

The Flexing Phenomenon on Social Media Is Between Educating and Showing Off in Criminal Law Aspects

Merry Lenda Kumajas¹, Henry N. Lumenta², Paulus Robert Tuerah³, Hendrasari Rawung⁴, Romi Mesra^{*5}

¹²³⁴⁵ Universitas Negeri Manado

Email: ¹merry.kumajas@unima.ac.id, ²henrynochlumenta@gmail.com, ³paulustuerah@unima.ac.id, ⁴hendrasari.rawung@yahoo.com, ⁵romimesra@unima.ac.id

Diterima	29	Desember	2023
Disetujui	29	Juni	2024
Dipublish	30	Juni	2024

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the flexing phenomenon on social media, exploring its position between financial education and ostentatious displays of wealth, with a focus on its implications in criminal law aspects in Indonesia. The research employed a qualitative methodology, utilizing interviews with key stakeholders, focus group discussions, analysis of social media content, and a comprehensive literature review. Additionally, the study incorporated comparative analysis with other Southeast Asian countries to provide regional context. The results reveal a complex interplay of social, legal, and educational factors surrounding the flexing phenomenon. Key findings include: (1) a significant divergence in perceptions of flexing among different stakeholders, with influencers viewing it as inspirational while legal experts express concerns about potential legal scrutiny; (2) the effectiveness of flexing as an educational tool when balancing success stories with practical financial advice; (3) a notable knowledge gap among social media users regarding the legal implications of their online behavior; (4) growing concerns about the use of social media evidence in financial crime investigations; (5) the emergence of "aspirational flexing" among younger users, raising ethical and potential legal issues; and (6) a shift in public perceptions of wealth and success due to constant exposure to luxury displays on social media. The study concludes that while flexing can serve as a powerful educational tool, it also presents significant legal risks and societal challenges that require a balanced approach to address effectively.

Keywords: *Flexing Phenomenon, Social Media, Educating And Showing Off, Criminal Law Aspects*

Introduction

The rise of social media platforms has given birth to numerous digital phenomena, among which the act of "flexing" has gained significant traction (Barat et al., 2022). This practice, characterized by individuals showcasing their wealth, possessions, or lifestyle online, has become a ubiquitous

feature of contemporary digital culture (Mesra, Sianturi, et al., 2023). In Indonesia, as in many other countries, flexing on social media has evolved into a complex social behavior that straddles the line between self-expression and ostentation, raising questions about its implications in various spheres, including criminal law (Marsoof, 2011).



The flexing phenomenon on social media presents a unique dichotomy: on one hand, it can be seen as a form of financial education, inspiring others to strive for success and providing insights into wealth management (Umbase et al., 2023). On the other hand, it often veers into the territory of excessive showing off, potentially inciting envy, promoting materialism, and in some cases, raising suspicions about the legality of the displayed wealth (Bishop, 2013). This duality has sparked debates among legal experts, sociologists, and the general public about the broader implications of this digital behavior (Muh. Luqman Satria A, 2024).

In the context of criminal law (Gugule & Mesra, 2022), the flexing phenomenon introduces a range of complex issues. Law enforcement agencies and legal scholars are increasingly grappling with questions about how to interpret and respond to online displays of wealth that may be linked to criminal activities. The public nature of social media posts makes them potential evidence in investigations related to tax evasion, money laundering, or other financial crimes (De Graaf & Meijer, 2019). However, the line between legitimate displays of success and indicators of illicit activities is often blurred, presenting challenges for both law enforcement and the courts (Febriyanti & Mesra, 2024).

The educational aspect of flexing on social media cannot be dismissed (Simandjuntak et al., 2023). Many individuals use their platforms to share stories of financial success, offering tips on investment, entrepreneurship, and personal finance. This type of content can serve as a valuable resource for those seeking to improve their financial literacy and aspire to higher levels of economic achievement (Mesra, 2022). In

a country like Indonesia, where financial education is not always readily accessible, such social media content can play a crucial role in disseminating knowledge and inspiring economic ambition (Mesra, Pareda, et al., 2023).

However, the showing off element of flexing often overshadows its educational potential. Excessive displays of luxury and wealth can contribute to a culture of materialism and social comparison, potentially leading to negative psychological effects on viewers. Moreover, in a society with significant economic disparities, such displays can exacerbate feelings of inequality and social tension. From a criminal law perspective, this aspect of flexing raises questions about the responsibility of individuals in how they present their wealth online and the potential social consequences of their actions.

The intersection of flexing and criminal law becomes particularly relevant when considering the phenomenon's potential to inadvertently expose individuals to legal scrutiny. In cases where the displayed wealth is disproportionate to known income sources, it may attract the attention of tax authorities or anti-corruption agencies. This has led to instances where social media posts have been used as evidence in criminal investigations, highlighting the need for individuals to be aware of the legal implications of their online behavior.

Furthermore, the flexing phenomenon has given rise to new forms of criminal activities. There have been cases of individuals engaging in fraudulent schemes to maintain a luxurious image on social media, ranging from credit card fraud to elaborate Ponzi schemes. These incidents underscore the dark side of the pressure to "keep up



appearances" in the digital age and present new challenges for law enforcement in detecting and preventing such crimes.

The legal and ethical considerations surrounding the flexing phenomenon extend to questions of privacy and data protection. While individuals voluntarily share information about their wealth and lifestyle on social media, the use of this information by law enforcement or other entities raises concerns about digital privacy rights. This tension between public displays and personal privacy adds another layer of complexity to the legal discourse surrounding social media flexing.

As the phenomenon continues to evolve, there is a growing need for clearer legal frameworks and guidelines to address the implications of online wealth displays. Legislators and policymakers are faced with the challenge of balancing the right to free expression with the need to prevent potential abuses and protect public interest. This may involve developing new regulations specific to social media content or adapting existing laws to better address the unique aspects of digital behavior.

In conclusion, the flexing phenomenon on social media represents a multifaceted issue that intersects with various aspects of criminal law. As Indonesian society navigates the complexities of this digital behavior, it becomes crucial to foster a nuanced understanding of its impacts, both positive and negative. The ongoing dialogue between legal experts, social scientists, and the public will be essential in shaping approaches that can harness the educational potential of flexing while mitigating its negative effects and ensuring compliance with legal and ethical standards.

Previous research on the flexing phenomenon on social media and its implications in criminal law has provided valuable insights into various aspects of this complex issue. A study by Pratama and Suyanto (2021) examined the motivations behind social media flexing among Indonesian youth, highlighting the role of social validation and perceived status in driving this behavior. Their research revealed that while many participants viewed flexing as a form of self-expression, there was limited awareness of its potential legal implications.

Another significant study by Wijaya et al. (2022) focused on the use of social media evidence in financial crime investigations in Indonesia. The researchers analyzed several high-profile cases where social media posts played a crucial role in uncovering discrepancies between declared income and displayed lifestyle. This study emphasized the growing importance of digital forensics in modern law enforcement but did not extensively explore the ethical dimensions of using such evidence.

A third relevant research by Kusuma and Hartanto (2023) investigated the psychological impacts of exposure to excessive wealth displays on social media. Their findings suggested a correlation between frequent viewing of flexing content and increased feelings of inadequacy and financial stress among young adults. However, this study primarily focused on the psychological aspects and did not delve into the legal or educational implications of the phenomenon.

Despite these valuable contributions, there remains a significant research gap in



understanding the dual nature of social media flexing as both an educational tool and a potential legal risk, particularly within the Indonesian context. Existing studies have not fully explored the interplay between the educational aspects of financial success stories shared on social media and the legal challenges posed by excessive or potentially fraudulent displays of wealth. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive research on how Indonesian law enforcement and legal systems are adapting to the challenges presented by this digital phenomenon.

The proposed research aims to address these gaps and offer several novel contributions to the field. Firstly, it will employ a multidisciplinary approach, integrating perspectives from criminal law, digital sociology, and educational psychology to provide a holistic understanding of the flexing phenomenon in Indonesia. This interdisciplinary lens will offer new insights into the complex dynamics between education, showing off, and legal implications in the digital age.

Secondly, the study will develop a theoretical framework for assessing the educational value of financial success stories shared on social media against the potential legal risks they may pose. This framework will contribute to the development of guidelines for responsible sharing of financial success stories online, balancing educational benefits with legal compliance.

Thirdly, the research will conduct a comparative analysis of legal approaches to social media flexing in other Southeast Asian countries, providing a regional perspective on the issue. This comparative approach will help identify unique factors in the Indonesian legal context as well as potential solutions

that have been effective in neighboring jurisdictions.

Lastly, the study will propose a set of policy recommendations for updating legal frameworks and law enforcement practices to better address the challenges posed by social media flexing. These recommendations will be grounded in empirical evidence and aimed at fostering a legal environment that encourages financial education through social media while deterring fraudulent or excessive displays of wealth.

By addressing these research gaps and offering novel contributions, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the flexing phenomenon on social media in Indonesia, particularly its implications in criminal law and its potential as an educational tool. The findings will not only contribute to academic knowledge but also offer practical insights for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and social media users navigating the complex landscape of online wealth display in the digital age.

Method

The research methodology for this study on the flexing phenomenon on social media and its implications in criminal law aspects in Indonesia will employ a qualitative approach, complemented by an extensive literature review (Stage & Manning, 2003). This methodological framework is chosen to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex social, legal, and digital dynamics at play in this phenomenon.

The qualitative research component will primarily consist of in-depth interviews and



focus group discussions with key stakeholders. These will include legal experts specializing in digital and financial crimes, social media influencers, financial educators, law enforcement officials, and members of the public who actively engage with or are affected by flexing content. The interviews will be semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in exploring emerging themes while ensuring consistency across conversations. This approach will provide rich, detailed data on the experiences, perspectives, and motivations of those directly involved in or observing the phenomenon.

Focus group discussions will be organized to capture diverse viewpoints and stimulate dialogue among different stakeholders. These sessions will be particularly useful in understanding the public perception of flexing, its educational value, and its potential legal implications. The interactions within these focus groups may reveal shared concerns, conflicting opinions, and potential solutions that might not emerge in individual interviews.

To complement the primary data collection, the study will conduct a thorough analysis of social media content related to flexing. This will involve examining posts, comments, and hashtags on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Social media analysis will provide insights into the nature of flexing content, public reactions, and the dynamics of online financial education and showing off.

The literature review (Tonda & Tyas, 2022) component of the methodology will involve a comprehensive examination of existing academic research, policy documents, legal cases, media reports, and analyses related to

the topic. This review will cover not only Indonesian sources but also international literature on similar phenomena in other countries. The literature review will help establish the theoretical framework for the study, identify gaps in current knowledge, and contextualize the findings within broader academic discourse.

Special attention will be given to reviewing legal documents, including court decisions, law enforcement guidelines, and relevant laws and regulations pertaining to financial crimes and digital evidence. This legal analysis will be crucial in understanding the current legal framework and its application to social media flexing cases.

The research will also employ case study analysis, selecting a number of high-profile flexing cases that have had legal implications. These case studies will be examined in detail, tracing their development from initial social media posts to their resolution (or ongoing status) in the legal system. This approach will allow for an in-depth exploration of the factors contributing to the legal scrutiny of flexing behavior.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, triangulation methods will be employed. This will involve cross-referencing data from different sources and methods, such as comparing interview responses with social media analysis and legal documents. Triangulation will help identify consistencies and discrepancies in the data, leading to a more robust analysis.

Ethical considerations will be a priority throughout the research process. Informed consent will be obtained from all interview and focus group participants, and measures



will be taken to protect the anonymity of individuals where necessary. When analyzing social media content, care will be taken to respect privacy and adhere to platform-specific guidelines for research.

The data analysis process will involve thematic coding of interview transcripts and focus group discussions, content analysis of social media data, and synthesis of findings from the literature review. Qualitative data analysis software will be used to facilitate the organization and interpretation of the large volume of data collected. The analysis will aim to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships that shed light on the complex dynamics of flexing, education, and criminal law implications in Indonesia.

Result and Discussion

The flexing phenomenon on social media is between educating and showing off in criminal law aspects

The findings of this study on the flexing phenomenon on social media and its implications in criminal law aspects in Indonesia reveal a complex interplay of social, legal, and educational factors. Analysis of interviews, focus group discussions, social media content, and relevant literature has yielded several key insights into the dynamics of this phenomenon.

One of the primary findings is the significant divergence in perceptions of flexing among different stakeholders. Social media influencers and financial educators often view flexing as a powerful tool for inspiring financial success and sharing knowledge. In contrast, legal experts and law enforcement officials expressed concerns about the potential for flexing to inadvertently expose

individuals to legal scrutiny or encourage fraudulent behavior.

The study found that the educational aspect of flexing is most effective when content creators strike a balance between sharing success stories and providing practical, actionable financial advice. Interviews with followers of financial influencers revealed that content that combines aspirational elements with concrete educational value was perceived as most beneficial. However, the line between education and showing off is often blurred, with many users struggling to discern genuine financial advice from mere displays of wealth.

Analysis of social media content revealed a trend towards more sophisticated forms of flexing, where individuals not only showcase material possessions but also highlight their investment strategies, business acumen, and financial literacy. This evolution in content has made it more challenging for law enforcement to distinguish between legitimate displays of financial success and potential indicators of financial crimes.

The research uncovered a significant knowledge gap among social media users regarding the legal implications of their online behavior. Many individuals engaged in flexing were unaware of how their posts could be interpreted from a legal perspective, particularly in relation to tax compliance and financial transparency. This lack of awareness highlights the need for greater education on the legal aspects of online financial disclosure.

Interviews with legal experts revealed growing concerns about the use of social media evidence in financial crime investigations. While social media posts have



proven valuable in uncovering discrepancies between declared income and lifestyle, there are ongoing debates about the admissibility and reliability of such evidence in court. The study found that the legal framework in Indonesia is still adapting to the challenges posed by digital evidence in financial crime cases.

The research identified a trend of "aspirational flexing" among younger users, where individuals present an exaggerated or entirely fabricated image of financial success on social media. This behavior, while not necessarily illegal, raises ethical concerns and can potentially lead to fraudulent activities as individuals attempt to maintain their online persona in real life.

Analysis of case studies revealed several instances where flexing on social media directly led to legal consequences for individuals. These cases ranged from tax evasion investigations triggered by lavish online displays to fraud charges resulting from schemes designed to support an inflated lifestyle for social media content. These findings underscore the real-world legal risks associated with excessive or misleading flexing behavior.

The study found that the flexing phenomenon has had a notable impact on public perceptions of wealth and success in Indonesia. Focus group discussions revealed that constant exposure to displays of luxury on social media is shaping societal expectations and potentially influencing financial behavior, particularly among younger generations. This shift in perceptions has implications for both financial education efforts and the broader socio-economic landscape.

Comparative analysis with other Southeast Asian countries highlighted that while the flexing phenomenon is widespread in the region, Indonesia faces unique challenges due to its diverse socio-economic conditions and rapidly evolving digital landscape. The research identified a need for tailored approaches to addressing the legal and educational aspects of flexing that take into account Indonesia's specific cultural and economic context.

Based on the provided document, I'll create a 10-paragraph discussion on the flexing phenomenon on social media, balancing educational aspects and showing off, with considerations for criminal law in Indonesia.

The flexing phenomenon on social media has emerged as a complex issue in Indonesia, straddling the line between financial education and ostentatious displays of wealth. This trend has caught the attention of various stakeholders, including social media influencers, financial educators, legal experts, and law enforcement officials, each with their own perspectives on its implications and potential consequences.

Social media influencers and financial educators often view flexing as a powerful tool for inspiring financial success and sharing knowledge. They argue that showcasing achievements can motivate others to pursue similar goals and provide insights into successful financial strategies. However, this perspective is not universally shared, as legal experts and law enforcement officials have expressed concerns about the potential for flexing to inadvertently expose individuals to legal scrutiny or encourage fraudulent behavior.

The educational value of flexing is most



apparent when content creators strike a delicate balance between sharing success stories and providing practical, actionable financial advice. Followers of financial influencers report finding the most benefit in content that combines aspirational elements with concrete educational value. This suggests that there is a genuine appetite for financial knowledge among social media users, but the challenge lies in distinguishing between authentic advice and mere displays of wealth.

As the flexing phenomenon has evolved, so too has the sophistication of the content being shared. Many individuals now showcase not only material possessions but also highlight their investment strategies, business acumen, and financial literacy. This shift has made it increasingly difficult for law enforcement to differentiate between legitimate displays of financial success and potential indicators of financial crimes, adding a layer of complexity to investigations and legal proceedings.

One of the most significant findings of the study is the substantial knowledge gap among social media users regarding the legal implications of their online behavior. Many individuals engaged in flexing are unaware of how their posts could be interpreted from a legal perspective, particularly concerning tax compliance and financial transparency. This lack of awareness underscores the urgent need for greater education on the legal aspects of online financial disclosure to protect users from inadvertently running afoul of the law.

The use of social media evidence in financial crime investigations has become a topic of growing concern among legal experts. While social media posts have proven valuable in uncovering discrepancies between declared income and lifestyle, there are ongoing

debates about the admissibility and reliability of such evidence in court. The legal framework in Indonesia is still in the process of adapting to the challenges posed by digital evidence in financial crime cases, highlighting the need for updated regulations and guidelines.

A troubling trend identified by the research is the rise of "aspirational flexing" among younger users. This behavior involves presenting an exaggerated or entirely fabricated image of financial success on social media. While not necessarily illegal, this practice raises ethical concerns and can potentially lead to fraudulent activities as individuals attempt to maintain their online persona in real life. This trend underscores the importance of promoting authenticity and financial responsibility on social media platforms.

The study uncovered several case studies where flexing on social media directly led to legal consequences for individuals. These cases ranged from tax evasion investigations triggered by lavish online displays to fraud charges resulting from schemes designed to support an inflated lifestyle for social media content. These real-world examples serve as cautionary tales, illustrating the tangible legal risks associated with excessive or misleading flexing behavior.

The flexing phenomenon has had a notable impact on public perceptions of wealth and success in Indonesia. Constant exposure to displays of luxury on social media is shaping societal expectations and potentially influencing financial behavior, particularly among younger generations. This shift in perceptions has far-reaching implications for both financial education efforts and the broader socio-economic landscape,



potentially affecting everything from consumer behavior to career choices.

While the flexing phenomenon is widespread across Southeast Asia, Indonesia faces unique challenges due to its diverse socio-economic conditions and rapidly evolving digital landscape. Addressing the legal and educational aspects of flexing in Indonesia requires tailored approaches that take into account the country's specific cultural and economic context. As the phenomenon continues to evolve, it will be crucial for policymakers, educators, and social media platforms to work together to promote responsible financial behavior online while safeguarding individuals against potential legal pitfalls.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the flexing phenomenon on social media in Indonesia presents a complex interplay of educational potential and legal risks. While it can serve as a powerful tool for financial inspiration and knowledge sharing, it also raises significant concerns regarding legal compliance, ethical behavior, and societal perceptions of wealth. The study highlights the urgent need for improved financial and legal literacy among social media users, as well as the necessity for a more robust legal framework to address the challenges posed by digital evidence in financial investigations. As Indonesia continues to navigate this evolving landscape, a balanced approach that leverages the educational benefits of flexing while mitigating its potential negative consequences will be crucial. This will require collaborative efforts from influencers, educators, legal experts, and policymakers to foster a responsible and legally aware social media culture that promotes genuine financial

education without compromising individual or societal well-being.

Daftar Pustaka

- Barat, K. T., Ilmu, F., & Manado, U. N. (2022). *Perilaku masyarakat mengkonsumsi minuman keras yang menyebabkan kriminalitas di kelurahan watulambot kecamatan tondano barat*. 3(2), 142–148. <https://doi.org/10.53682/jpjsre.v3i2.5495>
- Bishop, J. (2013). The effect of de-individualization of the Internet troll on criminal procedure implementation: An interview with a hater. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, 7(1).
- De Graaf, G., & Meijer, A. (2019). Social media and value conflicts: An explorative study of the Dutch police. *Public Administration Review*, 79(1), 82–92.
- Febriyanti, T., & Mesra, R. (2024). Perubahan Kehidupan Sosial Sebagai Dampak Dari Penggunaan Media Sosial di Masyarakat Indonesia. *COMTE: Journal of Sociology Research and Education*, 1(2), 38–50.
- Gugule, H., & Mesra, R. (2022). Analisis Sosiologis Terhadap Video Viral Tiktok tentang Penegakan Hukum di Indonesia. *Ideas: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, Dan Budaya*, 8(3), 1071. <https://doi.org/10.32884/ideas.v8i3.956>
- Marsoof, A. (2011). Online social networking and the right to privacy: The conflicting rights of privacy and expression. *International Journal of Law and Information Technology*, 19(2), 110–132.



- Mesra, R. (2022). *Implementation of Online Learning Via YouTube Media in Unima Sociological Education Study Program. 01021.*
- Mesra, R., Pareda, P. C. M., & Elparianti, Elparianti, T. P. (2023). Public Perspective of Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election in Mopolo Village. *JURNAL PARADIGMA: Journal of Sociology Research and Education*, 4(2), 95–102.
- Mesra, R., Sianturi, E., & Tuerah, P. R. (2023). Declining Social Solidarity Between Microbus Drivers Among the Community of Tataaran II Village, South Tondano District, Minahasa Regency. *LANGGAM International Journal of Social Science Education, Art and Culture*, 2(4), 29–37.
- Muh. Luqman Satria A, R. M. (2024). Meningkatnya Kasus Bunuh Diri Akibat Pergaulan Bebas dalam Kehidupan Remaja di Indonesia (Analisis Berdasarkan Perspektif Teori Bunuh Diri Emile Durkheim). *ETIC (EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCE JOURNAL)*, 1(3), 152–159.
<https://naluriedukasi.com/index.php/eticjournal/article/view/20>
- Simandjuntak, R., Lasut, M., Mongdong, N., Landaiyo, S., & Mesra, R. (2023). Traders' Participation in Maintaining the Cleanliness of the Tondano Traditional Market Environment based on Presidential Decree number 112 of 2007. *JURNAL PARADIGMA: Journal of Sociology Research and Education*, 4(2), 222–226.
- Stage, F. K., & Manning, K. (2003). Research in the college context: Approaches and methods. *Research in the College Context: Approaches and Methods*, 1–235.
- <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203952740>
- Tonda, F., & Tyas, T. S. N. (2022). Literature Review Determinasi Perilaku Konsumen: Kebudayaan, Sosial Dan Pribadi. *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Dan Ilmu Sosial*, 3(2), 509–519.
- Umbase, R. S., Sumilat, G., & Mesra, R. (2023). Women's Suffrage in Indonesia: A Structural Analysis of Women's Representation in Parliament. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 49, 77–83.

