

**When Fitness Becomes Content: The Role of Digital Creation Motivation in Youth Exercise Interest****Nur Alam Rahmatullah^{1✉}, Carsiwan², Lutfan Ananda Antariksa³**Sport Education Study Program, Graduate School, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Jl. Dr. Setia-budi No. 229, Bandung 40154, Indonesia¹³Physical Education, Health, and Recreation Study Program, Faculty of Sports and Health Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia²**Article History**

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Abstract

The increasing trend of documenting physical activity on social media has transformed exercise into a form of digital content, yet its influence on youth exercise interest remains underexplored. This study aims to examine the effect of digital content creation motivation on exercise interest among young people. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey of 250 respondents aged 15–30 years, selected through purposive sampling. All participants were active social media users who had experience producing or engaging with exercise-related content. The research instrument consisted of 33 items adapted from motivation and exercise behavior theories, with 24 items retained after validity and reliability testing. Data were analyzed using SPSS through descriptive statistics, classical assumption tests, and simple linear regression. The results indicate that digital content creation motivation has a positive and significant effect on exercise interest ($\beta = 0.566$, $p < 0.001$), accounting for 32% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.320$). This finding suggests that young people tend to show greater interest in exercising when their physical activities can be documented and shared as digital content. The magnitude of the explained variance indicates that digital content creation motivation is a meaningful predictor of exercise interest. These findings conclude that digital content creation functions as a psychological and social stimulus that enhances youth engagement in physical activity. The study contributes theoretically to digital behavior research and offers practical implications for developing social media-based health campaigns to promote active lifestyles among young people.

How to Cite

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology over the past decade has profoundly reshaped the lifestyles, behaviors, and daily routines of young people worldwide. Increased internet accessibility, widespread smartphone ownership, and the dominance of social media platforms have shifted adolescents' leisure patterns, with screen-based engagement increasingly replacing traditional physical activities (WHO, 2022). This shift has been associated with declining levels of youth physical activity, raising concerns among educators, health institutions, and policymakers regarding long-term health and psychosocial outcomes (Jaf et al., 2021). Similar trends are evident in Indonesia, where digital entertainment and online social interaction have become more appealing to many adolescents than active participation in sports.

Generation Z often referred to as digital natives has grown up within a highly networked and technology-driven environment. Their familiarity and fluency with digital tools shape how they communicate, learn, and construct identity (Alruthaya et al., 2021; Cutillas et al., 2025). Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube serve not only as entertainment spaces but also as arenas for self-expression, personal branding, and social participation (Armijos-Buitrón et al., 2024; Salvietti et al., 2023). These platforms' interactive features encourage content creation, enabling young users to share aspects of their daily lives including fitness routines, sports participation, and lifestyle activities (Mude & Undale, 2023). As a result, social media plays a significant role in shaping youth lifestyles, exposing them to fitness challenges, exercise trends, and motivational content that can influence attitudes and intentions toward physical activity (Peiró-Signes et al., 2025; Luis et al., 2025; Hai & Xiong, 2025).

Motivation for digital content creation is multifaceted, encompassing both intrinsic and extrinsic drivers. Intrinsic motivation stems from internal desires such as creativity, personal satisfaction, enjoyment of the creative process, and the need for self-expression ((Baldassarre & Miroli, 2013; Levesque et al., 2009). In contrast, extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards such as social recognition, visibility, popularity, and potential financial incentives (Tyler & Adams, 2014). On social media, such motivations are reflected in users' pursuit of likes, comments, followers, and audience engagement. Evidence suggests that while extrinsic incentives can

strengthen intention, sustained content creation is more strongly influenced by intrinsic factors (Blair & Shaver, 2019; Kremen et al., 2016).

Self-Presentation Theory provides an important conceptual lens for understanding digital content creation, suggesting that individuals strategically manage how they are perceived by others through the curated images and narratives they share (Devito et al., 2018; Li & Reider, 2024). In digital environments—where content can be edited, filtered, and refined—users have greater control over the identities they present, such as portraying themselves as active, healthy, or productive individuals (Dolezal, 2017); Mateus et al., 2023). This identity-management process can motivate young people to engage in physical activity specifically to produce content that aligns with their desired online image.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) further explains that individuals actively choose media to satisfy cognitive, affective, social, and identity-related needs (Haridakis & Humphries, 2019; Özkoçak & Tuna, 2025). Creating fitness-related content can fulfill these gratifications by offering enjoyment, social interaction, perceived competence, recognition, and opportunities for self-expression. U&G research on digital behavior demonstrates that both content consumption and content production reflect meaningful psychological motivations, which can directly influence real-world behaviors such as exercise participation (Stafford et al., 2004; Korhan & Ersoy, 2016; Roy, 2009),

Youth exercise interest itself is a multidimensional construct comprising cognitive, affective, and conative components (Su & Zhang, 2024; Zheng, 2024). Several behavioral theories provide insight into how this interest develops. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) posits that exercise behavior is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2020; Rhodes & Blanchard, 2006). For young people, subjective norms are increasingly shaped by digital environments, fitness trends, and peer influences online (Rush, 2014; Chernozub, 2022). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) highlights the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation for physical activity (Deci & Ryan, 2015; Ryan, 2023). Social media can support these needs by offering instructional content, digital communities, and social support networks (Kim & Mao, 2024; McEown & Oga-Baldwin, 2019). Meanwhile, the Health Belief Model (HBM) explains how perceptions of vulnerability, severity, benefits, and barriers influence the likelihood of

engaging in exercise (Luquis & Kensinger, 2019; Carpenter, 2010), and research shows that health-related content on social media can shape these perceptions (Henshaw & Freedman-Doan, 2009; Dafroyati et al., 2024).

Taken together, digital platforms both reflect and reinforce the psychological processes that shape youth engagement in physical activity. Importantly, creating physical activity content may act as a behavioral catalyst: because users must perform the activity before documenting and posting it, the content creation process itself may stimulate greater exercise participation. Positive audience feedback can strengthen this behavior, creating a reinforcing loop between digital creativity and real-world physical activity.

Although research on social media and youth health behaviors has grown, empirical studies specifically examining personal digital content creation motivation as a predictor of exercise interest remain limited, particularly in Indonesia. Existing studies predominantly focus on content consumption rather than content production. Moreover, the integration of digital motivation constructs with theories of exercise interest has received relatively little empirical attention. These gaps underscore the need for a deeper understanding of how digital creativity intersects with youth lifestyle behaviors in contemporary media environments.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of digital content creation motivation, particularly the motivation to document and share physical activities, on youth exercise interest within the context of social media use.

This study offers novelty by shifting the focus from social media content consumption to digital content creation motivation as a predictor of exercise interest among young people. Furthermore, this research provides empirical evidence from the Indonesian context, which remains underrepresented in existing literature on digital media and physical activity.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative survey approach involving 250 participants aged 15–30 years who were active users of digital media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on predefined criteria, including age range, active social media use, and prior experience creating or interacting with sports-related digital content. Data collection was conducted online using Google Form, and participation was

voluntary without compensation. Prior to completing the questionnaire, all participants received study information and provided informed consent electronically.

Data were collected using a self-administered closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 33 items measured on a five-point Likert scale. After validity testing, 24 items were retained for analysis, comprising 12 items measuring digital content creation motivation and 12 items measuring interest in sports. All instruments were researcher-developed and demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha values exceeding .80. The questionnaire was distributed digitally, and respondents completed all items independently without time constraints.

The independent variable in this study was digital content creation motivation, while interest in sports served as the dependent variable. Data analysis was performed using SPSS and included descriptive statistics, validity and reliability testing, classical assumption tests, and simple linear regression analysis. Statistical significance was determined at the .05 level, and the strength of the relationship between variables was assessed using standardized regression coefficients and the coefficient of determination (R^2).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	(%)
Gender	Female	175	70
	Male	75	30
Age	15–18	9	3.6
	19–22	157	62.8
	22–25	69	27.6
	25–29	11	4.4
	≥ 30	4	1.6
Education	University	188	75.2
	Senior High School	61	24.4
	Junior High School	1	0.4
	Active	250	100
Social Media Activity Most Used Platform	Instagram + TikTok	77	30.8
	Instagram + TikTok + YouTube	75	30
	TikTok	35	14
	Instagram	24	9.6
	Instagram + YouTube	14	5.6
	Other combinations	25	10

This study was conducted over a four-week period and involved 250 respondents aged 15–30 years who were active users of social media platforms. All questionnaires were completed fully and deemed eligible for analysis. This section presents the characteristics of respondents, descriptive statistics of the research variables, instrument testing results, and the regression analysis examining the influence of digital content creation motivation on youth exercise interest, followed by an integrated discussion of the findings.

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the research sample. Of the 250 respondents, 70% were female and 30% were male. Most participants were aged 19–22 years (62.8%) and were predominantly university students (75.2%). All respondents (100%) reported being active social media users, with Instagram and TikTok identified as the most frequently used platforms.

Table 2. Region of Origin of Participants

Region	N	(%)
West Java	46	18.4
DKI Jakarta	39	15.6
East Java	33	13.2
Central Java	26	10.4
Sulawesi	22	8.8
Banten	16	6.4
DIY Yogyakarta	15	6
Sumatra	11	4.4
Kalimantan	4	1.6
Riau Islands	4	1.6
Nusa Tenggara	1	0.4

Participants originated from various regions across Indonesia, as shown in **Table 2**. The largest proportions came from West Java (18.4%), DKI Jakarta (15.6%), and East Java (13.2%). This distribution reflects considerable regional diversity within the sample, suggesting that the findings represent youth from different geographical backgrounds.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Motivation to Create Digital Content (X)	250	19	60	46.86	8.6
Exercise Interest (Y)	250	28	60	51.87	5.74

Descriptive statistics for the main research

variables are presented in **Table 3**. The mean score for motivation to create digital content was 46.86 (SD = 8.60), while exercise interest had a mean score of 51.87 (SD = 5.74). These values indicate that respondents generally demonstrated moderate to high levels of both digital content creation motivation and interest in exercise.

Instrument testing showed that 12 of the 15 items measuring digital content creation motivation met the validity criteria, while three reverse-coded items were removed. The final scale demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.84$). Similarly, 12 of the 14 items measuring exercise interest were retained, with the final scale showing strong reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.83$). These results indicate that the measurement instruments were valid and reliable for further analysis.

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression Results

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p	Interpretation
Constant	34.2	1.66	—	20.589	< .001	Intercept of the model
Digital Content Creation Motivation (X)	0.38	0.04	0.57	10.809	< .001	Positive significant predictor

Regression analysis results are presented in **Table 4**. The findings indicate that motivation to create digital content has a positive and statistically significant effect on youth exercise interest ($\beta = 0.566$, $p < .001$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.320$) shows that digital content creation motivation accounts for 32% of the variance in exercise interest, indicating a moderate-to-strong effect size.

These findings suggest that producing exercise-related digital content functions not only as a form of self-expression but also as a behavioral driver that encourages physical activity among young people. This result aligns with descriptions of Generation Z as digital natives who often frame everyday activities through digital documentation and self-representation practices (Alruthaya et al., 2021; Armijos-Buitrón et al., 2024).

From the perspective of Self-Presentation Theory, individuals actively manage how they are perceived by others through the content they share (Devito et al., 2018). In social media environments, young people often present themselves as active, healthy, and productive. This desire to construct a positive digital identity motivates engagement in physical activity that can be documented and shared, thereby strengthening inter-

est in exercise.

The findings are also consistent with Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that media use is driven by the fulfillment of social, personal, and hedonic needs (Haridakis & Humphries, 2019; Özkoçak & Tuna, 2025). Creating exercise-related content provides enjoyment, social interaction, recognition, and audience feedback, all of which reinforce motivation to continue participating in physical activity.

In line with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2015), the content creation process supports autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Young individuals exercise autonomy in choosing content styles, experience competence by demonstrating progress or skills, and develop relatedness through interaction with online audiences. Fulfillment of these psychological needs fosters intrinsic motivation, contributing to higher interest in exercise.

The results also resonate with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2020) and the Health Belief Model (Carpenter, 2010; Luquis & Kensinger, 2019). Exposure to digital fitness trends and health-related content strengthens subjective norms, perceived benefits, and perceived behavioral control, which in turn support exercise interest. Importantly, this study extends previous research by demonstrating that creating digital content rather than merely consuming it plays a significant role in shaping youth exercise interest.

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the view that digital content creation is closely intertwined with psychological processes underlying health behavior. Practically, the results suggest that educators, coaches, and public health institutions may leverage content creation activities, such as fitness challenges or digital progress documentation, to stimulate exercise interest among digitally engaged youth.

Several limitations should be noted. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and future longitudinal or experimental studies are recommended. Additionally, the study focused on a single predictor variable; future research could incorporate additional factors such as social norms, influencer engagement, or intrinsic exercise motivation. The reliance on self-report measures may also introduce response bias, suggesting the value of integrating behavioral or objective activity data in future studies.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that motivation to

create digital content has a positive effect on youth exercise interest. Individuals who are more motivated to produce and share exercise-related content demonstrate higher interest in engaging in physical activity. The findings highlight that digital content creation serves not only as a mode of self-expression but also as a psychological and social motivator that supports active lifestyles. Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of how digital behavior intersects with exercise motivation and underscores the potential of social media platforms as tools for promoting active living among young people.

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