

Digital Literacy Vs Flexing Culture on Youtube

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Article Information

Submitted January 10, 2022

Revision February 5, 2022

Accepted March 27, 2022

Published April 30, 2022

Abstract

This research aims to analyze how flexing can become a popular culture in Indonesia. This research analyzes the flexing phenomenon on YouTube social media for some Indonesian content creators. How can YouTube become a mechanism for spreading and flexing popular culture, and how is it related to digital literacy? This study used a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach and data collection through literature study and interviews. The Ecumenical Culture and Invasion diffusion theory is used as a theoretical framework. The results of the research stated that when it comes to Indonesian digital literacy, numerous people take the information hypocritically and are deceived by the lifestyle of influencers and try to follow the influencer's lifestyle. People who do not have an adequate understanding of digital literacy tend to believe what they see more easily. Listen and read regardless of their level of education and generate a desire to own things that are seen on the YouTube content watched. At the same time, people who know about digital literacy will tend to be more selective in finding and absorbing information.

Keywords: Flexing, popular culture, digital literacy, YouTube

Introduction

According to the Cambridge dictionary, flexing ^{is} shows off something owned or achieved unpleasantly. According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary, flexing is showing off something that is held conspicuously. Another definition states that flexing is a keyword often used on social media and has a symbolic meaning when discussing luxury goods or well-known fashion brands (Juha Park and Jaehoon Chun, 2021). In short, flexing focuses on showing off wealth.

Flexing is currently a popular term in Indonesia due to the emergence of the Indra Kenz alias Indra Kesuma case. He is a binary

option afiliator charged with fraud, with the number of victims reaching 40 people with a total loss of up to 44 billion rupiahs (Liputan 6.12/4/2022). Apart from being an affiliate, Indra Kenz is a content creator who frequently exhibits a luxurious lifestyle with YouTube subscribers of more than 1.32 million people. His subscribers tend to be smaller than Ria Rici's or Atta Halilintar's subscribers, which total 30.1 million and 29.7 million subscribers. Those public figures continually create video content that exhibits their luxurious lifestyle, similar to Boy Wiliam's YouTube content or Raffi Ahmad's and Nagita Slavina's Rans Entertainment. Flexing is a trend proliferated on various YouTube platforms for content

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creators. This trend is the background of the research, where flexing is a phenomenon that content creators carry out in Indonesia.

The problem formulation in this study is how flexing can transform into popular culture in Indonesia. This research analyzes the flexing phenomenon on YouTube for Indonesian content creators. How can YouTube become a mechanism for spreading and flexing popular culture, and how is it related to digital literacy? For this reason,

← *Change* ~~and flexing~~ *named flexing*

researchers conduct further research on the popular culture of flexing on YouTube and its relation to digital literacy. This study aims to identify and analyze the flexing phenomenon on YouTube for Indonesian content creators and to describe the public's perspective on the flexing content of these content creators and its relation to digital literacy.

Some previous studies as a reference in this study are:

No.	Research title	Writer's name	Institutional origin	Year	Category
1.	The Characteristic Of Fashion Flex On Social Media	Park Juha, Chun Jaehoon	Seoul National University	2021	International Journal
2.	Social Climber and Exhibition Culture: The Paradox of Contemporary Society's Lifestyle.	Mahyudin	Gajah Mada University	2017	National Journal
3.	The power of YouTube's New Media in shaping popular culture	Detya Wiryani, Tiarani Vidia Pratami	Indonesian Informatics and Business University	2019	National Journal
4.	Social And Cultural Change Due To Social Media	Dahlia Sarkari	Secretary of ASM BSI Jakarta	2016	National Journal
5.	Youtube, digital literacy, and the growth of knowledge	John Hartley	Queensland University Of Technology, Australia	2008	International Journal
6.	Digital Literacy, A New Challenge in Media Literacy	Ajani Restianty	London School of Public Relations	2018	National Journal
7.	The strength of New Media in shaping Popular culture in Indonesia	Rudy Setiawan	Mulawarman University	2013	National Journal

The Ecumene Culture Theory and the innovation diffusion theory are used to explain the flexing phenomena. These two theories are related. Communication is a fact of culture. As a cultural fact, communication can be studied utilizing a cultural perspective. On the other hand, cultural studies can

provide a more critical understanding of communication practices or communication phenomena (Momon Sudarma, 2014)

The theory of Ecumene Culture is one of the theories of globalization. Ecumene is a place of continuous interaction,

interpretation, and cultural exchange. Modern culture crosses distance, space, and time through technology (Dahlia Sarkawi, 2016). Western culture will dominate the world. The whole world will become a copy of lifestyles, consumption patterns, values, and norms as well as ideas and beliefs of western society. Globalization brings issues that can change cultural homogenization (more precisely, cultural homogenization into western culture) and capitalism. We can see how Indonesian content creators adopt the flexing culture from the west. Reporting to the official website of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia from an article entitled Crazy Rich, the flexing phenomenon has existed for centuries.

Long before the flexing term existed, flexing was known as conspicuous consumption. In 1899, Thorstein Veblen raised this theme in his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions*. Conspicuous' also describes how objects or goods are exhibited to show social status and position. High-class people use the money to buy luxury goods and services to conduct quality or financial strength. Thorstein Veblen observes that, at the time, silver spoons and corsets were symbols of social status in society.

With increasingly sophisticated information technology development, flexing activities are more accessible. Suppose during the Thorstein Veblen era. The super-rich showed off their silver spoons and corsets at the royal parties in this era of globalization. In that case, the "sultans" (high-class social level) show off through their respective social media pages. It is more practical, and the amplification is more global. These

phenomena emerge as contagious and endemic in Indonesia (Kemenkeu.go.id, 14/3/2022)

Based on the explanation above, the current flexing phenomenon is a culture absorbed from the western culture through globalization and technological developments, especially social media. The uniqueness of local indigenous culture will disappear due to the dominance of western civilization. Indigenous people need more time to accept the sophisticated western culture, and their tastes still need to be higher. Content creators who produce flexing content on YouTube attract a lot of audience attention.

The theory of innovation division is the following theory to describe how social media YouTube can create popular flexing culture. This theory talks about how new idea and technology ~~is~~ spread in a culture. Everett Rogers popularized this theory in 1964 through his book *Diffusion of innovations*. Diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through various channels and within a certain period in a social system (Setiawan, 2013). A diffusion is a form of communication that is specifically related to the spread of messages in the form of new ideas, or in Rogers' terms (1961), diffusion concerns "which is the spread of a new idea from its source of invention or creation to its ultimate users or adopters."

Before flexing, YouTube brings up new famous people through trending culture. The trending is a benchmark to see trends or popular culture fever that emerges in society (Momon Sudarma, 2014).

Method

^{The} This research uses qualitative methods. This method is a process to understand human or social phenomena by creating a comprehensive and complex picture that can be presented in words, reporting detailed arguments obtained from informant sources and carried out in a natural setting (Walidin, Saifullah & Tabrani in Rizal Fadli, 2021).

The research analyzes flexing on social media phenomena and ^{relates it to} digital literacy. Data collection ^{utilizes} literature study, specifically combining literature studies such as articles, books, and journals from the internet, and visual documentation studies by providing analysis on YouTube content for content creators who represent flexing. Furthermore, interviews with three informants using the purposive sampling method. All the informant ^{is} followers of the YouTube channel that often expose flexings, such as Atta Halilintar, Ria Ricis, Boy William channel, and Rans Entertainment.

analyzes flexing as a phenomenon on social media

Results and Discussion

Flexing As Popular Culture in Indonesia

Flexing is the result of the absorption of western culture through globalization resulting in the copying of lifestyles, consumption patterns, values, norms, ideas, and beliefs of western society to countries. Public concern about flexing stems from the Indra Kenz's case. He is a binary option affliator and content creator who uses flexing as marketing communication. He was proven to have committed fraud on 40 victims, with the victims' losses reaching 44 billion rupiahs. Since the case of the binary option was revealed in early 2022, flexing has started to be discussed a lot. The mass media,

psychologists, and academics also commented on this showing off wealth activity. Is it only Indra Kenz who flexes on social media? Flexing is a value used by other content creators in Indonesia, such as Ria Ricis, Atta Halilintar or Rafi Ahmad, and Nagita Slavina's Rans Entertainment.

Communication technology produces cultural products in large quantities (mass production), then disseminated (dissemination). This mass production has created a mass culture that has become popular culture. Pop culture is a commercial culture resulting from the mass output (Farid Hamid, 2012). Furthermore, according to Inda Fitriani (2012), Culture-creation, taste, and human initiative become popular culture when it fulfills several characteristics, specifically:

1. Trends, a culture that gets a trend and is followed or liked by many people has the potential to become popular culture;
2. Uniformity, a human creation that became a trend, was eventually followed by many copycats. The work can be a pioneer for other jobs that have identical characteristics; for example, the genre of pop music (taken from the word popular) is a musical genre in which the notation is not too complex, the song lyrics are simple, easy listening and easy to remember;
3. Adaptability, popular culture is easily enjoyed and adopted by audiences, and this leads to trends;
4. Durability, popular culture will be seen based on durability in the face of time. A pioneer of popular culture that can defend itself if competitors that later appear cannot compete with its uniqueness will survive.

Flexing has become popular culture because it fulfills the requirements in the point above. Many people are fond of the flexing content on social media, for example, content showing off luxury vehicles such as "Raffi-Nagita is traveling on a yacht to snack on durians." Another video is "Private Jet of the sultan's family," which was watched 1.2 million times even though it was only uploaded once last week. The number of viewers in a short time shows that many are interested in viewing the flexing content. YouTube promises financial benefits with more subscribers, and the number of times videos are watched encourages content creation to become a profession of interest. The type of content considered most in demand is then copied by other content creators, and so on, until content homogenization occurs as a role model. Initially, Atta Halilintar raided the luxury homes of top entrepreneurs and artists because he could attract a large audience. Other content creators, such as Boy Wiliam, adopted this content.

Popular culture can also come from anywhere, like the Korean wave that emerged from the ginseng land. Flexing emerged from the western world with the development of increasingly sophisticated technology. Flexing activities are becoming more accessible. In the past, during Thorstein Veblen's time, people labeled as wealthy showed off their silver spoons and corsets at parties of nobles. In this era of globalization, "sultans" show off through their respective social media pages. It's more practical, and the amplification is more global (Kemenkeu.go.id, 14/3/2022)

Flexing on Youtube Indonesian Content Creators

Flexing is a thriving phenomenon and is currently a trend among Indonesian content creators. For example, Atta Halilintar, Ria Ricis, Rans entertainment, Boy Wiliam and the one who got the most attention was Indra Kenz. According to Rhenald Kasali, a business expert who is also an academic at the University of Indonesia, Kompas.com (15/2/2022) reported that flexing is performed to show status and social position, create an impression on others and demonstrate ability, besides that flexing is also used to strategic marketing.

1. On YouTube, Ria Ricis with 30.1 million subscribers. In 1 month, Ria Ricis can upload around 49 videos.

The sample of flexing content is in the following:

- Showing off luxury goods by mentioning a nominal price, as in his vlog entitled "Husband repurchases a Car, shut up," was watched 790 thousand times and uploaded one month ago. This content showcases supercar cars and yachts, priced at 10 billion rupiahs.
- Content on luxury vehicles, such as in the range "daddy loves to ride a helicopter," which was uploaded one month ago and was watched 556 thousand times
- Surprise luxury gifts such as luxury vehicles, jewelry, or luxury holidays, as in the content "surprise give a car to mom," where the focus is on the luxury vehicle brand. The video has been watched 2.1 million times as "Ricis was bullied but got a car," which was scanned 3 million in five months.
- She shows off luxury homes, both his own and other artist's homes, for example,

- "See bang Ryan's new house," which was watched by 4.5 million in eight months.
2. Atta Halilintar, with the account name AH, has 29.7 million subscribers with 1700 videos As for Atta Halilintar's youtube flexing content are :
 - Shopping content with a nominal value of hundreds of millions, as in the range "Atta Aurel shopping for Eid clothes runs out of hundreds of millions," which was watched 774 thousand times in three weeks
 - Show off luxury homes with billions in value, both their own homes and other artists' homes, by mentioning the nominal price as in the content "AH's New House is almost finished," which was watched 747 thousand times in three weeks
 - They were showing off the holiday allowance by mentioning a nominal value of 3 billion and showing a picture of the money.
 - Buying luxury vehicles like Lamborgini and Hermes bags with the title "Aurel buys a bag worth a car," which was watched by 1 million in one month. Also, the content "atta buy 1 M bag for Aurel" was protected 2.8 million times.
 3. Rans Entertainment with 23.6 million subscribers with 2,916 videos
The flexing content on YouTube:
 - Showing off luxury vehicles such as in the content "Raffi-Nagita traveling by ferry to snack on durians," then "Private Jet of the sultan's family," which was watched 1.2 million times and was uploaded one week ago.
 - They showed off activities with exaggerated video captions by always using the word "sultan" and promoting certain places or trademarks.
 - The contents of the artist's house inspection are to show off the furniture and prices for the house.
 - The content is worth the material aspect, whether distributing money with the stated nominal, showing off luxury car gifts, or shopping with fantastic value.
 4. Boy Wiliam with 5.07 million subscribers, has a total of 330 videos. Flexing content on Boy William YouTube channel:
 - The content behind the door exposes the treasures and luxurious homes of mostly Chinese businessmen. For example, in "behind the door," Christie is a new singer with a luxury house; Natasha Vinski, Helena Lim, Dave, Airyn Tanu, Franses Susanto, and Valencia Tanusudibjo. These contents are watched as low as 1 million times and as high as 10 million on content behind Valencia Tanusudibjo's door.
 - Broker Kings content in which there are businessmen of Chinese blood who show off their luxurious lifestyle.
 5. Indra Kenz has 1.32 million subscribers and a total of 114 videos. The number of videos is less than Atta Halilintar or Ria Ricis. However, the flexing phenomenon has become a viral topic due to his arrest.
The flexing content on YouTube:
 - The prevalence of Indra Kenz's content is flexing. He doesn't hesitate to give hyperbolic captions by mentioning nominal prices. The content "35 billion bars and 35 billion cars" was viewed 9 million times in eleven months.
Ria Ricis, Atta Halilintar, and Rans Entertainment have identical content patterns. They both elevate the daily life of a family household by using symbols of luxury such as branded bags, supercars, and foreign-

made cars, giving each other lavish and expensive gifts. They also don't hesitate to title YouTube content by mentioning the nominal price of the items on display. Regardless of the value that each content creator wants to raise, what is visible is exposure to all forms of consumerism.

Apart from that, there are aspects of content marketing on the YouTube of these influencers. They make content blend with marketing communications. For example, Indra Kenz made flexing himself a testimony that the business he was running was very beneficial to make himself a rich man. In the end, people were interested in following the binary options he was promoting, and the fraud case occurred.

Youtube in Creating Popular Flexing Culture and its Relation to Digital Literacy

As reported in the journal the power of YouTube's New Media in shaping popular culture, YouTube has become the primary media to share information with society. Youtube is more than just a lifestyle but also an agent of change for all levels of organization (Wiryani and Vidya Pratami, 2019). Regarding the Gangnam Style phenomenon, which was popular on YouTube in 2012. When popularizing a cultural product, the media acts as a disseminator of information according to its function and forms public opinion, then develops into a uniformity of opinions and tastes. As a result, whatever is produced by the media will be accepted by the public as a cultural value (Setiawan, 2013).

A survey conducted by Hootsuite and we are social in 2021 shows that YouTube ranks at the top of the most popular social media for Indonesian people. YouTube was founded in 2005 and has become a new trend

on the Internet (Shuang Liu et al., 2015) and provides access for its users to share videos with others. YouTube plays a role in making moments in the media go viral, as in the case of Britain go talent Susan Boyle, who sang the song I Dreamed A Dream. From someone unknown to someone who gets popularity internationally and multi-million dollar contracts. YouTube has also become a media that revealed the famous singer Justin Bieber, which caught the attention of producers when they saw his online videos on YouTube. YouTube, in its era, was able to create international artists and provide access for people in any part of the world to share videos for any purpose, such as politics, education, entertainment, or information (Shuang Liu et al., 2015)

YouTube has also ~~issued~~ ^{bring about fame to} famous lip-sync singers like Norman Kamaru and Sinta-Jojo, "Keong Racun," in Indonesia. Their video was so viral and gave them popularity at that time. This research stated that YouTube could create popular culture. Popular culture is a culture born of the intention of the media. If the media can produce a cultural form, ^{then} the public will absorb it and make it an art form. Popularity is inseparable from the consumption behavior and determination of the mass media toward the people who act as consumers (Strinati, 2003). YouTube promises financial benefits based on subscribers and advertisers on the YouTube channel of someone considered influential or has a large number of followers, so it becomes a new business field for the people of Indonesia. Therefore, many people are competing to create YouTube channels with various contents.

So how does this relate to digital literacy? Muhamad Mufid (2005) Describes digital literacy as the ability of participants to use

computers as a medium of communication and understand their features. Furthermore, participants will gain experience following social cues or symbols in the communication media. This phenomenon means that what is watched becomes a frame of reference for someone and ~~will~~ ^{will} then influence someone. Furthermore, Sherry Turkle, a psychologist, explains the power of computers to provide social presence effects. Addiction will arise when the user can explore the world through the computer and can achieve the illusion of closeness and intimacy with the computer.

To answer questions regarding popular culture flexing on social media, YouTube, and its relation to digital literacy, the researchers interviewed three informants ^{based on} ~~regarding~~ their knowledge of flexing content for content creators on YouTube. With the following details:

1. The first informant, a housewife, 30 years old, has a bachelor's degree in nursing and has completed professional nursing education.
2. The second informant, an employee at a mining company aged 32, has a bachelor's degree.
3. The third informant, a 24-year-old graduate student who is also a mass media worker

Based on interviews with the three researchers obtained the results:

1. According to the first informant, she has been a subscriber of Atta Halilintar, Ria Ricis, and Rans Entertainment since the couple got married. She watches YouTube daily to kill time while caring for ^{her} ~~his~~ children and ^{her grocery} ~~his~~ shop. ~~He~~ ^{she} watches Youtube from getting up in the morning until before going to bed at night every

day. She gets happy watching their YouTube accounts and finding fashion inspiration from them. Aurel inspired almost all the fashion items she bought; she was even willing to accept a fake bag similar to what Aurel wore. She claimed to like the warmth of these couples. When asked about digital literacy, she realized it was just content and even said that no content ~~doesn't~~ ^{no} eat it. But she voluntarily watched their YouTube account. For him, flexing is not ~~his~~ ^{her} focus when ~~he~~ ^{she} watches. The value ~~he~~ ^{she} captures is the romance of the celebrity couple by giving each other gifts and having fun activities. Not infrequently, after watching YouTube Atta Halilintar-Aurel, Rafi-Nagita, and Ria Ricis-Rian, she hopes that her husband can also give sweet treatment like the husbands of these content creators. She feels she has a ^{new} standard of a "good husband."

2. According to the second informant, he uses YouTube as a substitute for television. As a miner who has to work far from urban areas, YouTube is entertainment that helps to overcome fatigue after work. He watches Boy William and Indra Kenz content. He does not observe the content of Atta Halilintar, Ria Ricis, and Rans Entertainment because he feels that he is not interested and has no benefit. He knows that what the two content creators are showing needs to be more accurate. However, he still watches Boy William's content because he feels he is getting information about the wealth of the conglomerates in Indonesia. Indra Kenz's content raises questions in the minds of informants, how can someone still very young become that rich? In the end, he watches Indra Kenz's content.

3. According to the Third Informant, he is a graduate student working in the mass media. He watches YouTube videos in his spare time. So only some days he watches YouTube. He realizes that currently, many Indonesian content creators exhibit flexing. It's just that he isn't interested in protecting it. According to his explanation, there is too much information on social media, so observing it all wastes time. The informant admitted that he was very selective in seeking information, especially since flexing content has no benefit because it only shows something everyone wants to have. The informant revealed that he had experienced symptoms of stress because there was too much information circulating on social media, so the informant had time to deactivate almost all of his social media to reduce exposure to reports that only added to the anxiety. For him, digital literacy is critical to distinguish which information can be absorbed and which cannot. He also realizes that everyone has their interests, so media references and information content of interest also vary.

Based on the results of interviews with informants, I draw several conclusions, including:

1. The level of education is not an absolute factor for someone competent in absorbing the information they receive
2. Men and women have different interests, perspectives, and focuses on viewing content. Women prioritize the emotions obtained from the spectacle presented, while men focus more on the benefits of video content.
3. People more often exposed to media literacy are more selective in choosing

information and thinking critically before seeking and absorbing information.

4. The duration of using social media, especially YouTube, affects what and how a person sees reality.

Conclusion

Flexing culture exists because of globalization and the development of Information and Communication technology. In short, western culture entered Indonesia due to media effects. Indonesian YouTube creators have widely adopted flexing with large subscribers, such as Raffi Ahmad-Nagita Slavina's Rans Entertainment, Atta Halilintar, Ria Ricis, Boy William, and the most phenomenal Indra Kenz. Flexing has become a popular culture on YouTube. YouTube, which generates financial benefits, increasingly makes flexing content adopted by other content creators. In the end, people who do not have an adequate understanding of digital literacy tend to believe what they see more easily. listen and read regardless of their level of education and generate a desire to own things that are seen on the YouTube content watched. At the same time, people who know about digital literacy will tend to be more selective in finding and absorbing information. Therefore digital literacy must continue to be carried out and target all groups without exception because, based on the results of this study, the level of education is not a benchmark that someone understands digital literacy and is not affected by exposure to the content he watches. The more often ~~someone~~ ^{people} watches ~~them~~ ^{them} YouTube, the greater the potential for ~~him~~ ^{him} to absorb its content. Therefore digital literacy must continue to be carried out and target all groups without exception because, based on the results of

this study, the level of education is not a benchmark that someone understands digital literacy and is not affected by exposure to the content they watch.

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