



## Flexing Phenomena of Ritual Piety in Social Media and The Loss of Empathy Among The Muslims

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### Abstract

This research is a descriptive qualitative research using a phenomenological approach. This study aims to describe the phenomenon of religious flexing and the loss of a culture of empathy among Muslims. Data collection techniques are carried out by collecting documents in the form of uploads in the form of pictures, photos or videos from social media YouTube, Instagram and Facebook. This data is then analyzed with the support of secondary sources in the form of data relevant to this research. The data was obtained from books, journals, and websites. The phenomenon of flexing is included in the theory of structural functionalism, flexing becomes a new culture and becomes a spectacle that has sprung up among the public. Social media such as Instagram and Facebook, YouTube with content that is the talk of all levels of society. Displaying piety on social media is a matter of ritual worship. With the aim of getting appreciation, honor and social status.

**Keywords:** flexing; ritual piety; social media

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## Introduction

Flexing, often referred to as showing off, is a behavior that deliberately shows or displays wealth in public, whether in the form of achievements or a luxurious lifestyle, both directly and through social media, to get attention, recognition, or pride from other people. The term flexing is usually used negatively because it represents impoliteness and arrogance or reflects dishonesty and indifference (Clore & David, 2004).

The world is experiencing rapid changes due to the development of technology and information. This development has had an impact on changes in human behavior (Ambrose, 2010). One of these impacts is the emergence of a flexible cultural trend. This culture has even been considered as something commonplace. Surprisingly, this flexing phenomenon is very popular among people from the upper classes (elitists) and the lower classes (proletarians). This can be seen in the many uploads on various social media. People often view flexing posts as showing off wealth and grandeur, as if this behavior were commonplace. This behavior even now has penetrated into the behavior of the Islamic community, such as showing off ritual piety. They shamelessly upload ritual activities such as during Hajj or Umrah, buying expensive worship equipment, distributing zakat while breaking the fast, praying, and so on (Koenig & Saad: Springer, 2014).

If observed in depth, the rise of flexing among Muslims cannot be separated from the development of social media such as

YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and others. Through this media, anyone can upload their activities. In fact, many no longer have the shame of posting their treasures and ritual activities. The aim is to gain popularity and social recognition in society (Dollár, *et al.*, IEEE: 2005)

Flexing in Islam is actually an act that is not good and is prohibited. This prohibition is stated clearly, both in the Koran and al-Hadith (Lubis & Hasan, 2023). Even morally, flexing includes actions that are not unethical. From a psychological standpoint, flexing has a bad impact on the perpetrator and other people. Flexing causes people with a weak economy (proletariat) to live life with illusions. They wish they could become rich instantly, if necessary, without working (Leite-Silva, *et al.*, 2016). If flexing behavior violates, the perpetrators should have a sense of shame, but the fact is not. The perpetrators of this flexing have shown the public an attitude that is not empathetic towards other people, especially those who are socially and economically weak. Never mind the flexing behavior; just daily life is difficult.

## Method

Methodologically, this research is descriptive qualitative research using a phenomenological approach. This study aims to describe the phenomenon of religious flexing and the loss of a culture of empathy among Muslims. Data collection techniques are carried out by collecting documentation in the form of uploads in the form of pictures, photos, or videos from social media YouTube, Instagram, and

Facebook. This data is then analyzed with the support of secondary sources in the form of data relevant to this research. The data was obtained from books, journals, and websites.

## Result and Discussion

The phenomenon of flexing ritual piety among Muslims is something that is prohibited (Curtis, 2002). All behavior carried out by Muslims should be based on serving themselves to Him, not seeking praise and recognition of their status in front of humans (Busro, 2022). God's sustenance is in the form of wealth, a throne that should not be flaunted but be grateful for and distributed to other less fortunate people. It's not that in Islam, it is explained that in the assets of the rich, the rights of the poor must be fulfilled (Bonner, 2005).

People who flex are hurting other people because it has created social jealousy (Wert & Peter, 2004). Giving birth to jealousy, envy, and even arousing can generate strong illusions to be able to get the same thing (social recognition). Religious people should empathize with them by sharing with them (Sheikh, *et al*, 2022).

### 1. Flexing Culture

In the 1990s, flexing is a racial slang word meaning "show courage" and "show off." (Chou, *et al*, 2001). Literally, in Indonesian, it means "show off." (Arsyad, 2022). More specifically, in the Cambridge Dictionary, it means denoting possession or achievement in a way no one likes (Richens, 1958). Flexing has several functions, one of which is to endorse and show the ability to achieve it (M Tew, *et al*, 1989). This flexing

model usually aims to attract the attention of the market or business actors to want to cooperate. Flexing also functions as a mode of fraud to show the existence and solely for vanity (Fisher, 1936).

Rich people usually feel ashamed to show their existence and achievements (Hefni, 2015). They prefer to remain silent and cover up their existence; they even shy away from the media/ spotlight. Flexing culture has a negative impact, not only on himself but also on others (Mustamin, 2022). The negative impact for the perpetrator is the desire to always get the attention and recognition of others. When this is not fulfilled, the perpetrator can justify any means to achieve it by selling the valuable assets he owns or owes to fulfill the desire to gain social recognition. The negative impact on other people is causing social jealousy among the people around him (Leite-Silva, *et al*, 2016).

### 2. Ritual Piety

All piety in Islam lies in monotheism (Memon, *et al*, 2023). Tawhid is a system of thought about life that emphasizes the process of unity and oneness in various aspects of life (Al-Attas, *et al*). All that exists. Sourced from God Almighty, the unifying principle of His creation in various forms, types, and fields of religious activity. The point must have something to do with religious activities.

Ritual purity is often called individual piety. This piety emphasizes the dimensions of applying ritual worship, such as prayer, fasting, zakat, pilgrimage, remembrance, etc. It is called individual piety because it only emphasizes worship related to God and personal interests (Rivard, 2009).

Islam believes that if every person acts, the reward or sin is for himself. Word of Allah S.W.T. Q.S. Fussilat: 46, which means Whoever does good, then (the reward) is for himself and whoever does evil, then (his sin) is for himself; your Lord will not oppress his servants (Hidayat, 2016). Sometimes, the religious order associated with individual worship shows a dual purpose and function. In one of the ways, the servant draws closer to Allah, purifies the heart, and frees himself from dependence not only on Allah S.W.T. but also conveys his request to humanity to carry out its social responsibilities. Prayer is a means to introduce Allah S.W.T. to everyone (Ab Rahman, *et al.*, 2018). Understanding God's coming will make people always live with goodness. Fasting, for example, is not only a process of introducing Allah S.W.T. to Muslims but also a way for mankind to be able to manage the ego, which often demands and hinders hedonism. Zakat worship is one of worship that can cleanse oneself from mistakes and sins and sterilize assets; besides that, zakat also has high social value.

Individual devotion to zakat frees ego behavior from being stingy, learns to be willing to sacrifice, and increases the enthusiasm for seeking sustenance from Allah S.W.T. Zakat should not only confiscate individual piety as an Islamic obligation. However, there is a value of social piety that must be preserved. Hajj is a form of total surrender to Allah, and without question, it also symbolizes the unity, equality, and brotherhood of humanity in the universe (Gutub & Nemshan, 2011). All Muslims only wear two pieces of Ihram cloth and do not

wear perfume, cover their heads, wear shoes, and use epaulets; how rich and great are the degrees of the pilgrims at this time? Together, while simultaneously confirming that the Greatest and Most Rich is Allah S.W.T. Himself.

### **3. Flexing in Islam**

The flexing phenomenon is an antithesis in society caused by various things. One is the lack of public figures who can be used as role models in society (Mustamin, 2022). Undoubtedly, showing off is wrong in Islam, as it is a matter of decency and ritual. Also, flex behavior is not ideal with value consumption. Islam forbids anything excessive because it is classified as an act of Satan (Afifah & Yeti, 2023). Showing behavior is widely discussed when public figures display their wealth or ritual activities on social media. In Islamic ethics, this behavior is classified as scrap, an excess forbidden in Islam. This deed is also in the Qur'an, Surah at-Takasur verses 1-2, which means: "being proud in multiplying the world has neglected you until you enter the grave." (QS. At-Takasur: 1-2).

Flexing is strictly prohibited in Islamic teachings. Rasulullah S.A.W. taught his people to stay away from it. Instead, he taught his people always to be simple, humble, and generous (Mailani, 2022). This is so that there is no gap between the rich and the poor. In the Qur'an in Surat-Hasyr: 7, it is emphasized which means "Human spoils that Allah has given to His Messengers (from) residents of various countries, namely for Allah, Messengers, relatives (Rasul), orphans, the poor and people people who are on the front lines. Road. So that

wealth is not scattered only among the rich among you. Whatever the Apostle gives you, accept it. And what is forbidden, then leave it. And fear Allah, verily, Allah is severe in punishment.

#### 4. Flexing on Social Media

Today's social media can be likened to currency; on the one hand, it can establish friendships, such as bringing together friends who have lost contact for a long time. On the other hand, social media can destroy social order, for example, households, and one's faith and morals, especially among the younger generation (Anshari, 2013).

Social media, as a communication medium, basically functions to facilitate communication. Nevertheless, it has an impact, both negative and positive. Negative impacts, for example, crimes on social media, are sometimes more brutal than in the real world. For example, defamation, harassment through writing, and falsification of identity, all of which are easily found on social media that are developing in society. Besides that, due to the lack of interaction and communication with other people in the real world, social media can slowly destroy the abilities of both children and adults. It lowers the level of development of language skills and makes children feel they do not need other people. Social media sites make their users more selfish. They will be ignorant of their surroundings because they are too engrossed in social media. As a result, social media users become less empathetic to the real world (Memon, *et al.*, 2021).

Some people use social media to show off, whether it's showing off their wealth or their deeds. Showing off wealth, for example, is like showing off excessive gold when

returning from the pilgrimage. While showing off deeds, for example, taking pictures while praying, reciting the Koran, giving alms, pilgrimage, fasting, and reading the Koran. Dalam Islam, flexing atau pamer ditentukan dengan orang yang sombong (Lubis & Sazali, 2023). Perbuatan sombong dalam Islam sangat dibenci oleh Allah SWT. Dalam al-Qur'an Surat a-Baqarah: 264 dijelaskan yang artinya:

"O you who believe, do not lose your charity (reward) by mentioning it and hurting (the recipient's feelings), like someone who spends his wealth because it is *riya'* for humans and does not believe in Allah and the Last Day. So, the parable of that person is like a fine stone with soil on it, then heavy rain flushed the stone and made it clean (not dirty). They do not master anything from what they earn, and Allah does not guide the disbelievers."

Based on the verse above, all posts in the mass media must be intended because of God, not because they expect social recognition from humans. People who post on social media, whether text, photos, videos, or useful articles for others, will be judged as kind (Siddiqui and Tajinder, 2016). Vice versa, if the post has no benefits, it will be recorded as bad. This has been confirmed in the Qur'an, which means "not a single word he uttered, but there was a guardian angel nearby who was always present." (QS. Qaf: 18). There are many things to pay attention to in social media. For example, strict selection is needed when commenting on a post, whether the comments we post are offensive and hurt other people or not. Our posts and comments will also be accounted

for before Allah S.W.T. In a Hadith Rasulullah explained:

*"If someone cannot say good things, it is better to be silent, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Hereafter, let him say good things or keep silent." (Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim).*

Islam teaches its adherents to live, not to be extravagant, and not to show off their wealth (Aaliyah, 2021). In Islam, Allah only entrusted wealth, and at any time, he can take it back. People who used to show off have lost their sense of empathy for others, especially in our current society, which is learning to rise from adversity due to exposure to Covid19.

Muslims are not prohibited from having wealth, many activities, and also a lot of knowledge. However, their use must be by Islamic guidelines. According to Islam, wealth is not an essential goal in human life but only a means to achieve the goal of life and the pleasure of Allah (Irwan, 2021). Wealth is as much as possible to provide good for individuals and society. The forms are very diverse, such as lightening the burden of others.

One of the goals of social media is to connect with many people, not to show off (Siddiqui and Tajinder, 2016). Social media was created to display positive interactions in social communities. Social media is often used as a place to show off to its users. Showing off wealth is part of the attitude of the royals. Whether you realize it or not, the attitude of *riya'* is a minor act of *shirk* and is a very big sin. Allah says which means:

*"And do not turn your face away from people (because of arrogance) and do not*

*walk the earth arrogantly. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are arrogant and proud of themselves." (Q.S. Luqman: 18)*

Especially if this attitude of showing off is followed by the notion that he is more noble than others, he demeans, humiliates, and humiliates other people through actions and words.

Wealth is not a measuring tool used to judge human glory (Aaliyah, 2021). A noble person is not measured by his wealth but by his holiness. Flaunting wealth or activities on social media does not benefit others. Wealth will benefit others when it is used to help people in need. People who are used to the culture of showing off demonstrate their inability to understand proper social relations. Besides that, he is showing a loss of empathy for others. People who are used to showing off are likened to dark-minded people who have no feelings (Leite-Silva, *et al.*, 2016). Why is that? Because around them, many people are still socio-economically living in poverty.

### **5. Loss of Empathy awareness for the Ummah**

Empathy is the awareness that a person will place himself as another individual through thoughts, feelings, and understanding of other people's circumstances (Hoffman, 2008). Empathy is about knowing what others feel and communicating good behavior and attitudes, knowledge, and emotional experiences to others. Thus, empathy is a psychological process that allows individuals to understand, predict someone's behavior and feel the emotions that trigger their emotions.

Individuals look like other people until they can understand emotional states from other people's points of view (Ibid).

Empathizing means being able to feel an emotion and identify with the feelings of others, such as sadness, jealousy, anger, joy, shame, guilt, and sullenness. Empathy can be built based on self-awareness. The more a person knows his own emotions, the more skilled he is at reading the emotions of others. By improving cognitive skills, especially the ability to accept and consider other people's perspectives, individuals will understand other people's feelings and emotions. People who can feel the emotions and feelings of other people will give birth to compassionate traits and behaviors and like to help others (Ibid).

In everyday life, individuals express emotions through sign language (non-verbal) rather than verbal (verbal). This shows that individuals are able to read other people's feelings in sign language (non-verbal), such as facial expressions, body language, and gestures. By knowing sign language, empathy will emerge by itself, and individuals will respond to other people's cues with their physical sensations. Empathy is also not only through cognitive recognition of their feelings but empathy will also open individual eyes to give and want to act. Individually. Smartphone addiction can affect users who are often indifferent to the social environment (Gong, *et al.*, 2022).

There are several steps in building empathy, namely by:

1. Generating awareness of emotional expression;

Understanding emotions is a basic step for empathy; individuals need skills to

express emotions with these words that can represent different types of emotions so that they can understand the feelings of others.

2. Increase sensitivity to the feelings of others.

One of the ways a person becomes more sensitive is the ability to correctly interpret a person's emotional symptoms, including voice, body posture, and facial expressions. To develop empathy for other people, empathy can be fostered by encouraging someone to practice feeling what others feel by placing it in themselves (Nurdin and Nurfitriany, 2020).

## Conclusion

Flexing ritual piety is an act that is not good and is prohibited by Islam. All our actions, both in the real world and in cyberspace, should be based on expecting His pleasure, not human recognition or praise. Flexing ritual piety will not only bring no reward to the perpetrators but will instead result in sin.

Rizki bestowed by Allah SWT. is a trust and a test for humans. Can humans be grateful or vice versa become kufr? The fortune owned is not a benchmark for the degree of human glory before Allah S.W.T., but righteousness is the benchmark.

Human glory is also not measured from the physical side but from the sincere intentions in the heart. So, use the fortune you must fulfill according to what He commands, not for an image to get human recognition. Flexing the ritual piety will not get a great reward from Allah S.W.T.; on the contrary, it will cancel the charity and even bring Allah S.W.T.'s wrath. It would be nice if the rizki that Allah has bestowed were used,

as it should not be shown to the public to gain social recognition, especially if our ritual piety evokes the most pious feelings of all.

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