

Critical Discourse Analysis: The Meaning of #Indonesiagelap on the X Platform

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Abstract: *The emergence of the social media platform X has also transformed the way people understand and interpret the social reality around them. Through the use of hashtags on X, individuals not only share information but also convey their experiences and perspectives. Hashtags have become a vital tool for bringing people together and sparking discussions on specific topics. The hashtag #Indonesiagelap emerged as a protest against public dissatisfaction with the government, which is perceived as leading Indonesia's future into "darkness" due to a series of controversial government policies and a deteriorating national economy. This study aims to conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis of the hashtag #Indonesiagelap to examine the meanings it conveys to other users on the X platform. This study employs a qualitative approach using the phenomenological method. Data collection techniques include observation, in-depth interviews with three informants who engage with the #Indonesiagelap hashtag, and supporting documentation. Data analysis is conducted descriptively through the processes of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the hashtag #Indonesiagelap is interpreted by X users as a symbol of collective criticism and disappointment regarding the prevailing socio-political conditions. Based on textual practices, discourse, and the underlying social context, this hashtag serves not merely as an indicator of an issue but also as a communication tool capable of fostering a shared understanding of meaning and cultivating critical awareness among X users.*

Keywords: *Social_Media_X; Meaning_of_Hashtags; #Indonesiagelap; Discourse; Critical_Discourse_Analysis*

Introduction

In today's world, information can spread rapidly across various social media platforms, including X (Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, websites, and others. Social media is very easy to use and does not require significant costs, making it not only a means of communication and expanding one's social network, but also a tool for shaping public discourse and social issues (Lestari & Erawat, 2019). X (Twitter) is a text-based social media platform known for its "tweets." X allows users to share information quickly and widely, and serves as a dynamic space for discussion on various social, political, and cultural issues (Hazimah et al., 2024). According to a 2025 survey by We Are Social, active X users in Indonesia account for 50.3% of the country's total population of 143 million people who use social media, with an average time spent on X of six hours and forty-nine minutes (We Are Social.Com, 2025).

X users can use the tweet feature to share stories, experiences, or complaints about various issues. A tweet can include mentions of other users and use hashtags. Hashtags allow social media platforms to provide information in the form of text, photos, and short videos as an introduction, which can then direct users to the original source of the information (Hapsari et al., 2024). A hashtag is a combination of characters—including letters and numbers preceded by the “#” symbol, which functions as a message that links to a broader conversation. Messages tagged with a hashtag make it easier for other X users to see what topics are trending. Hashtags are an important tool for bringing people together and sparking discussions on specific subjects (Juditha, 2025). Tweets that capture users’ attention and influence others have the potential to become trending topics. Trending topics are a feature on X that highlights widely discussed topics and helps other users stay informed about the issues being discussed on the social media X (Akbar & Arianto, 2025).

Trending topics on X change daily depending on the events being discussed at the time. In early February 2025, trending topics in Indonesia were dominated by posts using the hashtag #Indonesiagelap on the social media platform X. The hashtag #Indonesiagelap emerged as a protest against public dissatisfaction with the government, which is perceived as leading Indonesia’s future into “darkness” due to a series of controversial government policies and a deteriorating national economy. Many media outlets and members of the public shared their stories, experiences, and grievances regarding the #Indonesiagelap phenomenon on X. This phenomenon is worth examining using Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory, as this theory enables researchers to understand the relationship between language, discourse, and social practices on the social media platform X as reflected in the use of this hashtag and the meanings perceived by the general public. In accordance with the statement from (Blumer, 1969) that meaning is not directly inherent in an object or message, but is formed through a process of social interaction.

This research is important because the emergence of the hashtag #Indonesiagelap on the social media platform X reflects public dissatisfaction with current social and political conditions. The massive scale and widespread discussion of this event on X have turned the hashtag into not just a marker of a discussion but also a space for conveying the intended meaning. To date, research specifically examining how a hashtag can also shape the meaning of a tweet’s content remains limited. Therefore, this study is necessary to observe and understand how hashtags on the social media platform X can shape the meaning perceived by other X users.

This study analyzes texts such as stories, personal experiences, or complaints from the general public, as well as news reports from media outlets posted on the social media platform X, using Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis theory to examine: 1). How text practices within the #Indonesiagelap discourse on platform X shape the meanings accepted by other X users by identifying and describing the structure, meaning, and implications of texts emerging in the #Indonesiagelap issue. 2). How the public interprets the meaning of #Indonesiagelap through digital interactions and 3). How the sociocultural practices of tweets using #Indonesiagelap occur by linking them to the situational, institutional (influential parties), and social contexts that shape the formation of this discourse in society. The objective of this study is to uncover the meaning of the hashtag “#Indonesiagelap” on the X social media platform through a Critical Discourse Analysis.

Literatur Review

The researcher reviews various previous studies relevant to the research topic to be conducted, namely “Critical Discourse Analysis: The Meaning of #Indonesiagelap on Platform X.” This review of previous research is conducted to provide a more comprehensive overview of how this topic has been examined by previous researchers.

Previous research on critical discourse analysis of hashtags on X concluded that critical discourse analysis of the hashtag #percumabayarpajak revealed public criticism of the Directorate General of Taxes’ portrayal of its tax administration (Anggriyani et al., 2024). Further research conducted by (Rahmawati & Wahyu Mulyani, 2025) A critical discourse analysis of #emergencyalert concludes that the hashtag “emergencyalert” is a discourse deliberately constructed to serve the ideological interests of the actors involved.

Previous research conducted by (Nur Jannah et al., 2023) A study on discourse analysis of public opinion on social media platform X reveals that users tend to use active sentences, prioritize expressive symbols, and incorporate rhetorical elements—such as metaphors—to enhance the impact of their messages. This usage reflects not only the diversity of communication styles on social media but also efforts to influence the views and opinions of readers and the public. This is supported by research (Fadhila et al., 2024) that social media can be used to shape public perception.

Further research conducted by (Refdi & Oktariani Lubis, 2021) The #UnsikaKenapaSih movement reveals that Twitter (X) users were motivated to engage in this movement by new policies implemented at UNSIKA itself; consequently, many Twitter (X) users expressed their disappointment, sadness, and anger regarding these developments by launching the #UnsikaKenapaSih movement.

Previous research by (Ikhsan, 2022) A study on the framing of the police’s image in the hashtag #percumalaporpolisi (Critical Discourse Analysis) reveals that the hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi emerged as an expression of the public’s anxiety and frustration toward this institution tasked with safeguarding civil society. Those who are supposed to provide protection and care have instead treated the very people they are meant to protect in an arbitrary manner.

Further research conducted by (Rohman et al., 2025) Regarding the importance of information technology, it is evident that information technology is necessary to demonstrate the transparency and efficiency of an event. The hashtag #Indonesiagelap is needed to serve as a tool for the public to see what actually happened without any cover-ups (transparency).

Based on the results of the literature review presented above, critical discourse analysis on the X platform has yielded varying conclusions. The study (Anggriyani et al., 2024) shows that critical discourse analysis of hashtags on the X platform is a form of public criticism of a particular issue. Further research (Rahmawati & Wahyu Mulyani, 2025) states that a hashtag is a discourse deliberately created to serve the ideological interests of the actors involved. Research (Rohman et al., 2025) shows that information technology is necessary to ensure transparency regarding the events that have occurred.

A research by (Refdi & Oktariani Lubis, 2021) A hashtag can gain traction as a response to a new policy that is at odds with public sentiment. Research (Ikhsan, 2022) supports this by stating that a hashtag emerges as an expression of the public's concerns and frustrations. Meanwhile, research (Nur Jannah et al., 2023) highlights that people tend to use active sentences, prioritize expressive symbols, and incorporate rhetorical elements, such as metaphors, to enhance the impact of the messages conveyed in their tweets

Social Media X

X, formerly known as Twitter, is one of the simplest social media platforms to use and allows users to quickly share information. One of X's key features is that its user posts constantly evolve in response to trending topics discussed by other users, making X a "real-time" source of information that reflects the interests, opinions, and concerns of its users (Marzuuqi & Yuliyanto, 2019).

Users of the social media platform X can only write messages of about 240 characters, which led to the creation of the term "Thread." A Thread is a series of interconnected tweets published by a single account in sequence to convey longer information or stories that exceed the 240-character limit per tweet. Previously posted tweets can be viewed by other users on the profile page, and users can lock their accounts to prevent others from viewing their profiles.

A hashtag is a feature created using the "#" symbol. Its purpose is to group tweets based on the theme of the hashtag used. A hashtag consists of a sequence of characters, including letters and numbers, preceded by the "#" symbol, also known as the hash. Users can also use the "@" symbol to mention other users by typing their username after the symbol; this feature is useful for exchanging comments with other users. Retweeting is another feature on X that allows users to repost tweets from others. Additionally, X offers the advantage of a user-friendly interface that streamlines interactions—such as receiving replies and posting text—in a matter of seconds (Ikhsan, 2022).

Hashtag #Indonesiagelap

The hashtag #Indonesiagelap emerged on the social media platform X as a new form of protest by the Indonesian public on February 17, 2025. With over 81,900 posts, the hashtag became a trending topic on X. The phrase "Indonesia Gelap" carries symbolic meaning rich with political messages. The word "dark" not only represents the absence of light—symbolizing the public's limited access to information and participation in the legislative process regarding the TNI Bill—but also depicts the political darkness threatening constitutional democracy (Gladys Intan Juniarta et al., 2025). People are using this hashtag to voice their dissatisfaction and concerns about a number of government policies they consider controversial. In addition to serving as a public platform for openly expressing opinions on social media, posts using this hashtag also include personal accounts, critiques, and complaints about the current social and political climate.

It is this disappointment, anxiety, and dissatisfaction that have driven young people to form the Indonesia Gelap movement as a symbol of resistance (Clairine et al., 2025). The hashtag #Indonesiagelap serves as a reminder that the state—which should be standing by its people, prioritizing their well-being, and providing solutions to their problems—has instead positioned itself against the people through policies that are at odds with their living conditions

Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse is the largest and most comprehensive linguistic unit, encompassing sentences or clauses with strong coherence and sustained cohesion. Discourse can be conveyed both orally and in writing and has a clear beginning and end. Language serves as both a tool for discourse and a means of interpersonal communication. Humans are able to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and ideas through language (Sukma, Albertus & Mayasari, 2019).

Discourse often arises through one-way or two-way interactions in everyday life. Speech, writing, images, diagrams, films, music, and other forms of symbolic interaction can be used to communicate discourse, which is a social practice—such as paragraphs, discussions, speeches, opening remarks, and anything else that carries meaning—and can be used to construct discourse.

Discourse can be expressed both verbally and nonverbally through various media, including literature, radio, television, advertising, social media, and new media (Refdi & Oktariani Lubis, 2021). New media such as social media, podcasts, and websites have evolved into highly dynamic platforms for shaping public discourse in the digital age. Discourse can spread rapidly and be reinterpreted, thereby influencing the public's perspective on specific issues.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is one of the methods used to examine the interplay between language, power, and ideology within a specific sociocultural context (Purba et al., 2024). According to Fairlough, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) views discourse as a social activity connected to broader social, political, economic, and cultural contexts, rather than merely as one type of language practice.

The fundamental principle of critical discourse analysis is that discourse not only shapes and produces social reality, but also reflects it. In other words, discourse is not merely descriptive; it is also ideological and constructive (Siahaan et al., 2025). In analyzing discourse, AWK employs several principles, namely:

1. **Contextuality:** Discourse always exists within a specific social, political, economic, and cultural context.
2. **Historicity:** Discourse is a product of history and culture; therefore, discourse must be understood within the historical and cultural context in which it was produced.
3. **Multimodality:** Discourse encompasses other semiotic elements, including sound, visuals, and visual cues in addition to spoken text.
4. **Interdisciplinary:** Critical Discourse Analysis combines a number of academic fields, including politics, sociology, linguistics, and cultural studies.

Fairclough argues that Critical Discourse Analysis can be viewed in terms of three dimensions (Fairclough, 1992) that is:

1. Text as an object of analysis, specifically by analyzing the text's structure, meaning, and implications.
2. Discourse practice, focusing on how audiences produce and consume (write, speak, and see/read/listen). This dimension examines how texts are produced and used, and how they are received by audiences.
3. Sociocultural practice, which involves linking discourse analysis to broader social structures.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at gaining a deep understanding of the meaning and context of social phenomena. Miles and Huberman explain that qualitative research uses descriptive data in the form of words and texts, which are analyzed interactively through the processes of data reduction, data presentation, and the drawing of conclusions and verification (Miles et al., 2014). This qualitative study focuses on depicting social reality in its natural state through narrative data obtained from observations, interviews, and document analysis.

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to analyze the meaning of #Indonesiagelap on the X platform. The primary aim of phenomenology is to uncover the deepest structures of human lived experience through data collection methods such as in-depth interviews with participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon under study (Aflah & Murhayati, 2025). Meanwhile, Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis is used as the theory of this research.

This qualitative study focuses on depicting social reality in its natural state through narrative data obtained from observations, interviews, and document analysis. Phenomenological design is used to understand how individuals experience, interpret, and provide interpretations of a phenomenon based on their life experiences. Meanwhile, Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis is used to analyze how the experience is inseparable from text practices (The content of tweets posted that are read and viewed through platform X), discourse practices (Users X in consuming posts by viewing/reading/listening and leaving reactions from posts containing #Indonesiagelap) and sociocultural structures (How #Indonesiagelap is influenced by something understood and experienced by users X).

The research location is virtual, specifically the X platform (focused on Indonesian-language accounts), and was conducted online without physical fieldwork to ensure efficiency and access to the latest digital data. This location was chosen based on its relevance to the research topic, as the social media platform X is where the #Indonesiagelap hashtag originated and gained traction. The research was conducted from February to May 2025, a period when the hashtag was actively used and became part of public discourse on the X platform.

The research subjects consist of posts by the public on the social media platform X that use the hashtag #Indonesiagelap, as well as active users on X who frequently view that hashtag. The research objects are posts on X that use the hashtag #Indonesiagelap as a means

for the public to share their stories, experiences, or grievances regarding government policies deemed controversial and the deteriorating national economic conditions.

The primary key informants are active users of the social media platform X who have seen and read #Indonesiagelap. Key informants in this study were 3 people who had seen and read #Indoensiagelap. They serve as the main sources for revealing the meanings they derived from seeing and reading the hashtag, thereby validating the findings by describing their experiences with the hashtag and enriching the data triangulation. Although #Indonesiagelap has a national reach and involves many users, this study does not aim to describe all public opinion regarding #Indonesiagelap, but rather to understand how specific individual users experience and shape their understanding of the discourse. The three informants are considered capable of providing rich data because they have direct experience in consuming, responding to, or participating in conversations related to the hashtag. The research location is virtual, specifically the X platform (focused on Indonesian-language accounts), and is conducted online.

The data in this study consists of qualitative data in the form of narratives, insights, and interpretations from informants. Data sources include primary in the form of posts that explicitly use the hashtag #Indonesiagelap and are related to the research objectives, especially posts that contain narratives, opinions, experiences, criticisms, or forms of response to the issues discussed in the hashtag. Based on these criteria, this study uses three main posts and one reply from user X as the unit of analysis taken directly from platform X using keyword searches from February to May 2025. The selection of this amount of data is not intended to represent the entire conversation of user X regarding #Indonesiagelap as a whole, but to gain a deep understanding of how discourse is constructed through text practices (language structure, the meaning of the narrative expressed and the implications of the post), discourse practices (user X's response after seeing/reading posts containing #Indonesiagelap) and sociocultural practices (Conditions that occur due to the hashtag #Indonesiagelap) in accordance with Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis.

This study also utilized interviews with three informants and secondary sources, including national news and journal articles, as a form of data triangulation. These various sources were used to strengthen interpretations and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the #Indonesiagelap discourse.

The data collection methods involved observational data in the form of screenshots related to #indonesiagelap and semi-structured interviews based on an operational concept table and interview guidelines, as well as direct observation during the event and the collection of secondary documents. Semi-structured means that the researcher has a set of questions or main topics they wish to explore, but still allows informants the freedom to provide in-depth responses. Research instruments include screenshots related to #indonesiagelap, in-depth interview guides, and national news reports as well as journal articles supporting the research.

Data analysis involves data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions in accordance with the model (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data is presented through a narrative description that integrates observations, direct quotes from interviews, national news reports discussing #Indonesiagelap, and other supporting journal articles.

Validity and reliability were ensured through data source triangulation and researcher-led member checks. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documents to ensure the consistency of findings. Member checks were conducted by confirming the analysis results with informants to verify the accuracy of interpretations. Additionally, an audit trail is maintained through systematic documentation of the research process and peer discussions with the supervising instructor to obtain external feedback aimed at enhancing the validity of the data

Result and Discussion

This study analyzes the meaning of the hashtag #Indonesiagelap, which appeared on the X platform, as a form of social discourse using 3 (three dimensions) of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis theory are text practice, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. The text practice dimension is used to analyze the formation of the meaning of #Indonesiagelap through the language structure in the posts uploaded by user X, the intended meaning of the text and its implications for other X users. The discourse practice dimension is used to examine how the process of production or consumption of #Indonesiagelap discourse through the communication activities of user X. These activities can be seen through the use of hashtags, the number of likes, and interactions between users through comments and Retweets. The sociocultural practice dimension is used to understand the social and political conditions that occur in the #Indonesiagelap hashtag.

The three dimensions of Fairclough's AWK are used in this study to gain a comprehensive understanding of the #Indonesiagelap discourse. The textual practice dimension is the main focus because this study seeks to understand how the meaning of #Indonesiagelap is formed through user X's tweets. The dimensions of discourse practice and sociocultural practice serve as supporting contexts to explain how the discourse is produced, or consumed, and related to the prevailing social and political conditions. The research data was obtained from X users who posted using that hashtag between February and May 2025, as well as from X users who saw #Indonesiagelap on their X accounts.

The results of the study indicate that the hashtag #Indonesiagelap represents the public's disappointment, dissatisfaction, and protests regarding Indonesia's social and political conditions. This is demonstrated through the application of Critical Discourse Analysis, which shows that the tweets analyzed generally contain expressions of sarcasm and satire, metaphors, and language that conveys a sense of pessimism.

The study found that the #IndonesiaGelap hashtag was created and disseminated by users from diverse backgrounds, ranging from ordinary individuals to accounts active in social and political issues. The discourse production process occurs on a massive and recurring scale, particularly when specific events or policies emerge that trigger public responses. This is evident in the #IndonesiaGelap hashtag appearing on the trending topics of social media platform X in February 2025.

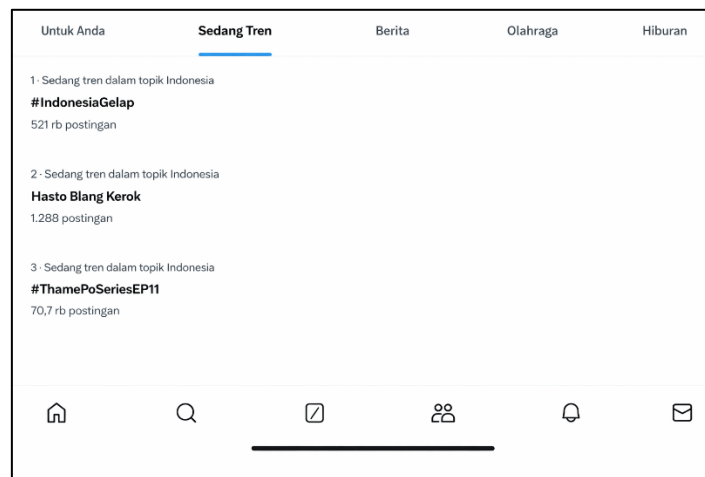


Figure 1. Trending Topic #Indonesiagelap on X
Source: Platform X in February 2025

The process of discourse consumption among other X users is evident through their reposting of others' content on their social media (retweets), replies, and quoted tweets, which expand the reach and reinforce the narratives being constructed. Interactions among users demonstrate the process of meaning-making, whether in the form of reinforcing criticism or rejecting the emerging narratives.

The study also identified the social practices underlying the emergence of #Indonesiagelap a situation resulting from various government policies perceived as unfair and detrimental to the public, compounded by Indonesia's economic downturn. The hashtag #Indonesiagelap is used to express public dissatisfaction and protest regarding issues of social and political justice in Indonesia. People can freely voice their criticisms on the social media platform X as a space to share their grievances. The discourse surrounding #Indonesiagelap illustrates the power dynamics between the general public as critics and the government as the target of criticism.

A. Textual Practices Within the #Indonesiagelap Discourse on the X Platform Can Shape Meanings That Are Accepted by Other X Users.

The interview results show that X users who read tweets with the hashtag #Indonesiagelap can easily understand and interpret the content of those tweets. Informants noted that the messages in these tweets are easy to understand because most of them use clear language structures, explaining the details of the core issues at hand in everyday language that is easy to grasp, and also provide examples to illustrate the points being made. This aligns with the opinion of (WAH), "The messages are conveyed using everyday language; although there is sometimes the use of metaphors or figures of speech in the tweets, they also include case examples, making them easy to understand."

This statement indicates that X users who view tweets containing the hashtag #Indonesiagelap can easily understand and interpret the message conveyed by the tweeter, as the message is presented in detail using everyday language and includes specific examples.

The hashtag #Indonesiagelap serves not only as a way to highlight an issue but also as an effective communication tool for conveying public criticism and concerns regarding current sociopolitical conditions. Through the use of accessible language, clear and detailed narratives, and the inclusion of concrete examples—ensuring the message is easily understood—this hashtag has fostered a shared understanding among X users.

This study is consistent with the findings of the research (Nur Jannah et al., 2023) which states that X users tend to use active sentences, prioritize expressive symbols, and incorporate rhetorical elements, such as metaphors, to enhance the impact of their messages. However, this study reveals more specific findings, namely that the content of tweets from X users employing the hashtag #Indonesiagelap tends to utilize everyday language with detailed explanations, alongside metaphors or figures of speech that remain easily understandable, and provides relevant case examples so that the message's meaning remains comprehensible to the audience. Thus, this study expands upon previous findings that tended to focus on the use of active sentences and symbols by emphasizing that everyday language can also be understood by the public.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the text practices within the #Indonesiagelap discourse on the X platform shape the meanings accepted by other X users through the use of clear linguistic structures, everyday language that is easy to understand, and concrete examples. This hashtag is not neutral; rather, it guides readers to interpret Indonesia's current conditions as a problematic situation that requires serious attention.

B. Interpreting the Meaning of #Indonesiagelap Through Digital Interactions by X Users

Analysis of the meaning of #Indonesiagelap through digital interactions among X users reveals that the hashtag's meaning is not fixed but emerges from a process of interaction, discussion, and message exchange among users. The public collectively builds a shared understanding of the socio-political issues raised through activities such as reading, retweeting, and commenting on tweets containing #Indonesiagelap. This digital interaction enables mutual influence in the process of interpreting messages, so that the meaning of #Indonesiagelap evolves into a representation of public anxiety, criticism, and evaluative attitudes toward current social and political conditions. This was conveyed by an informant (IA) who stated that the meaning of #Indonesiagelap on X is "a form of criticism and warning directed at the government, as well as a wake-up call for the broader public regarding a serious issue that must not be ignored."

Based on the research findings, X users view #Indonesiagelap not merely as a hashtag, but also as a form of public protest stemming from the public's lack of knowledge regarding where to file complaints. Informant (IA) also noted that #Indonesiagelap represents a public show of solidarity against government policies deemed harmful to the public and a factor in Indonesia's economic decline.

This study is consistent with the findings of the research (Rahmawati & Wahyu Mulyani, 2025) which states that hashtags are a discourse deliberately crafted to align with the ideological agendas of the actors involved. However, unlike previous studies that emphasize that hashtag discourse is shaped by the ideological interests of the actors behind it, this study shows that the #Indonesiagelap hashtag discourse does indeed have actors behind it, but is not controlled solely by a single specific ideological interest.

The #Indonesiagelap hashtag has evolved dynamically through the collective participation of X users, who continuously reproduce, interpret, and expand its meaning based on their individual experiences and concerns. Thus, #Indonesiagelap is not merely an ideological agenda of the original actors, but also functions as an open public discussion space, where the discourse of the #Indonesiagelap hashtag is constantly shaped through interactions among users.

C. The Sociocultural Practices Surrounding the #Indonesiagelap Hashtag Influence the Formation of That Discourse in Society

The sociocultural practices surrounding the #Indonesiagelap tweets indicate that this discourse did not emerge suddenly, but rather was shaped by ongoing sociopolitical conditions that also influenced how the public both produced and interpreted tweets using the #Indonesiagelap hashtag. Based on an interview with an informant (RH), who stated that “The #Indonesiagelap hashtag emerged because the public is currently disappointed and pessimistic about the state of the country regarding the new policies.”

This statement indicates that the emergence of the #Indonesiagelap discourse is closely tied to the socio-political realities directly experienced by the public. When public disappointment and pessimism arise due to the government’s implementation of new policies, the social media platform X is utilized as an alternative space to voice complaints, criticism, and public dissatisfaction. Through a repeated process of sharing experiences, opinions, and criticism, this hashtag has evolved into a collective discourse representing the public’s anxiety, dissatisfaction, and critical stance toward social realities.

This study is consistent with (Refdi & Oktariani Lubis, 2021) which states that Twitter (X) users constructed their discourse in response to the social and political conditions prevailing at the time the hashtag emerged—namely, the introduction of new policies perceived as detrimental to the public and deteriorating economic conditions. However, this study emphasizes that the #Indonesiagelap discourse is not solely triggered by the emergence of specific policies or economic issues, but is also reinforced by the accumulated social experiences of a public that feels its voice is not being heard through formal channels. Therefore, this hashtag serves as an alternative space for the public to express the criticism, complaints, and frustrations they experience collectively with other X users.

Based on Norman Fairclough's theory of Critical Discourse Analysis (1992) Discourse is viewed as a social activity connected to broader social, political, economic, and cultural contexts, rather than merely as a type of language practice. The findings of this study indicate that the X user community interprets #Indonesiagelap as a form of social criticism directed at government policies, expressed through the use of #Indonesiagelap to suggest that Indonesia is heading toward darkness.



Figure 2. The use of #Indonesiagelap on X
Source: Platform X in March 2025

Figure 2 shows a tweet on the social media platform X that uses the hashtag #Indonesiagelap. The tweet highlights five points of concern for the user. The phrase “We have a president who can only talk” is intended to question the performance of the Indonesian president, who was inaugurated in October 2024. This statement highlights the perception that the president spends more time speaking in public but has yet to demonstrate concrete actions or policies that the public can directly feel. This assessment arises because, after 100 days in office, the president's performance is deemed not yet clearly visible.

The phrase “The vice president's GPA is a bit lacking” is a form of sarcasm directed at the Indonesian vice president, who is known to have earned a lower second-class honors (second division) degree, which is equivalent to a GPA of 2.3 in the Indonesian system (*CNNIndonesia.Com*, 2024). This situation has sparked questions and debate among the public—particularly among users of the X platform—regarding college graduation standards. Comparisons have also been drawn with job application requirements in the formal sector, such as state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and civil service positions, which generally set a minimum GPA of 3.00.

The phrase “Having ministers who can’t speak” is a criticism of several ministers in Indonesia who are seen as lacking a thorough understanding of the substance of the issues they present to the public. This statement reflects the perception that some ministers often speak without a clear direction or consistency. One example frequently highlighted is the Minister of Human Rights, who is seen as making inconsistent statements and too often meddling in various issues by framing them as human rights matters, even though those issues are not always directly related to the realm of human rights.

The phrase “We have police officers who can’t speak English” is another jab at the Indonesian police force, which is perceived as unable to master English as an international language. This criticism stems from the belief that limited English proficiency can hinder communication, particularly when receiving reports from foreign tourists. Consequently, the tweet’s author questioned the Indonesian police’s readiness to serve the international community that uses English.

The statement “The people’s right to speak is constantly being restricted” reflects the tweeter’s concern over government policies perceived as limiting freedom of expression. This concern arose following the enactment of the TNI Law and the introduction of the Police Bill, which are seen as expanding the authority of these two institutions. This situation has sparked concerns among the public that such an expansion of power could facilitate arbitrary arrests, thereby making the public’s right to express opinions feel increasingly restricted. Therefore, the tweeter used the hashtags #IndonesiaGelap, #CabutUUTNI, and #TolakRUUPolisi as a form of protest against policies deemed detrimental to public freedom.

This study shows that the tweet has a well-structured composition because it uses points that are easy to understand and avoids overly complex language, making its meaning easily grasped. The use of the word “kopong” also serves as a euphemism for “empty” or “incompetent.” The tweet received a fairly positive response, as evidenced by the number of views, likes, retweets, and comments. This is because the tweet’s emergence was closely tied to the political context at the time, particularly the Constitutional Court’s ratification of the TNI Law on March 26, 2025, which sparked public unrest and criticism.

This study is consistent with the findings of the research (Nur Jannah et al., 2023) which states that X users tend to use active sentences, prioritize expressive symbols, and incorporate rhetorical elements, such as metaphors, to enhance the impact of the messages they convey. This usage reflects not only the diversity of communication styles on social media but also efforts to influence the views and opinions of readers and the public. However, this study reveals a more specific finding: X users not only utilize active sentences and expressive symbols but also employ key points that concisely explain the creator’s grievances in a way that is easily understood by other users. Thus, this study expands upon previous findings, which tended to focus solely on the use of active sentences, by adding concise, easily understandable points to make the tweets easier to interpret.



Figure 3. The use of #Indonesiagelap on X
Source: Platform X in April 2025

Figure 3 shows one of the tweets that received 541,000 views from X users. The tweet highlights the plight of many Indonesians who remain unemployed due to the wave of layoffs occurring across various companies. Additionally, the tweet criticizes the president's attitude, which is portrayed as prioritizing ministerial perks over the unemployment crisis currently facing the public.

The statement "Thousands of people have lost their jobs" reflects the irony currently being experienced by the Indonesian people. Indonesia is currently facing a problem of increasingly limited job opportunities that are difficult for the public to access. This situation has fueled public demands regarding the president's campaign promises, particularly the commitment to create 19 million jobs. However, more than 100 days after the inauguration, this promise is seen as having yet to be tangibly realized. On the contrary, what has occurred is an increase in layoffs across various sectors, thereby intensifying public disappointment and criticism of the government's performance.

The tweet also questioned the president's stance, which was seen as prioritizing the situation of ministers who had not yet received official vehicles, and portrayed the ministers as if they were merely performing community service. This focus is seen as disproportionate to the situation of the Indonesian people, who are currently facing economic hardships. These questions and criticisms arose because the ministers essentially already receive salaries and various allowances funded by the state budget, so the government's attention should be directed more toward issues of public welfare.

The tweet garnered a wide range of responses from other X users. This is evident from the number of views, which reached 541,000, along with approximately 4,000 likes, 2,000 retweets, and 115 replies. The content of the comments indicates that the majority of users understood and grasped the meaning of the criticism conveyed in the tweet. This is reflected in replies that similarly questioned the president's decision, which was seen as showing more empathy toward his ministers than toward the people's plight. Other users' responses were also varied, ranging from tagging the president's account to encourage him to read the tweet, to asking which minister had complained, and even including a sarcastic suggestion that these ministers be "dropped off and picked up by the people."



Figure 4. Replies to comments on the #Indonesiagelap tweet on X
Source: Platform X in 2025

This study shows that the tweet had a wide reach and that other X users quickly picked up on the Indonesian president's latest statement.

This study is also consistent with the findings of previous research (Rahmawati & Wahyu Mulyani, 2025) which states that hashtags are a discourse intentionally crafted to align with the ideological agendas of the actors involved. The analysis of this study indicates that the primary actors in shaping this discourse are members of the public who are concerned about the surge in layoffs and who question the president's stance, which they perceive as prioritizing his ministers. Thus, this study reinforces previous findings that discourse does not exist neutrally but is shaped by the interests of the actors behind it; specifically, the hashtag #Indonesiagelap is a discourse driven by public anxiety.



Figure 5. The use of #Indonesiagelap on X
Source: Platform X in February 2025

Figure 5 shows a tweet depicting the situation on the ground regarding the issue discussed under the hashtag #Indonesiagelap. The tweet contains text expressing public anger over the state of the nation, along with a firsthand account from a citizen describing the conditions they are experiencing as a result of the chaotic national situation. The video in the tweet has been viewed 1.3 million times by other users and explains the reasons behind the public's anger toward the government, which is seen as only capable of enforcing rules that cause the public to suffer and cast a shadow over Indonesia's future.

The word "dark" in #Indonesiagelap describes Indonesia's increasingly bleak situation and lack of a future, particularly for those segments of society directly affected by government policies. The use of the word "dark" in the hashtag serves as a metaphor representing the public's feelings of pessimism, uncertainty, and disappointment toward the state. The hashtag #Indonesiagelap serves not only as an issue marker but also as a form of expression containing social and political criticism. This hashtag serves as a symbolic space for the public to voice their concerns, strengthen solidarity, and highlight the disparity between government policies and the realities experienced by people on the ground. Thus, the hashtag in these tweets demonstrates that a discourse can emerge from specific socio-political conditions as a response to the situation currently facing society.

This study is consistent with (Refdi & Oktariani Lubis, 2021) which states that Twitter (X) users construct their discourse in response to the social and political conditions prevailing at the time the hashtag emerged—namely, the introduction of new policies perceived as detrimental to the public and deteriorating economic conditions. However, this study reveals a more specific finding: X users do not merely use a hashtag to disseminate information about ongoing social and political events in general, but also to help other X users understand and interpret these issues through text posts that highlight the specific problems being experienced. Thus, this study expands upon previous findings that tended to focus on the dissemination of information, emphasizing that hashtags, as a feature of X, can be used to provide an understanding of the meaning behind them.

Overall, this discussion demonstrates that the #Indonesiagelap discourse is a hashtag that emerged as a public reaction to prevailing sociopolitical conditions, consistent with the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis—namely, that discourse is a product of history and culture and must therefore be understood within the historical and cultural context in which it is produced. Through Critical Discourse Analysis, it can be seen that user X is a social actor who actively produces, disseminates, and consumes discourse as a form of expression of anxiety, criticism, and symbolic resistance against power relations. This hashtag functions not only as a communication tool but also as a public discussion space that brings together personal experiences with collective interests, thereby shaping a shared meaning regarding the national situation perceived as “dark.” Thus, research on Critical Discourse Analysis: the meaning of #Indonesiagelap on the X platform can be understood as a discursive practice that reflects the public’s critical awareness of the policies, leadership, and socio-political conditions they experience. These findings also contribute to expanding the study of Critical Discourse Analysis, particularly regarding the meaning of the hashtag for X users

Conclusion

This study shows that the hashtag #Indonesiagelap on the X platform is interpreted by users as a form of social criticism used to express both their disappointment and the public’s assessment of the socio-political situation in Indonesia. The use of simple, everyday language and examples drawn from real-life events makes the meaning of this hashtag easier to understand.

This hashtag is not merely a marker of an issue, but also a communication tool capable of fostering mutual understanding and cultivating critical awareness among X users. Digital activities such as retweets, replies, and quote tweets further reinforce the process of meaning-making around the hashtag, allowing the #Indonesiagelap discourse to evolve collectively as a space for expression, building solidarity, and engaging in symbolic resistance against power dynamics perceived as not serving the public interest.

The findings of this study confirm that Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis theory is relevant for analyzing the dynamics of hashtag meaning-making on social media, while also helping to understand the role of the X platform as an alternative space for public discourse in the digital age. This study demonstrates that hashtags have the potential to serve as a participatory medium for social and political communication, as they can connect individuals’ personal experiences with broader collective interests. However, this study is limited to data from a specific timeframe and focuses solely on the X platform, so its findings cannot yet be generalized more broadly. Therefore, for future research, it is recommended to expand the observation period, involve various social media platforms, and employ diverse methodological approaches so that Critical Discourse Analysis studies in the context of digital communication and public political discourse become increasingly rich and comprehensive.

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