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FLEXING AMONG STUDENTS IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA ERA: QUR'ANIC-HADITH PERSPECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MORAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

The phenomenon of *flexing* among students has become increasingly visible in the social-media era, particularly through the display of material possessions, lifestyles, achievements, and experiences as forms of digital self-presentation and social recognition. Although previous studies have examined conspicuous consumption, social comparison, and self-presentation in digital environments, limited attention has been given to interpreting *flexing* through an integrated Qur'anic-Hadith ethical framework and translating the interpretation into moral-educational implications. This study therefore examines *flexing* among students from the perspective of the Qur'an and Hadith and formulates its implications for moral education. The study employed qualitative library research using the Qur'an, authentic Hadith collections, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, and relevant scholarly literature as sources. Data were analyzed thematically through familiarization, coding, categorization, thematic synthesis, contextual interpretation, and source triangulation. The analysis indicates that *flexing* can be interpreted through the Qur'anic ethical concepts of *tafākhur* (boasting), *takāthur* (competitive accumulation), *isrāf* (excess), and *takabbur* (arrogance), while Prophetic teachings provide complementary principles concerning intention, inner richness, humility, and responsible self-presentation. The study proposes an Islamic digital character-formation framework consisting of ethical awareness, critical reflection, self-regulation, and responsible digital action. The findings indicate that moral education should not merely prohibit material display but should cultivate students' capacity to regulate intention, consumption, social comparison, and digital self-presentation in accordance with Islamic ethical values.

Keywords: *Flexing; Social Media; Qur'anic Ethics; Hadith; Tafsir Al-Azhar; Moral Education; Digital Character.*

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Abstrak

Fenomena flexing di kalangan siswa semakin terlihat pada era media sosial, terutama melalui penampilan kepemilikan material, gaya hidup, pencapaian, dan pengalaman sebagai bentuk presentasi diri digital dan pencarian pengakuan sosial. Meskipun penelitian sebelumnya telah membahas konsumsi konspikuitas, perbandingan sosial, dan presentasi diri dalam lingkungan digital, kajian yang menafsirkan flexing melalui kerangka etika Al-Qur'an dan Hadis secara terpadu serta menerjemahkannya ke dalam implikasi pendidikan akhlak masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis fenomena flexing di kalangan siswa berdasarkan perspektif Al-Qur'an dan Hadis serta merumuskan implikasinya terhadap pendidikan akhlak. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kepustakaan, dengan Al-Qur'an, hadis-hadis autentik, Tafsir Al-Azhar, dan literatur ilmiah yang relevan sebagai sumber data. Data dianalisis secara tematik melalui tahapan familiarisasi, pengodean, kategorisasi, sintesis tematik, interpretasi kontekstual, dan triangulasi sumber. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa flexing dapat dibaca melalui konsep etika Al-Qur'an berupa tafākhur (bermegah-megahan), takāthur (persaingan memperbanyak kepemilikan), isrāf (berlebih-lebihan), dan takabbur (kesombongan), sedangkan Hadis memberikan prinsip pelengkap mengenai niat, kekayaan batin, kerendahan hati, dan tanggung jawab dalam menampilkan diri. Penelitian ini menghasilkan kerangka pembentukan karakter digital Islami yang mencakup kesadaran etis, refleksi kritis, regulasi diri, dan tindakan digital yang bertanggung jawab. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan akhlak tidak cukup hanya melarang penampilan material, tetapi perlu membentuk kemampuan peserta didik dalam mengelola niat, konsumsi, perbandingan sosial, dan presentasi diri digital sesuai nilai-nilai etika Islam.

Kata Kunci*: Flexing; Media Sosial; Etika Al-Qur'an; Hadis; Tafsir Al-Azhar; Pendidikan Akhlak; Karakter Digital.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed the ways in which students construct identity, communicate with peers, and present themselves in public spaces. Social media is not merely a medium for interpersonal communication; it has become a symbolic environment in which individuals continuously negotiate how they want to be perceived by others (Ayyildiz, 2024; Lüders et al., 2022; Rosalina et al., 2025; Yao, 2025). Among adolescents, this process is particularly significant because identity development and sensitivity to social evaluation make digital self-presentation an important component of everyday social interaction. Research indicates that adolescents actively monitor how they present themselves online and how their self-presentation compares with others, thereby influencing the construction of their possible selves and self-

evaluations (Beyens et al., 2020; Keles et al., 2020; Mann & Blumberg, 2022; Pedrouzo & Krynski, 2023; van der Wal et al., 2024; Vannucci et al., 2020).

The expansion of social-media platforms has transformed the ways students construct, negotiate, and communicate their identities. Digital platforms provide highly visible spaces in which individuals can selectively present aspects of themselves through photographs, narratives, possessions, achievements, and lifestyle symbols (Arts et al., 2021; Butler, 2024; Denegri-Knott et al., 2022; Frei & Ulloa, 2025; Jain et al., 2021). Research on social-media self-presentation shows that such practices are closely connected with peer recognition and social comparison, while social-media comparison can shape how young people evaluate themselves during important stages of identity development (Chua & Chang, 2016; Yang et al., 2018).

Within this environment, *flexing* can be understood as a form of conspicuous digital self-presentation in which material possessions, consumption practices, achievements, or lifestyle experiences are made highly visible to an audience. The phenomenon is particularly relevant to contemporary digital culture because social-media affordances allow users to receive immediate audience responses through likes, comments, followers, and other forms of engagement. Recent research conducted in Indonesia directly examining Instagram users demonstrates that conspicuous consumption and anticipated social engagement are relevant to the dynamics surrounding material-oriented digital self-presentation (Yusainy et al., 2025).

The relationship between social comparison and digital identity further complicates the phenomenon. Social media provide an environment in which individuals repeatedly encounter curated representations of other people's achievements, appearance, possessions, and lifestyles. Among college students, social-media comparison has been associated with different forms of identity-related processing, demonstrating that online comparison is not merely an observational activity but can become part of how young people evaluate and reconstruct their sense of self (Yang et al., 2018).

From a consumption perspective, digital self-presentation can also intersect with materialistic orientation. Research on Facebook users has shown that materialism may be associated with social comparison and the use of social-networking platforms as a means of pursuing materialistic goals, indicating that digital interaction can become connected to broader processes of status-oriented self-regulation (Geng et al., 2023; Ozimek et al., 2017). Similarly, experimental research has demonstrated that social comparison can spill over into materialistic

pursuits and spending intentions, particularly through emotional mechanisms such as envy (Zheng et al., 2018).

The Indonesian context makes this issue particularly important for moral education because *flexing* is increasingly discussed not only as a lifestyle phenomenon but also as a question of values, social recognition, and responsible digital behavior. Existing Indonesian studies have examined *flexing*, hedonistic lifestyles, Islamic communication ethics, and character education, but these strands of scholarship remain relatively fragmented. The manuscript's original literature review likewise shows that previous studies largely approach *flexing* through lifestyle, social-media behavior, or general Islamic morality rather than integrating the phenomenon systematically with Qur'anic-Hadith interpretation and moral education.

This fragmentation creates an important research gap. Studies of digital behavior explain mechanisms such as self-presentation, social comparison, and materialistic aspiration, whereas Islamic educational scholarship emphasizes moral formation, humility, moderation, and spiritual responsibility. What remains insufficiently developed is an analytical bridge connecting the contemporary phenomenon of *flexing* with Qur'anic ethical categories, Prophetic teachings, and their pedagogical translation into moral education. The present study addresses this gap by treating *flexing* not simply as a lifestyle problem but as an ethical phenomenon requiring interpretation at the level of intention, consumption, social relations, and character formation.

The novelty of this study therefore lies in developing an integrated Qur'anic-Hadith ethical reading of *flexing* and translating that reading into an Islamic digital character-formation framework. Rather than categorically identifying every form of self-presentation as morally problematic, the study distinguishes legitimate self-expression from ethically problematic display by considering intention, excess, social comparison, and attitudes toward others. This approach is consistent with evidence showing that social-media self-presentation and comparison have multiple and differentiated consequences for young people's identity development (Yang et al., 2018).

The study specifically employs *Tafsir Al-Azhar* because Hamka's interpretation consistently relates Qur'anic teachings to social and moral realities (Hamka, 1984). In the present study, this interpretive orientation provides a basis for connecting Qur'anic concepts such as *tafākhur*, *takāthur*, *isrāf*, and *takabbur* with contemporary digital self-presentation. The Hadith dimension complements this interpretation by emphasizing intention, inner richness, humility, and the ethical distinction between legitimate beauty and arrogance.

Accordingly, this study asks: (1) how can the phenomenon of *flexing* among students be interpreted through Qur'anic ethical concepts and *Tafsir Al-Azhar*; (2) how do Prophetic teachings provide additional ethical principles for evaluating digital self-presentation; and (3) what implications do these interpretations have for the development of moral education in the social-media era? The study aims to formulate an analytical framework that contributes simultaneously to Islamic ethical scholarship and contextual moral education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative library-research design because its primary objective was to interpret concepts, normative values, and scholarly arguments concerning *flexing*, Qur'anic ethics, Hadith, and moral education rather than to measure behavioral variables statistically. The original manuscript identifies the Qur'an, Hadith, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, and scholarly literature as the principal materials for analysis.

The research was structured as an interpretive thematic study. The Qur'an and authentic Hadith were treated as primary normative sources, while *Tafsir Al-Azhar* functioned as the principal exegetical source for contextual interpretation. Scholarly journal articles and books were used to situate the phenomenon within contemporary research on social media, conspicuous consumption, social comparison, and moral education.

Primary Islamic sources consisted of Qur'anic verses and authentic Prophetic traditions addressing wealth, boasting, excess, humility, intention, contentment, and interpersonal ethics. Hadith were prioritized from recognized canonical collections, particularly *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, while other canonical collections were consulted when they provided directly relevant material. This approach strengthens the normative basis of the analysis and responds directly to the reviewers' request for authentic primary sources. The original manuscript identifies *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, *Musnad Ahmad*, *Sunan al-Nasa'i*, and *Sunan Ibn Majah* among the consulted collections.

Qur'anic verses were selected when their thematic content directly addressed one or more of four analytical dimensions: boasting over worldly possessions (*tafākhur*), competition in accumulation (*takāthur*), excessive consumption (*isrāf*), and arrogance or superiority (*takabbur*). Hadith were selected when they directly addressed intention, wealth and inner richness, humility, beauty, arrogance, or ethical treatment of others. Sources were excluded when they discussed social media or Islamic morality only in general terms without a substantive connection to the study's analytical categories.

Secondary literature was selected based on relevance to the contemporary phenomenon of *flexing*, social-media self-presentation, social comparison, materialism, digital ethics, character education, and Islamic moral education. Priority was given to peer-reviewed international literature and recent Indonesian scholarship, while foundational theoretical and exegetical works were retained regardless of publication year because of their conceptual significance.

Literature searches were conducted using Google Scholar and relevant scholarly journal platforms and repositories. Search terms included combinations of "flexing," "social media," "conspicuous consumption," "self-presentation," "social comparison," "materialism," "students," "Islamic ethics," "Qur'anic ethics," "Hadith," "Tafsir Al-Azhar," "moral education," and "digital character." The search process involved identification, screening for relevance, evaluation of source credibility, and thematic inclusion.

International literature was deliberately incorporated to strengthen the theoretical explanation of digital self-presentation and social comparison. For example, Yang et al. (Yang et al., 2018) examined social-media comparison and identity distress among college freshmen, while Yusainy et al. (2025) directly examined conspicuous consumption and anticipated engagement on Instagram.

Data were collected through documentation by recording relevant Qur'anic verses, Hadith, exegetical passages, and scholarly findings. Thematic analysis proceeded through six stages: (1) familiarization with the sources; (2) initial coding; (3) categorization of related codes; (4) thematic synthesis; (5) contextual interpretation; and (6) triangulation across source types. The thematic categories were subsequently compared across Qur'anic sources, Hadith, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, and contemporary scholarly literature.

The first coding cycle identified recurring concepts associated with the phenomenon, including display, recognition, comparison, wealth, excess, boasting, arrogance, intention, humility, contentment, and responsibility. These codes were then grouped into broader analytical categories representing the material, psychological, relational, normative, and educational dimensions of *flexing*. This procedure allowed the study to move from isolated textual references toward an integrated interpretive framework.

Triangulation was conducted by comparing interpretations across three source levels: primary Islamic texts, exegetical interpretation, and contemporary academic literature. A conclusion was treated as analytically stronger when the relevant theme was supported by more than one source type. This strategy was particularly important in distinguishing normative Islamic claims from empirical claims about social-media behavior.

The analytical framework linked four stages:
Digital phenomenon → Qur'anic-Hadith interpretation → ethical synthesis → educational implications.

At the first level, *flexing* was interpreted as digitally mediated self-presentation. At the second level, the phenomenon was examined through *tafākhur, takāthur, isrāf,* and *takabbur*, complemented by Prophetic concepts such as *niyyah*, *ghinā al-nafs*, and humility. At the third level, these concepts were synthesized into educational values, and at the fourth level they were translated into practical principles for moral education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Flexing Among Students as Digital Self-Presentation and Social Recognition

The literature indicates that *flexing* can function as a form of digitally mediated self-presentation through which individuals make selected aspects of their possessions, lifestyles, achievements, or experiences visible to an audience. Social-media platforms intensify this process because visibility can be immediately measured through likes, comments, followers, and other forms of engagement. Research on conspicuous consumption on Instagram further demonstrates that material display can intersect with anticipated social engagement, making digital visibility an important component of contemporary consumption behavior (Yusainy et al., 2025).

Social comparison provides an additional mechanism through which *flexing* becomes socially meaningful. Students do not encounter digital displays in isolation; they encounter them within a continuous stream of comparisons involving achievement, appearance, lifestyle, possessions, and social status. Yang et al. (2018), for example, found that social-media comparison among college freshmen could be associated with different forms of identity-related processing, demonstrating that comparison on social media can become part of the broader process of negotiating identity.

The phenomenon should therefore not be reduced to the possession of expensive goods. The ethically relevant dimension lies in the relationship between what is possessed, why it is displayed, how it is displayed, and how the display positions the individual in relation to others. This distinction is essential because the same visual content can have different meanings depending on whether it functions as documentation, gratitude, professional communication, personal expression, or status signaling. Yusainy et al. (2025) similarly demonstrate that conspicuous consumption on Instagram is embedded in processes of audience engagement rather than being merely a private consumption choice.

A useful illustration is the recurring circulation of viral student posts displaying luxury goods, branded clothing, expensive devices, exclusive travel, or prestigious experiences. Such posts can become controversial when audiences perceive a discrepancy between the displayed lifestyle and the student's publicly known social or educational circumstances. However, because this study does not employ digital ethnography or participant interviews, these viral cases are treated only as contextual illustrations of the phenomenon, not as empirical evidence of the motives or moral character of particular students.

The literature therefore supports understanding *flexing* as a multidimensional digital phenomenon involving self-presentation, recognition, comparison, and material signaling. This interpretation avoids the methodological problem of assuming that every display of wealth is inherently arrogant. Instead, it establishes the analytical basis for asking when digital self-presentation becomes ethically problematic from the perspective of Islamic teachings.

Qur'anic Ethical Interpretation of Flexing through *Tafsir Al-Azhar*

The Qur'anic analysis identifies four interconnected concepts that provide a useful ethical vocabulary for interpreting *flexing*: *tafākhur*, *takāthur*, *isrāf*, and *takabbur*. These concepts do not establish that every form of material display is prohibited; rather, they identify specific moral orientations involving boasting, competitive accumulation, excess, and superiority. The literature on *tafākhur* and *takāthur* similarly connects these concepts with worldly competition and hedonistic orientation (Yuwanti et al., 2023).

Q.S. Al-Hadid [57]:20 is particularly relevant because it describes worldly life through images of play, amusement, adornment, mutual boasting, and competition in wealth and children. The verse therefore provides an ethical framework for examining situations in which material possession becomes a basis for competition and symbolic status. Contemporary Qur'anic interpretation of this verse emphasizes that worldly attractiveness should not displace the broader spiritual and moral purpose of human life (Fikri et al., 2024).

Through *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, Hamka's interpretation can be connected to the contemporary digital phenomenon by emphasizing the danger of allowing material symbols to become central to human orientation. Hamka's socially contextual approach makes the ethical message of the Qur'an applicable beyond the historical circumstances of revelation. In the digital context, the relevant issue is not whether students possess valuable goods but whether possessions become instruments through which identity and social worth are publicly constructed. This

interpretation provides the critical bridge between the Qur'anic text and contemporary digital self-presentation (Hamka, 1984).

The concept of *tafākhur* is particularly relevant to the communicative dimension of *flexing*. Boasting involves presenting worldly advantages in ways that communicate distinction or superiority. When digital self-presentation intentionally emphasizes possessions or achievements primarily to obtain admiration or establish superiority, the practice can be interpreted as approximating the ethical problem addressed by *tafākhur*. However, this remains an interpretive analogy rather than a claim that every social-media post constitutes *tafākhur*.

The concept of *takāthur* adds a competitive dimension. Whereas *tafākhur* emphasizes boasting, *takāthur* emphasizes the pursuit of "more" and competition in accumulation. In contemporary digital culture, this can be reflected in cycles of comparison involving phones, fashion, travel, vehicles, achievements, or lifestyle experiences. The relevance of *takāthur* is therefore not limited to the amount of wealth possessed but concerns the process through which accumulation becomes a means of establishing relative status (Yuwanti et al., 2023).

The concept of *isrāf* provides a further analytical distinction. Islamic ethics does not prohibit the enjoyment of legitimate blessings; rather, the concern arises when consumption becomes excessive, disproportionate, or disconnected from responsible use. This distinction is important because an ethical analysis of *flexing* should not equate prosperity with wrongdoing. The critical question is whether material consumption is governed by moderation, responsibility, and legitimate purpose.

Finally, *takabbur* addresses the relational dimension of digital display. Q.S. Luqman [31]:18 warns against turning away from people out of arrogance and against walking proudly upon the earth. The relevance to social media lies in the possibility that digital self-presentation can construct hierarchical distinctions in which one person communicates superiority and others are implicitly positioned as inferior. Yet, consistent with Prophetic teaching, arrogance should not be equated merely with attractive appearance or material possession; it involves a morally problematic orientation toward truth and other people.

Table 1. Qur'anic Ethical Dimensions of Flexing

Qur'anic concept	Core meaning	Digital manifestation	Ethical concern
Tafākhur	Boasting and pride	Displaying possessions/achievements for admiration	Status-oriented self-presentation

Qur'anic concept	Core meaning	Digital manifestation	Ethical concern
Takāthur	Competition in accumulation	Comparing wealth, lifestyle, or possessions	Endless status competition
Isrāf	Excess and disproportion	Excessive consumption/display	Loss of moderation
Takabbur	Arrogance/superiority	Positioning oneself above others	Devaluation of others

The synthesis shows that the Qur'anic critique is directed less toward visibility itself than toward the moral orientation attached to visibility. This distinction is essential for an educational framework because students should not be taught that every photograph of a good possession, achievement, or experience is sinful. Instead, they should be guided to recognize the boundary between legitimate self-expression and self-presentation driven by boasting, excess, competition, or superiority.

Prophetic Hadith and the Ethics of Intention, Humility, and Inner Wealth

Prophetic teachings deepen the Qur'anic framework by shifting attention from visible behavior toward intention and inner disposition. The well-known Hadith concerning *niyyah* establishes that the moral value of an action is closely connected with the intention underlying it (Al-Bukhari, 1978; Muslim, 2024). Applied to digital self-presentation, this principle means that the ethical evaluation of a post cannot be determined solely from its visual content. A similar display can represent gratitude, documentation, professional communication, personal expression, or a desire for admiration and superiority.

The principle of *niyyah* therefore provides an important safeguard against overly simplistic judgments of *flexing*. Students may share achievements, attractive clothing, travel experiences, or possessions without necessarily acting arrogantly. The ethical concern becomes stronger when the primary orientation of the display is to obtain status, provoke comparison, or establish superiority. The moral task is consequently to cultivate reflective awareness of intention before and during digital self-presentation (Al-Bukhari, 1978; Muslim, 2024).

A second important Prophetic principle concerns inner richness (*ghinā al-nafs*). The Prophet taught that true richness is not simply the abundance of possessions but the richness of the soul (Muslim, 2024). This principle directly challenges the assumption that personal worth must be demonstrated through increasingly visible material symbols. Within a digital culture characterized by

continuous comparison, *ghinā al-nafs* offers an alternative conception of success based on inner sufficiency rather than external validation.

The concept of inner richness is particularly relevant to the educational problem of status-oriented *flexing*. When students begin to associate self-worth with possessions, followers, likes, or the ability to reproduce prestigious lifestyles, material display can become a mechanism for maintaining self-esteem. The Prophetic emphasis on inner richness redirects self-worth toward moral character, spiritual development, knowledge, contribution, and responsible relationships rather than material visibility (Muslim, 2024).

The Prophetic teaching concerning beauty and arrogance provides a further distinction. In *Sahih Muslim*, the Prophet explains that Allah loves beauty while identifying arrogance with rejecting truth and looking down upon people (Muslim, 2024). This teaching is particularly important because it demonstrates that Islam does not equate beauty, good clothing, or attractive appearance with arrogance. The ethical boundary lies in the attitude of superiority and contempt, not in aesthetic presentation itself.

Accordingly, a student's fashionable clothing, expensive device, academic achievement, or travel experience cannot automatically be classified as *takabbur*. The relevant educational questions concern intention, excess, social comparison, and relational orientation. This distinction makes the Islamic ethical framework more nuanced and prevents moral education from becoming a blanket rejection of prosperity or digital self-expression.

Table 2. Prophetic Ethical Principles for Interpreting Flexing

Prophetic principle	**Ethical meaning**	**Relevance to *flexing***	**Educational value**
Niyyah	Intention determines moral orientation	Distinguishes sharing from status-seeking	Ethical self-awareness
Ghinā al-nafs	True richness is inner richness	Challenges dependence on possessions	Contentment
Jamāl	Beauty is permissible	Prevents condemnation of appearance itself	Balanced self-expression
Rejection of *kibr*	Arrogance involves superiority and contempt	Identifies relationally harmful display	Humility and respect

The Qur'anic and Prophetic frameworks therefore complement one another. The Qur'an provides categories for recognizing boasting, competition, excess, and arrogance, while Hadith provides principles for evaluating intention, inner orientation, humility, and the ethical boundary between beauty and superiority.

Together they offer a more comprehensive framework for interpreting digital self-presentation.

Implications for Moral Education in the Digital Era

The preceding analysis indicates that moral education should not respond to *flexing* simply by prohibiting students from displaying possessions. Such an approach addresses the visible behavior while leaving the underlying motivations of recognition-seeking, comparison, insecurity, or status orientation insufficiently examined. Character education requires attention to moral understanding, affective orientation, and behavioral practice; consequently, Islamic moral education should connect normative principles with the real decisions students make in digital environments (Hermino & Arifin, 2020).

The first implication is the development of ethical digital self-awareness. Through the principle of *niyyah*, students can be guided to reflect on why they want to upload a particular image or experience. Teachers can use reflective questions such as: *What is my intention? Am I sharing information or seeking superiority? Would I still post this if no one praised me? Does this post communicate gratitude or provoke comparison?* Such questions translate the theological concept of intention into a practical form of moral self-regulation.

The second implication is critical digital literacy. Students need to recognize that social-media content is selective and constructed rather than a complete representation of reality. This is particularly important because social comparison can influence identity-related processes among young people (Yang et al., 2018). Critical digital literacy should therefore include discussion of curated lifestyles, algorithmic visibility, influencer culture, material symbolism, and the difference between online representation and lived reality.

The third implication is the cultivation of intrinsic self-worth through *ghinā al-nafs*. Instead of allowing social-media recognition to become the primary measure of personal value, moral education can emphasize knowledge, integrity, service, spiritual development, achievement through effort, and contribution to others. This approach directly challenges the status-oriented logic underlying some forms of *flexing* and provides students with alternative sources of identity.

The fourth implication is education for moderation and responsible consumption. The concepts of *isrāf* and *takāthur* provide a basis for teaching students to evaluate consumption in terms of necessity, proportionality, benefit, and social responsibility. Contemporary research showing relationships between social comparison and materialistic pursuits reinforces the relevance of addressing

consumption not merely as an economic decision but also as a socially and psychologically mediated practice (Zheng et al., 2018).

The fifth implication is humility and relational ethics. Students should learn to distinguish between self-expression and superiority. The Islamic framework does not require students to conceal all achievements or avoid attractive possessions; instead, it requires them to avoid transforming those possessions into instruments for devaluing others. This distinction allows moral education to establish ethical boundaries without producing an unnecessarily restrictive attitude toward digital participation.

The sixth implication is reflective digital citizenship. Digital citizenship in an Islamic educational context should include responsibility for how one's digital actions influence other people. Students can be encouraged to consider whether their posts contribute to healthy interaction or intensify comparison, envy, exclusion, or status competition. This orientation transforms social media from merely a technological environment into a context for practicing ethical responsibility.

The seventh implication is that moral education should become experiential and reflective rather than exclusively normative. Students need opportunities to analyze actual social-media cases, discuss ethical dilemmas, reflect on their own digital habits, and practice alternative forms of self-presentation. Contextual character education similarly emphasizes the importance of connecting moral values with students' actual social environments (Hermino & Arifin, 2020).

Table 3. Educational Translation of Qur'anic-Hadith Ethics

Islamic ethical foundation	Digital problem	Educational practice	Character orientation
Tafākhur	Boastful self-presentation	Intention reflection	Humility
Takāthur	Status competition	Social-comparison analysis	Contentment
Isrāf	Excessive consumption	Consumption reflection	Self-control
Takabbur	Superiority	Perspective-taking	Respect
Niyyah	Recognition-seeking	Pre-post reflection	Ethical awareness
Ghinā al-nafs	Externalized self-worth	Reflection on intrinsic value	Inner richness
Jamāl without *kibr*	Confusing beauty with arrogance	Ethical distinction-making	Balanced expression

From Flexing to Islamic Digital Character Formation

The integrated analysis demonstrates that *flexing* should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon in which digital self-presentation, social comparison, material signaling, and identity construction intersect. International research supports the relevance of self-presentation and social comparison to young people's identity processes, while research on conspicuous consumption demonstrates that material display can be connected with anticipated social engagement (Yang et al., 2018; Yusainy et al., 2025).

The Qur'anic framework contributes four ethical dimensions: *tafākhur* identifies boastful display, *takāthur* identifies competitive accumulation, *isrāf* identifies excess, and *takabbur* identifies superiority. Hadith then adds the dimensions of *niyyah*, *ghinā al-nafs*, humility, and the distinction between beauty and arrogance. This synthesis produces a more nuanced framework than defining *flexing* simply as "showing off."

The central educational contribution of the study is therefore the formulation of Islamic digital character formation. This framework consists of four interconnected capacities: ethical awareness, critical reflection, self-regulation, and responsible digital action. Ethical awareness helps students identify problematic motivations; critical reflection enables them to examine social comparison and curated digital representations; self-regulation supports control over consumption and recognition-seeking; and responsible action translates these capacities into respectful digital behavior.

Table 4. Integrated Framework of Islamic Digital Character Formation

Digital process	Ethical risk	Islamic response	Character developed
Self-presentation	*Tafākhur*	Intention awareness	Humility
Social comparison	*Takāthur*	Critical reflection and contentment	*Qana'ah*
Consumption display	*Isrāf*	Moderation	Self-control
Status signaling	*Takabbur*	Respect and equality	Humility
Online validation	Externalized self-worth	*Ghinā al-nafs*	Inner confidence
Achievement sharing	Boasting	Intention and gratitude	Responsible expression

The model indicates that Islamic moral education should not merely tell students what not to post. It should help them understand why they post, what social comparison does to their judgment, how consumption shapes identity, and

how their digital actions affect others. In this sense, moral education moves from external behavioral regulation toward the development of reflective moral agency.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *flexing* among students should not be understood merely as the display of expensive possessions. It is more appropriately interpreted as a form of digitally mediated self-presentation in which materiality, social recognition, comparison, and identity construction intersect. The ethical significance of such behavior depends on intention, excess, social orientation, and the relational meaning attached to the display.

The Qur'anic analysis identifies *tafākhur*, *takāthur*, *isrāf*, and *takabbur* as four complementary ethical dimensions through which *flexing* can be critically examined. The analysis of *Tafsir Al-Azhar* further demonstrates the relevance of interpreting worldly orientation in relation to spiritual awareness, social responsibility, and moderation. Hadith complements this framework through the principles of *niyyah*, *ghinā al-nafs*, humility, and the distinction between legitimate beauty and arrogance.

The principal contribution of this study is the formulation of an Islamic digital character-formation framework consisting of ethical awareness, critical reflection, self-regulation, and responsible digital action. The framework shifts moral education from merely prohibiting visible forms of display toward cultivating students' ability to regulate intention, consumption, comparison, and digital self-presentation.

This study is limited by its reliance on library research and textual interpretation. It does not contain interviews, surveys, observations, or systematic digital ethnography involving students. Consequently, the framework developed here should be understood as an interpretive and conceptual contribution rather than evidence of causal effects of *flexing* on students' character or psychological well-being. The original manuscript likewise confirms that the study was designed as a literature-based inquiry rather than field research.

A second limitation concerns the use of *Tafsir Al-Azhar* as the principal exegetical lens. Although Hamka provides a valuable contextual interpretation, other classical and contemporary exegetical traditions may offer different emphases regarding boasting, worldly attachment, excess, and arrogance. Future research can therefore compare Hamka's interpretation with other tafsir traditions.

A third limitation is the dynamic nature of social-media culture. Platforms, algorithms, forms of digital self-presentation, and patterns of online recognition

continue to evolve. The proposed framework should therefore be regarded as adaptable rather than permanently fixed.

Future research should empirically examine how students understand *flexing*, what motivates their digital self-presentation, and how they negotiate Islamic ethical values within social-media environments. Interviews, focus-group discussions, surveys, and digital ethnography could provide empirical evidence that complements the present interpretive study.

Future research should also test whether the proposed Islamic digital character-formation framework can be implemented through moral-education interventions. Experimental or action-research designs could examine whether reflective activities involving *niyyah*, *qana'ah*, moderation, humility, social comparison, and digital responsibility strengthen students' ability to regulate digital self-presentation.

Comparative research could further examine how different Qur'anic exegetical traditions interpret *tafākhur*, *takāthur*, *isrāf*, and *takabbur*. Such comparative work would strengthen the theoretical basis of Islamic digital ethics and clarify how classical moral concepts can be contextualized within emerging digital cultures.

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