
Current Trends in the Commercialisation of Humour and Its Implications for Egalitarianism: An Islamic Exposé on Muslim Urban Society Development

Sidiq Uthman Okanlawon*

Department of Religions and Peace Studies, Lagos State University, Ojo, Nigeria

Emiola Habeeb Olasunkanmi

Graduate Student, Social Science Institute, Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi, Konya, Türkiye

*Correspondence: uthman.sidiq@lasu.edu.ng

Abstract

Modern living is characterised by innumerable sources of vivacity, whether conventional or self-induced, to ensure living is lively. This parallel quest is sought for vehemently, even if it must be at the expense of expending finances to ensure this lively apparatus is at our disposal. This has exacerbated the increasing growth of the entertainment industry in the present milieu. Unarguably, one of the leading sales points of the entertainment industry is Humour creation. Popular content creators, skit makers, and seasoned movies, to name a few, are in consonance of generating comic artifacts. If not professionally managed and regulated, this quest for vivacity can end up serving as a thief of sanity: society, which is hitherto known as the joint juncture of individuals to discuss pressing issues and source common ground solutions, has grown copiously fragmented and delineated by a hypothetical "mind my business" ordeal. Humorous phenomena continue to gain commercial patronage and unwavering importance, deteriorating the egalitarian de facto as established by Islamic dictates, a dynamic with direct bearing on the development of Muslim urban society, where mosques, preachers, and Muslim content creators increasingly compete for attention within the same digital economy that commodifies laughter. Using a qualitative, case-study, and hermeneutic-evaluative design, this research critically analyses the implications of the far-reaching, widespread commercialisation of humour, highlighting the Islamic perspective and precepts on the foregoing through case studies and qualitative surveys, and providing palpable recommendations for content creators, preachers, and audiences within Muslim urban communities.

Article History

Received 04 August 2026

Revised 05 August 2026

Accepted 26 August 2026

Available online 31 August 2026

Keywords: Egalitarian Society, Current Trends, Commercialisation, Humour, Islamic Expo.

Introduction

The human tendency to be psychologically lifted by delight is a time-honored phenomenon. Psychologically, humans are wired to respond to stimuli, as in the face of pain, affliction, vis-à-vis happiness, serenity, and accidental eureka. Categorically, as much as man is inclined to happiness and satisfying his dopamine glands, in the same vein, efforts are canvassed to erode and ward off all forms of terror that are avoidable towards more gratifying experiences. Hence, the transformation and evolution of this phenomenon transformed into present-day skits, content, and gestures that bring about lighting man's mood. This comic and humour are indeed potent in creating vivacity. However, the underlying question should be: at the expense of what? What's at stake in this pursuit? These and many other questions will be put to bear alongside an analysis of lucid responses stemming from Islamic perspectives in lieu of the end effect of the highly embraced modern "Joy machine."

Commercialisation has become the new norm in today's humour trajectory. In fact, modern man sees it as deserving a quota of intermittent budgetary allocation, as it has become a necessary part of life's ordeal. Aside from the growing trend of gross monetization of humour-generating platforms, many are ready to enterprise without demand. An overflow of paid/premium humour-generating platforms is, in fact, endemic across all walks of life. A rhetorical question that begs for an answer is why people subscribe to platforms such as YouTube Premium, Netflix, and Hulu, which are behemoths that attest to the extent to which people devour entertainment content. Social networks have made audiences much more eager for humour. A 2020 Global Web Index survey found that 41% of Gen-Z respondents and 34% of Millennials said their main reason for using social media was "to find funny or entertaining content."

The aphorism that too much consumption of anything is injurious holds true across contexts. Without a level of control being levied, highly beneficial and therapeutic drugs become subjects of drug abuse. The same applies to all spheres of life. Hence, the submission of Ibn Qayyim: virtues lie not in leaving asunder the endowments that Allah has bequeathed man through nature; real virtues are enjoying them within the confines of Shari'ah. The import of this establishes the importance of regulations, policies, benchmarks, and points of distinction in all aspects of life.

This tension carries particular weight for the development of Muslim urban society. Mosques, da'wah platforms, and religious content creators increasingly compete for attention within the same digital economy that commodifies laughter, and preachers themselves are not outside this scope: a sizable number of Muslim scholars adduce humour to sustain their da'wah missions and their visibility on social media and in-person lectures. In the opinion of many, the use of humour in the context of da'wah not only creates familiarity but also provides emotional support that is so needed by this generation; modern Muslims even see lectures devoid of humour as too serious for their liking. Recent Indonesian scholarship on digital da'wah confirms this trajectory: cyber-creation, the creative production and distribution of da'wah content through social media, video platforms, and interactive websites, has been documented as a strategy that enhances audience engagement and expands the reach of Islamic messages specifically within the development of urban Muslim communities (Nurhaidah, Lubis, & Hidayatullah, 2025). As humour increasingly becomes a currency within Muslim urban public life, whether used by preachers to soften religious instruction or by content creators chasing virality, questions about its ethical limits move from the periphery to the centre of Muslim urban society development discourse.

Three interrelated concerns anchor the problem identification of this study: (1) the exponential growth of digital humour commercialisation and monetisation; (2) the discernible shift from lighthearted social banter towards profit-driven content; and (3) the potential erosion of egalitarian values and Islamic ethics that this shift entails. Consequently, the formative era of cracking jokes merely for laughter has been averted; it is now a major source of livelihood in the present epoch. Latest industry data shows that TikTok influencers earn an average salary of \$131,874, and an increasing number of people go into content creation because they are paid based on the number of viewers or subscribers they have. Facebook announced that by the end of 2022 it planned to invest over \$1 billion in programs that allow creators to earn more money for the

content they create, including the Creator Fund, which monetises content through IGTV Ads, Instagram Live Badges, and Bonuses. YouTube's Super Thanks feature likewise allows fans to pay to view a fun animation and get their message highlighted in a video or Shorts' comments section. Consequently, the influx of people seeking to harness payment on these platforms has resulted in a plethora of immoral promotions, ranging from leaked escapades and defamation of prominent personalities to exponential displays of nudity. Islam specifically frowns on uncontrolled joke-telling, as it is believed to often be a licentious package of lies conducted at the discomfort of others. Hence, this study aims to critically examine the pitfalls of humour in contemporary society, attempting to examine specific content creators' schemes and activities as case studies, while assessing their implications for the development of an egalitarian Muslim urban society.

Over the past two decades, scholarship has increasingly explored humour not merely as a form of entertainment, but as a rich cultural, entertainment, and communicative tool intersecting theology, social identity, politics, and ethical realities. Its contemporary widespread patronage further escalates the implications of humour in society: the implication is diverse and often paradoxical, capable of both building community and sowing division. There is also a vast collection of books of anecdotes and jokes belonging to the humour genre in the Islamic intellectual tradition, generating laughter and amusement while also containing an educational component, evidence that humour in Arabic literature has a long-standing tradition, exemplified in works such as al-Jāhiz's *al-Bukhalā'* (Book of Misers), Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī's *Kitāb al-Imtā' wa-al-Mu'ānasah* (Book of Enjoyment and Bonhomie), and Abū Ishāq al-Ḥuṣṣrī's *Jam' al-Jawāhir fī al-Mulāḥ wa al-Nawādir* (Collection of Jewels from Jokes and Anecdotes).

If humour is a universal human attribute, then why is there no apparent consensus among Muslims about its permissibility? The Qur'an confirms that it is God who gifted humankind with the ability to laugh: "And that it is He who makes [one] laugh and weep, and that it is He who causes death and gives life" (Qur'an 53:43). The most straightforward interpretation of this verse is that laughing is a gift from God to humankind, credited to God's primordial and eschatological roles as creator and terminator (Amin, 2021: 26). Nowhere in the Qur'an is laughter directly condemned, by contrast, Christian religious thinkers following Saint Chrysostom have repeatedly pointed out that "Christ never laughed" (Kuschel, 1994: 27; Viladesau, 2018: 213). This absence of an outright prohibition, however, does not amount to unconditional license: Purwaningsih's (2023) content-analysis of Surah Al-Hujurat verse 11, published in *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an*, similarly concludes that humour is a *fitrah* (a natural human disposition to feel and share happiness), yet becomes ethically problematic precisely where trending formats such as pranks and roasting cross into mockery and humiliation of another person, a boundary this study adopts as a central analytical anchor.

Contemporary research frequently situates humour within the matrix of social performance and identity construction. Kuipers (2006) identifies humour as a tool of boundary-making, one that demarcates in-groups and out-groups, thus becoming a subtle (or overt) mechanism for the performance of power, class, and culture, often reinforcing existing power dynamics even as it pretends to subvert them. Similarly, Mintz (2005) describes "comic inversion," where the oppressed mimic the oppressor through satire, only to find that such mimicry reinforces rather than challenges the status quo.

From a hermeneutical standpoint, humour in religious discourse is rarely neutral. In Islamic intellectual traditions, humour occupies a morally charged space. Al-Ghazālī, in his *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, emphasised moderation in humour, warning against frivolity while acknowledging the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) occasional jesting as a *sunnah* of gentleness and empathy. Contemporary scholars have revisited these classical positions through modern lenses: Abdel Haleem points to instances of rhetorical playfulness and irony in the Qur'an, what he terms "divine humour" as pedagogical tools, while Karim (2011) investigates Islamic comedy in diaspora communities, arguing that humour among Muslims in the West often becomes a vehicle for both religious education and cultural resistance.

The explosion of digital media has transformed humour into a global phenomenon. Phillips and Milner (2017) explore internet memes as a form of "vernacular creativity," suggesting that online humour is increasingly shaped by algorithmic logic and monetization. These shifts pose challenges for Islamic ethics, where humour is ideally restrained by the Maqāṣid ash-Sharī'ah (higher objectives of Islamic law), particularly in preserving dignity (karāmah) and avoiding slander (ghībah) or mockery (sukhriyyah). Bayat (2013) identifies humour, especially in digital form, as a "non-movement" strategy in which satire becomes a low-risk form of political and theological critique among Middle Eastern youth.

The functional implications of humour are best observed in its economic and political entanglements. As humour becomes increasingly commodified through stand-up specials, branded memes, influencer satire, and comedy shows, it risks shedding its counter-cultural edge; Frank (2009) critiques this trend as the "McDonaldization" of humour, where mass appeal dilutes its ethical substance. For Muslim audiences this is particularly salient, El Guindi (2010) raises concerns over the dilution of Islamic values in the pursuit of "halal comedy" that often mimics secular paradigms without adequate critical reflection. On the constructive end of the spectrum, however, humour also carries therapeutic and communal potential: Aboul-Ela (2014) documents its use in Arab American fiction as a mechanism for coping with Islamophobia and cultural displacement, and Saleh (2020) argues that humour in the Majlis setting, where stories are told orally, serves as both cultural preservation and a release valve for communal tension, a functionally therapeutic register aligned with prophetic traditions that endorsed smiling and gentle banter as ways of winning hearts and reinforcing communal bonds, provided it remained truthful and did not degrade others.

Humour is an integral part of human interaction, and it is worth clarifying at the outset that humour and laughter, though closely related, are not synonymous: humour is the underlying cognitive process that frequently, but not necessarily, leads to laughter, while laughter is a seizure-like activity that can be elicited by other stimuli such as tickling. One can therefore laugh without a humorous stimulus, and equally experience humour without laughing; the end goal of humour is invariably to trigger comic laughter, so the two are like a means and an end, not an end in themselves. Humour has arguably been part of the behavioural repertoire of modern Homo sapiens for thousands of years, evidenced in ancient Greek jokebooks and figures such as Democritus, the "laughing philosopher" and anthropological observation of humorous conversation among Australian Aboriginal peoples, who have been essentially genetically isolated for at least 35,000 years, suggests a comparably deep evolutionary age for the trait, if genetic factors dictate the fundamental capacity to perceive or produce humour.

Several, not mutually exclusive, theories account for what constitutes humour. The Incongruity Theory, advanced by writers such as Immanuel Kant, Norman Maier, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Arthur Koestler, and later formalised by Suls holds that humour entails a split between congruous and incongruous elements; T. C. Veatch's model similarly centres on two incongruous components: a socially acceptable element and a transgression of subjective moral order. A second, functional theory, associated with Freud, conjectures that humour and laughter originate in the repressed expression of sexual or aggressive feelings, releasing psychic tension related to inhibited unconscious impulses; researchers working within this framework note that while many jokes carry a hostile edge, many others lack prominent aggressive themes, though covert or low-level aggression could be read into almost any humorous comment depending on social context. A third strand of theory treats humour as a demonstration of superiority and elevated social status, including mockery and body-shaming, which is considered repugnant when directed by a servant against a master, a despondent person against the affluent, or an ordinary citizen against those on higher social scaffolding. Taken together, these theories confirm that humour, beyond reasonable doubt, has always existed, and its application across different contexts further accentuates its endemic presence in human interaction, while also supplying the conceptual vocabulary (incongruity, aggression, superiority) this study draws on when categorising contemporary humour genres in the Results section below.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design combining case-study analysis with Islamic hermeneutic evaluation, structured through five sequential stages, illustrated schematically in Figure 1 below. Rather than testing a hypothesis through numerical measurement, the design is oriented towards interpretively tracing how the commercialisation of humour on digital platforms interacts with Islamic ethical-legal norms and with the social fabric of egalitarian, urban Muslim community life.

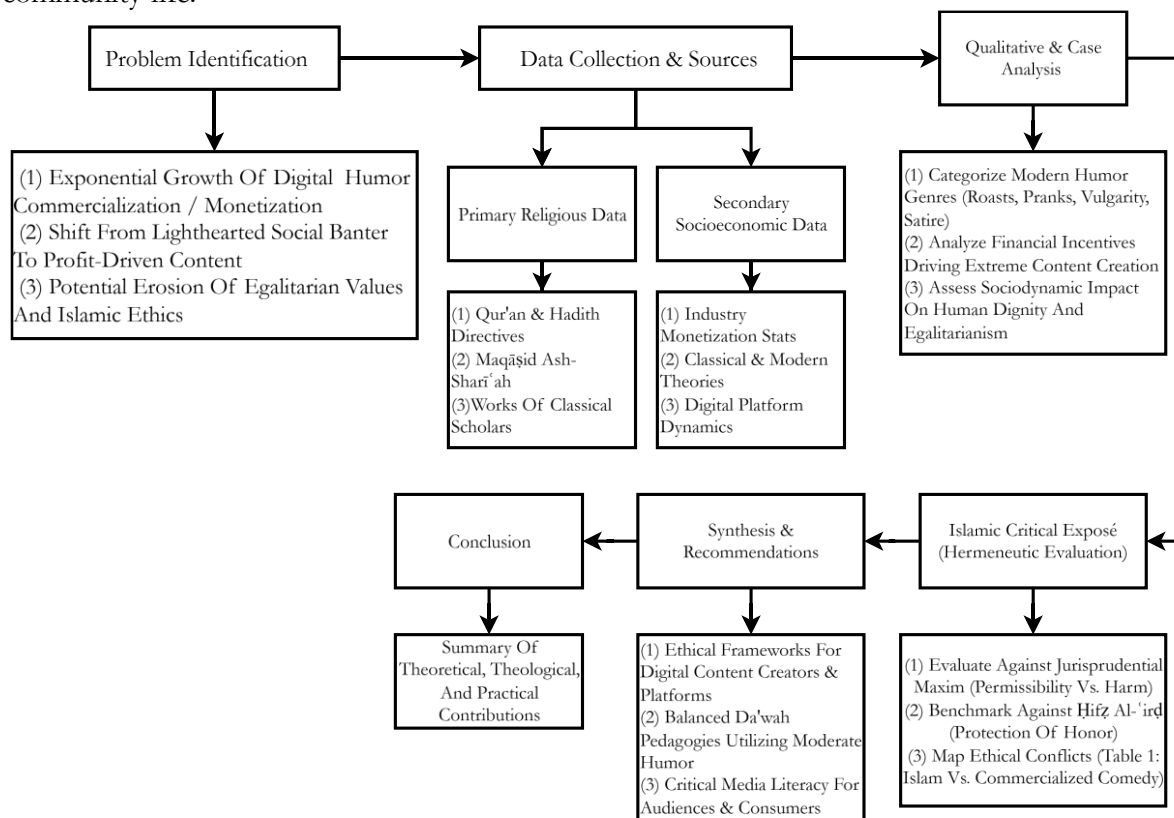


Figure 1. Five-stage research design, from problem identification to synthesis and recommendations.

Problem Identification

The research begins by delineating the phenomenon under study along three axes, established in the Introduction: (1) the exponential growth of digital humour commercialisation and monetisation; (2) the observable shift from lighthearted, informal social banter towards profit-driven, algorithm-optimised content; and (3) the potential erosion of egalitarian values and Islamic ethics that accompanies this shift. These three points frame the research questions and bound the scope of the subsequent data collection.

Data Collection and Sources

Data were drawn from two complementary streams. The first, primary religious data, comprises (1) Qur'anic and Hadith directives bearing on speech ethics, mockery, and honour; (2) the Maqāṣid ash-Sharī'ah (higher objectives of Islamic law), particularly the preservation of dignity (*karāmah*) and the prohibition of slander (*ghībah*) and mockery (*sukhriyyah*); and (3) the works of classical and contemporary scholars, among them al-Ghazālī, Ibn Qayyim, and Abdel Haleem, on the ethics and permissibility of humour. The second stream, secondary socioeconomic data, comprises (1) industry monetisation statistics (e.g., TikTok influencer earnings, Instagram's Creator Fund, YouTube's Super Thanks program); (2) classical and modern theories of humour (incongruity, psychoanalytic/relief, and superiority theories, together with sociological accounts of humour as boundary-work); and (3) documentation of digital-platform dynamics, including algorithmic amplification and platform monetisation architecture. Where Indonesian and Southeast Asian Muslim urban contexts required closer grounding, the study additionally draws

on recent Sinta-accredited Indonesian Islamic-studies scholarship published in Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an (JSQ) and Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies, both of which document how humour, digital da'wah, and content creation intersect with the development of urban Muslim communities.

Qualitative and Case Analysis

Using the collected data, the study (1) categorises modern humour genres into four working categories, roasts and insults, shock and prank comedy, vulgar and profane jokes, and satire on sacred values; (2) analyses the financial incentives that drive the production of increasingly extreme content, using three staged, world-renowned humour-generating platforms (TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube) as illustrative case studies of monetisation architecture; and (3) assesses the sociodynamic impact of these dynamics on human dignity and on the egalitarian fabric of society, with particular attention to Muslim urban communities in which mosques and da'wah platforms compete for the same attention economy.

Islamic Critical Exposé (Hermeneutic Evaluation)

Each humour category identified in Stage 3 is then (1) evaluated against the foundational jurisprudential maxim that the origin of all matters of Mu'āmalāt (human transactions/interaction) is permissibility (al-aṣl fī al-ashyā' al-ibāḥah), weighed against demonstrable harm; (2) benchmarked against the principle of Ḥifẓ al-'Ird (Protection of Honour), one of the objectives Islamic law pays premium attention to; and (3) mapped onto specific Qur'anic and Hadith directives, producing the ethical-conflict matrix presented as Table 1 in the Results section.

Synthesis and Recommendations

The final stage synthesises the hermeneutic evaluation into actionable recommendations across three audiences: (1) ethical frameworks for digital content creators and platforms; (2) balanced da'wah pedagogies that utilise moderate humour without trivialising core theological principles; and (3) critical media literacy guidance for audiences and consumers. These recommendations are presented in full in the Conclusion.

Results And Discussion

Categorisation of Modern Humour Genres

Applying the Stage 3 case analysis to available content and industry data, four broad genres of commercialised humour emerge as dominant on contemporary digital platforms: (1) roasts and insults, in which comedic value is generated by demeaning a target; (2) shock and prank comedy, which stages deceptive or startling scenarios for audience reaction; (3) vulgar and profane jokes, which rely on obscenity or sexual content for engagement; and (4) satire targeting sacred values, symbols, or religious figures. Each of these genres recurs across the platforms examined and forms the basis of the ethical mapping in Table 1 below.

Financial Incentives Driving Content Commercialisation

The data collected under Stage 2 confirm a marked financial logic behind the genres identified above. With top TikTok influencers pulling in millions of dollars per year, aspiring content creators are flocking to the platform in hopes of achieving similar success; industry data shows that TikTok influencers earn an average salary of \$131,874. Instagram and Facebook present a comparable picture: Facebook announced plans to invest over \$1 billion by the end of 2022 in programs that allow creators to earn more from their content, including the Creator Fund, which monetises content through IGTV Ads, Instagram Live Badges, and Bonuses. YouTube's Super Thanks feature similarly allows fans to pay to view a fun animation and have their message highlighted in a video or Shorts' comments section. The result is a plethora of monetised, often immoral, promotions, leaked escapades, defamation of prominent personalities, and exponential displays of nudity are consistently near the top of the engagement radar. The second-highest all-time paid creator on TikTok, Charli D'Amelio, is a flagrant example of the displays of nudity that this uncontrolled monetisation of humour warrants, an illustrative case of how financial incentive, rather than communicative or educational value, increasingly drives content design. A comparable pattern of identity being shaped by platform incentives is documented among Indonesian Muslim

content creators: micro-celebrity Muslimah Instagram influencers construct and perform their religious identity in ways calibrated to audience expectations and endorsement opportunities, underscoring that commercial incentive structures shape self-presentation among Muslim digital creators just as they do elsewhere on these platforms (Dewi, Yunizar, & Fuady, 2024).

Sociodynamic Impact on Human Dignity and Egalitarianism

Qur'ān 43:32 attests that individual endowments, including intellectual and communicative capacities, are apportioned unevenly by design, so that people "may make use of one another for service": "Is it they who distribute the mercy of your Lord? It is We who have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in degrees [of rank] that they may make use of one another for service." As commercialised comedy grows, it increasingly involves a critique of human performance, reactions, actions, and flaws, exposing individual vulnerabilities for profit. The nature of income-generating content is marked by fierce intensity, counter-attack competition, and a constant struggle to outdo prior content, meaning that, left unchecked, more hysterical and boundary-crossing jokes should be expected to keep surfacing. This trajectory bears directly on egalitarian social structures: society, understood as the joint juncture of individuals gathering to discuss pressing issues and source common solutions, becomes fragmented when interaction is increasingly organised around humour-driven, individualised content consumption rather than collective deliberation.

Mapped Ethical Conflicts

Applying the Stage 4 hermeneutic evaluation to the four genres identified above produces the following mapping of ethical and jurisprudential conflicts against specific Qur'anic and Hadith directives.

Table 1. Clash of Modern Comedy with Islamic Ethics Due to Monetisation Incentives

Category / Genre	Ethical / Jurisprudential Conflict	Qur'anic & Hadith Directives
Roasts & Insults	Haram (Mockery & Superiority): Violates sukhriyyah (mockery) and takabbur (arrogance).	Qur'an 49:11; Hadith (Muslim): "A Muslim is the brother of another Muslim; he does not wrong him, nor humiliate him."
Shock & Prank Comedy	Deception & Exploitation: Deception (kidhb) if staged as real; exploitation of individual dignity (zulm).	Hadith (Bukhari & Muslim): "Do not harm others, nor return harm with harm (la darar wa-la dirar)."
Vulgar & Profane Jokes	Promotes Obscenity: Promotes fahish (obscurity). Earnings derived from haram acts are impermissible (kasb haram).	Qur'an 24:19; Hadith (Tirmidhi): "Modesty is an integral part of faith."
Satire on Sacred Values	Mockery of Religion: Mocking religious precepts (istihza' bi-al-din) is strictly forbidden.	Qur'an 5:57–58, 6:68: (Do not sit with those who ridicule divine verses).

Islam and Humour: Between Fact and Fallacy

Islam, as a religion, has a comprehensive, elastic legislative system adaptable to all realities, theologically, jurisprudentially, and in transactions. Humour, as a matter of interaction, is a sheer issue of Mu'āmalāt (human transactions/interaction), and a guiding principle well-entrenched by the Uṣūliyyūn is that the origin of all matters of Mu'āmalāt is permissibility (al-aṣl fī al-ashyā' al-ibāḥah). Humour is not explicitly prohibited; its permissible status is manifested through the usage of lightheartedness in both the Qur'an and Sunnah. The concepts of Bashīr (bringer of glad tidings) and Nadhīr (warner) delineate the two registers by which the messages of Prophet Muhammad

can be classified, and Bashīr in particular can be found abundantly in creating a visual introspection of imminent enjoyment for those who take heed of the message.

Another conjecture worth engaging is the agreement that scripture contains satire directed at disbelievers and wrongdoers. The question that follows is whether satire is becoming of scripture while humour is not, whether satire serves a noble purpose while humour is an exercise in flippancy. That distinction does not hold, for humour and levity are not necessarily the same: humour can be added to create a long-lasting impact in a given instance, whereas levity is a thief of time. Humour, like satire, is one of the devices used to make a point, and prophets and scriptures, too, have points to make; there is no reason to suppose they would disavow this device as a matter of principle.

The Qur'an itself contains verses that seemingly accrue humorous reflection. In Qur'an 11:69–73, angels visit Abraham with news of a son, and his wife breaks into laughter of incredulity: "She said, 'Woe to me! Shall I give birth while I am an old woman and this, my husband, is an old man? Indeed, this is an amazing thing!'" The demonstrative gesture implied by *hādhā ba'lī shaykhan* suggests a combination of surprise, hope, and disbelief, adding to the gentle humour of her remark. Likewise, in Qur'an 27:17–18, Prophet Sulaymān hears an ant instructing its companions to enter their dwellings before Solomon's army arrives unaware, and "smiled, laughing at her speech." Beyond the Qur'an, the Prophet himself communicated with humorous elements in numerous narrations, as when he told a man requesting a mount, "I will give you a she-camel's young to ride on," then clarified, "Are camels born from anything other than she-camels?" and, in a widely cited hadith, playfully told an elderly woman there would be no old women in Paradise, before comforting her sadness by quoting the Qur'anic verse (56:35–37) that women in Paradise will be created anew as virgins.

Purwaningsih's (2023) thematic study of Surah Al-Hujurat verse 11 in *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* corroborates this reading from a contemporary vantage point: drawing on Tafsir Al-Maraghi, Tafsir Muyassar, Tafsir Al-Munir, Tafsir Fii Zhilalil Qur'an, Tafsir Al-Azhar, and Tafsir Al-Mishbah, the study finds that humour is fundamentally part of human fitrah, yet the popular trending formats of pranking and roasting analysed in that study consistently cross into humiliation and mockery of another person, precisely the boundary that verse 11 prohibits. This finding, produced independently through a different corpus of tafsir literature, converges with the classical Bashīr/Nadhīr and satire-versus-humour distinction drawn above: the dividing line in Islamic ethics is not humour itself but whether it degrades another human being.

Islam is a balanced religion that does not place reality-averse burdens on its adherents; doing so would render it impractical or too rigid to withstand the passage of time. In the opinion of Ibn Qayyim, Islam and Shari'ah embody complete wisdom and welfare for people, such that whatever changes wisdom to folly, mercy to tyranny, justice to perversion, and welfare to cacophony is a variance from Islam. Indeed, if one looked to the formative figures of the three monotheistic world religions for an indication of the role laughter plays in each faith, Islam emerges as the most explicitly pro-laughter among them: the authoritative ḥadīth collections record scores of instances where the Prophet Muḥammad was smiling, chuckling, or laughing, something rarely recorded of preceding messengers, and standing in contrast to the Christian tradition following Saint Chrysostom, which holds that "Christ never laughed." Any form of humour antithetical to the nature of Islam, exoterically or endoterically, is therefore incongruent and deviational, in the same way that other permissible acts are scorned when performed without the right intention or methodology. It is not surprising that people increasingly resist the wholesale permissibility of humour in its present form: it has been bastardised and made practically inseparable from lies, falsehood, denigration, and vilification. Yet this reality cannot justify labelling all humour as un-Islamic; the corrective lies in distinguishing permissible from impermissible registers, not in foreclosing humour altogether.

Implications for an Egalitarian Muslim Urban Society

For the development of Muslim urban society specifically, the findings above carry consequential implications. Undoubtedly, humans have been created with mental and

communicative capacities that are, by divine design, unevenly distributed, precisely "that they may make use of one another for service" (Qur'ān 43:32). Cracking jokes and making humour must therefore not come at the expense of exposing another person's shortcomings, as doing so directly contradicts the principle Islam has come to protect, unanimously agreed upon as *Hifz al-'Ird* (Protection of Honour), an area to which Islam pays premium attention and continues to amplify. There is a plethora of hadith in which the Prophet describes a true Muslim as one from whose actions, speech, and disposition people are neither denigrated, vilified, nor manipulated; the protection of honour is intertwined with the protection of another person's wealth and blood. Contemporary banters and anonymous, hysterically aggressive memes circulating within Muslim digital spaces are not exempt from this principle.

Sa'dullah, Alkaromah, and Putri's (2024) social piety is sustained through visible, communally recognised practices that reinforce mutual regard and solidarity among community members. Read against the present findings, the commercialisation of boundary-crossing humour represents a countervailing force to precisely this kind of social piety, where mockery-driven content trades short-term engagement for the erosion of the mutual regard on which egalitarian Muslim urban community life depends. This is not, however, an indictment of humour or of digital media as such. Nurhaidah, Lubis, and Hidayatullah's (2025) study of cyber-creation in da'wah for the development of urban Muslim communities demonstrates that the same digital tools and, implicitly, the same communicative registers, including humour and visual storytelling, can instead expand the reach of Islamic messages, enhance audience engagement, and encourage inclusive religious dialogue when guided by sound communicative strategy and ethical restraint. The contrast between these two bodies of Hayula-published scholarship, commercialised, mockery-driven content on one hand, and ethically bounded cyber-da'wah on the other, sharpens the central argument of this study: the same platforms and the same comedic register can either strengthen or corrode the egalitarian fabric of Muslim urban society, depending entirely on whether *Hifz al-'Ird* is observed.

The nature of income-generating content is marked by fierce intensity, counter-attack competition, innovation, and a constant struggle to outdo prior output. Joseph Schumpeter's theory of Creative Destruction is instructive in explaining why: the theory assumes that long-standing arrangements and assumptions must be destroyed to free up resources and energy for innovation, with economic development arising as the natural result of forces internal to the market, created by the opportunity to seek profit. This theory permeates all profit-making enterprises, humour-generating platforms included. If humour continues in its present operational usage as an independent source of livelihood, then, left to the unregulated logic of creative destruction alone, the worst of its excesses, and its costs to egalitarian Muslim urban community life, are still in embryo.

Conclusion

This study has comprehensively surveyed the overflow and upsurge of humour-inclined content in the modern gallery of living, tracing it through a five-stage qualitative and hermeneutic design, problem identification, data collection, case analysis, Islamic critical exposé, and synthesis, that moved from a mapping of commercialised humour genres and their financial incentives (Results) to an Islamic theological evaluation of their implications for egalitarian, urban Muslim community life (Discussion). History shows that humour is as old as man and cannot be effaced across ages and civilisations. However, the contemporary companion of humour-making with the escalated end-goal of wealth maximisation and profitability has proven to be the spoilsport that has corroborated the degradation of humour in today's reality, with direct consequences for the development of Muslim urban society, where mosques, da'wah practitioners, and Muslim content creators must compete for attention within the same commercialised digital ecology. While Islam does not, in any way, consider interacting with humour appalling or an aberration, the noticeable trends of incrementally promoted anti-Islamic demeanours are alarming, a reality extensively

evidenced by both the classical theological sources and the contemporary Indonesian Islamic-studies scholarship engaged in this study.

Synthesising these findings, the following recommendations are proffered for the sustained, egalitarian development of Muslim urban society:

1. Ethical Regulation of Digital Content: Content creators and digital media platforms, Muslim-oriented and general alike, should establish ethical frameworks aligning comedy with respect for human dignity (karāmah) and social responsibility, informed by the Ḥifẓ al-'Irḍ principle mapped in Table 1.
2. Promoting Balanced Da'wah Pedagogies: Islamic scholars and preachers (du'āt) utilising humour in religious instruction must ensure that comic relief remains a secondary, respectful tool rather than trivialising core theological principles, building on the constructive model of cyber-creation documented by Nurhaidah, Lubis, and Hidayatullah (2025).
3. Consumer Awareness and Media Literacy: Audiences within Muslim urban communities should cultivate media literacy to recognise and reject commercialised humour that relies on mockery, profanity, body-shaming, or slander, thereby protecting the social piety and mutual regard that Sa'dullah, Alkaromah, and Putri (2024) identify as constitutive of cohesive Muslim society.

Taken together, these recommendations reaffirm that the development of Muslim urban society is not served by foreclosing humour, but by anchoring it, commercially, communicatively, and theologically, in the egalitarian and dignity-preserving ethics that Islam has always prescribed.

References

- Zimbardo, Zara. "Cultural Politics of Humour in (De)Normalizing Islamophobic Stereotypes." *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 59–81.
- Jonsson, Jakob. *Humour and Irony in the New Testament*. Reykjavik: Bókaútgáfa Menningarsjóðs, 1965.
- Howarth, Josh. "How Much Do TikTok Influencers Make? (2025 Data)." Accessed February 26, 2025. <https://explodingtopics.com/blog/tiktok-earning-stats>.
- Semenoff, Lena. "How to Make Money on Instagram in 2025: 10 Effective Ways." Accessed February 26, 2025. <https://www.wix.com/blog/how-to-make-money-on-instagram>
- YouTube Help. "Super Thanks Eligibility, Locations & Policies." Accessed February 26, 2025. <http://support.google.com/youtube/answer/72857?hl=en>
- Kuipers, Giseline. *Good Humour, Bad Taste: A Sociology of the Joke*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2006.
- Mintz, Lawrence E. "Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation." *American Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2005): 71–80.
- Abdel Haleem, M. A. S. *The Qur'an: A New Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Karim, Jamillah. *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender within the Ummah*. New York: NYU Press, 2011.
- Phillips, Whitney, and Ryan M. Milner. *The Ambivalent Internet: Mischief, Oddity, and Antagonism Online*. Cambridge: Polity, 2017.
- Bayat, Asef. *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013.
- Frank, Thomas. *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- El Guindi, Fadwa. "Halal Humour? Reflections on the Ethics of Laughter in Muslim Societies." *Contemporary Islam* 4, no. 3 (2010): 289–304.
- Aboul-Ela, Hosam. *Other South: Faulkner, Coloniality, and the Mariátegui Tradition*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014.
- Saleh, Randa. "Orality, Humour, and Healing in Arab Majlis Culture." *Journal of Middle Eastern Oral Traditions* 8, no. 2 (2020): 145–169.

- Polimeni, Joseph, and Jeffrey P. Reiss. "The First Joke: Exploring the Evolutionary Origins of Humour." *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 4, no. 1 (2006): 109–131.
- Bremmer, Jan. "Jokes and Jokebooks in Antiquity." In *A Cultural History of Humour*, edited by Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, 11–28. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997.
- O'Connell, J. F., and F. J. Allen. "When Did Humans First Arrive in Greater Australia and Why Does It Matter?" *Evolutionary Anthropology* 6, no. 4 (1998): 132–146.
- Veatch, Thomas C. "A Theory of Humor." *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 11, no. 2 (1998): 161–216.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1960.
- Mir, Mustansir. "Humour in the Qur'an." *The Muslim World* 81, no. 3–4 (1991): 179–193.
- Elias, Abu Amina. "Ibn Qayyim on Sharia: Islam is Based on Justice, Mercy, and Wisdom." *Journal of Religion and Peace Studies* 6, no. 1 (2024).
- Dewi, Eka Amelia Suryani, Tria Kurnia Yunizar, and Ilham Fuady. "The Identity of Modern Muslim Women on Instagram: Studi Fenomenologi tentang Konstruksi Makna Hijab Terhadap Mikro Selebriti." *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2024): 197–214. <https://doi.org/10.21009/hayula.008.02.04>
- Nurhaidah, Siti Nuri, Nabila Lubis, and Hidayatullah. "The Role of Cyber-Creation in Da'wah for the Development of Urban Muslim Communities." *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* 9, no. 2 (2025): 259–280. <https://doi.org/10.21009/hayula.009.02.06>
- Purwaningsih, Rahma Fitria. "Humor Trend in The Age of Social Media 'It's Just A Kidding' in The Qur'anic Perspectives of Surah Al-Hujurat Verse 11." *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* 19, no. 1 (2023): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.21009/JSQ.019.1.01>
- Sa'dullah, S., Risma Alkaromah, and Winny Azwita Putri. "The Meaning and Relevance of Social Piety in Muslim Societies." *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2024): 227–240. <https://doi.org/10.21009/hayula.008.02.06>
- Schweizer, Bernard. *Muslims and Humour: Essays on Comedy, Joking, and Mirth in Contemporary Islamic Contexts*. Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2jn91xb>
- Mopp, M. C. "Creative Destruction: Out with the Old, In with the New." Investopedia, 2023. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/creativedestruction.asp>.

