



The Culture of Flexing in the Context of the Maqāsid al-Qur'an: A Case Study of Social Media

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Abstract

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This article discusses the maqasid behind the “flexing” verses, as these five verses do not explicitly prohibit flexing as a promotional strategy. Meanwhile, in the present day, the proliferation of flexing content on social media serves as a promotional strategy to generate income. This issue is significant for reinterpreting the flexing verses so that they can address contemporary challenges and be considered in all aspects. Therefore, maqasidi exegesis is employed as an analytical tool to uncover the maqasid of the flexing verses and to identify the benefits and harms of flexing content on social media. Findings from this study: Flexing, taken literally, does not merely mention the prohibition of flexing during prayer and charity but encompasses all activities (both ritual and non-ritual acts of worship). Meanwhile, the maqasid behind the prohibition of flexing are to protect the religion (from hypocrisy, disbelief, and polytheism) and to protect the soul (from showing off, arrogance, and seeking fame). Based on an assessment of the benefits and harms of flexing content on social media, flexing as a promotional strategy is not permitted because it tends to be harmful to both oneself and others.

INTRODUCTION

Flexing on social media, which was once used to demonstrate credibility, is now employed as a promotional strategy. The content shared offers opportunities to monetize the platform and generate income. Creators have adopted this as a strategy due to the large audience for such content. However, the reality is that flexing content is not well-received by the public and is even viewed negatively, given the prevalence of fraudulent investment schemes, emerging criminal schemes, and scams (Munjazi, 2022; Eno, 2023).

Specifically, studies on the phenomenon of flexing are not new. Previous research, based on hadith interpretations, concluded that flexing is not permitted as it violates social media ethics (Darmalaksana, 2022). Other journals note that the impact of flexing fosters competition within society, as what people consume on social media can alter their mindset and behavior in interpreting their surroundings' needs. (Khayati, Nur. Apriliyanti, 2022; Pohan et al., 2023; Purnamasari, 2022; Salam & Sundari, 2023)

The term "flexing" in the Qur'an is defined by the word *riya'* (showing off), which is repeated five times, and all instances are understood as prohibitions. The prohibition against showing off in prayer (Q.S. An-Nisa: [4], 142 and Q.S. Al-Ma'un [107]: 4), the prohibition against showing off in giving charity (Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 264 and Q.S. An-Nisa [4]: 38), and the prohibition against showing off one's wealth (Q.S. Al-Anfal [8]: 47). These five verses do not explicitly explain the prohibition against showing off as a promotional strategy. Therefore, a reinterpretation is necessary to uncover the true meaning and address contemporary issues.

This study aims to supplement the literature on flexing through *maqasidi* exegesis. The importance of *maqasidi* exegesis lies in identifying the *maqasid* (objectives) of the verses regarding *riya'* (ostentation). The *maqasid* of the verses on *riya'* will be used to assess the benefits and harms underlying the issue of flexing on social media. Specifically, this paper addresses two research questions. First, what are the *maqasid* behind the verses on flexing? Second, how are the benefits and harms of flexing on social media evaluated through *maqasidi* exegesis?

The author assumes that flexing content, as a promotional strategy, tends to have more harm than benefit. This is evident from cases of fraud, the large number of victims of bogus investments due to the desire to get rich quickly without working, the increasing number of people who normalize showing off material possessions on social media, and the prevalence of hedonism and impulsive buying.

METHOD

This study will focus on identifying the content posted by Sisca Kohl and Indra Kenz on Instagram. The author selected these two creators as subjects because the trend of "flexing" is currently popular, and they are figures who

consistently share content on social media. Specifically, this study relies on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data consists of flexing posts and the content of Sisca Kohl and Indra Kenz on Instagram. Meanwhile, secondary data consists of classical and contemporary interpretations and literature supporting this study. The data collection techniques include: 1) Observation of Sisca Kohl and Indra Kenz's content on Instagram or TikTok. This content is identified based on scenes, speech/language, and resolution methods to serve as data samples. 2) Documentation of each shared post (number of likes, comments, followers, viewers), tracing the personal biographies of those targeted, their life histories, as well as journalistic reports on the internet and other mass media. Afterward, the data is processed through content analysis to examine all forms of communication on social media and address the critical question: "the maqasid behind the flexing posts and the benefits and harms of the flexing content, which will be analyzed through maqasidi interpretation."

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Reinterpretation and the Maqasid of Verses on Showing Off

Verses regarding flexing (showing off or *riya'*) are mentioned through the term *ria an-nas* in Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 264, Surah An-Nisa' [4]: 38, Surah Al-Anfal [8]: 47, and the term *yurau an-nas* in Surah An-Nisa' [4]: 142, and Surah Al-Ma'un [107]: 6. Through the maqasidi exegesis theory, the reinterpretation of flexing verses is examined by considering linguistic aspects, the sciences of the Qur'an, and their interpretation, with the aim of identifying the maqasid behind these verses. Only after identifying these maqasid can we examine the content of flexing on social media and analyze the tendencies of such issues (whether they lean toward public benefit or harm).

Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 264 literally discusses the parable (as a reinforcement and warning) of those who give charity, likening them to a slippery rock (*safwan*). This parable explains the consequence of charity accompanied by the act of *riya'*—that one will not receive anything from what is sown and will gain no benefit from it. (Darwazah, 1964, p. 481) If one observes, the prohibition against showing off is not explicitly stated. The use of a parable explains the cause and effect of the action performed. An act done for the sake of showing off results in the deed being rendered futile (receiving no reward), and the consequence to be faced is intimidation and punishment because the perpetrator has failed to fulfill their duty. Here it is explained that if the act performed is a *sunnah*, then not only is no reward gained, but the consequences are also avoided.

The historical context of the revelation of verse 264 is linked to the preceding verse (verse 261). The event occurred during the Battle of Tabuk in the month of Rajab in the 9th year of the Hijri calendar. At that time, the Muslim community was facing difficult times, with scorching heat. The hypocrites, who knew of the

Prophet's call to war, ignored it and did not join the expedition. Nevertheless, the Prophet proceeded and urged the Muslims to prepare for war against the Roman forces. They competed to prepare, spending their wealth and giving charity. (Al-Mubarakfuri, 2012, pp. 529–530) The interpretation of verse 261 encourages charitable giving because Allah promises to multiply the reward for those who spend their wealth. Verse 262 specifies that the condition for having one's reward for charity multiplied is avoiding two evils: seeking personal gain from the charity given and hurting the feelings of the recipient. Verse 263 explains that a kind word without charity is far better than giving charity while causing harm. Verse 264 emphasizes the prohibition while providing a negative example for those who commit it. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al Misbah: Message, Impression, and Harmony of the Quran*, Volume 11 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2000), 566–71.

QS. An-Nisa' [4]: 38 literally describes those who use their wealth (for the purpose of zakat, charity, providing for their wives, or sustenance) so that people may see them. Such actions do not belong to those who believe in Allah and the Last Day. As for verse 38, it is connected to the preceding verses (verses 36 and 37), which describe characteristics disliked by Allah. For instance, verse 36 explains that Allah does not like those who are arrogant and self-satisfied. Verse 37 states that Allah does not like those who are persistently stingy and forbids people from being stingy. Verse 38 states that Allah does not like those who give away their wealth or make charitable contributions accompanied by acts of showing off. Those who engage in such acts of showing off in their charitable giving may give their wealth to the wealthy who do not need it, and their actions are motivated by the expectation of something in return from the wealthy. (Shihab, 2000b, pp. 439–444)

Q.S. Al-Anfal [8]: 47 literally explains the prohibition against leaving one's hometown in a manner resembling the state of the polytheists when they went to Badr—departing with arrogance and showing off to others. Historically, the event described in Q.S. Al-Anfal [8]: 47 occurred during the Battle of Badr. There, the Quraish polytheists managed to escape the ambush of the Medina army and sent a message to the people of Mecca who had arrived at Al-Juhfah. Abu Jahl, upon learning that the Quraish forces in Medina had survived, began to act arrogantly and haughtily. He refused and prevented the Meccan forces from returning, insisting on fighting the Muslims. The group that had not yet returned waited for three days, slaughtering animals, feasting, drinking wine, and entertaining themselves with female singers. Abu Jahl's decision to stay had been advised against by his peers but was ignored. Consequently, Abu Jahl and his forces were defeated in the Battle of Badr. (Al-Mubarakfuri, 2012, pp. 233–237).

After understanding the literal and historical meanings of the verses above, the explanation of the term *kal-ladzi yunfiku malahu ria an-nas*, in Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:264, according to several scholars, describes the characteristics of those likened to hypocrites and referred to as perpetrators of *riya'*—namely, those who give charity accompanied by insults and curses, give charity but boast about it and hurt the recipient's feelings, and giving charity not for the sake of Allah but with the aim of receiving praise from others and gaining popularity through a good reputation. (Ibn Ashur, 1984b, pp. 47–49) Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 38 explains the intention of those who give charity accompanied by *riya'*—seeking something from the recipient of the charity (not for the sake of Allah)—and states that such individuals are classified as hypocrites and polytheists, likened to those who do not believe and do not believe in the Day of Judgment. (Ibn Ashur, 1984d, pp. 52–53) Unlike the previous verses (Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 264 and Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 38), which do not explicitly prohibit *riya'*, the phrase *wala takunu* clearly warns against the prohibition of *riya'* and arrogance. This verse reveals how the condition and nature of polytheists can have a detrimental effect on others.

Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 142 does not explicitly mention the prohibition of *riya'*. “*Yuraun an-nas*” is interpreted as “*ria' an-nas*,” meaning to show off to people. According to Ibn Ashur, regarding *riya'* itself, the prohibited behavior of those who pray is performing it lazily and with *riya'*, and doing so only when others are watching. If no one is watching, they do not perform it. (Ibn Ashur, 1984c, pp. 239–240) According to other scholars, (Ibn Kathir, 2004, p. 435; Imam Al-Qurtubi, 2000, pp. 999–1000) the term *yuraun an-nas* refers to displaying one's good deeds so that people may see them, not out of a sincere, wholehearted awareness to carry out Allah's command. This verse explains that *riya'* can occur in both obligatory and recommended acts. The prayer referred to here is of a general nature. The term *kusala* describes the outward and inward characteristics of hypocrites. Their outward nature is evident in performing acts half-heartedly, while their inner nature is characterized by performing an act without involving Allah as the purpose, lacking sincerity, and merely putting on a show for people.

Q.S. Al-Ma'un [107]: 6 is connected to verse 4, as explained by Imam As-Suyuti regarding the reason for the revelation of verse 4: this verse was revealed concerning the hypocrites who engage in *riya'* during their prayers while praying, yet neglect their prayers when not in a place of prayer, and are reluctant to offer assistance. One of the themes of Surah Al-Ma'un concerns orphans and the poor who are neglected, addressing those who pray yet whose hearts do not remember Him, and issuing a warning that those who pray must remember Allah and empty their hearts for Him when they stand before Him in worship.

Specifically, the true meaning of the word *riya'* in Surah Al-Ma'un refers to seeking worldly gain through worship, and the original meaning of the word is to seek attention in the hearts of people. It is explained that an act does not constitute *riya'* when fulfilling an obligation toward others, provided that such an obligation is rightfully due to be performed. Performing obligatory acts of worship is a sign of Islam, and displaying them is a form of propagating the religion. On the other hand, it is recommended not to display voluntary acts of worship to others. Even if a voluntary act of worship is performed in a demonstrative manner, it is permissible if the intention is to set an example for others to follow. This is distinct from *riya'*, which means performing an act so that others may see it and admire it. Ibn Ashur, *At-Tahrir wa at-Tanwir*, Vol. 30 (Tunis: Dar at-Tunis, 1984), 566–68.

From the explanation of the five verses above through the terms *ria an-nas* and *yuraun an-nas*, they discuss: four verses regarding the consequences and punishments, and one verse regarding the command to prohibit. The repetition of the consequences and punishments for committing *riya'* is emphasized to remind people that the threat of such actions is terrifying and will be faced by the perpetrator. Therefore, to avoid such acts, the characteristics of those who commit *riya'* are also explained. The attitudes of those who commit *riya'* include seeking attention, arrogance, insincerity, and self-interest. The efforts made by the perpetrator to gain appreciation in the eyes of others stem from the belief that receiving praise and recognition from others is essential, without considering that their behavior may also harm or hurt others.

After examining the linguistic aspects, the sciences of the Qur'an, and the interpretation of the five relevant verses—which explicitly prohibit *riya'* in Surah Al-Anfal [8]:47—it is clear that this prohibition applies to arrogance and *riya'* in social settings. Nevertheless, according to some interpretations by scholars previously explained, the four verses mentioning *riya'* in prayer and charity serve merely as illustrations of the consequences and punishments for committing *riya'*, but they can also apply to any other obligatory or recommended acts.

The *maqasid* (objectives) found in the verses regarding showing off are: 1) *Hifz Ad-Din*, the preservation of humanity from hypocrisy, disbelief, and polytheism. Performing acts whose primary purpose is to be seen by others rather than to seek God. This has been described as the behavior of a hypocrite who does not believe in Allah or the Day of Judgment. Such actions are futile because they yield no reward, just like the deeds of polytheists and unbelievers. 2) *Hifz An-Nafs*, the protection of oneself from acts of *riya'* (show-off), *sum'ah* (seeking praise), *ujub* (arrogance), and *pamrih* (self-interest). Such behavior is not only unbeneficial to others but also to oneself. For in society and the workplace, people dislike those with poor character. In addition to guarding

against evil deeds, one must also prevent oneself from befriending the devil. For those who practice *riya'* are certain to have the devil as their companion, and the devil is the worst of companions.

The hierarchy of *maqasid* in the verses regarding *riyâ'* falls under *ḍarurîyat*, which is obligatory, because it prevents hypocrisy, disbelief, and polytheism, as well as the nullification of the reward for charity. It also falls under *hajîyat*, which is a necessity, because it requires maintaining good character—both in attitude and speech—to preserve others' feelings, as well as mutual assistance. Meanwhile, the fundamental values in the verses on showing off that need to be realized in life are: 1) The value of humanity, to consider others' feelings, show empathy toward others, and help one another. 2) The value of equality, because behind the prohibition against arrogance, pride, *riyâ'*, and self-serving motives lies the moral message that such attitudes are disliked by Allah. In His sight, all humans are equal except in their piety; this means that before Allah, everyone is equal. 3) The value of moderation, because by maintaining a good attitude, one avoids causing harm, anger, and hatred in others. In the social environment, a harmonious and peaceful atmosphere will be created.

Analysis of “Flexing” Content on Social Media

Indra Kenz and Sisca Kohl are prominent newcomers on social media. They each possess unique traits that make them easily recognizable to their audiences. For instance, Indra Kenz is known as the “Crazy Rich Medan” figure who enjoys sharing content featuring luxury items, OOTD photos, daily activities, and various stories of his struggles. Meanwhile, Sisca Kohl is an Instagram influencer who enjoys sharing *mukbang* and food review content. At first glance, the content they share appears similar, as they both frequently showcase luxury items they've acquired. However, each has their own distinct style when sharing content.

Indra Kenz's unique trait that has made him a hot topic on social media is his slogan “Murah Banget” (So Cheap). Indra Kenz loves to slip the phrase “Murah Banget” into every video, caption, and post. Besides YouTube, Indra also shares his content on Instagram and TikTok (his TikTok account has far fewer videos compared to his YouTube channel because it was blocked by certain parties). The author observed that the types of content shared—divided into flexing, non-flexing, and trading content—from July to December 2021 showed that flexing content was more dominant than other types. The flexing content he shared featured luxury items he owned at high prices. After reviewing each of Indra's wealth-flexing videos, the author noted the following: First, Indra tends to use the phrase “so cheap” when mentioning the prices of the luxury items he owns. Second, Indra consistently shares details about his life background and previous work with his audience, accompanied by calls to “work hard,” aimed at

motivating them. The tendencies Indra displays in his content have sparked controversy in society as well; those opposed to Indra’s content view the slogan as arrogant, while supporters believe it can serve as self-motivation to improve one’s life further.

To gain a deeper understanding of Indra Kenz and his content, the author examined one of the samples of content he shared on social media. For example, Indra’s YouTube video titled “Eating at an Indomie Stall for 10,000 Rupiah and Driving a Ferrari!” was posted on March 28, 2021. The video has been viewed 1.2 million times and recounts his habit of visiting his regular Indomie stall back when he was doing odd jobs in Medan. Indra demonstrated to his audience that he still frequently eats there—despite his success and owning a luxury Ferrari—through his conversation with the stall owner. Second, Indra’s YouTube video titled “Medan Sultan Buys a Tesla Electric Car at 3 AM! #SoCheap” was shared on February 8, 2021. The video has been viewed 1.1 million times and details his activities at 3 AM while caring for his sick girlfriend, followed by his boredom. His boredom led him to buy a Tesla through an online marketplace. When his new car was delivered the next morning, he began filming himself trying to drive it.

Based on the explanation of the purpose and content of the two videos shared by Indra, the author will now present two content samples from the sentences used by Indra Kenz, analyzed from both verbal and non-verbal perspectives, as follows:

Table 1
Part of Indra Kenz’s Content on Social Media

No	Upload Date	Verb Forms	Nonverbal Forms	Frequency
1.	March 28, 2021	Really cheap		6 times
		Even though we already have a Ferrari, a watch worth hundreds of millions, and an iPhone 12, our souls are still on the side of the road	Showing off a Ferrari, a watch, and a cell phone	3 times
		Eating by the roadside but driving a Ferrari		3 times

		Now he's driving that,	Showing off the Ferrari to the Indomie vendor	1 times
		The car may be a Ferrari, but I'm still eating Indomie for just 10,000		2 times
		The Indomie is red, and the Ferrari is red too		1 times
		Even though I'm a millionaire now, with a Ferrari and a house worth billions, my favorite food is still Indomie		1 times

From the table above, the terms “flexing” and “body language” appear repeatedly. In the first instance, the phrase “so cheap” is used to describe the price of Indomie and the items he wears—specifically an iPhone, a watch, and a Ferrari—which are considered affordable. The sentence “Even though I already have a Ferrari and a watch worth hundreds of millions, an iPhone 12, but our soul is still on the street” aims to show that his taste hasn’t changed even though he’s rich—he still chooses simple places. The sentence “Eating on the street but driving a Ferrari” aims to show that there’s no problem eating in a simple place while driving a luxury car. “Now I’m driving that” (pointing to the Ferrari while talking to the Indomie vendor) means he’s now successful and wealthy. The phrase “The car can be a Ferrari, but I still eat Indomie for just 10,000” shows that behind the luxury, there’s still a simple side to him. The phrase “The Indomie is red, and the Ferrari is also red” equates the color of the food with that of his car. The phrase “Even though I’m a sultan now, with a Ferrari and a house worth billions, my favorite food is still Indomie” shows that even though he’s successful and extremely wealthy, his go-to food remains affordable Indomie. It can be concluded from Indra’s first content that the message is: the luxury of one’s material possessions should not be the sole criterion for choosing between a luxurious or simple dining spot, because what truly matters is the deliciousness of the food.

Next, moving on to Sisca Kohl’s content, which uniquely blends “flexing” and “non-flexing” segments—featuring product promotions, cooking, and mukbangs. There’s one thing the author observed from her TikTok videos: First,

whenever Sisca promotes a product, she highlights its high price. For example, buying chili sauce for 55 million, sausages for 50 million, chicken for 6 million, sheet masks for 11 million, and so on. In every mukbang, cooking, and food-tasting video, she serves luxurious foods like caviar and foie gras, while mentioning their prices. Despite being famous as a TikTok celebrity, Sisca keeps her family background private, so there have never been any reports of her being invited or interviewed by any media outlets. Her audience speculates that she comes from a wealthy background based on the content she shares on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

To gain a deeper understanding of Sisca Kohl and her content, the author examined one of the samples she shared on social media. For instance, her TikTok video titled “Sultan-Style Meal with Caviar and Truffles: Rp 50 Million Check!” posted on July 21, 2021. The video has been viewed 28.7 million times and received 3.1 million likes. The content features her buying Kenzler sausages worth 20 million rupiah. The sausages were then served alongside caviar and truffles, bringing the total value of the meal to 50 million rupiah. This content aims to promote Kenzler sausages, highlighting their delicious taste and how they pair well with caviar and truffles to enhance the flavor.

The verbal and non-verbal expressions used by Sisca Kohl in her content are as follows:

Table 2:
A Selection of Sisca Kohl’s Social Media Content

No	Upload Date	Verb Form	Nonverbal Form	Frequency
1.	21 Juli 2021	Today I bought a whole bunch of my favorite ready-to-eat sausages worth 20 million		1 times
			Showing a huge amount of sausages, caviar, and truffles	1 times
		This is a combination of Sultan Kenzler sausages, caviar, and truffles worth 50 million		1 times

The statement “Today I bought a large quantity of my favorite ready-to-eat sausages worth 20 million” means that Sisca purchased a large quantity of her

favorite sausages worth 20 million rupiah, as evidenced by a video showing the sausages arranged in a pyramid shape. The sentence “This is a combination of Sultan Kenzler sausages, caviar, and truffles worth 50 million” means that when the sausages are served with caviar and truffles, the meal becomes more expensive, valued at 50 million rupiah, since caviar and truffles are generally expensive. Thus, it can be concluded that both of Sisca’s posts aim to promote a product. The unique marketing strategy involves showcasing a large quantity of products to convince people that they, too, use those products.

Through the content shared by Indra and Sisca on Instagram and TikTok, there are both positive and negative comments. People who responded negatively to Indra’s posts did so because, in their view, his attitude is overly arrogant and he flaunts his wealth after achieving success. The arrogance and show-off behavior they perceive stems from Indra’s content, which consistently features luxury items, mentions prices, yet claims those prices are “super cheap.” Those who respond positively view Indra as a role model because his hardworking nature has helped him achieve his dreams and succeed. In contrast, Sisca receives negative feedback because when advertising a product, she buys too many items and appears excessive. The positive feedback she receives stems from her body language and speech, which do not appear arrogant—the opposite of Indra. However, Indra has stated that his “flexing” content uses arrogant language to easily capture the audience’s attention. If observed, both Indra and Sisca use “flexing” language (Indra uses language that appears arrogant, while Sisca does not use it but mentions prices) and feature luxury products or items.

Benefits and Harms of Flexing Content on Social Media

After understanding the content of Indra Kenz and Sisca Kohl on social media, it is necessary to consider the indicators of benefits and harms present in each piece of content to facilitate review through maqasidi interpretation. As shown in the following table:

Table 3

Analysis of Indra Kenz and Sisca Kohl’s Instagram Content on Social Media

No	Indra's Content	Sisca's Content	Indicators	Indicators
	“Eating at Warung Indomie While Riding in a Ferrari”	“Eating Like a Sultan with Caviar and Truffles”	Maslahat	Drawbacks
1.	Showing the Indomie vendor his Ferrari to celebrate his			Arrogance, showing off, and seeking praise

	success and wealth			
2.	Showing off the luxury items he wears to explain to the audience that his wealth hasn't changed him—he's not ashamed to eat on the side of the road			Arrogance, showing off, and seeking praise
3.	Motivating the audience that they too can be like him (rich and successful)		It is a good thing if the audience takes it as motivation	It is a vice if the audience perceives it as a form of arrogance
4.		Buying a Kenzler sausage for 20 million	The promoted items are available and accurate	Excessive and wasteful in the management of assets
5.		Stating that Kenzler sausages are delicious	Audience feedback confirms that Kenzler sausages are indeed delicious. The promoted product is also certified halal	

6.	In content creation and the editing process, Indra and Sisca do not work alone; they have a dedicated team	Creating job opportunities for others	
7.	Flexing content will make it easier for tax authorities to remind the relevant individuals to pay their taxes	Helping the national economy	
8.	Trending “flexing” content, with the audience following suit to create their own “flexing” content		<i>Flexing has become a culture that can ruin the future of young people who are prone to overspending and wastefulness. Other consequences include getting trapped in online loans (pinjol) or even online gambling (judol). These consequences can ruin their future and lead to mental health issues</i>

Based on the presentation of the table of indicators of benefit and harm for both types of content, harm is the most prevalent indicator, as it has a negative impact not only on oneself but also on others. Meanwhile, the benefits derived from flexing content, when analyzed through the Five Principles, include: 1) Hifz An-Nafs (Protection of the Soul), as the audience, motivated by Indra’s videos, continues to strive in their work and does not lose hope; this brings benefit to themselves and their families. 2) Hifz A-Mal (preservation of wealth), as content creators do not work alone; they have a team to produce quality content. This creates job opportunities and helps others. Quality content generates effective promotion, which in turn boosts product sales and revenue, encouraging manufacturers to continue production. This also facilitates tax collection, encouraging those who flex to pay their taxes. The taxes paid can help the national economy.

Meanwhile, the harm is evident in Indra Kenz’s content, where he shows off a Ferrari to an Indomie vendor to flaunt his wealth and displays the luxury items he wears to explain to his audience that his wealth hasn’t changed him—he’s not ashamed to eat by the roadside. This is clearly addressed in Surah Al-Anfal [8]:47 regarding the prohibition against showing off and arrogance. (Ibn Ashur,

1984e, pp. 32–34) Although Indra’s statement suggests his motive was arrogance as a strategy, in Islam, pretending is the same as lying. This means that the motive of pretending to be arrogant is still not justified. Meanwhile, his facial expressions and choice of words—using the hashtag “so cheap” and validating the truth of his wealth—are not permitted, as explained in Surah An-Nisa’ [4]: 38 and 142. In those verses, it is also not permitted to perform deeds accompanied by riyâ’ (show-off), sum’ah (seeking praise), and ujub (arrogance).

Sisca, who bulk-purchased promoted products worth tens of millions, demonstrates excess and wastefulness in the management of wealth. This means she is displaying an attitude of excess and wastefulness that is not good. Meanwhile, in the Qur’an, the two attitudes mentioned above are addressed in Surah Al-Isra’ [17]: 27 and Surah At-Takathur [102]. Q.S. Al-Isra’ [17]: 27 discusses excess or wastefulness; what is meant by wastefulness is spending wealth not for good causes or necessities. Wasteful behavior is akin to that of the devil, and associating with the devil can lead one to disbelief. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al Misbah: Messages, Impressions, and the Harmony of the Qur’an*, Vol. 7 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2000), 452–53. This means that excessive or wasteful spending that serves no beneficial purpose is not permitted. Then, in Surah At-Takâsûr, it speaks of those who boast about their possessions, competing to show off worldly pleasures with the wealth they possess without considering religious norms and values. (Shihab, 2000b, pp. 486–487) This verse condemns such competition, for competition, by its very nature, can cause one to become complacent and neglect other matters of greater importance.

“Flexing,” as a marketing strategy used to attract the audience’s attention to its content, causes several harms to others. First, it alters their perspective by defining success through wealth, leading society to become preoccupied with accumulating wealth to meet that standard of success. Meanwhile, the Qur’an addresses the prohibition against hoarding wealth in Surah At-Taubah [9]: 34–35. Second, it sets a bad example by using money without considering its benefits, making hedonistic lifestyles and the flaunting of wealth commonplace. Third, it encourages the audience to participate in Binomo trading (Binary Options). In fact, the “education” provided by Indra Kenz has had detrimental effects on others. In 2022, people using Binomo became victims of a fraud case. These cases constitute criminal offenses. In addition to charges of investment fraud, the allegations also include the dissemination of false information and money laundering. Fourth, the use of “flexing” as a promotional strategy is part of the capitalist system because it tends to seek popularity, accumulate wealth, and act arbitrarily for personal gain. Consequently, the interests of others are disregarded to increase one’s own wealth. People from the lower-middle class and below no longer have the opportunity to obtain sources of income except merely to meet their basic needs to sustain their lives.

The reinterpretation of “flexing” verses through maqasidi exegesis has proven its relevance in addressing contemporary issues, particularly in the realm of social media. The maqasid identified not only elucidate the maqasid of the Qur’an but also reinforce the maqasid of Sharia, which establish that “flexing” is not permitted, even if its purpose is promotional. Based on the author’s analysis,

a key point to be developed in future research on the maqasid of flexing verses is the need to expand the scope of discussion to include other current issues on social media through maqasidi exegesis.

CONCLUSIONS

This study found that the maqasid of the verses prohibiting flexing extend beyond the scope of prayer and charity to encompass all activities, whether they are acts of worship or not. The underlying purpose of the prohibition on flexing is to protect the religion from hypocrisy, disbelief, and polytheism, as well as to safeguard the soul from the attitudes of showing off, seeking praise, and arrogance. Flexing content on social media, when used as a promotional strategy and evaluated from various perspectives of benefits and harms, tends to be detrimental both to oneself and to the surrounding community. Thus, flexing as a promotional strategy on social media is not permitted based on the maqasid of the Qur'an. As for the limitations of this study, it did not conduct direct interviews with the research subjects and was limited to journalistic data from the internet and social media.

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