

**Religious Humor Digitalized by New Media****Yeni Medya ile Dijitalleşen Dini Mizah****Mahmut KUTLU<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

The relationship between religion and humor requires more research with in the religious context. The main purpose of the study, which focuses on the entertaining appearance of the religious-themed visuals in social media and their comforting qualities, is to determine how religious humor in physical life is transformed into a digital form in electronic media. For this purpose, Facebook application, which has millions of users in Turkey, was chosen as a sample. Visuals with religious content were handled particularly in line with the approaches of Morreal, and with Thorson and Powell, who conduct research in a framework close to him. Discourse analysis model, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study. As a result of the study, it was seen that religious humor is fictionalized with the possibilities offered by the electronic environment within the integrity of the visual and text. In the visuals analyzed during the research process, traces of religiously recommended humor were seen mostly. As with other humor types, religious humor elements were produced for the purpose of coping with life's difficulties, forgetting the troubles and relaxing psychologically, having fun, motivating oneself in a positive way, showing a positive perspective in the face of negative situations, making other people laugh and creating funny social environments through humor.

**Keywords:** Religion, Digitalization, New Media, Humor, Discourse Analysis

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**Öz**

Din ile mizah arasındaki ilişki dini bağlamda çok az çalışılmıştır. Dini temalı görsellerin sosyal medyadaki eğlenceli görünüşleri ve bunların bireyleri rahatlatıcı nitelikleri üzerine yoğunlaşan çalışmanın temel amacı fiziki hayatta var olan dini mizahın elektronik ortamlarda dijital bir forma dönüştüğünü tespit etmektir. Bu amaçla örneklem olarak Türkiye’de milyonlarca kullanıcısı olan Facebook uygulaması seçilmiştir. Dini içerikli görseller Morreal başta olmak üzere ona yakın bir çerçevede araştırmalar yürüten Thorson ve Powell’in yaklaşımları doğrultusunda ele alınmıştır. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden içerik analizi modeli kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın sonucunda sosyal hayatta var olan dini mizahın elektronik ortamda dijital bir formda varlığını devam ettirdiği görülmüştür. Araştırma sürecinde analizi yapılan görsellerde çoğunlukla dini açıdan tavsiye edilen mizahın izleri görülmektedir. Diğer mizah türlerinde olduğu gibi dini içerikli mizah öğeleri de hayatın zorluklarıyla başa çıkma, sıkıntıları unutup psikolojik olarak rahatlama, eğlenceli vakit geçirme, kendini pozitif yönde motive etme, olumsuz durumlar karşısında pozitif bakış açısı sergileme, diğer insanları güldürme, mizah aracılığıyla eğlenceli sosyal ortamlar oluşturma gibi amaçlarla üretilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Din, Dijitalleşme, Yeni Medya, Mizah, Söylem Analizi

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## Introduction

Many attempts have been made to define humor. The definition that seems most reasonable and consistent due to its general applicability relates humor to the comfort felt by the sudden disappearance of one of the many limitations imposed by the social and physical environment on people (Rosenthal, 1997, p. 3). Researchers have examined how humor finds a thousand ways in certain contexts to induce smiles and laughter at oneself and the “other” as a mirror of oneself, and how it enables one to resist the difficulties of social life and the suffering caused by them (Fenoglio & Georgeon, 2000, p. 7). Humor as a social relaxation mechanism has taken place in people's lives from past to present. As a result, most theorists are united in the idea that the relationship between laughter and humor is an inherent need for relaxation in humans (Bergson, 2019; Freud, 2016; Klein, 1999; Koestler, 1997).

John Morreal (1997), in his book "Taking Laughing Seriously", examined humor in the light of "superiority theory", "incompatibility theory" and "relaxation theory" in the literature. He mentioned the theses of Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer and Freud, who are prominent thinkers on this subject. However, he developed his own thoughts on this subject, arguing that the ideas of these thinkers about humor were insufficient. According to him, the above three theories of laughter are not fully sufficient to explain all states of laughter. A comprehensive theory must include all of them. For example, as in psychological approaches, laughter does not occur only as a result of changes in the psychological state of the person. Laughter itself is neither a psychological state nor a product of change. Laughter is actually the expression of the emotions caused by the change with a nervous action. It is possible to call this feeling itself “fun” or “cheerfulness” (Morreal, 1997, pp. 58-60). As Morreal (1997) mentioned, humor has a direct relationship with fun and cheerfulness. Thinkers like Thorson and Powell (1993), similar to Morreal, said that the current efforts to evaluate the general sense of humor were insufficient, and they examined the sense of humor through the perceptions of amusement, laughter, and humor.

In this study, social network pictures with religious content are addressed particularly in line with Morreal's methodologies as well as those of Thorson and Powell, who carry out their research in a framework similar to his. One of the qualitative research techniques employed in the study was the discourse analysis model. The purpose of the study, which is concerned with the amusing appearance of religiously themed graphics on social media and their positive perception, is to demonstrate how religious humor has evolved into a digital form in electronic media. Facebook, which has millions of users in Turkey, was picked as a sample for this.

### 1. Digitalized Humor

Establishing relationships with other people is one of the various basic human needs of every human being (Aronson et al., 2012). People, who tend to live in social environments due to being a social being, have met this need with space-dependent and traditional methods until the electronic age. With the advancement of technology, this need got rid of its limitations and turned into a fast one (Eryılmaz,

2020, pp. 133-134). Digitalization has manifested itself in all aspects of life, especially since the 2000s. Internet technologies, which are now found in everything from mobile phones to televisions, computers, and even smart watches, have altered daily life and communication styles. The adaptation of global societies to this change has also gained momentum (Ayaz, 2021, p. 521). In today's world, which is called the electronic age, the perception of humor in the society has undergone a transformation, as in every subject. Virtual environments have become a new area where humor products come to life. One of the most concrete indicators of this new space is the humorous elements constructed in the form of visual images. These indicators, which can be created by people with humor skills in the society, make people laugh in social media environments, while contributing to social capital in a way.

Laughing is a reflex that can occur for many different reasons. Humor is one of the factors that can cause laughter. Humor is a mechanism that both shows the funny side of events and makes people laugh. With these aspects, one of the most used areas of humor, which is widely used in daily dialogues, is social media environments. Especially today, in social media-based communication networks in the digital culture environment, users often share humorous images in order to convey their thoughts and make people laugh (Kahya, 2018, p. 1021). Humor is at the center of our understanding of the world (Lowe, 1986, p. 439) and it has a central position in its virtual environment. The growing and proliferation of communication environments through social media has led to transformations in communication forms.

The global communication environment has inevitably brought with it the necessity for messages such as images to be striking, remarkable and memorable. This practical, fast and memorable communication has given birth to one of the most effective communication forms of the last decade (Aktaş, 2016, p. 5). As a result, humor that exists in social life has continued its life in electronic media by taking a digital form. Humor is one of the important criteria to understand the political and economic ups and downs of the society. Since humor is seen as a tool of domination by the governments from time to time, cartoonists are attempted to be put under pressure, but today humor continues to be produced and shared on the Internet and on the street. Making humor is now as easy as typing in Microsoft Word. The person who makes the humor can now be the person who writes on the wall on the street, or another person who takes a photo of the street writing and shares it on the Internet, or a university student who makes a meme about the writing he sees on the Internet. Thanks to smart phones, various design programs, social media and the Internet, the way humor is made has begun to transform (Karahisar, 2015, pp. 76-77).

That heralds structural changes (Söğüt & Öngel, 2022, p. 214) while it is said that digitalization and new media have affected daily life practices considerably (Ayaz, 2021, p. 521), the fact that digital broadcasting is accessible at any time without the restriction of time and place has made the star of digital elements shine. As a result of the transformation brought about by digitalization in the media, traditional humor contents have been transferred to the digital environment (Yeniceler & Karadağ, 2019, p. 102). As of today, digital humor is frequently encountered in various websites and social media. For

example, in addition to websites such as bobiler.org, zaytung, ekşi sözlük, uludağ sözlük, inci sözlük, inci caps (Fırat, 2016, p. 646), it is possible to list the circles where digital humor is produced: 1. Facebook, 2. Twitter, 3. Tumblr, 4. Bobiler.org, 5. Onedio, 6. Zaytung, 7. Sözlükler, 8. Instagram, 9. Youtube, 10. Reddit, 11. 9GaG, 12. forums and other sites that produce humor (Arslan, 2016, p. 28).

Humans are always at the center of humor. As a matter of fact, many things about people find their place in humor easily. This situation is widely observed both in traditional cultural products and in today's digital culture. In the cultural context, a social relief provided by traditional humor products is also there with products related to digital humor. Digital humor examples, unlike traditional humor products, appear in interactive environments with the help of web infrastructure, getting their way out printed and written materials. Contrary to traditional humor, this type of humor is a cultural product produced by the young generation who are Internet users. In addition, digital humor expands the field of humor by using the possibilities offered by hypertext. In digital humor examples, the original visual is semantically destroyed and reconstructed with humorous elements (Fırat, 2016, p. 653). Although important humorous weapons such as theater, cinema and caricature are available today, the digital form of humor has emerged with the concept of social media. Those who used to be only consumers of humor in the past have become both producers and consumers thanks to the user-based structure of social media (Kırık & Saltık, 2017, p. 99). Today, factors such as the development of Internet technology, its ease of use, and the predisposition of generations Y and Z to the Internet have facilitated the production of humor on the Internet. Even when the readers of the printed humor magazines could not interact with the illustrators, the likes and comments received for the products made in Internet humor provided feedback to the illustrators. Feedback from readers has been helpful to the illustrators. While only those who buy the magazine can see the humor made in the printed magazines, the humor made on the Internet has appealed to the whole world. Although inspired by printed humor, social media users have produced their own humor with their own slang and words (Karahisar, 2015, p. 88).

Humor, which has a long history, has gained a pluralistic identity by leaving the hands of a certain group in terms of production, unlike the old periods, with new media opportunities (Fırat, 2016, pp. 642-643). Social media users, who do not have to be pure consumers, thus started their own humorous adventures. The resulting humor products created a polyphonic discourse, inspired other users and encouraged them to make new formations (Kırık & Saltık, 2017, p. 100). The spread and distribution of products belonging to different humor actors further liberated the field of humor (Arslan, 2016, p. 26). Visual humor, in which the shares on politics, individual and social life have increased and what is presented to the consumer is produced, has also contributed to the production of new humor products among people who share common knowledge by using elements of tradition. Social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Whatsapp have also added humor products based on visual materials to the ever-growing sharing network within their own sharing area and cultural circle (Arslan, 2016, p. 22).

The common points of social media humor are that the humor elements produced in social media have a unique language, change the shape according to the environment in which they are used, proliferated and reproduced by sharing, and show anonymity according to the profile and product produced (Arslan, 2016, p. 37). The most important aspect of humor produced on the Internet is that it interacts very quickly with the real world. Therefore, digital humor products reach the target audience instantly. Thus, a topic or event that is up-to-date instantly resonates in the Internet environment and humorous elements related to it are produced immediately. Memes, montages or dubbings made about a current topic on the Internet also reveal the hidden aspects of that topic. In fact, these humorous elements allow for a clearer interpretation of that situation. The humor in question is not the objectification of the image in the brain, but the reinterpretation of the event by other people (Kullar & İnci, 2015 as cited in Fırat, 2016, p. 646). Social media humor, which is sometimes produced with a subtle humorous quality and sometimes without aesthetics and delicacy, appears as a popular production method (Kırık & Saltık, 2017, p. 115), with humorous products sometimes in the form of a photograph, or pictures drawn by digital tools (Arslan, 2016, p. 34).

## 2. Religious Humor

Religious humor in the virtual environment has become an important issue in recent years. Because, a significant part of the humor elements that we frequently encounter in social media is images with religious content. Humor deals with almost everything that belongs to human beings as well as religious themes (Beyazkılınç, 2022, p. 306). Today, there are many Internet pages where religious humorous items are shared (Karahisar, 2015, p. 86). These shares are increasing and becoming popular phenomena in the virtual environment. However, it will be insufficient to evaluate the spread of these posts and their transformation into a humorous visual phenomenon only on the basis of religiosity. Because in the current situation, most social media users share religious messages as well as different topics in electronic media.

In an interview with the cartoonist Ahmet Altay on this subject, Altay said: "There is no Islamic humor, humor is humor! Only those who make humor can have different views on life. There is as much humor as religion is in life" (Kayayerli, 2014). In some of the scientific studies, Islamic culture of human birth based on the presupposition that he is inclined towards religion, it is concluded that people are inclined to religious subjects from birth (Spinks, 2008, p. 307; Tokur, 2014, p. 259; Bilici, 2012, p. 191; Önder, 2004, p. 242; Yiğit, 2006, p. 183). These results obtained through are actually the reaffirmation of the concept expressed as 'fitra' (disposition) in the religion of Islam. Fitra is an innate (coded) nature of the creatures without being exposed to the built physical environment in which they were born (Düzgün, 2016, p. 322). The most appropriate and increasingly widespread view in understanding this concept is the understanding that nature expresses positive abilities and tendencies such as the instinct to know the Creator, the cleansing of the soul, etc. (Hökelekli, 1996, pp. 47-48).

Researchers such as Margaret Evans, who seeks the source of religious beliefs not in the "supernatural", but in the "natural", George E. Newman, who studies the emergence of religious belief, and Karen Wynn, who emphasizes whether religious feelings are innate or learned later, are all united in the idea that people are innately inclined to religious issues (Çifçi, 2015). Similarly, Deborah Kelemen (1999), who conducts research at Boston University, has concluded that teleological thinking is not learned afterwards, and that human beings bring this innate emotion along with them as a result of her studies.

Although humor, laughter and fun are accepted as natural expressions of human beings, these actions are sometimes seen as subjects that need to be limited and disciplined in the religious tradition. In some cultures, there have even been attempts to ban humor on the grounds that it harms people's religious life. From such a background, some stereotypes have emerged that the relations between humor and religious life are problematic. Is it really possible to talk about a contrast between the understanding of religion and humor? (Emre, 2020, p. 13). In this regard, a negative approach to humor has been displayed in most religions (Karakuş, 2019, pp. 44-45). In Islam, rather than the absolute prohibition of humor; the idea that laughing is an innate, that is, natural state, predominated. However, the fact that the humor style should have a pure structure has set an example for Muslims in terms of humor style (Uz, 2017, pp. 22-23) and it has been emphasized that humor should be approached carefully.

It was reminded that humor should not be made with lies and made-up words, that jokes or humor should not harm people, that a person's property should not be confiscated even as a joke, and it was advised that no one should be intimidated or disturbed by humor (Karakuş, 2019, p. 53). The fact that the word humor comes from Arabic (Karahisar, 2015, p. 77) in our language shows that it is also indirectly used in Islamic literature, and one of the factors that cause Muslims to be cautious about the practical performance of this art is the preference of dignity and seriousness to jokes due to religious understanding. (Uz, 2017, p. 22). Even if humor is sometimes approached negatively, it cannot be concluded that making jokes is prohibited, but instead not being able to joke is prohibited. In other words, people who have difficulty in making jokes, do not know how to joke and do not pay attention to the limits of humor are asked to stay away from humor. If these issues are not taken into consideration, it is thought that "humor will lose the value of people and harm brotherhood" (Karakuş, 2019, p. 48).

The existence of humor, laughing and joking has not been questioned in the Islamic tradition. The general tendency was that humor, jokes and laughter should not be overdone, and that negative and destructive humor such as sarcasm should be avoided. In the context of the relationship between humor and religion, possible situations such as humor that can cause uncontrolled, offensive and obscene content are seen as aspects that do not comply with the nature of religion. The fact that humor provides support and relief to the individual in coping with troubles and shedding light on the problems of life has been seen as a common aspect that it shares with religion (Beyazkılınç, 2022, pp. 306-307).

In Muslim societies such as the Seljuk and Ottoman Empires (Karahisar, 2015, p. 87), there is a distinct culture of humor. This tradition of humor has an extremely rich range due to the colorfulness of its characters (Uz, 2017, p. 37). For example, while Nasreddin Hodja, and Karagöz and Hacivat are the greatest representatives of oral tradition, Nefi, Nâbi, Şair Eşref [“Poet Eşref” in English] and Neyzen Tevfik [“Ney Performer Tevfik” in English] have also taken their place in history as satire masters (Karahisar, 2015, p. 76). The fact that humor literature is intertwined with religious life as well as social life is among the prominent features of the humor of religious geographies such as classical Arab and Persian ones. Therefore, we can say that hundreds of stories that are historical or completely fictional are inspired by various manifestations of religious life. Therefore, humor seems to have given the necessary weight to the narrations related to the characters with religious personality and the basic rituals related to the practical field of religion such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, etc. (Uz, 2017, p. 26).

### 3. Methodology

In the study, religious humorous items that became widespread in social media applications were evaluated in the context of Morreal's (1997), Thorson and Powell's (1993) approaches to humor. Discourse analysis model, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the research process. Discourse analysis deals with semantic products created through speech and texts. It is a research method used in comprehensive social and cultural research (Çelik & Ekşi, 2008, p. 99). Moreover, discourse analysis is a new development in the social psychological methodology that deals with how language is used (Elliot, 1996). Depending on the developments in social psychology, it has become a qualitative study in recent years. It is a prominent research method in scientific studies. It focuses on the variability of meaning in texts and is considered an initiative (Çelik & Ekşi, 2008, p. 105). This approach emphasizes the social action aspect of language. It focuses on how people use language in daily events to create their own world of perception. From this point of view, discourse analysis, in a sense, reveals the diversity of "meaning" and is seen as an advanced semiotics (Elliott, 1996).

Discourse can only be made from a social context, and all the words in material and spiritual scope used in a discourse can only be formed in a social context. Discourses do not stay in a vacuum; they develop in one context, in another discourse, and become externalized by relating to contexts. Therefore, discourse is a technique based on interpretation, and the impartiality expected from science cannot be expected from discourse, because its ontological feature is that it is interpretive and plural. There is no singular discourse or reality in the world. Items are interpreted by humans. The context in which the discourse emerges is the social space in which people live (Punch, 2013). Discourse analysis is intersubjective, which occurs when individuals are conversing with others. It is a truly social method that focuses on the components of the mind. According to the basic assumption of discourse analysis, the individual uses language to create social world value. At the heart of this analysis is how language is used (Elliot, 1996). For these reasons, the focus of research in social sciences is no longer factual, material facts and first meanings, but discourses (Oğuz, 2008, p. 53). The subtle understanding, warning,

comfort and humor in the religious content that social media users produce by combining visual elements and texts can only be analyzed in a social and religious context with discourse analysis. In order to understand the relationship between religion and humor, discourse analysis method was used in this study. The semantic construction of the texts within the visual elements has made it easier to analyze the relationship between religious humor produced in social media and religious tradition, and thus to understand the digitalized religious humor.

The primary problem of the study, which concentrates on the entertaining appearance of religiously themed images in social media and its comforting aspects, is to ascertain how religious humor in real life is translated into a digital form in electronic media. With millions of users in Turkey, the Facebook application was selected as a sample for this. Posts from January 2021 to December 2021 from the Facebook application were examined. It was thought that the twelve-month follow-up period would be sufficient to reach the research findings. Key concepts such as "religion", "humor", and "laughter" were sought in the selection of images. The main reason for examining such texts is that we live in a world where visual communication is more common. In daily life, visuals accompany people even on the Internet, television, newspaper, election posters, advertisement, and transportation stations (Kahya, 2018, p. 1023). The relationship between religion and humor has been little studied in a religious context. When we look closely at the subjects of humor and piety, it is seen that the relationship has a multidimensional nature. As such, we can say that religious humor is a subject waiting to be studied with its different dimensions. Although such studies cannot make the relationship between humor and religiosity intelligible in all its dimensions, they are noteworthy in that they show that it is a subject that is too broad to fit into a single stereotype (Emre, 2020, p. 11). Conceptually, studies on the relationship between humor and religion are generally discussed (Çolak, 2016, pp. 231-232) with reference to Christianity (as in the examples of Capps, 2006; Saroglou, 2002). However, there are also studies such as "Humor in Early Islam" (1997) by Franz Rosenthal.

When the field is scanned, studies such as "İslam Kültüründe Mizah ve Türk Edebiyatındaki Yansımaları: Cevâmiu'l Hikâyât Örneği" by Uz (2017), "Dijital Mizahın Biçimbozumu: Bobiler.org Örneği" by Fırat (2016), "Basılı Mizahtan Paylaşılan Mizaha Doğru Dönüşüm: İnternette Mizah" by Karahisar, (2015), "Mehmet Âkif Ersoy'un Mektuplarında Mizah" conducted by Kurt (2021), and "Bir İletişim Aracı Olarak Mizah: Sosyal Medyada Spor Temalı 'Caps' Kültürü" by Kahya (2018) draw attention. Although the studies have reached guiding findings in the field, studies on the appearance of religious humor in social media have not been found in the literature. In this study, religious humor, which has gained an important position in new media environments and has become increasingly widespread, has been investigated through the form of digitalization.

#### **4. Research Findings and Analysis**

The images which were shared in the Facebook application and thought to be directly related to the research problem were analyzed by discourse analysis method below. Each picture examined reflects a different sharing on social media.



**Image 1.** Social Security Themed Humor Examples

**Source:** (Facebook, 2021)

The first image examined reads "Don't trust your insurance, connect with your Lord". While the last word means "connecting" in the sense of connecting to divine assurance and support, a referential relationship was established by referring to the institution "BAG-KUR". The Social Insurance Institution for Tradesmen, Craftsmen and Other Independent Employees, known as Bağ-Kur in short, was established in 1971 as a separate social security institution with the Law No. 1479. With the Social Security Institution Law No. 5502, which united the social security institutions under one roof in 2006, the SGK was established and the existence of a separate social security unit, Bağ-Kur, came to an end. Bag-Kur insurance has been regulated in article 4/b of the new social security law no. 5510, and the term 4/b is now used instead of Bağ-Kur (Demirci, 2022). Thus, both social media users were relieved by laughing, and a warning message was given. The use of an example of homophones (Türk Dil Bilgisi, 2014), with the same spelling but different meanings, gave the message. Similarly, in the second image, the sentence "You cannot find an accident insurance that is more protective than the prayers of your parents" has turned the visual sharing into a humor element by associating a religious advice with accident insurance.

While we see classical humor as a relief (Türkmen, 1996, p. 2), we witness the same situation in new media environments. The projection of humor in a written text or verbally among people is made in social media as in these examples. Although it looks like simple visuals at first glance (Kutlu, 2021, p. 19), this relaxation provided by humor makes people laugh. While embarking on the task of understanding laughter, it is necessary to be prepared not only for the wide variety of situations in which laughter occurs, but also for the exceptional nature of behavior (Morreal, 1997, p. 7). As seen in the examples, these pictures, produced with unconventional, and exceptional words and in a digital form,

both surprised and amused the target audience. These images, which rather serve to get rid of unrest, reduce distress and anxiety, visualize religious content and turn it into an element of humor.



**Image 2.** Transforming Advertising Slogans into Religious Humor

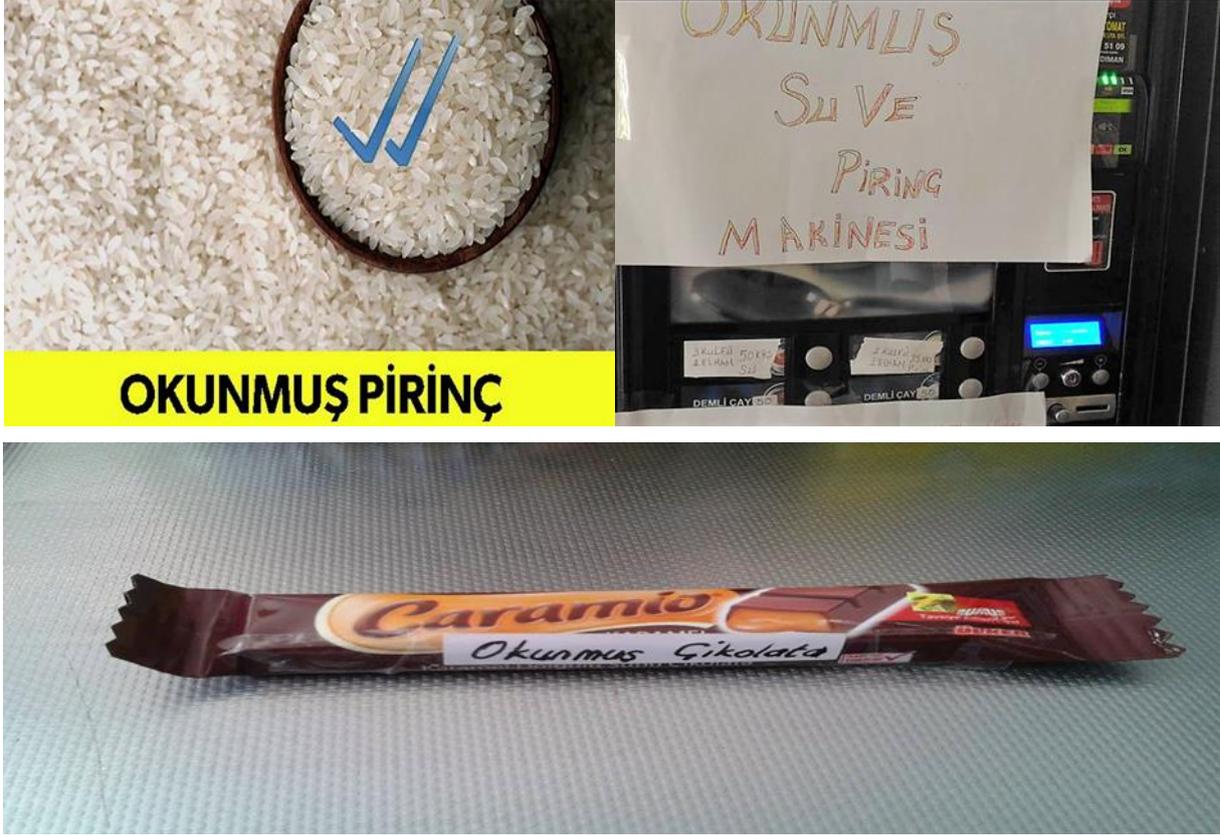
**Source:** (Facebook, 2021)

Individuals have varying degrees of motivation in the development of a sense of humor. For example, if the person's previous efforts at humor have been in vain, they will have little motivation to reproduce humor. In this case, he will have to develop his perceived abilities in the field of humor. On the other hand, the person whose effort is not in vain will have a lot of motivation for the production of humor. The person who perceives the feeling of "other people find me funny" will try to further develop the existing humor elements (Thorson & Powell, 1993, p. 14). As seen in the sample pictures, the same sentences are constructed with different visual elements. The posts that attract the attention of social media users and are found funny are reproduced with different icons and shared in the virtual environment. Although their number has increased and consists of repeated sentences, these posts, each made by a different account, do not lose their popularity.

While "The Sweetest Mornings Begin with Prayer" is written in the first image, "The Sweetest Mornings Start with Morning Prayer" is written in the second and third images. In all three posts, the advertising slogan of an internationally corporate company, "The Sweetest Mornings in All Regions of Turkey, Starts with Çokokrem" (Ülker, 2022) was addressed, and the second half of the advertisement sentence was changed and turned into humor. An important part of humor depends on experiencing or imagining dissonance. The cognitive change in humor is mostly due to the fact that the person has a different

expectation about the thing or situation. Funniness arises when the person realizes that the situation is not as expected. The person has seen and heard the same situation before, but then there are no dissonances in the situation. The confusion here is due to the partial deterioration of people's cognition system (Morreal, 1997, pp. 64-65). As mentioned above, humorous elements were revealed in the digital environment by changing and disharmonizing an advertising slogan that was heard and known by almost everyone. The main factor that creates humor in these images is that the advertising slogan is changed and transformed into religious content, and as such, it surprises people. Again, as Morreal (1997, p. 62) points out, if you touch a person after saying "I will touch you", that person will not smile. But if you do not touch him after pretending to touch, then you will make that person laugh. It is the unexpected here that makes joke humorous. As in the visuals examined, situations that surprise individuals are the basic raw material of humor.

This new slogan, written on visuals, both cheered the target audience and indirectly advised them, just like the first visual. The common theme of religious humor elements in the digital environment is to influence social media users by warning them about religious issues, as can be seen in the above and many other images. Social media users, while creating images of religious humor, did not neglect to give a message to the society at the same time. Charles Y. Glock (1998, pp. 254-255), explained the basic dimensions of a religion in five typology: belief dimension, worship dimension, experience dimension, knowledge dimension and influence dimension. Unlike other basic dimensions, the dimension of influencing emerges in the dimension of influencing people rather than the relationship between the creator and human. In the visuals examined, it is seen that social media users want to influence other users. The integrity of meaning created in the shares and the visual that strengthens the language of discourse constitute the basic structure of these efforts to influence. Social media allows its users to create and share content as well as communicating. This feature of social media reveals that users can influence other users with the content they share and that they are also open to influence against other content they encounter (Haberli, 2018, p. 643). In Morreal's (1997, p. 94) thoughts, influence is considered among the basic conditions of humor.



**Image 3.** Blessed Food

**Source:** (Facebook, 2021)

As seen in this example, in social media environments, visual examples involving the effort to make people laugh and have a good time are frequently encountered. While in the theory of relaxation, nervous energy emerges and the act of laughing occurs before laughing, Morreal (1997, p. 35) emphasized that the act of laughing itself relaxes people rather than this energy. The blessed rice, water and chocolate in the images above were turned into humor elements and made people laugh. Especially the double blue check mark on the first picture has turned the subject into a more humorous structure as an image belonging to the digital environment. The double blue check mark (WhatsApp, 2022), meaning that the message was read by the recipient in the WhatsApp application, implied that the rice was also read (blessed), making the subject humorous. These posts, which can be shown as examples of religious humor items, have also been evaluated as a coping mechanism for social media users. James A. Thorson and F. C. Powell (1993, p. 13) evaluated personal sense of humor as a coping mechanism in their study titled "Development and validation of a multidimensional scale of sense of humor". For them, humor has long been recognized as a mechanism for dealing with life's problems and situational challenges. Humor helps a person cope with negative life experiences. For example, it counteracts a person's tendency to become depressed. Reported psychological studies confirm this (Capps, 2006, p. 409).



**Image 4.** Religious-Themed Humorous Warnings

**Source:** (Facebook, 2021)

A sense of humor in general is really a way of looking at the world; it is a style, a means to protect oneself or to make a living (Thorson & Powell, 1993, p. 13). On humor and the ability to tell jokes, Sanders (2001) says that "a well-constructed sentence can take one's breath away, but a good joke refreshes it" (p. 106). As seen in the sample pictures, in these images, which are about the pandemic process, on the one hand, people are warned and on the other hand, they are cheered and relieved. In the first image, it reads, "Muslims who cannot enter the mall without the HES code want to enter heaven without prayer, I'm surprised." HES code, it is a code that allows you to securely share whether you carry any risk in terms of COVID-19 disease with institutions and individuals in your transactions such as transportation or visit within the scope of controlled social life (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2020). With this sentence, it was emphasized that it is not possible to enter places with crowded human communities such as shopping malls without the HES code, and it was reminded that lessons about the other world should be learned from here. Associating and depicting the measures taken by official institutions with religious content has been evaluated as an element of religious humor in the digital environment.

In the second image, death, which is one of the disasters that can happen to a person if the measures are not followed, is described in a humorous style. On the tombstone, on which information such as the name and date of birth of the deceased is written, "Stay at home or this is where you will stay" is written. In both images, which are examples of creating humor with funniness (Morreal, 1997), the humorous intelligence of the people who produce humor and their ability to relax by making people laugh while warning them are striking. As Thorson and Powell (1991) state, a sense of humor should include at least the following elements:

1. Humor production, a humorous ability to identify funny things that will amuse others;
2. Ability to have a good time;

3. Ability to use humor to achieve social goals; using humor to alleviate tense situations and to increase in-group solidarity;
4. The humorous perception of strange events and personal mistakes in life;
5. Sense of humor, humorous people and humorous situations;
6. Using humor as an adaptation mechanism, being able to laugh at problems (p. 701).

The sense of humor is a person's way of coming through a situation with his intelligence, ability to produce, and power of imagination. Joyful, relaxed, and loose situations can activate the ability to produce humor, which is hidden in people, as well as pressured, difficult, and tightly controlled environments and periods - perhaps as an indirect extension of the instinct of survival - cause humor to come out of the human mind. Whatever the case, the ability and sense of humor, is a kind of productivity resulting from them, and a human act, consciously undertaken. Wittiness, that is, the ability to make humor, has always been associated with sharp intelligence (Koestler, 1997, pp. 23-24). Also, Reich, Maglio and Fulmer in their study conducted in 2021 (p. 4) found that men were evaluated more negatively than women in terms of humor. One of the reasons for this is that men are used more frequently than women are in humor items. As seen in the sample pictures, there are men in almost all of the images shared, and the humorous warnings are made through men.



**Image 5.** Images About Death

**Source:** (Facebook, 2021)

Human nature cannot always show the same vitality and performance. Sometimes, when he wants to get rid of the tiredness and troubles of hard work, he turns to some activities. Humor comes first among these activities (Doğan, 2004, p. 192). It is possible to understand that humor is a necessary phenomenon for today's societies by looking at its effects on society. For this reason, the value of humor in terms of public health is frequently emphasized in studies. Humor not only relaxes people in the society, but also provides benefits on a large scale by regulating their social relations (Şahin, 2010, p. 141).

Humor has important psychological benefits such as relieving life stress, anxiety and depression (Capps, 2006, p. 393). Therefore, religion and humor seem to be allied because religion is also considered compatible with psychological well-being (Capps, 1985). The fact that humor is seen in religious figures also confirms this argument. For example, it can be seen in a study investigating Mehmet Âkif Ersoy's humorous side that he frequently resorted to humor both in his work *Safahat* and in his daily life in his relations with his family and surroundings, and humor became his favorite style (Kurt, 2021, p. 101) to soften the negativities he saw around him. It has been seen that in *Safahat* he uses humor as a social service tool, and sometimes uses humor in dialogues to have fun, to have a good time and to make people laugh (Safi, 2017, p. 335). In some studies, it has been concluded that if humor is used as an alternative method in teaching religion, students will significantly reduce their anxiety about the lesson (Uz & Çakmak, 2018, pp. 107-108).

In some studies, although there are still discussions that the relationship between religion and humor cannot be resolved, and that religion is opposed to humor, there is no religious problem in the humor elements that are created in a way that will not harm human dignity. As can be seen in the sample pictures, these posts have the feature of warning through humor. It does not have a structure to offend any personality. In the first picture shared, it is written, "This body you use will also have an expiration date". In this post, the "expiration date" which is generally used in non-human, food products, was attributed to the human body, and a warning -and reminder- themed humor was created. The expiration date is the last date for a product to be consumed in a healthy way without deteriorating its quality. Since the consumption or use of the product after this specified date will carry a risk, the products in question cannot be sold after this date (Karma Kodlama Teknolojileri, 2020). As Bergson (2019, p. 5), one of the leading theorists of laughter, stated, laughter really belongs only to human beings. Therefore, the most important and essential aspect of humor is that it is presented through people, on issues that concern people. In the examined image, the date of death is marked as the expiration date. Thus, humor was created through a signification (strangeness) that people are unfamiliar with (Morreal, 1997, p. 66). An event such as death that will cause pain and sadness for people has been fictionalized with humor. In the second post, "Death does not work for us, but, it will happen to us..!" is written. This sharing is one of the religious posts that has the potential to both relax and warn people in social media applications, just like the first picture.

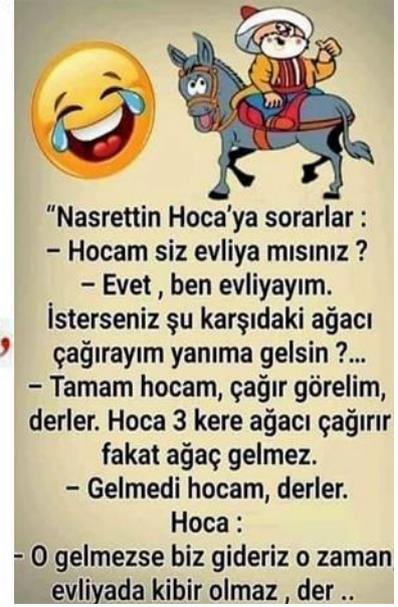


Image 6. Nasreddin Hodja Themed Posts

Source: (Facebook, 2021)

Social media platforms, which are open to almost all communities, have become environments where a lot of information is shared quickly on many issues as well as on religious issues (Haberli, 2015, pp. 54-56). The Internet, which has become a part of social life, has thus brought virtual dimensions to the religious life of individuals (Haberli, 2013, p. 17). In the posts shown above, two anecdotes attributed to Nasreddin Hodja are told in the virtual environment. In both jokes, which have a humorous style, the aim of comforting and cheering people over religious issues is seen.

In the first post, "They asked Nasreddin Hodja, 'Sir, is Ramazan satisfied with us, can we please it?' Hodja replied, 'If it wasn't satisfied, would it come 10 days earlier every year?'" is written. In the second post: "They ask Nasreddin Hodja:

- Sir, are you a saint?

- Yes, I'm a saint. If you want, I can call the tree across the street to come to me.

They say, "Okay, sir, let's call and see." Hodja calls the tree three times, but the tree does not come.

- They say 'It didn't come, Hodja!'

Hodja replies:

- If it doesn't come, we'll go. "There is no arrogance in the saint."

Nasreddin Hodja, who is the pinnacle personality carrying the Turkish humor and critical thinking world from the past to the future, has been living as a cultural phenomenon for 800 years. He became the symbol of Turkish folk philosophy, and at the same time, he is the sage of the Turkish system of thought. Through Nasreddin Hodja's memory of anecdotes, generations learn the systematic structure of critical

thinking in the tolerant world of humor (Özdemir, 2010, pp. 27-28). As seen in the images above, Nasreddin Hodja jokes, which have an important place in Turkish culture and many cultures around the world, have been transferred from written works and oral culture to the virtual environment with the digitalization process, like many other cultural phenomena.

In the first post where Nasreddin Hodja jokes (Bekki, 2018, p. 1050), which always renew themselves despite the passage of time and eras, and contain deep messages for today's world (Şahin, 2010, p. 142) are digitalized in visual form in the new media environment, it was emphasized that the months in the "Hijri calendar" came earlier than the Gregorian calendar. The calculation of the beginning of the months in the Hijri calendar is based on the criterion of seeing the crescent moon (Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2022). This is the difference between them and the Gregorian calendar. This information was also shared as a visual element of religious humor. Similarly, it is possible to see the theme of humor with religious content in the second post. The fact that the first sentences of the jokes arouse people's curiosity, and that the last sentences end in a pleasant way makes people relax and laugh. Morreal (1997, p. 69) explains this situation when people relax and laugh after solving a problem or riddle. According to him, if the solution is found immediately without spending energy, this will not cause laughter. But, its later resolution will cause laughter. In the visuals examined, firstly, the sense of curiosity is aroused, and the message is given at the end, causing an emotional change in people and causing them to laugh. When the result is not reached, all the attention and effort is on the subject, but as soon as the issue is resolved, the tension ends and laughing begins. In both posts, Hodja's answers in the last sentence are the moment when the issue is resolved and laughter is experienced.

### Conclusion

As a result of the study focusing on the fun appearance of religious-themed images in social media and their comforting qualities, it was seen that religious humor is fictionalized with the possibilities offered by the electronic environment within the integrity of the visuals and texts. It has been determined that in some cases, images which were taken from the Facebook application and examined through purposeful sampling technique, adhere to the original subject and dialogues, but in some other cases, humor is created by combining the religious discourses with other phenomena as in examples of conversion of advertising slogans into religious humor. A long with these determinations, an important point that draws attention in every post is the humorization of religious subjects through visualization.

These visual elements, which are considered as one of the possibilities offered by the digital environment, have made the classical style humor such as verbal narration even more humorous on the virtual platform. The creation of the message with visual examples made the subject easier to understand, and also cheered and relaxed people. It is also possible to define the visual elements examined within the scope of the study as the humor memory of the society. In the study, which was designed in line with the discourse analysis, it was seen that the humorous posts generally have a

structure that tends to warn people while cheering them up. One of the points that the research wants to draw attention to in this regard is the ability of social media users to produce humor. Editing visual elements and texts together depends on the humorous intelligence of the humor creators and their ability to use technological tools. In addition, it should be noted that the digital environment makes humor easier with visual elements compared to making humor over any phenomenon in daily life.

As with other humor types, religious humor elements are produced to cope with life's difficulties, to forget the troubles, to relax psychologically, to have fun, to motivate oneself in a positive way, to show a positive perspective in the face of negative situations, to make other people laugh, and to create funny social environments through humor. In social media environments, people use religious humor as a means of relaxation and reminders of religious warnings.

In the visuals examined within the scope of the study, no impropriety or inconsistency was observed in terms of the spiritual values of the Islamic society. In this case, there is no objection to the humor produced, provided that it does not simplify and underestimate religious facts. Apart from making religious subjects an object of ridicule in order to make people laugh and create a funny environment, it is thought that a temperate sense of humor will not cause religious inconveniences. As mentioned in the theoretical part, the religion of Islam allows for temperate humor made in the proper place. In the analyzed posts, there were no situations such as lying, distorting the truth, humiliating people or other objects while making humor. Religious topics have been humorized for the sole purpose of comforting and warning. While doing these, digital humor objects were created by taking support from the power of discourse. For example, writing the sentence "don't trust your insurance, connect with your Lord" on a religious themed background image requires both a discourse construction and a religious infrastructure. The religious humor desired to be produced in the digital environment will only be possible if these conditions are met. Otherwise, even if people are made to laugh over religious facts, it will not be possible to talk about a temperate religious humor. Similarly, converting foods such as water and chocolate into religious humor requires both religious background knowledge and the ability to fictionalize visual content. In addition, the matching of the "read rice" image with the WhatsApp read message explains how digital humor is created in the virtual environment. The ritual of "saying prayers" in religion was linked with the "read" icon, which is a virtual term in the WhatsApp application, to create a humorous discourse with a religious theme.

In the visuals analyzed during the research process, traces of religiously recommended humor were seen mostly. Of course, not all religious humor in social media environments will be evaluated in this way. There are also humorous posts that ignore human dignity in the virtual environment. Examining such posts from a religious perspective in prospective studies will contribute to the literature.

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