

GEN Z'S RECEPTION ON THE HASHTAG #kaburajadulu ON INSTAGRAM

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Abstrak

Munculnya fenomena #kaburajadulu di Instagram mencerminkan dinamika opini publik yang terbentuk melalui komunikasi digital, khususnya di kalangan Generasi Z di Indonesia. Tren ini tidak dapat dipisahkan dari konteks globalisasi dan kemajuan teknologi, karena platform media social telah menjadi ruang sentral bagi kaum muda untuk mengekspresikan kecemasan sosio-ekonomi dan rasa frustrasi kolektif. Namun, penelitian yang secara khusus mengkaji bagaimana tagar viral seperti #kaburajadulu diterima dan ditafsirkan oleh generasi muda sebagai peserta aktif dalam masyarakat digital masih terbatas. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana Generasi Z memandang dan memposisikan diri mereka terhadap tagar #kaburajadulu di Instagram. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan kerangka analisis penerimaan encoding/decoding karya Stuart Hall, dengan lima informan Generasi Z yang dipilih melalui purposive sampling dan data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-struktural mendalam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dua informan mengadopsi posisi pembacaan yang dominan-hegemonic, dengan sepenuhnya menerima tagar tersebut sebagai ekspresi yang sah atas rasa frustrasi terhadap kondisi social-ekonomi Indonesia, sementara tiga informan menunjukkan posisi pembacaan yang dinegoisasikan, yang mengindikasikan bahwa makna yang diutamakan dari tagar tersebut sangat selaras dengan realitas yang dialami Generasi Z. Temuan ini berkontribusi dalam mengisi kesenjangan penelitian dalam studi aktivisme digital di Global selatan dengan menunjukkan bahwa lingkungan algoritmik Instagram memperkuat narasi emosional.

Kata Kunci: komunikasi, politik, media sosial, gen z, resepsi, instagram.

Abstract

The emergence of the #kaburajadulu phenomenon on Instagram reflects the dynamics of public opinion shaped through digital communication, particularly among Generation Z in Indonesia. This trend cannot be separated from the context of globalization and technological advancements, as social media platforms have become central spaces where young people express socio-economic anxieties and collective frustrations. However, limited research has specifically examined how viral hashtags like #kaburajadulu are received and interpreted by young generations as active participants in digital society. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how Generation Z perceives and positions themselves toward the hashtag #kaburajadulu on Instagram. This study employs a qualitative approach using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding reception analysis framework, with five Generation Z informants selected through purposive sampling and data collected through in-depth semi structured interviews. The results reveal that two informants adopted a dominant-hegemonic reading position, fully accepting the hashtag as a legitimate expression pf frustration toward Indonesia's socio-economic conditions, while three informants demonstrated a negotiated reading position, indicating that the hashtag's preferred meaning closely aligns with the lived realities of Generation Z. these findings contribute to filling the research gap in digital activism studies in the Global

South by demonstrating that Instagram's algorithmic environment reinforces emotional narratives.

Keywords: communication, politics, social media, gen z, reception, instagram.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has transformed by the way people interact, share information, and participate in public discourse. Social media platforms have become important spaces where individuals can express opinions, exchange ideas, and collectively respond to various social, political, and economic issues (Hussain et al., 2024). Unlike conventional media, social media allows users not only to consume information but also actively participate in the production and circulation of messages. This transformation has shifted the nature of public communication into a more participatory and interactive form, where audiences play an active role in shaping digital discourse.

One of the most distinctive features of communication on social media is the use of hashtags. Hashtags function as digital markers that organize conversations and connect users around particular topics or issues (Hussain et al., 2024). Through hashtags, scattered post across social media platforms can be grouped into a shared conversation, enabling users to follow discussion, express opinions, and engage in collective dialogue. In this context, hashtag have evolved beyond simple categorization tools and have become symbolic instruments that facilitate the circulation ideas, emotions, and social concerns within digital communities. Hashtag activism on Instagram has been documented as a mechanism through which user explicitly signal their stance on issues and engage in public discourse (Kim et al., 2020).

In recent years' hashtag have increasingly been associated with forms of digital activism and collective expression. Social media platforms have played a significant role in organizing digital campaigns and disseminating information in real time (Sudirman, Rosmilawati et al., 2024). Various global movement have demonstrated how hashtag can mobilize public attention and create widespread conversations about social issues movements such as #metoo (Manikonda et al., 2018) and #blacklivesmatter (Freelon et al., n.d.) illustrate how digital users utilize hashtags to articulate social grievances, challenge, dominant narratives, and build solidarity across geographical boundaries. These phenomena show that hashtag can function not only as communication tools but also as spaces where social meanings and public sentiments are negotiated among users(Altahmazi, 2020). (Tufekci, 2017) argues that while digital tools such as hashtags significantly lower the barrier to collective action and enable

rapid mobilization, the movements they produce are often structurally fragile, lacking the organizational depth needed for sustained political impact. This tension between visibility and durability is relevant to understanding the hashtag #kaburajadulu phenomenon, which achieved massive online traction but remains primarily an expressive rather than organized political movement.

The phenomenon of hashtag driven discussion is also evident in the Indonesian digital landscape.

Several viral hashtags have emerged as forms of public reaction toward social and political issues. Including #reformasidikorupsi (Wahyuningroem et al., 2025) and #percumalaporpolsi. These hashtags illustrate how social media users collectively express criticism, disappointment, or resistance toward particular policies or institutional practices. In this context, social media becomes a digital spaces for public discourse where individuals participate in conversations that reflect broader social realities (Rosanti et al., 2025). In Indonesian context, hashtag activism has been documented across various social issues beyond political movements. (Bate & Amrullah, 2024) examined the use of hashtag #100harikanjuruhan on X “twitter” as a form of digital commemoration following the Kanjuruhan football tragedy, demonstrating that hashtags in Indonesia function not only as a tools for political mobilization but also as spaces for community solidarity and shared expression. This finding supports the broader understanding that hashtags serve as multifunctional discursive spaces, a dynamic that similarity underpins the emergence of #kaburajadulu as a site of collective expression among Indonesian youth.

The hashtag #kaburajadulu was not a spontaneous 2025 phenomenon but had documented origin nearly two years earlier. The hashtag first appeared in September 2023, originating from discussion among Indonesian information technology workers on platform X, where the earliest exchanges centered on comparing overseas incentives for IT professionals (Adyatama, 2025). The hashtag then went largely dormant. Drone Emprit’s monitoring data traced the earliest resurgent post to January 8, 2025 (Hutasoit, 2025). This resurgence was driven by dissatisfaction, declining quality of life, social injustice, and perceived inadequacy of government policy, reflecting the broader frustration among Indonesian youth about their prospects within the country (Hutasoit, 2025). This context positioned #kaburajadulu not merely as an expression of individual aspiration to work or study overseas, but as a hashtag rooted in specific socio-political grievances that reactivated a dormant digital symbol into a nationally visible discourse. Within this growing culture of digital expression, the hashtag #kaburajadulu has recently emerged as widely discussed topic among Indonesian social media

users (Ardianti et al., 2025). The phrase literally means “just leaves first” or “run away first,” and it has been widely used by the internet users to express frustration toward socio-economic conditions in Indonesia (Ajie & Wardhana, 2025). The hashtag reflects concerns related to employment opportunities, rising living costs, educational challenges, broader uncertainty about the future (Erlisya et al., 2025). As a result, the hashtag has gained significant traction as a form of collective expression among young people who feel anxious about their prospects within the current national context (Amir et al., 2025).

The emergence of this hashtag cannot be separated from the broader dynamics of globalization and digital communication. Through social media platforms such as Instagram, individuals are continuously exposed to information about opportunities, lifestyles, socio-economic conditions in other countries. This exposure may influence how young people evaluate their own circumstances and imagine alternative possibilities for their future (Walton-roberts, 2019). Consequently, the hashtag #kaburajadulu can be interpreted not merely as a literal desire to migrate abroad, but also as a symbolic expression of dissatisfaction, anxiety, and aspiration among the younger generation.

Among various demographic groups, Generation Z plays a particularly significant role in shaping digital conversations on social media. As digital natives who grew up alongside the development of internet technologies, Generation Z is highly familiar with social media platforms and actively participates in online discussions. Their engagement in digital spaces often reflects their perspectives on contemporary issues, including education, employment, politics, and social justice (Boyd, 2014). Empirical studies confirm that social media use on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok positively correlates with political interest and civic engagement among young users (Oden & Porter, 2023), suggesting that Gen Z’s digital activity is not merely recreational but also constitutes a form of civic participation. demonstrated that young people’s engagement with social media is shaped not only by technological affordances but also by social pressures, identity formation, and the desire to belong to network publics. In this sense, young people do not simply use social media as communicative tool, they actively construct their identities and negotiated their sense of belonging through the content they consume, share, and respond to. This understanding is particularly relevant to the hashtag #kaburajadulu phenomenon, where the generation Z’s engagement with the hashtag reflects not only an informational response but also a deeply personal process of identifying with shared anxieties and collective aspirations. Therefore, understanding how Generation Z interprets and responds to viral hashtags becomes important in analyzing the dynamics of digital public discourse.

Reception analysis provides a useful perspective for examining how audiences interpret media messages. Rather than assuming that media messages have fixed meanings, reception studies emphasize that meaning is actively constructed by audiences based on their experiences, social backgrounds, and cultural contexts. In the context of social media, this perspective becomes particularly relevant because digital users are constantly exposed to diverse narratives and interpretations circulating within online environments.

Therefore, this study seeks to analyze how Generation Z interprets the hashtag #kaburajadulu on Instagram by applying Stuart Hall's reception theory. By examining how young social media users understand, negotiate, or possibly reject the meanings associated with this hashtag, the study aims to provide deeper insight into the relationship between digital discourse, youth perspectives, and sociopolitical concerns in contemporary Indonesian society.

The #kaburajadulu phenomenon on Instagram has emerged as a widely discussed digital discourse on Instagram. As of March 3, 2026 the hashtag #kaburajadulu has appeared in more than 164,000 posts on Instagram, indicating its rapid circulation and growing relevance in digital conversations. The significant increase in its usage suggests that the hashtag is not merely a temporary trend, but a dynamic digital discourse that continues to evolve and generate diverse interpretations among users. The hashtag #kaburajadulu is a public response to the difficulty of finding a decent job. Many individuals feel the heavy burden of rising cost of living, low wages, and limitations in obtaining decent work. The high price of basic necessities, soaring education costs, and fierce competition for jobs are the main factors driving people to seek a better life. Competition are the main factors that encourage people to seek a better life abroad (Irhamdhika et al., 2025). The use of #kaburajadulu on Instagram has also sparked debate in public sphere, including responses from government officials who questioned the nationalism of citizens expressing the desire to move abroad. This indicates that the hashtag does not carry a single meaning but is open to multiple interpretation among Instagram users.

Previous studies have shown that social media plays significant role in shaping political opinion, mobilization, and collective awareness among young people (Hasan, 2024; Sihombing, 2024; Xiong et al., 2019). These studies primarily focus on the role of digital platforms in facilitating activism, solidarity, and civic participation, including, global hashtag movements such as #metoo and #blacklivesmatter. However, limited attention has been given to how local viral hashtags in the Indonesian context are interpreted and received by young audiences. This indicates a research gap in understanding the reception process of Generation Z toward the hashtag #kaburajadulu as a form of digital discourse.

Unlike previous studies, this study specifically focuses on the #kaburajadulu phenomenon as a unique form of digital expression, born out of the socio-economic anxieties of Indonesia's younger generation. This study not only looks at the use of social media from the perspective of political mobilization or social movements, but also seeks to understand the interpretive meanings and subjective experiences of Gen Z in interpreting and responding to this phenomenon. By employing reception approach based on Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how the hashtag #kaburajadulu is interpreted by Generation Z within their socio-cultural experiences.

Given this gap, the question guiding this research is how Generation Z perceives and positions themselves toward the hashtag #kaburajadulu on Instagram. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how Generation Z perceives and positions themselves in relation to the hashtag #kaburajadulu on Instagram.

1.2. Reception Theory

Reception Theory, proposed by Stuart Hall (1980), is one of the important approaches in communication and media studies. Through the encoding/decoding model, Stuart Hall explains that communication does not take place unidirectionally between the sender and receiver of a message. Instead, the communication process is interactive and dialogical, in which the audience does not only play the role of passive recipients of messages, but also become active interpreters who construct meaning based on their experiences, social and cultural backgrounds, and ideologies. Stuart Hall divides the process of interpreting messages into three main positions, namely:

The first is Dominant-hegemonic reading, which is when the audience fully accepts and agrees with the meaning of the message as intended by the message creator (encoder).

Second is Negotiated reading, which is the position where the audience understands the meaning of the message but interprets it in a way that is adapted to their personal views and social conditions.

And the third is Oppositional reading, which is the position where the audience rejects and opposes the meaning of the message, even interpreting it in a way that is contrary to the original intention of the message creator. As noted by (Murdock et al., 2017), the first empirical application of Hall's encoding/decoding model was conducted by Morley (1980), who studied how different social groups decoded the same television program and found significant variation in reading positions based on class and cultural background, confirming that meaning is not fixed but actively constructed by audiences within their specific social contexts.

Hall (1980) also emphasizes that both encoding and decoding processes are influenced by social and cultural contexts. The audience's interpretation is shaped by their knowledge, experiences, socio cultural background. Therefore, meaning is not fixed, but constructed differently depending on the audience's positions and lived realities

In the context of the #kaburajadulu phenomenon on social media, this theory can be used to understand how the public, especially Generation Z, perceives the message behind the hashtag.

1. The dominant interpretation comes from those who fully agree with the symbolic meaning of the hashtag #kaburajadulu, namely as a form of criticism of the difficulty of finding decent work, the high cost of living, and the uncertainty of the future in Indonesia.
2. A negotiated interpretation appears from social media users who understand these social concerns but do not fully support the idea of "running away" as a solution. They see it as an emotional expression that reflects disappointment, but still have hope for change within the country.
3. The opposition interpretation comes from groups who reject the meaning behind this hashtag and consider it a form of weakening nationalism or a lack of love for the country among the younger generation.

Scholars have extended Hall's model to account for digital interactivity, arguing that interface design and algorithmic features actively shape which reading become visible to audiences (Shaw, 2017).

2. METHOD

This study uses qualitative research. Qualitative research aims to explore and understand how individuals interpret social phenomena within their natural contexts through descriptive data in form of words and narrative (Creswell, 2013). This research specifically applies a reception analysis approach developed by Stuart Hall (1980), which emphasizes that audiences are active interpreters of media message. Through this approach, the study seeks to identify how Generation Z positions themselves in relation to the hashtag #kaburajadulu on Instagram. Data analysis in this study follow the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which consists of three stages: (1) data reduction, namely selection, focusing on simplifying rough data that emerges from written notes in the field, (2) data presentation can be in the form of descriptive text in the form of notes, matrices, graphs and charts, (3) drawing conclusions. Subject selection technique using purposive sampling, namely a sampling method that determines the identity of

the sample in accordance with the research objectives (Lenaini, 2021). The subject criteria include (1) Informants were active Instagram users from Gen Z who knew about, had seen, or interacted with the hashtag #kaburajadulu, (2) have Instagram social media, (3) follow the hashtag #kaburajadulu, (4) willing to take part in interviews.

As elaborated in theoretical frameworks, Hall (1980) identifies three reading positions, dominant hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional which serve as the analytic categories for examining each informant's reception of the hashtag #kaburajadulu on Instagram.

The data collection technique in this study was conducted through in-depth interviews with selected informants. Each question was designed to explore the participant's interpretations and positions toward the #kaburajadulu phenomenon. During the interviews, the researchers strictly adhered to research ethics principles. All participants were informed of the purpose of the research, their right to refuse or withdraw from participation, and the confidentiality of their identities. The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, with each question designed to explore the subjects' personal narratives related to the #kaburajadulu phenomenon.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

This study involved five informants who belong to Generation Z and are active users of social media, particularly Instagram. The informants were selected because they had experience viewing, following, or being aware of the phenomenon of using hashtag #kaburajadulu on social media. Their identities were disguised using two letter initials (AL, YS, MS, MF, and AH) to maintain data confidentiality. The profiles of the informants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of Research Informants

No.	Initials	Age	Gender	Domicile	Status
1	AL	22	Female	Surakarta	Fresh Graduate
2	YS	22	Male	Wonogiri	Student
3	MS	22	Female	Wonogiri	Teacher
4	MF	25	Male	Egypt	Postgraduate Student
5	AH	24	Male	Wonogiri	Musrif (Religious Tutor)

Source: Primary Data, 2026

According to interviews with informants conducted on March 16, 2026, the results were:

3.1.1 Dominant–Hegemonic Reading

A dominant-hegemonic reading occurs when the audience accepts the primary meaning (preferred meaning) conveyed by the media message relatively intact. In the context of the #kaburajadulu phenomenon, the dominant meaning circulating on social media is that the hashtag represents the younger generation's expression of frustration with social and economic conditions in Indonesia, as well as a desire to seek better opportunities abroad.

Based on the interview results, two informants in this study showed a tendency to adopt the dominant-hegemonic reading position, namely YS and AL. Both informants understood the hashtag #kaburajadulu as a form of expression regarding social conditions that are perceived as failing to provide optimal opportunities for the younger generation.

Informant YS, for example, interprets the hashtag as both a reminder and a critique of Indonesia's current state, which is seen as failing to fully realize its potential. This is evident in his statement:

“In my opinion, this hashtag is like a reminder or even a wake-up call for Indonesia, because we actually have a lot of potential, but many people still feel they have to seek a better life abroad.”

This statement indicates that the informant accepts the primary meaning emerging in social media discourse, namely that the hashtag #kaburajadulu serves as a reflection on the national situation as well as a critique of the existing system. Thus, informant YS's interpretation can be categorized as a dominant reading, as they accept the meaning circulating on social media as a representation relevant to social reality.

A similar interpretation also emerged from informant AL. This informant views the hashtag as a form of expression from the public, particularly the younger generation, who feel they have limited opportunities within the country. AL believes that this phenomenon is linked to the growing awareness among the younger generation of global opportunities they can access through various channels, such as education or employment abroad.

This is reflected in his statement:

“In my opinion, this phenomenon is a form of expression by young people who are becoming aware of global conditions and comparing opportunities in Indonesia with those in other countries.”

This quote indicates that informant AL accepts the narrative circulating on social media regarding the comparison of opportunities between Indonesia and other countries. He does not reject this meaning but understands it as a form of the younger generation's awareness of global realities. Therefore, AL's interpretive stance can also be categorized as a dominant-hegemonic reading, as his interpretation aligns with the dominant meaning circulating within social media discourse.

3.1.2 Negotiated Reading

The negotiated reading position occurs when the audience essentially understands and accepts some of the dominant meanings of the media message, but at the same time makes adjustments based on their own personal experiences, values, or perspectives. In this position, the audience does not completely reject the media message, but neither does it fully accept it.

In this study, informants MS and MF demonstrated a tendency toward the negotiated reading position. Both informants understood the context behind the emergence of the hashtag #kaburajadulu, yet they did not fully view the phenomenon as a solution to the various existing issues.

Informant MS, for example, views the hashtag as an expression of the younger generation seeking better educational or job opportunities abroad. However, he does not interpret the phenomenon as a particularly strong critique of national conditions, but rather as an individual choice tied to future aspirations.

This is evident from his statement:

“In my opinion, this hashtag is more of an expression of young people seeking better educational or job opportunities.”

This statement indicates that the informant understands the meanings that have emerged on social media, but interprets the phenomenon in a more moderate way. He does not directly link the hashtag to structural criticism of the state, but rather views it as an expression of the personal aspirations of the younger generation. Therefore, MS's interpretation can be categorized as a “negotiated reading,” as he accepts some of the dominant meanings while adapting them to his personal perspective.

Meanwhile, informant MF offered a more reflective interpretation of the #kaburajadulu phenomenon. Unlike other informants, MF had lived abroad for several years. This firsthand experience influenced how he interpreted the phenomenon, as he viewed life abroad not only through social media representations but also through his own personal experiences.

MF views the #kaburajadulu phenomenon as indeed emerging as a response to specific social conditions in Indonesia, but he also emphasizes that the decision to live or work abroad is not always the ideal solution for everyone. In his view, life abroad also presents its own challenges that are often not fully visible in social media content.

This is evident from his statement: “In my opinion, this phenomenon needs to be viewed critically, because going abroad is not necessarily a solution to all problems.”

This statement indicates that informant MF understands the social critique underlying the use of the hashtag, but he does not fully accept the idea that leaving the country is a solution to various problems. This stance is also influenced by his experience of having lived abroad, giving him a more complex perspective compared to the narratives often found on social media, which tend to highlight the positive aspects of life abroad.

Thus, MF’s interpretation can be categorized as a “negotiated reading,” as they still grasp the dominant meaning of the hashtag #kaburajadulu as an expression of young people’s dissatisfaction with domestic conditions, yet simultaneously negotiate its meaning based on their personal experience, which reveals that the reality of life abroad is not always as ideal as portrayed on social media.

Informant AH also demonstrates a negotiated reading position. Although AH expressed a strong personal desire to seek opportunities abroad and identified closely with the frustrations expressed through the hashtag, his interpretation nonetheless reflects a negotiated stance. AH understands the hashtag as a collective message of awareness directed at peers and society, rather than a straightforward endorsement of emigration as a solution. His framing of the hashtag as an attempt to “awaken” others to the realities of Indonesia indicates that he accepts the dominant critique embedded in the hashtag but reinterprets its call to action through the lens of social solidarity and collective consciousness rather than personal departure. This negotiation is further reflected in his strong reaction to the government minister’s statement questioning the nationalism of those considering moving abroad: his disagreement does not represent a rejection of the hashtag’s meaning, but rather a defense of the legitimacy of the socio-economic critique it embodies. Thus, AH’s reception can be understood as negotiated, accepting the dominant meaning of frustration and critique while adapting it to a framework of social awareness and collective responsibility.

3.1.3 Oppositional Reading

An oppositional reading occurs when the audience understands the dominant meaning conveyed by the media message but actively rejects or opposes it with a different interpretation.

In this scenario, the audience possesses a different frame of reference, leading them to interpret the media message in a manner contrary to the meaning intended by the message producer.

However, based on the results of the interviews conducted in this study, no informants were found who clearly demonstrated an oppositional reading stance toward the #kaburajadulu phenomenon. Although there were variations in how informants interpreted the hashtag, generally they still understood the phenomenon as a form of social expression among the younger generation related to opportunities, future aspirations, or criticism of the current situation.

The absence of oppositional reading among the informants in this study itself a theoretically significant finding. According to Hall (1980), an oppositional reading requires the audience to possess an alternative ideological framework through which they can consciously reject the preferred meaning of message. The fact that no informant demonstrated this position suggests that preferred meaning encoded in #kaburajadulu content, namely the socio-economic conditions in Indonesia are inadequate and that seeking opportunities abroad is a rational response, aligns closely with the lived experiences of informants themselves, leaving little ideological ground for opposition. This finding is consistent with (Abelia et al., 2025), who noted that Gen Z's collective experience of structural inequality reinforces rather than challenges the dominant narratives circulating under this hashtag.

The dominant interpretation emerged because all informants directly experienced structural problems such as difficulty finding employment, unclear education policies, high cost of living, corruption, and uneven public services. Direct quotes such as "this hashtag represents people who are disappointed with the state of the country," "this is a forum for dissatisfied people," and "this shows public unrest towards the government," show that the meaning of the hashtag is relevant to the social reality they experience. These conditions reinforce the preferred meaning, which in Hall's theory is called the preferred meaning because the narratives circulating on social media emotionally correspond to their experiences as young people facing an uncertain future.

Meanwhile, the negotiated meaning emerged among informants who understood the concerns expressed by the hashtag, but continued to negotiate it with the hope that Indonesia could change for the better. This can be seen from his statement that he wanted to persevere as long as there was hope for the country's improvement. This pattern shows that the audience did not fully accept the dominant meaning; they made adjustments based on personal values and optimism. Hall also describes this negotiated position as a process of accepting messages with modifications according to the individual's social context.

The finding about this study on the role of hashtag as a space for collective expression among the Gen Z are in line with (Sinpeng, 2021) study, which shows that youth movement hashtags serve for mobilizing opinion as well as an arena for political debate on microblogging platforms. Another findings of this study are consistent with those of previous studies. (Irhamdhika et al., 2025) found that the hashtag #kaburajadulu (Just Run Away First) was born out of a crisis of public trust in the government and increasing public frustration. (Erlisya et al., 2025) also mentioned that Gen Z views opportunities abroad as an alternative to achieve a more stable and productive life. Similarly, (Abelia et al., 2025) emphasized that public reactions on social media to this phenomenon are a form of collective awareness among the younger generation regarding the socio-political situation that continues to deteriorate. Thus, the results of this study reinforce the view that Gen Z not only participates in the digital space but also uses social media as a space for articulating political identity and structural criticism.

(Poell & Dijck, 2013) argue that social media platforms are not neutral conduits for communication but actively shape the content users see through algorithm functions as a structural force that repeatedly surfaces #kaburajadulu content to users who have previously engaged with similar material, reinforcing their exposure to a particular emotional and ideological framing of Indonesian's socio-economic conditions. All informants mentioned that content related to hashtag often appeared on their homepages, showing that algorithm reinforce emotional narratives that get a lot of engagement. In addition, the influence of social media and Instagram algorithms also plays a major role in the formation of meaning. All informants mentioned that content related to the hashtag often appeared on their homepages, showing that algorithms reinforce emotional narratives that get a lot of engagement, this is consistent with findings that platform affordances significantly shape how political content is encountered and engaged with by users (Theocharis et al., 2023). In the context of Hall's theory, the decoding process is greatly influenced by the media context, and in this case, Instagram's algorithm acts as a new gatekeeper that determines which issues are seen as important to the public. The repetition of content with a critical tone, anxiety, and complaints reinforces the perception that the country is indeed in trouble, so that users feel that they are "not alone" in their anxiety. Some informants even described this influence as a form of social conformity, showing that social media not only disseminates information but also forms emotional solidarity among users.

Overall, this discussion shows that Gen Z's interpretation of #kaburajadulu is the result of an interaction between personal experiences, Indonesia's socio-political conditions, and the digital media environment that reinforces certain narratives. The dominance of the dominant-

hegemonic reading reflects that for Gen Z, this hashtag is not just a viral trend, but an authentic representation of collective anxiety about the country's situation, which they consider unstable and lacking space for the development of the younger generation. The absence of oppositional readings also shows that in the context of this study's informants, there are almost no counter-narratives or readings that reject the hashtag's meaning as a form of criticism. Thus, the results of this study confirm that #kaburajadulu is an important means for Gen Z to express dissatisfaction, build digital solidarity, and reflect on Indonesia's socio-political conditions through the meanings they construct themselves.

Based on Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model, the following table presents the three reading positions and maps each informant's reception of the hashtag #kaburajadulu accordingly

Table 2. Mapping of Informants' Reception Positions toward #kaburajadulu

No.	Reading Position	Informants	Core Stance
1	DominantHegemonic Reading	YS, AL	Fully accepts the preferred meaning: #kaburajadulu is a legitimate expression of frustration with socioeconomic conditions and limited opportunities in Indonesia.
2	Negotiated Reading	MS, MF, AH	Understands and partly accepts the dominant critique but adapts it based on personal experience, values, or optimism; does not see emigrating abroad as a full solution.
3	Oppositional Reading	None	No informant rejected the hashtag's meaning or adopted a counter-narrative; the preferred meaning was too closely aligned with informants' lived experiences.

3.2. Discussion

All five informants first encountered the hashtag #kaburajadulu through social media platforms, primarily Instagram, with some also mentioning X (Twitter) and Facebook as secondary sources of exposure. The content they encountered generally took the form of short videos, reels, vlogs, and poster style posts documenting the experiences of Indonesian citizens living, studying, or working abroad.

Informant AL first came across the hashtag in late 2024 through Instagram Reels featuring Indonesian students abroad, particularly content about scholarship experiences and academic life in other countries. Informant YS encountered it first on X before seeing it again on Instagram, where the content focused on comparison between life in Indonesia and abroad. Informant MS came across the hashtag through social media discussions comparing educational conditions, income levels, and job security between Indonesia and other countries. Informant MF frequently encountered the hashtag through mini-vlogs and monologues by Indonesian citizens that already living overseas. Informant AH recalled first seeing the hashtag approximately two years ago through Instagram and Facebook, in the form of vlogs and poster content, and described the content as immediately resonating with events he was already witnessing in Indonesia.

These patterns of exposure indicate that the hashtag #kaburajadulu circulates primarily through personal narratives content, particularly visual that foreground the lived experiences of Indonesians abroad, and that initial awareness tends to be triggered by algorithmically surfaced content rather than active searching. Recent scholarship has conceptualized algorithm as active encoders that produce personalized visibility regimes, to which audiences respond through interpretive processes (Pronzato, 2024)

Informants Interpretation of the Hashtag's Meaning

While all five informants demonstrated familiarity with the hashtag, their interpretations of its core meaning varied in emphasis and framing.

Informant YS interpreted the hashtag as a form of critique and a “wake up call” for Indonesia, arguing that the country possesses significant potential that remains unrealized, which drives young people to seek better prospects elsewhere. Informant AL understood it as an expression by netizens who feel constrained by limited opportunities within the country, linked to a growing awareness among young people of global alternatives accessible through education and employment. Informant MS viewed it more narrowly as an expression of the younger generation seeking better educational and job opportunities without connecting it strongly to structural criticism of the state. Informant MF offered the most reflective interpretation, acknowledging the social conditions behind the hashtag while emphasizing that the phenomenon also partly reflects social media virality and that life abroad carries its own challenges not visible in the content. Informant AH interpreted the hashtag as a collective message of awareness directed at peers and society as a whole describing it as an attempt to awaken those not yet conscious of what was happening in Indonesia.

Across these five informants, a consistent thread emerges: the hashtag is understood as an expression of frustration with socio-economic conditions in Indonesia. However, the degree to which this frustration is linked to systematic critique versus personal aspiration varies significantly across individuals, foreshadowing the different reception positions each informant occupies. Informants Personal Stance and Relation to the Hashtag Beyond interpretation, the informants also articulated personal positions in relation to the hashtag, reflecting how their own social contexts shaped the way they received and responded to its message.

Informant AL acknowledged a desire to work abroad but remained in a deliberative stage, weighing multiple factors before committing to any decision. Informant YS expressed an ongoing desire to seek opportunities abroad, recognizing that such a decision requires careful consideration, including cultural and geographical factors. Informant MS similarly held a desire to pursue opportunities abroad but noted that these aspirations are not always easy to realize, particularly given practical constraints. Informant MF, who had already lived abroad for several years, offered the most grounded perspective, acknowledging the value of international experience while also maintaining the intention to return to Indonesia, and cautioning that life abroad is not always ideal as social media content suggests.

Informant AH expressed the strongest and most immediate personal alignment with the hashtag's message, stating that he would "sangat diusahakan" (very much pursue) any realistic opportunity to work or study abroad, and that the pressures he currently experiences as a young person directly reinforce his identification with the hashtag's concerns.

All informant who were asked about the minister's statement questioning the nationalism of those considering moving abroad reacted with disagreement or pushback. Informant AH described his reaction as "sangat tercengang" or "very shocked" arguing that Indonesian working abroad in fact contribute to the country's internationally. Other informants' similarity expressed disagreement with the minister's statement. This shared critical response further indicates that the dominant meaning of the hashtag as a legitimate expression of socio-economic frustration is broadly accepted among the informants, regardless of differences in the degree of their personal alignment with it.

4. CLOSING

This study found that among the five Generation Z informants that has been interviewed, two informants demonstrated a dominant hegemonic reading positions, and the other three informants demonstrated a negotiated position, and none of the Informants demonstrated oppositional reading positions toward the hashtag #kaburajadulu on Instagram. These findings

indicate that the dominant meaning circulating on social media namely, that #kaburajadulu represent legitimate and relatable expression of socio-economic frustration among Indonesian youth is broadly accepted by Generation Z, even though with varying degree of personal negotiation based in individual experience and social context.

This study contributes to filling gap identified by scholars who note that digital activism research has disproportionately focused on the Global North, leaving contexts such as Indonesia underexplored (Reilly & Özkula, 2024). Unlike prior research that examined this hashtag primarily through framing analysis or sentiment analysis (Abelia et al., 2025), (Ajie & Wardhana, 2025), or (Ardianti et al., 2025) this study is among the first to apply Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model to examine how individual of Generation Z members actively decode the hashtag's meaning. This approach reveals that interpretation is not uniform but is shaped by personal socio-economic experience, lived realities, and individual ideological positioning dimensions that framing and sentiment studies are not designed to capture. By applying Hall's model specifically to Generation Z's decoding of #kaburajadulu, this study offers a reception based perspective that has not been used in prior research on this hashtag, which has largely relied on framing or sentiment analysis.

This study has several limitations. The sample consists of only five informants selected through purposive sampling, which limits the generalizability of findings to the broader Generation Z populations. The study also focuses exclusively on Instagram, while informants mentioned X and Facebook as additional sources of exposure. Additionally, no standardized stimulus material was shown during interviews, meaning interpretations were based on recalled exposure rather than shared text.

Further research could build on the finding of this study in several directions, first, expanding the sample size to include informants from diverse regional, educational, and socio economic backgrounds across Indonesia would allow for a more comprehensive mapping of reception positions among Generation Z. Second, comparative studies across different social media platforms such as TikTok, X (Twitter), and YouTube, or perhaps Threads would provide insight into how platform affordances and algorithmic shape the decoding process differently. Third, longitudinal research tracking of how Generation Z's reception of hashtag based digital discourse shifts in response to changes in Indonesia's political and economic landscape would deepen understanding of the relationship between digital communication and youth civic consciousness. Finally, future studies could incorporate standardized stimulus materials during interviews to ensure greater comparability of informant responses and more systematic analysis of reception positions.

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