

Flexing culture in the age of social media: From social recognition to self-satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

In the digital age, flexing culture may have become a virtual tradition in which people display their possessions and express their conspicuous consumption behaviors on social media. Within the platform, the commodities attached to their bodies and the services they post indicate multiple meanings such as gaining social recognition, building body image, negotiating self-branding, finding self-pleasure and self-satisfaction, demonstrating self-actualization, and gaining more financial benefits. This practice is common on social media, including YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. This study explores flexing culture by referring to Indonesian content creators who display their extra wealth on their social media accounts. This is qualitative research with a cultural studies approach, using Jean Baudrillard's theory of consumer society and Thorstein Veblen's conspicuous consumption. The result shows that flexing culture on social media is an ideal place to express social identity by displaying luxury fashion brands and services. Flexing culture increasingly spreads and constructs a space for virtual competition. Moreover, it is becoming a strategy for the social hierarchy to fight and differentiate itself from the other classes. The social behavior of today's society shows something intended to be offensive through the manipulation of signs and symbolic values.

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Introduction

In the age of social media, showing off one's possessions is becoming a virtual tradition. When the users start exhibiting and posting what they have and expressing their consumption behavior, flexing culture seems undeniable. This culture is defined as a glamorous behavior that aims to stand out with a luxurious lifestyle to gain recognition from society, including online communities. Stellarosa and Ikhsano (2015) argued that based on what they consume, possess, and show, the middle and upper classes of society buy fancy commodities to increase their position and personal identity, as a result, their existence can be acknowledged and respected in social life. Therefore, the phenomenon of flexing culture in society is a place for self-performance both real and virtual society and represent the contents of thoughts, moods, or planned actions in social media (Mahyuddin, 2017).

The existence of flexing culture takes advantage of cyber communities through social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. The users utilize special social media features such as writing statuses on photo posts or reels on Instagram, video vlogs on YouTube, or the short video feature on TikTok. Sayang and Rahardjo (2018) stated that the content they post can sometimes produce a sense of pleasure and satisfaction, which is shown by people who react by tapping the like button and leaving comments on their profile page. This practice continuously runs and develops into the form of a culture that fills the spaces of daily life with a conspicuous purpose.

Social media is frequently used to represent pleasure or beauty by employing the meaning of symbols and manipulation of signs addressed to a wider community. The goal is not only to share information but also to show off and show their existence in their social environment (Irfani, 2014). It

is almost impossible for social media users to post photos or videos as ordinary posts unless to show off or seek attention. Flexing is understood as a conspicuous consumptive behavior, in which people spend money on luxury products and premium services to show their social status and financial capabilities (Mardiah, 2022). The spread of the show-off practice or flexing culture today tends to be a simulation of individual worship or madness for the consumption of signs or symbolic meanings in the sphere of social life which is regulated as reproduction by demanding attraction as the logic of the commodity itself.

The flexing culture continues to hegemony and produces as it is influenced by the power of social media that is rapidly growing in the community. Flexing culture has become part of the mass culture that has resulted in automation in everyday life that cannot be separated from the consumer society. Baudrillard (1998), a postmodern social theorist, directed his attention to the analysis of consumer society. In his view, consumption is no longer dominated by production, but rather by media, cybernetic models, information processing, entertainment, and the knowledge industry (Baudrillard, 1998)

Veblen (1899) as cited in Bakti et al. (2020) has shown how the leisure class conducts conspicuous consumption as a social performance to display wealth and status and build an impression on the viewer or society. This is in line with Chaney (1996) (as cited in Rosida and Azwar, 2020) who stated that everything we have is a spectacle culture, where everyone wants to see and wants to be seen by others. Subsequently, this is completely developed since social media is used to display ownership of wealth and this practice is followed by many people. Most people consider wealth a measure of one's success. By having a life goal to achieve as much wealth as possible and conducting

conspicuous consumption, one not only fulfills the necessities of life and comfort but also gains prestige (Bakti et al., 2020).

In the age of social media, the flexing culture is initiated by those who have extra wealth and want to display it in social spaces. People tend to exhibit their possession on social media including famous Indonesian content creators such as Raffi Ahmad, Ashanty, Willi Salim, Tasyi Athasyia, and Adeline Margaret, and many more. The content they create mostly shows luxury lifestyle and their vacancy consumption behavior. By having a lot of subscribers or followers, it is increasingly encouraging to present themselves as superior in social class. Thus, this also indicates that social media is experiencing a shift in function. Initially, social media was used to connect with many people and allow positive interactions (Mardiah, 2022). However, it has shifted into a place to flex everything, to exhibit conspicuous consumption activities luxury fashion brands, luxury cars, expensive perfume, traveling, and even religious worship such as Umrah and hajj. As a result, the flexing culture has been conducted by all circles of society, both the upper and the lower classes (Khayati et al., 2022).

Flexing culture has become a common practice, particularly in social media. Since it reaches a broader social network rather than real life, it is used as a place to fulfill esteem needs. Therefore, people who flex have lifestyle demands that are usually similar to their circle to be considered superb and have a higher position so that they are respected (Mardiah, 2022). As people want to gain social recognition by posting photos and videos, they keep practicing flexing. The users pretend to be the upper class by showing off their wealth which is produced intentionally to gain more benefits. This practice then can lead to a hedonistic lifestyle,

manipulation, social segregation, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), identity camouflage, hyperreality, insecurity, fantasy, the idea of instantly succeeding, and many more.

Flexing culture is becoming a popular issue within society and has been discussed by many scholars in related fields. Mahyuddin (2017) analyzed how social and cultural symbols of showing off are represented in the realm of social media. He added that this practice is influenced by the lifestyle of the consumer society and social climber. This study reveals that the showing-off culture represents a social reality that shows the worship of consumption and the formation of self-identity. Bakti et al. (2020) examined how excessive consumption behavior was carried out by the leisure class. This study shows that conspicuous consumption generates elite tastes which further expand and have an impact on society. Duan and Dholakia (2018) explored how consumption-related posting behavior provides implications that are important in user-generated content, materialism, and purchase-type research. They revealed that the type of purchase of a commodity affects consumption-related posting behavior.

This study explores flexing practices which are presented by some Indonesian content creators who are frequently exposing their extravagant lifestyles and luxury goods and services on social media pages. This study examines human behavior on current social media platforms where people often display their wealth for many purposes. This study addresses the research question: How flexing culture is defined based on its representation in social media? This research provides a critical discussion on flexing culture by applying the concept of consumer society by Jean Baudrillard and the concept of conspicuous consumption by Thorstein Veblen.

Method

This research is focusing on the practice of flexing on social media. By referring to some Indonesian content creators such as Raffi Ahmad and Nagita Slavina, Willi Salim, Tasyi Athasyia, Adeline Margaret, and some social media users we found who frequently shared their consumption behavior in social media. They have large subscribers, and followers that indicate what they are posting including flexing to gain attention from their viewers. This paper highlights their consumption behavior on luxurious lifestyles which are posted on their social media accounts. This research focuses on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok as these content creators share their photos and videos. The method used in this study is qualitative with a cultural studies approach that highlights the relation between cultural practices and power. The power here lies in social media. The data was collected by looking at the photos and videos posted on their social media in the engagement of flexing culture and analyzing the practice by using the theory of Jean Baudrillard (1998) on consumer society and the theory of Thorstein Veblen on conspicuous consumption. The analysis focused on what they are showing in their social media accounts.

Results and Discussion

In the digital age, people easily construct their identities through their activities on social media, either through their consumption behavior or writing statuses or stories. Commodities that one wears have signs and hidden meanings that are aimed at finding ultimate attraction with a high engagement. In this matter, signs are the most attractive manifestation of personal self-actualization in consumer society. According to Martyn (2006), consumption is a political-economic measure supported by

commercial logic, prioritizing the surplus value. According to Baudrillard (1998), consumer culture is increasingly exposed to images in the postmodern era. The design industry has succeeded in luring individuals to think that the commodities consumed by society are not in essence, but only on the surface. Therefore, flexing culture is not entirely based on actual needs, it has transformed into a game of commodities in the form of a new trend to gain social identity and prestige. The commodities attached to one's body and the services she/he posts indicate multiple meanings such as gaining social recognition, building body image, exposing self-branding, finding self-pleasure and self-satisfaction, showing self-actualization, and gaining more financial benefit.

Social media and flexing culture

The development of technology increasingly affects people's lives. One of them brings changes in the way people communicate. Social media facilitates people to communicate remotely with stable internet access. Social media also opens a wider space for individuals to express themselves by creating personal information profiles, including photos, videos, and blogs. Watie (2016) stated that social media leads people present in the public sphere to respond and express their opinions freely. Here, with the fast emergence of social media, influencers, celebrities, and content creators have a medium and opportunity to promote their influence. Social media becomes a place for those who have the modal to show it off to the public. Thus, they can get as much attention as they want and control the trend.

In this study, several popular social media platforms are ideal for displaying one's possessions. According to CNBC Indonesia news data in June 2022, based on the results of a Populix survey with 1,023

respondents, the three most popular social media platforms in Indonesia are YouTube (94%), Instagram (93%), and TikTok (63%) (Anam, 2022). Meanwhile, reporting from DataIndonesia.id, Indonesia occupies the second position in the category of the most TikTok users in the world with 99.1 million active users. Then followed by YouTube in the third position with 127 million active users, and Instagram in the fourth position with 99.9 million active users each month. Since, both globally and even in Indonesia social media has a great quantity number of users. This indicates the importance of social media in rapidly spreading the flexing culture to a wider space. By using supportive and attractive social media features people can easily post their possessions, such as collections of branded products, fancy trips, luxury car collections, and many more.

YouTube is a video-sharing platform with an easy and user-friendly layout. Aside from that, YouTube includes a variety of interactive educational tools to help new users of different levels of participation utilize this platform properly. Here, there are features for uploading short and long videos, liking, sharing, commenting, and subscribing. The view count is shown beneath each video thus audiences and content creators may observe how the number is growing. Furthermore, alongside each video, registered users' reactions and comments are presented. Consequently, YouTubers may regularly read and answer their viewers to keep subscribers and increase views (Chau, 2010). These features can make it easier for people to share the contents they create quickly and efficiently. This encourages content creators to be more active and innovative in earning audience attention, which gives them satisfaction. Since the big number of viewers indicates that the public values and is aware of their existence.

As the fastest-growing social networking service (SNS), Instagram allows individuals to upload pictures and videos, modify them with filters, share them with other people, and comment on or like other people's photos and videos. In addition, Instagram also has several interesting features to show someone's possession such as feeds, reels, Instagram stories, and live. Then, Instagram users can easily share their luxury commodities and see other people's possessions. According to Lee et al. (2015), self-expression is one of the motivations for using Instagram, which suggests that Instagram users utilize a variety of methods and features to convey their personalities, lifestyle, and interests. Besides, photos or videos are better than text for self-expression and impression management because there is a myth that photography has credibility that text does not have. Moreover, current findings show that Instagram is becoming a new self-presentation medium that empowers people, especially young people.

TikTok users may produce videos in stitches that are just around 30 seconds long by using creative special effects and a variety of music to show what they are shopping for or show luxury items. Additionally, it has several important features for spreading flexing culture, such as liking, commenting, following, and sharing. Users can participate in various activities or dances, which may inspire them to become content creators and increase their innovation. As a medium for expressing creativity, TikTok's cultural consumption patterns change large societies. TikTok changes the culture of the general public's consumption patterns to passively consume the culture presented by industrial culture and facilitates its users to produce their own culture (Kurniawan, 2018). Therefore, this application offers convenience for its users to be able to appear or exist and be famous in a short time, which is what makes most users get satisfaction.

According to prior studies, the usage of social media might lead to irrational decisions by promoting shopping for luxury products, specifically to show off (Widjajanta et al., 2018). Individual audiences are competing against each other in a duel arena, in the framework of consumer society's challenges, seductions, and temptations. People who interact with the media in the twenty-first century are frequently transformed into media formation.

This study sees flexing culture on social media as an act for an entertaining motive that promotes a person to continue competing against each other to buy luxury products regardless of their function in everyday life. According to Veblen (1899), excessive consumption of valuable commodities is a way to take advantage of leisure time. People engage in conspicuous consumption to be valued more than those around them and to demonstrate their distinction from other social classes. In addition, luxury products, expensive trips, and premium services are used to express and represent a certain identity, allowing individuals to distinguish themselves from others and eventually build a group image. Furthermore, this group will develop a separate lifestyle and consumption behavior that tends to be excessive and extravagant as a symbol of their high status.

There are a growing number of posts on social media about displaying one's possession of luxury products and the extravagant lifestyle of the content creator (Duan & Dholakia, 2018). Since social media has always been easily accessible, allowing people to take photos or videos on the spot and post them immediately. It makes social media an ideal platform for showing one's possessions to the public.

Virtual tradition and consumption behaviors

According to Veblen (1899), the leisure class refers to the urban middle class

(nouveau) in the United States or the working class that produces goods due to the industrial revolution. They attempt to follow the lifestyle, tastes, and consumption patterns of the upper class or the nobility (aristocratic) in Europe. In the age of social media, leisure classes can be initiated by entrepreneurs, celebrities, politicians, content creators, and religious leaders. However, they have similar purposes when conducting conspicuous consumption as a social performance to pursue status. Trigg (2001) stated that other members of society's judgments define an individual's status or position in society; thus, people must display wealth to get established. In this case, Veblen involves two ways, extensive activities on consumption and services.

Veblen, as cited in (Trigg, 2001), considered that people could display their wealth in any way on an equal basis. The first way is an effective network to convey a person's level of leisure and the things they own. Therefore, in the digital age, people are not well-informed about the leisure activities that other people conduct. Thus, the display of wealth through the consumption of goods becomes more vital than the display of leisure. Moreover, according to Bakti et al. (2020), exposing generosity and flexing a hedonistic lifestyle can embody it. Flexing culture is no longer an odd practice since people of all ages, especially celebrities or content creators, often use branded goods (Arsyad, 2022). With various types of social media, such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, the flexing culture is increasingly disseminating and constructing a space for competition between them. Further, it becomes a strategy for the social hierarchy to struggle to distinguish itself from the other classes. The upper class maintains their social class distinction continuously by showing their tastes; this indicates that consumption creates social stratification because it involves social prestige (Khayati et al., 2022).

Posting photos and videos on TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram makes viewers compare themselves with content creators and hope to have abundant wealth and consume goods or services without considering the price. According to Rosida et al. (2022), when people compare themselves to others, they do not feel like they belong to a particular group and are looking for approval from that group to affirm their sense of self. This means that the comparison of viewers to content creators in the comment column indicates an upward comparison, where other people can find out about the class position by how they respond.

From worshipping to flexing

Visiting Makkah is adored by Muslims around the world. Unfortunately, this cost a lot, and only those who have financial capabilities, effort this. However, the aims of this worship may vary, for instance, they aim to spread Islamic teachings regarding Umrah worship or encourage and invite Muslims to complete the pillars of Islam, worship Allah, and gain spiritual experience. However, in the age of social media, doing Umrah has

shifted from worshipping to flexing. It is unavoidable for people this day for not to posting activities on social media including worshipping God. The following pictures on Instagram users are the example how doing Umrah and Hajj for Muslim has become tradition to post on social media platform.

Worship is personal, or only known by God and us, subsequently, it is becoming a public consumption. Both content creators and all people love taking pictures during worshipping, then posting them on their social media (Figure 1). This depends on the purpose of the person who posts whether is it for their collection, memory, and many others. This day, worshipping and flexing seem biased. When people pray in front of the Kabah, it should be for his/her and Allah, not for their viewers on their social media accounts. More than that, this is unsuggested in Islam as it is categorized as *riya* (flexing). Mardiah (2022) stated the flexing worship in Islam is called *Riya*. This *Riya* expects a compliment from those who see them.

This also builds their self-image as people are religious and financially capable. Thus, in the age of social media, worship has



Figure 1. Virtual tradition of posting Umrah worship @ranni_rara and @miskahzi

two contradictory purposes: attempting to carry out God's commands while expecting recognition or praise. This praise can lead to even worse behavior, which they consider nobler than others, as a result, this practice creates a new problem in the hegemony of the holiness of one's worship (Hidayat, 2022).

In this sense, when the primary intention is to worship God but is then tempted by worldly cravings because they want to flex it on social media and generate a good self-image. Umrah worship is the form of flexing culture, where the objective of worship not only includes himself and God but also involves the viewers on their Instagram account. Those that engage in this flexing are not only celebrities, but also common people who are not famous as they are living in the age of social media.

Exhibiting luxury branding products

Flexing culture represents a person's social class because of conspicuous consumption performed in public. This also triggers the lower class to imitate

their consumption patterns. In doing so, those in the upper class gained prestige or social acceptance since they confessed their impression of their wealth. Moreover, they also succeeded in distinguishing themselves from the other class and stating their qualities to the world (Bakti et al., 2020). They also argued that the dominant or superior class creates a new standard for the lower class and encourages their mindset by making it an ideal goal. In addition, the lower middle class is panicking about achieving happiness or pleasure (Mahyuddin, 2017). As a result, practically all modern humans today define happiness as being able to buy a luxury vehicle or other luxury goods, and the desire for status through consumption is endless. Even worse, the phenomenon of the competition of "crazy rich" or "Sultans" can manipulate viewers who are uncritical and easily deceived in distinguishing between illusion and reality or flexing wealth due to work agreements (Mardiah, 2022).

The following are the posting photos in the content creator's accounts:



Figure 2. *Adeline Margaret unboxed luxury perfume collections on her YouTube channel*

The photos and videos on social media that show flexing behavior are included in user-generated content. This content has become a common practice for consumers society in social media. Flexing can also be used to express feelings and opinions about someone's interesting commodities to the audience on social media. For example, Adeline Margaret (Figure 2) exhibited her perfume collections by unboxing new perfumes and mentioning the prices. Mostly, those are luxury perfumes, such as Louis Vuitton (IDR 3.7 million) and Roja Elixir (IDR 4.6 million). According to Baudrillard (1998), social media presents a new reality that makes everything vague and unreliable. Therefore, the commodities displayed on social media might not have useful value but they contain a symbolic value that shows prestige (Baudrillard, 1998). Each commodity carries certain different symbols and images, in which the more expensive the commodity, the higher the symbolic value it contains. This suggests that influencers, celebrities, and content creators display luxury goods to gain higher social status and prestige. Adeline Margaret is an Indonesian YouTuber who has 750K subscribers. The video content is dominated by luxurious life since she often uses the words 'luxury'

and 'millions' in her video titles. In her video unboxing luxury perfumes, she attached the price of it. The video got 54K viewers and 2.2K likes (Margaret, 2022)

Raffi Ahmad and Nagita Slavina (figure 3) are well-known celebrities, presenters, entrepreneurs, and influencers in Indonesia. Their account has been verified by Instagram and has 65.1M followers. They often expose their busy lives, especially in the entertainment and business fields, and show their collection of luxury cars. As seen in the picture (Figure 3), they have a Ferrari F8 Tributo with a price of around IDR 3 billion (Danesvaran, 2022). Their postings of luxury cars indicate their pride as celebrities and influencers from the upper class since they drive scarce and expensive luxury cars. Hereafter, this invites society to distinguish them from others and recognize them as "crazy rich" or "Sultan" (a name originally to address) Next, as Bakti et al. (2020) argued, the dominant or superior class creates a new standard for the lower class and encourages their mindset by making it an ideal goal. In addition, the lower middle class is panicking about achieving happiness or pleasure (Mahyuddin, 2017). In his post about his Ferrari car, they got 535.9K likes (Ahmad & Slavina, 2022).



Figure 3. @raffinagita1717 exhibited photos with luxury cars on their Instagram account



Figure 4. @tasyiiathasyia displayed wealth in her TikTok account by shopping for branded goods and clothes

Tasyi Athasyia (@tasyiiathasyia) is an Indonesian content creator who is active on TikTok to upload video content with the theme of shopping, particularly branded goods with 1.5M followers. In her video post (Figure 4) themed 'How Much I Spend in a Day', she exposes groceries and branded goods such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Zara along with the total price. It got 9.8M viewers and 817.4K likes (Athasyia, 2022). Next, Willie Salim is an Indonesian YouTuber who has 9.29M subscribers. He creates varied content such as buying all items or food provided in a store (Figure 5). He once bought all Starbucks menus and got 1.6M viewers and 28K likes (Salim, 2022).

Those who flex their wealth promote a hedonistic and consumptive lifestyle. @tasyiiathasyia spent IDR 100 million in one day shopping for branded goods and clothes, such as Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Zara. Those brands are the top fashion brands in the world which are trendy, high-end, and luxurious (Meyer, 2021). Meanwhile, Willie Salim bought up the entire stock of Starbucks in a day, as seen in the picture results of the long receipt. Starbucks is the

largest coffee company in the world (Juline, 2022), and not all people choose and buy coffee there. Hence, their contents show conspicuous consumption because they spend a lot of money in one day. In addition, it provided satisfaction in terms of identity and validation. Since clothes and appearance can represent a person's identity (Faidah & Rosida, 2022), @tasyiiathasyia tends to buy and wear branded goods and clothes to state her identity as a wealthy content creator. In his action, Willie Salim wants to please himself and the viewers regarding his consumptive content.

At the same time, they seem to be asking society for validation that a hedonistic and consumptive lifestyle is ordinary among content creators or YouTubers. Ultimately, this can also challenge society's rationality in responding to the flexing culture that glorifies excessive consumption not based on needs but satisfaction. Thus, flexing is a cultural practice that has been internalized by people to gain recognition in society through social media (virtual life) or real life. Hereafter, the increasing use of social media in Indonesia will open competition space



Figure 5. Willie Salim bought up the entire stock of Starbucks stores performed on his YouTube channel.

to compete for social recognition. It also automatically leads to a growing sense of conspicuous consumption (Widjajanta et al., 2018). Likewise, it is ironic that people who proudly flex the consumptive and hedonistic lifestyle are as if blind and heartless to other people living in poverty (Mardiah, 2022).

These content creators utilize YouTube or Instagram or TikTok to express messages through photos or videos they upload regarding the ownership of wealth. They proudly display conspicuous consumption, such as expensive perfume collections, branded goods, luxury cars, first-class airline services, traveling abroad, and buying up the entire stock in a store to represent identity. Sayang and Rahardjo (2018) considered that the photo will have its mind automatically describe the kind of identity it wants. Therefore, photos or videos exhibited on social media invite the viewer to determine their social identity related to their social class position.

Some people seemingly assumed that when someone can afford luxury goods and travel abroad, it means he/she is wealthy and comes from the upper class, regardless of how he/she acquires it. In addition, the viewer sees and judges only people around him/her, such as family, neighbors, and friends, so it can be said that only a

few people will give a direct confession, while the rest only admit it and keep it to themselves. Nevertheless, in the age of social media, posting photos and videos can invite many people to pay attention and respond through the like and comment features. It is an opportunity for Youtubers or influencers or content creators to continue to display their wealth and produce many impressions from the viewers. Thus, it can let some people provide indirect recognition through the like and comment features. Further, the viewer not only people around them but also people they do not know.

Therefore, flexing culture is crucial for these social media accounts for three reasons: First, showing pride in their achievements financially is shown by the ability to engage in various activities that involve conspicuous consumption. Second, getting recognition from the viewer as the upper class can be seen from how many people respond to their posts, especially comments that contain elements of self-comparison. Third, maintain their identity on social media as famous Youtubers or influencers, or content creators. The strong label defenses as Youtubers or influencers or content creators will keep them from being perceived by the viewer as wealthy people who can afford luxury and expensive goods

and services. Mahyuddin (2017) argued that flexing hegemony continues to be produced to give the impression that their existence or performance reflects a different self-identity than other people.

Consumer society, flexing culture, and manipulation

The phenomenon of flexing by displaying wealth or luxury reflects everyone's reality where there may be a forgery in the virtual world. The existence of a person's prestige is not only shown in various physical symbols such as the attributes attached to the person being demonstrated but the designation of an individual's reputation can also be represented in non-physical symbols, for example showing off expensive jewelry, branded style, a place to eat, a luxurious shopping place that then disseminated through social media platforms. Social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok play an important role in shaping reality in the era of the development of communication and information technology. These media are used as a tool to shape reality, which often manipulates certain images to gain social recognition from people who see that they come from a prominent class by labeling the rich with the luxury of a materialist life.

According to Baudrillard (1998), the modern capitalist society is a consumer society, also referred to as a society created by the manipulation of signs. Mahyuddin (2017) argued that the current social media platform shows a symbol of pleasure and success. It does not matter what reality is formed in social media posts, even if it is fake, so sometimes reality and fantasy become something that overlaps. Many people who claim to be upper-class or rich people continue to do flexing to construct their social class differences by showing the image they want others to see them. Social

media users who upload photos or videos on their social media by showing expensive smartphones, using luxury vehicles, choosing classy restaurants, performing rituals of worship repeatedly, and buying many branded stuffs to identify wealth and social status indicate the social hierarchy within the online communities.

The system of producing forces and object marking through mass media are two factors that contribute to the desire to consume because of sign manipulation, which is supported by two things. First is the productivity system. The lifestyles and production systems of people have been significantly impacted by advances in science and technology. This is shown by the development and invention of the production system during the past few decades which has brought major changes in the community's economic activity. The capitalist production system that is currently supported by technological advancements creates a productive power system where the requirements of the populace are produced as consuming power. The second is the mass media item marking system. Modern capitalism applies the process of manipulating signs in the mass media to transmit information by encouraging people to consume the production of goods and services in shaping some meaning in society. Handoyo (2020) stated that today's capitalist society consumes it based on its relationship to the overall meaning it contains. Thus, in today's capitalist society, consumption needs arise by manipulating signs that people consume goods and services to satisfy their desire.

Urban society including the content creators, flexes their wealth through excessive consumption, especially of expensive goods. In a situation where urban society is apathetic and mostly unfamiliar with each other, the ideal way to show one's money power is through the conspicuous consumption of

goods (Corrigan, 1997). Moreover, in the age of social media, to be acknowledged and recognized is simply using social media. Flexing culture and engaging in consumption activities involving various images or objects is the best route one can take to introduce their social cultural identity to the public by boasting about their wealth on their homepage display or social media account page. Therefore, consumerism has crept into people's daily lives, particularly in the cities. Abdullah (2007) stated urban places are constructed as consumer spaces that are supposed to be able to meet the wants of the emerging middle class, hence consumerism is more prevalent there.

In "Consumer Society: Myths and Structures" Baudrillard (1998) firmly rejects Karl Marx's (use-value) and (exchange-value) principles which are no longer relevant as a framework, and he stated that human consumption activity is non-utilitarian activity. Baudrillard expanded Marx's concept and made a breakthrough, namely the principles of sign-value and symbolic value) that are relevant to the postmodern era. From his principles, Baudrillard does not intend to downplay the significance of necessity. He merely meant to make the point that, in a consumer culture, the system of meaning that governs purchasing is now governed by a set of aspirations for prestige, position, honor, and identity through a "signing mechanism," rather than by a need or want to experience pleasure (Baudrillard, 1998). He added that consumerism or late capitalism is a development of his concept of the hyper-real. His philosophy holds that everything in our daily lives is a representation of reality. The simulation is completed when products are created and consumed, that is our purchases are a reflection of our deepest desires, linking consumption to our psychological self-production. Malpas (2005) stated Baudrillard used the sign/ signifier technique to explain

consumption, drawing on semiotics to show that what we buy is more than just a product; it's part of the "language" that helps define who we are. Thus, the phenomenon displayed by the consumer community is ultimately experiencing a change in behavior patterns as well as changes that take place in the realm of social life. Therefore, the social behavior of today's society displays something that is intended to be offensive through the manipulation of signs and symbolic values.

YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are a stage for its users particularly the content creators to flex everything they possess, use, and do. Anything that is attached or not attached to their body becomes a symbol and manipulation of their wealth ownership, which is displayed in real life first and in virtual life later. It indicates that flexing ownership of wealth is a cultural practice applied by almost all levels of society, especially content creators. Flexing culture is usually exhibited by conspicuous consumption, which leads to a hedonistic and consumptive lifestyle. However, by gaining an impression or recognition from the viewer, they have succeeded in manipulating because the viewer is aware of the differences in social status or social class between them. In addition, they crave wealth and recognition or prestige from society.

Conclusion

Flexing culture seems undeniable when people have a close attachment to social media. Showing off one's possession is mostly conducted by all people these days. Aside from any purposes, this creates a new paradigm in human behavior that nothing is private, all practices must be a public consumption, including worshipping God. Religious practices no longer have one meaning "to worship" but have multiple meanings when it is posted on social media,

and one of them is flexing. Social recognition dan self-branding seems to be important since the content creator is acknowledged by a wider community on their online platform. Flexing culture has become a virtual tradition that not only involved the upper classes and those who have extra wealth, but it has reached more classes including the lower and middle classes.

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Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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