

## Meme as a Tool for Resistance Towards Hustle Culture: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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### **Abstract**

There is currently an emergence of Indonesian meme accounts on Instagram which specifically discuss the work culture in startups or technology-based companies. One of the most popular is @ecommurz, which has roughly 152,000 followers (by 12 July 2022). Using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, this study aims to analyze how the working class group use memes from the @ecommurz Instagram account to demonstrate a resistance to hustle culture in Indonesia, particularly in startup environments. This study shows that Ecommurz has demonstrated the potential of meme accounts as a platform that unites middle-class workers to carry out resistance to the hegemony of the dominant culture by drawing on Gramsci's (1971) conceptions of cultural hegemony and resistance. Ecommurz has democratized the discussion of issues and difficulties encountered by many middle-class workers in the workplace through humorous and casual memes. Furthermore, it has also increased public awareness of workers' rights and prompted real systemic change.

**Keywords:** *cultural hegemony, hustle culture, instagram, meme, resistance.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

There are currently a lot of internet users who create and share memes on social media and the internet to express their feelings as well as to react to and criticize phenomena. Meme studies can be useful for understanding communication patterns and trends, including how information is shared and received, and the ways in which communication technologies and platforms shape the way people communicate. Richard Dawkins, a biologist, coined the term "meme" for the first time in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. According to him, the term "meme," which derives from the Greek "mimema," refers to a "culture replicator", and describes how genes play a part in biological evolution (Miltner, 2018). Meanwhile, in its development in cultural studies and cyber culture studies, Internet meme refers to the spread of media objects or content, such as jokes, rumors, videos, websites from one person to another via the internet (Shifman, 2013a). Memes are media texts which, like other types of media texts, can contain certain ideologies (Wiggins, 2019). Furthermore, memes also have the ability to create an emotional connection between the creator and the recipient. Internet users share memes because they connect with the message conveyed in the meme and find them to be relevant. While memes are being circulated, typically there are parts of the content that are reproduced from the original version (Shifman, 2013b).

In addition to this, Evnine (in Anderson & Keehn, 2020) offers another explanation of the term, stating that memes are captioned images that can continually reproduce information or messages when distributed for the aim of expressing humor, satire, and occasionally political commentary. Memes can also be considered an expression of digital participatory democracy or participatory digital culture, allowing the public to democratically and satirically express, assess, and analyze socio political situations and discourses (Hariman, 2008). At this time, memes that are used as a tool to convey criticism can be commonly found on the internet and social media. This objective cannot be separated from memes' character, which is frequently humorous and allows for subtler and less overt criticism to be expressed.

In Indonesia, memes have been used as a means of conveying criticism in a humorous manner. For example, during the 2019 Indonesian general election, political memes featuring the fictitious presidential and vice presidential candidate Nurhadi-Aldo (Duile, 2020) were circulated. These memes, which were characterized by humor and sarcasm, were used to criticize the polarization and ongoing debate between the two main presidential candidates and their supporters. They replicated the contents of the presidential campaign by both pairs of candidates and reproduced them with new messages. The appearance of this fictional couple's campaign caught the attention of internet users, and it was successful in gaining support from the general public who agreed with the themes and political criticism contained in their memes (Duile, 2020). Not only to criticize, memes can also be used as a tool of resistance for subordinate groups or those with low social position or power against dominant groups and ideas. In other words, memes are countercultures or subcultures that aim to challenge hegemonic cultural norms in a society (Hebdige, 2006).

Since 2020, there has been a new trend, which is the emergence of Indonesian meme accounts on Instagram which specifically discuss the work culture in startups or technology-based companies as it is, such as @ecommurz, @ridehailing, and @taktekbun (Freischlad & Prasadya, 2021). The first Instagram account in Indonesia that appeared and actively uploaded memes about work culture at Indonesian startups was @ecommurz or Ecommerce & Tech Meme Factory. The uploaded memes frequently contain humor and satire to criticize the hustle culture of a technology company. Since this account's debut on Instagram in September 2020, it has accumulated around 152,000 followers (by 12 July 2022). Their activeness in uploading memes can also be seen from the large number of uploads, which are 778 posts (by 12 July 2022). Despite its success, @ecommurz has remained a pseudonym Instagram account that purposefully hides the identity of its creators.

Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony (1971) explains how the capitalist ruling group, which also usually refers to the bourgeoisie and social institutions, exerts control over society (Hebdige, 2006). Gramsci also demonstrated how this dominant group may remain in control by, among other things, convincing the working class to embrace capitalism beyond their conscious level. Within that economic system, the dominant group will seek to maximize its profits, which inevitably has an impact on the working class or subordinate

group's workplace culture. For instance, the working class must put in a lot of overtime to reach the goal. Rather than through coercion, capitalism can spread and become the dominant economic system through cultural hegemony, which causes the working class to willingly and unconsciously normalize capitalism values as part of their lives, (Gramsci, in Contreras Jr., 2021). As an example, many employees believe that continuing to work and be productive past normal business hours should be normalized.

Hegemony is closely related to power and information studies as it involves the dominant group's control and circulation of information to shape the public narrative, leaving little opportunity for other groups to voice their own perspectives. It can be seen as a form of social control, in which the dominant group uses various forms of media to reinforce its perspective and suppress alternative viewpoints. The study of hegemony is important for understanding how power and information shape social and cultural norms and values, as well as how marginalized groups may resist or challenge the dominant narrative. Cultural hegemony can be countered by raising public awareness of the power of the dominant class and the capitalist system. Then it can be continued by organizing resistance movements that challenge cultural hegemony. According to Li (2011), hegemony is less apparent and powerful than it once was, and it may now be contested and questioned because of the existence of new communication technologies. The presence of criticism of hegemony that emerged through new communication media is in line with the initial concept put forward by Gramsci (1971). He stated that the existence of the general public or ordinary people who are involved in discussions about this hegemonic discourse can form resistance or counter hegemony against capitalist hegemony (Cloud, 2020).

According to Mumby (2005), resistance is an action taken by people or groups when a dominant, established, and regulated social system disrupts their identity. Furthermore, Hebdige (2006) also discusses the existence of subcultures or alternative cultures that aim to challenge cultural hegemony in a society. Because some individuals feel they do not belong in or are dissatisfied with the previous mainstream culture, a resistance towards it may appear. Memes, viral videos, and internet satire are some examples of media or instruments that can be used to challenge hegemony (Contreras Jr., 2021; Kumar, 2015). These media are often created to convey social criticism wrapped in humor and parody. According to Kumar (2015), parody hides something as humor while simultaneously unleashing criticism by taking off the 'mask' of a power to uncover what's really going on.

Therefore, parody and humorous content-producing websites and social media accounts can be considered as arenas of resistance against power. Through his research, Li (2011) has discovered how the simple act of laughing at humorous content may bring together a lot of internet users who feel weak on an individual level but strong as a group when they challenge the dominant cultural and sociopolitical order. Due to the nature of memes, which can continue to spread swiftly and continue to be duplicated by anyone on the internet, the combination of memes and parody or humorous content can be the ideal way to transmit social and political critique (Kumar, 2015; Pettis, 2018). An example of a social media that is widely used by people these days is Instagram, which is a platform that enables users to upload photographs and videos and have others view them. Additionally, a lot of individuals now use Instagram to participate in social movements and activism like

the #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements. Instagram users can interact and connect without knowing one another in order to accomplish their shared objectives (Cornet et al., 2017).

Numerous studies have examined how memes are utilized on the internet and in social media to express opposition to dominant groups and cultures as well as criticism and resistance. A research by Contreras Jr. (2021) on the @justhumansof Instagram meme account gives as an illustration of how internet users can come together to discuss their common experiences of living in a capitalist society. Even if they haven't entirely persuaded them to carry out a social revolution, memes can at least make people aware of the relationship of political power structures, corporations, and the media, (Contreras Jr., 2021). Through the account's comment section, people from various backgrounds can gather, interact, and provide critical comments on the hegemonic power of capitalism. The findings of this study are also in line with the results of a study conducted by Mina (2014) on memes used to voice socio-political criticism and challenge the hegemony of the media ecosystem in China. In the midst of many acts of media censorship carried out by the dominant group in the country, meme culture has become a subculture that offers opportunities for subordinate groups to voice and express themselves through humor on social media.

The battle between cultures or ideologies between groups will continue. However, in his research that discusses the Pepe the Frog meme phenomenon, Pettis (2018) argues that unlike other media objects, it is difficult for the dominant group to commodify, control, and dominate memes on the internet because of their unique nature. Memes have no fixed notion of ownership or power since their messages or meanings can vary over time and be copied by anyone. In fact, if the dominant group wants to buy and control the memes that have been circulating, they only do so temporarily. This is because there will continue to be individuals who can return to producing new messages and meanings through memes (Pettis, 2018).

However, apart from these studies, academic research that discusses meme accounts on social media and their relation to worker group resistance in Indonesia is still limited. Thus, this research will offer novelty by examining it through Fairclough's critical discourse analysis method which pays attention to 3 domains, which are text analysis, analysis of text production and consumption, and analysis of sociocultural practice. The question that will be explored further is how the memes in the @ecommurz Instagram account are used by groups of workers to show an attitude of resistance to the hustle culture in Indonesia, especially in the startup environment.

## **METHOD**

In order to understand how @ecommurz attempts to critique, resist, and battle against the dominance of hustle culture and capitalism, this study employs a qualitative technique with a critical paradigm and draws on Gramsci's concepts of hegemony and resistance. The critical paradigm is used to reveal what lies behind the dominant structure or truth in this world by questioning the inequality of existing social relations (Neuman, 2014). Research

with this paradigm relies on the perspective of critical theory and its assumptions. Thus, this paradigm's use in research aims to criticize the present situation and is determined to expose hidden realities, especially those depicted in the media (Neuman, 2014).

In order to understand the meaning behind Ecommurz memes and how it relates to the social context that causes their existence, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis will be the method used in this study. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a qualitative analytical approach to critically describe, interpret, and explain how discourse builds, maintains, and legitimizes social inequality (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Fairclough's CDA focuses primarily on the idea of language as a social practice, namely how language or discourse is created and altered by social relationships and specific social circumstances (Fairclough, 2001). Thus, the three domains of text analysis (micro), discourse practice (meso), and social practice (macro) will be used to investigate memes (Fairclough, 2001).

Meme posts on the Ecommurz Instagram account will serve as the primary data source for this study. A purposive sample of five memes, selected from the total population of 778 memes uploaded to Ecommurz as of July 12, 2022, will be taken based on the highest number of likes. These samples are deemed representative of the other memes, in terms of the topics of discussion they address. Then, to study the visual components of memes, this micro textual data gathering method is supported by visual social semiotics derived from Roland Barthes' semiotics (Aiello, 2006; Yoon, 2016). The existence of several levels of meaning is a key concept in Barthes' visual semiotics. The denotation layer, which is the first layer, addresses the issue of "what, or who, is described here" (Van Leeuwen, 2001). The second layer is the connotation layer, which asks: "what ideas and values are expressed through this representation, and in what way are they conveyed?" (Van Leeuwen, 2001). In addition to the visual elements, an analysis of the accompanying text will also be carried out. Then, more data will be collected from books, articles, online news sources, and other literary sources to fully understand the material being studied. As a result, the current text can be traced to the social practice that underlies it as well as the discourse practice that led to its creation. These three elements in Fairclough's CDA together build the discourse being studied, which are memes on Ecommurz Instagram account.




## **RESULT & DISCUSSION**

This study uses Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) method which has three dimensions: text dimensions (micro), discourse practices (meso), and socio-cultural practices (macro).

### ***Text Dimensions (Micro)***

At the micro level, five memes posted in @ecommurz Instagram account were analyzed. In conducting the analysis, Roland Barthes' semiotic method also used to reveal the denotative and connotative meanings, as well as the myths that exist in these five memes.

**Table 1.** Analysis of five memes posted on the Instagram account @ecommurz

Meme	Denotative, Connotative, Myth
<p>                     this will be good experience!      wait i'm being exploited   </p> <p>                     Me and my Colleagues getting our paychecks.                      Our new Intern:   </p> <p>                     Caption: Meme dump about most recent VIRAL story about internship (check our IG story) 😊                 </p>	<p> <b>Denotative Meaning:</b>                      The words “Unpaid Internships” which its meaning is divided into two: “this will be a good experience!” and “wait I’m being exploited”. The part of the first meaning is much bigger than the second one.                      There is a description that reads “Me and my colleagues getting our paycheck” and a photo of a young man identified as ‘our new intern’ asking, “You’re getting paid?” His facial expression shows confusion.                 </p> <p> <b>Connotative Meaning:</b>                      Instead of giving the interns a positive work experience, the internship program makes them feel more exploited. This has also become normalized to the point where the intern is surprised to discover that someone is being paid.                 </p> <p> <b>Myth:</b>                      These two memes demonstrate how unpaid internship programs offered by companies have spread and become considered as a norm.                 </p>
	<p> <b>Denotative Meaning:</b>                      It’s an advertisement from Murz Shop selling a detergent under the name of “Andalan Boss” (the boss’ backbone). On the package there are several slogans and descriptions that show the advantages of this product, such as “Intern Sweat Blossom”, “Kekuatan 10 Tangan Anak Magang” (The Power of 10 Interns), “Kerja jadi 2x lebih cepat” (Works 2x faster), and “Lembut di Tangan” (Soft in Hands).                      In the second picture, a man in a suit is                 </p>



Caption: #murzshop presents products that understand you to overcome year-end EOD

Thank you for those of you who have tried our product. Like the product? Please help review this product

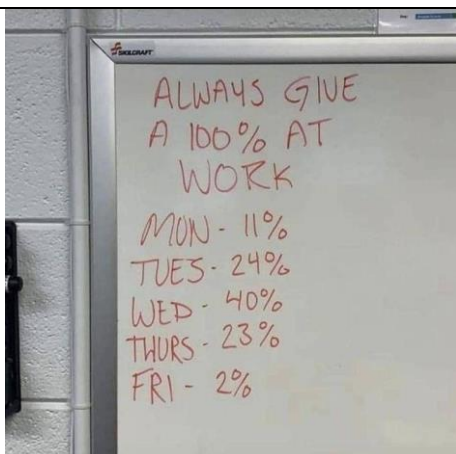
making a phone call from a high place, looking at the buildings below. There is a picture of many hands with the captions 'Kekuatan 10 Tangan Anak Magang' (The Power of 10 Interns) and 'Never dream for Success without an intern's hands.'

Connotative Meaning:

This advertisement depicts a product that isn't actually a detergent. The advertised product is the service of interns who work hard, act immediately, and can be relied upon as a backbone.

Myth:

Behind any successful boss or company, there is the hard work of interns who become the backbone.



Denotative Meaning:

The words "ALWAYS GIVE A 100 percent AT WORK" are written on a whiteboard, followed by the names of the days and their percentage distribution: "MON 11%, TUES – 24%, WED – 40%, THURS – 23%, FRI – 2%".


An image of a man throwing papers away with the description, "It's Friday, fuck this shit", and an image with the same man picking up the papers back with the description "Monday". There is an additional caption which says "I know y'all pretending to be busy".

Connotative Meaning:

The phrase "always give a 100 percent at work" is one that is frequently used to advise people to consistently put their best effort and attention into their jobs. However, this meme reconstructs the message's meaning. The proportion of effort put out each day is listed under the sentence, along with the working days from Monday through Friday, so that when the total is combined, it





	<p>prospects.</p> <p>Myth: The working class still finds it difficult to change their current social and financial situation, despite working continually and with equal energy as the ruling class or upper class.</p>																														
 <p><b>Wasting Time</b> Most executives and other professionals blame inefficiencies in their organizations for extending the amount of time they need to devote to work.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Unnecessary meetings are wasting their time</th> <th>Poorly planned meetings are wasting their time</th> <th>Changing focus and goals of the executive team is wasting their time</th> <th>Too many people involved in decision-making is wasting their time</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Professional</td> <td>High</td> <td>Medium</td> <td>Low</td> <td>Low</td> </tr> <tr> <td>First-level manager</td> <td>High</td> <td>Medium</td> <td>Low</td> <td>Low</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Manager of managers</td> <td>High</td> <td>Medium</td> <td>Low</td> <td>Low</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Manager of a division</td> <td>High</td> <td>Medium</td> <td>Low</td> <td>Low</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Executive</td> <td>High</td> <td>Medium</td> <td>Low</td> <td>Low</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Source: Center for Creative Leadership survey in September and October 2012 of 483 executives, managers and professionals working for companies, nonprofits, governments and other organizations world-wide. The Wall Street Journal</p> <p>Caption: When u have an all-day meeting and each meeting comes with new tasks</p>		Unnecessary meetings are wasting their time	Poorly planned meetings are wasting their time	Changing focus and goals of the executive team is wasting their time	Too many people involved in decision-making is wasting their time	Professional	High	Medium	Low	Low	First-level manager	High	Medium	Low	Low	Manager of managers	High	Medium	Low	Low	Manager of a division	High	Medium	Low	Low	Executive	High	Medium	Low	Low	<p>Denotative Meaning: A large billboard saying “Kerja Bego, Meeting Mulu” (Work You Dumb, Instead of Continuously Meeting) and featuring a picture of Queen Elizabeth II. A screenshot showing the results of a survey that the Center for Creative Leadership conducted on behalf of 483 employees from various levels all across the world. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents believe that the company's approach of extending working hours may really cause many things to run inefficiently.</p> <p>Connotative Meaning: This meme mocks and criticizes the countless meetings that employees must attend each day, which eventually leave them with no time for other types of work.</p> <p>Myth: A criticism that extensive working hours and countless meetings are frequently considered to be ineffective.</p>
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The memes on the Instagram account @ecomurz voice and critique problems that employees at startup companies in Indonesia frequently find and experience, like long working hours and unpaid internships.

**Discourse Practices (Meso)**

One of the @ecomurz admins stated in a podcast interview with Talk 2 Talk that the initial motivation behind the creation of the account was to have a platform where they could share stories about their daily work at startups using humorous memes. Over time, more and more people responded, feeling represented by the stories, memes, and

criticisms that were uploaded. The followers then also contributed to uncover the issues and other aspects of their work experience at startups (Hadinata, 2020). Through memes, issues that are difficult to discuss can be expressed in a simple way. Furthermore, the message conveyed by meme content can also be easily understood by people who have the same feelings and experiences, which results in high engagement (Shifman, 2013b).

Then, the admin said that there are 6 people who actively manage this account, and all of them are e-commerce and startup workers who work in different companies. They have a group of followers named MursFamz, and almost all of the content they upload comes from them. However, due to the continuous need to confirm the validity of the claim, Ecommurz does not instantly post all of the stories and complaints that are sent to the DM. By sharing these stories and criticisms, @ecommurz is also often referred to as the 'workers' union 4.0' which helps to raise awareness of urban workers about the potential exploitation they experience from companies and also about the rights of workers that should be obtained (Azalia & Yansverio, 2021).

In terms of text consumption, the popularity of this account continues to increase because the audience feels relevant and represented by existing content (Pramesthi & Dhia, 2021). In turn, it fosters a sense of community togetherness and emotional connection. Apart from being an Instagram account that often uploads memes about work culture in technology companies, Ecommurz is now also well-known as a platform that is active in raising awareness of workers about the rights they get as workers (Freischald & Prasideya, 2021). As a result of their active role in supporting and fighting for these employees' rights, Ecommurz frequently receives messages from their followers explaining the issues they are having at work. Then eventually there is an urge and encouragement to address the current issues once they are brought to light and are ultimately known by many people.

One of the cases that had become viral because it was discussed by @ecommurz was the polemic of the low salary of interns at Ruangguru, an education startup from Indonesia. On March 13, 2021, media portal Fast Company placed Ruangguru among the list of the 50 most innovative businesses in the world, sparking the discussion about it. In response, Ecommurz also asked their followers via Instagram Stories about what it was like to work at Ruangguru. Numerous staff of Ruangguru responded after that. More than 70% of the 60 responses that came in highlighted and complained about the low salary they received (Freischald & Prasideya, 2021). The interns at Ruangguru said that although they worked nearly as much as full-time staff did, they only received a monthly compensation of one million rupiahs. Following that, many people thought that Ruangguru had taken advantage of its interns by giving them excessive workloads but only for modest remuneration.

The testimony of the underpaid intern at Ruangguru was becoming the subject of widespread discussion. This topic was widely discussed on Instagram, and it also became viral on Twitter after being brought up by the @Taktekbum account there. According to their bio, the @Taktekbum Twitter account actively explores the Indonesian startup industry. Several other Ruangguru employees responded to their tweet about this and shared about the same thing regarding the low pay they received. The day after this

discussion went viral on various social media, on March 14, 2021 the co-founder and Chief Product Officer (CPO) of Ruangguru spoke about this on Twitter. According to him, his company offers interns competitive pay based on the kind of job they undertake. Then, in order to receive feedback for further improvement of this internship system, he also offers a Google Form link. The conversation regarding this issue did not end there because several internet media outlets afterwards brought it to light and continued the discussion.

The creation of the online petition "Protect E-commerce Couriers" is another example of an action Ecommurz has done to support the welfare of workers. This action began when Project Multatuli, an online news source that regularly exposes the stories of marginalized groups, produced a series of articles regarding e-commerce couriers in June 2021. For example, are the articles "Lebaran with Latifah, traveling 184 KM to Deliver Packages," "Small Screw Machines 'Big Tech': Partnership Without Equality," and "The Courier's Story in Gorontalo: From the District Head's Trial to the Threat of a Machete in the Head". Through this report, Project Multatuli highlights the fact that many e-commerce couriers' welfare and safety are not assured even though online shopping site business grows, particularly in the pandemic era. There are couriers who experience threats frequently while performing their responsibilities (Dengo, 2021) and receive relatively low pay for their services despite their irregular work schedules (Singgih, 2021).

In response to this case, Ecommurz, together with other anonymous employee 'rant' accounts, namely Taktekbum and Design Rant and the social community Emancipate Indonesia created an online petition on change.org on behalf of themselves as the Workers' Union 4.0. Through this petition, they demand that the Ministry of Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia fulfill five standards to protect e-commerce couriers, including providing them with legal representation, ensuring their workplace safety, providing them with fair compensation plans, and educating the public about the COD (cash-on-delivery) service so that customers do not arbitrarily treat couriers (Union 4.0, 2021). 9,079 people have finally signed this petition.

Following this, Ida Fauziah, the Indonesian Minister of Manpower, met with a number of e-commerce couriers to discuss the issues they were having, including the low pay they were receiving, the lengthy hours they were working, the partnership arrangements that only benefited the company, and the lack of regulations that would have protected them (Artiyono, 2021). Following the discussion, the Ministry of Manpower committed to resolve the issue and added that it will further collaborate with the Ministry of Transportation.

### ***Socio-cultural Practices (Macro)***

Since 2020, there has been a new phenomenon, namely the emergence of Indonesian meme accounts on Instagram which specifically discuss the work culture in startups or technology-based startups as it is, such as @ecommurz, @ridehailing, and @taktekbum (Freischlad & Prasidya, 2021). With the rise of companies like Tokopedia, Traveloka, and Gojek that use technological advancements to solve problems and offer their goods and services, the existence of a startup ecosystem in Indonesia itself started to sprout in the 2010s. According to the Startup Ranking's ranking from 2020, Indonesia has 2,195 startups and is now ranked fifth among nations with the most startups worldwide. Furthermore,

Indonesia currently has 1 decacorn or startup with a valuation of more than US\$ 100 billion and 7 unicorns with a valuation of more than US\$ 10 billion (Katadata, 2021).

The rapid development of startups in Indonesia makes many young people interested in working for these technology-based companies. This enthusiasm may arise from a variety of factors, including the workplace atmosphere, which is viewed as more relaxed and flexible than that of major corporations and feels to offer more chances for everyone to create and contribute new ideas. Despite these benefits, it is also believed that the emergence of startups has sparked the development of the hustle culture, which encourages employees to put in extra time at work in order to achieve targets and gain more profit for the company. Hustle culture usually arises because the work environment is fast-paced, as the companies have the ambition to always create new innovations and changes. According to a survey by The Finery Report, up to 83.8% of respondents indicated they work more than they should, and 69.6% of respondents even admitted to working on the weekends. As a result, many of them work up to 75 to 80 hours in a week, which is significantly more than the recommended 40 hours a week for full-time employment.

### **Discussion**

All of the five memes that were analyzed highlight the hustle culture that many startup workers nowadays encounter. To this day, the dominant discourse circulating in the community is that the presence of startups has disrupted the traditional work culture in corporate companies by offering flexible working hours and providing more agency for employees to innovate. However, this flexible scheduling ended up having the opposite effect, forcing many employees to put in overtime hours, while some of them are underpaid. This hustle culture has now become something that is considered normal and glorified, and makes many workers feel they have to continue to work and be productive in order to be successful in their work (The Finery Report, 2021). Many end up feeling guilty if they do nothing. This has finally become a cultural hegemony that many parties have not realized has perpetuated. For example, are company leaders who make their employees have to work for long periods of time, the government continues to echo the slogan *kerja, kerja, kerja* (work, work, work), workers who continue to work beyond the working time stated in the contract, to the media that often displays a narrative that if we work hard we will be successful.

Ecommurz then tries to expose this reality using memes on their Instagram account in an effort to criticize and resist the hustle culture that is widespread among startups. For instance, they expose the "dark side" of startups, such as how many employees engage in excessive time-working practices, in addition to the commonly echoed positive aspects of startups. It is argued that this hustle culture should not become the norm because it causes many employees to feel burnout due to the amount of work they are required to accomplish. This account takes the proactive step of producing humorous memes to explore the reality of cultural hegemony in the startup environment, and is successful in gaining the attention of Instagram users who also felt relevant to the hustle culture issue.

Furthermore, the @ecommurz Instagram account later developed into a platform to promote class consciousness and have more conversations that voiced the opposition to the hustle culture. Followers of @ecommurz can have more freedom and comfort when discussing and complaining about the poor working circumstances they encounter at work, unlike talking about it directly. For instance, because they are concerned about the potential repercussions, interns may lack the bravery to immediately inform the company about the issues they are facing. Then, when members of this working group experience unfair treatment based on the rights they are entitled to, Ecommurz will demonstrate class solidarity to combat this situation and promote change. Ecommurz has proven their position and strength as a forum for groups of employees to voice up and cannot be ignored (Freischald & Prasyda, 2021). They demand that the working group's rights be adequately upheld instead of submitting to the arbitrariness with which they are treated.

This study highlights the fact that expressing criticism can take many forms and that the manner in which criticism is communicated can be influenced by a variety of factors. In the workplace, for example, it may be difficult for workers to express criticism directly due to power imbalances that may exist. As a result, they may need to find alternative ways to articulate their criticisms, such as through subtle or indirect means. The Ecommurz meme account has shown its uniqueness and potential for providing alternative space for startup workers to voice their criticisms. More importantly, they have raised the collective awareness of the working class on Instagram to be more critical of the treatment they receive at work through memes that discuss and expose the work culture at startups as it is. Workers can exert agency and resistance against the hegemonic forces that have been tied to them in the startup workplace by starting with this critical mindset.

The presence of criticism and resistance of hegemony that emerged through memes on Instagram is in line with the initial concept put forward by Gramsci (1971). He stated that the existence of the general public or ordinary people who are involved in discussions about this hegemonic discourse can form resistance hegemony against the dominant discourse (Cloud, 2020). Meanwhile, for people who have not experienced the hustle culture or worked at a startup directly, through this account they can also find out another side of the startup world that has rarely been discussed because it is covered by the dominant narrative. The findings of this study are consistent with those of earlier studies (Li, 2011; Kumar, 2015; Pettis, 2018; Contreras Jr. 2021), which also showed how memes on the internet and in social media can be used as tools to express criticism and to dominant groups and cultures.

### ***Research Implications***

The analysis of memes, particularly as they appear on social media platforms like Instagram, has significant implications for the field of communication studies. By examining the ways in which memes can be used as a form of cultural communication, we can gain insight into how cultural texts can be leveraged to challenge dominant cultural norms and values. For the practical implications, this can be especially valuable for businesses and governments, which may be able to use the insights gained from this study to better understand employee perspectives and their way of communication, including their ability

to communicate criticism, and to develop regulations that take into account the aspirations of workers.

## CONCLUSION

The study's findings indicate that middle-class workers are now using Instagram meme accounts to express their criticism and resistance to hustle culture's dominance in startups. Ecommurz addresses this by candidly exposing and discussing working conditions at startups in their memes. This Instagram account has democratized the conversation about issues and problems faced by many middle-class workers in the workplace, such as prolonged working hours, heavy workloads, low wages, and other workers' rights violations issues, through humorous memes and a conversational language style. As a result, Ecommurz finally succeeded in gathering many followers on Instagram who felt it was relevant to the memes and created a collective awareness among them.

According to Gramsci's (1971) concept of resistance to cultural hegemony, Ecommurz has demonstrated that they are working to build class awareness and resistance to hustle culture. Due to Ecommurz's popularity, stakeholders and company executives are now aware of this account's presence and voice. From this study, it is apparent that meme accounts on social media have the potential to serve as a platform or tool for expressing opposition to cultural hegemony and dominant discourse, and even to promote changes in real life. For the upcoming research, I suggest that it is necessary to also analyze other Instagram meme accounts in Indonesia, and measure the tangible impact they have created and brought to the industry.

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