In Meme *Dakwah*: A Netnographic Study of *Garis Lucu* Social Media Accounts

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**Abstract.** There is a demanding trend among online Muslim communities in Indonesia that utilize *garis lucu* (funny line) social media accounts to spread the message of *dakwah*. Started by @NUgarislucu account, a meme event then occurred when a serial of replication by some similar accounts emerged. The replication – that is, an essential aspect of anything to be called a meme event, enables them to proselytizing religious ideas among broader audiences. By using Kozinets' netnography, this paper found the fact that to reach the audiences who mostly exist in a cyber world, the preacher needs to develop new ways of *dakwah* of which is the lightest method of idea spreading: the meme. The earlier success in using a meme formula at its turn encourages others to replicate. In a brief conclusion, this paper confirms that meme is one of the most trending campaign strategies in this age of cyberspace.

**Keywords:** humorous satire; Islam; Indonesia; meme; Muslim youth; netnography; social media account; twitter.

1 Introduction

As a process of transforming Islamic values, *dakwah* requires the existence of channels or delivery means, where the preacher can optimally deliver the essential message contained in the content of Islamic teachings. The procedure describes the pattern of the *dakwah* process applied to the communication process (Saputra, 2011: 225). The differences contained in the communication process and the process of *dakwah* are that the communication process includes all types of messages, while the *dakwah* process focuses more on messages that contain the value of goodness (*khayr*), calls to do a good deed and prevent evil (*amr ma'ruf* and *nahy munkar*) (Arifin, 2011: 38-39).

Within the traditional community, *dakwah* activities are often interpreted only in the form of preaching or sermon consisting of religious scholars as preachers deliver messages in front of the audience. In the present development of modern technology, particularly the internet, *dakwah* is not only the authority of religious scholars or public
figures because it has a broader area in all aspects of life where it has a variety of forms, methods, media, messages, and behavior.

We can see, for instance, that technological developments significantly affect our lives today. The existence of increasingly sophisticated technology makes communication media, both printed and electronic, to develop very rapidly. The existence of the internet enables users to access information and communicates online quickly so that it can be accessed anywhere and anytime (Omar et al., 2015: 46). This development makes information and communication technologies (ICT) a basic human need nowadays, people even use it for daily activities including dakwah. The internet also introduces people to social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, where the spreading of religious ideas is ubiquitous.

Statista (2020) recorded that there were at least 150 million internet users in Indonesia as of January 2019. The population who spent an average of 8 hours and 36 minutes online every day for connecting, discovering, shopping and ride-sharing (Wong, 2019) places Indonesia in the third position of social media users in the Asia Pacific and fifth worldwide after China, India, United States, and Brazil. More than 50% of internet users, 81 million Indonesian people, are currently frequent social media users, furthermore also predicted by Statista (2019), will reach as many as 103 million by the year 2023.

![Number of social network users in selected countries in 2018 and 2023](https://www.statista.com/statistics/273841/number-of-social-network-users-in-selected-countries/

Figure 1. Number of social network users (source: statista.com)

From the Figure 1, we can know that the users of the internet, especially social media networks, among Indonesian people, are quite high. This fact prompted some scholars to use social media account as an alternative media for dakwah. By using a social media account, they can easily share their religious ideas or Islamic teachings to the public audience. In turn, the participating netizens spread the messages previously proselytized by the core population. This cycle produces a new terminology in the nature that is clicktivism (Ahyar, 2017: 438).
An interesting phenomenon that has emerged lately is the existence of social media accounts, especially using the Twitter platform, with satirical and humorous themes that call themselves "funny line" of a particular religious community, among those, are NU Garis Lucu (@NUgarislucu) and Muhammadiyin Garis Lucu (@MuhammadiyinGL). The emergence and development of these social media account genres started from NU Garis Lucu's joking critics against a splinter group of Nahdlatul Ulama, who claimed themselves as the straight liner (NU Garis Lurus). The latter was previously noticeable for their disputes against whom they considered as crooked liners (garis bengkok) of Nahdlatul Ulama, where they, the straight liners, aspire to purify the largest Indonesian Muslim organization from any alien culture or influence such as secularism, pluralism, and liberalism. In their efforts, the NU Garis Lurus sympathizers often deliver criticism and even hate speech through their social media facilities against leaders or supporting groups within the structural or official NU board (PBNU) whom they consider to be crooked and as far as deviant.

Instead of taking an apparent defensive turn, some NU youth parodied the term straight line (Garis Lurus) into thin lines (Garis Ku) and later on born the NU Garis Lucu social media account. With this account (@NUgarislucu), they intend to broadcast moderate and peaceful teachings of Islam as traditionally developed within the NU community. This account also makes as a patron the figure of Gus Dur (Kiai Abdurrahman Wahid), former Executive Chief of NU Central Board (PBNU), who is also a top-notch figure of humor because of his unique ability to combine intellectual and even religious business with humor. In one of its accounts on social media, NU Garis Lucu even uses the phrase "sampaikan kebenaran walaupun itu lucu (convey the truth even if it is funny)" as its slogan.

Later, the existence of NU Garis Lucu triggered a new trend; a bunch of thematically similar accounts from other social and religious groups were also established. This emergence also indicates the occurrence of meme events or phenomena, where the existence of a pattern (@NUgarislucu) is replicated or followed by subsequent patterns to achieve a matching message.

While what so generally described as an internet meme is typical viral pictures such as Funny Cat, Successful Kid, and Good Guy Greg, internet meme itself is not limited to these kinds of pictorial file published online. The initial inventor of the term "meme", Richard Dawkins, interviewed by Mahmood (2018) of VICE.com, re-explained that meme is anything transmitted culturally, like a plague. Hence, a new obsession in a school, new fashion trends, a particularly new way of speaking trends; all of these can be categorized as memes. Everything that can be the basis of the evolutionary process is also a meme. The problem is, Dawkins regretted, the internet has only adopted a small part of the original concept of memes that is far more general than imaged examples of memes on the internet.
2 (Internet) Meme Phenomenon in *Garis Lucu* Accounts

The term meme comes from the ancient Greek word "*mimeme*", which means something that mimics or resembles. Another similar term is "*meme*", which means memory. In its early development, this term was first coined by a geneticist of Oxford University, Richard Dawkins, in his book (1976) entitled "The Selfish Gene". He put forward the term by abbreviating the word *mimeme* to *meme* because it requires an equivalent monosyllabic word that sounds similar to the word "*gene*".

"Meme" is an element of cultural transmission, as Dawkins interpreted. Transmission of cultural information can be in the form of thought, idea, habit, song, or fashion that forms specific cultural patterns. Dawkins analogizes memes as genes in the human body, or having characteristics similar to genes, and explains that if genes multiply in a gene pool by jumping from one's body to other's through sperm and eggs, memes reproduce in the meme pool by jumping from a brain to others through a *process*, which in the broad sense, is called imitation or replication.

Memes continually replicate through certain habits or ideas so that it becomes a repetitive pattern and eventually forms a cultural pattern on a large scale. Not only can the nature of a meme replicate itself, but it also undergoes a process of evolution or change over time, and at the same time, it also seeks to survive the effects of new memes that are emerging. Dawkins even says that where there is a cultural evolution to human life, the replicator is memes. The meme is a replicator, which means it can replicate itself.

Developing to its existence in the digital world, Davison (2012) defines an internet meme as a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission. To analyze meme, he proposes that a meme has three components: the manifestation, the behavior, and the ideal.

The manifestation of a meme is its observable, external phenomenon. It is the set of objects created by the meme, the records of its existence. The popularity of existing *garis lucu* accounts is the example of meme's manifestation. Then, the behavior of a meme is the action taken by an individual or group in service of the meme that creates the manifestation. For instance, if the manifestation is the existence of a @NUgarislucu account, so the behavior is creating a social media account and managing it. Lastly, the ideal of a meme is the concept or idea conveyed. The ideal dictates the behavior, which in turn creates the manifestation. If the manifestation is a religious funny-line account and the behavior is registering an account at www.twitter.com and managing it, then the ideal is something like "promoting ideas of religious teachings using fun ways."

It can also be seen from the discussed social media accounts that they symbolize the term "Garis Lucu" as a meme formula, as illustrated in Figure 2.
3 Methods

The approaching method used in this paper is netnography. This research method has advantages in telling, understanding complex social phenomena, and helping research in developing themes from the respondents’ point of view (Rageh et al., 2013). According to its founder, Kozinets (2010), netnography is indeed designed to study culture and online communities or phenomena related to online communities. Compared to (general) ethnography, a netnographer conducts the data finding through computer-mediated communication (CMC) where the online researchers can gather a vast amount of data without making their presence visible to culture members.

The use of netnography in the context of research into the phenomenon of the Garis Lucu account is quite relevant, especially since the existence of researched subjects takes place in cyberspace. Besides, it is also because the existence of the Garis Lucu account is a meme event, which is also a cultural phenomenon.

This paper chooses @NUgarislucu, considered as the core meme account, and other five garis lucu accounts that have been chosen based on 1) age (the date of account registration), 2) popularity (the number of followers), 3) activity (the account’s activeness), and 4) response (the interaction of the account’s audience). By considering those criteria, and consistently focusing on social media accounts that are used by Muslim community/es and delivering the message of dakwah, the chosen accounts are @GontorGarisLucu, @MuhammadiyinGL, @HizbutTahrirGL, @LdiiLucu, and @TasawufGL.

4 Finding and Discussion

Twitter is a microblogging platform which can publish user saying in 140 characters to their followers. The common purpose of using Twitter is similar to other social media applications, which are to establish a network with other users, spread information, promote opinion, discuss trending issues, and so forth. The effectiveness of Twitter to share the account holder’s ideas then makes this platform popular among scholars or preachers, ones of those are Dr. Ulil Abshar-Abdalla (@ulil since December 2008), Dr.
Nadirsyah Hosen (@na_dirs since October 2015), and Kiai Mustofa Bisri or Gus Mus (@gusmusgusmu since November 2010). They are actively managing their Twitter accounts (Miftahuddin, 2018).

Popularity and easiness of Twitter account management also seemingly triggers several Muslim youths to create accounts that proselytize peaceful values of Islam in fun ways, in any case. The trend was started in March 2015 by @NUgarislucu.

Based on the report of Prasetyanto of Kumparan account (2019), the making of @NUgarislucu, according to the admin who prefers to anonymize his name, was inspired by the NU former leader, KH Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), who is considered as a figure that can be accepted by all parties from different backgrounds and also famous for his ability to produce many smart and white humor. "We want to present Gus Dur's humor amid the communication standoff that is currently taking place in Indonesia," said the admin. Besides, he continued, preaching with the typical joke of NU is more touching among the mass. Because "they (the community) are enjoying more when facing a common joke containing religious values".

Actively tweeting tens of thousands of tweets, as portrayed in Figure 3, consisting of original posts by admin and retweets of several famous figures such as Gus Mus, Husein Ja'far Hadad, and Savic Ali (Hernawati, 2019) since March 2015 as the only social media account on this genre, @NUgarislucu is then memed by several accounts as mentioned. The earliest noticeable account in the pool is Gontor Garis Lucu (@GontorGarisLucu) that was active since March 2017, about two years after its core, @NUgarislucu.

![Figure 3. Screenshot of @NUgarislucu account](image)
The entity of Gontor cited in Figure 4 is Pondok Modern Gontor, one of the pesantren institutions in Ponorogo, East Java. Slightly similar to Nahdlatul Ulama which is a cultural and religious mass organization where the @NUgarislucu account derived from, Pondok Modern Gontor, which happened to be established the same year as the founding of NU, 1926, does have a social position that is almost parallel to any social organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah. Based on the account activity, it appears several typical pesantren tweets were posted by its administrators, such as the anecdote of the santri daily life in Gontor and Arabic lessons.

The following account in Figure 5 is Hizbut Tahrir Garis Lucu (@HizbutTahrirGL) that was active since February 2018. Though this account is regarded among the Garis Lucu meme pool, it can be clearly seen that the desk of this account is not a real member or even sympathizer of the entity of Hizbut Tahrir, so the account activity cannot portray the legit funny line of Hizbut Tahrir, a transnational political party banned in several countries. However, this account is still eligible to be considered as an example of how the meme phenomenon occurs in cyber dakwah.
In the same year, Muhammadiyah Garis Lucu (@MuhammadiyahGL) was born, precisely in May 2018. Noticed from the username, the youth of Muhammadiyah, the second-largest religious mass organization in Indonesia, is this account's administrator. As of August 2019, its username changed into Muhammadiyin Garis Lucu (@MuhammadiyinGL) as in Figure 6, this account with @NUgarislucu is leading the popularity of garis lucu meme pool.

The two accounts often interact and sometimes even discuss specific issues of their differences that might not be easy to discuss face to face. For example, during the holiday
season where many people traditionally went home (mudik), @NUgarislucu once quipped its counterpart:

“Saat mudik, tempat favorit buat istirahat adalah masjid NU. Selain kamar mandinya luas juga tersedia spot wisata religi yakni wahana kolam renang gratis di kobokan kaki. Di masjid @MuhammadiyahGL mana ada".

"When (going home for) mudik\(^1\), my favorite place to take a break is the NU mosque. In addition to the spacious bathroom, there is also a 'religious tourism spot which is a free swimming pool' at the foot cleansing pool. There is no such thing at @MuhammadiyahGL mosque".

This tweet was then answered:

“Setelah dari Masjid NU, berikutnya mampirlah ke rest area Kami yang disupport Lazismu dan RS PKU. Di sana biasanya ada pemeriksaan kesehatan. Bukan apa2, khawatir kalo anaknya gatel2 setelah berenang di kolam gratisan, misalnya. Maaf sekadar mengingatkan”.

"Out from the NU mosque, kindly stop by at our rest area, which is supported by LazisMU and PKU Hospital [two charity units of Muhammadiyah]. There is a periodic medical check. No offense, I am just worried if your kid is itching after swimming in that free pool. So sorry, just to remind you".

In addition to those tweets above, there are more corresponding tweets of these two accounts, which make fun of the issue of differences in religious interpretations between them. Interestingly, their followers are not even offended.

The fourth account following the meme is Tasawuf Garis Lucu (@TasawufGL), which was also created in May 2018. However, this one in Figure 7 is the most unclear account on this meme pool, because the entity of Tasawuf itself is not representing any formal and even informal institution since Tasawuf is what so-called Sufism or mysticism of Islam. Nevertheless, the activeness of this account made it eligible to be considered inside.

\(^1\) Mudik is an Indonesian tradition when people travelling from urban cities to rural villages, especially on holiday season, to visit family and going back to the cities afterward.
The following is LDIIGarisLucu (@LdiiLucu) that comes from Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia, a minor religious mass organization in Indonesia. It is quite reasonable that the account might grab public attention due to the number of actual members or sympathizers of this organization. Published on its official website (LDII.or.id, 2008), there are 32 provincial (DPD Provinsi), 302 regency (DPD Kabupaten), 1637 district branch (PC), and 4500 village branch (PAC) official boards and reaching 15 million members. Through this garis lucu account, we can also see that they also participate in delivering a peaceful message of dakwah – even not in too fun ways, as stated in the account slogan in Figure 8: Lucu tidak lucu tetap thank you (Funny or not funny, anyway thank you).

In summary, the profiling map of those six social media accounts of the garis lucu meme pool is as described in the following table 1.
| Account (as of August 29, 2019) | Slogan | Interaction |
|----------------------------------|--------|-------------|
| NU Garis Lucu (@NUgarislucu)     | Sampaikan kebenaran walaupun itu lucu (Convey the truth even if it is funny) |
| 334,487 followers                |        | Despite its anonymity, the administrator is clearly a member or sympathizer of NU and has adequate networking with its influencer so that this account can be a trendsetter. In daily activities, this account is very active by tweeting and retweeting posts, including replying to audiences’ interaction. This account also has frequent corresponding joking tweets with other accounts in particular @MuhammadiyinGL and lately @KatolikG (Katolik Garis Lucu). |
| 212 following                    |        |             |
| 39,907 tweets                    |        |             |
| Muhammadiyin Garis Lucu (@MuhammadiyinGL) | Menceriakan Indonesia Menggembirakan Semesta (Cheering Up Indonesia Exhilarating the Universe) |
| 56,097 followers                |        | The administrator is very likely to be a member or sympathizer of Muhammadiyah and has enough networking among social media influencers. As a part of the second-largest religious mass organization, the account reaches its popularity and virality by its activeness. Its frequent interaction with @NUgarislucu account and followers also makes a big share. |
| Unpublished following            |        |             |
| 6,866 tweets                     |        |             |
| Gontor Garis Lucu (@GontorGarisLucu) | "Qulil Haqqa Walaw Kana Mudhikan." Sampaikan Kebenaran, Meskipun itu Lucu. Kalau yang Pahit Saja Harus Disampaikan, Apalagi yang Lucu? (Convey the truth, even if it is funny. If the bitter truth must be conveyed, let alone the funny?) |
| 16,584 followers                |        | The administrator is very likely to be alumni of Gontor and seemingly to utilize this account as a reunion media or nostalgic melting pot of what so-called Gontoriyyun (students and alumni of Gontor). This account is occasionally having interaction with other garis lucu account, especially the big two: @NUgarislucu and @MuhammadiyinGL. |
| 512 following                    |        |             |
| 1,606 tweets                     |        |             |
| Garis Lucu                              | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hizbut Tahrir Garis Lucu (@HizbutTahrirGL) | The administrator is very likely to have no structural or ideological relation with Hizbut Tahrir. He/she uses this account to criticize or even mock the ideology of Hizbut Tahrir. It is also occasionally having interaction with other garis lucu account, especially the big two: @NUgarislucu and @MuhammadiyinGL. |
| LDIIGarisLucu (@LdiiLucu)              | The administrator is very likely to be a member or sympathizer of LDII and has occasional interaction with other garis lucu account, especially the big two: @NUgarislucu and @MuhammadiyinGL. This garis lucu account also seems to position itself as a dissemination agent for the official @ldii_news account by sending retweets from that official accounts of the parent organization. |
| Tasawuf Garis Lucu (@TasawufGL)       | The administrator is very likely to be a reader or practitioner of tasawuf teaching but utilizing the account not exclusively to post about it. Occasionally posting tweets related to NU, but seldom tagging or mentioning @NUgarislucu or other garis lucu accounts. |

Table 1. Profiling map of garis lucu meme pool

From those garis lucu accounts, we can see the meme process, as explained previously, where other accounts replicate @NUgarislucu formula. Besides the replication action, there are also occasional interactions among them, take, for instance, the corresponding tweets of @NUgarislucu and @MuhammadiyinGL. More than just merely joking tweets, even it is relevant to their milieu, they also tend to keep going on the track of dakwah by posting or reposting valuable messages of the peaceful Islam, sourced from their parent organization's official statement or others. Based on the account's timeline interface, there are at least three categories of posts:
1. Posting or corresponding joking threads
2. Disseminating parent organization's statements
3. Reposting public figure's opinions

Despite a variety of post categories, the spirit of their postings remains similar, namely proselytizing religious ideas in fun ways. This consistence becomes their advantage, as humorous media accounts likely to have more followers than [too] serious Islamic-social media accounts (Hernawati, 2019: 36). Moreover, the essential existence of garis lucu accounts can get rid of prejudice and build dialogue among different social and religious backgrounds of the communities (Asad, 2019).

5 Conclusion

This research explains that there is a meme event occurring on the phenomenon of garis lucu social media accounts. Even stimulating from various backgrounds, their existence has a similar objective that is proselytizing religious ideas using social media networks and in fun ways. Those accounts that use the Twitter platform are actively interacting among them and their audiences and posting mostly three post categories, namely humorous threads, the organization's statement, and public figure's opinion. As further as this research can portray the popularity of those account among the internet users and its primary benefit for proselytizing peaceful message of Islam, what is unanswered yet is a question of reliable effectiveness of using this garis lucu accounts to persuasively promote moderate essential values of religious teaching in daily life.

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