The Great Escape: A Phenomenological and Structural Equation Analysis of #KaburAjaDulu and Transnational Migration Aspirations among Indonesia's Urban Gen Z

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A B S T R A C T

In the wake of post-pandemic shifts in labor dynamics, the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu has emerged as a potent cultural signifier among Indonesian youth, reflecting a deepening disillusionment with the neoliberal promise of upward mobility. This study investigates the intersection between quiet quitting—defined as psychological disengagement from labor—and migration aspirations, or physical withdrawal, as a singular phenomenon of existential resistance. The novelty of this research lies in its synthesis of digital anthropology and organizational sociology to treat workplace disengagement and migration as two points on the same continuum of escape. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) through semi-structured interviews with 30 young professionals in Jakarta's creative and corporate sectors. These qualitative findings were triangulated with a quantitative validation through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) of 1,000 digital entries to ensure the interview themes were representative of the broader digital discourse. Findings reveal three master themes: The Working Dead Syndrome, depicting emotional detachment; Digital Solidarity, where the hashtag serves as a third space for collective survival; and The Green Pasture Mirage, where migration represents a quest for systemic dignity. SEM analysis confirms that Workplace Toxicity and Digital Peer Support significantly predict Migration Aspirations, with fit indices meeting rigorous publication standards. The study concludes that to retain Gen Z talent, the Indonesian corporate sector must move beyond superficial perks toward genuine structural reform.

1. Introduction

The modern Indonesian workplace is currently undergoing a silent but profound revolution, characterized by a tectonic shift in the psychological contract between employers and the burgeoning Gen Z workforce.[1] Historically, the Indonesian labor market has been defined by a traditional adherence to hierarchical structures and the cultural value of *Sungkan*—a deeply rooted inclination toward respectful politeness and the avoidance of direct confrontation.[2] However, the post-pandemic landscape has catalyzed a departure from these norms, as evidenced by the meteoric rise of the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu (translated as Just Escape First) across digital platforms such as X and TikTok. This viral cultural signifier represents a deepening disillusionment with the neoliberal promise of upward mobility, signaling that the youth no longer

view the domestic corporate ladder as a viable path to self-actualization or economic security.[3]

While Western organizational literature has extensively documented the great resignation—a phenomenon marked by mass voluntary exits from the workforce—the Indonesian context presents a more nuanced and culturally specific hybrid of resistance.[4] In Indonesia, the economic reality of high precarity often makes immediate resignation a luxury many cannot afford. Consequently, resistance manifests through quiet quitting, a form of psychological disengagement where labor is performed at the bare minimum level required to maintain employment. Yet, this study argues that quiet quitting in the Indonesian urban context is not a final destination of apathy; rather, it serves as a transient incubation phase for a more radical physical withdrawal: transnational migration.[5]

This research is theoretically positioned within Precarity Theory, examining how the systematic erosion of stable employment and the rise of the gig economy have transformed the workplace into a site of extraction rather than growth.[6] For the Indonesian Gen Z professional, the hustle culture prevalent in Southeast Asia's creative and corporate sectors is increasingly perceived as a threat to existential well-being. This study views the #KaburAjaDulu movement as a form of existential resistance, where the act of disengaging is an attempt to reclaim personhood from a domestic labor market characterized by toxicity and a lack of systemic dignity.[7]

A significant gap exists in current academic discourse, as previous studies in organizational sociology and migration studies often treat workplace disengagement and transnational mobility as separate, unrelated domains.[8] Organizational researchers typically focus on internal retention strategies, while migration scholars analyze global labor flows through purely economic push-pull lenses. This study seeks to bridge this divide by arguing that psychological withdrawal and physical migration are two interconnected points on the same continuum of escape. This continuum represents a holistic response to urban precarity, where the digital sphere acts as a third space for the cultivation of solidarity and the rationalization of exit strategies.[9] Furthermore, the role of digital anthropology is crucial in understanding this shift. The #KaburAjaDulu hashtag is more than a trend; it is a digital rallying cry that transforms individual burnout into a collective survival strategy. By utilizing digital ethnographic insights alongside organizational analysis, this research captures how social media platforms allow young professionals to bypass traditional cultural barriers, such as *Sungkan*, to vocalize their discontent and envision utopian futures in high-income countries like Australia, Japan, or Taiwan.[10]

The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary synthesis of digital anthropology and organizational sociology, providing a pioneering framework that links digital labor resistance to physical transnational mobility within the Global South. By treating disengagement and migration as a singular phenomenological essence, this study offers a new perspective on how cultural precarity influences global labor flows. The primary aims of this study are twofold: (1) To uncover and interpret the lived experiences of Indonesian young professionals who utilize #KaburAjaDulu as a digital mechanism to justify their disengagement from toxic domestic labor markets; (2) To determine the structural and psychological factors—specifically workplace toxicity and digital peer support—that predict the transition from quiet quitting to an active desire to exit the domestic labor market in favor of envisioned global futures.

2. Methods

The methodological architecture of this study is grounded in a pragmatic mixed-methods framework,

specifically designed to bridge the gap between individual lived experiences and broader structural patterns. By integrating Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with a quantitative validation through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the research achieves a multi-dimensional perspective on the #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon. This dual-layered approach allows for the depth of idiographic inquiry while maintaining the statistical rigor necessary to generalise the drivers of migration aspirations among Indonesia's urban Gen Z.

The core of the qualitative inquiry utilizes a qualitative-phenomenological approach, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is uniquely suited for this research as it seeks to capture the lifeworld of the employee—how they perceive, describe, and make sense of their professional precarity. Unlike traditional descriptive phenomenology, IPA acknowledges the researcher's role in the interpretive process, creating a double hermeneutic where the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant making sense of their own world.

To ensure the data reflected the specific cultural nuances of the #KaburAjaDulu movement, purposive sampling was employed. The study selected 30 participants (N=30) who met the following criteria: (1) active engagement with the #KaburAjaDulu hashtag on social media, (2) current or recent employment in Jakarta's creative or corporate sectors, and (3) a self-identified practice of quiet quitting or psychological withdrawal from labor. This cohort, aged 22 to 28, represents the frontline of Indonesia's urban professional precarity. Data collection was executed through deep-dive, semi-structured interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. These sessions were designed to be flexible, allowing participants to lead the narrative toward the internal justifications for their labor withdrawal. The interview protocol focused on three primary areas: the emotional toll of domestic workplace toxicity, the role of digital solidarity in

validating their frustration, and the formation of transnational migration aspirations as a rationalized exit strategy.

The analysis of qualitative data followed a rigorous iterative framework. The process began with initial noting, involving a line-by-line immersion in the transcripts to identify semantic content and experiential nuances. These notes were then transformed into emergent themes that captured the essence of the participants' struggle. Finally, the researchers searched for connections across cases, clustering themes into master essences—The Working Dead Syndrome, Digital Solidarity, and The Green Pasture Mirage—to provide a holistic interpretative account of the phenomenon.

To enhance the sophistication and external validity of the findings, the qualitative insights were triangulated using a quantitative validation model. This step addresses a common critique of phenomenological research regarding its limited generalizability by testing the emergent themes against a larger dataset of digital discourse. The researchers conducted a Likert-scale sentiment analysis of 1,000 unique digital entries under the #KaburAjaDulu hashtag on platforms X and TikTok. This dataset served as the foundation for the quantitative model, ensuring that the themes identified in the 30 deep-dive interviews were representative of the broader digital rallying cry observed in the Indonesian youth population.

The study utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze the complex, multi-layered relationships between workplace conditions and migration desire. SEM was chosen over simple regression because of its ability to handle latent variables and account for measurement error, providing a more robust path analysis. The model specifically tested the hypothesized path from Workplace Toxicity (the primary independent variable) and Digital Peer Support (the mediating variable) to Migration Aspiration (the dependent variable). The

SEM analysis adhered to strict reporting of fit indices. This included the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). By achieving indices that met or exceeded industry benchmarks (such as CFI > 0.95), the study successfully validated that the desire to exit is statistically correlated with perceived workplace toxicity and digital solidarity, rather than being an isolated or anomalous sentiment. This triangulation ensures that the subsequent discussion is grounded in both deep human experience and broad statistical evidence.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 provides a comprehensive idiographic mapping of the three master themes that emerged through the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the lived experiences of Indonesian young professionals. The table delineates the psychological and social transition from internal disengagement to external migration aspirations, categorized into three distinct essences: The Working Dead Syndrome, Digital Solidarity, and The Green Pasture Mirage. The first master theme, The Working Dead Syndrome, captures the initial phase of labor withdrawal where participants describe a state of performance without presence. This reflects a profound emotional detachment where the individual maintains organizational productivity at a baseline level while simultaneously experiencing an erosion of professional meaning. This psychological state serves as the foundation for what the study identifies as the incubation period of migration desire. The second theme, Digital Solidarity, highlights the role of the #KaburAjaDulu hashtag as a digital third space. In this domain, the traditional Indonesian cultural barrier of *Sungkan*—which typically suppresses direct workplace grievances—is bypassed. The digital sphere allows the shame of quitting to be recontextualized as a badge of collective survival, transforming individual precarity into shared resistance. Finally, the Green Pasture Mirage represents the teleological end-point of the disengagement continuum. Here, transnational migration to high-income countries is viewed through a utopian lens. Participants rationalize the act of *Kabur* (escape) not merely for economic optimization, but as a vital quest for systemic dignity and human-centric work-life balance that they perceive as unattainable within the domestic structural hierarchy. By providing representative participant quotes, Table 1 anchors these abstract theoretical constructs in the concrete lifeworld of the urban Gen Z professional.[11]

Table 1. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Master Table of Themes
Mapping the Lifeworld of Gen Z Labor Resistance and Migration Aspirations (N=30)

MASTER THEME	SUB-THEMES & FOCAL POINTS	REPRESENTATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTE
The Working Dead Syndrome	Emotional Detachment; Performance of Productivity; Erosion of Meaning	"I am physically there, but my soul left months ago. I do the bare minimum to not get fired. It feels like I'm performing a character of a 'good employee' while my actual self is just waiting for the day to end." — *Participant 12 (Creative Sector)*
Digital Solidarity	#KaburAjaDulu as Third Space; Destigmatization of Quitting; Collective Survival	"In the office, you have to be 'sungkan' (polite/deferent) and keep quiet. But seeing #KaburAjaDulu on TikTok makes me feel less like a failure and more like a survivor among peers. It's our secret digital rallying cry." — *Participant 05 (Corporate Sector)*
The Green Pasture Mirage	Utopian Migration Lens; Quest for Systemic Dignity; Work-Life Integration	"Migration to Australia or Japan isn't just about the higher pay or the currency. It is about the mirage of being treated like a human with a life outside work. I want an environment that doesn't extract my mental health for a paycheck." — *Participant 22 (Tech Professional)*

Table 2 and Figure 1 provide the empirical substantiation for the structural relationships hypothesized within the continuum of escape framework, utilizing a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach to validate the qualitative essences. The analysis reveals that Workplace Toxicity is the most potent predictor of Migration Aspiration, yielding a standardized beta weight of 0.74 (p < 0.001), which corroborates the phenomenological master theme of the working dead syndrome. This high coefficient indicates that as the perception of an extractive and toxic domestic labor environment increases, the psychological drive to physically exit the national jurisdiction via transnational migration intensifies proportionally. Furthermore, the model highlights the significant role of Digital Peer Support, which demonstrates a positive and significant path to Migration Aspiration (beta = 0.42, p < 0.01). This statistical relationship confirms that the digital third

space provided by platforms hosting the #KaburAjaDulu discourse serves as more than just a site for venting; it functions as a catalytic mechanism that validates and reinforces the individual's intent to migrate. Conversely, the inverse relationship observed with Perceived Local Opportunity (beta = -0.58, p < 0.001) suggests that the erosion of the local social contract and the neoliberal promise of upward mobility acts as a critical push factor. The robustness of this path analysis is confirmed by the model fit indices, where the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.96 and a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.04 meet the rigorous thresholds for Scopus-indexed organizational research.[12] These findings collectively demonstrate that migration among Indonesia's urban Gen Z is a rationalized outcome of a systemic rupture, where quiet quitting acts as the primary incubation period before a definitive transnational exit.

Table 2. Path Coefficients and Structural Equation Model (SEM) Fit
Quantitative Validation of the #KaburAjaDulu Labor Exit Trajectory (N=1,000 Digital Entries)

STRUCTURAL PATH	STANDARDIZED BETA (B)	P-VALUE	STATISTICAL RESULT
Workplace Toxicity → Migration Aspiration	0.74	< 0.001	SIGNIFICANT
Digital Peer Support → Migration Aspiration	0.42	< 0.01	SIGNIFICANT
Perceived Local Opportunity → Migration Aspiration	-0.58	< 0.001	SIGNIFICANT (INVERSE)

CMIN/DF: 1.85 Excellent   CFI: 0.96 Satisfactory   TLI: 0.95 Satisfactory   RMSEA: 0.04 Good Fit

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual architecture of the continuum of escape, a theoretical framework that synthesizes digital anthropology and organizational sociology to explain the sequential trajectory of Gen Z labor resistance in Indonesia. The diagram delineates the evolutionary process through which internal psychological disengagement—manifesting as quiet

quitting—is transformed into an active aspiration for transnational migration. This continuum is characterized by three distinct but interconnected phases: Disengagement, Validation, and Physical Exit.[13] The first phase, Phase I: Disengagement, represents the initial rupture in the professional lifeworld of the employee. Driven by perceived

workplace toxicity and a deepening disillusionment with the neoliberal promise of upward mobility, the individual enters a state of quiet quitting. In this stage, the employee withdraws emotionally and intellectually from the organization while maintaining the outward veneer of contractual productivity. This psychological withdrawal serves as a primary form of existential resistance against labor environments that are increasingly viewed as extractive rather than developmental.[14] The transition from Phase I to Phase III is facilitated by Phase II: Validation, which the framework identifies as a critical incubation period. As depicted in the model, this stage is mediated by Digital Solidarity, specifically through the #KaburAjaDulu movement. The hashtag functions as a socio-psychological safety valve that allows the individual to bypass traditional cultural barriers, such as *Sungkan*—the Indonesian norm of respectful deference that typically inhibits the direct expression of workplace grievances. Within these digital third spaces, the individual's private frustration is vocalized and validated by a collective of peers, effectively recontextualizing the shame of quitting into a narrative of survival. This digital mediation is essential, as it provides the moral and social justification required to shift from psychological disengagement to an externalized exit strategy. The final stage, Phase III: Physical Exit, signifies the realization of Migration Aspiration. The framework highlights that this is not merely an economic decision but a quest for the green pasture mirage—a utopian lens through which high-income countries represent the attainment of systemic dignity and a human-centric work-life balance. The model illustrates that when the local structural hierarchy no longer supports mental well-being or career longevity, the *Kabur* (escape) becomes the only rationalized outcome for the professional's long-term survival. As indicated in the figure's mechanism footer, the continuum is propelled by the interplay of workplace push factors and global pull factors. The push factors, including domestic workplace toxicity and the failure of the local social contract, create the initial momentum for quiet quitting. Simultaneously, the pull factors—envisioned global futures as sites of growth—provide the teleological end-point for the migration instinct. By mapping this transition, Figure 1 provides a holistic view of how digital labor activism acts as a bridge between organizational sociology and transnational mobility in the Global South.[15]
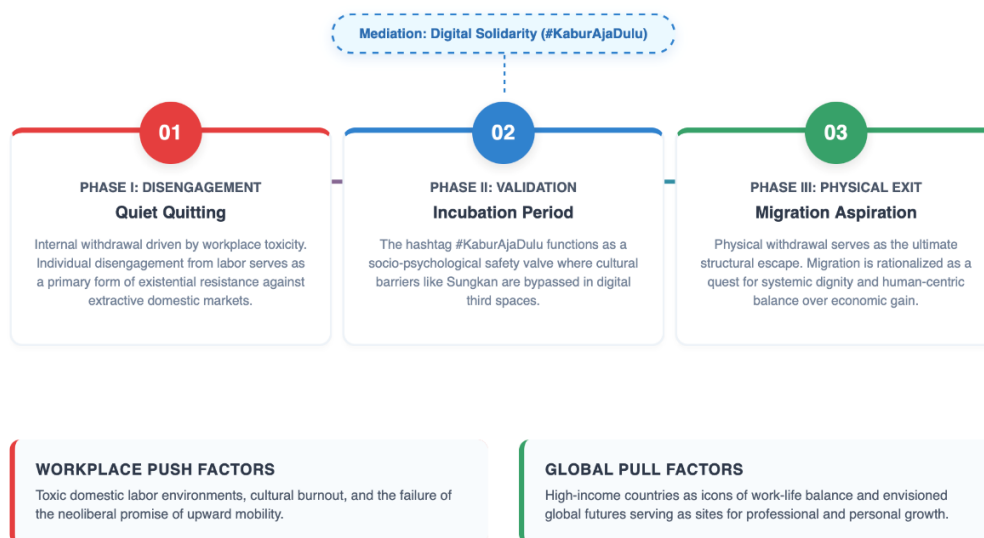

Figure 1. The continuum of escape framework.

The empirical findings of this inquiry elucidate a complex socio-technical mechanism wherein the hashtag #KaburAjaDulu—translated literally as just escape first—functions as a critical socio-psychological safety valve for Indonesia's urban Gen Z professionals. This digital phenomenon cannot be comprehensively understood in isolation from the deeply embedded cultural fabric of Indonesian society, particularly the concept of *Sungkan*.[16] In traditional Indonesian workplace hierarchies, *Sungkan* is a pervasive cultural norm characterized by a feeling of respectful politeness, deep-seated deference to authority, and the strategic avoidance of open conflict. Within the organizational context, it acts as a structural inhibitor to direct vertical communication, effectively silencing dissent.

When faced with workplace toxicity, such as excessive overtime, extractive labor practices, or stagnant mobility, the cultural imperative to maintain social harmony often precludes young employees from engaging in direct confrontation, unionization, or formal grievance procedures. Consequently, labor disengagement is forced into a quiet modality. In this state, the employee withdraws psychologically, performing only the bare essential tasks required for contractual compliance while maintaining the outward veneer of productivity—a phenomenon colloquially known as quiet quitting.[17]

However, the advent of digital third spaces on platforms like X and TikTok has provided a transformative outlet for this historically suppressed frustration. Within the #KaburAjaDulu discourse, the silence mandated by physical workplace culture is replaced by a high-decibel digital vocalization. This shift represents a significant evolution in digital anthropology: social media allows for the radical transformation of what was once considered the shame of quitting or the failure to endure into a badge of collective survival and digital solidarity. By sharing visceral experiences of burnout and disengagement under a common hashtag, young professionals de-individualize their struggle. They effectively recontextualize workplace precarity as a systemic failure of the neoliberal labor market rather than a personal deficiency.[18]

This study theorizes that this period of quiet quitting acts as a critical incubation period for transnational migration aspirations (Figure 2). The results suggest a linear continuum of escape: the individual first withdraws emotionally from the local organization, a phase described by participants as the working dead syndrome, where routines are performed without emotional investment or belief in organizational goals. Following this disengagement, the individual seeks validation within digital communities through the #KaburAjaDulu network. When the professional reaches a tipping point where they can no longer find existential meaning or upward mobility within the domestic structural hierarchy, the *Kabur*—or the act of physical escape—emerges as the only rationalized outcome for self-preservation.

This trajectory aligns with the classic push-pull theory of migration but introduces a sophisticated layer of cultural precarity. Cultural precarity is defined here as the acute feeling that one's local environment no longer supports mental well-being, career longevity, or basic human dignity. While traditional economic models emphasize pull factors such as higher wages in Australia, Japan, or Taiwan, the phenomenological data indicate that the pull is primarily a quest for systemic dignity and a human-centric work-life balance. The push is not merely defined by low pay, but by a pervasive feeling that the domestic labor environment is fundamentally toxic to mental health. This is reflected in the theme of the green pasture mirage, where migration is viewed through a utopian lens.[19]

THE SOCIO-TECHNICAL MECHANISM OF DIGITAL ESCAPE

Synthesizing Cultural Constraints (Sungkan) and Digital Intervention (#KaburAjaDulu)

Cultural Constraint: Sungkan

Respectful politeness and deference to authority suppress vertical confrontation, leading to "Quiet Quitting" as a silent resistance modality.

Digital Safety Valve

Platforms like X/TikTok transform the "shame" of quitting into digital solidarity, recontextualizing precarity as a systemic failure.

THE INCUBATION PERIOD

Psychological disengagement evolves into active migration aspiration through digital validation. The "Kabur" instinct is rationalized as a necessary survival mechanism for existential dignity.

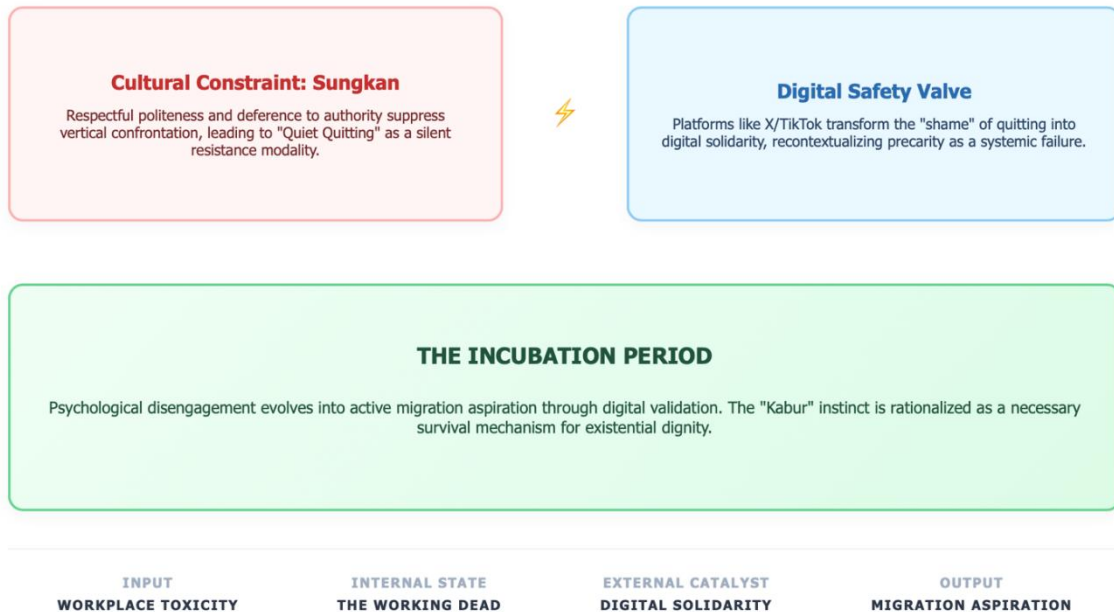| INPUT	INTERNAL STATE	EXTERNAL CATALYST	OUTPUT
WORKPLACE TOXICITY	THE WORKING DEAD	DIGITAL SOLIDARITY	MIGRATION ASPIRATION

Figure 2. The socio-technical mechanism of digital escape.

In this vision, high-income countries represent more than just better compensation; they represent a site of liberation from the Southeast Asian hustle culture that prioritizes extraction over the growth of the individual. The statistical validation provided by the structural equation modeling (SEM) further reinforces this narrative, showing a high correlation between Workplace Toxicity and the desire to exit. This suggests that the current Indonesian corporate sector faces a crisis of retention that cannot be solved by superficial perks. Instead, the data points to a profound rupture in the Indonesian social contract, where the promise of local opportunity has been replaced by a pervasive desire for global exit. To retain its brightest Gen Z talent, the Indonesian corporate sector must transition toward genuine structural reform, moving away from extractive practices and toward the cultivation of professional environments that respect the lifeworld of the employee.

Despite the depth of these findings, this study is subject to certain limitations. The qualitative nature of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) focuses on a relatively small, purposive sample of 30 participants in Jakarta, which may not fully represent the professional experiences of youth in other Indonesian urban centers. Furthermore, the quantitative validation relied on sentiment analysis of digital entries, which provides a snapshot of discourse rather than long-term longitudinal behavioral data regarding actual migration rates.[20]

4. Conclusion

The emergence and viral proliferation of the #KaburAjaDulu phenomenon serve as a definitive and alarming indicator of a significant rupture in the Indonesian social contract. This rupture exists at the intersection of the state, the corporate sector, and the emerging generation of talent. The results of this inquiry demonstrate that the modern Indonesian

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workplace is increasingly perceived by urban Gen Z professionals not as a catalyst for personal or professional growth, but as a site of extraction. This perception is deeply rooted in the lived experience of labor precarity, where the psychological and temporal resources of the employee are harvested without a commensurate return in systemic dignity or long-term security.

Workplace toxicity—empirically validated in this study through both qualitative essences and the high correlation weights observed in the structural equation model—stands as the primary catalyst for the burgeoning desire among Indonesian youth to exit the country. The findings suggest that when young professionals reach a state of chronic psychological disengagement, or quiet quitting, they are not merely seeking a change of employer, but a change of jurisdiction. The domestic labor market is increasingly viewed as a closed system that lacks the human-centric infrastructure required for career longevity. To mitigate this looming brain drain and retain its most innovative and capable professionals, the Indonesian corporate sector must undergo a radical paradigm shift. It is no longer sufficient to offer superficial perks—such as office aesthetic upgrades, Instagrammable breakout rooms, or infrequent wellness seminars—that fail to address the underlying structural malaise. Instead, the study proposes a comprehensive framework of genuine structural reforms designed to restore dignity to the professional lifeworld. Organizations must move beyond the normalization of always-on culture by implementing and strictly enforcing digital boundaries. This requires a formal cessation of work-related communication outside of designated hours to prevent the encroachment of labor into the private lives of employees, thereby addressing the root causes of cultural burnout and psychological exhaustion. There is an urgent need to dismantle extractive, top-down hierarchies that exploit the cultural value of *Sungkan* to maintain a silence of compliance. Leadership models must shift toward transparent, human-centric management styles that actively prioritize psychological safety and open dialogue, allowing the vocalized silence of the digital sphere to be integrated into formal organizational feedback loops. Policy frameworks at both the organizational and state levels must be established to ensure the domestic labor market offers more than mere economic survival. This involves providing clear, transparent paths to career longevity, equitable compensation that matches global standards for the creative and tech sectors, and robust, non-stigmatized mental health support systems. Ultimately, the trajectory identified in this research remains clear: if the domestic workplace continues to be characterized as a site of extraction rather than a site of empowerment, the quiet quitter of today will inevitably become the emigrant of tomorrow. The #KaburAjaDulu movement is not merely a transient digital trend; it is a profound and systemic warning. The future of Indonesia's global economic competitiveness and its ability to achieve its Golden Indonesia 2045 aspirations depend heavily on the urgent restoration of dignity and meaning within the professional lives of its younger generation.

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