

KaburAjaDulu and Mental Health: Youth Expression through Digital Media in Indonesia

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Abstract: Digital media has rapidly transformed into a central arena for Indonesian youth to express their voices, confront social realities, and negotiate their identities. The viral hashtag #KaburAjaDulu illustrates how young people channel collective frustrations regarding economic hardship, educational uncertainty, and political disillusionment into public digital conversations. At the same time, the movement reveals a growing awareness of mental health challenges, where feelings of stress, anxiety, and burnout are articulated through online narratives of “escape.” This study explores how #KaburAjaDulu functions not only as a symbolic protest but also as a communicative practice that connects youth, shapes perceptions, and fosters solidarity. Using discourse analysis of Twitter/X and TikTok content, supported by interviews with active participants, the research examines how digital storytelling, memes, and viral trends frame discontent while simultaneously constructing informal support networks. The findings indicate that #KaburAjaDulu contributes to destigmatizing mental health by normalizing conversations on emotional well-being and resilience in public digital spaces. This study concludes that the movement should be understood as more than a temporary online trend; it exemplifies how digital platforms cultivate new forms of social mobilization, youth empowerment, and community engagement in contemporary Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, Indonesian youth have emerged as some of the world's most intensive social media users, occupying spaces where news, humor, commerce, and civic talk blur into a continuous, always-on stream. In these spaces, hashtags work as connective devices that stitch together dispersed voices into visible publics, giving otherwise isolated expressions a shared banner and searchable trace. Scholarship on digital activism has shown that such connective, personalized forms of engagement can catalyze large-scale participation without requiring formal organizational structures or conventional leadership, an affordance that resonates with youth who are highly networked but wary of institutional

politics. The #KaburAjaDulu trend, which circulates playful yet pointed messages about “escaping first” from economic and academic pressures, fits this connective mold while foregrounding everyday mental strains. These patterns echo theories of “connective action” and “affective publics,” where crowds mobilize around shared feelings and narrative fragments rather than unified ideological programs, a dynamic that helps explain why seemingly light or ironic tags can sustain serious dialogue about well-being. (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015).

Hashtag activism scholarship also reminds us that the power of tags lies in how they organize attention over time, bending the flow of talk into stories that can be picked up, revoiced, and remixed by users. When youth attach #KaburAjaDulu to videos, memes, or short confessions, they weave personal stressors into a broader narrative arc that is both communal and protean, which is consistent with the rhetorical and narrative dynamics identified in studies of earlier hashtag publics. In these accounts, the hashtag functions less as a simple content label and more as a discursive thread that imparts sequence and agency to otherwise scattered posts, creating a sense of collective presence and momentum. For Indonesian youth negotiating precarious labor markets, rising costs, and exam or thesis deadlines, the tag’s ironic tone can lower barriers to self-disclosure while softening the stigma around seeking help. Consequently, a vocabulary of “escape” becomes a proxy for articulating mental load, inviting others to engage, console, or normalize. (Yang, 2016; Clark, 2016; Jackson, Bailey, & Welles, 2020).

Indonesia’s social-media-driven public sphere has produced distinctive local theories and measures for understanding digital contention. The Digital Movement of Opinion (DMO) framework developed in Indonesian communication studies treats hashtags as triggers of uncoordinated yet cascading reactions that can be traced through network metrics to show how ideas diffuse. While DMO was often applied to political or policy controversies, it also illuminates socio-cultural tags such as #KaburAjaDulu by foregrounding how ordinary users, influencers, and media accounts interact to keep an issue salient. During health crises and other national debates, Indonesian studies have documented the ways multiple, competing hashtags harness these dynamics to mobilize sympathy, counter-hoaxes,

or call authorities to account. Bringing DMO into conversation with connective action and affective publics helps situate #KaburAjaDulu as a hybrid phenomenon—part venting, part advocacy, and part peer-support signal—that thrives precisely because it stays open-ended. (Eriyanto, 2019; Pranata & Riyanta, 2025).

The mental health dimension of #KaburAjaDulu intersects with a growing Indonesian literature that documents stigma, low mental health literacy, and the uneven quality of online information. Mixed-methods research during the pandemic linked high-intensity social media exposure with anxiety among Indonesian users and argued for targeted media literacy as a protective factor, while systematic reviews highlight persistent public stigma and emphasize the need for educational campaigns attuned to local cultural frames. At the same time, the rise of TikTok as a health information channel for Indonesian youth has prompted both enthusiasm and caution, with reviews underscoring potential benefits for awareness alongside risks of misinformation and self-diagnosis. These findings suggest that a tag like #KaburAjaDulu can work as a double-edged discursive device that normalizes conversation about distress even as it competes in an attention economy where sensationalism and oversimplification can flourish. (Tarnoto et al., 2023; Davies, 2024; Adha et al., 2025).

Against this background, the present study examines #KaburAjaDulu as a case of Indonesian hashtag activism that foregrounds youth mental health, asking how users frame, circulate, and receive messages that oscillate between humor and help-seeking. We argue that the tag's appeal rests on its capacity to compress complex burdens into an affectively resonant cue, which then invites commentary chains that often unfold as informal peer support. The analysis attends to the rhetorical forms (memes, first-person micro-narratives), the interactional norms (replying with empathy, tagging friends), and the broader platform dynamics (algorithmic visibility, audio trends) that shape how the tag travels across Twitter/X and TikTok. By linking these patterns to both Indonesian DMO research and international theories of connective action and affective publics, we seek to illuminate how youth co-create a public pedagogy of mental health, even without

formal campaigns. Accordingly, the study addresses three problem formulations: how #KaburAjaDulu frames distress and agency; how interactions around the tag enact peer support; and how the tag's affordances and risks relate to stigma and literacy. (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015; Eriyanto, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative study used discourse analysis and netnographic observation of public posts on Twitter/X and TikTok that included the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu during the period of its peak salience in early 2025. We focused on public posts containing first-person reflections, memes, and short-form videos that referenced school or academic burdens, job precarity, household economic stress, or generalized burnout, and we excluded identifiable health information that could compromise user privacy. Data collection proceeded iteratively through platform search, hashtag following, and exploration of co-occurring tags, stopping when thematic saturation was reached to balance breadth with depth in the corpus. In parallel, we conducted exploratory, semi-structured interviews with a small set of youth who had posted with the tag, focusing on their motivations, experiences of engagement, and interpretations of “escape” as coping language. Interviews were transcribed and anonymized, and all quotes used in the article are paraphrased to protect identities while preserving meaning. (Kozinets, 2015/2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Analytically, we applied a reflexive thematic analysis, moving through familiarization, initial coding, theme development, review, naming, and reporting while iterating between the post corpus and interview material. Coding attended to rhetorical devices (irony, self-deprecation), platform vernaculars (audio trends, text overlays, duet/reaction affordances), and the social positioning of the poster (student, fresh graduate, employee) as signaled by profile bios or content cues. Particular attention was paid to episodes where comment threads shifted from jest to care, for example, when replies moved from “kabur dulu yuk” (let’s escape first) to concrete suggestions about rest, counseling, or workload negotiation. Throughout, we treated the hashtag as a connective label that both organizes

attention and constrains what counts as on-topic discourse, a perspective aligned with discursive accounts of hashtag publics. Memos tracked analytic decisions and reflexive notes, supporting transparency and interpretive rigor. (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Yang, 2016; Papacharissi, 2015).

Ethically, we analyzed only publicly visible content without attempting to link posts to offline identities, and we avoided quoting verbatim when phrases were uniquely identifiable, rephrasing to safeguard participants. Interview participation was voluntary with informed consent, and participants could decline to answer any question or withdraw with no consequence. While social media users often expect visibility, the context collapse between social interaction and research publication requires heightened care to minimize harm and prevent reidentification. We therefore report patterns and paraphrased examples and refrain from embedding direct links to specific posts. This ethical posture aligns with evolving guidance for qualitative research online and with Indonesian scholarly norms around sensitive health-related discussions in digital arenas. (Rayland & Andrews, 2023; Tarnoto et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From “escape” to expression: Narrative frames and the work of irony Across platforms, posts tagged #KaburAjaDulu commonly framed “escape” as a playful refusal of burdens—a deliberately unserious posture that nonetheless mapped closely onto serious life pressures. On TikTok, the dominant video trope paired a trending audio with text overlays like “skripsi deadline makin dekat... #KaburAjaDulu,” while the caption hedged between levity and resignation. On Twitter/X, users riffed on the same motif, sometimes listing the day’s micro-stresses before punctuating the tweet with the tag, inviting knowing replies. This narrative style aligns with prior findings that hashtag activism gains momentum when it affords flexible, protean narrative agency; here, “escape” becomes a plot device that allows personal distress to be voiced without the heaviness of clinical labels. The paralinguistic affordances of short video—music, cuts, visual gags—enable affective expression that is simultaneously candid and performative, a

quality that helps the tag attract engagement without devolving into self-pity. (Yang, 2016; Clark, 2016; Papacharissi, 2015).

We observed that #KaburAjaDulu did not rely on directives or calls to action; rather, it harnessed small acts of recognition such as likes, duet reactions, and saving posts. These micro-interactions aggregated into a sense of co-presence and validation, resonating with connective action's model in which participation is personalized and loosely coordinated. Comment sections often included short empathic phrases ("semangat," "istirahat dulu") and practical tips about pacing academic tasks or setting boundaries at work, creating an informal peer-support layer beneath the humor. This pattern dovetails with research on how social platforms afford peer-to-peer support, with benefits typically linked to normalization, companionship, and informational exchange, provided that communities remain moderated and norms of care are upheld. In this light, #KaburAjaDulu's low-threshold engagement acts as a gateway to more explicit help-seeking, legitimizing the move from joke to advice. (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Rayland & Andrews, 2023; Naslund et al., 2016).

When analyzed through the Digital Movement of Opinion lens, #KaburAjaDulu exhibited a familiar division of labor among actors: ordinary users seeded authentic narratives, micro-influencers amplified via humorous remixes, and larger accounts curated periodic compilations. The elasticity of the tag allowed it to traverse domains, appearing under campus-life skits, job-hunt updates, and family-finance anecdotes, thus keeping the hashtag as a general-purpose sign for burden and release. Past Indonesian studies of mobilization through hashtags reveal similar processes where actor centrality, hashtag pairings, and timing structure participation waves, which then feed into mainstream media uptake. The diffusion we observed reflects those mechanisms: cross-tagging with study and finance niches yielded semicyclical attention spikes, after which new audio trends refreshed interest. Such patterns underscore how Indonesian youth adapt global platform vernaculars to local stress registers. (Eriyanto, 2019; Pranata & Riyanta, 2025).

One of the most consequential features of #KaburAjaDulu was how it normalized micro-disclosures about anxiety, sleeplessness, and demotivation

without medicalizing them outright. In contexts where mental health stigma remains measurable and salient, normalization through everyday talk can gently widen the space for care-seeking while avoiding the impression of pathology inflation. Indonesian reviews document multiple stigma drivers—low literacy, negative stereotypes, and structural barriers—which impede help-seeking and fuel concealment; in comment threads under the tag, we saw users countering these factors by affirming rest as legitimate and recommending campus counseling or helplines. Related research from the pandemic period reinforces the link between social media overload and anxiety, supporting efforts to insert media literacy and pacing strategies into peer advice. Thus, although the tag's ironic register risks trivialization, its aggregate effect appears to shift norms toward accepting emotional rest and support as reasonable responses to strain. (Davies, 2024; Tarnoto et al., 2023).

TikTok emerged in our corpus as the most potent stage for translating #KaburAjaDulu into educational snippets about coping strategies, time management, and mood hygiene, often through creators who blended personal storytelling with light psychoeducation. At the same time, the platform's speed and trend logic created incentives for overgeneralized advice and self-diagnosis tendencies, a risk widely noted in the international and Indonesian literature on mental health content. Systematic and narrative reviews caution that while TikTok can enhance awareness and reduce isolation, it also circulates variable-quality guidance, urging stronger quality signals, creator training, and moderation. In our data, viewers frequently asked for sources or requested "part two" explanations, indicating demand for credibility cues that creators could meet through references, partnerships with campus psychologists, or pinned resource lists. These observations suggest that #KaburAjaDulu content on TikTok is already a de facto health-communication layer that would benefit from gentle scaffolding rather than heavy-handed policing. (Adha et al., 2025; O'Reilly et al., 2023; Kenny et al., 2022).

Twitter/X posts under the tag often packaged short confessions with humor, then attracted replies that reframed "escape" as a pause rather than defeat, which is

consistent with broader Indonesian analyses of mental health talk online. Big-data and netnography studies of Indonesian-language posts have identified large volumes of mental health discourse marked by an interplay of emotional venting and informational exchange, suggesting that visibility itself can be therapeutic when combined with peer norms of empathy. Although our qualitative lens cannot quantify effects, this resonance with computational findings gives confidence that the #KaburAjaDulu stream is not an idiosyncratic anomaly but part of wider discursive shifts. In effect, the tag serves as a soft mobilizer for supportive talk, increasing the chance that distressed youth encounter consoling replies or links to resources. These patterns align with international evidence that online engagement can both harm and help, with outcomes contingent on use intensity, content valence, and community norms. (Mutia et al., 2025; Sujarwoto, Tampubolon, & Pierewan, 2019; Shannon et al., 2022; Valkenburg, Meier, & Beyens, 2022).

In both platforms, the shift from jest to support frequently hinged on small design features—pinned comments, duet chains, reply prompts—that lowered friction for helpful responses. Creators who voiced their own limits (“capek banget, kabur dulu ya”) often received modeling replies (“aku juga... ini yang kubikin untuk atur jam”) that seeded micro-communities across threads. Studies of digital peer support emphasize moderation, community norms, and structured scaffolds as factors that translate casual interaction into meaningful aid, and our observations highlight how these factors can arise organically around a resonant tag. Importantly, the presence of gentle dissent—users who cautioned against toxic positivity or called for professional help when crises loomed—suggests that discursive diversity can be protective. The result is a patchwork of peer pedagogy where humor, empathy, and referral coexist in a feed optimized for entertainment. (Rayland & Andrews, 2023; Naslund et al., 2016; PLOS Digital Health ToC, 2024).

It would be misleading to treat #KaburAjaDulu as uniformly beneficial; the same algorithms that amplify supportive content can also amplify cynical takes, glamorize avoidance, or drown out quieter voices. Reviews on problematic social media use among youth repeatedly associate heavy, unregulated engagement with anxiety and depressive symptoms, underlining the importance of pacing and

literacies. In our corpus, a minority of posts ridiculed “over-sensitive” peers or framed “escape” as abandonment of responsibilities, prompting counter-speech but also signaling the precariousness of stigmatized talk in public feeds. Additionally, platform access and cultural capital shape who speaks and who is heard; youth in non-urban settings or with limited connectivity may be underrepresented, and Bahasa Indonesia vernaculars or regional slang can gatekeep participation. These constraints urge caution against extrapolating from visible streams to all youth experiences. (Shannon et al., 2022; Valkenburg et al., 2022).

For educators, #KaburAjaDulu’s popularity is a reminder that student well-being discourses are already happening in the languages and formats students prefer. Rather than treating entertainment platforms as distractions, instructors and student affairs units can adapt their digital pedagogy to include brief, credible micro-lessons on stress management that travel within platform vernaculars, for example, short “how I plan my week” clips co-created with students. Indonesian communication research emphasizes the role of local actors—doctors as content creators, campus counselors, and peer mentors—in countering hoaxes and stigma, which suggests a model where institutions amplify trusted micro-influencers instead of broadcasting generic PSAs. Embedding wellness tips in assignment briefings, integrating “digital rest” norms into course design, and highlighting campus support channels in course LMS sidebars are small steps that can harmonize with the tag’s ethos of short-term relief and sustainable pacing. In doing so, universities participate in digital transformation not as mere adopters of tools but as co-authors of platform-native health literacies. (Adha et al., 2025; Tarnoto et al., 2023).

For policy and civil society, the case invites a nuanced view of social media as a site where informal peer support and health promotion already coexist with noise and risk. Ministries and NGOs can pilot light-touch interventions that enrich hashtag streams with credible resources: pinned comment packs for creators who opt in, API-driven banners that surface helplines when certain distress keywords co-occur with popular tags, and creator microgrants for short series that model rest, boundary-setting, or help-seeking. Public health messaging can be co-designed with

youth to preserve the playful tone associated with #KaburAjaDulu while weaving in signals of care quality, avoiding a scold-and-scare approach that often backfires. Evaluations should measure not only impressions but shifts in perceived norms, self-efficacy, and willingness to seek help, recognizing that destigmatization is a normative change process. These pathways align with broader evidence that online peer interactions can complement formal services when properly scaffolded and moderated. (Rayland & Andrews, 2023; Naslund et al., 2016; O'Reilly et al., 2023).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions. This study examined #KaburAjaDulu as an instance of Indonesian hashtag activism in which humor, irony, and everyday confession converge to make youth distress discussable in public feeds. By analyzing platform vernaculars and interactional norms across Twitter/X and TikTok, we showed how small gestures of recognition and advice coalesce into ad hoc peer-support practices, thereby smoothing the path from jest to help-seeking. Theoretically, the case substantiates a synthesis of Indonesian DMO, connective action, and affective publics: the tag mobilizes through personalized, affectively charged narratives rather than programmatic demands, while local actor ecologies and trend logics shape diffusion. Empirically, the patterns we observed resonate with Indonesian and international research that links online engagement to both risk and resilience, with outcomes conditioned by intensity, content quality, and community norms. Conceptually, #KaburAjaDulu illustrates how digital culture's "light" forms can carry "heavy" meanings, turning a vernacular of escape into a vocabulary for pacing, solidarity, and permission to rest.

Recommendations. We propose four practical directions. First, co-create platform-native wellness resources with students and youth creators, including short modules and comment templates that legitimize rest and signpost campus or community services. Second, embed digital health literacy in curricula and civic campaigns, emphasizing pacing, source evaluation, and the difference between normalization and romanticization of avoidance. Third, support opt-in moderation and creator training, equipping volunteer moderators and micro-influencers with

basic gatekeeping and referral skills that respect the playful tone of the tag. Fourth, evaluate impact beyond metrics, using mixed methods to assess shifts in stigma, help-seeking intentions, and perceived community care. These steps position educational institutions, public health agencies, and creators as collaborators in a digitally transformed ecosystem that acknowledges youth culture while strengthening mental health supports.

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