

Emotional Manipulation and Public Opinion Formation through Viral Content: A Case Study of the #KaburSajaDulu Hashtag on Social Media Platform X

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how the viral hashtag #KaburAjaDulu on social media platform X is used as a persuasive communication tool in shaping public opinion through emotional manipulation. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and content and framing analysis methods, this research explores tweets containing the hashtag, focusing on language usage, emotional expression, and public responses. The findings reveal that this hashtag employs emotional communication strategies such as anger toward government policies, fear of an uncertain future, and excitement about better opportunities abroad. These strategies effectively accelerate message dissemination, shape a collective narrative of migration as a solution, and emotionally engage the audience. Additionally, the hashtagged content raises ethical concerns, including the potential for opinion manipulation and social polarization in digital spaces. In conclusion, the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu is not merely a spontaneous trend but a form of strategic communication that powerfully frames public discontent, underscoring the importance of digital literacy and ethical awareness in using social media as a platform for shaping public opinion.

I. Introduction

In the ever-evolving digital era, social media has become one of the primary communication platforms that not only functions as a medium for social interaction but also as a powerful tool for disseminating information and shaping public opinion. One increasingly prominent phenomenon is viral content that emerges suddenly and spreads rapidly within a short period, often carrying strong emotions such as anger, fear, or excitement. This phenomenon can take various forms, ranging from videos and images to trending hashtags. A recent example is the hashtag #KaburSajaDulu, which went viral on X (formerly Twitter), triggering various reactions and influencing public attitudes and mindsets (Nurlina & Purwanti, 2024; Tripalupi, Aini, & Ayodya, 2023).

This viral content is not merely an entertainment phenomenon but also a form of persuasive communication that holds considerable power in shaping public opinion. From the perspective of persuasive communication psychology, emotional manipulation in viral content is one of the main techniques used to influence audiences, both directly and indirectly. Therefore, understanding how viral content works in influencing emotions and public opinion is crucial to assess its impact on existing social and political dynamics (Berger, 2011; Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013). Research on social media, persuasive communication, and emotional influence has rapidly developed in recent years. Many studies focus on how social media, as a communication platform, can shape public opinion (Nababan, Namotemo, & Ferdinandus, 2024), including through persuasive techniques used in viral content.

Previous studies have shown that emotion is a highly influential element in digital communication, and content that can manipulate users' emotions tends to go viral more quickly and attract more attention (Berger, 2011). However, although many studies have explored the mechanisms behind content virality, few have specifically examined hashtags or social media-based movements such as #KaburSajaDulu from the perspective of persuasive communication psychology (Alkatiri, Nadiyah, & Nasution, 2022). On the other hand, studies on social media ethics have also raised concerns about emotional manipulation carried out by certain individuals or groups for specific purposes, such as reinforcing social polarization, spreading hoaxes, or directing public opinion toward a desired narrative (Tufekci, 2015; Susilowati & Sukmono, 2021).

Existing research indicates that although viral content can be used for positive purposes, such as social movements, there is often a risk that emotional manipulation may create negative impacts such as division and distrust among different community groups (Fraser, 2020). Based on the current body of literature, there is a noticeable gap in studies examining the influence of specific hashtags on public opinion, particularly in relation to emotional manipulation and ethical communication within viral content. Previous research has mostly focused on the technical or algorithmic aspects behind virality, while very few have discussed how emotional elements, such as the language used in hashtags, can shape audience perceptions and behaviors. Furthermore, most studies have concentrated on visual or video content, even though hashtags on platforms such as X also play an essential role in mobilizing public opinion (Kurniawan Pontoh, 2021).

In this study, #KaburSajaDulu is considered a compelling case to analyze more deeply, as it illustrates how the emotions embedded in a hashtag can influence social behavior on a

broader scale. While this hashtag has the potential to bring about positive social awareness, such as raising awareness about Indonesia's socio-economic conditions, there remains the danger of manipulating public emotions for particular objectives (Nurlina & Purwanti, 2024). Therefore, it is essential to critically assess each hashtag or viral content that emerges on social media to understand its context and its broader impact on society (Susilowati & Sukmono, 2021).

This hashtag reflects how a simple message can become viral and shape public opinion in a short time. The use of provocative language, sometimes infused with humor, when combined with specific social and political contexts, can prompt audiences to share, disseminate, or even act according to the message conveyed. Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap in the literature by analyzing the influence of the #KaburSajaDulu hashtag in shaping public opinion, as well as the potential psychological and ethical implications arising from such viral content.

Referring to the above background and previous research, this study aims to analyze how the hashtag #KaburSajaDulu on X is used as a persuasive communication tool to shape public opinion, focusing on the persuasive techniques employed in the viral content, the emotional impact on the audience, and the ethical aspects related to opinion manipulation and social polarization.

This study employs a qualitative approach to analyze content that uses the #KaburSajaDulu hashtag on the X platform. By applying content analysis techniques, this research will examine the elements in posts using the hashtag, both in terms of the textual content and the emotional context conveyed. The analysis will include identifying the key messages delivered through the hashtag and how these messages shape social media users' opinions and emotions.

This research is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of how social media, particularly X, is used as a tool to influence public opinion through emotional manipulation.

2. Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to understand how the hashtag #KaburSajaDulu on X is used in shaping public opinion through viral content. This approach is chosen because it enables the researcher to delve deeper into the meanings embedded in each tweet and interaction, as well as observe the social impacts resulting from the use of the hashtag (Creswell, 2014). In this research, primary data is collected by directly observing tweets that use the hashtag, as well as examining interactions such as comments or replies from the audience in response to the viral content.

To analyze the data, the researcher will use two main techniques: textual analysis and framing analysis. Textual analysis will explore how words and emotions are conveyed in the tweets. This is important because the language used in viral content can significantly influence the audience, particularly by evoking emotions such as anger or excitement (Berger, 2011). In addition, framing analysis will help to understand how the hashtag frames particular issues—such as dissatisfaction or protest—and how this framing can influence audience perspectives or opinions (Entman, 1993). Through these two

techniques, the researcher aims to gain a clearer picture of how the hashtag #KaburSajaDulu shapes conversations and public reactions on social media.

The steps in this research begin with collecting tweets that include the hashtag within a predetermined timeframe. Following that, the researcher will analyze the messages to identify persuasive elements used in the content. Furthermore, ethical aspects will also be analyzed to assess whether the use of the hashtag potentially manipulates public opinion or contributes to social polarization (Tufekci, 2015). Using this approach, the study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how viral content on social media can broadly influence public opinion and attitudes.

3. Results And Discussion

The viral phenomenon of the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu on social media, particularly on X (formerly Twitter), reflects the growing public anxiety in Indonesia regarding domestic social and economic conditions. Since January 2025, the hashtag has been used by netizens to express their desire to seek better opportunities abroad, especially in terms of employment, education, and quality of life. Many users shared information related to work visas, job vacancies, and cost-of-living comparisons in countries such as Singapore, Amsterdam, and Berlin.

One influential figure in popularizing this idea is Yoel Sumitro, an Indonesian citizen currently residing in Berlin, Germany, who introduced his experiences of working abroad through his tweets at the end of January 2025. He compared various countries by including practical information such as visa opportunities, salaries, and living costs, while using the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu to represent this idea (Kompas, 2025).



Figure 1. Screenshot from the X platform showing the motives behind the emergence of the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu

This hashtag also reflects dissatisfaction with government policies that are perceived as detrimental to the public, such as budget cuts in education and the high rate of layoffs. Netizens view "escaping" (kabur) as a solution to seek a better life, although this has sparked debate around nationalism and loyalty to the country. Some argue that seeking opportunities abroad should not be seen as betrayal, but rather as a means to improve one's quality of life and eventually contribute back to the homeland after gaining valuable international experience (Akurat, 2025). Figures such as Irwan Prasetyo, a labor affairs analyst, also emphasize the importance of international experience for Indonesia's younger generation in order to acquire global skills that will be beneficial in the future.

The main driver behind the emergence of the #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon is dissatisfaction with the economic and social challenges faced by many young people in Indonesia. Many of them struggle to find decent employment that meets their expectations, as unemployment rates remain high among recent graduates, and salaries are often disproportionate to the cost of living. Additionally, widening social inequality and government policies perceived as unsupportive of job creation and the education sector have further worsened the situation. As a result, many young people feel that their future is being hindered, prompting them to seek opportunities abroad as an escape from these unfavorable conditions (Kompas, 2025).

Persuasive Techniques in Viral Content: An Analysis of the Impact of the #KaburAjaDulu Hashtag

In analyzing the persuasive communication techniques found in content using the #KaburAjaDulu hashtag on social media, it becomes evident that the primary strategy relies heavily on emotional manipulation of the audience. Emotion serves as a key tool for attracting attention, generating engagement, and stimulating wide-scale message dissemination. These contents are intentionally designed to evoke specific emotional responses, prompting the public to react—whether by reposting, engaging in discussions, or reconsidering their attitudes toward the highlighted issues. The types of emotions used represent common persuasive approaches found in tweets with the hashtag, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Types of Emotions in Persuasive Communication

Emotion Type	Description of Persuasive Technique
Anger	Expresses frustration with Indonesia's social, political, and economic conditions, encouraging the audience to voice dissatisfaction actively.
Humor/Satire	Uses humor or irony to subtly deliver social criticism, making serious issues feel lighter while remaining thought-provoking.
Fear	Highlights uncertainties about the future—such as unemployment or social inequality—to drive actions like migration or changes in attitude.
Excitement	Presents positive narratives about opportunities abroad, such as higher wages or better quality of life, fostering hope and optimism.

The #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon on Indonesian social media demonstrates how emotion-based persuasive communication can significantly shape public opinion. One of the most prevalent techniques observed is emotional manipulation. Within content bearing this hashtag, anger is the dominant emotion, used to voice discontent over Indonesia's current socio-political and economic landscape. This dissatisfaction leads many individuals to feel frustrated and more inclined to share information about job opportunities abroad as a solution for a better future (Berger, 2011). According to Yu et al. (2020), strong emotions like anger tend to motivate audiences to share content more actively, accelerating the spread of messages.

In addition to anger, humor is also frequently employed to attract audience attention. Content that incorporates humor or satire functions to reduce the tension often associated with serious themes such as unemployment or dissatisfaction with government policies. Humor, especially in the form of subtle satire, provides a lighter yet still critical lens through which issues are addressed. This aligns with findings from Bartsch et al. (2022), who argue that humor in persuasive content can increase audience receptivity while also promoting higher engagement with the issues discussed.

Another persuasive technique is fear, which is often utilized to motivate audiences into action. This fear typically relates to an uncertain future, such as the high risk of unemployment or the inability to meet basic needs due to a difficult economic environment. Ghanem et al. (2019) found that fear is among the most effective emotions in mobilizing audiences, as people tend to seek ways to avoid threatening scenarios, such as being unable to secure decent employment. In this context, the fear of a bleak future may prompt individuals to consider relocating abroad as a more promising alternative.

However, not only anger, humor, and fear are utilized; excitement also plays a vital role in these persuasive strategies. Many individuals use the #KaburAjaDulu hashtag to share positive information about working or studying abroad, including higher salaries and better living standards. This gives audiences a more optimistic view of life abroad, potentially influencing their attitudes toward leaving Indonesia (Hosseini & Staab, 2023). Jiang & Wei (2020) explain that excitement in persuasive content can strengthen positive audience sentiments toward the message, increasing the likelihood of participation and further dissemination of the message.

The #KaburAjaDulu hashtag illustrates how emotional manipulation can shape public opinion and influence audience behavior on social media. By combining persuasive techniques involving anger, humor, fear, and excitement, content using this hashtag successfully captures audience attention and encourages them to share information and shift their perspectives on the idea of living abroad. Studies by Berger (2011), Bartsch et al. (2022), and Yu et al. (2020) highlight that these emotional elements are powerful drivers in determining whether a message spreads quickly on social media, influences audience attitudes, and ultimately contributes to broader public discourse.

The Role of Social Media in Shaping Public Opinion: A Case Study of the Hashtag #KaburSajaDulu

Social media has emerged as a dominant force in shaping public opinion in the digital age. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allow individuals to express their opinions, share information, and build collective narratives in real-time. The hashtag #KaburSajaDulu emerged as a response to dissatisfaction with Indonesia's social, economic, and political conditions, reflecting how social media can serve as an effective tool for persuasive communication that influences public opinion.

This phenomenon is also closely linked to psychological aspects in the formation of public opinion. The concept of the "looking-glass self" suggests that individuals form their self-image based on how they perceive others view them—an effect that, in the context of social media, is reflected through interactions such as “likes” and comments (Aiken, 2016). Additionally, the spiral of silence theory explains that individuals tend to withhold opinions they perceive as unpopular to avoid social isolation. However, social media can either amplify or diminish this effect depending on the dynamics of the platform (Gearhart & Zhang, 2015). Research has also shown that the expression of moral outrage on social media can intensify polarization and accelerate the spread of misleading information (Brady et al., 2017). Therefore, social media functions not only as a channel of communication but also as a space where psychological and social dynamics interact in the formation of public opinion.

The speed and reach of social media enable messages containing the hashtag #KaburSajaDulu to spread widely in a short amount of time. This phenomenon is known as virality, the process by which digital content spreads exponentially through social networks. In the socio-political context, virality can bring marginal issues into the public spotlight, forming a collective narrative within hours. A study by Cinelli et al. (2021) shows that the rapid dissemination of content on platforms such as Twitter is often driven by strong emotions, including anger and dissatisfaction, which resonate with a broad audience. Thus, hashtags like #KaburSajaDulu are not merely spontaneous expressions but reflections of social unrest effectively capitalized through the rapid dissemination features of social media.

Social media also provides an interactive space that allows for the exchange of ideas among users. Features such as comments, discussion groups, and threads open up opportunities for the public to respond directly to issues. However, although these features allow room for deliberation, discussions often lead to polarization. This is exacerbated by social media algorithms that tend to present content aligned with users' preferences, reinforcing biases

and creating a “filter bubble” that limits exposure to differing viewpoints (Bail et al., 2018). As a result, dialogue becomes fragmented, and public opinion tends to be extreme and less inclusive of diverse perspectives.

From a psychological perspective, users’ involvement in online discourse reflects the concept of the “looking-glass self” introduced by Cooley and adapted in digital studies. In the context of social media, individuals often adjust themselves based on feedback from others through likes, shares, and comments. Zhao et al. (2021) state that perceptions of online social acceptance can influence a person’s self-esteem and emotional engagement with certain issues. Furthermore, the spiral of silence theory is also relevant; individuals tend to be reluctant to express opinions that contradict the mainstream to avoid social exclusion. However, according to Matakos et al. (2021), this dynamic can be different on social media because the presence of groups with similar opinions provides a space for more open expression, even if the opinion is a minority in the general public.

Thus, social media is not merely a communication channel, but a complex arena where psychological and social interactions shape public opinion. This dynamic indicates that fostering healthy public discourse in digital spaces requires understanding the mechanisms of algorithms, users’ psychological characteristics, and inclusive communication strategies. As emphasized by Vaccari and Valeriani (2023), digital literacy interventions and more ethical algorithmic design need to be developed to reduce polarization and strengthen the quality of digital democracy.

The hashtag #KaburSajaDulu highlights how social media can be strategically used to shape public opinion. Through persuasive communication techniques that tap into emotions such as anger, humor, fear, and joy, content with this hashtag successfully draws audience attention and encourages them to share information and reconsider their views about opportunities abroad. Research shows that high-arousal emotions, such as anger and anxiety, increase the likelihood of content going viral on social media (Berger, 2011). Additionally, shifts in emotional tone in persuasive narratives can influence audience attitudes and behavior (Bartsch et al., 2022). Another study found that the expression of negative emotions, particularly anxiety, can expand the reach and depth of content distribution on platforms like WeChat (Yu et al., 2020).

Social media’s influence in shaping public opinion is also evident in individuals’ or groups’ ability to voice their opinions without going through traditional media channels. This allows previously unheard voices to gain public attention, enriching discussion with diverse perspectives. However, this power can also be exploited by certain groups to shape public opinion according to their agenda. Through organized social media campaigns, they can influence public perception of products, political candidates, or government policies. A study by Ma et al. (2023) shows that the multidimensional characteristics of public

sentiment on social media can be leveraged for public opinion management, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This demonstrates that social media can be an effective tool of propaganda when used strategically.

Social media plays a major role in shaping public opinion, particularly through the influence of public figures and influencers. These figures have large followings on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter), giving them the power to influence their followers' perceptions and attitudes. When an influencer expresses their views on a social or political issue, many of their followers tend to adopt those views, especially when the message is emotionally resonant or delivered with high credibility. According to a Pew Research Center (2024) report, around 21% of adults in the United States actively get news from social media influencers, with the number increasing to 37% among young people aged 18–29. This reflects a shift in public information sources from traditional media to digital figures perceived as more relatable and relevant by their audiences.

However, this great power is also accompanied by the potential for misuse. Social media enables the rapid spread of information with little to no filtering, unlike mainstream media which has editorial mechanisms. When political or policy issues become topics of discussion, the information circulating is often not adequately verified. In this context, the Aspen Institute (2024) asserts that influencers now play not only a role in digital marketing but have become key actors in shaping public opinion, especially in times of crisis or conflict. They can reinforce specific narratives or even shape public framing of major issues through the content they share.

This ease also brings significant challenges: the rise of hoaxes and disinformation. Not everything shared on social media is based on solid facts, and often, misleading information spreads faster than its clarification. According to a study from Pennsylvania State University, influencers spreading distorted political information can cause political parties to shift their policy positions to accommodate popular opinion, even though this can worsen public polarization (Tutella, 2023). Therefore, it is important for digital communities to develop media literacy skills and critical thinking towards content, even when it comes from trusted figures.

The hashtag #KaburSajaDulu serves as a real example of how social media can function as a persuasive communication tool. Content expressing social anxiety through this hashtag can evoke emotions, spark discussion, and even change one's orientation toward ideas such as migration or "escape" from a system perceived as disappointing. Rashid et al. (2024) in their study argue that discussions sparked by influencers on social media can form collective sentiment that, over time, influences public discourse and reinforces polarization. This hashtag did not appear randomly, but emerged from accumulated frustration and disappointment that found expressive space on social media.

In this context, it is important to understand that the influence of social media is not just

about the speed of dissemination, but also about how narratives are formed and mediated by figures who hold public credibility. Digital influencers can direct discussions, construct meaning around events, and even influence collective action, such as solidarity movements, online protests, or political campaigns. Pew Research Center (2024) emphasizes that social media has surpassed traditional media in its ability to reach and mobilize the masses, especially among younger people who are more accustomed to interacting with information visually and emotionally.

Conversely, without strong digital literacy, society becomes more vulnerable to information manipulation. Viral content does not always reflect truth, and the popularity of an opinion in cyberspace does not automatically signify its validity. Aspen Institute (2024) states that in the post-truth era, emotion and sensation often replace facts as the basis for forming opinions. Therefore, society must be equipped with the ability to filter information, recognize algorithmic bias, and understand that what appears on their timeline is not an objective representation of reality, but the result of digital system curation.

This dynamic shows that social media is not only a communication platform but also a contested space of discourse. Tutella (2023) explains that in political contexts, influencers are no longer mere product endorsers, but political actors influencing voter orientation. They become extensions of political machinery, either consciously or unconsciously, through the narratives they construct in their daily content. Thus, the influence of social media on public opinion must be viewed as a complex phenomenon involving psychology, technology, and politics.

Ultimately, hashtags like #KaburSajaDulu remind us that social media can reflect collective anxiety, but also serve as a battleground for narratives. It is crucial for users not only to actively express opinions but also to be reflective and critical in understanding the impact of every post they consume and share. As the role of influencers and digital figures in shaping opinion increases, the public must also become more responsible in managing their exposure to information. Digital literacy is no longer optional—it is a necessity for surviving in a fast-paced and nuanced information ecosystem.

Emotional Impact and Ethical Aspects in the Use of the Hashtag #KaburAjaDulu

The phenomenon of the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu on Indonesian social media has triggered a range of emotional responses from audiences. Many users feel connected to the message conveyed, fostering a sense of solidarity among those who share similar experiences in facing social and economic challenges within the country. Research by Liu et al. (2019) shows that the expression of moral emotions, such as anger or a sense of injustice, plays a key role in the dissemination of moral and political ideas in online social networks, which can strengthen solidarity among individuals with shared views.

However, many others also experience frustration or despair over the current situation.

These negative emotions are often reflected in comments or tweets that criticize the government and its perceived inadequate policies. This aligns with findings from Hasell & Weeks (2016), which reveal that political communication on social media is often marked by emotion, especially negative emotion, which can exacerbate polarization and influence audience attitudes toward socio-political issues.

In terms of ethical considerations, the use of the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu also raises questions about the manipulation of public opinion. Is the content shared with this hashtag deliberately intended to steer audiences toward certain views or actions, such as fostering distrust in the government or damaging the country's image internationally? In many cases, this hashtag is used by individuals or groups seeking to express criticism of the government and its policies. While this may be considered a form of free speech, there is potential for manipulation when the information shared is unbalanced or tends to incite hatred without a clear and factual basis. Tufekci (2015) notes that social media often becomes a vulnerable space for opinion manipulation, where emotional content can be used to influence audiences without their awareness.

Moreover, content using this hashtag carries the risk of fueling social division. When negative emotions such as anger and dissatisfaction toward the government are collectively triggered, audiences may become polarized in both opinion and behavior. This is particularly likely when the messages circulated fail to consider differing viewpoints or do not promote constructive dialogue. Therefore, it is important to uphold ethical principles of communication, such as honesty, informational balance, and respect for diverse perspectives. Fraser (2020) warns that content inclined to spread hatred or distrust can worsen social polarization and disrupt harmony within society.

The #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon illustrates the powerful emotional impact that can affect audiences, both in terms of solidarity and hostility, and highlights the ethical challenges of communication on social media. When persuasive communication is used to disseminate potentially manipulative emotions such as fear or hatred, the risk of social division becomes more imminent, making it essential to pay attention to ethical standards in the distribution of such content.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu on social media platform X (formerly Twitter) has become a highly effective channel of collective expression in evoking and disseminating public emotions—particularly negative emotions such as anger, dissatisfaction, and fear concerning Indonesia's social and economic conditions, as well as positive emotions such as excitement about opportunities abroad. The use of this hashtag has proven to employ emotionally driven persuasive communication techniques that significantly mobilize public opinion and enhance the appeal of the conveyed messages. Tweets containing this hashtag not only voice public concerns about government policies and social inequality but also spark discussions, foster a sense of solidarity among audiences with similar aspirations, and construct the narrative that "escaping" abroad is a rational solution to future uncertainty. Thus, this hashtag serves as evidence of how viral content can function as a framing tool that shapes collective perception through emotional pathways, while also raising ethical challenges related to information manipulation and the potential for deeper social polarization within digital public spaces.

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