

#staystrongmelbs: Online Humour and Community Caused by an Earthquake

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It is well known that humour is a common way for people to process and deal with tragic events such as genocide, war, pandemics, and sites of occupation and/or political oppression (e.g., Browning & Brassett 2023; Cheurfa 2019; Cottingham & Rose 2023; Fluri 2019; Lionis 2021; Üngör & Verkerke 2015). Political controversies, natural disasters, and other crises often lead to the rapid proliferation of creative and amusing memes as a digital response mechanism (Dynel 2024), creating a sense of community and levity (Aslan 2020) and an outlet for anxiety and frustration. While it turned out to be relatively minor, the earthquake which shook Melbourne in September 2021 (during the city's sixth Covid lockdown) prompted an outpouring of humorous tweets and memes on Australian social media. No sooner had houses stopped shaking than the humour began - and it came fast and furious for the next 48 hours, not all of it connected to the earthquake. Other topics in the firing line that week were the anti-lockdown protests in Melbourne and the AUKUS submarine deal.

In this presentation I will analyse a selection of tweets, memes and media articles (received from my own contacts over the period of one week from 22nd September 2021), focusing on three linguistic elements of humour: intertextuality, wordplay, and incongruity. It will be shown how the humour in these examples was not just performing as a coping mechanism for the earthquake, but also as a creative way of engaging with current political issues.

Keywords: *humour, Melbourne, community, social media, earthquake*

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Bio

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