

CELEBRATING VIRTUAL EXISTENCE ON SOCIAL CLASS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

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Lifestyle is no longer just about meeting basic needs or cultural practices through material possessions, but also as a way to display oneself in front of others. There are many social meanings associated with this, and members of society are often involved in conflicts regarding social status. Consumer culture, where consumer products are used to build lifestyle, personality, and social status, is a typical phenomenon of our time. This research involves a qualitative descriptive method in which the researcher describes different situations, conditions, and variables. To collect relevant data, the research utilizes secondary data techniques and photo searches on social media. Flexing, which has become a new and popular culture among the public, has become a widely discussed issue across various social groups. Flexing content on social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook is often posted with the intention of gaining recognition, honor, and social status, although the wealth displayed may not always come from personal asset ownership. The conclusion drawn from this is that flexing is often viewed as deceitful because those who do it do not conform to reality. Flexing is done by people who want to show that they have high social status.

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1. Introduction

The term "flexing" is used to describe the behavior of someone who often flaunts their wealth. This behavior has become more prevalent due to the existence of social media, where people compete to showcase their possessions and riches, such as luxury goods, overseas vacations, private jets, and various other luxury items. The purpose of this behavior is to demonstrate one's social position and status, as well as their abilities, and to influence others' perceptions of themselves (Darmalaksana, 2022).

"Individuals who engage in 'flexing' behavior or actions tend to be different from those who are actually wealthy. True wealthy individuals do not want to draw attention to

themselves. There is a saying that "poverty screams, but wealth whispers" which means that the poor are more visible, while the wealthy tend to be humble." (Rahardjo, 2009).

Along with the changing times, villages are transformed into urban areas and undergo changes in form, function, physical buildings, landscape, and people. The increase in prosperity also contributes to the development of lifestyles, and society often displays hedonistic behavior directly or through social media (Rahadi, 2017).

Currently, lifestyle is no longer just about meeting basic needs or cultural practices through material possessions, but also as a way to display oneself in front of others. There are many social meanings associated with this, and members of society are often involved in conflicts regarding social status. Consumer culture, where consumer products are used to build lifestyle, personality, and social status, is a typical phenomenon of our time (Subagya, 2010).

In terms of behavior and lifestyle, individuals are generally influenced by their social class in their consumer culture. Higher social classes typically exhibit characteristics in their consumption patterns, while lower or middle social classes also have distinct features in their consumption patterns. Due to differences in each individual's consumption ability, this results in differentiation and can lead to social actions or behaviors called "social climbers" where someone tries to improve their social status. There are various ways to meet the demands of current lifestyles and fulfill the need to appear wealthy. (Agustianti & Amir, 2020).

In modern society, the changes in consumption behavior that occur indicate that the desire for consumption has exceeded the limits of insanity. In everyday life, there are many meanings that emerge, both rational and irrational. This phenomenon is important to study because it not only occurs among the upper class or wealthy families, but also appears in mass culture consumption among various groups, including the lower middle class or people with limited financial means. (Wang, D., & Chan, C. M, 2019).

Some people consider this phenomenon as a cultural dynamic, which means that culture is always moving and forming new cultures. However, this behavior cannot only be regarded as a forward movement because it is also related to ecstasy and pathology. Baudrillard used the term "social disease and intoxication" to describe this, which occurs in various aspects of contemporary life such as entertainment, politics, communication, commodities, sex, and even consumption (Mahyuddin, 2019).

Money currently plays an important social role, as it is known to function as an economic measure. One's wealth can increase their social status, honor, and reputation within society. To gain these benefits, one's wealth must be demonstrated through generosity and luxurious lifestyle. Nowadays, showcasing wealth through social media has become commonplace and a public spectacle. Individuals who showcase their wealth are expected to enhance their social status, thus being considered equal to aristocrats. (Bakti et al., 2020).

Wisdom and focus have shifted in today's society, where people are more interested in luxury and immediate pleasure, which can force them into a cycle of hard work or an excessive work culture. Sometimes, a person's obsession with desires and false images can overpower them, causing them to lose focus on spirituality and wisdom, which can help them achieve greater happiness and inner peace (Avianto, 2022).

According to Marx, ideas have a highly abstract nature and therefore do not always reflect empirical reality in society. As expressed by Umanailo (2017), social change that occurs due to the presence of social media does not only arise from ideas, but also from material factors.

To publish something on social media, there is usually a certain intention behind it, whether it is to promote goodness or to flaunt wealth. However, this purpose needs to be analyzed further and questioned. Based on psychological research, individuals who are used to "flexing" or flaunting their wealth tend to become obsessed and repeat the behavior (Musman, 2020). Those who have become accustomed to this behavior can become addicted, without considering the impact on their finances. In addition, owning branded goods that are always new can increase consumerism and encourage someone to continue posting about their wealth on social media (Musman, 2020).

Revealing the fact that income showcased by displaying wealth is not always obtained honestly, but can come from fraud by using trading application Binomo, as exposed by the issue. In addition, many celebrities and influencers do good deeds only to receive praise and social status recognition from society. This case shows that what appears is not always in line with reality. Therefore, as social media users, we need to be wise in assessing and imitating what is viral, as well as understanding the inequality in social relationships.

This article examines the phenomenon of flexing, which refers to the behavior of displaying wealth and luxurious lifestyles to the public, while considering all the aspects involved. Additionally, the author will also explain the impact of flexing on consumption patterns, uncover facts from case studies about income used to display wealth, and analyze the symbolic meaning within society. The author will study the behavior of flexing by considering the social context and examining how this phenomenon is manifested on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and others.

2. Method

In this study, the researcher utilized a qualitative method that adopted a phenomenological approach and was descriptive in nature. The purpose of this research is to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of flexing, which is currently a hot topic in society. In a descriptive context, the researcher will describe various situations, conditions, and variables related to the phenomenon. This study is focused on issues of dynamics, lifestyle, and consumption patterns.

In this study, the method used includes the elaboration and exploratory steps outlined in qualitative research. The research selected a phenomenological approach with a focus on the behavior of flexing in contemporary lifestyles as a social stage (Nugrahani & Hum, 2014) as the reason for using this method.

Meanwhile, the phenomenological approach attempts to explain the meaning associated with the concept. Therefore, in this case, the researcher wants to understand the meaning desired by someone who is engaging in flexing.

The data collection is carried out through non-participant observation, where the researcher only observes phenomena that occur on social media. Additionally, documentation

is also important in data collection, such as collecting images or photos from social media platforms such as Instagram, Tiktok, and Facebook. This data collection is supported by research procedures using secondary data. Secondary data itself is the search for relevant data to enhance research insights, particularly related to displays of wealth.

3. Results and Discussion

In this modern era, a new culture has emerged that we often see every day called "flexing", which is a tendency to showcase wealth as a symbol of human life's grandeur. Not only focusing on the real world, but also the virtual world through social media such as Facebook pages, Instagram photos, thoughts, feelings, and actions uploaded on TikTok. All of this fulfills our needs in daily life, where many people express happiness, beauty, and joy through commonly communicated symbols and meanings. Sometimes, there are moments of joy in social activities that are not shared with others, but the purpose of all this is not only to share information but also to display and explain their presence in their social circles.

Everyone in the world seems to be unable to avoid showing off behavior nowadays. In this context, happiness and peace are no longer achievements of gratitude towards oneself, but are considered as a natural pleasure that depends on how others and their close ones acknowledge them. Many people are even willing to spend money to buy branded goods, go on vacations abroad, and eat at expensive restaurants, all done with the aim of showing off on social media and gaining social recognition. All of these demonstrate a decline in critical thinking ability and a decrease in mental values. (Lee, S. Y., & Kim, M. S., 2018).

The following are Indonesian female celebrities who have abundant wealth and flaunt their riches through various activities.



Figure 1. Olla Ramlan

Regarding fashion, Olla Ramlan is an artist who never misses using Hermès bags, which can cost hundreds of millions to billions of rupiah. (Manado Tribun News, 2019)

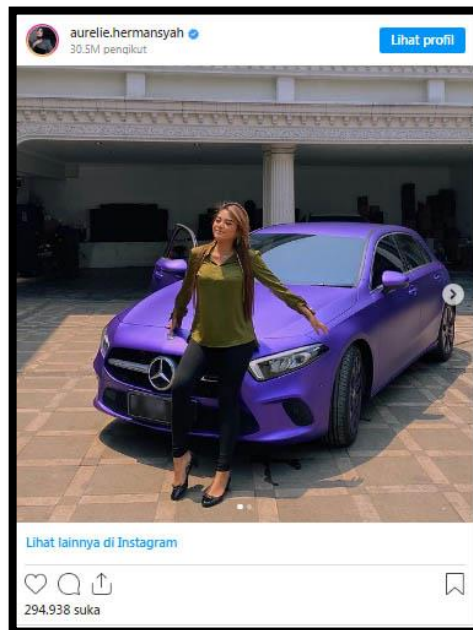


Figure 2. Aurelie Hermansyah

Aurelie Hermansyah also likes to share her photos with luxurious cars that cost more than 1 billion. (Manado Tribun News, 2019).

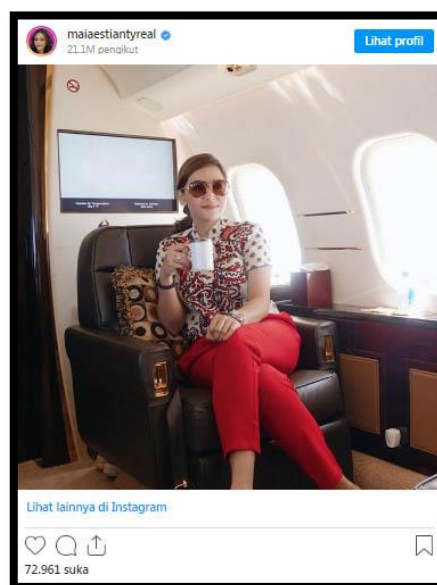


Figure 3. Maia Estianty

Rolex watches, Hermès bags, and Chanel jackets are some of the luxury items owned by Maia Estianty. She also enjoys taking photos while on her private jet. Queen! (Manado Tribun News, 2019)

From a psychological perspective, the majority of individuals are motivated to perform certain actions because of their desire to demonstrate their presence in the social environment. The Indonesian psychology forum confirms this by providing examples of behaviors such as taking selfies in a luxury car, showing off trips on planes, uploading pictures of expensive food, and photos that reflect a luxurious lifestyle.

In addition to displaying social status differences, symbolism, and social achievement, consumption can also be interpreted as language and symbols. People not only use things for their value and usefulness, but also to convey messages and meanings behind them. And this can also be used to express someone's social status in society. (Bourdieu, P. 1984).

Often we find actions called flexing or showing off wealth on various social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and others. This activity involves displaying one's luxury and achievements to gain attention. In Indonesia, many vloggers and content creators create flexing content as part of their social media presence. This phenomenon is becoming popular on social media as it offers competition among people who want to flaunt their wealth in society. (liputan6.com, 2022).

The idea of "flexing" has been applied in the field of marketing, which is a theory of consumer behavior that involves displaying various forms of consumption intentionally to others. The phenomenon of flexing has actually been around for a long time, but what sets it apart today is that others signal in a more widespread way through social media. For example, a doctor who has a clinic or practice at home may display their certificate or achievements on social media. (Schau, H. J., Muñiz Jr, A. M., & Arnould, E. J, 2009).

The drastic change in the behavior of flexing or showing off wealth in society is evidence of the new consumption habits of modern society. It has gone beyond reasonable limits and become excessively extravagant. Human daily life is now filled with hedonistic pleasures and consumption that have both rational and irrational symbols and meanings. This has become a new culture and is commonly practiced by many people, so it needs to be further studied because this phenomenon has spread across all layers of society, from the upper to the lower social classes.

In today's era, popularity displayed on social media is not only based on someone's physical appearance, but can also be seen through individual statistics displayed in non-physical forms such as prestige. For example, someone can show their prestige by choosing expensive restaurants, shopping centers, or recreational places, and then sharing photos or videos of their experiences on their social media account to be viewed by many people. This indicates that they are respected in society and pay attention to their social status.

The display of videos and photos on social media has become a new phenomenon in postmodern society, as a result of high levels of consumption. This phenomenon is also a new social reality. It cannot be denied that in today's age, showcasing one's social and cultural identity can be done most effectively through this activity."

Using the flexing strategy in influencer marketing is crucial in attracting the attention of influencer followers on social media. Flexing can influence the subconscious mind of humans and often causes them to imitate the appearance of others who are perceived to be better than themselves. As a result, when someone sees another person's success, they can be affected by

this "disease" in their brain and the movement of bending can easily be implanted as a result of mentors, guides, or other influences.

This results in individuals being impacted by the pressure of flexing due to the fear of missing out on current trends promoted by influencers. Society often imitates the trending appearances of influencers, and this phenomenon is known as Fear of Missing Out. As a result, individuals experiencing FOMO may feel unhappy, envious, and even ashamed when meeting their friends because they have not been able to follow the physical trends that are popular among their peers.

Indirectly, when someone frequently engages in flexing on social media, it can have negative effects on themselves. Some of the negative impacts of flexing include:

The person tends to be consumptive and wants to appear as wealthy in their daily life, both on social media and in real life, in order to gain attention from others. To create such an impression, they will do various ways. If someone who flexes is unable to fulfill a lavish lifestyle like a wealthy person beyond their means, such as borrowing from others, it can become a financial problem if they are unable to repay the debt. By frequently engaging in flexing, the likelihood of possessing empathy decreases as they disregard those in need and experiencing hardship. They only focus on showcasing their wealth.

Peter L. Berger, a humanistic sociologist as cited by Subandi (2007), identified a phenomenon called "consciousness urbanization." This phenomenon creates a new construction of reality where people are no longer restricted by particular groups, but individuals can be part of diverse groups. For instance, a rural youth can have an urban lifestyle like a youth in Jakarta, even though he has never visited the capital city.

According to Parsons' structural functional theory, society can achieve stability and balance by maintaining the existing systems within the state and community. A community that can operate effectively and uphold the norms and values embraced by the community can create stability within itself. Akbar (2019) explained that a well-functioning community can create stability within itself.

"The products of culture that are consumed indicate and contribute to the crisis of personality that affects almost all aspects of social life in Indonesia. The failure of national forums and the social structures of society are important factors in the deep social control incapacity."

The culture of refraction also becomes an important factor in the inability of forums and democratic structures to control deviant behavior from expected social values. As Pierre Bourdieu revealed, the symbolism used by most people is based on cultural products they consume from certain social groups.

The upper class showcases their social status differences through their displayed preferences, such as wearing expensive jewelry, choosing luxurious restaurants, or engaging in costly rituals. Consumption can also strengthen social stratification since social status in society can be indicated by the cultural products consumed. This can result in a crisis of identity that affects nearly all areas of social life in Indonesia.

In society, people not only strive to overcome social class differences, but also fight for social status legitimacy through the use and dissemination of meaningful symbols of happiness and comfort. In contemporary culture, spiritual values are spread through implementation as a social virus supported by therapeutic values such as entertainment, achievement, and ecstasy. This shift in values, known as the fractal (or viral) value stage by Baudrillard, is a value system that replicates itself infinitely. These values spread in all directions, infecting and contaminating every aspect of life.

In today's society, social actions are evident in the social reality of individuals, the consumption deemed noble, the ever-increasing desire for life, and the conflict between the social identity of hikers and the culture they display. The current social lifestyle presents a paradox where status, image, and self-awareness become cultural practices that are very familiar in our daily lives. This phenomenon occurs consciously or unconsciously in our daily lives. In the postmodern universe, symbolic circulation becomes essential and unavoidable, especially in our navigation of the world of lifestyles, images, and branding, which always fulfill individuals' needs

4. Conclusion

The conclusion drawn from this is that flexing is often viewed as deceitful because those who do it do not conform to reality. Flexing is done by people who want to show that they have high social status. This action is not only done by the upper class but also by the middle and lower class. They usually try various ways to fulfill the current lifestyle. Showing off wealth is not only done directly, but also through social media. People compete to show off their luxurious possessions. The flexing phenomenon is related to structural functionalism, which means that the changes that occur will not alter the basic social and cultural elements. How showing off wealth affects the social media users essentially does not change the structure of society but creates competition within it.

Flexing is a way to gain social respect and recognition, as well as to demonstrate success and progress compared to others. Those who have engaged in flexing often become addicted to it and continue to do so in order to maintain their status. Flexing has a significant impact on our lives today. However, showcasing wealth on social media can often have negative effects, such as buying unnecessary items. The culture of flexing has caused many people to doubt their own abilities and feel like failures if they are not rich and successful. The term "social climber" is used to describe people who work tirelessly to make money. (Sullivan 2015, Newman 2016, Pomeroy 2017, Beasley 2018, White 2018, Hurst 2019)

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