

FITSPIRATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA: AN UNTOLD NARRATION OF HEALTH AND FITNESS COMMUNICATION AMONG MYANMAR YOUTHS*

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Abstract

Social media becomes the most necessary in the daily lives of not only youths but also the older generation for their everyday activities. It intervenes in many ways of lifestyle such as education, entertainment, information, health and community settings for the users. In recent years, a new fitness trend has developed on social media especially among young people, called “Fitspiration”. Fitspiration on social media which is the term for “Fitness Inspiration” is about receiving motivation from fitness and health related posts on social media and change the daily lifestyles, exercise habits and even to diet among the youngsters. This study focuses on the interrelated link between fitspiration on social media and significantly changing lifestyles of young adults in Myanmar who become loving in fitness culture in their daily lives. The research is based on narrative analysis to conduct the quality information and narration from the participants throughout their experiences before and after the fitness inspiration. Moreover, the study will clearly present the impact of social media on the young adults in consuming health related information and fitness culture and how those impacts lead them changes up and down in their daily lives.

Keywords: fitspiration, social media, youths, fitness, health communication.

Introduction

In the current community which mostly relies on the modern technology, people are spending much hours on using social media than walking or exercising in their free time. Therefore, the contents on social media which can mention and contains fitness and health related ideas have big impacts on the people’s perspectives on physical activities and fitness culture in society. However, these days, people are being interested in sports and fitness for attaining either better physical appearance or staying healthy and fit. It is also mentioned that online fitness culture on social media leads the users in finding their health and fitness goals (Yang & Thi Ngoc , 2017).

It is argued that people are lack of physical activities and more dull due to the modern technology and social media by spending their most of the time sitting and using social networking sits and online. However, an undeniable fact is that people get lots of information about health on social media. Significantly, during the Covid-19 pandemic time, health expertise, governments, professionals and more applied social media for the wider and faster health information coverage (Friedman , et al., 2022).

Being a key player of health information, social media offers its users communication channels where users can communicate with the specialists or communicators concerning different health perspectives. On social media, recently, most of the health-related topics are about fitness and physical exercises (Ramme , Donovan , & Bell , 2016). The most popular social

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media network, YouTube, is the main access point of work out videos of fitness influencers by demonstrating their workouts ways and routines. With the Covid-19 outbreak worldwide, people have been more relying on online and social media for their daily workout plans and physical activity routines as gyms and fitness clubs were closed.

Mass media effects on body image and beauty perception could only considered about print such as magazines, journals and so on and television channels in previous times. However, internet and social media becomes the primary source of media effect on idealizing beauty and body among youths lately (Vaterlaus , Patten , & Young , 2015). The term “fitspiration” is the combination of “fitness” and “inspiration” which refer to gaining inspiration for work out and fitness in daily live. Fitspiration is evidently remarkable among social media because those are based on eye-catching images, photos and videos. Fitspiration on social media could be trending positively or negatively among young adults either by supporting fitness culture and healthy lifestyles or body dissatisfaction. Apparently, women consume more time by looking at image-based media online rather than other types of media (Willis & Knobloch-Westernwick , 2014).

Fitspiration contents are mostly popular on social networking sites and online media to motivate the viewers leading healthy lifestyle and diet. Fitspiration on Instagram which is one of the most popular social media means that influencers or role models show the photos, images and videos about their experiences and motivation words or quotes. Such technique is quite effective among the users as there are over 65 million posts on Instagram displaying and relating fitspiration messages (Ahrens , et al., 2022).

Concerning bodybuilding and fitness contents, young male adults usually share knowledge about weight-lifting, lean, muscular bodies including the photos and images, diet plan, dietary supplements and even their experiences throughout their fitness journey (Deighton-Smith & Bell , 2018). Viewers on social media such as Facebook, Instagram and so on, often gain inspiration and motivation for their fitness routines. On the other hand, those posts also lead young people to negative shortcut ways in obtaining physique modeled in the pictures (Robinson , et al., 2017). Therefore, this study highlights the impact of social media on fitness culture among Myanmar youths concerning the perception of fitness and gym culture and habitual changes and daily lifestyles in term of health communication.

Literature Review

Sport, Fitness Culture, Human beings and Society

It is undeniable that sport has been stick strongly together as a part of culture in the society throughout the history. The researchers also mentioned that sport is not only the model reflection of social life but also autonomous being, in different ways of anticipating social trends. Moreover, in the society, the role of sport has been so significant that brings many health benefits not only in physical but also in psychosocial development among young and old people (Audience Project, 2017).

Apart from visible positive effect on the people around the society, sport helps to promote personal development and also indirectly, it increases lesser consumption of alcohol and illegal drug usage. Doing sport can increase the youth’s knowledge of diet and nutrition, exercises and their daily health-related knowledge. In real situation, human bodies need a specific amount of physical activity for maintaining their wellbeing and good bodies (Jung & Lee , 2006). According to the anthropological point of view, biological adaptation to lives of people with

physical passiveness and lesser sport might take down many generations of human being. People who are living in this generation need the same or similar physical activities as 40,000 years ago (Grabe , Ward , & Hyde , 2008).

In practical situation, an ordinary person with a body weight of 65 kg needs more than 10 km daily walking distance and also physical activities for his or her wellbeing. The daily energy intake is directly linked to daily energy output for a person's weight balance (Perloff , 2014). If a person's daily energy consumption is more than his or her energy output, there is an energy surplus, and from this point, the problem even leads to overweight problem and its related health issues such as diabetes, high blood pressure problem and even to cardiovascular diseases (Malm , Jakobsson , & Isaksson , 2019).

According to the statistics by World Health Organization (WHO), one in four adults who are at the minimum age of 18 and older and three in four adolescents who are at age of 11 to 17 are not currently meeting the global standard recommendations for physical activity. Based on the globally data, it is estimated that poor diet and nutrition causes about 22% of all adult deaths including high sodium consumption and eating less wholegrains and fruits in their daily meal plans (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

Fitness culture can be regarded as a sociocultural impression which involves sports and physical exercises. Fitness culture is also interlinked with the gym culture where gym and wellness centers, fitness and health clubs have emerged for workout routines and physical activities. Under the term "fitness culture", it can be also regarded as an industry which includes sportswear, sport and fitness equipment, diet and nutrition and also fitness club (Jong & Drummond , 2016).

Based on the statistics and facts on health and fitness clubs, the global fitness market value hit to \$81.2 billion in 2015 and there are nearly 200,000 gym and fitness clubs at the global coverage. Such blooming economy due to fitness culture in the society has been forming competitive business war (Baker & Churchill , 1977). Academically, some literature stated that fitness culture is as part of booming economy for mobile fitness applications, social media websites and health related information. Recently, in the society, fitness culture is being highlighted as a developing digital technology such as health and fitness apps (Anderson & Wolff, 2010).

Impact of Social Media on Youths

Modern technologies can be applied in different ways positively in daily lives of people including youths and elders. Social networks, e-learning platforms and websites, compute games and mobile application which we are using as leisure activities can bring the easy and effective education system in ways of benefits. Moreover, such applications and modern technologies are even being applied in physical education and tracing physical activities in their everyday lifestyle. Using modern technologies of information age quickly leads the young people towards the new and effective chances in maintaining their health and fitness in their practical situation (Cojocar , et al., 2022).

Many researches already mentioned that young people are addicted to the information technologies due to its accessibility, effectiveness and easy coverage. Social media addiction on young people has both positive and negative perspectives such as social media stimulate brain activity by improving feelings, emotion, collaboration and solidarity in the community in positive

ways. On the other hand, such addiction leads to sociopsychological problems due to information overload on social media in their daily information intake negatively (Millington , 2014).

People are using social media for the better and effective communication and connecting with each other and also find information about different matters. After Covid-19 pandemic time, social media is being applied positively not only in entertainment but also in education, workplace, society communication and even in the physical exercises and diet tracing. It can be undeniable that interventions of social media support positive changes to healthy behaviors, increasing physical activities and monitoring daily nutrition intake (Limniou, Mahoney, & Knox, 2021).

Fitspiration on Social Media

According to the researches, it is estimated that 79% of young people these days are using social media daily. Moreover, young people these days have begun relying on social media for their health and fitness related information in their daily lives. Recently, the trend of health and fitness sector has been changing into web-based and social media-based trends for each and every person to participate in fitness and wellbeing (Homan, McHugh, Wells, Watson, & King, 2012).

Fitspiration on social media encourage social media users in viewing health and fitness related images, posts and videos and diet and nutrition ideas, and even physical exercises to make inspiration among the youths. Such fitspiration on social media comes into many forms such as exercise tips, photos and images of fitness models, posts about experiences and emotion in fitness industry, before and after images in highlighting weight lost and muscle gain achievements (Carrotte, Carrotte, Prichard, & Su Cheng Lim, 2017).

As use of social media becomes quite largely popular among the young adults, fitspiration on social media quickly turns into the most well-known trend all over social media which can motivate and encourage the young people showing healthy lifestyle, nutrition and diet and physical exercises (Eveland , 2003). Fitspiration contents are mostly and significantly shared on famous social media applications such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and even TikTok lately (Homan , McHugh , Wells , Watson , & King , 2012).

World Health Organization (WHO) also set up Global Action Plan for physical activity to meet the biggest coverage reaching to targeted audiences in promoting physical activity engagement (Goodyear, Wood, Skinner, & Thompson, 2021). Social media participates in key role in growing the perception of fitness culture among the young adults. Fitness culture can be also seen as everyday communication tool and online dialogue, so scholars focused that social media is a possible and tangible source of fitness and health information. Rapid and wide social media consumption is an alternative source for collecting and learning health and fitness information among the young people (Feng & Xie , 2015).

Around 38% of the global population regardless of gender, ethnicities, cultures and socio-economic groups are using social media applications and websites such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and TikTok. Therefore, social media is regarded as one of the most powerful communication mediums in influencing a person's lifestyle, physical activity, and even behaviors (Durau , Diehl , & Terlutter , 2022).

Research Methodology

The principal objective of this study is to investigate and analyze the impact of modern technology on the habit of fitness and physical activities of youths of Myanmar in the recent years. Perceiving an in-depth understanding on social media usage among young people in Myanmar, the following main research questions are developed;

1. How much social media has impacts on the inspiration of fitness culture among the Myanmar youths?
2. Which habitual changes do the youths encounter via fitspiration on social media in their daily lives?

In order to meet the research objective and find out research questions, the research is solely based on narrative analysis research method which is a powerful qualitative research tool in social science study. Narrative research mainly explores about the behaviors, feelings and motivations which cannot be shown explicitly in many research methods. As the narrative analysis supports the researchers with the detailed information about the subjects and participants which the researchers cannot dig up easily with other methods, such research method is mostly regarded as a tool for revealing hidden feelings, motivations and experiences that would be difficult to perceive directly in research.

In other words, narrative research is a study of human experience and opinions, so it can be regarded as key human activity which shapes experience and offers it meaning. Narrative research process and the result is different from each other. Therefore, narrative research is defined as a method of shaping and collecting new experiences and knowledge by building knowledge and creating it more learnable. Narrative research is usually applied in various field such as sociology, anthropology, history, nursing, psychology and communication studies (Jong & Drummond , 2016).

In narrative research, storytelling is the main feature for data collection and analysis, so the research process can be sometimes intimate and powerful in highlighting the participants' experiences and emotions applied for the research. Therefore, in this fitspiration and social media study, the researcher collected the data from 15 participants; ten males and five females within the age of 20 – 30 years' old who are keen on working out at gym and fitness centers. The researcher has been spending seven months together with the participants at gym and talking with them in order to collect the information including their emotions, experiences and even about their motivation on fitness culture in their daily lives.

The detailed explanation of participants who participated in this narrative research and shared their experiences, opinions, lifestyles and even their interesting stories spending time together with the researcher throughout seven months are shown as below –

Participants No.	Gender	Age	Occupation
Participant – 1	Male	24	Gym trainer
Participant – 2	Male	22	Gym trainer
Participant – 3	Male	24	Own business
Participant – 4	Male	20	Student

Participants No.	Gender	Age	Occupation
Participant – 5	Male	26	Own business
Participant – 6	Female	27	Company staff
Participant – 7	Female	24	Student
Participant – 8	Female	30	Own business
Participant – 9	Female	26	Company staff
Participant – 10	Female	30	House wife
Participant – 11	Male	27	Own business
Participant – 12	Male	27	Company Staff
Participant – 13	Male	29	Gym trainer
Participant – 14	Male	28	Own business
Participant – 15	Male	21	Company Staff

Finding

The research findings are shown based on the themes and discussed topics during the data collection, deep conversation with participants and narration and observation on the participants while the researcher had spent seven months together with them in fitness club. The findings are shown as both in positive and negative experiences and perceptions including their beginning of the fitness journey, their perceptions and experiences on fitspiration and social media, how fitness contents lead and motivate them to new lifestyle and how their habitual lifestyle changed as the workout plans become part of their daily routine.

Starting Point of Fitness Journey

Out of many popular sports and physical exercises, gym trainings and fitness culture has become popular not long ago among Myanmar people, apparently just few decades ago. Most people love to do sports due to health reason. In this study, the participants come to gyms for different reasons, however, most of their basic and fundamental reason on coming to gym and started working out is due to health and fitness matter.

“I has started my workout routine when I was 17 years old. At that time, I have amenia. I often passed out when I felt tired or even while I was walking down the streets.”

(Participant – 1, Male)

“I didn’t like when my friends called me ‘bony’ because I was so skinny. And, I saw some advertisements about fitness club with fitness models’ photos. So, I decided to start my fitness journey.”

(Participant – 3, Male)

“I had arthritis problem since I was in middle school. So, my mother sent me to the fitness club when I finished my matriculation exam to make me strong and healthy.”

(Participant – 6, Female)

“I started going to gym when I was 18 years old because my weight is just 80 lbs at that time. I want to become a model, so I have to think about my body. So, I searched the solutions on social media and my friends suggested me to go to gym.”

(Participant – 4, Male)

“I began working out at gym because I wanted to start doing physical exercise, but I didn’t know any sports. So, my friends suggested me to go to gym near my house, and I become addicted since that time.”

(Participant – 10, Female)

People mostly choose to go to gym mainly due to health reason at the first time. According to the participants, some people do not know how to play any kind of sport or being trained at training course or sport equipment are expensive, however, they would like to do physical exercises for their health and fitness. Hence, they become coming to gyms and fitness clubs for their physical activities and getting trained based on their body types and age group by the trainers.

Fitspiration, Social Media and Me

Using social media in their daily lives, participants see fitspiration contents on social media applications what they are using in free time. So, the quotations and their answers are explaining what they think about the contents and how they consume those fitspiration contents.

“I saw many fitspiration posts, sometimes video, sometimes photos and sometimes even written texts. Whenever I see any fitspiration posts on social media, I just read or look at them.”

(Participant – 6, Female)

“I really like fitness models. I always look at their posts and photos. How should I say? I just love to seeingsuch fitness posts and photos rather than any other posts.”

(Participant – 12, Male)

“I use social media most of my time because of my business. Apart from checking things about my business, I usually look at fitness posts and videos, and also nutrition plans shared by others. I really love seeing those things on social media.”

(Participant – 8, Female)

“Yes, I usually check fitness posts and photos whenever I have free time. I am mostly at home, so whenever I use social media, I always check fitness sites that I follow on social media, such as Facebook and Instagram. I find it amazing.”

(Participant – 10, Female)

“I follow many fitness models’ accounts both on Facebook and Instagram. I become obsessed with gym training and so, I always look for the videos, photos and even guidelines shared by others’ professionals or players.”

(Participant – 3, Male)

Along with the trending social media usage on health and fitness, all participants claim that they watch fitness videos or read fitness posts on social media. Most participants express that they intentionally find fitness accounts to see those photos and videos because they just cannot resist those posts being attractive, useful and interesting.

Motivated by Social Media Fitspiration

“I really love seeing fitness models’ photos. They make me motivated a lot, for example; whenever I feel lazy to workout, those photos make me feel to try harder and better.”

(Participant – 15, Male)

“My job is fitness trainer, so I am really devoted into this workout routine. But I have sometime feeling depressed and don’t wanna do anything. At that time, those fitness posts on social media make me feel motivated again.”

(Participant – 13, Male)

“I follow many male fitness models’ account on Instagram and I have lots of idol fitness models – IFBB Pro Anderi Deiu, IFBB Pro Thanos and so on. They and their posts always inspire me doing workouts regularly in my daily lives.”

(Participant – 4, Male)

“The only and main reason why I am using Instagram is about seeing fitness contents. I prefer tanning and strong women’s photos than skinny and thin ones. I am really impressed with the female bodybuilders’ exercise posts. Those posts really make me go and be trained at gym.”

(Participant – 6, Female)

“I use social media most of time for many reasons, learning, socializing, entertainment, shopping and so on. I really envy what I see on social media about fitness models and their body appearances. So, I have started to go to fitness center to receive workout plans.”

(Participant – 7, Female)

Motivation from fitspiration contents on social media is the most controversial topic among the participants in this research. Stating the term of fitspiration, it is discussed about trending body appearance, workout plans, fitness routines, exercise plans, nutrition and so on. Anyone can feel impact of social media posts meaning the contents what they see online and the trending social perception of ‘popular body image’ on social media. Participants mention that fitspiration contents on social media mostly affect their motivation level for fitness training.

Now, Workouts Become Part of my daily routine

“Every day, I spent at least one or one and half hour at gym. Even my family members said I become addicted to gym. But I really love to go to gym and now it becomes part of my daily life.”

(Participant – 9, Female)

“Whenever after I get trained at gym, I check my body in the mirror myself. The now me is quite different from the before me. I am gaining confidence about that. I am enjoying myself. Seem like, gym is part of my daily routine now.”

(Participant – 5, Male)

“I never thought that seeing some ads on social media make me addicted to gym and such habit also becomes one of my daily routines now.”

(Participant – 3, Male)

“Actually, I started going to gym because I saw some attractive and sexy fitness models on Instagram and want to get some sort of trainings. Now, what should I say? I become loving gym lifestyle. Every morning, the only job I do after I wash up is going to gym.”

(Participant – 8, Female)

Regardless of any reason for choosing fitness journey, working out and physical exercises are necessary parts of their lives for participants. Apart from kind of doing sports or support for individual's health, workouts and physical activities are their habitual thing in their everyday lifestyles.

Discussion

Motivation is the most basic reason for physical exercise behavior. It is also occurred that motivation to work out routines can sometimes begin from the encouragement from friends, family and from role model which can either be in neighborhood or on social media. Due to the social cognitive theory, the model behaviour which is accessed by observing role model or inspired person performs can influence on the individual's lifestyles practically.

In digital world these days, social media influencers who are attractive and reliable on specific topics or issues gradually become health communicators to interact with the users and motivate the people to work out at home or fitness clubs. This study proves the impact of fitspiration contents on the social media among young adults and how fitspiration contents contribute to individuals' health and fitness. Even before the Covid-19 era and its restrictions, young adults have become more interested in joining gyms and fitness clubs during their leisure time. More adults have started caring about their physiques and aiming for their targeted body goals.

Many research about social media and body appearance mostly focused on female behaviour and dietary practices based on body image goal. On the other hand, most study has lacked on the typical understanding of body image goal and perception concerning male body types among male adults. Frequently, a male ideal body type has assumed as muscular and tanning physiques, on the other side, such influential body perceptions lead many young male

adults' depression, lower self-esteem, eating disorder and even supplement addictions. However, it is widely seen that women prefer thin and skinny body type while men focus on muscular and toning body goals.

Positive impacts can be highlighted when the social influencers or fitness models uploaded fitspiration contents about healthy lifestyles and behaviors. According to the study, men are interested in gaining weight and toning their upper bodies while women are aiming for thin and skinny bodies mostly. Male participants in the research openly express that they keep idol fitness models or persons what they are seeing and liking on social media for their motivation in fitness journey. Starting the fitness journey with the motivation by social media's fitspiration contents, participants admit that gym and fitness clubs are the places where they spend their time everyday and feel like they worth spending time in it. Male participants even admit that they prepare their meals according to diet plans shared by fitness influencers on social media.

Nevertheless, with the emerging of Korean popular culture and Chinese culture via drama series and movies, the preferred body types by Myanmar young female adults are skinny, white and thin bodies like Korean or Chinese actresses. Based on the trainers at fitness clubs who participated in this study, they claim that younger female within around 16 to 24 years old are keen on getting skinny body while women in their late 20s and early 30s are interested in healthy and fit physiques. It is significant that mass media and social media have huge impact on the audiences' consumption of their contents and leads to different perceptions. Therefore, there are still possible concerns regarding the negative influence of fitspiration contents and its focus on only weight loss and reduce meal sizes aiming to thin and skinny body shapes have been seen on all over the social media.

Conclusion

Generation these days are always together with social media from the dawn to the dusk, so it also means that those young adult generations sometimes even create their virtual community on social media. Considering such habits, fitspiration contents including photos, images, text posts and videos are usually consumed by the younger generation who are spending their time with social media. It is undeniable that fitspiration contents by social media influencers lead different perceptions to the individual social media users regarding health issues, body image goals, lifestyles, diet and nutrition and so on. Therefore, apart from fitness inspiration, there might occurs problems of low self-esteem among the social media users when their body targets do not result like the influencers' although they strictly follow their fitspiration guidelines.

Spending time together with the participants for seven months and listening to their conversation, the study shows that women are used to experience more mood dissatisfaction regarding their body targets whilst males are aiming for gaining muscular and toning physiques. However, it is necessary to be understood that different bodies need diverse workout routines and diet plans. It is found out that young adults; both female and male only focus on one ideal body type which they assume attractive, trending and most popular on social media, but they do not intend to learn about anatomy of bodies and nutrition.

Fitspiration contents surely encourage the fitness and workout motivation of youth, but sometimes those can be stereotype showing muscular, strong and toning body shapes for men, thin and skinny for women body appearance. As a part of the most popular communication medium, social media fitness trend should focus on more about the nutrition and body anatomy

in preventing body dissatisfaction problems among the youths. In current situation, social media is quite effective health communication trend by bring fitness and gym culture among Myanmar youths, however, there is no wide knowledge coverage about sport medicine in Myanmar, so the researcher recommend about the participation of nutritionists and sport medicine physicians in health and fitness communication.

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