Impact of Instagram Influencers Flexing Content on Gen Z’s Consumer Behaviour in Indonesia

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Abstrak

Kata Kunci: Instagram Influencer, Flexing Content, Gen Z, Perilaku Konsumen
Abstract
This study analyzes the impact of flexing content that is published by influencers on Instagram could affect the shopping behaviour of Generation Z. Researchers used two of the most viral studies in Indonesia, the case of Indra Kenz and Doni Salaman. These two influencers are Generation Z who rose to fame in 2020 due to the luxurious life and instant success of trading apps. Until 2022, these two young people were arrested for fraud. The notion of content flexing is becoming viral in Indonesia because of this case. It refers that flexing is publishing a luxurious and famous life excessively, especially if it turns out that the published content is fake. To explore this research, the researcher uses one of qualitative methods, that is a Forum Group Discussion or FGD. This method is intended to find out personally the views and experiences of each individual. The FGD was conducted with participants who were categorised as Generation Z and knew about the cases of Indra Kenz and Doni Salaman. The FGD was conducted with 9 participants aged 20-23 years through an online meeting for 90 minutes. This study found that the flexing content made by influencers on Instagram influenced Generation Z audiences to shop more often, put value and self-worth in luxury, and become more extravagant. This is because Generation Z has a high curiosity and is very easily influenced. Therefore, flexing content created by influencers on Instagram will indirectly lead to the desire of Generation Z to be like them.

Keywords: Instagram Influencers, Flexing Content, Gen Z’s, Consumer Behaviour

INTRODUCTION
In early 2022, Indonesia had a 273.5 million population (Indonesia Population (2022)) and was dominated by those aged 25 to 34 (Kemp, 2022). Based on Data Reportal per January 2022, 68.9% of the total population is using social media, which is equivalent to 191.4 million, whereas it is reported that the number has increased by 12.6% over the previous year. The most used social media platform in Indonesia is Whatsapp, followed by Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, and Telegram (Data Indonesia, 2022). Looking at the dominant age of the population and the social media age group of users, we can identify that the target market of social media is Millennials and Generation Z. Theoretically, a millennial is born between the ages of 26-41, whereas a Gen Z is born between 1997 and 2012, which is the age of 9-24 years old for now (Latkovikj & Popovska, 2020). Both generations agreed that social media has an impact on their daily lives in both positive and negative ways (Kaja, 2016). However, the influence of social media is more felt by Gen Z because they were born and raised in the middle of the internet, and this created them to be dependent on the internet (Firamadhina, 2020). At this moment, we can say that the Gen Z mindset is filled with social media content and information, and their behaviour will reflect what they see and hear on social media.
Instagram, as one of the Gen Z most used social media, is a medium that is well known as the sharing platform of moments through posts, videos, stories, live, and reels. Instagram allows users to follow others who they want to follow, and view others’ profiles, like photos, videos, and comments. The researcher found out that Instagram may become an addiction among users because it is defined as a small window where we can see and be interested in others’ lives virtually, even though we don’t know the person, we are attracted to their content, which fulfils our human desire to figure out something new and different continuously (Uzun, 2020). Through the theory of Uses and Gratifications (U & G) by Katz and Blumler (1974), people will choose the medium that can give them convenience and understand their specific needs. Cha (2016) described the theory related to social media nowadays, which could provide people with satisfaction and a desire to interact with and know others. Gen Z is the majority of Instagram users and is responsible for the annual increase in Instagram consumption. They have some specific characteristics which turn them into more active users on Instagram. They spend their time browsing the internet, like instant things, and love to show their expressions on social media rather than in real life, and they lack face-to-face communication (Zis et al., 2022). These characteristics of Gen Z make them easily influenced by anything, especially by the influencers or content creators on social media.

Researchers found that social media has a big impact on influencing people’s consumption behaviour (Ryan, 2015), where the contents on social media could affect their decision-making. In addition, social media is identical to influencers, which solidifies the effect of social media. Influencers have been chosen to be looked up to by their followers and are trusted for what they say, what they like, and what they dislike (Hennessy, 2018). Thus, it is very much considered if the content of influencers on social media could harm Gen Z’s behaviour. In the past month of 2022, conveying status to the public is currently the trend on social media. The more flexing the content is, the more it gets viral and the more well-known it will be. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the word “flex” is the slang for “show-off,” which means to show others that you are very proud or happy about something that you have done or something you own. Usually, this attitude annoys people (FLEX / Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary, 2022). Researchers found that two influencers flex on social media. Both of these similar study cases can be categorised as influencers because they require the types of influencers and they had more than 1 million followers. However, here are the two most recent flexing contents spoken in Indonesia.

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The researcher found a case of an Indonesian young man named Indra Kenz who is well known for his slogan “Murah Banget”, or in English, “Very Cheap” (Instagram, 2022). His content is always viral and full of comments. He was known as a trader, influencer, and young entrepreneur. He used social media, especially Instagram, as a platform to create his personal branding. He created all his contents which lead him to be known as a young successful trader. He was known as an affliiator in Binomo, a trading application, and he influenced his followers to join his program, got deceived, and he became richer. He broke people’s trust in him. His flexing contents successfully led him to be viral, had billions of followers, invited to TV stations and podcasts, and collaborated with big brands, famous artists and influencers. Unfortunately, the media caught him revealing the fake content about buying a Lamborghini at one of the biggest prestige car companies in Indonesia. However, on April 2022, Investigator of the Directorate of Special Economic Crimes of the Police Civic Police in Indonesia has assigned him as a deceiver and carrying out punishment for 20 years in the prison (“Resmi Jadi Tersangka, Dari Mana Sumber Kekayaan Indra Kenz?” 2022).

Another cause is a young man named Doni Salmanan in Indonesia, who is well known as a billionaire gifter (Youtube, 2022). He used to give artists or other people a billion rupiah randomly and publish it on Instagram and Youtube. It is shown that both of them came from an ordinary young man who suddenly became viral, had a billion followers, and was invited to a big television channel as a guest star. It must be because of the glamour and luxurious content. was known as a young successful trader and young entrepreneur too, the same as Indra Kenz. He was known in Quotex, a trading application. On his Instagram, he did the same method as Indra Kenz to gain attention and followers, especially to join his program in Quotex. At the end, he gone to the prison too as Indra Kenz did because of deceiver. He His famous contents were his luxurious shopping, his random transfer of one billion dollars to Reza Arap, an Indonesian famous musician, Ducati Panigale V4S, Harley Davidson, etc (Galamedia News," 2021). After being investigated when he was arrested by the police, he admitted that he deliberately did and published his showy content to entice the audience to believe in what he did to get that way. In fact, it’s just a fraud mode. It is also known that the total assets detained by the police reached 60 billion rupiah (Merdeka, 2022). Now, the official accounts of each influencer have been banned, but all the sources can still be found through Youtube, which records their previous Instagram videos.

Consumer behaviour is the process of individual or group choice and purchase of a product or service to satisfy their desire. The environment will conduct the exchange of
consumption desires. As time goes by, consumer behaviour is not affected by their personal choice but, moreover, by the situation they usually face. People usually purchase things because they are looking at the review by the influencer or because they need something and are searching for the review. However, this behaviour will be more toxic if a user buys an unnecessary product or a product that does not suit their pocket money. Gen Z will begin to place value in what they wear and what others say about them. As shown by Indra Kenz and Doni Salaman, that was the power of flexing, especially flexing about wealthiness, where the value of somebody is based on how they live luxuriously (Dobre et al., 2021). Gen Z believes that by presenting well and visually on social media, they will increase their self-worth and be more recognized. The behaviour of consumers is turning far from the line because the need is not really the need of Gen Z, but people’s validation is more needed, indeed.

Therefore, when Generation Z consumes flexing content, especially what is broadcast by influencers, the mindset and habits of Generation Z can be influenced as well. Therefore, if flexing content becomes widespread in the world of social media and is consumed continuously, it is very likely that Generation Z audiences will follow the flexing lifestyle in the real world as well as in cyberspace. Thus, researchers want to know the perceptions and points of view of Generation Z participants regarding flexing content by influencers on Instagram. It is become important to know how the impact of Instagram influencers flexing content on Gen Z consumer behaviour.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research method is scientific in nature to obtain information as it is in accordance with the methods, data, objectives and functions of the research itself. This research methodology is divided into four parts, namely, procedures, participants, and processes. Overall, the research method used by the author is to use qualitative research methods using the Forum Group Discussion. Participants in this method are targeted based on predetermined criteria to achieve targeted answers and survey results as well. The research process is also carried out systematically and accurately. The analysis of the research results is also linked to relevant facts and theories.

This research paper will utilise Focus Group Discussion (FGD). According to Akyildiz (2021), FGD is one of the most common tools in qualitative research that can provide a more authentic environment to collect high-quality data in social context research. In addition, researchers will use it because it is proven that qualitative research is suited to social field
research to gain a detailed explanation of the human points of view, feelings, and attitudes (Tong et al., 2012). Therefore, FGD is a suitable and appropriate methodology approach for this study.

To collect the data, researchers will use non-probability sampling. Sampling is commonly used by the researcher who will study an existing or developing theory (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). Specifically, the researcher will use convenience sampling and purposive sampling. Convenience sampling is chosen by the researcher's own convenience, for example, friends or family, and purposive sampling is chosen by selecting the specific needs and understanding of the field of research (Taherdoost, 2016). Thus, the total of the focus group session will be 10 to 15 people, which consists of researcher friends, where some of them will be specialists in analysing human behaviour and human ethics.

The researcher will follow the basic rule of FGD, which is having a group with specific characteristics that have the experience and familiarity with the case study or research topic to create a relevant and interconnected debate or discussion (Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021). Thus, the researcher requires the participants to be Indonesia Gen Z active Instagram users, aged between 18-24, who know and follow the Indra Kenz and Doni Salaman case. The participants do not have to be followers of the influencers, but as long as they recognize, notice, or know the update, they can participate. To achieve a balanced point of view, 50 percent of the population will be 50 percent male and 50 percent female.

The FGD will be held in February 19th, 2024. Firstly, the researcher will list the names of the candidates and approach them one by one by Whatsapp chat one month before the FGD is held, which is the first week of February 2024, to make sure they are willing to participate and to mark their calendar for the FGD. Secondly, due to the different locations of the participants, the FGD will be held online by Zoom, as the most recommended video platform for collecting qualitative data (Archibald et al., 2019). Thirdly, the researcher will ask for general information about themselves and start with the questions. The researcher will record the session and the FGD will be held for approximately 90 to 120 minutes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted on July 31, 2022 through the Focus Group Discussion method consisting of 9 participants. The FGD process was carried out by conducting in-depth interviews discussing flexing content by influencers on Instagram via online. The FGD is expected to help the analysis process regarding the types, responses, and impacts of flexing content by influencers on social media, especially Instagram. FGD will generate many
perspectives and arguments. Thus, the questions that the researcher poses to the participants aim to get as many perspectives or opinions as possible from the different personal experiences of these participants. Overall, the interview discussion began with the case study of flexing content that is used by the researcher on the dissertation topic. The explanation was used to set the foundation for further dialogue about their specific perspective about the topic. Furthermore, participants were asked to describe their responses and how far the content could affect their shopping behaviour.

The online interview was divided into ten questions. The first question was designed to know what social media they usually use as the Generation Z. All the participants use Instagram as their daily social media platform to interact and to socialise with their friends and gain information. They prefer Instagram as the platform to share and to see photos and videos rather than chat with others. The second question is created to know what kind of content they usually watch on Instagram. Conceptually, people consume content based on their own preferences and interests. In addition, the Instagram algorithm will likely show content that is liked by its users. Content that the users themselves put the special interest with. Some of them, especially the men participants, answered that they consume content about sports, automotive, and life hacks. Meanwhile, women have considerable interest in the fields of lifestyle, fashion, and food.

As the main topic of this research, flexing content covers many kinds of interests that are answered by the participants. For example, the flexer used to flex their high class lifestyle such as, branded fashion, fancy foods, and prestige cars. The contents are created to make them go viral. This phenomenon leads to the third question on purpose to know if they ever watch flexing content or not. According to the discussion, all of them watched the flexing contents, which in fact, they did not specifically search about. Some of them answered that the flexing contents are randomly shown up on their Instagram page and others are shown by their friends or relatives. Furthermore, they do notice about the flexing contents by some of the influencers which is going to be elaborated in question number four and number five.

The influencers that have gone viral with the flexing contents in Indonesia which are consciously noticed by the participants themselves are Indra Kenz and Doni Salaman. Participants answered that viral flexing content was produced using a personal tagline such as “Murah Banget” means “very cheap” by Indra Kenz. This tagline is used by the influencer to create his personal branding and reach followers, so do the viewers. On the other hand, the most viral flexing content of Doni Salaman was his sudden online charity in a big amount
of money. The participants responded that the Doni’s charity was not genuine charity, but it is his method and strategy to gain public trust and intention.

One of nine participants found out that Indra Kenz told his audiences that he bought one of the most expensive cars, Lamborghini, at Prestige Showroom in cash. However, the truth was he never did it at all. This fact was reported by the owner of the Prestige Company. The owner of the Prestige company publicly said that Indra Kenz’s brother clearly didn’t come to buy the car, and only came to the showroom to get more information about expensive automotives, then made offers and negotiated several luxury cars, including the Lamborghini which was recognized as his own and purchased in cash. All of his actions are recorded and publicly shared on his personal Instagram and Youtube channel, whose name is Indra Kenz. On the other hand, another participant found one of Indra’s videos in their Instagram reels timeline that was sound ungrateful, the participant also highlighted his egocentric, consumptive, and hedonistic lifestyle from the video.

In an effort to deepen the discussion, the researcher then asked questions about what was the first thing that came to mind when they were shown the flexing content itself and what were their detailed thoughts about it. Participants then issued opinions that were quite fundamentally different. The first answer that arises is that the existence of luxury goods always attracts attention. Furthermore, the ability to buy them will be interesting to watch as entertainment for the public. Public will tend to seek information about the value of these luxury goods and will attach certain assumptions, such as admiration for those who can buy them. Second answer represents the disappointment towards lies perpetrated by creators just to produce such interesting content or entertainment. There are many facts that reveal that what is shown in their flexing content was contrary to what actually happened in real life.

Furthermore, the third participant argued that because of this kind of content, entertaining things and shows only tend to be related to nominal appearance, amount of money, and purchasing power. Where these things should be a privacy because of the diversity preference and perspective in responding to the value of an item, especially the luxury one. The fourth and fifth answers state that there is a hidden strategy through market conditions utilisation where influencers clearly know that this content will appeal to people who do not have the same purchasing power or ability as the creator/influencer. Meanwhile, it is these people who contribute a large number of views and likes to the content they share on social media, especially Instagram.
Then, the sixth participant thinks it is not surprising that viewers of flexing content are growing rapidly, because young Indonesians tend to have a high curiosity, especially in someone’s lifestyle. However, what actually needs further attention is whether the awareness level of young people in Indonesia is sufficiently qualified to consume flexing content with a high enough intensity level. If they still can’t rationalise it clearly, it will be hard to be not influenced, especially on the rise of consumerism. On the other hand, the next participant assumed that in fact a shopping content or purchase of luxury goods could not only be categorised as flexing content. In many countries, this kind of content is also common to be published, but not as viral in Indonesia. This “viral” condition then provides a wide space for the public to submit arguments, opinions, and even further investigations. The big mistake that was created was not more about the flexing lifestyle, but the public deception that was clearly made to produce the content.

After knowing what participants thought about flexing content, it is now important to know the impact of flexing content based on their perspective and personal experiences. According to the first participant, the impact of flexing content makes people lazy and thinks that everything can be obtained instantly and quickly. In addition, this creates a high insecurity of oneself, it can even make people fake themselves and their goods just for validation from other people and also content on social media. Second Participant thinks that the impact of flexing content will not affect his life and according to him, flexing content is only one kind of content on social media that may not have any effect on a person's personality, because we are in our control.

The third participant states that the first impact of flexing content is manipulation. Flexing content created by Indra Kenz and Doni Salaman creates a public lie that undermines the audience's trust in influencers who are supposed to give good and true influence to the public. Second, such content creates a more pronounced social strata in society. According to him, if someone like that is famous, then others can also think that by showing off his wealth on social media, people will be easily known. Third, this participant feels they can increase a person's insecurity. People become inferior if they do not have such items. So that someone puts his value above a luxury item.

According to the fourth participant, this flexing content creates a desire to be like the influencers, the desire to get rich quick like the influencers. On the other hand, the fifth participant thinks the impact of this flexing content is to make people curious about where influencers can get rich quick like that. Follow the way these influencers get rich instantaneously, follow the programs promoted by the influencers on purpose to get rich.
like him. The fifth participant actually followed what Indra Kenz did, played and traded in Binomo. In the end, he lost and after being investigated that the program promoted by Indra Kenz was a fraudulent program. The fifth participant honestly said that he once really believed in Indra Kenz and followed what Indra Kenz said. Until finally he realised that there is no instant way to become rich and successful.

The sixth participant responded that this flexing content makes him motivated to own these items. According to him, by having these expensive and luxury items, his value will also increase. If he does not have these expensive items, then his self-worth becomes less or he becomes inferior. On the contrary, the seventh participant thinks that flexing content does not affect him. He stated that he followed the cases of Indra Kenz and Doni Salaman but never had the desire to follow and imitate them.

According to the eighth participant, flexing content can indirectly wash the audience’s brain, especially since the participants are young people who are very easily influenced by what is consumed through Instagram. In addition, participants feel that the content created by influencers also affects how they perceive other people. The more expensive a person’s goods or the richer a person is, the more cool and honourable a person is seen. Vice versa. If a person does not have cool and expensive things, then he is less respected and appreciated by someone.

The last participant thinks that flexing content makes him want to fulfil all his desires. Maybe not as luxurious as Indra Kenz and Doni Salaman, but participants are getting more excited to have the things they want, even though they realise that they can’t afford to buy them. This causes participants to have to fulfil their desires by buying fake goods and borrowing money to buy luxury goods.

Exploring the discussion of the seventh question, the researcher’s question leads to whether there is an effect on the shopping behaviour of Generation Z. Eight of the nine participants agreed that flexing content affects their shopping behaviour. They said that this flexing content affected the children of Generation Z. Some participants believed that they as part of Generation Z also realised that at their age, they did not yet have a solid understanding and mindset towards their decision to buy an item. Generation Z, like the participants, are in a period where they often see examples, imitate new things, want instant things, and get bored quickly. Therefore, the question about whether flexing content affects Generation Z’s behaviour in shopping, will be answered by totally agreeing. In addition, these nine participants shared a lot about their personal experiences and their friends around their environment who were very quickly influenced by lifestyle transformation.
There is often an attitude of inferiority found among Generation Z caused by the things they have and the things they don't have. Apart from that, Generation Z is an easy target for influencers to influence. Generation Z is the audience that absorbs the most and receives injections and influence from influencers.

In addition to looking at the impact of flexing content on consumer behaviour, especially Gen Z, it is important to know whether watching flexing content has an effect on increasing arousal/desire to shop. The researcher received two answers from all respondents, namely yes and no. The answer yes from several respondents is accompanied by several reasons, including:

1. The intensity in publishing flexing content has had a psychological impact, especially in creating optimism, a mindset to feel able to buy and will become like the influencer. So, more or less definitely affects the passion / desire to shop for the content audience.

2. Flexing content does give the audience a sense of interest, but it doesn't just directly affect the shopping passion of the respondents. Moreover, to buy goods that match the influencer's purchase. What we see will of course have an effect on our attitudes, but the decision regarding the actions to be taken after experiencing the feeling of being affected is in ourselves. While the unaffected answer has the reason that the respondent finds no interest at all with the flexing content carried out by the influencer and deeply regrets the public application process carried out to produce the “flexing” content.

Generation Z's level of approval regarding flexing content made by Indra Kenz and Doni Salama on Instagram

Based on the results of the FGD with 9 participants, all eight of the nine participants agreed that what Indra Kenz and Doni Salaman did in their Instagram content was a show of content. 88.9% of participants said that influencers should have a good, educational, positive, and constructive influence on their audience. However, these influencers have been branded as arrogant young people with their sudden wealth. Plus, these two influencers have sown and made sweet promises about their struggles to be successful, when in reality, they are scammers. And the majority of the victims of fraud from these two persons are their followers on social media. His followers have been successfully tricked by the sweet words and successful methods that are said by Indra Kenz and Doni Salaman.

Participants agree with the way they publish flexing content. In general, many people publish luxury watches, luxury homes, and sports cars. However, unlike Indra Kenz and Doni
Salaman, they display the image that all the luxuries they have are cheap and trivial things. That is, easy to obtain and for him is not a luxury. According to the participants as Generation Z, what the two individuals were doing was showing off. On the other hand, even though people claimed that Indra Kenz dan Doni were flexed, the audience and Indonesia media mass and citizens are interested in them. That is why they have become viral and many brands are interested in collaborating with them.

The impact of content flexing on Generation Z

Generation Z is actually very disappointed and sad about this phenomenon in Indonesia. Continuing with the response from participants regarding the impact that influencers on Instagram have on them as Generation Z is to increase their desire to own luxury goods or become more ambitious to fulfil their tertiary needs. It can even be said that the sense of having these tertiary goods is like a necessity like primary goods. This is assessed by Generation Z that what is imaged by Indra Kenz and Doni Salaman has received a lot of praise and is viral in the community. The thought that having luxury items like that can increase the value and self-esteem of Generation Z in the midst of their friendship and social environment. At an age that is looking for identity, Generation Z is increasingly attracted to shopping like influencers seen on Instagram who seem to have unlimited money. This perception is very sad, especially now that Generation Z is at an age that does not yet have the capacity to be wasteful in buying things that are beyond their main needs. In addition, Generation Z becomes wasteful in the sense of buying something that is not appropriate or useless, but for the sake of a mere social recognition, then he is willing to set aside money for this.

Generation Z is in a phase where they are looking for identity, want to know new things, need validity, like everything that is instant, and are passionate about being successful. When the content flexing that is currently happening in Indonesia is categorised as successful and successful content, it is very likely for generation Z to imitate this, especially when the perpetrators who create this content are also generation Z. Think that he has the same opportunity and desire to be like that, thus creating the wrong habit, which is to shop more often and choose to buy luxury items as well. This is believed by the participants to damage the mindset of every young person in thinking, acting, and deciding.

CONCLUSION

Content created by influencers is getting more and more into the nature of flexing. Apart from increasing the behaviour of Generation Z to consume and shop like these
influencers, they also create content like they saw before. This phenomenon is like a snowball effect that will continue to occur. When an influencer who is actually trusted by the audience to influence it turns out to provide an injection of content that makes an addiction to a lifestyle that is not constructive. Coupled with the characteristics of Generation Z who are in the phase of wanting to show who they are, have high curiosity, and try new things. The character of generation Z children when combined with the flexing content they consume every day will nourish them to have a lifestyle like that too. Generation Z will imitate and believe that having luxury goods and a high-class lifestyle will increase self-confidence, self-worth, and thirst for validity of others. These three things lead Generation Z to be able to own goods and live a life like a crazy rich, even though the conditions may not be possible. Generation Z considers that excessive and extravagant shopping is a normal or understandable lifestyle.

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