

THE PHENOMENON OF FLEXING THROUGH INSTAGRAM SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG GARUT STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

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Flexing is an act of showing off something that is owned conspicuously, and is currently a widespread phenomenon among students, including Garut students who do a lot of flexing through Instagram social media. This phenomenon is interesting to study because social media has a major influence on how students express themselves and build their social image. The purpose of this study is to determine the form of flexing they display, and how their behavior in real life is compared to the persona displayed on social media. The study used a qualitative approach with Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory as the basis for analysis, especially the concept of front stage and back stage. The results of the analysis show that on the front stage to show the form of self-existence as a space for expression as well as a social stage where you build identity and get social validation, attract the attention of the opposite sex through a fashionable appearance, and environmental influences, students display their self-image through Instagram by posting photos and videos of vacations, hobby activities such as skateboarding, and displays of luxury such as certain cars or fashion. These activities function as a form of social validation and representation of personal achievement, in everyday life (Back Stage) their behavior tends to be different, students are able to manage different roles in real life and cyberspace effectively appearing simpler than the charm displayed on social media.

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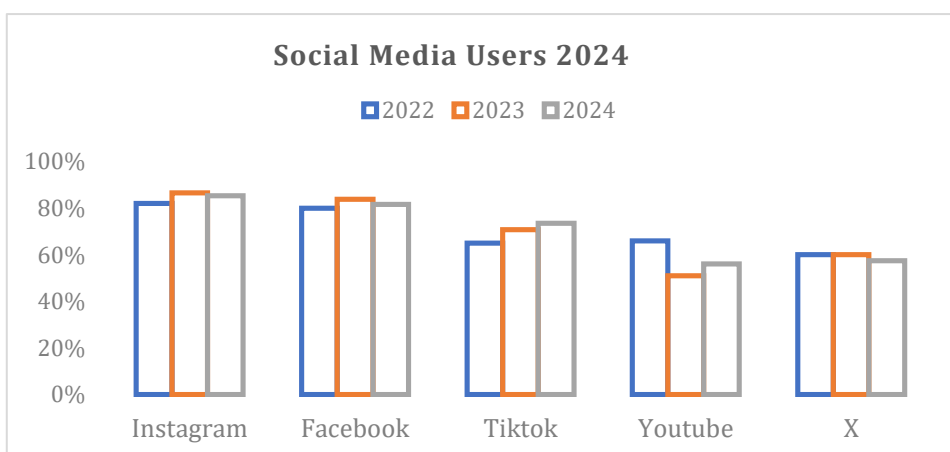
1. Introduction

The term "flexing" literally means "showing off" in English. Showing off is the act of showing off goods or something you have conspicuously. Flexing is the behavior of someone who shows or shows off what they have in order to gain praise or recognition from others, especially on social media (Defianti, 2022). Generally, the main reason someone does flexing is to attract attention or gain social validation. The term flexing was first introduced by Thorstein Veblen in 1899 through his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions*. It is undeniable that when someone has something that is considered valuable, the temptation to show it off on social media, especially the Instagram platform, is indeed great. Although it only occurs in cyberspace, this habit can foster a

constant desire to look rich, famous, or have an attractive physical appearance (Ananda, 2022).

In the current era of media technology, nearly everyone utilizes social media due to its ease of use and accessibility from virtually anywhere. Among the most favored platforms is Instagram. According to a 2024 survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), Instagram is accessed by 85.3% of Indonesian internet users, and its usage continues to increase annually. The survey was conducted between December 2022 and December 2024, with 8,720 respondents selected proportionally and randomly from 38 provinces in Indonesia.

Tabel 1. Social Media Graphics 2024



The essence of Instagram lies in photo and video sharing. However, the current use of the platform has shifted dramatically. Images uploaded must appear perfect, often undergoing extensive editing to achieve a flawless aesthetic. Beyond visual appeal, these posts are also expected to showcase happiness or highlight financial or personal success. Many users are willing to invest time and money into producing these idealized visuals whether hanging out at cafés, traveling, shopping for luxury items, or dining at upscale restaurants. Individuals who exhibit such behavior are often identified as engaging in luxury exhibitionism or flexing.

This issue has become increasingly prevalent among students, where flexing involves showcasing luxury or exclusivity to gain public recognition or simply to conform. This trend is deeply linked to platforms like Instagram, which encourage self-exposure and enhance users' self-worth. The intensity of flexing varies based on social background; commonly, it involves luxury brands or items perceived as exclusive due to their high cost. Individuals who frequently flex are often driven by narcissistic tendencies, seeking praise or criticism both of which they perceive as beneficial (Adinda, 2023).

The significant impact of the flexing phenomenon is the occurrence of unhealthy social comparisons in the Garut Student environment. Often students compare themselves to others based on the content they see on social media, without realizing that what is uploaded only reflects a small part of their real life in order to benefit themselves, namely by showing off their achievements and advantages as proof that they are indeed worthy and entitled to receive something they want as evidence and stimulus by providing digital notes that are displayed on various existing social media platforms.

Dramaturgy Theory developed by Erving Goffman views social life as a form of theatrical performance, where individuals act as actors who present themselves to an audience in various social situations. In this perspective, identity is not understood as

something that is fixed and essential, but rather as a dynamic and contextual construction, which is continuously formed and modified through social interaction. Goffman emphasizes that the main concern lies not in the "authentic" or "true" actions of the individual, but rather in how the individual manages impressions and conveys a certain self-image to others. Identity, in this case, is not an entity that is fully owned by the individual, but rather the result of a negotiation process between "actors" and "audiences" in a particular social space, because identity is performative, namely formed through actions and symbolic representations in interaction, it is very vulnerable to disruption or inconsistency if social expectations are not met or if self-appearance is not effectively controlled (Hidayah, 2020).

This study uses Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory to understand how Garut students form identities on social media, especially Instagram. In this theory, identity is displayed through two social stages, namely the front stage and the back stage. The front stage is a public performance space. Students display ideal images of vacations, fashion, hobbies, and luxury as a form of impression management, namely an effort to regulate the impression that the public wants to receive. The back stage is a simpler real life that is not displayed openly. Here students are more honest, such as limiting access to content from family or dividing accounts for different audience groups. These findings indicate that flexing is not just showing off, but a conscious strategy in forming social identity in the digital era, students play different roles according to context and audience, showing adaptive abilities in building self-image in cyberspace.

As an illustration, the results of the analysis of the flexing phenomenon on social media involving students from Garut University.



figure 1. (Rangga posting while on vacation @ranggajlyn)

According to a student from the Faculty of Economics named Rangga, he flexed by uploading vacation photos on social media. He added that showing off a lifestyle on Instagram is considered fashionable. Through these uploads, the informant wants all his followers to see and acknowledge that what he shares on social media is impressive or "cool". Informants generally demonstrate flexing behavior by uploading photos of food, travel experiences, and other personal activities to their Instagram accounts. This lifestyle fosters a habit of interacting with social media, where individuals increasingly spend time pursuing popularity by showing off their activities whether eating out or traveling for public consumption and validation.

The first research conducted by Arik & Pradana (2024) With the title “The Flexing Phenomenon on Social Media: Generation Z’s Perceptions”, this study employed a phenomenological and qualitative approach. The findings of the study revealed that: (1) feelings of insecurity do not always lead to flexing behavior; (2) individuals who excessively express themselves often engage in self-manipulation; (3) those who find satisfaction in visiting less popular locations tend to exhibit excessive behavior; (4) the motives behind flexing vary from person to person; (5) external cues received by an individual can serve as triggers for such behavior; (6) the tendency to flex is not always part of a deliberate or staged scenario; and (7) an individual’s capacity for self-regulation may prevent flexing behavior in response to the challenges of social interaction.

Second, research by Khayati et al. (2022) In their study titled “The Flexing Phenomenon on Social Media as a Platform for Social Class Recognition: A Structural Functionalism Perspective”, the researchers employed a qualitative descriptive method, meaning the study aims to describe various scenarios, conditions, and contributing factors. The findings indicate that the flexing phenomenon can be analyzed within the framework of structural functionalism; flexing has become a new cultural pattern and a spectacle that has spread throughout society. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook which feature flexing-related content have become central topics of discussion and debate across all social classes. The act of displaying wealth on social media is aimed at gaining respect, honor, and social status; however, the wealth shown is not necessarily an accurate reflection of actual ownership or financial capability.

Third, research by Yuwita et al. (2022) with the title "Dramaturgy: Flexing Culture Under the Guise of Fraud on Social Media (Case Study of Indra Kenz and Doni Salmanan). In this study, the researcher examines further the problems that ensnare Indra Kenz and Doni Salmanan as binary option affiliates who show off their wealth on various existing social media platforms in the hope that other social media users will be tempted to follow the steps taken by Indra Kenz and Doni Salmanan and become interested in following the binary option affiliate, which leads to fraud. This study was conducted using dramaturgy theory through front stage and back stage. This study, as well as the researcher's research, both explore the tradition of showing off wealth on social media and use Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory as a framework for thinking. The contrasting research objectives between this journal and this study highlight the fact that these publications address different issues. The target of the research in this article is the showing off behavior of Indra Kenz and Doni Salmanan which leads to fraud, while the subject of this study is showing off among students at Garut University.

The topic of the Flexing Phenomenon through Instagram Social Media Among Garut Students was chosen because this phenomenon reflects the dynamics of the formation of student self-identity in the digital era. Students do not only use Instagram as a sharing medium, but also as a stage to display an ideal self-image according to social expectations. Through Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory, it can be understood that the act of flexing is not just a means of showing off, but a conscious strategy in managing impressions and forming social identities in public spaces (front stage) while maintaining personal lives behind the scenes (back stage). This phenomenon is relevant to study because it reflects how students respond to social pressures and the need for existence in the digital era in a complex and structured way. In addition, Instagram as a visual medium greatly supports the practice of imaging, making it the main platform in the practice of flexing. the reality of his life.

2. Method

The research method used is a qualitative approach, Sugiyono (2018) explains that the qualitative research method is a research method used to research natural object

conditions, where the researcher is a key instrument with descriptive characteristics using a Phenomenological approach with Dramaturgy Theory by Erving Goffman, Goffman (1959) divides the theory into two concepts, namely the Front Stage and the Back Stage

A. Front Stage

1. Setting namely the actor's physical appearance in playing his role on social media.
 - a. Form of Self Existence
 - b. Desire to attract the opposite sex
 - c. Environmental factors
2. Front Personal namely, the appearance of a character becomes the center of attention and determines whether the drama survives or not.
 - a. Posting vacation spots
 - b. Posting hobbies
 - c. Posting wealth

B. Back Stage is someone who is backstage with no audience, so it is certain that the person can behave freely in his daily life without considering his attitude or role in the next play.

This approach aims to understand the Phenomenon of Flexing and Social Interaction Through Instagram Social Media Among Garut Students, which is relevant and consistent with the research because it requires contextual and factual data as well as direct understanding of reality.

In this study, the researcher interviewed six students from various backgrounds, namely five male students and one female student studying in Garut. One person, namely a lecturer at Garut University, became a reinforcement of the informant, the research time was in March-April 2025. The informants in this study were Generation Z, especially students. Informants were selected based on three criteria. First, students aged 18 to 25 years from Garut. Second, have an Instagram account. Third, often flex as indicated by the type of posts, Instagram highlights, and daily Instagram stories.

Tabel 2. Research Informants

No	Informant	Instagram Account	Description
1	Rian	@riannnn42	Student at Universitas Garut
2	Adi	@adibe.or	Student at Institut Teknologi Garut
3	Fauzan	@fauzannovaldi13	Student at Institut Pendidikan Indonesia Garut
4	Mutiara	@muti.ara__	Student at Universitas Garut
5	Rizki	@mryzkiprtma	Student at Sekolah Tinggi Hukum Garut
6	Lucky	@luckylkmnlh	Student at STIE Yasa Anggana

Tabel 3. Research Source

No	Source	Description
1	Dr. Hadiati., M.Si	Lecturer at Garut University, academic expert

The data collection procedure is the most strategic phase in research, because its main objective is to obtain facts (Sugiyono, 2018). Based on the aforementioned statement, in this study, the researcher employed two data collection techniques, namely observation and documentation. Interviews were conducted by interviewing six Garut students, with the expectation that the researcher could avoid personal assumptions. Observation was carried out to systematically and directly track communication phenomena related to social, political, and cultural issues within the community. In conducting the observation, the researcher

personally performed direct field observations regarding the phenomena of flexing and social interactions through Instagram social media among Garut students. Documentation in the form of photographs was also collected to supplement the data gathering process.

This study employs an interactive model of data analysis along with data reduction, which is the process of decreasing the amount of collected data to obtain more relevant and useful information. In this research, there is also data presentation or data display (the act of presenting sorted and summarized data visually or narratively to facilitate understanding) and conclusion verification to confirm the conclusions or findings that emerge from the qualitative data analysis.

Data analysis in this study follows the paradigm Miles et al. (2017) This includes data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing/verifying conclusions. The obtained data are analyzed to identify similarities and aggregated to facilitate prioritization or ranking in the subsequent stage. The prioritized data are then prepared for presentation. The findings from the data presentation are summarized in the form of consumer profiles based on consumers' occupations, constraints, and benefits, which have been collected, reduced, and presented.

3. Results and discussion

In this study, the researcher examines the Phenomenon of Flexing Through Instagram Social Media Among Garut Students by referring to Erving Goffman's Theory which includes Front Stage which can be seen through Instagram to form the desired self-existence and Back Stage which is the reality of everyday life.

A. Front Stage

1. **Setting** namely the actor's physical appearance in playing his role on social media

a. Form of self existence

According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), existence means being or being. In the context of adolescents, self-existence refers to their efforts to use social media as a means to display and acknowledge their existence. This can be associated with the concept of setting in Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory, where individuals as actors prepare the front stage deliberately through physical appearance, clothing style, photo background, and communication style to form certain perceptions in the eyes of their audience. Social media such as Instagram becomes a front stage space, where students arrange visual and symbolic elements as part of impression management, namely an effort to regulate the impression they want to receive by the public. In this case, the form of self-existence is displayed through uploads of vacation photos, branded goods, luxury activities, or academic achievements, all of which are selectively chosen to strengthen the desired self-image. Through this representation, they try to gain social recognition and validation of their existence from other users. (Efendi et al., 2024; Wibisono, 2020).

The various identities desired by various parties who show off on Instagram social media all have one thing in common: they want to be known and get support from other users. Everyone who shows off comes from a different background, and not everyone does it by lying to others through social media posts. One of the reasons Garut University students show off is because they follow Instagram social media trends. Furthermore, people show off behavior on their Instagram social media accounts because they are encouraged by other people they admire (Gunawan et al., 2023).

" From an outside perspective, flexing is often seen as image-making or showing off with negative connotations. However, when viewed from a psychological perspective, flexing can be a form of self-expression to fulfill the need for appreciation and social recognition. This behavior is driven by various factors, such as technological advances that facilitate access through the grip of the hand, cultural shifts due to global influences such as the fading sense of shame typical of Eastern society and the weakening of social control in the digital

space. As a result, individuals often post lifestyles, goods, and achievements to show their existence, attract attention, and gain validation, especially from netizens. Instagram was chosen because it is a popular platform among young people” Interview with Dr. Hadiati., M.Si, Wednesday,23 April,2025.

The informant explained that showing off, which is often considered a form of showing off or image-building with negative connotations, can actually be understood as a form of self expression aimed at gaining appreciation and social recognition. This behavior is driven by the ease of technology, a cultural shift from politeness to freedom of expression, and changes in social interaction patterns based on digital media such as Instagram which is popular among young people.

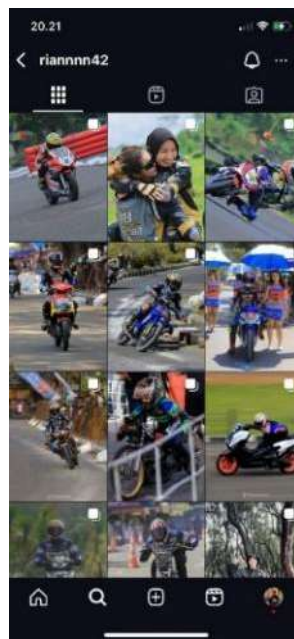


Figure 2. (Rian posted himself riding a motorbike @riannnn42)

“I am very inspired by Valentino Rossi, a legendary figure in the world of motorcycle racing who has extraordinary charisma both on and off the track. His distinctive style, full of confidence and energy on the circuit, has always managed to attract my attention for a long time. That's why I often imitate Valentino Rossi's style on the track, starting from his body position when cornering, celebrating after finishing, to small details such as his facial expressions and his confident attitude” Interview with Rian, Saturday, March 22,2025.

The informant explained that he followed the flexing trend because he was inspired by Valentino Rossi's style, which he thought looked very cool and charismatic. Rossi's figure, who is known as an iconic racer with a striking and confident style, is the main reference for the informant in forming a self-image, especially in the digital world. The informant then tried to imitate Rossi's style in various aspects, such as in dressing, posing, and in carrying himself, then uploaded it on social media in the hope of getting recognition from his followers, namely being considered cool like Rossi.

This phenomenon can be analyzed through the concept of front stage in Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory, where individuals present the best version of themselves in front of the public, like actors on stage. Social media functions as a front stage, where individuals consciously regulate their appearance, style, and expression to form certain social perceptions. This shows how social media becomes a space for expression as well as a social stage where individuals build their identity and gain validation from others. In this case, flexing behavior does not merely arise from the desire to show off, but also as a form of self-

actualization influenced by idol figures and popular culture. Informants are indirectly influenced by artists or public figures that they often see on social media, thus forming a pattern of imitative behavior that is aspirational.

b. The desire to attract the attention of the opposite sex

The behavior of presenting oneself attractively on social media, especially to attract the attention of the opposite sex, can be explained through Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory. In this framework, social media functions as a front stage, where individuals (especially young people) carry out impression management, namely managing their appearance and behavior to create a certain impression in front of the audience. Young people who are in love, for example, will display a self-image that is considered attractive and in accordance with social standards, such as dressing cool or following the latest trends. Uploads such as OOTD (Outfit of the Day) luxurious lifestyle activities, or content that shows self-confidence, are part of the image strategy to look attractive and worthy of attention by the opposite sex. This is in line with the social need for acceptance and love, as explained by Abraham Maslow in his hierarchy of needs. In addition, the urge to appear "up-to-date" is also influenced by social pressure in the digital space. Being left behind in following trends can give rise to anxiety about social alienation, so they continue to manage their self-image to remain relevant in the eyes of the public, especially in the eyes of those who have the potential to become partners.



Figure 3: (Fauzan uploading himself showing OOTD @fauzannovaldi13)

“My opinion, doing Flexing through OOTD (Outfit of The Day) has become commonplace on social media. Many people share their style of dress not only to show their fashion sense, but also to shape their self-image. OOTD uploads are often used as a way to express identity, attract attention, and even show social status, for example through branded clothing or exclusive locations. In addition to being a form of expression, OOTD can also be a means of seeking social validation, especially in the form of likes and comments. The goals are also diverse, including wanting to look attractive in the eyes of the opposite sex.” Interview with Fauzan Saturday, 22 March, 2025.

The informant explained that the showing off behavior was intended to appear trendy or sophisticated. The informant emphasized that his appearance was intended to attract attention from acquaintances, especially females. The informant believed that the showing off behavior could influence people's perceptions of him because he appeared stylish. The informant exploited this stylish appearance as a type of self-image on social media platforms

such as Instagram, especially among his female acquaintances. Showing off behavior, as the informant did, is not wrong or detrimental to others as long as it is done within the limits permitted by applicable standards. The informant's showing off behavior to attract the attention of the opposite sex is acceptable and common when compared to current trends in finding a partner.

c. Environmental factors

Individuals act like actors on a social stage, where they present themselves according to the expectations of the environment. In this context, the surrounding environment acts as an audience that influences how individuals form and present their identities. Social pressure to be recognized or praised drives individuals, especially young people, to manage their impressions on the front stage such as social media. When the environment continues to signal certain standards (luxurious lifestyles, current trends), individuals tend to conform even if it involves behavior that is not entirely authentic. In this process, flexing behavior becomes a strategy to form an ideal self-image in order to gain social validation. This means that the environment becomes a strong determinant in forming the “role” that individuals play in front of the public (Rojiati & Afifah, 2024).



Figure 4 : (Mutiara posting while at the cafe @muti.ara__)

“I started to be inspired to post photos on social media after seeing friends' posts that looked attractive and aesthetic. In addition, some of them also did flexing, which encouraged me to show my side. Initially, I knew the term flexing from Instagram reels that showed a luxurious and confident lifestyle. From there, I started to get interested and felt that this could be a way to express myself and build self-confidence through posts on my personal account.” Interview with Mutiara, Friday, 21 March, 2025.

The informant stated that his/her showing off behavior was influenced by other people's posts, especially after seeing his/her friends' attractive posts on social media, which encouraged him/her to share pictures to look like them. This behavior, as indicated by the informant, is a common phenomenon, especially among teenagers, where the lack of commitment and strong principles encourage individuals to follow trends or behaviors shown by others around them.

In this case, forming a self-image that looks beautiful and attractive in the eyes of others, but is not a reflection of his true character. He emphasized that his motivation in doing flexing was triggered by the influence of friends around him who also did the same

thing, thus giving rise to a desire to follow the behavior. The informant's interest in the flexing phenomenon began with exposure to content on social media, especially Instagram, where he often saw videos on the reels feature that showed a glamorous lifestyle or attractive appearance, so that he unknowingly encouraged himself to participate in the trend.

2. **Front Personal** namely, the appearance of a character becomes the center of attention and determines whether the drama survives or not.

a. Post vacation spots

Social life is seen as a theatrical performance where individuals act as actors who present themselves in front of an audience. Young people often upload vacation-related photos and videos online to gain attention and social recognition from their friends or followers on social media. They use these uploads not only to share their vacation experiences but also to try to develop a more attractive and enjoyable self-image. One of the goals is to publicize vacation spots under the pretext of having fun to escape from the fatigue caused by daily routines on the body and mind. Vacationing is considered a way of expressing oneself to live a fun, adventurous, and stress-free life. Meanwhile, uploading vacation photos on Instagram is a common way for young people to show their personality to the world, show their ideal lifestyle, or simply follow trends.

When selecting a holiday destination, some individuals consider a range of factors, including budget constraints, travel distance, and local weather conditions that may affect the overall comfort of the trip. Additionally, the level of crowding at a location is an important consideration especially for those seeking either solitude or, conversely, a lively atmosphere to capture and share the festive experience. Despite these practical considerations, there is a growing tendency among some individuals to choose travel destinations based on visually appealing standards suitable for social media display. Locations deemed "Instagrammable," featuring aesthetically pleasing photo spots or unique scenic views, often become the preferred choice. Frequently, destinations that go viral on social media attract large numbers of visitors, even if they do not fully align with personal preferences. Ultimately, for certain segments of the population, vacations are no longer solely about rest and enjoyment, but also about curating and presenting the experience in a way that appears idealized and impressive to others through social media posts.



Figure 5. (Rizki posting while on holiday in japan @mryzkiptma)

“The reason I shared my holiday in Japan on social media is because Japan is an immensely popular travel destination with strong visual appeal. Locations such as Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, as well as scenic views of Mount Fuji and cherry blossoms, are considered

highly “Instagrammable” spots. Posting a holiday in Japan can enhance the aesthetic value of one’s social media feed through visually appealing content, as Japan is widely recognized as a photogenic country. Even everyday activities such as shopping in Harajuku or dining at a local ramen restaurant can become visually engaging content. Therefore, posting a trip to Japan is not merely about sharing moments, but also about showcasing a unique and aesthetically pleasing experience that may not be easily found elsewhere” Interview with Rizki, Tuesday, 18 March ,2025.

The informant explained that the reason for posting a holiday in Japan on social media goes beyond simply sharing travel moments it also serves to enhance the visual appeal of one’s social media feed. As a popular tourist destination, Japan offers strong visual allure through its iconic locations such as Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Mount Fuji, and the aesthetically pleasing cherry blossoms all of which are considered highly Instagrammable. Moreover, Japan is widely regarded as a photogenic country, where even everyday activities like shopping in Harajuku or enjoying local cuisine such as ramen can be captured as visually engaging content. Thus, sharing a holiday in Japan on social media is not only a means of documenting personal experiences but also an effort to showcase unique and aesthetically rich moments that may not be found in other tourist destinations.

b. Post hobby

Hobby flexing is an effort to display activities based on personal interests on social media to gain social recognition and validation. Different from academic or financial flexing, hobby flexing emphasizes the creative process, skills, and dedication in certain fields such as art, sports, or automotive. In Erving Goffman's perspective, this is a form of impression management on the front stage, where individuals display their self-image as talented, active, or inspiring individuals. Through these uploads, they not only share the results of their activities, but also form a social identity that they want to be recognized by the digital audience. This activity reflects a role that is deliberately constructed to show their existence and self-value in front of the public. (Rosida et al., 2023).



Figure 6. (Adi posted his achievements in skateboarding @adibe.or)

” My main goal in doing flexing while skateboarding on social media is to show my progress and achievements in mastering certain tricks. Skateboarding is a hobby that requires a lot of practice and dedication, so when I succeed in doing a new trick or completing

a certain challenge, it feels good to share it with others. In addition, I want to inspire other skaters, especially beginners, that with consistent practice, they too can reach a certain level. By sharing videos or photos while practicing at the skate park or participating in competitions, I can get feedback, support, and even opportunities to collaborate with other skaters. Of course, there is an element of social validation in it, because every like, comment, or share from the skater community can increase my confidence and motivation to continue improving” Interview with Adi, Tuesday, 18March ,2025.

The informant explained that Flexing in the context of skateboarding on social media is done with the aim of displaying individual progress and achievements in mastering certain tricks that require intensive training and high dedication. Skateboarding is not only a recreational activity, but also a form of self-expression that can demonstrate technical ability and success in overcoming certain challenges. By posting videos or photos of new tricks that have been successfully executed or moments while practicing at the skate park, a skater tries to show their improved skills while sharing their experiences with the public. Flexing skateboarding on social media also functions as a form of social validation, where every like, comment, and share from fellow skaters can increase self-confidence and motivation to continue developing. However, for some skaters, the main purpose of flexing is not just to gain recognition or popularity, but to share the training process, challenges, and stories behind each achievement. Thus, skateboard flexing can be seen as an effort to document the journey of skill development publicly, while creating space to share inspiration and build a supportive community.

c. Post wealth

In this context, financial flexing such as showing off branded goods, luxury vacations, or glamorous living becomes part of a strategy to build a self-image as an established and successful individual. The goal is not just to share moments, but more to shape public perceptions of success and social position. This phenomenon is closely related to Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory, where social media functions as a front stage, where individuals consciously organize their appearance to impress their audience. Through posts that are curated in such a way, individuals carry out impression management, namely an effort to control how they are seen by others. Wealth flexing becomes a social role played to strengthen the image of a superior and above average person in an increasingly competitive society. In Goffman's view, this is a form of social performance that is arranged by considering the expectations and norms that apply in their social group.

Psychologically, the act of flexing wealth on social media is also influenced by the basic human need to obtain social validation and respect from one's social environment (Nurhayat & Noorrizki, 2022). When individuals perceive their online identity as a reflection of personal success, receiving likes, comments, and attention from followers on Instagram becomes a highly sought-after form of social recognition. In this context, wealth flexing is not merely driven by the desire to boast, but also serves to reinforce an identity as someone who is successful and respected. For some, it is also a strategy to gain new friends, expand social networks, or attract potential admirers.



Figure 7. (Lucky posting wealth on social media @luckyikmnlh)

"For me, posting photos while driving a luxury car or mirror selfies is not just about showing off expensive items. It is more about my way of showing off my achievements and lifestyle that I have managed to achieve, it can be a symbol of my success and hard work. So, when I share those moments I want other people to know that I have reached a certain point in my life. Besides that, I also want to get recognition and social validation. Honestly, if my posts get a lot of likes or positive comments, I feel satisfied because other people acknowledge my success. There is also a little motivation to make other people amazed or even jealous, especially if I wear branded goods that are hard to get, actually I don't want to look too showy for me, it is more about sharing achievements and showing the results of my efforts so far" Interview with Lucky, Tuesday, 18 March ,2025.

The informant explained that the activity of sharing photos while driving a luxury car or mirror selfie is not solely intended to show off expensive items, but rather as a form of representation of personal achievements and lifestyles that have been achieved. For individuals who do so, the post can function as a symbol of success and hard work, as well as a means to gain recognition and social validation. The number of likes and positive comments from the audience is an indicator of appreciation for the achievement, which in the end can provide a sense of satisfaction and pride. On the other hand, although there is a desire to gain recognition, there is also an effort not to appear too show off, but rather to show the results of the efforts that have been achieved so far.

B. Back Stage

Back Stage Where someone is behind the stage with no audience, so it is certain that the person can behave freely in their daily life without considering the attitude or role in the next play. Back Stage according to Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory is a space where individuals are not showing themselves to the public or audience. In this area, a person is free from social pressure and role expectations, so they can express themselves more honestly, naturally, and without social masks. There is no audience watching, so individuals no longer need to think about image, impression, or performance strategies as they usually do on the front stage. In the context of everyday life, the back stage reflects personal realities that are not displayed on social media or public spaces. This can include real economic conditions, emotions that are not shown, or aspects of life that are considered less than ideal. Behavior in the back stage tends to be more authentic, because it is not directed at impressing anyone.

Therefore, this space is important for understanding who the individual really is behind the image that is displayed publicly.

Thus, the back stage for students behind social media is a space where they have the freedom to organize their life narratives that are not always visible to others. However, along with the development of technology and social media, this space is increasingly blurred because often the boundaries between the back stage and the front stage become increasingly difficult to distinguish, everyone's appearance must be different. Simplicity and luxury in appearance have their respective portions when interacting with others; there are people who are well-off but have a simple appearance, and there are people who are lower middle class but have a luxurious appearance; however, a simple or luxurious appearance has one thing in common, namely reflecting a person's attitude towards themselves (Amelia & Amin, 2022).

The researcher selected the three informants based on their social media updates and activities, one of which was the informant Mutiara. The researcher asked how the informant could regulate the behavior that she displayed in the real world and in the media because social media is public and anyone can access and see her appearance on social media.

"My appearance in everyday life is actually simple and not as luxurious or attractive as it looks on Instagram. What I show on social media is more of a form of self-expression, which is different from my everyday life. I do that because I often feel lonely, especially when I'm alone at home or don't have friends to chat with. By posting photos or stories on Instagram, I hope that someone will respond by at least giving a like or comment because it makes me feel that someone is aware of my existence" Interview with Mutiara, Friday, 21 March, 2025.

The informant revealed that there was a difference between her appearance in everyday life and that displayed on social media, especially Instagram. In real life, the participant admitted to having a simple appearance and not showing a striking impression. However, on social media, she tended to display a more attractive self-image and seemed more expressive. This action was carried out as a form of escape from the loneliness that she often experienced, especially when she was alone at home or when she did not have friends to interact with. By uploading photos or stories on Instagram, the participant hoped to get responses such as comments or likes, which gave her a sense that her existence was recognized and noticed by others.

"If I'm at home every day it's definitely different, but on Instagram I have to look cool and show what I have" Interview with Lucky, Tuesday, 18 March, 2025.

The informant explained that there is a difference between everyday appearance and the appearance uploaded on Instagram media, when appearing on Instagram media, you have to appear cooler compared to your appearance in everyday life.

"For me personally, on social media I have to maintain my image, and I want to leave an impression on some people, especially those who pay attention to my appearance/fashion" Interview with Fauzan, Saturday, 22 March, 2025.

The informant explained that maintaining an image on social media is not just about content but also how to present yourself. One aspect that you want to highlight is appearance, especially in terms of fashion, besides being a form of self-expression, paying attention to appearance is also a way to leave a positive impression for some people who pay attention to these details.

Based on research that has been conducted using Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory, social media such as Instagram becomes a front stage arena where individuals, in this

case students, display a version of themselves that has been consciously constructed to gain recognition, validation, and a positive impression from their audience. Through impression management strategies, they carefully choose the content they upload, such as their appearance, lifestyle, and hobby activities or hanging out in aesthetic places, in order to form an image as an attractive person. Meanwhile, the back stage becomes a private space where they can act more authentically, free from the pressure of social expectations. In this context, students hide certain aspects of their real lives, such as their economic conditions, original appearance, or feelings of loneliness because they do not match the image they want to display on social media. This practice is illustrated by the statements of informants who manage social platforms differently according to their target audience and acknowledge the striking differences between real life and what is displayed online. However, this research can be further deepened by considering psychological dimensions such as the need for external validation, feelings of alienation, and long-term effects on the formation of self-identity. In addition, structural aspects such as social class pressure and economic inequality are also relevant for further analysis, especially since many students imitate the upper-class lifestyle without a supporting economic background.

The phenomenon of flexing on social media, although often considered a form of self-expression, raises a number of ethical questions. One of them is the potential for manipulation of public perception through images that do not match the reality of an individual's life. Excessive flexing can create the illusion of success or false happiness that indirectly pressures others to appear similar, even though they are not financially or psychologically ready. This kind of action is ethically problematic because it can trigger social anxiety, feelings of inferiority, or even unhealthy consumer behavior in order to gain recognition in cyberspace. Therefore, social media users, especially students, need to have high digital literacy and ethical awareness in order to use the platform wisely and responsibly.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of research and analysis conducted, the phenomenon of flexing among Garut students is a form of identity performance that is greatly influenced by the dynamics of social media, especially Instagram. Using Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory, it was found that students consciously play roles in two social spaces, namely the front stage (social media) and back stage (real life). On the front stage, students build an ideal self-image through posts that display lifestyle, achievements, and status symbols. The main purpose of this performance is to gain social validation, attract attention, and build existence in the digital public space. Posts about vacations, fashion, hobbies, and luxury are part of the impression management strategy used to attract reactions from Instagram audiences. On the other hand, on the back stage, there was a significant difference between the life shown and the reality lived. Students display simplicity in real life and have a strategy to hide that side from the public stage. This shows a high awareness of image and the ability to manage identity adaptively. This study confirms that social media is not only a medium for sharing, but has transformed into a social theater where identity is staged. Therefore, flexing must be understood not only as a behavior of showing off but as a practice of social representation in digital society. The phenomenon of flexing among students can be an important indicator in seeing the pattern of identity formation of the younger generation in the digital era. If not handled with a digital literacy approach and media ethics education, this behavior has the potential to develop into a culture of image-making alone without a balance between self-actualization and the reality of life. In the future, educational institutions, families, and digital communities need to collaborate to form a healthier and more educational social media space. In addition, further research can explore the relationship between flexing and mental health, as well as the extent to which this behavior influences life decision-making, for example (career choices, consumption patterns, or lifestyle).

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