

INTERPRETING "TAKJIL WAR" AS A HETEROTOPIA OF DISCOURSE BATTLE: SYMBOLIC CONFLICT IN THE VIRTUAL SPACE OF RAMADAN

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Abstract

This research focuses on analyzing the phenomenon of the "Takjil War" as a form of digital conflict emerging on Indonesian social media during Ramadan in 2024 and 2025. The analysis shows that online discussions regarding *takjil* (iftar snacks) transcend culinary issues and reflect a complex struggle for meaning and a battle over social practices. This inter-netizen dialogue depicts a fluid interfaith encounter and reveals culinary narratives that cross class and religious boundaries. By employing a critical netnographic approach and multimodal discourse analysis, this study unravels the layers of symbolic conflict behind the narrative of religious harmony and the consumption of religiosity in digital space. In-depth analysis was conducted on three main dimensions: the practice of "performative piety" on social media; the narrative of "Takjil War" as an "interfaith heterotopia" and how this phenomenon is interpreted by netizens from various religious backgrounds. In conclusion, the "Takjil War" is a heterotopia where contemporary Islamic identity is commodified and subdued by the algorithmic logic of the digital economy. This study contributes to digital cultural studies by offering an analytical framework for interpreting socio-religious phenomena reinforced by social media platforms, while also reflecting on the transformation of the meaning of interfaith harmony in the Indonesian consumer society.

Keywords: Takjil war, critical netnography, symbolic conflict, heterotopia

INTRODUCTION

The popular term 'Takjil War' emerged in the Indonesian digital space during Ramadan 2024 and continued into 2025. This phenomenon is more than just a 'war' of content; it functions as a discursive metaphor, marking an arena of symbolic struggle where the meaning of religiosity, morality, and social identity is publicly negotiated. Drawing on Foucault's assertion that discourse is a field of power where social subjects create truth, this study explores how the 'Takjil War' creates ambiguity between personal piety and collective spectacle,

especially given its role in interfaith dialogue. To further investigate these dynamics, this study poses several key questions:

1. How do Foucault's heterotopia characteristics manifest in the platform architecture and interaction patterns of the 'Takjil War' phenomenon?
2. How is the illusion of the "harmlessness" of conflict produced and believed by its actors in this virtual heterotopia?
3. What are the discursive and social effects of the struggle in this heterotopic space on the understanding of piety in the real world?.

Although interfaith dialogue in social media comment sections does not always reflect these political tensions, the 'Takjil War' is important because it shows how Muslims not only worship but also participate in the production of digital culture. This research helps the readers understand how religious values are negotiated through algorithmic logic, as well as society's efforts to maintain spiritual authenticity amidst the torrent of commodification.

The research implicitly builds upon existing theoretical frameworks, most notably drawing from Michel Foucault's work on discourse and power. The assertion that "discourse is a field of power where social subjects create truth" is a foundational theoretical antecedent, indicating that the research will analyze how meanings and realities surrounding "Takjil War" are constructed and contested within digital conversations. Furthermore, the mention of "interfaith dialogue in social media comment sections" suggests an awareness of prior academic or public discussions regarding religious interactions in digital spaces. While these conversations exist, the introduction implies that they may not fully capture the complex symbolic conflicts and underlying political tensions evident in phenomena like "Takjil War".

This introduction highlights a significant research gap in the current understanding of digital religious phenomena. It asserts that the "Takjil War" is "more than just a 'war' of content", implying that existing analyses might be too superficial or fail to grasp its deeper sociological implications. The gap is specifically identified in the following areas: 1) The absence of in-depth exploration into how a seemingly playful digital trend functions as a "discursive metaphor, marking an arena of symbolic struggle where the meaning of religiosity, morality, and social identity is publicly negotiated"; 2) A lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the "ambiguity between personal piety and collective spectacle" as it manifests in digital interfaith dialogue, and these three core research questions precisely pinpoint the gaps:

1. How Foucault's heterotopia characteristics manifest within the platform architecture and interaction patterns of the "Takjil War"?
2. The mechanisms through which the "illusion of the 'harmlessness' of conflict is produced and believed by its actors in this virtual heterotopia"?

3. The discursive and social effects of this struggle on the understanding of piety in the real world, particularly in the context of "algorithmic piety" among young Muslim users.

The broader need to understand "how religious values are negotiated through algorithmic logic" and "society's efforts to maintain spiritual authenticity amidst the torrent of commodification" within the digital realm also signifies an unaddressed area, therefore this study offers significant novelty by applying Foucault's Heterotopia. By employing Foucault's assertion on discourse and specifically exploring "heterotopia characteristics," the research provides a fresh theoretical perspective to understand the unique "other spaces" created by social media for religious expression and conflict. This research also proposes to move beyond superficial interpretations of digital content wars, instead revealing the "arena of symbolic struggle" and how religiosity, morality, and social identity are negotiated within this digital space. This research tries to investigate "how 'algorithmic piety' forms a new ethic among young Muslim users" represents a novel contribution to understanding the evolving nature of religious practice and ethics in the digital age. By examining how "Muslims not only worship but also participate in the production of digital culture," and how religious values are negotiated through "algorithmic logic" amidst "commodification," the research offers a unique synthesis of these critical themes.

In essence, this research promises to provide a critical and nuanced understanding of a popular digital cultural event, shedding light on the complex interplay between religion, technology, power, and identity in contemporary Indonesian society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Discourse Map on Instagram

From a secondary analysis of online media reports, five main discourse clusters were found in the Instagram comment sections during Ramadan 2024–2025. This discourse map is based on the frequency of themes and communication tones in comments quoted by the media.

Discourse Category	Main Characteristics	Example Comments (anonymous, quoted from media)	Media Reference
1. Humor and Social Solidarity	Humorous tone, light teasing, and highlighting a lively spirit of sharing.	"Wow, this is no longer a war of goodness, but a war of clear plastic stock."	Kompas.com, 27 March 2024

2. Interfaith Tolerance	The participation of non-Muslims in sharing <i>takjil</i> is considered a symbol of harmony.	"Happy to see church friends helping to distribute <i>takjil</i> on the streets. Indonesia is truly beautiful."	CNN Indonesia, 30 March 2024
3. Moral Criticism and Digital <i>Riya'</i>	Cynical tone towards excessive recording and uploading of sharing acts.	"If it is sincere, why record it? Charity is not content, bro."	Tempo.co, 2 April 2024
4. Commodification of Charity and Religious Branding	Comments highlighting the involvement of big brands in performative CSR:	"All brands suddenly become pious. There's probably a KPI target for blessings too."	Tirto.id, 3 April 2024
5. Resistance and Social Reflection	Critical but reflective tone, questioning the meaning of Ramadan in the digital culture.	"Ramadan is becoming more like a capitalist festival, not a month of reflection."	Vice Indonesia, 10 April 2025

Humor as a Normalization Mechanism

Humor dominated the early Takjil War, described by the media as a "funny war." In Cultural Studies, humor functions as a tool for social normalization, which can cover up injustice or inequality with laughter. Thus, the humor of the Takjil War is a mechanism that normalizes the symbolic capitalization of religious practices. Humor also acts as an instrument to tame potential conflicts between groups, religions, and ideologies, making comments mere jokes.

Narrative of Tolerance and Politics of Representation

Cross-religious collaboration uploads, such as church or Buddhist community actions in sharing *takjil*, are highlighted by the media as symbols of "national harmony." However, from a representational perspective, these actions can be read as a form of moral performativity in which tolerance is only displayed. However, this inclusivity is symbolic, regulated by the logic of the majority that normalizes the boundaries of identity.

Moral Criticism and Digital *Riya'*

The third category of comments demonstrates a strong counter-discourse, which is resistance to performative piety. Many comments reject the exposure of charity that is recorded and capitalized as content, reflecting a tension between sincerity and spectacle (Debord, 1967) or a struggle between sincere spirituality and the logic of the digital spectacle.

Commodification of Charity and Performative CSR

Large brands like Indomie, Grab, and Shopee use "Takjil War" to increase engagement through CSR campaigns (Narendra et al., 2024). Public comments show ambivalence, with some calling it "sponsored merit" (April 2024). Within the framework of the Cultural Economy, this indicates a shift in charity into symbolic capital, whose value is measured algorithmically.

Moral Resistance and Social Reflection

Reflective comments increased in Ramadan 2025, linking the "Takjil War" to a culture of spiritual consumerism, such as comments stating that the fasting month has become an arena for moral branding (Vice Indonesia, 2025). This pattern indicates the transformation of the Instagram comments section into an arena for public debate about the meaning of piety.

The phenomenon of the "Takjil War" must be understood as the result of a complex interaction between technological structure, sociocultural capital, and the politics of representation. Therefore, this research uses three interconnected theoretical axes: social media as an arena of cultural-digital capital, social media as a digital heterotopia, and the politics of self-positioning in popular Islam.

Social Media as an Arena: Cultural and Digital Social Capital

Bourdieu views society as a *field* (social arena) in which individuals compete for various forms of capital. Social media is a *new field* in which capital is transformed into *digital capital*. *Digital social capital* is the ability of actors to build networks and utilize engagement (e.g., likes and views) as a form of symbolic power. *Digital cultural capital* is the ability to manage content aesthetics and religious narratives to conform to the tastes of the social media public. In the "Takjil War," this capital is evident in how corporations or individuals construct a religious self-image through spectacular visual narratives.

In this arena, Muslims are *social actors* who negotiate their positions in the digital economic hierarchy. The urban middle class, with greater technological and content capital, can convert digital capital into symbolic capital in the form of public recognition. Conversely, grassroots groups negotiate their positions through *moral critique*, questioning the authenticity of piety trapped in the logic of the display. The Takjil War "Takjil War" is a "digital ritual" that shows the transformation of religious *habitus* following the logic of visual capitalism.

Social Media Space as a Digital Heterotopia

Foucault views the 20th/21st century as the age of space, in which humans live in a network of overlapping places. *Des Espaces Autres* invites us

to shift from a narrative of time to spatial relations, where the world is filled with "other spaces"

Utopia: A Space That Does Not Exist

Utopia is a "placeless place" that exists only in the human imagination and idealization. It is a projection of human desires for total order, presenting a world that is supposedly perfect and harmonious but never truly exists. Utopia is a mirror that reflects society's face in its ideal form.

Heterotopia: Another Space, a Real One

Heterotopia is a space that truly exists but is radically different from the normal spaces of society—a "real yet strange anti-space." Examples include cemeteries, mental hospitals, museums and ships. Heterotopia functions doubly: it both represents and challenges social order. Like a mirror, it creates a space where we see ourselves "there" even though we are "here," changing our perception of our position in the world. Heterotopia contains mechanisms of power because it is controlled by an open and close system.

Between Utopia and Heterotopia

The difference between the two lies in how society manages its dreams: utopia soothes (offering a perfect world far away), while heterotopia disturbs (showing that the real world is full of cracks and inconsistencies). The two are not absolutely separate; we are always "between" reality and the shadow.

Virtual Space of Digital Media: Contemporary Heterotopia

Digital platforms such as Instagram are "other" spaces where life is re-created and questioned. Reading Foucault in the present means realizing that "social space" is always a field of interpretation and power.

Politics of Self-Positioning: Representation and Popular Islam

Stuart Hall (1990, 1997) emphasized that identity is constructed through *representation*. The concept of *politics of positioning* explains that social subjects always negotiate their positions within dominant meaning structures. In the "Takjil War," Muslims participate in the *politics of self-positioning* by producing various versions of "Islam" in the digital space, forming *Popular Islam*—Islam articulated through visual language and digital consumption.

In Hall's logic, the meaning of "piety" is produced through representation. Every upload and comment is a practice of self-positioning within power structures. For the majority, the "Takjil War" is a means of affirming religious identity; for the minority, it is an arena to assert involvement. "Takjil War" is an ideological practice where the community negotiates "who we are" before a plural and digital public

Synthesis: Arena, Space, and Representation Narendra et al., 2024

These three theoretical axes form a single conceptual map:

- **Bourdieu** explains the competition for religious recognition, demonstrating the transformation of piety into symbolic capital.
- **Foucault** explains how social media creates a simulacra space that blends piety and entertainment, revealing the illusion of harmony and symbolic domination.
- **Stuart Hall** explains how Muslim subjects present and interpret identity, describing Popular Islam as a negotiated participatory ideology.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design, primarily utilizing a critical netnographic approach coupled with multimodal discourse analysis to investigate the "Takjil War" phenomenon within Indonesian social media during Ramadan in 2024 and 2025. The research sought to uncover the symbolic conflicts embedded within narratives of religious harmony and the consumption of religiosity in digital spaces. The foundational theoretical perspective for this research is implicitly rooted in Michel Foucault's work on discourse and power. Specifically, the study drew upon Foucault's assertion regarding discourse and explored the characteristics of heterotopia to understand the unique "other spaces" created by social media for religious expression and conflict. This framework allowed for an analysis of how meanings and realities surrounding the "Takjil War" are constructed and contested within digital conversations.

The primary data for analysis was derived from online media reports, which facilitated a secondary analysis of public discourse on Instagram comment sections during Ramadan 2024–2025. This involved mapping five main discourse clusters based on the frequency of themes and communication tones observed in comments cited by the media.

Meanwhile, an in-depth analysis was conducted across three principal dimensions :

1. **Performative Piety:** Examination of the practice of "performative piety" as it manifests on social media platforms.
2. **Interfaith Heterotopia:** Analysis of the "Takjil War" narrative as an "interfaith heterotopia."
3. **Netizen Interpretation:** Interpretation of how this phenomenon is understood by netizens from diverse religious backgrounds.

Through this critical netnographic and multimodal discourse analysis, the study aimed to unravel the complex layers of symbolic conflict that underpin

the seemingly harmonious religious narratives and the commodification of religiosity in the digital realm.

ANALYSIS: TAKJIL WAR AS DIGITAL HETEROTOPIA

Arena, Space, and Representation

The Takjil War" is a cultural event that demonstrates the complex interaction between digital technology, social capital, and the politics of religious representation. It presents a new religious experience in the digital public sphere, existing between worship and spectacle, as well as between social solidarity and symbolic strategies. This phenomenon is a concrete example of how Indonesian society negotiates identity, morality, and symbolic power through social media.

First Layer: Arena of Cultural-Digital Capital

Social media has become a new arena in which economic capital is transformed into cultural-digital capital. Users compete to create an image of piety, goodness, and togetherness using attractive visuals. Charity and generosity have become *strategic actions* that affirm one's position in the digital social hierarchy. Large-scale *takjil* uploads by brands or celebrities are symbolic practices that mark a shift from spiritual piety to representational. These actions are *position-taking* to assert status in an increasingly visual, religious arena.

However, this arena is not egalitarian; actors with significant economic and cultural capital can produce spectacular representations of piety, while grassroots groups assert morality through sincere images. This creates a *distinction* in the piety style among social classes. Religiosity in Indonesia is now an *arena of moral competition* in which goodness has become a symbolic commodity. Interestingly, humor in this arena functions to soften all emerging tensions and conflicts, making them seem resolved without the opportunity to become open ideological conflicts.

Second Layer: Digital Heterotopia

Social media can be understood as a digital heterotopia—a real symbolic space that reflects and disrupts the social order. Instagram functions as a dual mirror of society, displaying spectacular public piety and the paradoxes behind it. This heterotopia allows cross-border collective participation but still maintains the power structures and symbolic domination of the physical world.

The Takjil War "Takjil War" is a digital heterotopia that functions as a "social mirror" where the community negotiates religious identity, morality, and interfaith relations through humor and irony. Behind the seemingly fluid and humorous image, this space holds latent inter-religious tensions that are

difficult to articulate in conventional public spaces. Humor acts as a heterotopic strategy, creating an illusion of closeness while covering social wounds. Jokes about non-Muslims "hunting for takjil," for example, show familiarity but also repeat hierarchical structures about who is the majority and who is merely "joining in."

This digital heterotopia operates with ambivalence in mind. It opens inter-religious dialogue but in an unstable format. However, its function is to be the only space where intense dialogue that is not physically harmful can occur. The virtual world accommodates the energy of tensions that could lead to conflict in the real world, managing them into light entertainment. In this space, religious practice appears as a *performance of civil behavior*.

This heterotopia serves as a liminal space in which social and religious norms are relaxed. Humor and narratives of togetherness are *domestication mechanisms* for sensitive issues. Interfaith conflicts are managed through jokes. However, heterotopia is always ambivalent; it reflects the world while organizing it through a *regime of visibility* (Foucault, 1991), where only positive representations gain primary prominence, thereby reinforcing hierarchical structures.

Third Layer: Politics of Self-Positioning and Popular Islam

Muslim identity is constructed through such representation. In the "Takjil War," Islam takes the form of *popular Islam* that appears through visual media and light. This is the *politics of positioning*: the actors of the "Takjil War" assert their positions through images (aesthetic urban Islam, relaxed humorous Islam), forming a *repertoire of representation* that builds the discourse of "inclusive Islam."

In the process of *encoding* and *decoding* Hall (1980), actors send moral messages, but the public interprets them diversely: some see it as sincerity, others as image-building. The participation of non-Muslim netizens in the "Takjil War" is also a self-positioning through humor or empathy, called *negotiated reading*—critical acceptance of hegemonic discourse without explicit rejection. Thus, popular Islam functions as a representational ideology that regulates what is considered "good" and "beneficial" in the digital context, while normalizing the boundaries of the majority and minority in harmonious visuals

Synthesis: Arena, Space, and Representation

These three theoretical frameworks complement each other: Bourdieu (competition of capital) shows piety as symbolic capital; Foucault (digital heterotopia) reveals the structure of space and power that governs visibility; and Hall (representation) explains identity negotiation within the framework of Islam. The combination of the three shows that Takjil War is a social system that reproduces hierarchies and meanings through visual and performative languages.

CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Takjil War is a discursive space that brings together religiosity, digital technology, and the politics of representation. Thus, popular Islam works as a representational ideology that regulates what is considered "good" and "beneficial" in the digital context, while normalizing the boundaries of the majority and minority in harmonious visuals.

Theoretical Implications

These findings reinforce the relevance of the following:

1. The concept of Cultural-Digital Capital shows that the religious field transforms, and the symbolic capital of piety is mediated by algorithms.
2. Foucault's reinterpretation of heterotopia as an algorithmic space that arranges and channels social tensions through acceptable cultural formats.
3. The application of Hall's theory of the Politics of Positional Self to popular Islam, highlighting how humor, philanthropy, and visibility are used as strategies to position oneself in a diverse social field.

Social and Cultural Implications

Socially, Takjil War reflects how Indonesian society manages interfaith and class sensitivities through a safe and open medium. Humor and images of togetherness are mechanisms of soft negotiation.

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