



## Digital Cultural Practices and Public Opinion Polarization in the #KaburAjaDulu Narrative on Social Media

**Herma Retno Prabayanti**

State University of Surabaya

**Putri Shofi Nabilah**

State University of Surabaya

### **Abstract**

The digital phenomenon surrounding the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu emerged in early 2025 as a form of critical expression among netizens regarding the socio-economic conditions in Indonesia. The researcher aims to analyze how this hashtag functions not merely as a viral trend, but as a cultural practice within the digital sphere that reflects the collective anxiety of the younger generation. Employing Christine Hine's Virtual Ethnography, this study examines digital interactions through the dimensions of embedded, embodied, and everyday practices across X, TikTok, and YouTube. Data were gathered through crawling techniques using Brand24 over the period of May to August 2025. The findings reveal a sharp polarization of opinion between groups that interpret "escaping" as a global survival strategy and those who perceive it as a dereliction of national responsibility. These results emphasize that social media serves as an arena for negotiating meaning, where humor and satire are utilized to articulate aspirations for better quality of life and education, aligning with the spirit of SDG 4. The researcher concludes that this phenomenon represents a snapshot of the trust crisis as well as a collective aspiration for transformation within Indonesia's digital society.

**Keywords:** Virtual Ethnography, KaburAjaDulu, Opinion Polarization, Social Media, Cultural Practices.

## 1. Introduction

In 2025, a digital phenomenon emerged in Indonesia through the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu, which became a form of netizen expression regarding domestic socio-economic and political conditions. According to a report in Connie J (2025), this hashtag began going viral in February 2025, triggered by increasing public dissatisfaction with government policies such as budget efficiency and cuts in the education sector, which created a sense of insecurity among the younger generation. Besides serving as a symbol of criticism, this hashtag also embodied a collective desire to distance or "escape" economic pressures, through seeking employment or study opportunities abroad. Using Christine Hine's virtual ethnography approach, this phenomenon is analyzed as a cultural practice in the public digital space. Digital space is not only a channel for the distribution of symbols but also an arena for the formation of collective identity and expression. In this case, social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become the primary means for netizens to express their aspirations, frustrations, and solidarity through the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu (Sejati et al. 2025).

A survey by Mitra Sensorial Nasional (Median) in February 2025 showed that the inability to find work was the main cause of the emergence of this hashtag (18.1%), followed by distrust in the government in protecting the people (16.9%), choosing to avoid it as a strategic choice (9.4%), perceptions of legal injustice (7.2%), and increasing hardships in life (5.8%). This confirms that the hashtag reflects the public's critical awareness of the complexity of the structural problems they face. Furthermore, based on monitoring by the Drone Emprit institute (VOI, 2025), the use of this hashtag increased sharply from January–February 2025, almost dominated by users aged 19–29 years (around 50.8%). This shows that millennials and Z generations feel political and economic uncertainty with significant intensity, and use digital media as a communication tool and an effort to articulate their collective anxiety. As a critical digital symptom, #KaburAjaDulu also raises concerns about brain drain or the migration of young talent abroad, which can weaken national productive capacity. According to Dr. According to Hempri Suyatna of UGM, this phenomenon can be recognized as a satirical and critical expression of domestic conditions, also reflecting opportunities if the diaspora returns and can contribute to national development through global experiences (Salma, 2025). From a crisis communication perspective, Hagi et al. (2025) analyzed the government's response to this hashtag using Steven Fink's crisis model (prodromal, acute, chronic, resolution). The results of the study showed that the government's response was not yet systemically structured and sometimes seemed less empathetic, thus requiring more strategic, transparent, and responsive crisis communication in managing public opinion in the digital era.

The escalation of the #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon in 2026 continues to demonstrate a paradigm shift from mere digital complaints to tactical survival measures. Amidst an increasingly chaotic domestic situation due to inflation and shrinking job opportunities for college graduates, the "runaway" narrative transforms into a form of resistance to future uncertainty. The collective desire to work abroad is no longer simply a dream of a global career, but rather an emergency response to a crippling economic reality. Social media, in this case, acts as an incubator for this escape narrative, where the exchange of information about labor migration schemes becomes a daily cultural practice that normalizes the idea that prosperity is more likely to be achieved beyond national geographic boundaries.

From the perspective of discourse framing, a study of Kompas.com's reporting using Van Dijk's model found that the media tends to use a framing structure (macro–super–micro structure) that is oriented towards the government's perspective. This reflects the dynamics of power structures in narrative construction, where news can become a mediating force between public expression and the government's ideological framework (Purwanti et al., 2025). In the realm of digital communication, Hine's virtual ethnography emphasizes the importance of understanding user practices as part of digital culture. Analysis of interactions, representations, performativity, and critical expression online. In the context of this hashtag, virtual ethnography reveals how netizens form collective meaning through posts, comments, sharing information about scholarships and overseas job opportunities, and deliberately creating cosmopolitan narratives without abandoning their love for their homeland. Overall, the #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon in 2025 is an important example of how netizens, especially the younger generation, voice their dissatisfaction in public digital practices. Through virtual ethnography, we understand that this hashtag is not merely a trend, but rather a manifestation of richly meaningful digital criticism, ranging from economic inequality and policy ambiguity to sincere hopes of finding a safe personal space even beyond geographical boundaries.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Framework: Virtual Ethnography Christine Hine**

Virtual ethnography, as developed by Christine Hine, provides a new perspective on researching communication phenomena in digital spaces. Hine (2000) rejects the old assumption that the internet is merely an inauthentic “virtual space.” Instead, she emphasizes that the internet is a cultural arena with its own structure, social practices, and meanings. Therefore, ethnographic research is no longer limited to physical locations, but also includes digital connectivity and interaction. In this framework, the internet is positioned as both a culture and a cultural artifact, functioning not only as a means of communication but also as a vessel for social identity formation and collective expression (Nasrullah, 2014). One of the fundamental aspects of Hine's virtual ethnography is the redefinition of the concept of “place.” In traditional ethnographic research, researchers are usually physically present at the research location. However, the internet means that physical presence is no longer an absolute requirement. Instead, researchers are required to follow the flow of communication, relationships, and networks built between users. Thus, what is important is no longer geographical boundaries, but rather the connectivity and interactions formed in the digital space (Braga, 2013).

In addition, Hine reminds us that online interactions are fragmentary and temporary. Participants are not present continuously for 24 hours, but appear at certain moments that are not always predictable. Consequently, virtual ethnographic data tends to consist of small fragments that must be interpreted contextually (Hine, 2000). Researchers are required to be flexible in understanding the limitations of temporality as an inherent part of digital research. To address these methodological challenges, Hine developed the approach of “ethnography in, of, and through the virtual.” This approach emphasizes that researchers do not only observe from the outside, but also actively participate as part of the digital space being studied. The personal relationship between researchers and internet technology, whether through text, audio, or visuals, is an important aspect of the research process (Hine, 2000).

In further development, Hine (2013) formulated an E-Internet framework consisting of three main dimensions: embedded, embodied, and everyday. First, the embedded dimension emphasizes that internet use is always embedded in specific social and cultural contexts, so that the meaning of the internet cannot be separated from the institutions and environments that underlie it. Second, the embodied dimension highlights that digital interactions still involve the material and emotional aspects of users. In this case, an autoethnographic approach can help us understand how the body, feelings, and subjective experiences influence internet use. Third, the everyday dimension reminds us that the internet has become a part of everyday life that is often taken for granted, so the researcher's task is to "make the ordinary strange again" so that the cultural meanings and social structures behind digital practices can be seen (Oxford Internet Institute, 2013). Thus, Christine Hine's virtual ethnography provides a strong theoretical framework for understanding the phenomenon of digital communication. She views the internet as a complex cultural space, emphasizes the active involvement of researchers, and offers a critical perspective on the temporality, authenticity, and multimodality of online interactions. This approach is relevant for analyzing contemporary digital phenomena, such as viral hashtags or social media-based public communication practices, because it is able to reveal the cultural meanings hidden behind everyday virtual interactions.

### **Sentiment Analysis and Public Opinion Polarization**

Sentiment analysis is one of the methods widely used in digital communication studies, especially to understand the expression of public opinion in online public spaces. Sentiment is basically a person's affective attitude towards a particular object, event, or issue, which is usually divided into three main categories: positive, negative, and neutral (Liu, 2012). In the context of social media, sentiment analysis serves to identify trends in public sentiment as manifested through text, comments, posts, and online conversations. According to Pang and Lee (2008), sentiment analysis is a subfield of natural language processing (NLP) that aims to extract subjective information from text data. With the increasing flow of big data from digital platforms such as Twitter/X, Instagram, and TikTok, sentiment analysis has become an important method for understanding public opinion on a large scale. For example, when social-political issues such as increases in the prices of basic necessities arise, netizens can express their frustration through certain hashtags. Sentiment analysis techniques allow researchers to classify and measure the extent to which public opinion tends to support or reject certain policies. Sentiment analysis also has strategic value in public communication. According to Tumasjan et al. (2010), the distribution of sentiment on social media can be a predictive indicator of people's political behavior, including trends in general elections. Thus, sentiment mapping not only provides a descriptive picture of opinion but also the potential direction of public opinion in the future.

Furthermore, regarding the polarization of public opinion, as digital communication spaces become more open, the phenomenon of polarization of public opinion is also becoming more apparent. Polarization refers to the formation of two opposing and increasingly extreme viewpoints, thereby limiting the space for deliberation (Sunstein, 2001). Polarization on social media is reinforced by platform algorithms that create filter bubbles or echo chambers, where users are more often exposed to content that aligns with their views and rarely encounter different perspectives (Pariser, 2011).

In the Indonesian context, the phenomenon of public opinion polarization can be clearly seen in political and socio-economic issues. The presence of hashtags such as #KaburAjaDulu (Just Run Away) not only represents individuals' emotional expressions towards socio-economic conditions, but also forms two poles of discourse: groups that support the idea of “escaping” from domestic pressures and groups that criticize this choice as a form of disloyalty to the nation. This kind of polarization shows how social media has become an arena for symbolic debates laden with values of identity, ideology, and perceptions about the future. On the other hand, the polarization of public opinion has significant implications for digital democracy. According to Iyengar and Westwood (2015), polarization deepens the distance between social groups, thereby increasing the potential for conflict, misinformation, and delegitimization of formal institutions. This is in line with the conditions in Indonesia, where digital polarization can hinder the achievement of healthy deliberative communication.

### **3. Method**

This article was written using the Social Media Analysis (SMA) method. SMA is the interpretation of data or metrics that can be measured and provide information about activities or conversations. This analysis provides insights into human behavior on social media platforms (Lovett, J. and Owyang, 2010). Meanwhile, according to Fan and Gordon; Zeng, Chen, Lusch, and Li (in Juditha, 2021), SNA is a tool that serves to develop and evaluate information systems and tools used to collect, evaluate, analyze, conclude, and visualize social media data. The data collection technique (data crawling) on social media in this study used the Brand24 tool. The social media platforms studied include News Portals, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok. Data from these four platforms can be crawled by tools. The keyword used to collect data is #KaburAjaDulu. The data collection period is three months (28 days) from May 30, 2025, to August 30, 2025. This time frame was chosen because it coincided with the issue beginning to circulate and becoming widely discussed on social media.

### **4. Result and Discussion**

#### **a. Sentiment**

The first objective of this analysis was to identify public sentiment towards the #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon on social media. Data crawling results found that the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu recorded 2,184 mentions with a social reach of 46 million audiences and a non-social reach of 2.3 million. Interactions reached 1.8 million, with likes dominating (1.7 million). These figures indicate a highly viral trend over the three-month period.

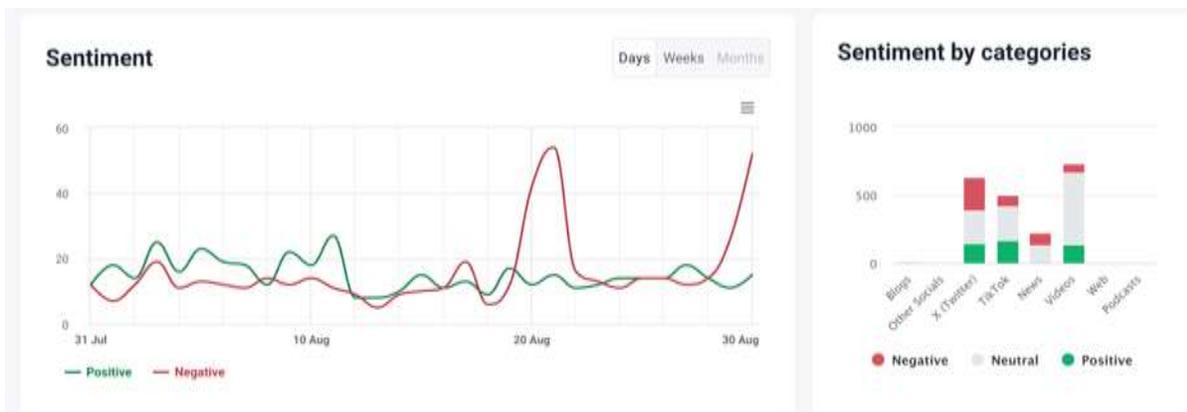


Figure 1 Sentiment of the Keyword #KaburAjaDulu on Social Media (Source: Data Crawling from Brand24 Tools)

From the platform perspective, the distribution of conversations shows dominance in several channels, including X (Twitter) with 649 mentions, TikTok with 519 mentions, and YouTube with 769 video content relevant to this hashtag. Meanwhile, online media and blogs are also involved with 222 news articles and 16 blogs discussing this phenomenon. This data confirms that #KaburAjaDulu is not only alive in the space of user interaction, but has also been elevated to a broader media space.

Sentiment analysis shows a division. Of the total conversations, 476 mentions (22%) were positive, 514 mentions (24%) were negative, while the rest, more than 50%, were neutral or ambivalent. Furthermore, the results of a visual analysis of the context of discussions regarding the #kaburajadulu hashtag show that netizen conversations on social media were dominated by negative sentiment. The dominance of words such as criticism, anxiety, wrong, controversial, demonstration, and even the hashtag #indonesiagelap (dark Indonesia) indicates an outpouring of disappointment and frustration among the public regarding the socio-economic situation and political conditions in Indonesia. The red color that dominates the word cloud signifies the strong expression of public dissatisfaction, manifested in the form of criticism of the state and the government.



Figure 3. World cloud from #Kabur AjaDulu (source : Brand24.com)

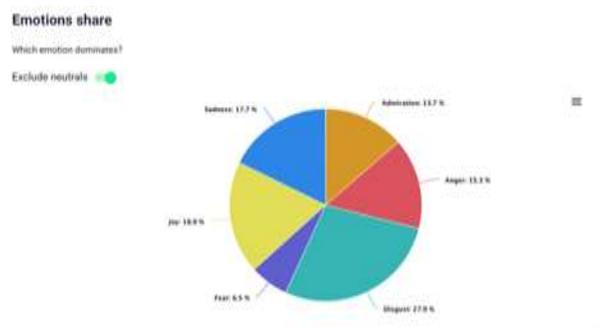


Figure 4. Emotion share from #KaburAjaDulu  
(source : Brand24.com)

Positive sentiment is often found in content that features stories of individual success abroad, such as work experiences in Japan or Europe. Related hashtags that reinforce this narrative include #whvaustralia, #kerjadiluarnegeri, #expat, and #hidupdi jepang. In addition, aspirational content in the form of tips on working or studying abroad, as well as light humor, also adds to the positive tone. Meanwhile, negative sentiment generally appears in the form of political criticism of the government, the House of Representatives, and economic conditions. Accompanying hashtags include #indonesiagelap (145 mentions), #dpr (72 mentions), #korupsi (58 mentions), and #pemerintah (55 mentions). Pessimistic narratives such as “RIP Indonesia” or accusations that those who flee are “traitors to the nation” are part of the negative opinion trend.

#### **b. Polarization of Public Opinion**

The #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon shows clear polarization among netizens, including: 1) The Pro Group (#Kabur as a personal solution), who consider “running away” in the form of migration, working holiday visas, or studying abroad as a realistic solution to the domestic crisis. This group often uses TikTok with practical narratives, such as tips for working in Europe; 2) The Contra Group (#Kabur as running away from problems), who consider running away as a sign of disloyalty to the nation. This narrative often appears on Twitter with nationalistic tones and harsh criticism of those who choose to leave; 3) The Satirical/Neutral Group, who use #KaburAjaDulu for humor and entertainment purposes. Memes about escaping to Wakanda or to a fictional world show how this hashtag is used as a way to release collective stress.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon reflects the complex dynamics of digital public opinion in Indonesia. This hashtag is not only a viral trend, but also a symbol of collective dissatisfaction and hope among the people. Conversation data reaching 2,184 discussions with a reach of up to

46 million accounts, as well as relatively balanced sentiment (476 positive and 514 negative), shows that this issue divides public opinion without producing a single consensus.

The polarization of meaning is clear: some netizens interpret “kabur” as a survival strategy and an expression of imagination for a better future, while others interpret it as a form of escape from social and political responsibility. In this tension, humor serves as a medium for conveying anxiety as well as a space for symbolic negotiation between criticism, satire, and hope.

Thus, #KaburAjaDulu can be seen as a portrait of Indonesian digital culture in 2025. It reveals a crisis of trust in socio-political institutions as well as a collective aspiration for change. Furthermore, this phenomenon shows that social media not only functions as a space for expression, but also as an arena for the formation of social, political, and cultural meanings that are continuously negotiated by the digital community.

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