

## Digital Humor as a Counter-Narrative to Radical Discourse: The Representation of Moderate Islam on the NU Garis Lucu Account

### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the forms and strategies of digital humor, the ways humor delegitimizes radical discourse, and the processes through which the NU Garis Lucu account (@NUGarisLucu) constructs and negotiates representations of moderate Islam on X. This research is important because digital spaces continue to facilitate the circulation of exclusive and provocative religious narratives that promote singular claims to truth. The study employed a qualitative approach and qualitative content analysis to examine 103 items, including text-based posts, memes or images, short videos, replies, and quote posts published between September 2025 and February 2026. The researchers collected the data through nonparticipant observation and online documentation. They analyzed the account's content and the accompanying audience responses by applying Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation, particularly the processes of encoding, decoding, and meaning negotiation. The findings show that the account uses satire, irony, popular language, symbols of digital culture, and interactive features to delegitimize fanaticism, intolerance, judgmental attitudes, and singular claims to truth without attacking personal or group identities. At the same time, the account normalizes tolerance, openness, dialogue, humility, balance, and communication ethics as everyday religious practices. Audience responses reflect dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings, which demonstrate that users do not produce the meaning of moderate Islam through a one-way process. This study conceptualizes humor as representational de-escalation that reduces communicative tension and weakens the symbolic legitimacy of extremist discourse, although it does not directly demonstrate changes in audience behavior. The study contributes to the broader application of Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation by showing that meaning production on social media operates through linguistic, multimodal, affective, interactive, and circulatory processes.

**Keywords:** Counter-narrative; digital humor; moderate Islamic representation; NU Garis Lucu; representational de-escalation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has changed social media from a simple channel for exchanging information into a public sphere where users produce, exchange, and contest religious identities, authority, and meanings. This transformation has occurred extensively in Indonesia alongside the growing use of the internet and social media. A survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association reported that Indonesia had 221.56 million internet users in 2024, with an internet penetration rate of 79.5%. By the end of 2025, the number of internet users was estimated to have increased to approximately 230 million. During the same period, the number of social media user identities reached 180 million, or 62.9% of Indonesia's population. Within this digital ecosystem, X had an estimated advertising reach of approximately 22.9 million users in Indonesia. These figures show that social media has become an important arena for shaping public knowledge, identities, and religious orientations rather than merely complementing religious activities in physical spaces (APJII, 2024; Kemp, 2025).

The vast scope of this digital public sphere creates opportunities for users to disseminate religious knowledge more widely, rapidly, and participatively. However, this openness also enables the growth of exclusive, intolerant, provocative, and extremist religious narratives (Saat & Burhani, 2020). Social media platforms prioritize speed, engagement, and recirculation, allowing users to reproduce narratives through posts, replies, quote posts, and interpersonal networks without relying on formal religious authorities. Consequently, digital spaces have become arenas of influence in which moderate religious narratives compete with religious discourses that promote singular claims to truth.

The problem of digital radicalism appears in findings from the National Counterterrorism Agency, which identified 6,402 items containing radicalism- and terrorism-related material between January 1 and August 26, 2025. These findings included 4,863 items of propaganda, 817 items related to the execution of attacks, 108 items involving recruitment, and several other items associated with financing, training, and planning. Previously, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology had also handled 5,731 items containing extremism, radicalism, and terrorism between July 2023 and March 2024. These data show that digital radicalism does not exist only as an abstract ideology. Actors also produce it through communication strategies that target social media users' attention, emotions, identities, and engagement (Antara News, 2025).

The spread of radicalism in digital spaces does not relate solely to the presence of extremist content. It also relates to the ways digital actors represent religion. Radical narratives often represent religion through binary oppositions, such as right and wrong, believer and infidel, pure and deviant, or the in-group and the out-group (Schmidt, 2021). Such representations simplify the complexity of religious life while reinforcing prejudice, exclusivism, and identity polarization. In this context, researchers cannot understand social media as a neutral medium. Virality mechanisms, engagement-based algorithms, and interactions among users can expand the reach of provocative, emotional, and conflict-oriented narratives. At the same time, the characteristics of social media also provide opportunities to produce more inclusive, dialogical, and contextual counter-narratives.

Efforts to address digital radicalism therefore cannot rely solely on content blocking and account removal. Repressive measures remain necessary to restrict the circulation of propaganda, recruitment messages, and calls for violence. However, stakeholders must complement these measures with alternative forms of meaning that can challenge singular claims to truth, identity polarization, and hostile language (Setia & Syarif, 2022). Digital spaces require forms of religious communication that not only convey normative teachings but also respond to the language, symbols, emotions, and communicative cultures of social media users. Therefore, the main problem of digital radicalism concerns not only the types of content that circulate online but also the ways actors represent religion, the symbols they use, the emotions they evoke, and the positions audiences occupy in meaning-making processes.

The NU Garis Lucu account, or @NUGarisLucu, represents a relevant phenomenon in this context. Unlike models of digital preaching that rely on formal, doctrinal, and normative language, NU Garis Lucu communicates religious messages through humor, satire, irony, wordplay, memes, short videos, replies, and quote posts (Azka, 2021; Maria, 2020). This communication style situates religious messages within the concise, popular, responsive, and participatory communicative culture of social media users. Although the account adopts a humorous approach, it continues to communicate values of tolerance, openness to difference, ethical communication, and criticism of extreme religious attitudes.

The presence of NU Garis Lucu shows that humor does not merely function as entertainment or as a supplementary element of religious preaching. Humor can also function as a symbolic practice that shapes how people understand Islam (Iqbal, 2020). Through humor, the account can communicate teachings about tolerance and moderation without using patronizing or confrontational language. Satire can portray fanaticism, judgmental attitudes, and singular claims to truth as contradictory, excessive, or open to criticism. Through this process, humor can produce a representation of Islam as a welcoming, moderate, inclusive, and dialogical religion. The research underlying this article documented 103 posts, including original posts, quote posts, and replies, published between September 2025 and February 2026 as units of analysis for examining this representational process.

Research on religion and digital media shows that technological development has transformed patterns of religious preaching, religious expression, and Islamic authority. Arifianto (2020) found that social media expands the marketplace of religious ideas while allowing conservative actors to challenge the authority of mainstream Islamic organizations. Kholili (2024), Wahid (2024), and Askar (2025) also emphasized that digital media have become new spaces for religious preaching, identity formation, religious education, and the negotiation of religious authority. However, these studies have generally treated social media as a channel for preaching and an arena for contesting authority. They have not specifically explained how humor, symbols, and popular language produce religious meanings.

A second research trend examines the relationship among social media, radicalization, and counter-narratives. Amit et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of digital technology in preventing extremism, while Poole et al. (2021) showed that counter-narratives can disrupt the spread of anti-Islam discourse.

Wolfowicz et al. (2022) and Bélanger et al. (2023) subsequently demonstrated that counter-narratives have limited and inconsistent effects on changes in radical attitudes. Studies within this trend generally apply security-based and psychological approaches and focus on behavioral measurement. Consequently, researchers have paid limited attention to cultural processes such as symbolic delegitimation, the reduction of communicative tension, and the normalization of moderate values.

A third research trend specifically examines religious humor and the NU Garis Lucu account. Hidayatullah (2019) described the account as a practice of inclusive Islamic preaching, while Syarifudin (2020) viewed humor as a means of promoting the values of peace. Hoesterey (2021) demonstrated that satire can reduce tension, whereas Ernayati (2021) and Binawan (2024) highlighted the role of humor in communicating tolerance and softening religious symbols and authority. These studies demonstrate that humor plays an important role in inclusive and nonconfrontational religious communication. However, researchers still tend to understand humor as a communication style rather than as a representational practice that produces and negotiates meaning.

Based on these three research trends, previous studies have not systematically explained the relationship among digital humor, popular cultural codes, audience interaction, and the construction of counter-narratives to radicalism on the NU Garis Lucu account. This study addresses that gap by applying Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation to analyze how language, satire, symbols, and the interactive features of X construct representations of moderate Islam. This study does not claim that humor directly reduces radicalism among audiences. Instead, it argues that humor can operate as a symbolic mechanism that weakens the legitimacy of extremist discourse, normalizes moderate values, and opens a more dialogical space for negotiating meaning.

Based on this research gap, this study aims to analyze the forms and presentation strategies of digital humor on the NU Garis Lucu account on X, identify how the account uses humor to delegitimize radical discourse, and explain how interactions between the account and its audience construct and negotiate representations of moderate Islam.

This study argues that humor on the NU Garis Lucu account does not merely serve as a decorative element in digital preaching. Instead, it operates as a mechanism of representational de-escalation through three processes: the symbolic delegitimation of fanaticism and singular claims to truth, the normalization of tolerance through popular language, and the creation of spaces for meaning negotiation through the interactive features of X. Within Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation, these processes show that social media users produce meaning not only through language and symbols but also through emotional atmospheres, multimodal forms, and audience participation. Therefore, this study extends the application of representation theory by demonstrating that digital counter-radicalism can initially operate as a struggle over meaning. It does so by weakening the legitimacy of extremism, strengthening representations of moderate Islam, and circulating more dialogical discourse before researchers can associate these processes with changes in audience attitudes or behavior (Hall, 1997).

## METHOD

The unit of analysis in this study consisted of digital communication artifacts published by the NU Garis Lucu account (@NUGarisLucu) on X between September 2025 and February 2026. The primary dataset comprised 103 items, including text-based posts, quote posts, replies, memes or images, and short videos. The researchers treated each item as a cultural text whose meaning emerged through language, symbols, media formats, socio-religious contexts, and audience interactions. They selected the content based on its relevance to religious messages, humor or satire, religious moderation, intolerance, and counter-narratives to radical discourse.

This study employed a qualitative approach and qualitative content analysis. The researchers selected this method because the study aimed to identify, categorize, and interpret representational patterns in the content published by NU Garis Lucu. These patterns included forms of digital humor, strategies for delegitimizing radical discourse, representations of moderate Islamic values, and audience responses. The analysis did not seek to measure the statistical effects of the content or demonstrate changes in audience behavior. Instead, it examined how users produced, circulated, and negotiated religious meanings through language, visuals, popular cultural symbols, replies, and quote posts.

The study used both primary and secondary data. The researchers obtained the primary data from content published by @NUGarisLucu and the accompanying public interactions, including post texts, memes, images, short videos, replies, and quote posts. They analyzed audience replies and quote posts when these responses directly related to the selected content and demonstrated acceptance, negotiation, or rejection of its messages. The researchers obtained the secondary data from books, journal articles, e-books, research reports, and other scholarly sources that addressed digital communication, social media-based Islamic preaching, religious humor, religious moderation, digital radicalism, and Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation. They used these secondary sources to strengthen the conceptual framework and explain the sociocultural context of the findings.

The researchers collected the data through nonparticipant observation and online documentation. They observed the account's activities without posting comments, sending replies, or participating in any other form of interaction. They documented the data by recording post texts, capturing screenshots, archiving images and memes, and noting publication dates, content formats, issue contexts, humorous elements, religious messages, and audience responses. The inclusion criteria covered content that: (1) contained religious messages or symbols; (2) used humor, satire, irony, or wordplay; (3) represented the values of religious moderation; or (4) responded to intolerance, fanaticism, judgmental attitudes, and radical discourse in digital spaces. The researchers excluded content that did not relate to the focus of the study.

The researchers analyzed the data through data selection and reduction, initial coding, category development, theme construction, contextual interpretation, and conclusion drawing. They grouped the data according to content formats, humor strategies, symbols and cultural codes, themes of religious messages, and patterns of audience responses. They then reviewed the coding results to ensure consistency among the data, categories, and themes. Next, they analyzed the data by

applying the concepts of meaning production, encoding, and decoding from Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation (Hall, 1997). They examined the encoding process through the account's choices of language, visuals, irony, humor, and symbols in framing moderate Islam. They traced the decoding process through replies and quote posts that reflected dominant, negotiated, and oppositional reading positions. This analysis explained how users produced, circulated, and negotiated representations of a moderate, inclusive, and dialogical Islam as a counter-narrative to radical discourse on X.

## RESULT

### 1. Profile and Characteristics of the NU Garis Lucu Account on X

NU Garis Lucu (@NUGarisLucu) is a religious community account that communicates Islamic messages through humor, satire, memes, and popular language on X. The account is publicly accessible, which allows users to view, share, quote, and respond to its content openly. This characteristic position NU Garis Lucu not only as a message producer but also as part of a participatory communication space that facilitates dialogue and the exchange of meanings among users (Nasrullah, 2015).

The observations showed that NU Garis Lucu does not operate as an official account within the institutional structure of Nahdlatul Ulama. Instead, the account represents a cultural initiative that maintains close ties to the traditions, identity, and Islamic values of Nahdlatul Ulama. This position gives the account administrators greater flexibility to communicate religious messages in a more fluid format than formal institutional communication allows. The account also reflects a shift in Islamic preaching from a formal and institutional model toward digital communication that is adaptive, popular, and closely connected to online culture (Muttaqin, 2021).

The account expresses its communicative identity through the slogan in its biography: "Speak the Truth, Even If It Is Funny." This slogan indicates that the account uses humor as a medium for communicating religious perspectives and social criticism. The account does not convey truth through formal and normative sermons. Instead, it uses satire, irony, wordplay, and commentary on everyday issues. This strategy represents religion as part of an open and communicative social life that does not always require rigid language. The use of popular language also brings religious messages closer to the experiences of digital audiences (Risty & Mustikawati, 2025).



**Figure 1. Profile Page of the NU Garis Lucu Account on X**

Source: Profile of the @NUGarisLucu account on X, accessed January 2026.

The account's activities during the observation period showed a relatively consistent pattern of content production and a high level of responsiveness to current issues. The account not only posted messages regularly but also responded to religious controversies, intolerance, fanaticism, and social issues that developed in digital spaces. It communicated these responses through posts, replies, and quote posts in a humorous style. This pattern shows that NU Garis Lucu operates as a digital actor that follows the dynamics of public conversation rather than merely as an entertainment account that produces occasional content. Its consistency and responsiveness help the account maintain visibility and expand the circulation of its messages (Taufiq & Alkholid, 2022).

The account's interactions with its audience also demonstrate a dialogical and nonconfrontational communication pattern. NU Garis Lucu frequently responds to comments, criticism, and differences of opinion through jokes, subtle satire, and wordplay. This strategy reduces the distance between the communicator and the audience while creating a more familiar atmosphere for discussion. Through replies and quote posts, other users can accept, reinterpret, negotiate, or reject the messages that the account produces. Therefore, the account administrators do not construct religious meanings independently; these meanings also develop through the accompanying digital interactions (Nasrullah, 2015).

Thematically, NU Garis Lucu consistently addresses tolerance, respect for differences, criticism of fanaticism, rejection of intolerance, and the promotion of moderate Islam. In this context, humor does not serve as the final objective. Instead, it functions as a strategy for communicating religious messages without creating a patronizing impression. These characteristics position NU Garis Lucu as a form of digital Islamic preaching that integrates religious identity, popular culture, and audience participation. The account also serves as an arena of discourse production that represents Islam as welcoming, inclusive, dialogical, and relevant to life in digital society.

## 2. Forms and Presentation Strategies of Digital Humor on the NU Garis Lucu Account

The analysis of 103 posts showed that NU Garis Lucu communicated religious messages through four main forms: textual content, visual content, audiovisual content, and interactive content. Textual content included short posts and brief narratives, while visual content consisted of memes, images, and text-based illustrations. The account presented audiovisual content through short videos that combined moving images, text, and audio. It produced interactive content through replies and quote posts in response to comments, posts by other users, and issues that developed on X. Text-based posts constituted the most dominant form because they allowed the account to communicate reflections, humor, and religious criticism quickly and directly. However, NU Garis Lucu did not rely on a single format. The account adjusted each content format to the characteristics of the message. It used text to deliver concise criticism, memes and images to strengthen visual humor, videos to create an emotional atmosphere, and replies and quote posts to introduce religious messages into public conversations. This diversity shows that the account selected content formats adaptively according to the needs of each message and the audience's patterns of media consumption on X.

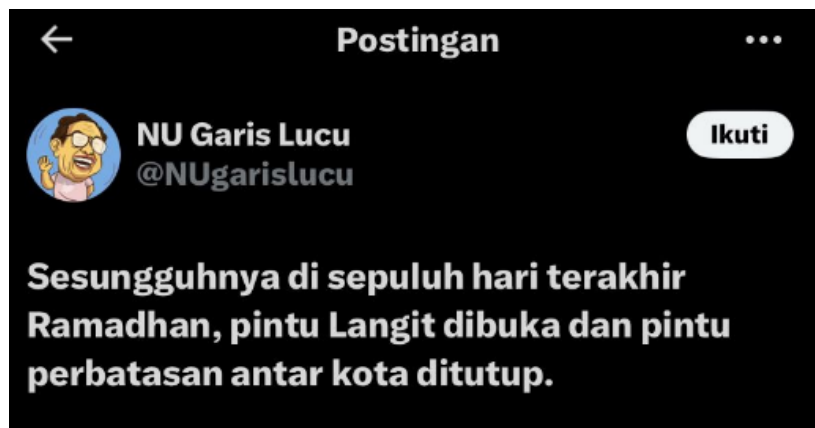
**Table 1. Distribution of Content Formats on the NU Garis Lucu Account**

| No.   | Content format   | Frequency | Percentage | Main characteristics                                                                                   |
|-------|------------------|-----------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Text-based posts | 40        | 38.83%     | Directly communicate brief reflections, satire, irony, and wordplay                                    |
| 2     | Quote posts      | 22        | 21.36%     | Respond to, comment on, and reframe issues or posts published by other users                           |
| 3     | Replies          | 14        | 13.59%     | Build interaction, provide clarification, develop reciprocal humor, and facilitate meaning negotiation |
| 4     | Memes/images     | 21        | 20.39%     | Combine visual humor, short texts, religious symbols, and popular culture                              |
| 5     | Short videos     | 6         | 5.83%      | Communicate messages through moving images, expressions, audio, and audiovisual narratives             |
| Total |                  | 103       | 100.00%    |                                                                                                        |

Source: Data obtained from posts published by the @NUGarisLucu account on X between September 2025 and February 2026.

NU Garis Lucu's linguistic strategies included satire, irony, wordplay, puns, insinuation, paradox, and conversational language. The account used satire to criticize rigid religious attitudes, fanaticism, and judgmental tendencies without

directly identifying its targets. Irony and paradox brought two conflicting situations together, while wordplay and puns combined religious terms with technological expressions, popular culture, or everyday experiences. The account also used informal forms of address, slang, and short sentences to create a sense of closeness with its audience. These choices made religious criticism feel lighter and less confrontational while preserving its reflective substance. Therefore, humorous language did not merely embellish the message. It functioned as a strategy that reduced communicative distance, minimized a patronizing tone, and encouraged audiences to reinterpret religious behaviors that digital users often regard as normal.



**Figure 2. Contextual Satire in a Post Published by NU Garis Lucu**

Source: Post published by the @NUGarisLucu account on X, accessed September 7, 2025.

The post in Figure 2 uses contextual satire by juxtaposing a religious expression about the opening of the gates of heaven during the final days of Ramadan with an administrative reality involving the closure of intercity borders. The post does not criticize the teachings of Ramadan. Instead, it criticizes a social situation that restricts people's mobility during a religious occasion. The account constructs humor through irony and syntactic parallelism between two types of "gates" that carry different meanings. The opening word "indeed" creates an expectation of a serious religious message, while the final clause reverses that expectation by referring to a public policy. This pattern produces light but reflective criticism and represents religious messaging as discourse that responds to social realities.

NU Garis Lucu also uses symbols and popular culture as communicative codes that reduce the distance between religious messages and audience experiences. The account uses memes, public figures, technological terms, digital trends, online language, and current events as shared references that users widely recognize on X. These codes prevent the messages from appearing unfamiliar or excessively abstract. Instead, they position religious messages within the everyday conversations of social media users. In several posts, the account combines religious terms with technological language or popular culture to create humor and help audiences identify the central message. This strategy shows that popular culture does not merely function as visual decoration. It serves as a representational device

that translates religious values into digital language. However, its effectiveness depends on the shared knowledge between the account and its audience. Unfamiliar symbols may reduce the audience's ability to understand the message. Therefore, the use of popular culture strengthens the contextual character of NU Garis Lucu's content and demonstrates that digital religious communication strongly depends on the ability to interpret cultural codes that circulate among users.

NU Garis Lucu generally presents its messages through three stages: a humorous opening, the insertion of criticism, and the affirmation of moderation values. The account often begins a post with a light statement, a pun, or a situation that creates a particular expectation. After attracting the audience's attention, the account introduces criticism of rigid, fanatical, reactive, or judgmental religious behavior. The final section then directs the audience toward a more reflective meaning, such as the importance of tolerance, self-control, openness, and respect for differences. This pattern shows that humor does not merely serve as an additional element that embellishes a message. Instead, it provides the primary structure that organizes how audiences receive the content. Humor attracts attention, criticism disrupts problematic perspectives, and the affirmation of moderation values directs the intended meaning. Therefore, NU Garis Lucu presents its content through reversed expectations and softened criticism, which allows religious messages to remain accessible without losing their substantive sharpness.

Overall, NU Garis Lucu communicates religious messages through concise, multimodal, popular, and interactive formats. Text-based posts, quote posts, replies, memes, images, and short videos do not merely provide technical variation. These formats also determine how the account constructs and circulates messages about moderate Islam on X. Concise formats accelerate message reception, multimodal elements strengthen appeal and depth of meaning, popular culture creates familiarity with the audience, and interactive features open spaces for response and negotiation. These findings show that presentation formats constitute an important part of NU Garis Lucu's communication strategy because the account's choices of medium, language, visuals, and interaction patterns directly shape how it encodes tolerance, openness, and criticism of extreme attitudes within digital communication culture. Therefore, the effectiveness of the messages depends not only on their religious content but also on the account's ability to adapt representations of moderate Islam to the platform's logic of attention, participation, and message circulation.

### ***3. Delegitimizing Radical Discourse through Humor and Satire***

The analysis showed that NU Garis Lucu primarily directed its criticism toward exclusive patterns of religiosity that could reinforce radicalism in digital spaces. The targets of this criticism included singular claims to truth, group fanaticism, judgmental attitudes, rejection of difference, hate speech, and the use of religion to justify social polarization. The account did not directly attack individual or group identities. Instead, it highlighted ways of thinking and behaving that closed opportunities for dialogue, demeaned others, and treated difference as a threat. Across various posts, the account communicated this criticism through satire, irony, puns, memes, and subtle insinuation that portrayed extreme attitudes as excessive, contradictory, or inconsistent with religious ethics. This pattern shows that NU

Garis Lucu constructed its counter-narrative by shifting the focus from identity-based conflict to the evaluation of problematic socio-religious behavior.

**Table 2. Counter-Narrative Themes in NU Garis Lucu Content**

| No. | Criticized theme                            | Dominant form of humor           | Counter-message                                         | Number of items |
|-----|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1   | Singular claims to truth                    | Satire and paradox               | Humility and openness in religious life                 | 19              |
| 2   | Group fanaticism                            | Irony and reversal of meaning    | Dialogue, proportionality, and respect across groups    | 16              |
| 3   | Intolerance and rejection of difference     | Puns, memes, and visual humor    | Tolerance and respect for diversity                     | 21              |
| 4   | Judgmental attitudes and religious labeling | Insinuation and reflective humor | Ethical communication and restraint from blaming others | 14              |
|     | Total counter-narrative content             |                                  |                                                         | 70              |

Source: Estimates based on coding trends in the primary data from posts published by the @NUGarisLucu account on X between September 2025 and February 2026.

As Table 2 shows, singular claims to truth constituted one of the main targets of NU Garis Lucu's counter-narrative. The account delegitimized absolute claims by portraying fanaticism, self-righteousness, and judgmental tendencies as excessive, contradictory, and inconsistent with religious ethics. Satire operated through exaggeration, irony, and reversals of meaning. Through these strategies, the account did not confront the symbolic authority of extremist discourse through direct attacks. Instead, it weakened that authority through humor. When the account placed claims that initially appeared serious within absurd or hyperbolic contexts, audiences could recognize their logical inconsistencies without feeling patronized. This strategy allowed humor to function as symbolic criticism that shifted extremist discourse from an apparently authoritative position into an object that audiences could question, ridicule, and reevaluate.



**Figure 3. Satire on Singular Claims to Truth in a Post Published by NU Garis Lucu**

Source: Post published by the @NUGarisLucu account on X, accessed February 8, 2026.

The post in Figure 3 represents criticism of singular claims to truth through visual satire that exaggerates self-righteous attitudes until they appear irrational. The post does not target the identity of any particular group. Instead, it criticizes religious behavior that closes opportunities for dialogue, demeans other perspectives, and treats personal authority as the sole measure of truth. The account constructs humor through exaggeration, irony, and reversals of meaning that strip such attitudes of their elevated or authoritative appearance. The visual signs and accompanying narrative work together to reveal the contradiction between claims of piety and behavior that fails to reflect humility. The post constructs a counter-message that mature religiosity should demonstrate openness, proportionality, and a willingness to respect differences.

NU Garis Lucu directed its criticism of intolerance and judgmental attitudes toward the practice of labeling, blaming, and declaring other groups deviant solely because of differences in religious practice, school of thought, or interpretation. The account did not directly attack personal identities or group affiliations. Instead, it highlighted behavioral patterns that used difference as a basis for demeaning others. Through insinuation, irony, and reflective humor, the account portrayed judgmental behavior as reckless, disproportionate, and contrary to the ethics of religious communication. This strategy remained important because it shifted the focus of criticism from the identity of the actor to the action itself and its social consequences. In this way, NU Garis Lucu encouraged audiences to reevaluate the culture of mutual blame in digital spaces while affirming that respect for difference constitutes an important aspect of religious maturity.

Humor functioned as a nonconfrontational strategy because it allowed the account to criticize extremist discourse without intensifying tension. NU Garis Lucu did not respond to fanatical claims with equally harsh language. Instead, it transformed direct confrontation into insinuation, irony, and reversals of meaning. This pattern created emotional distance between the audience and the object of

criticism, which allowed users to question extreme attitudes without immediately triggering excessive defensive responses. Humor also reduced the impression of a sermon because the corrective message appeared through an experience of amusement that aligned with online culture. Therefore, the criticism retained its capacity to provoke reflection while appearing in a safer, more dialogical, and less confrontational form. This strategy shows that actors do not always need to construct counter-narratives through direct rebuttal. They can also weaken the symbolic appeal of extremist discourse by deliberately presenting it as humorous, excessive, and unreasonable.

Analytically, the counter-radicalism constructed by NU Garis Lucu operated primarily at the representational level. Humor did not directly demonstrate that audiences changed their attitudes or reduced their radical orientations. However, it disrupted the symbolic authority of extremist discourse. Through satire, irony, and reversals of meaning, the account portrayed fanaticism, intolerance, and singular claims to truth as excessive, contradictory, and inconsistent with religious ethics. This process weakened the legitimacy of extremist discourse because it no longer appeared as absolute truth. Instead, it appeared as a construction that audiences could question and criticize. Therefore, the strength of NU Garis Lucu's humor did not lie in its ability to demonstrate behavioral change among audiences. Its strength lay in its capacity to create representational conditions that weakened the legitimacy of extremist discourse and normalized openness, reflection, and respect for difference.

#### **4. Representation of Moderate Islam and the Negotiation of Meaning on X**

The analysis showed that the NU Garis Lucu account represented moderate Islam through the values of tolerance, openness, balance, respect for differences, humility, dialogue, and communication ethics. The account did not present these values as abstract normative concepts. Instead, it expressed them through conversational language, satire, memes, replies, and quote posts that closely reflected the culture of X users. The account represented tolerance through humor about differences in religious practices and identities, while it constructed openness through nondefensive responses to alternative perspectives. It represented humility through satire directed at self-righteous attitudes, while it enacted dialogue through interactions that allowed audiences to accept, negotiate, or reject the messages. Therefore, NU Garis Lucu presented moderate Islam as a courteous, proportional, inclusive, and open communicative practice rather than merely as a religious slogan.

**Table 3. Representation of Moderate Islamic Values in NU Garis Lucu Content**

| No. | Moderation value | Form of representation                                                                       | Cultural code  | Constructed meaning                                   |
|-----|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Tolerance        | Humor about differences in religious practices, schools of thought, and religious identities | Memes and puns | Differences represent a normal part of religious life |

| No. | Moderation value     | Form of representation                                            | Cultural code                          | Constructed meaning                                                              |
|-----|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2   | Dialogue             | Replies and quote posts that openly respond to audiences          | Conversational language                | Religion functions as a space for communication and the exchange of perspectives |
| 3   | Humility             | Satire directed at self-righteous and judgmental attitudes        | Irony and reversal of meaning          | Claims to truth do not justify demeaning others                                  |
| 4   | Inclusivity          | Responses to intergroup issues and socio-religious differences    | Popular symbols and current references | Islam appears as an open religion that remains relevant to a plural society      |
| 5   | Balance              | Criticism of excessive, reactive, and rigid religious attitudes   | Humorous comparisons and paradoxes     | Ideal religiosity appears as proportional and nonextreme                         |
| 6   | Communication ethics | Insinuation directed at hate speech, labeling, and hostile debate | Online language and reflective humor   | Courtesy and self-restraint constitute essential elements of religious practice  |

Source: Results of the categorization of primary data from posts published by the @NUGarisLucu account on X between September 2025 and February 2026.

As Table 3 shows, NU Garis Lucu constructed representations of moderate Islam through forms of communication that closely reflected the everyday experiences of social media users. Light language, puns, memes, and informal conversations presented tolerance, dialogue, humility, and communication ethics as simple attitudes in daily interaction rather than as abstract institutional concepts. The account represented moderation through responses to differences that avoided anger, criticism that did not demean others, and conversations that used language familiar to online audiences. Popular culture also connected religious values with recognizable social experiences, which made messages of moderation appear more relevant and accessible. Through this pattern, the account normalized tolerance and dialogue as ordinary habits in everyday life rather than as teachings that appeared only in slogans or institutional discourse.



**Figure 4. Representation of Tolerance and Openness through Popular-Culture Humor**

Source: Post published by the @NUGarisLucu account on X, accessed December 19, 2025.

The post in Figure 4 encoded moderate Islam by adapting the lyrics of a popular song and combining them with religious terminology in an unexpected context. The incongruity between the popular cultural text and the issue of tolerance created the humor, which allowed the account to communicate a serious message in a light and recognizable manner. The song lyrics functioned as a shared cultural code, while wordplay and irony enabled the account to criticize excessively reactive religious responses to the presence of other groups or the celebration of other religions. Within the social context of a plural society, the post constructed the meaning that openness to difference does not weaken personal faith. Instead, it represented tolerance as a form of social maturity and an ability to coexist without treating differences as threats. Therefore, the account encoded moderate Islam as a confident, courteous, inclusive form of religiosity that could engage with social realities through language familiar to online audiences.

The analysis showed that the encoding process on the NU Garis Lucu account appeared in its selection of words, visuals, irony, and symbols that reflected the communicative culture of X. The account administrators used conversational language, puns, memes, and popular references to communicate tolerance, openness, and dialogue. Their use of light language created a welcoming impression, while irony allowed them to criticize exclusive attitudes without attacking personal identities. Visuals and popular symbols strengthened the messages by connecting religious values with the audience's everyday experiences. Within Stuart Hall's framework of representation (1997), this combination of signs showed that the account encoded Islam as inclusive, proportional, and open to differences.

The analysis of replies and quote posts showed that audiences did not receive NU Garis Lucu's messages of moderation uniformly. In the dominant reading position, audiences affirmed the humor and messages of tolerance by expressing support, reinforcing the satire, or repeating meanings that aligned with the original posts. In the negotiated position, audiences accepted parts of the messages of moderation but added qualifications, personal experiences, or alternative

interpretations based on their religious perspectives. Oppositional readings appeared when audiences rejected the mode of communication, disputed the message, or considered the humor an oversimplification of religious issues. These varied responses showed that the meanings of the content did not end with the messages that the account administrators encoded. Instead, audiences continuously reproduced those meanings through interaction. Therefore, replies and quote posts became spaces for negotiating meaning in which users could accept, adapt, or resist representations of moderate Islam.

**Table 4. Forms of Audience Decoding of NU Garis Lucu Content**

| Reading position | Characteristics of responses                                                                           | Examples of audience responses                                                                                                       | of Meaning                                                                                                                           |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dominant         | Audiences support, affirm, or reinforce the messages of moderation in the posts                        | Audiences agree with the satire, add aligned humorous comments, or emphasize the importance of tolerance and respect for differences | Audiences accept the messages of moderation according to the meanings encoded by the account administrators                          |
| Negotiated       | Audiences accept the main idea but provide qualifications, limitations, or alternative interpretations | Audiences support tolerance but argue that its application must reflect particular beliefs, contexts, or boundaries                  | Audiences partially accept the message and reinterpret it according to their experiences and religious frameworks                    |
| Oppositional     | Audiences reject, dispute, or question the message or the form of humor                                | Audiences consider the satire inappropriate, overly simplistic, or inconsistent with their religious understanding                   | Audiences resist the message of moderation and interpret it through a framework that differs from that of the account administrators |

Source: Results of the analysis of replies and quote posts associated with content published by the @NUGarisLucu account on X between September 2025 and February 2026.

Humor in NU Garis Lucu’s content functioned as a form of representational de-escalation because it created a lighter emotional atmosphere when the account addressed religious issues that could generate tension. Through humor, irony, and wordplay, the account did not immediately frame differences of opinion as conflict. Instead, it presented them as material for reflection and conversation. Within the framework of representation, words, visuals, and symbols did not exclusively

produce meaning. The affective atmosphere created by the content also contributed to the production of meaning. A lighter atmosphere could reduce psychological distance, limit defensive responses, and increase the possibility that audiences would accept or negotiate the messages more openly. Therefore, humor did not merely accompany messages of moderation. It also shaped how audiences felt, understood, and exchanged those messages through digital interaction.

Analytically, digital humor on the NU Garis Lucu account constructed representations of moderate Islam through three interrelated processes: the normalization of tolerance in everyday communication, the dialogical circulation of messages, and audience participation in interpreting content. Light language, popular symbols, memes, satire, and interactions through replies and quote posts presented moderate Islam as an open, welcoming, and respectful social practice rather than merely as a normative concept. These findings also show that social media users do not produce meaning solely through language, as Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation emphasizes. They also produce meaning through the relationship among linguistic, visual, and symbolic elements, affective atmospheres, and interactive audience responses. Therefore, representation on X remains multimodal, affective, and continuously negotiated because users may accept, reinterpret, or reject the meanings that the account administrators encode. Within the limits of this study, this extension does not replace Hall's framework. Instead, it demonstrates how representational processes operate more dynamically within the social media ecosystem.

## DISCUSSION

The findings show that NU Garis Lucu represents a shift in patterns of religious communication in digital spaces from formal, one-way, and institutional models toward forms of communication that are more fluid, popular, multimodal, and participatory. Although the account does not hold an official position within the institutional structure of Nahdlatul Ulama, it has developed cultural authority through a consistent identity, accessible language, familiar symbols, and active audience engagement. This condition shows that formal legitimacy does not exclusively determine religious authority on social media. Digital actors also build authority through their ability to adapt religious messages to the communicative culture of a platform. In this context, NU Garis Lucu acts as an intermediary that translates Islamic values into forms that online audiences can access more easily without completely abandoning the traditional identity that informs its messages. This finding aligns with studies of digital religion that show how digital media transform the production, circulation, and negotiation of religious authority. It also confirms that digital spaces allow more flexible forms of cultural authority to emerge alongside institutional authority.

The use of satire, irony, puns, memes, short videos, replies, and quote posts shows that humor on the NU Garis Lucu account does not merely function as a communication style. Instead, it forms part of the process of religious representation. From Stuart Hall's perspective, meaning does not naturally reside in words, images, or symbols. Communicators and audiences produce meaning through systems of representation and shared cultural codes (Hall, 1997). Therefore, the account's use of conversational language, popular symbols, and

reversals of meaning remains important because these devices encode Islam as accessible, communicative, and responsive to the everyday experiences of online audiences. This finding extends the studies of Hidayatullah (2019), Syarifudin (2020), Ernayati (2021), and Binawan (2024), which show that humor can support inclusive Islamic preaching, peace, and tolerance. While these studies primarily position humor as a means of delivering messages, the present study shows that humor also operates at the level of meaning production. Textual, visual, audiovisual, and interactive formats shape how audiences frame, experience, and connect religious messages to their social contexts. Therefore, digital media do not merely expand the channels of Islamic preaching, as Kholili (2024), Wahid (2024), and Askar (2025) demonstrate. Digital media also provide cultural codes and interactive features that actively shape religious representation.

The findings also show that NU Garis Lucu uses humor to delegitimize singular claims to truth, fanaticism, intolerance, and judgmental attitudes by portraying them as contradictory, excessive, and inconsistent with religious ethics. Within Stuart Hall's framework of representation, this strategy shifts the meaning of extremist discourse from something that initially appears serious and authoritative into something that audiences can question, parody, and ridicule (Hall, 1997). NU Garis Lucu does not direct its criticism toward personal identities or specific groups. Instead, it criticizes socio-religious behavior that closes spaces for dialogue, demeans others, and treats difference as a threat. This finding aligns with Hoesterey (2021), who shows that satire can reduce tension. However, the present study identifies a more specific dimension by conceptualizing humor as a mechanism that weakens the symbolic authority of extremist discourse. Counter-narratives therefore do not always operate through direct and confrontational ideological rebuttals, as studies by Amit et al. (2021) and Poole et al. (2021) more commonly discuss. They can also operate through cultural processes that reduce the moral legitimacy of fanaticism and intolerance. This perspective also explains why researchers should not assess the impact of counter-narratives solely through changes in attitudes, as Wolfowicz et al. (2022) and Bélanger et al. (2023) caution. Researchers should also consider how counter-narratives alter the ways digital audiences represent and evaluate extremist discourse.

The findings further show that NU Garis Lucu normalizes representations of moderate Islam through light language, humor, memes, and popular cultural codes that remain close to the audience's everyday experiences. The account does not present tolerance, dialogue, humility, balance, inclusivity, and communication ethics as abstract or official concepts. Instead, it presents them as practical attitudes, such as refraining from anger, avoiding the humiliation of others, remaining open to differences, and engaging in dialogue. From Stuart Hall's perspective, representation does not simply reflect reality. It also shapes the frameworks of meaning through which people understand reality (Hall, 1997). Therefore, the repeated use of symbols, language, and humorous situations that portray moderate attitudes as normal contributes to the formation of a new form of "common sense" in digital religious communication. This finding strengthens the studies of Hidayatullah (2019), Syarifudin (2020), Ernayati (2021), and Binawan (2024), on the role of humor in inclusive preaching, tolerance, and peace. At the same time, the present study shows that humor does not merely communicate the values of

moderation. It also normalizes those values as social practices that users of X can regard as familiar, reasonable, and relevant.

The representational process on the NU Garis Lucu account does not end with the encoding performed by the account administrators. It continues through audience decoding in replies and quote posts. The administrators encode Islam as welcoming, inclusive, and dialogical through light language, popular visuals, irony, and symbols associated with online culture. However, as Hall (1997) explains, encoded messages do not guarantee a single or uniform meaning because audiences interpret content according to their experiences, knowledge, and socio-religious positions. Dominant responses appear when users accept and reinforce messages of tolerance. Negotiated readings emerge when audiences agree with the main idea but add limitations or alternative interpretations. In contrast, oppositional readings appear when users reject the humor, dispute the message, or consider it inconsistent with a particular religious understanding. These findings show that users do not produce representations of moderate Islam on X through a one-way process. Instead, they continuously negotiate those representations through digital interaction. Therefore, replies and quote posts do not merely expand the circulation of messages. They also function as arenas in which users accept, adapt, debate, and resist meaning.

The central finding of this study shows that humor on the NU Garis Lucu account operates as a form of representational de-escalation, which refers to the process of reducing tension through the framing and communication of religious issues. Humor creates a lighter emotional atmosphere, transforms direct confrontation into satire, irony, or reflection, and allows audiences to receive criticism without immediately perceiving it as a personal attack. In this context, words, visuals, and symbols do not exclusively shape meaning. The affective atmosphere that accompanies the content, including familiarity, amusement, and a nonpatronizing tone, also contributes to meaning production. This finding aligns with Hoesterey (2021), who shows that satire can reduce tension. However, the present study extends this argument by positioning affect as part of the representational process itself. Nevertheless, researchers cannot equate representational de-escalation with behavioral change or a direct reduction in radicalism. This study only shows that humor can reduce communicative tension, open spaces for reflection, and weaken the confrontational force of extremist discourse at the symbolic level.

Theoretically, this study extends the application of Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation to social media by showing that meaning production operates not only through language but also through relationships among linguistic, visual, audiovisual, affective, interactive, and circulatory elements. Word choice and symbols construct religious meaning, memes and videos reinforce it, the emotional atmosphere created by humor shapes how audiences experience it, replies and quote posts provide spaces for negotiation, and users continue to transform it when they circulate and reframe the content. Practically, these findings show that communicators can use humor as a more dialogical strategy for promoting moderation, particularly when they direct criticism toward problematic behavior without attacking personal or group identities. However, readers should interpret these findings proportionally because the study examined only one account during

a single observation period and analyzed only publicly visible interactions on X. The study also did not measure changes in attitudes, long-term audience reception, or reductions in radical orientation. Therefore, future research should use interviews, audience surveys, cross-platform comparative studies, or longitudinal analysis to examine further the relationship among digital humor, the negotiation of meaning, and changes in religious attitudes.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that digital humor on the NU Garis Lucu account functions not merely as a style of message delivery but as a representational practice that shapes how audiences understand moderate Islam on X. Through text-based posts, memes, short videos, replies, and quote posts, the account represents Islam as welcoming, inclusive, dialogical, and closely connected to everyday life. The account also uses humor to delegitimize singular claims to truth, fanaticism, intolerance, and judgmental attitudes by portraying them as contradictory, excessive, and inconsistent with religious ethics. At the same time, the account normalizes tolerance, openness, balance, humility, and communication ethics through light language, popular symbols, and participatory interactions. This process does not operate in a one-way direction because audiences accept, negotiate, or reject the messages through replies and quote posts.

The main scholarly contribution of this study lies in its conceptualization of humor as a form of representational de-escalation. This concept explains how humor can reduce communicative tension, weaken the symbolic authority of extremist discourse, and create spaces for reflection without relying on direct attacks. The findings also extend the application of Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation to social media by showing that meaning production operates through linguistic, multimodal, affective, interactive, and circulatory processes. Words and symbols do not exclusively construct representations. Emotional atmospheres, media formats, and audience participation in the decoding and circulation of messages also shape them.

Nevertheless, this study examined only one account during a single observation period and included only publicly observable interactions on X. The study also did not directly measure changes in audience attitudes or reductions in radical orientations. Therefore, readers should understand representational de-escalation as a contribution at the level of meaning production and negotiation rather than as evidence of behavioral change. Future studies should conduct cross-platform comparative research, interview account administrators, survey or experimentally study audiences, and perform longitudinal analyses to examine more deeply the relationship among digital humor, the reception of moderation messages, and changes in religious attitudes.

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