

Impact of Social Media Sports Content on Students Physical Exercise Interest and Perceived Benefits: A Literatur Review

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Abstract

The rapid development of social media has significantly influenced students' daily behavior, including their engagement in physical activity and sports. However, the increasing exposure to sports-related content has not always been accompanied by a clear understanding of how it shapes students' interest in physical exercise and their perceptions of its benefits. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the impact of sports-related content on social media on students' interest in physical exercise and their perceptions of the benefits of such activities. This study employs a qualitative library research approach using content analysis of eight selected scientific journal articles published between 2021 and 2026. The findings indicate that students are among the most active users in consuming and producing sports-related content on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. The intensity of content exposure influences students' interest in physical exercise through intrinsic motivation, the formation of positive attitudes, and perceived behavioral control. Furthermore, sports-related content contributes to shaping students' perceptions of exercise benefits across physical, psychological, and social dimensions. In conclusion, social media sports content plays a significant role in encouraging students' interest in physical exercise and promoting an active and healthy lifestyle. However, its effectiveness depends on students' level of digital literacy and psychological readiness, highlighting the importance of guided and responsible use of social media.

Keywords: sports content; social media; interest in sport; perceptions of the benefits of sport; students

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology over the past decade has brought about a fundamental transformation in the way individuals access information, interact, and shape their daily behavior. (Abeza & Sanderson, 2023). However, despite the widespread exposure to sports-related content on social media, there is still a lack of clear understanding regarding how such content directly influences students' actual interest in engaging in physical exercise and how it shapes their perceptions of its benefits. This gap highlights the need for a more focused and comprehensive analysis within the context of students. One of the most prominent phenomena is the rapid growth of social media use among younger generations, including secondary school students (Shan & Tong, 2024). In Indonesia, data indicate that in 2023 there were approximately 167 million active social media users, the majority of whom belonged to adolescent age groups within the productive learning stage (DataReportal, 2023). According to the report by DataReportal (2023) regarding social media usage in Indonesia, most digital platform users are dominated by adolescents, making social media almost inseparable from their daily lives. This condition indicates that social media is no longer merely a communication tool, but has evolved

into a social space that actively shapes the values, interests, and behaviors of younger generations, including in relation to physical activity and sports (Abeza & Sanderson, 2023; Lawrence, 2022).

Research has shown that social media use and engagement in sports have been identified as two potential factors influencing adolescents' psychological well-being, particularly amid increasing academic pressures and the growing complexity of social relationships they encounter (Morningstar et al., 2023). Sports-related content circulating on social media has experienced exponential growth alongside rising global interest in healthy lifestyles. Various platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter are now filled with fitness-related content in the form of workout videos, nutritional tips, and body transformation journeys shared by fitness influencers and professional athletes. The increasing number of users accessing fitness content through digital platforms—including watching workout tutorials, participating in physical activity-based challenges, and documenting personal training progress—subtly shapes their attitudes and tendencies toward actual sports participation (Miral & Villanova, 2022). This phenomenon demonstrates that social media functions not only as a passive source of information but also as an active agent of behavioral change, particularly in the context of physical activity. Social media has also given rise to a new category of influencers, namely athletes and fitness enthusiasts who routinely share their journeys, challenges, and achievements, thereby exerting significant influence on audience attitudes and behaviors related to physical fitness (Goodyear et al., 2021).

The presence of fitness influencers on social media has increasingly been shown to play a substantial role in encouraging users' intentions to exercise, particularly among young people. Through content displaying workout routines, healthy lifestyles, and seemingly attainable physical achievements, these influencers create strong motivational effects. Within fitness-centered social media environments, the ideal female body is generally portrayed as slim, fit, and athletic, whereas the ideal male body is represented as muscular and toned. Consequently, fitness influencers with such appearances may influence body-related perceptions and behaviors, including physical activity, in both positive and negative ways (Dureau et al., 2022). Despite these potential negative aspects, research consistently demonstrates that exposure to high-quality fitness content on social media can significantly enhance exercise intentions. Findings from studies on the role of parasocial relationships reveal a positive association between viewers' emotional closeness to fitness influencers and their intentions to engage in exercise, thereby enriching the understanding of online physical activity from the perspective of behavioral psychology (Miral & Villanova, 2022).

The quality and credibility of sports-related content on social media also constitute determining factors in shaping users' intentions to engage in physical exercise (Xiao et al., 2025). Users tend to be more influenced by content presented by influencers who are perceived as trustworthy, physically attractive, and competent in their respective fields. Research grounded in the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) theoretical framework demonstrates that the attributes of fitness influencers on social media, including trustworthiness and physical attractiveness, together with content quality and electronic word-of-mouth, significantly contribute to audience trust and perceived usefulness of the content, which subsequently encourage the formation of exercise intentions (Zhang et al., 2023). This finding indicates that the influence of social media on exercise behavior is not automatic in nature, but rather mediated by various complex cognitive and affective factors within individual users.

The use of fitness-related social media has been shown to influence exercise behavior not only directly but also indirectly through psychological pathways such as self-efficacy, body image satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation, all of which mediate the relationship (Li et al., 2023). On the other hand, the motivational influence of social media on exercise behavior also operates through internal psychological mechanisms, particularly intrinsic motivation. Regular engagement with fitness-related content on social media has been proven to strengthen individuals' internal drive to exercise. Through observing and imitating the exercise routines of fitness influencers, some users not only enhance their perceptions of sports competence but also develop a sense of belonging through interactions with community members, ultimately reinforcing their willingness and commitment to engage in sustained physical activity (Shan & Tong, 2024). This finding aligns with the core assumptions of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes that intrinsic motivation, rooted in autonomy and genuine personal interest, is essential for maintaining long-term engagement in healthy behaviors. A cross-sectional study involving Instagram users in the United States revealed a significant correlation between encouragement from fitness influencers on social media and the actual levels of physical activity performed by their followers (Ruangkanjanases & Sivarak, 2022).

Nevertheless, the impact of social media on interest in exercise is not always linear and positive. There are complex dimensions that require deeper examination, particularly in the context of adolescents and school students. Excessive exposure to sports-related content without adequate digital literacy may lead to excessive social pressure, unhealthy social comparison, and even encourage unmeasured exercise behaviors aimed at achieving ideal body standards portrayed on social media (Lawrence, 2022). Research involving eighth-grade junior high school students found that the integration of social media into sports education programs could positively affect students' physical activity outside school hours, indicating the substantial potential of digital platforms as drivers of sports participation among students (Goodyear et al., 2021). However, the success of such integration largely depends on how the content is presented and the extent to which students possess critical abilities to filter the information they consume.

Exercise provides substantial benefits for both physical and mental health, enabling students to channel stress through physical activity, release endorphins, and develop a sense of belonging and self-esteem through team spirit, while social media serves as one of the initial bridges introducing these benefits to younger generations (Yin et al., 2024). Previous studies have extensively examined the relationship between social media use and physical activity behavior, including the influence of fitness influencers, intrinsic motivation, and exercise intention across various population groups (Goodyear et al., 2021; Durau et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023; Xiao et al., 2025). In addition, several studies have highlighted the relationship between social media use, psychological aspects, and sports participation among adolescents and university students (Morningstar et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025).

However, most of these studies have primarily focused on general populations or university students and have tended to emphasize exercise intention and exercise behavior as separate constructs. Research that specifically integrates the influence of sports-related content on social media toward actual physical exercise interest alongside the formation of students' perceptions regarding exercise benefits within school environments remains relatively limited. Furthermore, studies within the Indonesian context examining this phenomenon comprehensively are still scarce.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by more specifically analyzing the role of sports-related content on social media in shaping students' interest in physical exercise and their perceptions of exercise benefits within the student context. As digital media become increasingly integrated into daily life, their influence on the exercise behavior of university and school students has emerged as a continuously developing field of study. Previous research has highlighted the general benefits of media exposure; however, the specific mechanisms linking digital content consumption with actual sports participation still require further exploration (Zhong, 2025).

This gap serves as the foundation for the present study, which aims to examine more comprehensively the patterns of influence exerted by sports-related content on social media toward students' interest in physical exercise and their perceptions of the benefits of exercise. In this study, physical exercise activity is defined as fitness-related activity performed independently outside the context of formal physical education. Therefore, the findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective digital-based health promotion strategies targeting adolescent groups.

Based on the background described above, the research problem lies in the high level of students' exposure to sports-related content on social media, accompanied by varying patterns of content consumption in daily life. This phenomenon indicates the possibility of an influence on students' interest in engaging in actual physical exercise activities outside formal educational settings. On the other hand, the sports-related content consumed also has the potential to shape students' perceptions regarding the benefits of exercise, encompassing physical, psychological, and social dimensions. Therefore, a comprehensive study is needed to understand the relationship between exposure to sports-related content on social media, students' interest in physical exercise, and their perceptions of exercise benefits.

In general, this study aims to analyze and describe the impact of sports-related content on social media toward students' interest in physical exercise and their perceptions of exercise benefits. Specifically, this study seeks to: (1) identify the level and patterns of sports-related content consumption on social media among students; (2) analyze the influence of exposure to sports-related content on social media toward the formation of students' actual interest in physical exercise; and (3) identify students' perceptions regarding the benefits of exercise that are formed or reinforced through the consumption of sports-related content on social media, in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the relationship between the digital ecosystem and active lifestyle culture among students.

The findings of this study are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this study contributes to enriching the body of knowledge in the fields of health communication, sports psychology, and physical education, particularly regarding the role of social media as an agent of sports socialization in the digital era. Practically, the findings may serve as a valuable reference for educators and school policymakers in designing physical education programs integrated with the digital ecosystem, as well as for parents and counselors in providing digital literacy guidance to students so that they may critically and constructively utilize sports-related content on social media to support active and healthy lifestyles.

Despite the growing body of research on social media and physical activity, this study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, this research is limited to a qualitative library

research approach and does not involve primary data collection such as surveys or experiments. Second, the scope of the study focuses specifically on students as the main population, excluding other demographic groups. Third, the analysis is restricted to sports-related content on social media and does not cover other types of digital content. Finally, the study only includes selected scientific articles published between 2021 and 2026, which may not fully represent all existing research on this topic.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using a library research design. This approach was selected because the objective of the study focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of conceptual and interpretative phenomena that did not require direct statistical measurement. Qualitative research seeks to reveal phenomena in a holistic and contextual manner by positioning the researcher as the key instrument in the processes of data collection and analysis (Buda & Sal, 2020). In the context of examining the impact of sports-related content on social media toward students' interest in physical exercise and their perceptions of exercise benefits, this approach was considered the most appropriate, as it enables the exploration of meanings, relational patterns, and rich interpretations of socio-psychological phenomena.

The data sources in this study were entirely derived from literature materials relevant to the topic under investigation, including internationally and nationally reputable scientific journal articles, academic textbooks, official institutional reports, and other scholarly documents obtained through trusted databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, Scopus, and SINTA. The literature search process was conducted systematically to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected sources. Initially, a total of 85 articles were identified from databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, Scopus, and SINTA using keywords including “social media”, “fitness content”, “sports interest”, “physical activity”, and “students”.

The filtering process was carried out in several stages. First, articles were screened based on publication year (2021–2026) to ensure data recency. Second, articles were evaluated based on their relevance to the research variables, specifically focusing on social media sports content, students' interest in physical exercise, and perceived benefits of sports. Third, only peer-reviewed journal articles were included to ensure academic credibility. After the initial screening, 15 articles met the inclusion criteria and were further reviewed in detail. Finally, 8 articles were selected as the primary sources for analysis in this study, as they were considered the most relevant and aligned with the research objectives. The literature search was conducted using structured keywords in both Indonesian and English, including *social media*, *fitness content*, *sports interest*, *physical activity*, *students*, *perceptions of exercise benefits*, and *digital sports content*. The literature inclusion criteria were limited to publications from 2021 to 2025 in order to ensure data recency, and all selected sources were required to demonstrate direct thematic relevance to the research variables. The literature review technique was carried out through reading, examining, and documenting various sources relevant to the research topic, which were subsequently filtered and organized into a theoretical framework. The research procedure was conducted through four sequential and replicable stages. First, the problem identification and research focus determination stage was carried out based on the formulated research questions. Second, literature materials were systematically collected through searches in academic databases. Third, the selected sources were screened and evaluated based on their relevance, year of publication, and authorial authority. Fourth, the analysis and interpretation

stage was conducted using content analysis, which was applied inductively to identify patterns, themes, and interrelationships among variables emerging from the literature. The content analysis method was selected because it has proven to be both dominant and effective in research related to social media and sports, with qualitative content analysis representing the largest proportion of similar studies conducted over the past decade. The collected data were critically and comprehensively analyzed to support the propositions and arguments developed in this study (Cite et al., 2020). All stages were presented transparently to ensure that the study may be replicated by other researchers using equivalent procedures.

3. Result

Based on an in-depth review of the eight journal articles used as the primary data sources in this literature study, a comprehensive overview was obtained regarding the three core aspects corresponding to the research questions: the level of exposure and patterns of sports-related content consumption on social media among students, the influence of consumption intensity on actual interest in physical exercise, and the formation of perceptions regarding the benefits of exercise from physical, psychological, and social dimensions through digital content. A summary of the cross-literature findings is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Summary of the main findings of the literature review on sports-related content on social media and students' interest in physical exercise

No	Source	Subjects/Sample	Dominant Platforms	Main Variables	Key Findings
1	(Ali et al., 2021)	University students	Snapchat, Facebook	Content consumption & activity perception	46.4% planned health-related activities through social media; those who shared sports-related content perceived themselves as more physically active
2	(Escamilla-fajardo, 2021)	175 sports science students	YouTube, Instagram	Motivation & exercise behavior	Social media functioned as a motivator for independent physical activity; female students showed higher engagement
3	(Morningstar et al., 2023)	12.358 remaja kelas 6–10	Multi-platform	Intensitas penggunaan & partisipasi olahraga	Intense social media use was associated with a higher likelihood of meeting daily physical activity recommendations

4	(Wang et al., 2025)	1,500 university students from 10 universities in China	Multi-platform	Physical activity & mental health	Physical activity moderated the negative impacts of social media; significant gender and regional differences were identified
5	(Xiao et al., 2025)	425 active social media users	Fitness social media	Intrinsic motivation & exercise behavior	Fitness social media use predicted intrinsic motivation ($\beta = 0.396$), exercise intention ($\beta = 0.254$), and exercise behavior ($\beta = 0.295$)
6	(Yang, 2025)	679 university students	Fitness-related social media	Attitudes & exercise intention	Attitudes mediated the relationship between fitness-related social media use and exercise intention; perceived behavioral control acted as a moderator
7	(Bae et al., 2025)	251 sports science students	YouTube, Instagram, TikTok	Perceived benefits & sports promotion	Social media was perceived as a valuable tool for visualizing and promoting physical activity
8	(Oliveira et al., 2026)	201 participants (students & staff)	Multi-platform	Correlation between social media, exercise & health	The correlation between social media and physical activity was weak and independent; sleep quality was found to be more influential

4. Discussion

The Level of Exposure and Consumption Patterns of Sports-Related Content on Social Media among Students

Findings from various studies consistently indicate that school and university students are among the groups most intensively engaged in consuming sports-related content on digital platforms. YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are the three dominant platforms used to access content related to fitness, exercise routines, and active lifestyles. The resulting consumption pattern is not merely passive, as students not only watch content but also actively document and share their physical

activities with their respective digital communities, while simultaneously perceiving these platforms as a means of visualizing and promoting an active lifestyle that holds substantial value in their daily lives (Oliveira et al., 2026). This phenomenon indicates a paradigm shift in the relationship between younger generations and sports, where social media now functions as a social infrastructure that supports motivation and consistency in exercising.

More specifically, approximately 46.4% of the university students examined reported using social media platforms to plan activities directly related to their health and physical activity. More interestingly, students who actively documented and shared their exercise activities on social media were found to have a greater tendency to perceive themselves as physically active individuals and were less likely to describe their health conditions as poor compared to those who did not engage in such activities (Lawrence, 2022). This pattern suggests that sharing sports-related content on social media not only reflects pre-existing interests but also actively contributes to constructing and reinforcing students' self-identity as individuals committed to a healthy lifestyle.

In both pandemic and post-pandemic contexts, social media has also been shown to function as an effective alternative channel for students to remain engaged in exercise routines despite limitations in accessing physical facilities. Students independently utilized digital content as guidance for home-based workouts and employed it as a medium for motivating one another within virtual communities (Morningstar et al., 2023).

The Influence of the Intensity of Sports-Related Content Consumption on Social Media toward Students' Interest in Physical Exercise

The influence of exposure to sports-related content on social media toward students' interest in physical exercise has been proven to be both real and significant; however, it operates through a series of layered psychological mechanisms rather than through a purely direct effect. The use of fitness-related social media has been empirically shown to positively and significantly predict three variables simultaneously: intrinsic motivation ($\beta = 0.396$), exercise intention ($\beta = 0.254$), and actual exercise behavior ($\beta = 0.295$). Furthermore, a serial mediation pathway accounted for approximately 33.55% of the total overall effect, demonstrating that sports content on social media functions through emotional activation, which subsequently encourages cognitive planning before ultimately leading to actual behavioral action (Ali et al., 2021). These findings directly address the second research question, indicating that the influence of social media on students' interest in exercise is substantial but mediated by internal motivational processes (Abeza & Sanderson, 2023). The intensity of social media use has also been identified as a more crucial determining variable than mere duration of use. Data involving more than twelve thousand secondary school adolescents revealed that intense social media use was associated with a greater likelihood of meeting internationally recommended daily physical activity guidelines, whereas non-active use was linked to lower participation across all domains of physical activity, including organized sports, independent exercise, and active transportation. This finding emphasizes that the determining factor is not simply the presence of social media itself, but rather how and to what extent students actively engage with sports-related content.

The process of influence is also closely related to the roles of attitudes and perceived behavioral control. Positive attitudes formed through the consumption of fitness-related content have been shown to mediate the relationship between social media exposure and exercise intention, while

perceived behavioral control functions as a moderator that may strengthen or weaken this influence pathway depending on students' initial levels of self-confidence (Escamilla-Fajardo, 2021). These findings carry important implications, suggesting that school-based sports promotion programs utilizing social media should take into account students' initial psychological conditions rather than relying solely on the volume of content exposure.

Students' Perceptions of the Benefits of Exercise Shaped Through Social Media Content

The third dimension of the research problem concerns how sports-related content on social media shapes students' perceptions of the benefits of exercise from physical, psychological, and social perspectives. From the physical and informational dimensions, digital content has been shown to broaden students' understanding of various sports disciplines, proper training techniques, and the importance of consistent physical activity in maintaining fitness. The digital wellness ecosystem, supported by fitness influencers and online trainers, systematically constructs narratives of healthy bodies and ideal physical activity that gradually become embedded in the way students interpret and experience exercise activities (Bae et al., 2025).

From the psychological dimension, empirical evidence indicates that physical activity motivated through social media consumption contributes significantly to moderating the negative effects of excessive social media use on mental health, particularly in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety. This protective effect becomes even stronger among individuals with high-intensity social media use. These findings suggest that perceptions of the psychological benefits of exercise formed through social media are grounded in measurable empirical evidence rather than merely social constructions.

From the social dimension, students who actively share sports-related content and engage within digital fitness communities have been found to develop a stronger sense of belonging, peer support, and reinforced social identity as members of a healthy lifestyle community. In turn, these factors strengthen their commitment to maintaining regular exercise habits (Yang, 2025).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that not all contexts demonstrate a strong correlation between social media consumption and the formation of positive perceptions regarding the benefits of exercise. In one correlational study, the relationship between social media use, physical activity, and perceived well-being was found to be relatively weak, with each variable contributing independently of one another. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of digital content in shaping perceptions of exercise benefits is highly dependent on socio-cultural context, the maturity of digital literacy, and the psychological readiness of individual students (Xiao et al., 2025). These findings further emphasize that strategies for utilizing sports-related content on social media to shape students' perceptions of exercise benefits require personalized and contextual approaches, accompanied by adequate digital literacy guidance within the school environment.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This literature review successfully addressed the three proposed research questions and achieved the established objectives. Students were found to be the most active group in consuming sports-related content through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, not merely as passive audiences but also as content creators who digitally construct and express a healthy lifestyle

identity. The intensity of sports content consumption was shown to significantly influence interest in physical exercise through intrinsic motivation, attitudes, and perceived behavioral control. Furthermore, exposure to sports content contributed to shaping perceptions of benefits across physical, psychological, and social dimensions. This study contributes to enriching the fields of health communication and sports psychology within the context of the digital ecosystem. These findings are theoretically supported by the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation in sustaining long-term engagement in physical activity. In addition, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) also explains that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control play a crucial role in shaping individuals' intentions and actual behavior toward exercise. Therefore, the influence of sports-related content on social media can be understood as a process that not only stimulates motivation but also strengthens behavioral intention and actual participation in physical activity.

Considering that the influence of sports-related content on social media toward students' interest in and perceptions of the benefits of exercise is significant yet highly dependent on digital literacy maturity and individual psychological conditions, educators and school policymakers need to design physical education programs that critically and strategically integrate the digital ecosystem. Parents and school counselors should also play an active role in guiding students to selectively filter fitness-related content, avoid unhealthy social comparisons, and utilize digital platforms as constructive motivators for physical activity. Further research employing quantitative approaches and focusing on specific samples of secondary school students in Indonesia is strongly recommended.

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