

Humour, Morality, and Power: The Normalization of Hate Speech Against LGBTQ Representation in Malaysia

Mohd Baharim Mayidin¹, Mohd Azizi Ab Ghani^{2*}, Muhammad Luqman Ibnul Hakim Mohd Saad³,
Shahrizal Mahpol⁴, Nik Ahmad Kamal Juhari Nik Hashim⁵, Mohd Zuhdi Ismail⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6}Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kelantan Branch

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how public discourse on social media in Malaysia functions as a mechanism for normalising hate speech against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) representation in mainstream media. Drawing on Michel Foucault's Normalization Theory (1977), it explores how humour, religious moralisation, cultural identity, and political instrumentalisation collectively reinforce heteronormative norms and regulate non-conforming identities. Using a qualitative thematic content analysis approach, 455 public Facebook comments responding to MalaysiaKini's post about LGBTQ visibility at the 25th Anugerah Juara Lagu (AJL) were examined. Findings reveal that 35.8% of the comments contained hate elements, with 49.7% reflecting normalisation processes. Four interconnected discursive mechanisms were identified: (1) humour and sarcasm, which disguise hostility as entertainment; (2) religious rhetoric, which legitimises exclusion through moral policing; (3) cultural and national identity framing, which positions LGBTQ identities as threats to Malay-Muslim traditions; and (4) political instrumentalisation, where LGBTQ issues are weaponised to delegitimise political opponents. These mechanisms often overlap, forming a discursive network that sustains social hierarchies by blending ridicule, moral judgment, patriotism, and political rhetoric. The findings indicate that hate speech in Malaysia's digital spaces operates subtly, embedding prejudice within everyday discourse under the guise of humour, religion, and nationalism. The study contributes to sociological understandings of how normalisation processes perpetuate exclusionary ideologies, offering insights into the interplay between media, culture, and power. It recommends culturally sensitive content moderation, inclusive digital literacy initiatives, and further research on counter-discourses across other social media platforms.

Keywords – LGBTQ representation, Normalization Theory, hate speech, public discourse, Malaysia, social media

INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) representation in mainstream media is a widely debated topic, especially in culturally and religiously conservative nations (Ferreira, 2022 and Monaghan, 2021). In Malaysia, the visibility of LGBTQ individuals in media often sparks controversy, largely because Malay-Muslim identity is deeply integrated with state and societal structures (Xia et al., 2024; Tan, 2022 and Sofian & Azmawati, 2021). Recent social media discussions, particularly those reacting to LGBTQ appearances on television, show how public discourse reinforces traditional gender and sexuality norms. These reactions are frequently shaped by humour, religious rhetoric (Hayman, 2024; Xia et al., 2024), cultural identity (Waggoner, 2018), and political narratives (Gash et al., 2020), illustrating broader societal mechanism that govern non-conforming identities.

From a sociological point of view, Michel Foucault's Normalization Theory (1977) explains the establishment and enforcement of societal norms via discourse, institutions, and disciplinary mechanisms. Foucault argues that power operates not only through overt laws but also subtly through shared language and knowledge systems, which define what is considered acceptable behaviour and identity within a society. This process of normalization shapes social realities by making certain attitudes and expressions seem commonplace and natural, while others are deemed deviant and subject to regulation (Foucault, 2023). In this context, the backlash against

LGBTQ representation in Malaysian media suggests that humour, religious morality, national identity, and political affiliations serve as powerful discursive tools that significantly shape public perceptions and responses, effectively acting as mechanisms to reinforce dominant norms and discipline non-conforming identities.

Despite global trends towards increased LGBTQ representation in media, Malaysia continues to face significant resistance to such visibility. Public discourse on social media shows strong opposition through humour, religious rhetoric, cultural concerns, and political narratives. These rhetorical tools collectively reinforce heteronormativity as the societal standard. However, existing studies on LGBTQ issues in Malaysia primarily focus on legal policies and institutional discrimination, with limited research on how public discourse functions as a tool of normalisation and social control. Thus, this study aims to examine how humour, religious rhetoric, cultural identity, and political discourse operate as discursive mechanisms that normalize and legitimize hate speech against LGBTQ representation in Malaysian media, reinforcing heteronormativity and regulating non-conforming identities through public discourse.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how public discourse regulates identity expression through mechanisms of humour, morality, cultural narratives, and political instrumentalization. By applying Normalization Theory, a sociological concept that explores power dynamics and societal norms, this study provides insight into the broader sociocultural processes that maintain dominant gender norms. The findings provide insights for future research on media representation, public perception, and policy discussions regarding gender and sexuality in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussion of LGBTQ representation and public discourse in Malaysia can be framed within Normalization Theory focussing on social regulation through humour, religious moralization, cultural identity and nationalism, and political instrumentalization of LGBTQ issues. The following literature review explores relevant academic works that provide context to these themes.

Hate Speech Normalisation

Michel Foucault's Normalisation Theory (1977) explains how societies define behaviours that are acceptable in discourse, surveillance, and disciplinary mechanisms. According to him, power is not just enforced through laws and institutions but also embedded in language and knowledge systems that shape social realities (Foucault, 1977). This perspective is important to understand how media and public discourse regulate gender and sexuality norms, particularly in LGBTQ representation. For instance, public discourse can normalize certain attitudes, such as hate comments, by making them seem common and normal (Nie, 2024).

Hate speech normalisation occurs when discriminatory or hostile language becomes widely accepted in public discourse. In a study done by Tsirbas & Zircanou-Kazolea (2024) in Greece, the findings demonstrate that sexism and nationalism can become entrenched in digital spaces. Their research highlights how repeated exposure to hate speech can make individuals more likely to accept such discourse over time. This aligns with Spasova's (2017) findings that frequent encounters with hate speech reduce sensitivity to its harmful effects. Similarly, Soral et al. (2020) found that Polish adults who frequently use social media were more likely to perceive anti-Muslim hate speech as common.

Humour and Sarcasm as a Mechanism of Social Regulation

Humour has been widely recognized as a tool for social regulation by reinforcing dominant cultural norms and at the same time maintaining its own power structures. Billig (2005) argues that humour is more than mere entertainment; it serves as a form of ideological reinforcement that disciplines individuals who deviate from societal expectations. Meyer (2000) carries the same idea and highlights how sarcasm, ridicule, and satire function to create and maintain distinctions between in-groups and out-groups, shaping public attitudes toward marginalised communities.

Further research on social media in Malaysia shows that humour have a double barrel purpose in society. It can be used to criticize the government or any political party, but at the same time also helps maintain traditional values through soft reprimanding. For example, studies on political trolling in Malaysia find that jokes and memes on Twitter often carry hidden messages meant to shape public opinion and reinforce power structures (Rahman et al., 2024). Likewise, research shows that gender-based jokes on social media support social hierarchies by portraying marginalised groups as "weak" or "inferior," making discrimination seem like just "entertainment" (Chaves et al., 2023). While the patterns are not always focused on LGBTQ issues, it shows how humour can be a tool for both challenging authority and preserving conservative beliefs.

Beyond Malaysia, Silva & Carvalho (2023) found that in Portuguese LGBTQ communities, humour – through jokes or even compliments – can quietly reinforce stereotypes, making discrimination seem harmless or even positive. This is in line with wider research suggesting that humour can spread hate speech while avoiding blame. For example, studies on digital platforms in Portugal show that YouTube comments often use the element of irony and fear to attack marginalised groups, disguising insults as jokes (Carvalho et al., 2024). Similar trends are portrayed in the Philippines through the film series *Sakristan* that uses humour to portray LGBTQ characters in a negative way, turning their struggles into “entertainment” while reinforcing traditional gender roles and social hierarchies (Munsalud et al., 2024).

A major challenge in addressing hate speech lies in its implicit forms. The implicit nature of hate speech allows it to evade criticism by positioning offensive rhetoric as "just a joke," making it harder to challenge (Ali, 2021; Syahputra, 2017). Ocampo et al. (2023) found that indirect expressions of hate – such as metaphors, sarcasm, and coded language – can be just as damaging as overt hate speech. Despite its subtle tone, repeated exposure to such discourse contributes to the normalisation of use in public spaces, making discriminatory behavior appear more acceptable over time.

Religious Moralization and LGBTQ Identity

Michel Foucault’s theory of normalisation introduces an important view on how religious moralisation shapes societal norms around LGBTQ issues through hate speech. By framing homosexuality as "sinful" or "deviant," religious institutions and actors reinforce power structures that marginalise LGBTQ identities, creating discursive frameworks where hate speech becomes normalised as a defence of "divine order."

Religion and belief system particularly in Muslim-majority societies also plays a major role in shaping social attitudes towards LGBTQ identities. Studies by Yip (2005) and Siraj (2012) indicate that Islamic teachings are often interpreted as strictly prohibiting non-heteronormative identities, leading to moral condemnation and public policing. Foucault’s (1978) concept of biopolitics further suggest that religious discourse is used to regulate sexuality at both individual and institutional levels.

In the Malaysian context, studies by Mohd Noor (2020) and Ismail & Kamal (2022) found that religious authorities and online discourse work together to reinforce heteronormativity, using religious justifications to frame LGBTQ identities as immoral or unnatural. Online condemnation through social media comments, supports these findings, where religious language is used to construct LGBTQ individuals as outcasts to the standing moral and social order.

Cultural Identity, Nationalism, and LGBTQ Representation

LGBTQ rights are often discussed as to where it fits within the context of national identity, particularly in societies where traditional values are often strongly tied to cultural heritage. Studies by Puar (2007) and Rao (2020) examine how sexuality and gender expression are used as markers of cultural belonging, with LGBTQ identities frequently portrayed as Western imports that threatens the longstanding traditional values.

Research by Mohamad & Kassim (2019) and Abdullah (2021) suggests that in Malaysia, LGBTQ representation is often framed as an idea that challenges the Malay-Muslim identity. This aligns with Foucault’s (1977) idea that national discourse constructs the “ideal citizen” – one who conforms to cultural and religious expectations.

The online comments support this finding and the opposing view of LGBTQ representation sees the conflict as a threat to cultural preservation and national morality.

Political Instrumentalisation of LGBTQ Issues

LGBTQ issues are often politicized as the nature of the issue stands on discussion and disagreement that are well-documented in many countries. Studies by Adam et al. (1999) and Encarnación (2016) highlight that LGBTQ discourse is often used strategically by political groups to appeal to specific voter bases. In a more conservative societies, LGBTQ rights are framed as moral threats to garner support among religious and traditionalist groups.

In Malaysia, studies by Wan & Ibrahim (2022) and Chin (2023) found that LGBTQ issues are often used in political rhetoric to criticise opposing parties, with accusations of “liberal” or “Western” influence being used to delegitimise political opponents. Through analysis, the social media comments gathered shows an alignment with this trend, as the critiques of the issue were often linked to political dissatisfaction and ideological factions.

In Malaysian context, religion and politics are the moving force that shapes the social discourse on most issues especially concerning one such as the LGBTQ rights. The country's politics are frequently influenced by religious sentiment, directly affecting how social issues are discussed and addressed (Vera-Revilla et al., 2024). Some political parties exploit religious narratives to shape public opinion on LGBTQ issues for their own political gain (Saidin & Azrun, 2024). Ideally, social media should be a space for free expression, however these platforms are often used to spread hate speech against the LGBTQ community. This spread is heavily influenced by religious and political factors, with some popular figures playing a role in determining the direction of public discussion. Research by Iwan and Mohd Hed (2023) found that social media discourse is heavily influenced by political and partisan elements. There is even evidence that politicians hire "cybertroopers" to control the narrative of certain issues to gain support from social media users. This suggests that LGBTQ issues in Malaysia are also used as political tools to fulfil specific agendas.

Additionally, political discourse could massively affect the public views and changes the societal beliefs which may alter the attitudes towards many issues including LGBTQ concerns. This discourse is disseminated through mass media and digital platforms, which in turn shape public perception of a particular group or issue (Bekturovna & Syrtbaevna, 2024). Through studies done in Indonesia, hate speech is mainly delivered through the use of social media, which in turn influences public opinion and disrupts social cohesion especially during election seasons. This indicates that political figures and interest groups can manipulate digital platforms to frame hate speech according to their interests (Nurochman & Al-Hamdi, 2024). Research on political discourse also emphasizes its role in shaping public opinion, where politicians use language as a tool to influence, set agendas, and form political identities that ultimately affect social attitudes and perceptions (Bekturovna & Syrtbaevna, 2024). Therefore, the relationship between politics, religion, and social media plays a crucial role in determining the direction of public discourse, especially on issues involving the LGBTQ community.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative content analysis approach to investigate the expression and normalisation of hate speech related to LGBTQ representation in Malaysian media. The study is guided by Normalisation Theory (Foucault, 1977), which provides a framework for analysing how public discourse reinforces societal norms and regulates expressions of gender and sexuality. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the discursive patterns, rhetorical strategies, and underlying social structures that shape public attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals. By analysing public responses to LGBTQ visibility, the study seeks to understand how digital discourse—through humour, religion, culture, and politics—functions to normalize and legitimize hate speech, thereby reinforcing dominant heteronormative norms and regulating non-conforming identities.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected from public Facebook comments discussing LGBTQ representation in Malaysian media, particularly in response to a news article published by MalaysiaKini about the 25th Anugerah Juara Lagu (AJL) and the alleged promotion of LGBTQ culture by the mainstream media outlet TV3. The selection of this dataset was based on its high engagement and controversy, making it an ideal case study for analysing how online hate speech is framed and normalised in public discourse.

The Facebook post analysed in this study was titled “TV3 mohon maaf tetamu lelaki berpakaian wanita di AJL”, published on February 18, 2025. The post and its comments were chosen based on three criteria: first, the high public engagement, as indicated by the number of reactions, shares, and comments; second, the relevance to the research topic, as the discussion specifically addressed LGBTQ visibility and the public’s response to it; and third, the presence of hate speech, with comments expressing discriminatory or exclusionary views towards LGBTQ individuals.

Table1 Summary of The Data Set

Total comments collected	Hate comments identified	Reactions	Shares
455	(Total hate comments)163 (35.8%) (Hate comments focusing on normalisation process) 81 (49.7% from 163 hate comments)	554	31

A total of 455 comments were extracted manually and organised into a spreadsheet for analysis. These comments were filtered and categorised based on their content, focusing on hate speech and normalisation processes. The manual extraction process ensured that only relevant comments were included in the analysis, allowing for a more focused examination of how hate speech operates in digital spaces.

Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using thematic content analysis (TCA), a qualitative research method that identifies, analyses, and interprets patterns (themes) within textual data. This method was chosen for its ability to uncover underlying meanings and structures in public discourse, providing insights into how LGBTQ representation is framed and contested in Malaysian digital spaces. In the initial coding stage, comments were categorised with reference to Section 211 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (Act 588), which prohibits the provision of content that is “indecent, obscene, false, menacing, or offensive in character with intent to annoy, abuse, threaten, or harass any person.” This legal framework provided a guideline for identifying comments that could be considered harmful or offensive, ensuring that the analysis was grounded in Malaysia’s regulatory context.

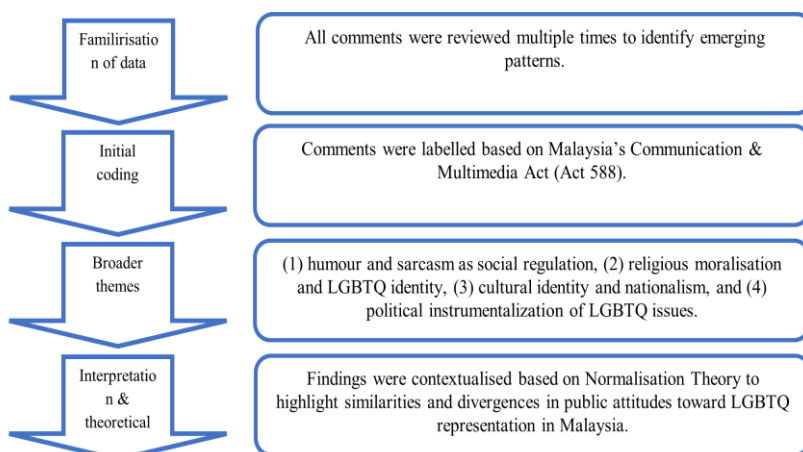


Fig 1. Data Analysis Flow

Ethical Considerations

This study followed ethical guidelines for digital research by using only publicly available data and anonymising all personal identifiers to protect user privacy. The analysis was conducted objectively within a sociological framework, avoiding moral judgment and focusing on understanding the mechanisms of normalisation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of 163 hate comments (35.8% of the total 455 comments) posted in response to MalaysiaKini's coverage of TV3's broadcast of the 25th Anugerah Juara Lagu reveals how online discourse functions as a mechanism for normalising anti-LGBTQ sentiment in Malaysia. Out of 163 hate comments identified, 49.7% (n=81) focussed on the concept of normalisation as introduced by Michel Foucault. Four interconnected discursive mechanisms were identified: (1) humour and sarcasm, (2) religious moralisation, (3) cultural/national identity framing, and (4) political instrumentalization as shown in the cross-tabulation table below:

Tableii Cross-Tabulation of Hate Comments Focusing on Normalisation Process

	Humour/Sarcasm	Religious / Moral Policing	Cultural Norms / Identity	Political Instrumentalisation
Humour/Sarcasm	42 (51.8%)	2	9	16
Religious / Moral Policing	2	17 (21%)	9	4
Cultural Norms / Identity	9	9	31 (38.1%)	17
Political Instrumentalisation	16	4	17	42 (51.8%)

*Percentages are based on thematic coding where some comments contained overlapping elements; thus, totals exceed 100%.

Humour and Sarcasm as a Mechanism of Social Regulation

There were 51.8% of the hate comments relied on humour, sarcasm, or wordplay to indirectly express disapproval of LGBTQ visibility. For example, the phrase “betul nuar verahim adalah idola ... wah kah kh kah kah” deliberately misspells the Prime Minister's name while sarcastically calling him an “idol,” softening the attack with laughter. Others, like “Zaman madani MCM2 dia promosi, menteri mcmc pn buta kayu kuat sgt berpolitik Smpai xterjaga siaran TV3 suku”, targeted institutions by equating political leaders with ignorance (buta kayu) and mocking TV3 as “¾-brained” (TV3 suku). Sarcasm was also directed at specific individuals: “Teringin nak tengok Fahmi pakai bikini” mocked the minister overseeing MCMC, while “Sajat pakai, mcm perempuan kann” ridiculed a well-known transgender influencer. Wordplay and parody extended to the programme itself, with terms like “Anugerah Jantan Lembut” and “Anugerah Jantan Longoi” used to mock the Anugerah Juara Lagu (AJL). Together, these examples show how humour and sarcasm disguise hostility while reinforcing exclusionary attitudes.

Based on Foucault's Normalisation Theory, humour such as the above expressions used as disguise to discriminate or express hate under the veil of entertainment. This aligns with Silva & Carvalho's (2023) argument that humour often support social rules while hiding messages that exclude some people which makes discrimination more socially acceptable. In the Malaysian context, the use of humour normalises heteronormativity while discouraging conflict such as LGBT representation.

From a sociological view, this situation reflects Foucault's (1977) concept of discourse as a form of power, where humour works as a subtle way to support heteronormativity. According to Billig (2005) and Meyer (2000), humour can also act as a tool to control behaviour by marking clear boundaries between those who belong (the in-group) and those who do not (the out-group). In the Malaysian context, studies on political trolling suggest that humour or jokes often carry hidden messages that influence public opinion while protecting traditional and conservative values (Rahman et al., 2024).

Comparison from other context also highlight this point. Silva & Carvalho (2023) show that humour within LGBTQ communities can strengthen stereotypes by treating discrimination as harmless banter. Similar trends are observed in Portuguese YouTube discourse (Carvalho et al., 2024) and in Philippine media representations such as Sakristan (Munsalud et al., 2024). Importantly, the implicit nature of humour allows hate speech to evade criticism by being framed as "just a joke" (Ali, 2021; Syahputra, 2017), a point echoed by Ocampo et al. (2023), who note that sarcasm, metaphors, and coded language can normalise exclusionary views over time.

Religious Discourse and Moral Policing

Religious framing appeared 17 comments (21%). These invoked Islamic teachings or divine punishment to delegitimise LGBTQ identities, with examples such as "Kaum Laknatullah", "Allah melaknat ke atasnya", "nasib majlis tu tak di tenggelam bumi", "Pemanggil malapetaka d bumi sendiri" and "tv3... mencabar syariat". Such rhetoric operates as a form of moral surveillance, publicly policing gender and sexuality boundaries.

In Foucauldian terms, this represents a disciplinary mechanism, where religious values define acceptable conduct, shaping public behaviour through internalised moral codes. As Kim (2024) notes, conservative religious discourse plays a critical role in reinforcing heteronormativity by positioning LGBTQ visibility as inherently immoral.

This reflects broader patterns documented in Muslim-majority contexts, where Islamic teachings are often interpreted as prohibiting non-heteronormative identities (Yip, 2005; Siraj, 2012). In Malaysia, religious authorities and online discourse work in tandem to frame LGBTQ identities as immoral or unnatural (Mohd Noor, 2020; Ismail & Kamal, 2022).

Kim (2024) further notes that conservative denominations often hold negative views of LGBTQ people, reinforcing heteronormativity via religious rhetoric. This is consistent with studies that see religion not merely as a personal belief system but as a social institution that actively polices identity through public discourse.

Cultural Norms and National Identity

Cultural and national identity framing accounted for 31 comments (38.1%), making the second most common framing used. These often portrayed LGBTQ representation as a foreign intrusion or a threat to Malay-Muslim traditions. Examples include "Kerajaan luar tabie", "Normalisasi era baru. Puak2 LGBT mula menampilkan diri", and "Bila kerajaan yang didokong ramai golongan liberal dan sekular, halal haram pun mereka boleh gaul sekali." Such remarks frame LGBTQ representation as a departure from Malay-Muslim traditions, echoing Puar's (2007) and Rao's (2020) observations that sexuality is often politicised as a marker of cultural belonging.

Another theme that keeps repeating within this cultural and national identity framing was the rejection of the "minta maaf, kira settle" approach, where wrongdoing is excused once an apology is issued. Comments such as "Zaman ketimbang... smua hal bleh muncul.. minta maaf settle", "Minta maaf selesai kes zaman madanon", and "Mcm biasa,.. cukup dgn minta maaf je daaahh settle" criticise the culture of impunity which makes the commenters believe that it leaves little room for real accountability. Some saw this as evidence of moral decline where cultural and religious boundaries are weakened, while ordinary citizens ("rakyat marhaen") still face harsher consequences, as expressed in "Mohon maaf settle... KERAJAAN madanon kalau rakyat marhein comfirm turun naik mahkamah!!!"

From the perspective of Foucault's Normalisation Theory, this discourse shows how normalisation operates not only through acceptance but also through selective leniency. The frequent mention of "minta maaf" as a way to

close an issue is criticised as it protects the interest of the elites while weakening Malay-Muslim cultural identity. In this way, commenters frame political tolerance towards LGBTQ visibility and public controversies as part of a wider cultural shift that threatens traditional norms. Similar to Foucault's (1977) theorisation of disciplinary power, this dynamic reveals how discourses of forgiveness can be normalised into governance, thereby reshaping boundaries of acceptable conduct. What critics resist here is not only LGBTQ visibility but also a governance culture that they see as undermining national and religious integrity.

Political Instrumentalisation of LGBTQ Issues

Similar to the humour and sarcasm, political, 51.8% of comments explicitly linked LGBTQ visibility to political leadership. The recurring use of terms such as “Kerajaan Madanon” and “Kerajaan kunyit” illustrates how discourse around LGBTQ issues becomes a vehicle for delegitimising political opponents. This aligns with Adam et al. (1999) and Encarnación's (2016) argument that LGBTQ discourse is frequently mobilised by political actors to appeal to voter bases, often by framing LGBTQ rights as moral threats. In the Malaysian context, Wan and Ibrahim (2022) and Chin (2023) found that accusations of “liberal” or “Western” influence are consistently deployed in political rhetoric, a pattern reflected in comments that accuse the government of eroding Malay-Muslim values through permissiveness toward LGBTQ visibility.

Several comments attacked ministers directly, such as “Hal Gini menteri agama madanon senyap Dan sunyi” and “Teringin nak tengok Fahmi pakai bikini”, combining ridicule with political critique. Such comments express dissatisfaction towards specific ministers like the Religious Affairs Minister and Minister of Communications of Malaysia that according to the commenters, are not doing their job properly and being ignorance when it comes to LGBTQ issues. The depiction of leaders as either silent or complicit show how the hate discourse is used politically to frame the government as lacking moral strength.

Another recurring theme was the idea of selective enforcement, where elites could resolve issues through apologies, while ordinary citizens continued to face punishment. Phrases such as “Minta maaf selesai kes zaman madanon” and “Mohon maaf settle... KERAJAAN madanon kalau rakyat marhein comfirm turun naik mahkamah!!!” reflect frustration with governance, suggesting that political elites are shielded from accountability. This reflects Bekturovna & Syrtbaeyna's (2024) who political discourse could affect public views and beliefs that can change the attitudes towards many issues including LGBTQ.

Commenters also highlighted broader concerns about weak governance, ignorance, and cultural erosion, as in “Zaman madani MCM2 dia promosi, menteri mcmc pn buta kayu kuat sgt berpolitik Smpai xterjaga siaran TV3 suku”. In this context, LGBTQ visibility is portrayed as a sign of government distraction and incompetence, echoing Iwan and Mohd Hed's (2023) point that online discourse is strongly shaped by political and partisan interests. The frequent use of ridicule and derogatory language further reflects Bekturovna and Syrtbaeyna's (2024) argument that political discourse circulated through mass and digital media plays a key role in shaping social attitudes.

These patterns are not unique to Malaysia. Nurochman and Al-Hamdi (2024) note that in Indonesia, social media is frequently used to spread hate speech during politically sensitive moments, disrupting social cohesion. In Malaysia, the focus on “minta maaf, settle” alongside ridicule of ministers shows how LGBTQ issues are politicised, targeting not only sexual minorities but also political elites and governance more broadly. As Adam et al. (1999) and Encarnación (2016) suggest, this illustrates how LGBTQ rights are drawn into wider struggles over national identity, morality, and political legitimacy.

Intersections Between Mechanisms of Hate Speech

The overlaps between the four mechanisms demonstrate that hate speech does not operate in isolation but through interconnected discursive strategies. The intersection map (Figure X) illustrates how humour, religion, politics, and cultural/national identity mutually reinforce one another.

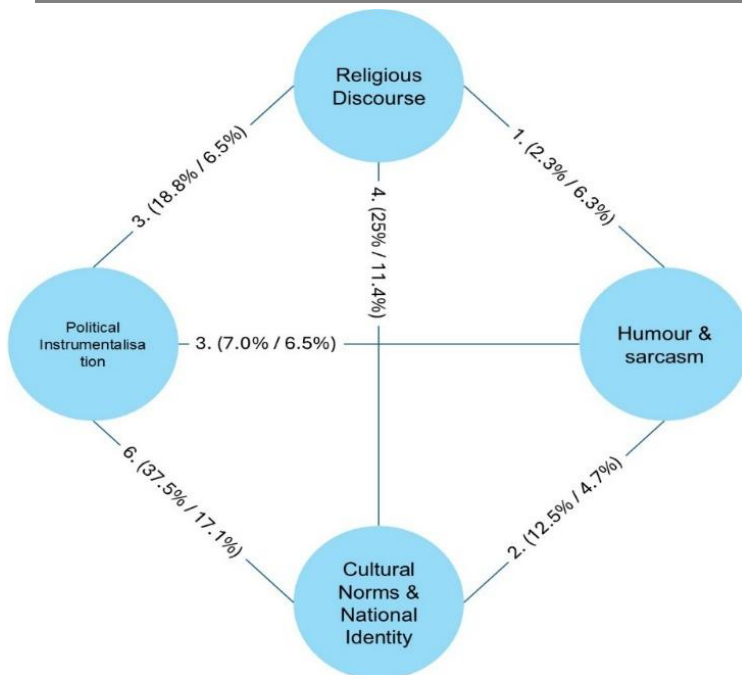


Fig 2. Network of Intersecting Mechanisms in Online Hate Speech

First, the overlaps between humour/sarcasm and religion (2.33% of humour posts; 6.25% of religious posts) illustrate how jokes are used to trivialise or mock religious prohibitions, while simultaneously conveying moral judgment through comedy. This reflects Billig's (2005) argument that humour often works as a form of ideological reinforcement, where laughter disguises and sustains exclusionary power dynamics.

Second, the intersection of humour and political instrumentalisation (6.98% of humour posts; 6.52% of political posts) shows how sarcasm and humour are directed at political leaders, connecting LGBTQ visibility to weaknesses or even corruption within government. This pattern supports Meyer's (2000) view that sarcasm functions by drawing boundaries between in-groups and out-groups, in this case targeting both LGBTQ communities and political elites seen as supporting them.

Third, the overlap between religious discourse and political instrumentalisation (18.75% of religious posts; 6.52% of political posts) carries weight. In this intersection, political frustration is expressed through hate that is framed by religion. It shows that LGBTQ acceptance is portrayed as proof that the government has failed to protect Islamic morality. This reflects the findings of Mohd Noor (2020) and Ismail and Kamal (2022), who show how religious institutions and political narratives in Malaysia often work together to uphold heteronormative norms.

The final intersection is between the cultural norms and national identity. This mechanism highlights that 15.6% of all hate comments that explicitly use culture or national identity in their comments, combined them with other themes. For example, remarks that labels LGBTQ visibility as "luar tabie" (unnatural) or as a threat to Malay-Muslim identity demonstrate how aspect of cultures were applied alongside religious or political arguments. These overlaps are consistent with the findings from Puar (2007) and Mohamad and Kassim (2019), who found that LGBTQ identities are always believed to destabilise cultural integrity.

All in all, these intersections show that humour, religion, politics, and cultural or national identity form a mutually reinforcing network of hate speech. While each discourse mechanism has its own style, these intersections reveal how each of them cannot stand on its own to form the discourse of hate on digital platform such as Facebook. It can be seen in the findings that humour softens hostility, religion lends moral authority, politics turns identity into a weapon, and culture or nationalism casts LGBTQ rejection as an expression of patriotism. This interconnected dynamic highlights the importance of viewing online hate speech as a system of overlapping discourses rather than as separate categories.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion this study shows that online hate speech directed at LGBTQ communities in Malaysia operates through humour, religious discourse, political narratives, and cultural identity, which often overlap to reinforce heteronormativity. The intersections between these mechanisms—for instance, humour being used to trivialise religious critique or religion providing legitimacy for political attacks—indicate that hate speech is not a single or isolated act, but a combined discursive practice that influences public attitudes and also silences non-conforming identities.

To respond to this issue, social media platforms need to strengthen moderation practices that are sensitive to cultural and local contexts, while policymakers should develop protections against hate speech that do not compromise freedom of expression. At the same time, civil society groups and educators have a role in challenging exclusionary discourse through digital literacy initiatives and the promotion of inclusive narratives.

Finally, it is suggested that future research should broaden its scope to include other platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube, and also investigate the counter-strategies adopted by LGBTQ activists. Such work would offer deeper insights into how digital advocacy can create more inclusive and supportive public spaces.

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