

Hate Speech against Javanese in Social Media: A Case Study of Instagram Platform

Tengku Abdillah Azis^{1*}, Cindy Melissa Wijaya², Maria Joito Gultom³, Muhammad Alfi Harahap⁴,
Ridho Amalan Saufi Sipahutar⁵, Tumiar Sidauruk⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6} Department of Geography Education, Faculty of Social Sciences, Universitas Negeri Medan

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Corresponding author*:

Tengku Abdillah Azis

Contact:

tengku.3222431013@unimed.ac.id

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Abstract:

This study examines the phenomenon of hate speech against the Javanese ethnic group on the Instagram platform, reflecting inter-ethnic tensions in Indonesia. Such hate speech appears in the form of negative stereotypes, verbal insults, and anti-migrant sentiments, triggered by perceptions of Javanese dominance in social, economic, and political sectors. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method, data were collected through documentation of Instagram posts and comments, as well as interviews with both perpetrators and victims. The findings reveal that hate speech is driven by historical grievances, social jealousy, and a culture of humor that belittles others. Its impacts include psychological harm to victims and the potential for social division. The lack of regulation on social media exacerbates the spread of hate speech. Therefore, public education and the promotion of inclusive communication are essential to encourage tolerance and strengthen social cohesion in digital spaces. This study aims to contribute to the field of digital communication and support policy development related to diversity in the social media era.

Keywords: hate speech, Javanese ethnicity, social media, instagram.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a primary medium for the public to express opinions, share information, and build broad social interactions. Amid the rapid advancement of digital technology, platforms like Instagram occupy a significant position as channels of communication, especially in Indonesia, which has a vast number of active social media users. However, this ease of expression often gives rise to negative consequences, one of which is the widespread phenomenon of hate speech, particularly ethnic-based hate speech (Sihombing et al., 2020).

Ethnic-based hate speech on social media appears in various forms, such as negative stereotypes, insults, and verbal discrimination. Messages containing hate speech toward certain ethnic groups often spread widely across social media platforms, creating negative prejudices against specific communities. As a result, social segregation occurs, further widening the gap between different societal groups (Ritonga et al., 2024). One of the ethnic groups frequently targeted by hate speech is the Javanese, which constitutes the largest ethnic group in Indonesia. This phenomenon is a serious concern, as it has the potential to cause far-reaching social impacts, including the weakening of inter-ethnic social cohesion and the rise of tensions and prejudices among communities (Frederickson, 2002).

Hate speech itself refers to communicative acts that express hatred or intolerance toward other social groups based on race, ethnicity, or certain identities (Pasyah et al., 2024). The spread of hate speech on social media is influenced by various factors, including personal motivations (such as envy or dissatisfaction), public ignorance, weak social control, and the availability of technological tools that facilitate the wide dissemination of harmful messages (Sihombing et al., 2020). In this context, hate

speech not only causes psychological harm but also leads to the character assassination of individuals or targeted groups, and can even trigger serious social division (Prasetyo, Sidarta, & Borman, 2024).

Moreover, the phenomenon of hate speech is closely linked to the practice of racism, which refers to differentiation and unfair treatment based on race. Racism contains two main elements—difference and power—and has a long history of perpetuating social injustice (Frederickson, 2002). Its effects are not only physical but also psychological, including symptoms such as depression, loneliness, and other mental health issues experienced by victims (Sihombing et al., 2020).

Through this study, the author aims to identify and analyze various forms of hate speech directed at the Javanese ethnic group on the Instagram platform, examine the underlying factors, and assess its impact on the individuals or communities targeted. It is hoped that this research can contribute to the fields of digital communication and social studies, and serve as a reference for policy development aimed at minimizing ethnic-based hate speech in digital spaces.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study method, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the forms, causal factors, and impacts of hate speech against the Javanese ethnic group on the Instagram platform. Data collection was conducted online without geographic limitations, utilizing documentation of posts and comments, as well as interviews via the direct message feature with both perpetrators and victims.

Primary data sources were obtained from screenshots of Instagram posts and comments, as well as interview results with several users of the platform. A questionnaire was used as the interview instrument, created in the form of a Google Form and distributed through direct messages and to acquaintances of the researcher who fell into the categories of either perpetrators or victims of hate speech. Secondary data sources came from relevant scientific literature and media reports.

Data collection techniques included documentation studies, non-participatory observation, and interviews through questionnaires. Data analysis was carried out through stages of data reduction, categorization, thematic analysis, and interpretation, aiming to uncover key themes related to hate speech and its impact within the context of social media, particularly on Instagram.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Hate Speech

Based on an analysis of comments and posts on Instagram containing hate speech against the Javanese ethnic group, several common forms of hate speech were identified, including:

1. Negative Stereotyping

Some Instagram users frequently label the Javanese ethnic group with negative stereotypes such as “Javanese are the root of destruction,” “Javanese = laborers,” “Javanese are sycophants,” and “Javanese are full of jamet groups” (a derogatory slang term), reflecting discriminatory and degrading views toward the ethnic group. These stereotypes are further reinforced by narratives portraying the Javanese as dominating various aspects of life, especially in government sectors, which fuels social jealousy and negative sentiment from other groups. The spread of such perspectives not only deepens prejudice and discrimination but also poses the risk of social division within a society that should uphold diversity and unity.

2. Verbal Insults and Harassment

Many Instagram comments contain direct insults toward the Javanese, including terms like “Javanese pests” and “Jawir,” which is an abbreviation of “*Jawa Ireng*” or “black Javanese”—a derogatory reference that demeans their ethnic identity. Hate speech also targets physical features and cultural traits of the Javanese, perpetuating negative stereotypes and reinforcing discrimination in digital spaces (Ahda, 2024). The use of harsh and offensive language in these comments further worsens the situation, highlighting how social media has become a vulnerable platform for the unchecked spread of hatred.

Verbal insults and harassment targeting the Javanese are widespread on social media, particularly Instagram. Numerous comments contain degrading language such as “Javanese pests,” which directly diminishes their ethnic identity. Additionally, hate speech also targets the physical

appearance and culture of the Javanese, creating negative stereotypes that intensify discrimination in the digital sphere (Sadita Novilyana Hartatik, 2025).

The lack of regulation on social media platforms allows this type of hate speech to spread rapidly without clear consequences for the perpetrators. Furthermore, social media algorithms that reinforce engagement within like-minded groups exacerbate the issue (Kusno et al., 2022). Many users feel supported by their digital environment, encouraging the continued dissemination of hate speech against the Javanese and creating an increasingly intolerant online space.

3. Dislike Toward Migrants

Dislike toward migrants is another factor that contributes to the rise of hate speech against the Javanese on social media, particularly on Instagram. Many users express dissatisfaction toward Javanese migrants who are perceived as dominating various sectors such as the economy, society, and government in different regions. The perception that Javanese people adapt more easily and are more resilient in diverse environments often leads to social jealousy and unhealthy competition. This is worsened by stereotypes that Javanese migrants are taking jobs or business opportunities that should belong to the local population. As a result, hate speech toward Javanese migrants is often expressed through sarcastic remarks or outright insults that demean their culture and way of life.

Explanation of Interview Results

1. Perpetrator Questionnaire

The perpetrator explained that hate speech directed at the Javanese ethnic group arises from several complex factors. One of the primary reasons is the widespread presence of Javanese people across various regions in Indonesia, often outnumbering the indigenous ethnic groups in those areas. This demographic dominance can trigger negative sentiments and social jealousy from other communities, which are then expressed in the form of hate speech.

In addition to population factors, the perpetrator mentioned that the behavior of some Javanese people—especially those living in Java—is perceived negatively. He gave examples such as the stereotype of Javanese people being of low human resource quality, as well as phenomena like “Sound Horeg” (loud music culture), and the appearance of fake religious titles such as “Habib” and “Gus,” which contribute to a negative image. The internet and social media further exacerbate the situation by accelerating the spread of such information, including hate-driven narratives.

The perpetrator also referenced historical grievances, particularly the anti-communist massacres associated with the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party), where many of the alleged perpetrators were of Javanese ethnicity. This historical trauma is believed to have passed down through generations in the form of stories and biased interpretations of history, fostering a lingering sense of resentment.

From his perspective, the Javanese, as the majority ethnic group, are often seen as the representation or face of the Indonesian nation. As a result, various societal issues such as crime, corruption, and poor governance are frequently linked to the Javanese people, especially since many prominent national figures and presidents have come from the Javanese ethnic group. This political and social dominance reinforces negative perceptions and often makes the Javanese a target of criticism.

However, the perpetrator also admitted that some of his hate speech remarks were made spontaneously and meant as jokes, indicating a lack of awareness about the consequences and sensitivity of such statements, as well as a limited understanding of interethnic respect in Indonesia.

2. Victim Questionnaire

The victim explained that hate speech targeting the Javanese ethnic group is a deeply harmful experience that often stems from baseless stereotypes and collective misunderstandings. According to the victim, such hate speech usually manifests in the form of mockery, derogatory comments, or generalizations that portray Javanese people as overly submissive, lacking assertiveness, or dominating political and bureaucratic systems. These labels, the victim argued, do not represent the actual diversity of personalities and backgrounds within the Javanese community.

The victim also mentioned that these forms of hate speech are sometimes disguised as jokes or casual remarks, but they carry significant emotional impact. What may seem like harmless humor to the speaker often leaves the target feeling belittled, alienated, or even anxious about expressing their identity in public. This is especially true on social media platforms like Instagram, where negative comments can spread rapidly and be amplified by likes, shares, and algorithmic visibility.

In many cases, the victim noted that such speech is not motivated by personal hatred but rather by long-standing prejudices and inherited biases that have been normalized in society. For example, some people may echo negative perceptions about the Javanese without critical reflection, simply because those ideas have been passed down through family stories or local community beliefs.

The victim emphasized that being exposed to repeated hate speech can lead to psychological distress, including feelings of isolation and lowered self-worth. It also contributes to a broader climate of ethnic tension and mistrust, which contradicts the ideals of unity and mutual respect in a pluralistic nation like Indonesia.

Despite the pain caused, the victim expressed hope that awareness and education could help reduce the spread of hate speech. He believes that open dialogue, empathy, and respectful communication are key to building a more inclusive digital environment where all ethnic groups, including the Javanese, feel safe and respected.

Discussion

1. Causal Factors

Based on the research findings, several key factors contribute to the emergence of hate speech targeting the Javanese ethnic group on social media, particularly on Instagram. The following is an explanation of these factors, supported by relevant journal sources:

a. Negative Stereotypes

Negative stereotypes about the Javanese ethnic group often manifest in derogatory labels such as “Javanese = laborer” or “Javanese bootlicker.” This phenomenon reflects the existence of prejudice and discrimination against the Javanese on social media. Such negative comments indicate that ethnic discrimination remains a serious issue in Indonesia (Sadita Novilyana Hartatik, 2025).

In addition, negative stereotypes are reinforced by the perception that the Javanese dominate various sectors of life, particularly in government. This perceived dominance leads to social jealousy from other ethnic groups who feel marginalized, which in turn triggers negative sentiment and hate speech against the Javanese on social platforms.

b. Resentment Toward Migrants

Resentment toward migrants is another contributing factor to the spread of hate speech against the Javanese on social media. Many Instagram users express dissatisfaction toward Javanese migrants who are perceived as dominating sectors such as the economy, society, and government in non-Javanese regions. This stems from the fact that Javanese people are known for their high mobility and adaptability, making it easier for them to secure jobs or business opportunities outside their home regions. Their success in integrating into new environments often provokes social jealousy among local populations who feel economically and socially threatened.

Moreover, the belief that Javanese migrants take away job or business opportunities that should belong to the local population exacerbates negative sentiment. Many narratives on social media portray Javanese migrants as opportunistic and as not contributing meaningfully to the local community. Hate speech is often expressed in the form of sarcastic remarks or direct insults that demean Javanese culture and lifestyle. This phenomenon demonstrates how social media can reinforce group exclusivity and heighten social tensions.

c. The Factor of Jokes

In addition to the factors of negative stereotypes and dissatisfaction with migrants, the factor of jokes also contributes to the emergence of hate speech against the Javanese ethnic group. Based on interviews with several individuals who engaged in hate speech, some of them who are ethnically Javanese also made jokes about their own ethnicity. They acknowledged that many Javanese people are seen as having behaviors that reflect a low quality of human resources, particularly in East Java. Some perpetrators even used the term “Jawir” (Jawa Ireng) to insult fellow Javanese people who are considered to fall short of the standards they view as ideal. These jokes are often seen as mere humor or playful remarks without realizing the negative impact they may cause.

Such jokes also come from individuals who are not of Javanese descent. They perceive belittling Javanese people as something normal or even funny, which ultimately worsens the negative perception of the ethnic group. This phenomenon may be driven by the stereotype that Javanese people are often the subject of jokes on social media. Furthermore, there is also the factor of *FOMO* (Fear of Missing Out), where individuals who may not have any hatred or stereotypes against Javanese people feel compelled to participate in the jokes to gain attention or feel part of

a certain group. In many cases, this phenomenon contributes to the spread of hate speech, where people tend to engage in jokes or insults about the Javanese ethnic group simply to align with the majority opinion or follow trends on social media.

2. Interview Results

a. Questionnaire Findings – Perpetrators

From the interviews conducted with individuals who engaged in hate speech, it can be concluded that their actions were primarily driven by negative perceptions toward the dominance of the Javanese ethnic group in various regions of Indonesia. Many perpetrators expressed that the significant population and social presence of the Javanese—sometimes even outnumbering local ethnic groups—created a sense of imbalance, which they interpreted as a form of “cultural colonization.” This sentiment was further reinforced by negative stereotypes, where certain behaviors among Javanese communities were labeled with derogatory terms such as “low human resources,” or associated with trends like “Sound Horeg” (a term mocking loud music culture) and accusations of falsely claiming religious titles. The spread of these stereotypes was exacerbated by the rapid circulation of content on social media. Historical grievances also played a role, as some perpetrators referred to unresolved trauma linked to the involvement of Javanese figures in events like the PKI rebellion, suggesting that these historical wounds have contributed to lasting resentment passed down through generations. In addition, the perception of political dominance—where many national leaders, especially presidents, have been Javanese—has led to a belief that systemic national issues like corruption and inequality are ethnically rooted. This belief supports the normalization of hate speech through generalizations. Finally, some perpetrators admitted that their hate speech was not always intentional, but rather emotional or impulsive, often meant as jokes, indicating a lack of awareness about the broader impact such comments can have within public digital spaces.

b. Questionnaire Findings – Victims

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that hate speech against the Javanese ethnic group on social media, particularly Instagram, manifests in various forms such as negative stereotypes, verbal insults, and anti-migrant sentiments. These expressions are driven by perceptions of social, economic, and political dominance by the Javanese. Perpetrators stated that their actions stemmed from dislike toward population dominance, historical grievances, behavioral stereotypes, and even spontaneous remarks made without awareness of their impact. Meanwhile, victims view such speech as a form of discrimination that undermines unity, causes psychological harm, and intensifies social tensions. The main factors reinforcing the spread of hate speech include the lack of social media regulation and the insufficient public education regarding the importance of tolerance and respect for ethnic diversity in Indonesian society.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of hate speech against the Javanese ethnic group on social media, particularly Instagram, reflects the existence of social tensions that can worsen inter-ethnic relations in Indonesia. This hate speech is triggered by various factors, such as negative stereotypes, dissatisfaction with migrants, and the impact of social and historical factors that shape the public's perception of the Javanese group. In addition, jokes often perceived as lighthearted humor also play a significant role in spreading hate speech. On one hand, social media provides a space for free expression, but without adequate oversight, hate speech can spread quickly and worsen distrust between groups. This has the potential to damage social harmony and threaten the principles of diversity and national unity.

It is crucial to take preventive steps by raising awareness of the impact of hate speech and introducing education that promotes tolerance and respect for cultural diversity. The involvement of individuals and communities in fostering more positive and inclusive communication on social media is necessary to create a healthier digital environment. Educating the public, especially the younger generation, about the importance of mutual respect among ethnic groups can help reduce the spread of hatred and strengthen unity in diversity.

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