

Social Media and Symbolic Interactionism in the #KaburAjaDulu Movement on TikTok

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Abstract

The hashtag #KaburAjaDulu went viral among young Indonesians in response to work pressures, with 173.9K posts on TikTok. This phenomenon influences the perspectives of the younger generation who want to move forward and develop, not just stay silent in the face of the country's situation. This descriptive qualitative research analyzes the phenomenon through observation and daily TikTok content analysis. The results show that this hashtag is an expression of disappointment as well as a reflection of the desire to develop outside a system that is not yet ideal. Although considered less nationalistic, many see it as a strategy to gain skills to later contribute back to Indonesia.

Keywords: Society, Media, Hashtag, Tiktok, #KaburAjaDulu

Abstrak

Tagar #KaburAjaDulu menjadi viral di kalangan anak muda Indonesia sebagai respons terhadap tekanan pekerjaan, dengan 173.9K postingan di TikTok. Fenomena ini memengaruhi perspektif generasi muda yang ingin maju dan berkembang, tidak hanya berdiam diri menghadapi situasi negara. Penelitian

kualitatif deskriptif ini menganalisis fenomena tersebut melalui observasi dan analisis konten harian TikTok. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa tagar ini menjadi ekspresi kekecewaan sekaligus refleksi keinginan untuk berkembang di luar sistem yang belum ideal. Meskipun dianggap kurang nasionalis, banyak yang melihatnya sebagai strategi mendapatkan keterampilan untuk nantinya berkontribusi kembali bagi Indonesia.

Kata kunci : Masyarakat, Media, Tagar, Tiktok, #KaburAjaDulu

Introduction

Social media is an online platform that facilitates web-based social interaction, transforming communication into interactive dialogue. It has become a space not only for entertainment but also for expressing criticism and shaping public opinion. One notable phenomenon is the viral hashtag **#KaburAjaDulu** (“Just Run Away First”), which gained traction among young Indonesians as a response to work-related stress. This hashtag went viral across multiple platforms, particularly TikTok, where it has been used in over **173.9K posts**. The widespread use of this hashtag reflects the sentiments of many Indonesians who are contemplating or pursuing opportunities abroad—either for better-paying jobs or improved educational prospects.

Indonesia continues to face high unemployment rates, partly due to a scarcity of job opportunities and the mismatch between job requirements and applicants’ qualifications. Government policies are often perceived as exacerbating the situation, with citizens feeling increasingly burdened by unfavorable regulations. Consequently, many turn to the **#KaburAjaDulu** hashtag as a symbolic expression of dissatisfaction and distress toward perceived authoritarian governance.

This hashtag has particularly influenced the perspectives of the younger generation. Rather than passively accepting the nation’s deteriorating conditions, these individuals are actively seeking growth and advancement abroad. For some, this “escape” is not merely a rejection of the homeland but a strategic decision to gain valuable skills and knowledge that may one day benefit the country upon their return.

From the perspective of **George Herbert Mead’s Symbolic Interactionism** (Griffin et al., 2019), the hashtag functions as more than a digital trend. It represents a symbolic interaction wherein language and gesture anticipate social reactions. Mead’s theory involves three key principles: **meaning, language, and thought**.

The first principle, **meaning**, suggests that individuals act toward people or objects based on the meanings those things hold for them. In this context, the hashtag **#KaburAjaDulu** symbolizes dissatisfaction with Indonesia’s socioeconomic landscape or a personal desire for change.

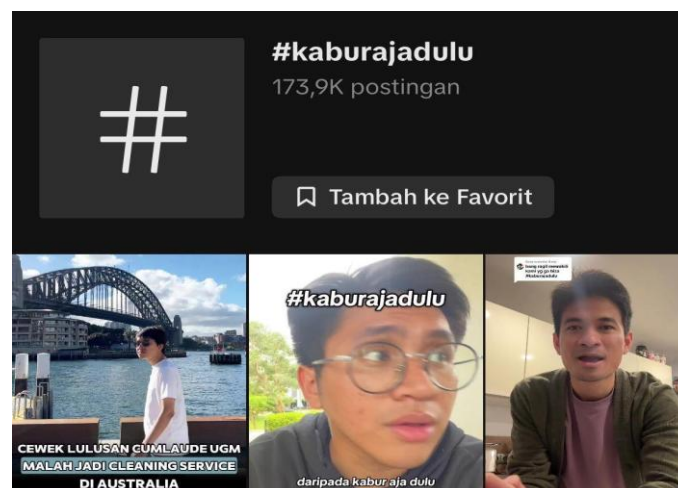
The second principle, **language**, posits that meaning arises through social interaction. The hashtag’s connotation does not exist inherently within the phrase “kabur” (escape), which typically carries negative implications (e.g., shirking responsibility). Rather, meaning is

negotiated through discourse, wherein “kabur” is redefined as seeking better opportunities abroad in response to unfavorable domestic conditions.

The third principle, **thought**, addresses the internal interpretation of symbols. Social media users weigh their decisions to engage with the hashtag against anticipated reactions from followers, peers, family, public figures, or the government. This reflective process shapes how they present their experiences and perspectives.

Prior studies have emphasized that the **#KaburAjaDulu** hashtag does not necessarily equate to hate speech against Indonesia. Instead, it reflects a temporary withdrawal from a chaotic national context. The hashtag can be likened to the narrative of the **Ashabul Kahfi**—youths in Islamic tradition who chose to withdraw from a corrupt ruler rather than accept his tyranny. This religious and moral parallel reinforces the interpretation of the hashtag as a symbolic stand against oppression.

Earlier research has explored how media platforms serve as tools for social critique. For instance, Anisa (2023) used a **qualitative cultural communication approach** in analyzing the **#FreePalestine** movement, demonstrating how public opinion is shaped and transformed via hashtag activism. Through content analysis, including text, imagery, and multimedia elements, such studies reveal the deeper meanings embedded in digital narratives. Similarly, this research seeks to explore how the **#KaburAjaDulu** hashtag operates as a communicative act of resistance, symbolic reflection, and redefinition of identity within Indonesia’s digital public sphere.



Methodology


This study adopts a **qualitative descriptive approach** to explore the social phenomena surrounding the use of the hashtag **#KaburAjaDulu** on social media platforms. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to uncover meanings, motivations, and underlying social dynamics embedded in the usage of the hashtag. The research was conducted online, specifically through the social media platform **TikTok**.

The data sources were derived from **participant observation** of content and user comments associated with the hashtag, as well as **secondary data** including scholarly articles, popular media, and social media trend analyses.

Data collection techniques involved **content observation**, where random posts containing the hashtag were collected and documented. The collected data were then analyzed using **thematic analysis**, which consisted of coding, identifying key themes, and constructing interpretations based on the interrelations between themes. To enhance data validity, **source triangulation** was employed by comparing observational findings with relevant secondary literature.

Findings


The analysis of TikTok content revealed a widespread sentiment of disillusionment among Indonesian youth regarding the national condition. Many young people expressed a desire to start a new life in more prosperous foreign countries. The hashtag **#KaburAjaDulu** had been used in approximately **173,900 posts**, reflecting a symbolic escape from domestic sociopolitical and economic frustrations.

		Upload	Views	Likes	Comment		
1	 <p>@Uni Lupi Teman Karimu</p>	20-2-20 25	97.600	13.000	195	488	Opini mengenai kesulitan persyaratan kerja di Indonesia

<p>2</p>	 <p>@Joseph Wijaya</p>	<p>15-2-20 25</p>	<p>169.100</p>	<p>4.002</p>	<p>347</p>	<p>83</p>	<p>Opini merasakan hidup di luar negeri tidak menyenangkan itu</p>
<p>3</p>	 <p>@Yovinia AJ - RSJ</p>	<p>11-2-20 25</p>	<p>3.700.000</p>	<p>616.700</p>	<p>4.705</p>	<p>11.900</p>	<p>Kondisi dimana <i>mental health</i> masih dianggap sepele di negara sendiri dibanding negara luar</p>

Four TikTok videos were selected for analysis—two expressing a preference for remaining in Indonesia and two advocating for relocating to another country. These videos were chosen to enable a comparative analysis based on user engagement. Specifically, the comparison focuses on the five most-liked comments from each video. The findings are presented as follows.

Content	Comment	Explanation
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<p>Konten 1</p>	<p>Komentar 1</p> 	<p>Dari likes komen terbanyak terlihat bahwa syarat kerja di Indonesia begitu rumitkan, dibanding di luar negeri yang lebih</p>
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DISCUSSION

The #KaburAjaDulu hashtag phenomenon on social media—particularly TikTok—reflects a profound sense of social dissatisfaction among Indonesia’s younger generation. Its widespread usage signifies a subtle protest against government policies and a desire for improved opportunities abroad. This section delves into the symbolic meaning of the hashtag and how it intersects with youth perspectives, nationalism, and aspirations for social transformation.

A statement by 2024 presidential candidate Anies Baswedan on TikTok captures the sentiment underlying this phenomenon: *"Loving Indonesia is not just about pride when the nation is doing well. Love is tested when the country faces challenges and needs change. It is normal to feel tired—struggles without rest can become burdensome. If we have tried to love and received nothing in return, it is okay to pause. By giving ourselves space to breathe, we can return stronger."* This perspective implies that pursuing opportunities abroad is acceptable, provided that one's connection to the homeland remains—a place to which one may ultimately return and contribute.

According to **Lubis & Khasiah (2016)**, symbols in social interaction do not carry fixed meanings; rather, their significance is negotiated through communication between individuals and groups. In the case of #KaburAjaDulu, the word "kabur" (escape), typically perceived negatively as fleeing from responsibility, is reinterpreted as a proactive step toward seeking a better life abroad. This reflects how symbols can be redefined within the evolving dynamics of digital platforms.

Pratiwi et al. (2016), in their study on symbols in the communication of street vendors, emphasize that symbols convey more than explicit messages—they also encapsulate deeper social meanings. Similarly, the #KaburAjaDulu hashtag is not merely an invitation to leave but serves as a symbolic act of soft resistance to socioeconomic pressures faced by young Indonesians.

Siregar et al. (2025) argue that despite being commonly interpreted as an expression of national dissatisfaction, the hashtag also embodies hope: the intention to acquire skills abroad and return to make meaningful contributions to Indonesia. This perspective adds a layer of complexity to the interpretation of symbolic communication.

Thus, symbolic interaction becomes key in understanding how #KaburAjaDulu functions not only as a viral trend but also as a space for social discourse—a digital forum where individuals negotiate identity, aspirations, and frustrations with current sociopolitical conditions. The hashtag operates dually: as a mode of expressive dissent and as a reflection of ambition for growth beyond a system perceived as failing.

CONCLUSION

The viral rise of #KaburAjaDulu among Indonesian youth is a vivid representation of widespread social anxiety and disillusionment. Sparked by job insecurity and an uncertain future, the hashtag has appeared in over **173,900 TikTok posts**, signaling a collective yearning for better educational and life opportunities abroad. It is not merely a digital trend; #KaburAjaDulu has become a symbol of dissatisfaction with an inadequate system and a hopeful aspiration to grow and gain skills overseas—ultimately with the intention to return and contribute to the homeland.

Social media, especially TikTok, serves as an effective interactive space for expressing critique and shaping public opinion. The hashtag gained popularity as many young people expressed frustration with the scarcity of job opportunities, complex employment requirements, and government policies perceived as inequitable. For some, #KaburAjaDulu is a form of protest against an unjust leadership.

Interestingly, the meaning of "kabur" in this context has undergone a semantic shift. Once synonymous with evading responsibility, it is now understood as a strategic move to seek better prospects abroad. In the framework of **George Herbert Mead's symbolic interaction theory**, the meaning of a symbol like #KaburAjaDulu is not static but rather socially negotiated through ongoing interactions. Thus, the notion of "escape" is reframed as a positive response to adverse conditions—a method of resilience and personal growth.

Comment analysis on TikTok reveals a spectrum of opinions. While some support the idea of seeking a better life abroad, others argue that life in Indonesia remains viable if economic and spiritual needs are met. Additionally, the lack of mental health support in Indonesia was cited as a reason why other countries are perceived as more conducive to personal development.

In summary, #KaburAjaDulu creates a new digital discourse space where youth articulate identity, hope, and survival strategies. It illustrates how Indonesian youth are no longer passive but are actively seeking solutions to contemporary challenges—whether domestically or abroad. The hashtag has become a subtle symbol of resistance to systemic pressures, as well as a hopeful expression for a more promising future.

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