

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DYNAMICS OF FLEXING BEHAVIOR AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

1st Hesti Firza Yuniar¹, 2nd Suryanto², 3rd Dyan Evita Santi³
{1532100030@untag-sby.ac.id¹, suryanto@psikologi.unair.ac.id², arma_luna@yahoo.com³}

Magister of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, 17 Agustus 1945 University Surabaya, Indonesia¹²³

Abstract. Flexing is a common term or slang that describes the act of excessive self-promotion when someone is showing off something. For instance, the practice of often publishing material after purchasing a new item, the practice of sharing accomplishments frequently on social media, or the practice of sharing numerous and frequently vacation images. The qualitative research in this paper, which employs a grounded theory methodology, focuses on the flexing behavior displayed by participants who are college students. This research seeks to "understand the types of flexing behavior, its patterns, and the psychological mechanisms that underlie it". Due to their lifestyle and peer-reported patterns, adolescents exhibit flexing behavior at alarmingly high rates. If this flexing activity interferes with activities, causes harm to others, or alters people's perceptions of themselves, it might be classified as a problem. They take a lot of time and money and don't even come close to meeting the demands of the show, therefore it's fascinating to talk about this phenomena. Participants as the main data source in this study were determined using purposive sampling with the criterias are as follows: female students, aged 18-23 years and exhibiting flexing behavior. The findings revealed that the psychological dynamics of flexing actors among students were caused by unrealistic expectations of external effects, fear of rejection, a high demand for self-existence, and personality variables. Furthermore, the advancement of time and digital technology, such as the growth of social media, has made this behavior more popular and common among students.

Keywords: psychological dynamics, flexing, students.

INTRODUCTION

Internet has become an important technological need for humans. Most Indonesian people already use the internet. Based on the data that the researchers obtained from databoks.katadata.co.id, there were 204.7 million internet users in Indonesia from 2018 to early 2022, or around 73.7% of the total population in early 2022. It was recorded that Indonesia's total population was 277,7 million people in January 2022.

The rising usage of smartphones and the development of internet networks to practically all regions of Indonesia aided the growth in internet users. Along with the fast advancement of information technology. It also influenced societal development. Through the advent of internet media, people's behavior patterns undergo a transformation in culture, ethics, and existing conventions. Indonesia, with its massive population and diverse ethnic, racial, and religious traditions, has enormous social development potential.

According to Puntoadi (2011), social media is a website-based feature that allows users to communicate within a community by forming networks. We may use visual and audio-visual writing to communicate information, collaborate, and get to know one another on social media. Nowadays, there are several social media platforms. Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok, and Instagram are among the most popular social media platforms among Indonesians nowadays. Social media encourages anybody who is interested to engage by making open contributions and feedback, posting comments, and sharing information in real time. Students are included.

In recent years, there have been several instances of people flaunting their wealth on social media, whether in the form of physical assets, commodities, or other things considered better to others. Students, for example, who publish material whenever they buy new products, tell tales on social media about their accomplishments, and share holiday images in big numbers and on a regular basis. Several cases of flexing behavior have recently gone popular on social media.

According to Antawati, Ilma (2022), in humans, social psychology states that showing off anything one possesses is done to exhibit one's social position, with the aim that it would be more desirable in the eyes of other people, thereby broadening relationships. Meanwhile, in clinical psychology, flexing behavior is related with a person's insecurity, thus there is an urge to show off what they believe is superior to others. Antawati, Ilma (2022) then states that flexing action is an innate tendency in creating partnerships. They used the analogy of a peacock flaunting its gorgeous tail in order to gain the attention of the opposing sex. Flexing behavior may also have an influence on interpersonal interactions, especially when in a new situation. Financial flexing has the consequence of promoting consumption since purchasing is done to improve social status rather than out of necessity. New social behaviors are becoming popular among people from all socioeconomic backgrounds, including the poor and middle classes.

People's consumption therefore loses importance since the logic of their wishes is portrayed more than the actual reality, resulting in consumptive behaviors that are sometimes contrived. The replication of lifestyles, from the daily necessities to purchasing beauty items, has become the primary focus of public concern today. Piliang describes this phenomenon as Cultural Hyper-Reality, a state in which numerous transcendental occurrences emerge. Pictures, illusions, and hallucinations that transcend nature and bounds have been taken over cultural reality; illusions are deemed more genuine than the truth they reflect, and images are more convincing than reality. It appears to be challenging for us to discriminate between truth and falsehood because this hyperreality has produced a state in which everything is regarded more significant than reality, lie is considered more true than truth, and issues are more trusted than information.

People's conduct, particularly social behavior, in this instance flexing behavior, is said to be closely related to psychological dynamics including cognitive, emotional, and behavioral inclinations. This is predicated on evidence that impulsive purchasing behavior is impacted by cognitive factors, as demonstrated by flexing behaviorists, (Rook & Fisher, 1995; Shahjehan, et al., 2012), there is a correlation between purchasing behavior and affect or emotional factors. (Eyesenck, et al, 2012). 1985; Shahjehan, et al., 2012), and there is a tendency for individuals to perform behaviors that they believe are by their judgments about impulsive actions (Puri, 1996; Shahjehan, et al., 2012). Accordingly, this study was done to look at the psychological underpinnings of college students' flexing behavior.

Walgitto (2010) describes psychological dynamics are defined as a process of human psychological existence that is constantly followed by three psychological characteristics, namely cognitive, emotive (emotional), and conative (will) or interpersonal connections. Cognitive components are associated with knowledge, perspectives, and attitudes regarding the object of conduct. This cognitive process influences each individual's decision-making and can occasionally lead to the establishment of bias. Another part is the emotive aspect. This element is associated to emotions or sentiments, as well as reasons. The emotional element includes feelings of pleasure and unhappiness towards the target of conduct. The last feature, the conative aspect, refers to the inclination to behave toward objects. Based on this explanation, we may infer that psychological dynamics is the psychological process that underpins the formation of a person's behavior and includes cognitive, emotional, and conative components related to the object of activity.

Flexing behavior is an action that makes excessive use of available space. This is because to the fact that individuals do not obtain knowledge by flexing, but rather through imitation, disguise, emotionality, and aspiration (Bukhari No. 2673). Managing social media demands skill training through hard effort in order to generate programs that are informative and instructional, but flexing has no educational learning value. Social media content necessitates production, but flexing is only made to satisfy content.

Flexing behavior also demonstrates a continuous pattern of excessive spending that is done in a variety of ways, such as spending a lot of time and money to buy or obtain the desired items even if these items are not their basic needs, but are only for the fulfillment of content to make it visible

and more interested in content uploaded on social media, or going to tourist spots or elite hangouts to demonstrate self-existence.

A wealthy and hedonistic lifestyle, following trends, the influence of family and friends, commercials, and the availability of social media that enables individuals to construct public profiles are some of the elements that contribute to flexing behavior. a) The opulent lifestyle is defined as the way of life of someone habituated to praising and enjoying a lavish existence with expensive stuff and following trends. This lifestyle is a factor affecting flexing behavior. Additionally, this way of living is linked to hedonistic impulses, which are also underlying causes of flexing behavior (Dewi, 2009; , in Resstiani, 2010) b) Trends determine one's position and recognition in their environment for various age groups. Someone who does not follow trends is generally thought to be out of date or uninformed. Teenagers, particularly those who are readily affected by their peer group, do not want to be regarded as out of date, therefore they will strive to follow a trend that is near to flexing at the end (Dewi, 2009; , in Resstiani, 2010).). Furthermore, the surroundings or circle of friends who have the tendency of showing off something fosters a desire to emulate and obtain what friends have, which eventually leads to inescapable flexing behavior (Siregar, 2010 in Resstiani, 2010). c) Another flexing behavior component is family, which influences one's behaviors and thinking. Families that are accustomed to living a luxury lifestyle or who teach their children to accept and buy goods excessively through their parenting style might encourage flexing behavior. It also does not teach a person (kid) to be more consuming. (Dewi, 2009; Siregar, 2010, in Resstiani, 2010). d) advertisement and e) the availability of social media platforms that enable people to construct publicly viewable personal profiles. Users are able to create their own identities and present whatever they wish to the online community. Additionally, other users may access details about the lives of one another's users, which frequently motivates someone to engage in flexing behavior. f) Social media facilitates user contact. As the name indicates, social media is a platform for socializing. This feature enables social media to contribute to the development and dissemination of popular cultural expressions, such as flexing behavior g) personal bias, believing that others are impressed by the flexer's accomplishments Flexing is done in order to impress people. Flexing is one of the acts associated with boasting, sometimes known as bragging. The Australian Institute of Professional Counselors defines boasting as "the act of inflating something." One reason is because braggarts believe their wealth and accomplishments impress others. Individuals that enjoy flexing will feel satisfied if they show off and brag. The pleasure is similar to the stimulus effect of dopamine, which is a chemical in the body that elevates mood. The act of showing off their wealth even makes them addicted, so they never stop showing off their wealth. h) Individuals who like flexing, have a strong urge for self-existence. These requirements are only satisfied when others acknowledge something they have. "When other people notice him (the flexer), he merely feels welcomed by other people, therefore they have to exhibit something that they think is "amazing" or exceptional, such as their riches, the perks they have, or things that other people rarely have." i) conceal emotions of inferiority, according to professor emerita, Dr. Susan flexing is produced by feelings of insecurity and poor self-esteem, according to psychology. "Braggarts (even flexing perpetrators) feel the need to be affirmed or acknowledged by others because of these emotions of insecurity and poor self-esteem." This is accomplished by displaying their achievements, accomplishments, and assets; boasting is done to persuade oneself that they are doing well. Flexing can be used to mask emotions of uneasiness or self-consciousness. "This is because flexors sense that they lack something and cover it up with other things, albeit in an exaggerated fashion." f). Humans are driven to succeed as individuals by social pressures because of our primal need to belong to a community. That is, inspiration is sparked by successful role models since everyone innately wants to fit in with a group. Someone who doesn't feel that way is feeling inferior. People have a propensity to display their progress toward achievement or supremacy (Adler, 2010).

Five general patterns, people do flexing, including flexing patterns carried out by students, namely: 1. Creating wealth content, flexing performers post material or just display their wealth on Facebook, Tik Tok, or Instagram. such as pricey things, travel destinations, or upscale hangouts, up to the income 2. Growing Curiosity, Viewing footage produced by flexing actors will arouse interest and provoke queries such as "how come he/she is so rich?" and "How can he/she just travel everywhere and purchase things?" 3. Communication with people, flexing behavior involves

establishing communication with others and catching their attention so that they want to be welcomed to connect, meet, or cooperate.4. Make similarities, because the majority of people will like people who have something in common, for example, "I used to live in poverty too," or "I also like doing chores at this café," "I've also been on holiday here," "I also wear this bag"5. Revealing Secrets, Actors who are flexing will start to "uncover secrets" to get other people to think, to behave, or to pay attention to them. People are secretive, thus this will grab other people's interest. For instance, the keys to financial success, professional fulfillment, healthy relationships, and so forth.

Related with behavior or lifestyle, it is usually in the culture of consumerism based on social classes. social classes that are at the top will show or describe the characteristics of their cultural consumption. In contrast, the lower and middle social classes will also show their characteristics in daily consumption. Because everyone has different abilities in consumption, from this there is a differentiation that they experience so that a group of individuals called "social climber" which means social action or behavior that a person does so that his social status increases (Agustianti & Amir, 2020). Various kinds of ways are done to meet the needs with the demands of the current lifestyle to look like a rich person.

The material form of money is currently able to take on a social role, which basically functions as an economic measuring tool. A person's wealth is able to increase social status, honor, and prestige in society. Therefore, to get what is expected, the wealth that a person has must be shown by means of generosity and a hedonistic lifestyle. Currently, to show one's wealth only through social media by showing the assets owned openly and becoming a common thing to watch. Showing wealth aims the public to assume that the person is stepping ahead of the status of the nouveaux or equivalent to aristocrats (Bakti et al., 2020). Many reputations can be built with non-materials. However, the understanding and social context among the money society has a strong influence and materialism dominates human thinking.

The purpose of uploading on social media is of course there is a symbol to be expressed, is it inviting goodness? or recognition of wealth?, of course there is an intention that the uploader wants to convey, trying to examine more deeply and certainly questioned. Research proposed by psychology that a person's habit of flexing or showing wealth will be obsessed with doing this repeatedly (Musman, 2020). Someone who has done flexing will be addicted without thinking about whether it has an impact on his finances or not, while branded items that are always new make a sense of consumptiveness even higher, which if known to the public, one must be consistent in posting forms of wealth on mass media.

This article examines the problem of flexing or showing their wealth to the public as a phenomenon of lifestyle behavior patterns in students with all the dynamics that exist, not only that the author will describe the impact of the flexing phenomenon on the craze of consumption, understand the facts revealed from case studies on students who show wealth, as well as the symbolic meaning in society. The author examines flexing behavior based on conditions and sees the social conditions that occur in the realm of social media such as tiktok, Instagram and other social media.

RESEARCH METHOD

Methods of qualitative research were applied in this study. According to Creswell (2010), qualitative research aims to comprehend a situation in greater detail than can be done or produced through statistical techniques or methods of quantification. This qualitative research emphasizes the psychological dynamics of flexing behavior in students using a grounded theory approach. This approach enables researchers to form constructs and build theories from data they directly collect and focuses on expert opinions as references that researchers gather, put together, and then develop. This approach was chosen due to the researcher's desire to perform an in-depth investigation of the psychological dynamics of flexing behavior in students in order to identify unique patterns and types of flexing activity in students. Primary data will be reduced, presented, validated, and evaluated into facts using the grounded theory, which departs from data to a

concept. Furthermore, the facts will be used as a basis for forming concepts regarding the psychological dynamics of flexing behavior in students.

This study employed a purposive sample strategy to identify and investigate the psychological dynamics of flexing behavior in college students. This study's subject requirements were female students aged 18-23 years who displayed flexing behavior. These criteria are established with the understanding that the subject is a flexing agent attempting to comprehend the phenomena under investigation. Three female students from a Malang institution were chosen as subjects for this study because they satisfied preset requirements. Data was collected from each research participant using methods such as interviews, observation, and documentation until the data was judged saturated (looking for information and continuously adding it until no new information could be found).

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The luxury and splendor of human life in today's modern era gave a new culture that we often see every day, where this culture is flexing which means like to highlight wealth. A few people express happiness, beauty, and joy in the form of symbols of meaning, which are usually communicated. There are certain moments in their social activities that are shared with others. The purpose is not only to share information but also a means of showing off and explaining their existence in their social circle.

Showing off today is an inevitable part of everyone in this world, including the phenomenon of showing off in college students. Achievement, happiness and serenity are no longer considered as self-actualization of gratitude towards oneself, so it is a decrease in critical thinking ability and mental impairment, but happiness is a complete and natural enjoyment that depends on visible signs of others and those closest to them. Many people in this case, including students, are willing to buy new items from well-known brands, vacation abroad, and choose food in expensive restaurants or just hang out in famous cafes and all the activities they do to be photographed and open them for the sake of social media to declare their social fame.

The subjects of this study were three persons who met the requirements of flexing behavior and often uploading personal stuff to social media profiles. The following are the entire research subjects:

1.1 Subject 1 (ER)

The first subject is a 23-year-old single active university student in Malang. The subject is the police officer's daughter. The subject resides in a residence purchased specifically for her by her parents to live in while studying in Malang. Her parents also purchased a vehicle for her to utilize during classes and other activities. The subject receives a monthly stipend of about 3 million rupiahs from her parents. Her parents' money is always spent on things she enjoys, such as make-up, bags, shoes, and other branded items, or on trips to areas where young people congregate, such as cafés or shopping centers or malls. or visiting popular tourist destinations such as Bali, Jogja, and Surabaya with their close pals. The subject doesn't hesitate to purchase what she desires and promptly publishes every action or object she possesses to her social media account. The subject will ask her parents to transfer the funds back when they run out but she still wants specific things or wants to travel elsewhere. Usually, after watching the celebgram account, the subject gets inspiration for the things and locations that she visits. Subjects are motivated to make the same purchases or travel to the same locations by content from celebgram profiles. Family variables, such as the fact that both parents never monitor their children's shopping or hedonistic behavior and readily supply more money when their pocket money is low or spent, promote the flexing behavior in the first subject.

ER is a person that utilizes social media frequently to publish her activities. She has three accounts on social media, including an Instagram account with 3202 followers, a TikTok account with 15.2K followers, and a Facebook account with 23 friends. ER is quite selective when it comes to friendships; only those she perceives to be of one frequency will

be her buddies. ER didn't have many friends and mainly hung around with the second subject. Social media posts tend to focus more on flaunting branded products that ER has bought or already own as well as the opulence of travel destinations. When ER publishes content and it receives a lot of likes or complimenting remarks, it gives her a distinct sense of happiness.

1.2 Subject 2 (FA)

The second subject is a student from a well-to-do household. The second subject's parents are coffee merchants in Malang's Dampit district. The subject is 23 years old and a close buddy of the first subject. The subject stated that anything the subject requested to her parents, particularly her father, it would always be obeyed. This causes the second subject to develop the habit of buying what she wants and traveling to where she wants without hesitation. The second subject, like the first subject, is used to show off the activities that she is conducting to her social media account, as well as the content of celebgram accounts.

The FA is also active on social media, with 3,859 Instagram followers and 887 Tik-Tok followers. Like the previous subject, content uploaded on FA's social media displays FA's behavior when using branded things, visiting luxury locales, or showcasing her attractiveness. The FA is also ecstatic when her followers appreciate or react to what she shows on her social media.

1.3 Subject 3 (RA)

The third subject is a student from an ordinary home. Her parents are teachers in Kalimantan. The subject is 23 years old and is pals with two previous subjects. The individual receives roughly Rp. 750,000 in pocket money each month. Subjects must be able to manage her pocket money in order to live in Malang and continue to mingle with their friends, as well as try to mimic their friends' attire, hobbies, or objects. She did this in order to make her would always be with her 2 friends, sometimes she had to borrow money to buy the same things as her friends or so she could hang out at a café or come to a tourist spot with her 2 friends. Subjects are also accustomed to uploading all her activities to her social media accounts. And it's very happy if she can create content together with her 2 friends. RA has an Instagram account with 1322 followers and Tik Tok with 106 followers. The content of RA's social media accounts contains more activities with subjects 1 and 2, but the content that subjects 3 uploads usually doesn't take long, it will only take a few days until it is deleted, this is done because RA feels insecure both physically or in the subject's outfit wear.

When they buy goods they enjoy, visit locations they like, and publish those experiences to social media accounts, all three of them feel pleased and satisfied. They are also thrilled when their uploaded material receives a lot of likes and supportive comments from their followers. Regarding the compulsive aspect, all three subjects have a propensity to make impulsive purchases, but there are differences between them. For example, the first subject buys things and goes wherever he pleases, the second subject imitates celebgram posts out of familial obligations, and the third subject did it to fit in with his friend group. With these dynamics, parents' propensity to adopt permissive parenting methods that do not regulate their children's buying activity is the primary determinant that promotes or fosters flexing behavior in these three subjects. The three participants differ from one another in terms of their financial standing. In the first subject, where flexible conduct is not constrained by time or money, there is greater wealth than in the second and third topics. Similar to the second topic, the third subject only allows flexing at specific periods, and the budget is in the form of monthly funds that are earned. As a result, the first subject's flexing behavior is practiced since she has the necessary resources and funds. Those activities include focusing on targeting of desired goods, visiting the locations she likes, and finding fulfillment because she was born from a family that can afford it. In contrast to the second topic, when she replicated the celebrity's account's content, the third subject saw her flexing in an effort to blend in with her buddies and hide the true circumstances.

Indirectly, someone who frequently flexes on social media, it will have a negative impact on the flexer. Here are the negative impacts of flexing :

1. Flexing actors in their daily lives will become increasingly consumptive, in order to get attention from others both on social media and directly, with the aim of looking like a rich person. And to fulfill this impression, flexing actors will do various kinds of ways.
2. If someone does flexing and is unable to fulfill their lifestyle or beyond their means, they do not hesitate to go into debt to others. It can also be a problem when flexers are unable to repay debts.
3. By doing flexing frequently, it is possible that they have less empathy because they do not care about people who need help or are in need, they only focus on showing off their wealth.

CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that knowledge and attitudes regarding flexing behavior were the cognitive components involved in flexing behavior in participants with impulsive shopping student characteristics. Then, affectively or emotionally, the pleasure derived from obtaining the desired products or visiting the desired locations, as well as a high number of likes and nice comments on their content, motivates individuals to engage in flexing behavior. The study demonstrates that expectations of external impacts, such as the influence of program content, fear of rejection, a strong desire for self-existence, and personality variables, that do not match reality are to blame for the psychological dynamics of flexing actors among students. The focus of this study is the permissive parenting style used in families, which has many of the same elements as student flexing behavior. The patient's family does not regulate his or her purchasing habits, which encourages the subject to engage in self-destructive conduct constantly. Flexing is used to gain respect, recognition of the upper social class, and to show that one is more successful than others. Someone will feel addicted if they have done flexing and will continue to do it repeatedly, in order to maintain the quality of the flexer. Our lives today are inseparable from flexing. Many consequences are caused by showing off wealth on social media such as buying unnecessary items and many people are doubtful of their own abilities. Therefore, further research needs to be done on the types of flexing behavior among students.

References

- Agustianti, S., & Amir, R. (2020). Fenomena Social climber Mahasiswa dalam Pandangan Hukum Islam; Studi Kasus Mahasiswa Fakultas Syariah dan Hukum. *Shautuna: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Perbandingan Mazhab Dan Hukum*.
- Antawati, Ilma. (2022). "Alasan seseorang lakukan flexing" on https://www.um-surabaya.ac.id/en/homepage/news_article?slug=dosen-psikologi-paparkan-alasan-seseorang-lakukan-flexing accessed June 05 2022 10.00 AM.
- Bakti, I. S., Anismar, A., & Amin, K. (2020). Pamer Kemewahan: Kajian Teori Konsumsi Thorstein Veblen. *Jurnal Sosiologi USK (Media Pemikiran & Aplikasi)*, 14(1), 81–98.
- Caniago, R. R., Thorybillah, A., Suroso, E., Iswanto, H., Hermanto, T. S., Kom, A. P. P. S. S., & Kom, M. (2022). Sosialisasi Dampak Positif serta Negatif Sosial Media terhadap Anak-anak. *JATIMIKA: Jurnal Kreativitas Mahasiswa Informatika*, 2(2).
- Creswell, J. W. (2010). *Research design: pendekatan kualitatif, kuantitatif, dan mixed*. PT Pustaka Pelajar
- Eysenck, H.J. (1993). The nature of impulsivity. In W.G. McCown, J.L. Johnson, & M.B. Shure (Eds.), *The impulsive client: Theory, research and treatment* (pp. 57-69). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10500-004>
- Mahyudin. (2017). Social Climber Dan Budaya Pamer: Paradoks Gaya Hidup Masyarakat Kontemporer. *Jurnal kajian Islam Interdisipliner*. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jkii.v2i2.1086>

- Musman, A. (2020). *The Power of IKIGAI: Dan Rahasia Hidup Bahagia ala Orang-orang di Dunia*. Anak Hebat Indonesia.
- Puntoadi, Danish. (2011). *Menciptakan penjualan melalui media sosial*. Jakarta. Elex Media Komputindo.
- Resstiani, S. A. (2010). *Gejala shopaholic di kalangan mahasiswa*. Skripsi. Bandung: Fakultas Desain Program Strata Satu Psikologi Universitas Komputer Indonesia.
- Rook DW, Fisher RJ (1995). Normative influences on impulsive buying behavior. *J. Consum. Res.*, 22: 305-313
- Shahjehan, A., Zeb, F., & Saifullah, K. (2012). The effect of personality on impulsive and compulsive buying behaviors. *African Journal of Business Management*, 6(6), 2187- 2194.
- Tyagi, P., Shyam, R. (2019). Shopaholism from a psychological perspective. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 7 (5 II) 1379-1381. Tyagi, P., Shyam, R. (2018) A study of affluenza in relation to stress. *International Journal of Social Sciences Review*, 6 (10) 1973-1975.
- Walgito Bimo. (2010). *Pengantar psikologi umum*. Andi Yogyakarta