyiah), mostly as a response and critique on NUGL helmed by K. H. Idrus Ramli from Jember (Tantowi, 2020). It is perceived as more radical, so the creation of NUGL is a sort of antithesis that calls for society to be more flexible and not as stern in being religious.

Besides being a direct tandem to NUGL, MuGL account appears as a counter narrative and discourse among the awkwardness and rigidity in arguments and discussions in social media. The existing da’wah accounts at that time mostly did not use comedy and satire in their counternarrative, including

in fighting radicalism. NUGL’s account presents discourses and discussions with NU’s values by accentuating freshness, satire, and comedy so their presence can color the discourses in multiple topics commonly uploaded by their accounts. The caricature on their profile picture presents K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) laughing his heart out, emphasizing the account’s positioning in social media, and presenting a humorous, flexible, and fresh take on Islam. The identification of religious humor with Gus Dur’s figure can break the ice when social media is filled with hate speech, claims of truth, and intolerance.

NUGL has two active accounts on social media, one on X with the username @NUGarisLucu and another on Instagram with the same username. NUGL is more active on X and uploads mostly screenshots of their tweets on their Instagram account. The founder or actor behind the account never appears by their own name, but they call themselves Gus of NUGL.

Furthermore, the X and Instagram accounts of MuGL both use the username @MuhammadiyahGL, first registered in August 2019 with the bio “Alon-alon waton

Figure 1. NU Garis Lucu and Muhammadiyah Garis Lucu’s X accounts (taken on October 15, 2022)



guyon” (take it slow as long it’s joking). Based on the observation of their activities and interactions on X, the content on the account generally is a reaction to the Tweets and Mentions from NUGL’s accounts directed to the members of Muhammadiyah. The two admins tag and mention each other on their posts and even campaign the same hashtag together. The interaction between the two accounts is done in good humor without any debates on their opinions, rules, or schools of jurisprudence (*madhab*), as stated by NUGL in one of their Tweets.

Interfaith issues

The existence of NUGL has inspired the creation of other funny-liner accounts, such as: Muhammadiyah Funny Brigade/Muhammadiyah Garis Lucu (@muhammadiyahGL), Indonesia Institute of Islamic Dawah Funny Brigade/LDII Garis Lucu (@LdiiLucu), Hizbut Tahrir Funny Brigade/Hizbut Tahrir Garis Lucu (@HizbutTahrirGL), Wahabi Funny Brigade/Wahabi Garis Lucu (WahabiLucu), Tasawuf Funny Brigade/Tasawuf Garis Lucu (TasawufGL), Hindu Funny Brigade/Hindu Garis Lucu (@HinduGL), Konghucu Funny Brigade/Konghucu Garis Lucu (@KonghucuGL), Catholic Funny Brigade/Katolik Garis Lucu (@KatolikG), Budha Funny Brigade/Budha Garis Lucu (@BuddhisGL), Protestantism Funny Brigade/Kristen Protestan Garis Lucu (@ProtestanGL), and Gontor Funny Brigade/

Gontor Garis Lucu (@GontorGarisLucu) (NU Online, 2019). These parody accounts paint their own colors in the process of the transformation of socioreligious issues with a refreshing and hilarious approach, both as satire or direct criticism. However, the method and medium with comedic messages in the form of satire and parodies give a more flexible space. Those accounts frequently share and repost content related to religious issues in Indonesia, particularly focusing on interfaith matters.

As an informal part of NU’s culture, NUGL has become a mouthpiece that spreads information through its content about the activities of NU members colloquially and informally, sprinkled with jokes from Islamic boarding schools. Gus Dur’s values who has become a role model in being a Muslim in Indonesia are packaged and implemented under certain measures through the content uploaded either on X or Instagram. The Islamic values which uphold kindness, politeness, tolerance, and brotherhood become an important foundation in forming their identity and activities on social media.

Since it is well-managed, NUGL is very up to date in bringing up trending issues in society and on social media. Among the recently discussed issues are the Kanjuruhan tragedy marked as the deadliest Indonesia football crush with 135 supporters killed, Ferdy Sambo’s case of the murder of his police bodyguard, and the latest was Lesti and Billar case of domestic violence and Infidelity. The admin also often uploads

Table 2. Detailed information of the accounts

Account	Usernames	Creation	Followers Amount
NU Garis Lucu	Twitter: @NUgarislucu	March 2015	919,1K per October 2022
	Instagram: @Nugarislucu	July 2015	830K per October 2022
Muhammadiyah Garis Lucu	Twitter: @MuhammadiyahGL	August 2019	4.268 per October 2022
	Instagram: @MuhammadiyahGL	December 2018	37.7K per October 2022

Source: Researchers’ processed data, 2022

Figure 2. Posts about the Kanjuruhan Tragedy (taken on October 22, 2022)



Islamic memes containing preaches in the tone of Nusantara Islam, also known as the Indonesian model of Islam, refers to the distinctive form of Islam that emerged in the Nusantara region. They often use satire within the caption of their posts which are aimed at the general public, including other parody accounts who agree with them, such as MuGL. Moreover, the video clips from some cleric's preaches that they sometimes upload have become the favorites of netizens who love to comment on them and bring them into virality.

Figure 2 tells us that the "Kanjuruhan tragedy, which killed 135 supporters, was regarded as God's will, beyond our hand," said Exco Football Association of Indonesia Sonhadji. With heavy sarcasm, NUGL quoted it by saying, "Finally, it's found out who should be responsible." The picture of figure 3 was posted by the Catholic Community of Funny Brigade (Komunitas Katolik Garis Lucu) describes the symbol of Cross very clearly by tweeting "Be strong religious generation and bond brotherhood with anyone to love Indonesia. The love of your country is from the acts of faith."

Figure 3. The newest content for Santri Day October 22, 2022 (taken on October 22, 2022)



Uploads containing jokes between the parody accounts and the network of funny-liner accounts mentioned above often become joke materials that refresh their timelines. The followers of each account often participate in giving engagement to those contents. Above is one of the examples of the posted refreshing memes that break the ice and bring smiles to their readers. Katolik Garis Lucu's account uploaded a cross in the form of food, tagging NUGL's account in celebration of Santri Day on October 22, 2022. These forms of symbolic communication are very casually and regularly done by NUGL's account, both as satire and appreciation of each other. Therefore, the laid-back and close-knit atmosphere that is full of laughter can build a brotherhood between the civilians without any regard to their religious backgrounds.

Both NUGL and MuGL's social media accounts have their own ways of responding and creating content according to the communal or even personal taste of the admins. Hence, not all aspects and issues can be discussed by them. In some aspects, NUGL's accounts seem to be more active in responding to radicalism and nationalism. However, both are put under the spotlight for this research as an alternative source that gives discursive spaces to the religious

Figure 4. Posted by @Nugarislucu on Twitter (taken on September 20, 2022)



population of Indonesia. As comedy and parody accounts, both show a refreshing, humorous, and not monotone way of communication that is also borderline casual. One of the memes posted by NUGL on July 23, 2022 (Figure 4) gives a theological portrayal where religious issues do not need to be taken too seriously and strictly, since the strictness may lead to negative sentiments. The posted memes indirectly show the face of a multicultural nation. For example, the memes of Figure 4 and 5 below can be seen how interfaith communication on specific issues can be presented refreshingly, without causing harm to each other. Communication with humorous memes can offer a dynamic space for discussion on faith.

Visually and textually, the memes indirectly reflected the multiculturalism of a nation. The visual shows an event expressed by a young man wearing religious attributes. He sat down, reading the Holy Quran while

Figure 5. Posted by @Nugarislucu on Instagram (taken on September 20, 2022)



wearing songkok which is closely related to the Muslim identity. However, on the back of his sweatshirt written a text saying, "Catholic High School", expressing a different faith.

The meme posted by NUGL is an example of interfaith dialogue with a comedic delivery. A response to it asked, "Why isn't there an heir to the Catholics?" which is answered by NUGL in the caption of the meme, "There's this one." This comical picture shows the multifaith value alongside humility, wrapped in a social phenomenon. The comical situation in virtual communication can build a casual and peaceful interfaith interaction. The presence of NUGL as the antithesis of religious hardliners filters the negative sentiments on different faiths piling up on social media which may impact multiculturalism. Through memes, the multicultural mission can also easily be understood by the general public. The entertaining and humorous nature of memes is easily accepted and understood by the public.

Mememes with interfaith topics are also present in some of NUGL posts (referring to Figure 5). The post displays a four-panel comic that portrays a dialogue between some individuals during a fire crisis. On the left side of the first three panels, a lady is shown screaming for help since her house was on fire. Someone portrayed as a religious person approached the lady while asking, “What’s your religion?” In the same panel, a man wearing a songkok and sarong overheard the question and looked shocked. Without missing a beat, he grabbed a bucket of water, and then helped the lady while saying, “Why are you asking about her religion if you want to help her?” In the last panel, some individuals helped the lady, including the religious man who asked the private question.

Discourses about antiradicalism

Mememes have become a language phenomenon that displays verbal communication through the internet and is spread widely in social media. When understood further, mememes become a new trend of communication that uses display pictures or uploaded pictures that contain responses to social realities. On the other hand, mememes become interactive entertainment while expressing virtual communication containing multiple expressions. As an expression of entertainment, mememes are made with various comical and humorous characters. Its casual and very comedic nature becomes an appeal that attracts individuals to send or repost it on their social media accounts. In that aspect, the binding and reflected messages within the mememes are even spread further, as a part of a discursive campaign containing ideologies (Wiggins, 2019).

During its development, mememes are not only a medium of entertainment or jokes. Some mememes seem to portray the

life situation packaged in humor, both responses to religious, political, or economic issues. In that aspect, mememes become a dominant medium for forming messages of the contextual meaning process (Denisova, 2019). The variation of mememes uploaded on the two accounts researched here shows the aspects including the genre of the mememes alongside the flexible articulation of modes of hyper-signification (Shifman, 2014b).

The mememes uploaded by both NUGL and MuGL’s social media accounts provided an interesting picture within the context of discourses against radicalism and intolerance. The mememes from 2015 uploaded by both accounts show their different ways of responding to radicalism and extremism in Indonesia. On one hand, the diverse practices cannot be detached from the identity of each account. However, on the other hand, their presence as parody accounts that do not formally represent their organizations makes their style flexible and adaptable to the situation and internal condition of each admin. There is a sort of cultural practice in the form of language ‘move’ which is adapted by both accounts in producing mememes (Burroughs & Feller, 2015).

Efforts taken by both accounts in antiradicalism are made by continually criticizing radicalism and fighting against indoctrination. Since the contextual awareness of multicultural state-nation is displayed widely as a part of discourses against the forms of radicalism and extremism, the uploaded mememes are also especially directed as a form of criticism and scorn on radicalism. The phenomenon of meme distribution in the development of social media has a very visible impact, specifically shifting the concept of mass communication. The reproduction of humor utilizing technological advances and the internet has become easily spreadable. Even as a virtual form that has high entertainment

value, memes are very easily accepted in society. Memes are popular as entertainment content, social expression, and even as criticism. The substance of memes slowly shifts from a mere reproduction of personal humor to a social expression wrapped in visual scorn. Memes uploaded on both accounts display criticism and education which are important to be discussed further. Various memes uploaded in both accounts and described in the findings of this research have a similar spirit, which comes from unextreme religious awareness that considers the context of a nation-state, that finally ends in the practice of a moderately religious life. The discourse is articulated through multiple expressions, including memes that generally open spaces for rich interpretations of creativity within the digital space. Substantially, memes undergo transformations with the various forms and languages used alongside clear motives and ideologies within. Uploaded memes on the two accounts represent complex elements, not only casual vocabularies or extracts sprinkled with agendas of the media. However, the users explore symbolic and rhetorical arguments in the debate or conversation with the form, size, and style through the maximal mutation process (Denisova, 2019). Such an extensive process is presented as an effort in opening the broad discourse space within criticism that is represented by memes on the internet.

However, if we try to look at the context of the owner of the NUGL's account, we can see it as a criticism of the NU organization itself. NU as the biggest religious organization in Indonesia has the biggest number of followers and often acts arrogant, feeling like the majority can dominate others. This phenomenon often occurs as injustice towards religious minority groups continues. Through satiric memes, NUGL feels like there is something to be corrected with what the majority often does to the minority.

Memes with a self-critical spirit become a new medium that is very strategically used to raise substantial awareness where digital sociality occurs more openly and creatively (Kanai, 2016). The criticism contained in the text visualization above at a glance seems like NUGL is giving their corrections to the religious communities to keep the peace intact and keep social justice for all the people of Indonesia. Moreover, people who have just begun their religious journey have not had a full understanding of the religion but then preach by intimidating the teachings of other religions. This often occurs with Islamic religious leaders who don religious attributes to appear as the most religious.

Another important aspect of the inevitable process behind the creation of radical ideas and actions is indoctrination which stems from the religious education process. Preaching on social media has become a new trend of indoctrination; inviting and guiding mankind in practicing the rules of the rightest religion. This process of preaching is conducted with a thorough preparation to reach the target, both individuals and groups, so they can learn, believe in, and practice the teachings of the understood religion. Using social media as a preaching channel is normal since it is related to the advancements of its time. This advancement is related to very advanced science and technology, so the preaching methods undergo developments that push preaching onto social media platforms, packaging them to be easily and efficiently accessed by society.

The ease of social media in reaching various content has resulted in the appearance of social media accounts with religious preaching missions and multiple interests. However, the development of the social media industry heavily depends on the existence, network, and capital behind the accounts. If it is handled by a good person, then the benefits will also be good

Figure 6. From the Instagram account of @MuhammadiyahGL. The leader of Muhammadiyah warns its adherents about the emergence of instant preachers (taken on October 20, 2022)



and vice versa, if it is handled by a bad person then the impact will also be negative. The phenomenon of social media preaching can be observed in the past few years, where accounts with a huge number of followers can benefit the communication space, preach the ideas of certain religions, dress up as clerics, and cite the Quranic verses as a base to their argument. In the end, “celebrity preachers” who only depend on the number of their social media followers appear here and there.

The problem of indoctrination is very vital in the discourse spaces and religious practice since the understanding process of religious followers is a result of indoctrination. This context is relevant to the pattern and model of the Salafi quietists who benefit the education and indoctrination sector as a quiet way to strengthen their network (Mandaville, 2014). The position and role of the preachers and those who are deemed to have big authority

and contribution to the creation of problems, their understanding and praxis in the religious aspects need to know about and realize the position of such indoctrination. The memes created by MuGL’s Instagram account act as food for thought. This account’s strategy uses screenshots of news about the Chief of Muhammadiyah itself which opens up a good space for discourse to the criticism on indoctrination. The meme uploaded on May 3, 2021, firmly sent a message to the members of Muhammadiyah, specifically to reconsider the preachers who instantly pop up amidst society, both digitally and in real life.

When the stage of indoctrination begins to gain attention and suggestions are followed, labeling others as heretics is very easy to do on social media. Religious fanaticism then becomes a part of someone’s character in public. Self-righteousness appears on some uploads or postings that contain one-sided arguments by claiming and justifying certain religions. The religious motive still becomes a productive tool in reproducing the public’s stupidity by pitting understandings, beliefs, and even religious principles of different religions against each other. These aspects are captured by NUGL and MuGL by creating measured and fluent memes both as image macros or photoshopped images (Denisova, 2019).

Throughout 2018, intolerant actions in the name of religion flooded social media. Even Setara Institute, a survey agency, released a statement showing that the number of intolerant acts increased compared to the previous year. The data is based on big events in Indonesia, specifically the moments of regional elections (Pilkada) and legislative elections (Pileg). Criticism on the condition became a creative field for meme creators and various social media accounts to produce memes more massively. Within the context, there is a sort of persuasion through bitter

humor to crowd the issue and at the same time criticize the momentum (Hakoköngäs et al., 2020).

Despite not being mainstream in the counterradicalism dynamics, the presence of MuGL paints its own color within the internal dynamics of Muhammadiyah itself. Muhammadiyah is often portrayed as a serious, aloof, no-laughter, no-joking-around organization, as shown in the official forums of the organization. This is contrary to the style of most NU clerics who love to throw some jokes in their speeches. However, Abdul Mu'ti, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of Muhammadiyah, is claimed as the father of MUGL since he is seen as an anomaly and stands outside the mainstream. Abdul Mu'ti can entertain Muhammadiyah's forums by throwing in some jokes in his presentation. Those jokes are, however, measured: stay in their focus and contain the essentials, and most importantly, scientific, ethical, and not a hoax (Nurfatoni, 2021).

The function of memes

Within the context of media studies, memes have become closely related to the development of the digital world. Memes can be a weapon in delivering certain messages widely. Internet memes are intrinsically related to the logic and rhythms of networks and social media, which are related to the way society expresses itself and thinks about it (Denisova, 2019). The term 'memes' then became an icon and is identical to the digital world that spreads on multiple platforms to influence the public.

In practice, memes have functions that benefit symbols as a medium of communication (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015). Memes are often delivered with comedic and symbolic words in order to laugh at overly formal things. Even satire and criticism are turned into memes so that their message seems funny and easy to understand

without offending other individuals. Some of NUGL's posts are considered as a part of caricatural memes that contain responses to tension between religions on social media. The delivery is formed as a meme to respond to an event, making it into puns with symbolic terms or memes responding to a Tweet from an account seen as funny can be materials to be uploaded by NUGL and MuGL's accounts both on Twitter and Instagram.

To NUGL and MuGL, memes function as a medium to raise awareness on multiculturalism and to grow nationalism. Awareness is important for a multicultural nation with diverse official religions as it determines our social behavior among the society. As shown in Figure 4, the meme indirectly shows the face of a multicultural nation: a young man wearing religious attributes, reading the Holy Quran, wearing songkok, but also wearing a sweatshirt with the words "Catholic High School" written on the back. The meme marks a religious memetic discourse that is presented as a medium for both sneers and contemplation (Burroughs & Feller, 2015).

The memes communication which portrays the interfaith spirit is highly urgent for a nation like Indonesia. There are not many actors who can manage and place themselves well among identity politics and exclusivity. However, memes developed by the two accounts can accommodate the issue of ethnic, racial, and religious discrimination without harming other groups. In principle, memes can give flexibility in expressing one topic within the aspect of multiculturalism. The contextual spirit as such is used to build a counternarrative against radical groups who lead to political issues under the state system of Indonesia. In parallel to Mandaville (2014), the meme narrative that emphasizes multiculturalism is one of the ways to fight against religious groups, among them Salafi Islamists.

The phenomenon related to religious symbols is always an important topic, both in social media and in formal institutions. The symbolic religious entity is perceived as a part of radical groups that can cause violence in the name of religion. The classification of symbols of certain religions is often related to attributes or signs used to show the faith of certain religions, but the religious symbols' realization, in reality, can go through variations or development following the group or social class. The ability to interpret memes by the issue invoked, especially on religious symbols, shows how the exploration of operative signs is formed, which is the textual roles and devices designed to invite creative actions (Shifman, 2014a).

In the context of statehood, the meme uploaded (refer to Figure 7) by NUGL on religion and nationalism can be an example of how multicultural awareness in Indonesia needs to be voiced. Uploaded on August 19, 2015, right in Indonesian

Figure 7. Uploaded by @Nugarislucu's Twitter account (taken on September 20, 2022)



independence month, the meme showed a family who debated on the importance of the Independence Day ceremony. The meme sarcastically shows its firm stance on the unity of the republic.

The knowledge of nationalism as a form of devotion to the nation and religion is a part of faith in God. However, this stance cannot always be understood rationally. The meme showed weakening nationalism due to particularist ideals on religious values that tend to be exclusive, shallow, and formalistic. Hence, some religious people do acts in the name of religion that do not bring peace and calm, even deviating from universal values coded in the religion. The massive awareness of nationalism is a direct opponent to the Salafi jihadist model that refuses the existence of nationalism with the ummah spirit (Mandaville, 2014).

As one of the strategies used to respond to nationalist and religious issues, NUGL chooses to upload an entertaining meme. Memes with comedic preaching gives an understanding while raising awareness on devotion to the nation. If investigated further, nationalism and religion have the same goals in achieving justice and prosperity in a nation. Nationalism has given birth to the basic ideology of the state, Pancasila, while the nationalist spirit is a formulation by the founding fathers who realize the diversity and plurality of Indonesia.

Conclusion

The discourse of the meme world represented by NUGL and MuGL's accounts has opened a space for internet exploration, both for thematic and technical aspects. Technically, the pattern of both accounts' movement depends on the availability of materials. Meanwhile, thematically, both accounts have a deep understanding of Indonesianness that places Indonesia as a homeland that needs to be taken care of

peacefully with a very diverse background, both in ethnic groups, religions, and races. Therefore, the two accounts show the same directions in facing radicals, with different details of approach and expressions.

After conducting intensive deepening and analysis of the data collected with certain measures on online media, this research found that some of its findings can be grouped into three. *Firstly*, discursively, the memes uploaded on both accounts reflect an ideological effort to fight against radicalism by conducting campaigns based on multicultural awareness in Indonesia, and by keeping criticism on forms of indoctrination and violence. *Secondly*, both accounts are patterned technically depending on each of their contexts. NUGL shows a more fluid stance and a culture that loves to joke around by often tagging various similar accounts when uploading a meme. Meanwhile, MuGL limits itself not to delve too deeply in the cultural practice of excessive humor. The last aspect is a portrayal of the organization's practice that enriches its pattern and way of facing radicalism. *Thirdly*, NUGL's account is very active and attractive in using memes as a medium for both criticism and self-criticism, while MuGL's account is relatively not too active. The last aspect is visible from the number of uploads, followers, and discussions sparked from each of their uploaded memes.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the materials and data sources for this study are limited. It is not possible to extrapolate the analysis of the gathered data to other situations because it was done on a specific and contextual basis. Still, this ought to provide a chance for more investigation. Furthermore, a comparison of various social media accounts from various Islamic groups that focus on combating religious radicalism will be beneficial for future research. More social media accounts, application-based

data gathering, and technologically enabled data analysis are suggested methods for doing research that represents social media data analysis in Indonesia.

Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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