



Analysis of the Flexing Phenomenon on Social Media: Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Flexing is a new phenomenon or culture in the current digital era to show off wealth on social media to increase social status and self-existence. This study aims to analyze the impact of the flexing phenomenon from the Islamic perspective, specifically for Muslims on social media. The method uses descriptive qualitative research with a phenomenological approach instrument that discusses a description of a phenomenon that appears in the social environment. The analysis uses Social Learning Theory and data collection methods with observation and literature study. The research found several impacts that complete previous studies, specifically, 1). The formation of an attitude of haughty and arrogance (Riya'), 2). The new paradigm of an understanding of materialism, and 3). Changing the orientation of the afterlife to the temporal. 4). Creating innovative criminality.

Keywords: Flexing phenomenon, Social media, Digital era.

Introduction

Modernization develops new technologies, cultures, values, and lifestyles. On the other hand, it also emerges flexing cultures. Flexing is an act of showing off wealth or luxury for the sake of self-recognition or self-existence. Surprisingly, this phenomenon emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic, when people experienced an economic crisis (Mardiah, 2022). The impact of this pandemic has caused the employee to lose their jobs. According to Bank Indonesia data, as many as 87.5% of people belonging to MSMEs have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Of this number, 93.2% have negative effects on their work (Wijayanto et al., 2022). The

existence of internet technology and social media makes many people use social media to find sustenance, such as selling goods or services or creating content. One of the most popular social media content is content about flexing. However, social media is used to show off wealth and gain recognition from others (Huda et al., 2022). With recognition from others, it can improve its social level in society. The objects exhibited to the public the expensive and luxurious items, luxurious activities such as traveling abroad, luxury vehicles, and much money in cash or ATMs (Khayati et al., 2022).

Flexing on social media allows individuals with wealth and splendor to show off their

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wealth (Hafidz, 2022). In addition to showing off wealth, they offer instant businesses, commonly termed "rich in a fast/instant way" (Sholahudin, 2022). This phenomenon has become a viral, trending topic and rife due to the increasing number of super-rich or crazy-rich people who show off their assets or goods on social media that are luxurious, expensive, branded, extravagant, and magnificent habits (Windyaningrum et al., 2022). Artists or public figures who get the title of crazy rich are currently famous, such as Raffi Ahmad and Nagita Slavina, famous as "Sultan of Andara," Andre Taulany with the nickname "Sultan Bintaro," Atta Halilintar, a famous YouTuber. In addition to artists, some public figure called crazy-rich, such as Gilang Widya Pramana, with his business and own a private jet; Maharani Kemala, the founder of MS Glow; Rudi Salim, a successful businessman in various fields; Ahmad Sahroni, a senator member and entrepreneur, and recently viral named Indra Kesuma (Indra Kenz) as an entrepreneur and YouTuber who is currently exposed in Binomo investment scam case (Sholahudin, 2022).

The flexing aims to convince people that the Binomo investment business is promising and profitable, so they are interested in investing. However, Binomo's image is currently bad due to the many reports of victims of Binomo fraud, with the number of victims reaching 246 (Chandra & Widya Mutiara, 2022).

According to Prof. Rhenald Kasali (Rizka & Senja, 2022), flexing was initially used for marketing strategies, but unfortunately, many take advantage of flexing as a detrimental fraudulent medium. In addition, there is also the same fraudulent investment case with Indra Kenz, such as Doni Salmanan, Reza

Shahrani or Reza Paten, Dinar Wahyu Septian or Wahyu Kenzo, who were all caught in the same case (Dzulfaroh & Nugroho, 2022).

Flexing culture comes from Westernizing the values of materialism, hedonism, and consumerism (Farid, 2022). The spread of materialism, consumerism, and hedonism has been attached to society (due to Westernization) to raise their social status (social climber) or look like rich people (Hafidz, 2022). The public figures who flex, such as Atta Halilintar, Ria Ricis, Raffi Ahmad, Baim Wong, etc., have many social media followers, and they influence their followers to dissolve in a culture of materialism. It is feared that Muslims who make themselves public figures or role models will follow this behavior or make wealth the main goal, and follow a lifestyle and instant business, which turns out to be a fraud as in the case of fraud by the Umrah Travel Agency PT. First Anugerah Karya Wisata, or known as First Travel. The number of victims affected by the fraud amounted to 58,682 people, with a total loss of 839.12 billion Rupiah (Chonyta & Nasiya, 2022).

In the flexing concept, culture in the digital era is a substantial problem for Muslims nowadays. Muslims experience high engagement in flexing culture on social media and consume flexing content frequently. It is feared that if Muslims consume the content regularly and continuously, the culture will be internalized and imitated. Moreover, this culture emerged during the economic crisis in the Covid-19 pandemic, which psychologically weakened rationality and affected flexing easily. The kind of flexing includes: 1). The main thing is driving capital or wealth and forgetting Islamic values, 2). Construct flexing behavior as the main goal if succeeded in

obtaining wealth, and 3). They were easily influenced by business scams owned by public figures or crazy rich such as in the case of First Travel Umrah service fraud, and Indra Kenz and some crazy rich or public figures affected by other similar cases.

So from this study, researchers want to analyze the impact of flexing culture in social media in today's all-digital era. Previous research, such as Wahyudin's research in his journal entitled "Flexing Studies in the View of Hadith with Thematic Methods and Analysis of Social Media Ethics," found flexing had a bad impact, specifically damage to human morals, only focusing on the property and arises of arrogant attitudes (Riya'). While in Anisatul's research entitled "The Flexing Phenomenon: Showing Off on Social Media in the Perspective of Islamic Ethics" found the impact or effect of the flexing phenomenon, specifically initiating an attitude of arrogance in humans/individuals. This research aims to complete the impact of the flexing phenomenon broadly on the perspective of Islamic ethics or hadith but on all aspects of Islamic teachings, including Islamic ethics, Islamic thought, and the orientation of human life in Islam.

Method

This study used descriptive qualitative research methods with a phenomenological approach. According to Kuswarno (Viviani et al., 2018), qualitative research methods use data such as oral and written forms of actions/ behaviors, reality/phenomena, events, and knowledge from a study or learning. According to Primadhany (P. K. Putri, 2016), the descriptive method means explaining the results of research in a description

with a detailed explanation. Sukmadinata (Zulkhairi et al., 2018) stated that qualitative descriptive research methods focus on elaborating existing phenomena naturally and constructing community reality by paying attention to aspects of characteristics, relationships between activities, and the quality of a phenomenon. In comparison, phenomenology means examining how phenomena occur consciously in action or behavior and accepting a phenomenon in a community environment. Qualitative does not have data in numbers (Sukma Alam, 2020). Qualitative data is non-numeric and emphasizes aspects of words describing an observed phenomenon, such as data from observations or observations, interviews, questionnaires, literature studies, etc. (Lubis et al., 2022). Qualitative research is used to understand the reality experienced by research subjects by explaining the research results with oral and written explanations (Ridwan & Aslinda, 2022). While Sugiyono explained that qualitative research aims to seek, develop and find knowledge and is expected to find new knowledge (Irfan et al., 2020).

Data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data is the preliminary data that will be analyzed and concluded. This data is used as the first source of information. Secondary data is complementary data that indirectly provides data to researchers (Aini Arrochmah, 2021). Primary data sources are literature studies and observations. Reference sources in literature studies contain books, articles, and journals related to flexing, Islam, and the Quran and Hadith. Observation is accomplished by surveying reality or flexing phenomenon.

Data analysis in this study uses qualitative analysis with stages including organizing, managing, synthesizing, and finding patterns described in written form. According to Jawade (Hafidz, 2022), qualitative analysis is understood as the process of deciphering data in quality in the form of sentences that are continuous, organized, logical, effective, and do not overlap, making it easier to interpret data or understand the data that has been analyzed. Miles and Huberman's theory states that qualitative data analysis techniques are accomplished by collecting data, reducing to find patterns in the data set following the problems studied, then displaying data as a whole to draw conclusions and verify data (Mujtahidah, 2018).

Result

The origin of the term flexing, according to Dictionary.com, comes from black slang, which has the meaning "showing courage" or "showing off" since the 1990s (Arsyad, 2022). In the previous discussion, flexing is a millennial term that refers to showing off wealth to gain social status, recognition, and high self-existence using social media (Putu et al., 2022). According to Sarah's research, another purpose of flexing behavior can be termed to meet or vent the ego of the individual flexing (Crump, 2022). In economics, this phenomenon is known as "Conspicuous Consumption," meaning the consumption of goods, services, or recreation of high value, either consciously or unconsciously, to show and improve social status. This flexing culture is not something new, but nowadays, social media facilitates influencers to prominently display forms of consuming expensive goods or services. Excessive consumption of goods has become a lifestyle of contemporary

society that makes materialism the primary focus; as a form of worship and madness for materialism, they consume these things excessively (Mahyuddin, 2017).

According to Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, the basis for showing off his wealth is the need for self-esteem and self-actualization (Mcleod, 2018). However, flexing to satisfy the need for respect and self-actualization is considered immoral or inhumane in religion and ethics.

Long before the social media era, people flaunted their wealth through television, magazines, newspapers, and directly through conversation (Haryanto, 2014; Sholahudin, 2022). However, social media make it easy for them to reach all levels of society to show off (Bakti et al., 2020; Paramesti et al., 2021). Social media support flexes well because people spend much time on social media for activities such as connecting with others and looking for information (Thoumrungroje, 2014). Although technology and science are rapidly developing, morality and ethical values are declining. The current era is called the Post Truth era, where lies can be wrapped as if they are the truth (Tiggemann & Anderberg, 2019). As a result, there are many hoaxes, fraud, fighting, hate speech, and other bad things or twit war (Darmalaksana, 2022).

Moreover, the internet and social media are increasing the number of frauds worldwide (Banerjee & Haque, 2018). Let us look forward to the case of Indra Kesuma (Indra Kenz), arrested by the authorities a few years ago for running an online trading business fraud (Herlina & Nurhaliza, 2022). They influence the public to join the Binary Options or Binomo trading business. They also offer training by obliging to trade with the lure of getting big returns.

In principle, the Islamic perspective in considering a culture or thought is divided into two: 1). Accept it if it follows Islamic or religious values and does not conflict with them. Such was the culture of clothing robes and imamah (headbands) in the time of the apostles. 2). Refuse if it is not following Islamic or religious values, such as the culture at the time of the apostle, namely drinking alcohol, gambling, worshiping idols, burying baby girls, drawing fate with arrows, and others. It is a culture or values contrary to religious values (Mustafa, 2018).

The Impact of Flexing on Society in Islamic Review

In Social Learning Theory, Albert Bandura invented the term observational learning, which states that humans can learn behaviors, attitudes, and skills from people they idolize, primordial or public figures, by observing these figures to influence their behavior (Rizka & Senja, 2022). Bandura stated that the learning process of forming individual behavior is many and almost all processes through observation of the behavior of other individuals or communities (Ismail et al., 2020). The observational learning model is carried out by observing and imitating others like a child imitating his mother. Observational learning has four stages: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Nursani et al., 2017). Factors that drive the individual to do observational learning and self-regulation on the people they follow include: 1) There is a reward from the behavior carried out by the figure so that the individual is encouraged to imitate the figure, 2) There are similarities in physical aspects, hobbies/preferences, paradigms, and others in individuals, and 3) Low levels of self-confidence and self-esteem

or independence in individuals make it easy to imitate the behavior of others.

Related to social learning theory, if people follow flexing content, see flexing content, follow public figures who do flexing become their role models and always consume it in their daily lives, they will be affected by flexing content and implement it into their life either in their values, mindset, and behavior. The individual enters the observational learning phase, which includes paying attention or observing, storing or absorbing information, reproducing or developing information, and making it a motivation. So that the learning process to form new behaviors is formed because of watching the content continuously. Following SOL theory, the driving factor that causes individuals to be interested in following the values and behaviors of flexing cultures or civilizing public figures is the existence of 1). The rewards or prizes obtained when following public figures who flex high social status and get abundant wealth. 2), There are similarities in physical aspects, hobbies/preferences to imitate or imitate the character figured, and 3). Flexing is caused by low trust or self-esteem. It is easy to be influenced to imitate the public figure's behavior, low confidence, or self-esteem due to not having what the public figure has.

Based on the theory of Social Learning Theory if it is related to the phenomenon of flexing that stimulates social media with the values they have, and previous research that found the impact of flexing, researchers found the impact of flexing in the review of Islamic thought, including 1) The formation of arrogant attitudes (Riya'); 2) The formation of materialism understanding; and 3) Changing the orientation of the afterlife to worldly; 4) Shaping Innovative criminality.

Discussion

Initiating a Riya' and Arrogant Attitude

Linguistically, the word riya' comes from the word Riya or ria (رِيَاءٌ), which has roots in the word race (رَأَى), which means "to see." According to the language, the word ria is mukhabarat from Kazan final (لَاعَفَ), which means to do something to be seen by humans. In Arabic speech, this word has the meaning of showing excessive behavior in order to gain popularity (Zulfikar, 2018). According to Al-Ghazali (Farwati, 2020), riya create from the word rupiah, which means to see. Riya' means behavior that deliberately shows or exhibits good deeds or good deeds to others to get admiration. Riya is a hidden shirk (Mufid, 2018). Showing off acts of worship consisting of prayer, fasting, prayer, hajj, and worshiping fellow humans such as zakat, infaq, or alms (Avrillia, 2021). Abdul Qadir Jailani, in his book *Al-faithful Arabbani*, analogizes flexing (Riya') are like people who dress cleanly but have dirty hearts (Farwati, 2020). The riya' behavior is derived from Sum'ah. Sum'ah means people who accomplish worship with a purpose or intention to Allah. However, the confession or pledge is inversely proportional to the actual purpose or intention to get good judgment from others (Fatmawati et al., 2021).

According to Al-Ghazali in his work entitled *Al-Arba'in Fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, arrogant is one of the ten main mazmumah or despicable qualities (Adam et al., 2023). Arrogant comes from the Arabic *Al-Kibr* or *takabbur*, which means to consider themselves better than others and consider others inferior or have shortcomings that they do not have to degrade others. The word *takabbur*, a loanword from Arabic to Indonesian, means arrogant, derived from the Arabic word *takabbara-*

yatakabbaru, which means arrogant or proud (Taufikurrahman, 2021). *Takabbur* usually exhibits science, worship, family, beautiful physique, possessions, wealth, and something that can cause pride and devalue others.

The existence of flexing culture causes the growth of Riya (showing off) and arrogant attitudes. The phenomena of showing off wealth on social media and in real life cause people to be affected by Riya's arrogant attitudes. These attitudes are forbidden in Islamic thought. They tend to follow and justify these behaviors because they raise social status and legitimacy through some Islamic public figure who also flexes in their social media. Allah SWT forbids Riya and arrogant attitudes and gets the value of sin. In *Al-Baqarah* 2:264, Allah states that riya deeds can remove the reward of alms. In *Anisa* 4:142, Riya's arrogant behavior is included in the behavior of hypocrites because of feeling selfish and not founded on faith in Allah SWT.

Furthermore, in QS *Al-Ma'un* 107:4-7 Allah also states that it is wretched for those who pray because of three things: neglecting to pray, flexing (Riya), and refusing to help with valuable goods. In the hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslims from Abu Hurairah RA, the Prophet of Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated that seven groups are given the shade of Allah on the day of no shade (doomsday). One is alms in secret in the hadith narrated by Ahmad (Al-Nawawi, 2015).

The Qur'anic argument that discusses vanity is found in *Al-Ghafir* 40:60; Allah states that those who are arrogant and refuse to worship will be punished in hell. Next, in *Al-Isra* 17:37, Allah also stated that humans should not walk on the earth arrogantly because it will not pierce the sky or make it as high as a mountain. Allah Almighty is very

displeased with pride; it can be seen in QS An-Nisa 4:36 and QS Luqman 31:18. In Al-A'raf 7:40, Allah also declares that he will not open the gates of heaven to the arrogant Muslims. While the hadith discussing the nature of arrogance is like the Muslim narration (Al-Nawawi, 2015), the apostle states Allah will punish the scornful poor grievously.

Shaping the Understanding of Materialism

The development of the digital era has brought materialism or ideology (Sholahudin, 2022), which continues to develop. However, the norms, rules, and human rights as the basis for social behavior are weakening (Yusrifa, 2020). Karl Marx is an important figure in the materialist school of thought, which considers getting absolute happiness, specifically by having as much material as possible and managing well so that the individual economy increases (N. A. Putri, 2022). This ideology resulted in a new society in terms of understanding, values, and culture. The ideology of materialism puts material as the highest value, a source of pleasure or happiness, the main goal, and as a paradigm. It means materialism only considers important points exclusively material and ignores the spiritual aspect. Materialism rejects the existence of non-material or immaterial (Juwaini & Rahmasari, 2022). The immaterial includes spirituality (religiosity), rules, or norms, which are not the main human goals (Muttaqin & Ardianto, 2019). The behavior of individuals who consume goods or services excessively is called consumptive behavior. Thus, in the era of globalization and postmodernism, it is known as the "consumption society," according to Jean Baudrillard (Fitriya, 2022). According to him, individuals who consume materials consume

goods and services, which are also included in the material in the form of images and lifestyle from buying these materials (Faridah, 2022). In addition, individuals who consume goods or services aim not only to obtain use value or benefit from a good or service purchased or obtained but to obtain prestige value, image, and social status from owning the good or service. Understanding consumerism that aims to obtain products to seek prestige value and social status forms a compulsive urge to make material purchases to find it (Wulandari, 2018). Individuals with materialism tend to prioritize their selfishness to get material, resulting in a loss of care and empathy and the formation of hedonistic consideration that prioritizes material or worldly pleasures (Ismail, 2020). It has become a lifestyle that has become a trend today (Balik, 2020).

In addition to forming derivatives of consumerist behavior, flexing can also construct hedonistic thought in Muslims, which is the object that gives great happiness and try to pursue it. As a result, Muslim behavior is inclined toward worldly passions. Understanding materialism that initiates hedonism and consumerism is problematic and prohibited in Islamic thought (Ramadan & Fitriah, 2019). Islam orients human life to pursue the afterlife and do charity, barakah, infaq, and alms. The impact of materialism understanding for Muslims includes 1). Tends to follow lust, 2). Not objective or not following the value of truth in Islam, 3). Avoid social charity (zakat, infaq, alms, etc.), 4). Be individualist, 5). Violate norms to achieve goals; 6). Loss of the mentality of hard work and only willing to work instantly with big profits, and 7). Loss of care and empathy. 8) Making wealth the standard of determining social acceptance to individuals.

In the Qur'anic verse, Allah Almighty in QS Ali-Imran 3:14 states that the happiness of life is better than material, and the happiness of the rest of the world is to be by his side. In QS Al-Anfal 8:28, Allah SWT also conveys that all possessions owned are tests for His servants. Other verses, such as Al-Baqarah 2:261, state that Allah will multiply his wealth if infaq in the way of Allah like a seed that grows seven grains, and each grain amounts to one hundred seeds.

Changing the Orientation of the Afterlife

According to Imam Al-Ghazali, the afterlife is the greatest goal for achieving true happiness (Rohayati et al., 2018). In Islam, mankind should drive the afterlife as an ideal of life by pursuing true happiness because the afterlife is eternal. In contrast, the world's life is temporary (V. Putri et al., 2019). A flexing culture spread in nowadays's all-digital life era causes the community, especially the Islam people, to be influenced to pursue worldly and ignore the afterlife. People are oriented to pursue the afterlife (paradise) in Al-Hadid 57:21. In the previous verse, Al-Hadid 57:20, Allah also states that the world's life is a game and a joke and deceptive. In other verses, such as Al-An'am 6:32, Allah declares the exact point regarding the world's life, which is just a game and joke, and declares the afterlife in heaven is much better.

In the hadith, the Messenger of Allah also conveyed the world's position or degree of life by giving parables. In the hadith narrated by At-Tirmidhi, the Prophet Muhammad stated that if this world is worth in the sight of Allah as big as a mosquito's wings, He will not give it to an infidel, even a sip of water (Al-Nawawi, 2015). In another Hadith, the

Prophet Muhammad also gave a parable about the picture of world life in the hadith of Muslim narration recounted by Dzabir (RA) (Al-Nawawi, 2015). The Prophet Muhammad stated that the life of this world is far more despicable than the carcass of a goat with deformed ears.

Creating Innovative Crime

As'ad and Moh. Hafid's research stated that flexing behavior is included in moral disengagement or behavior unfollowing universal moral standards and dehumanizing (As'ad & Hafid, 2022). In the current era of social media, there are many emergencies of hoaxes, hate speech, cyberbullying, and flexing, causing a loss of objectivity and increasing subjectivity, uncertainty, and ambiguity. The post-truth era means lies can be disguised as truth, which often happens, especially in Indonesia (Darmalaksana, 2022). It violates Islamic thought found in Al-Baqarah 2:42, which forbids combining truth with godliness.

In the research of Dewi et al. (2022), specific behavior that aims to get more attention, get social status, or social support in social media is called Oversharing. In principle, flexing is a form of wealth oversharing. Oversharing can endanger its users because it provides too much personal information so that there is no boundary between privacy and non-privacy. The impact on individuals who overshare has the potential for data leakage of secret personal information, cyberbullying, and potential victims of crime. Flexing behavior that shows off his ATMs, wealth, luxury activities, and luxury assets also has the potential to become a criminal target. In addition, as several cases

described earlier, it causes many cases of trading, traveling, and other scams to become rife due to flexing and taking many victims (Hafidz, 2022). Such deception is stated in the Qur'anic verse Surah Al-Baqarah 2:105, as those who do not believe in the Verses of Allah.

Conclusion

Flexing is prohibited in Islam and forbidden for Muslims because it has provoked the loss of Islamic values in Muslims. The flexing impact is: 1). Initiating Riya an arrogant attitude, 2). Developing a materialistic orientation and ignoring social charity (zakat, infaq, alms, etc.), being individualist, violating norms to achieve goals, a poor hard work mentality, pursuing instant results, and making wealth the standard of determining social imagining to individuals, 3). Change the orientation of the afterlife, and 4) Shape Innovative Crime. Some of these effects contradict Islamic thought that can provide wealth for humans wisely and follow religious values. Making wealth aims to get closer to Allah by doing social worship such as zakat, infaq, and alms, as well as living a life with simplicity, social life, empathy, and strengthening Islamic brotherhood (ukhuwah). Islam does not forbid its people to pursue material but makes them used for the path of Islam and not to be used as the main purpose of life. Islam commands Muslims to pursue the afterlife by making the life of the world a gathering place for charity and world success based on Islam to create a balance of world life and the afterlife.

Although flexing behavior aims to improve social status and self-existence or, in Abraham Maslow's theory, to meet the

needs of self-esteem and self-actualization, it does not mean that flexing is the right way. Improving social status should be done in a good and correct way. Furthermore, it does not violate ethics and Islamic thought.

The contribution of this study lies in finding the impact of flexing culture by combining social media content analysis and communication theory with basic Islamic principles with a Social Learning Theory approach. This study is only limited to finding the negative impact of flexing culture on Muslims; for this reason, researchers provide advice to further researchers to be able to overcome the negative impacts of flexing culture or be able to find solutions to problems related to flexing on social media or find efforts to be able to devastate flexing.

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