

Exposure to Social Media Contents On Gyming and Youths Perception of Fitness Culture in Jalingo

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of gym-related content on social media and its impact on the youth in Jalingo, Taraba State. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 437 respondents selected through multistage sampling, with the aim of assessing the extent of youth exposure to fitness content, its influence on attitudes and perceptions, and the challenges faced in engaging with such content. Findings revealed that a significant number of youths are highly exposed to gym-related content, which plays a role in shaping their interest in fitness, body image, and health practices. However, issues such as misinformation, unrealistic standards, and limited access to credible information were identified as key challenges. The study contributes to existing knowledge by providing insights into how social media fitness content is consumed by Nigerian youths and the implications for health communication and lifestyle development in the region.

Keywords: *Social Media, Gym Content, Youth, Jalingo, Fitness Culture*

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing popularity of social media has transformed how young people engage with health, body image, and lifestyle practices across Nigeria. Gym-related content, often shared through platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, has become a significant source of information and inspiration for fitness behaviours. These contents include videos of workout routines, images of ideal body shapes, and fitness challenges that present gyming as an important aspect of youth culture. Studies have shown that such exposure can influence body satisfaction, self-esteem, and lifestyle choices, with both positive and negative consequences (Barron, Dignard, & Jarry, 2021; Frühauf et al., 2024).

Globally, scholars have highlighted that fitness content on social media can motivate physical activity and healthier eating habits, but it can also create unrealistic standards and pressure among young people (Mayoh & Jones, 2021; Greyling & Naudé, 2023). In Nigeria, recent works suggest that youths are increasingly adopting gym culture not only as a means of improving health but also as a symbol of social status and identity (Njoku & Onyekaba, 2024; Nnamchi, Ike, & Okafor, 2024). However, the framing of fitness content online often leans towards aesthetics and body image ideals rather than holistic health, thereby influencing perceptions in ways that may not always be sustainable or healthy (Ojiakor-Umenze, Edet, Ibenge, Anorue, & Dibia, 2024).

In Jalingo, the state capital of Taraba, exposure to gym-related content has become more pronounced among youths, many of whom actively follow influencers and participate in fitness-inspired challenges on social media. While this exposure has encouraged some to take up exercise and diet adjustments, many others

face barriers such as lack of access to gyms, limited resources, or unrealistic comparisons with online ideals. This mismatch between online representation and local realities can create tensions, leading to frustration, low self-esteem, or unhealthy fitness practices.

Although research on social media and fitness culture is growing, there remains limited focus on smaller urban centres like Jalingo, where socio-economic conditions and cultural settings differ from larger Nigerian cities. Existing studies often concentrate on broader national trends or metropolitan contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how youths in semi-urban areas interpret and respond to gym-related content (Li & Du, 2022; Greyling & Naudé, 2023). This study therefore aims to address this gap by investigating the level of exposure to gyming content on social media and its influence on youths' perceptions of fitness culture in Jalingo. In doing so, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on media influence, health behaviour, and youth culture in Nigeria (Njoku & Onyekaba, 2024; Nnamchi et al., 2024).

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- i. To examine the extent of youths' exposure to gym-related content on social media in Jalingo.
- ii. To analyse how exposure to gym-related content on social media shapes youths' perceptions of fitness culture in Jalingo.
- iii. To identify the challenges and implications associated with youths' perceptions of fitness culture formed through social media exposure.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Cultivation Theory, propounded by George Gerbner and Larry Gross in 1976. The theory explains how long-term exposure to media content shapes individuals' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about reality. Gerbner and Gross argued that heavy and consistent media consumption cultivates a shared set of views, which may or may not reflect actual social reality. Originally developed in relation to television, the theory has been expanded in recent years to apply to new media, particularly social media, which has become even more immersive and accessible (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2021).

The central idea of Cultivation Theory is that the more individuals are exposed to media portrayals, the more likely they are to internalise and accept those portrayals as representative of real life. In the context of this study, exposure to gym-related content on social media can cultivate specific perceptions of fitness culture among youths in Jalingo. For example, repeated exposure to images of muscular men or slim, toned women may lead young people to view those body types as the ideal standard of fitness, regardless of whether such standards are realistic or healthy in their local context (Greyling & Naudé, 2023). Similarly, continuous engagement with workout routines, fitness challenges, and lifestyle promotion online may shape attitudes that equate fitness more with appearance and status than with overall health and wellbeing.

The theory directly relates to this research because it explains the mechanism through which social media content influences perception. Just as Gerbner highlighted how television viewers develop a mainstream perception shaped by media, youths in Jalingo may form their understanding of fitness culture through the cultivated messages they encounter on social media. This makes Cultivation Theory a suitable

framework for studying the connection between social media exposure and perceptions of fitness culture in a semi-urban Nigerian setting.

However, the theory is not without criticism. One major limitation is that it tends to overemphasise the power of media exposure while underestimating individual differences such as personal experiences, cultural background, or critical thinking skills (Potter, 2021). Critics also note that cultivation assumes a passive audience, whereas modern media users, especially on interactive platforms like TikTok and Instagram, are active participants who create, share, and reinterpret content (Livingstone, 2020). Additionally, cultivation does not fully account for selective exposure, where individuals may choose the kind of content they consume based on personal interest, which affects how much influence the media actually has.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A qualitative study by Mayoh (2021) explored young people's engagement with "fitspiration" on Instagram, using in-depth interviews and thematic analysis. The study aimed to understand motivations for following fitness content and how it shaped behaviour and self-perceptions. Findings showed that fitspiration motivated exercise but also encouraged negative social comparison, with women mostly focused on slimness and men on muscularity. However, the reliance on a purposive sample limited its generalisability, and it did not provide a quantitative measure of exposure. The gap left was the absence of representative data on how widespread such exposure is. This present study will fill the gap by measuring the extent of gym-related content exposure among youths in Jalingo.

Nnamchi, Ike and Okafor (2024) conducted a cross-sectional study in Nigeria to examine how social media use, self-esteem, and body-image dissatisfaction relate among undergraduates. Using questionnaires and statistical analysis, the study found that heavy social media use was linked to body dissatisfaction, with low self-esteem worsening this effect. While it provided useful quantitative evidence, it focused only on university students in a single institution and did not examine gym-related content specifically. The authors themselves recommended more context-specific research that distinguishes between different types of online content. This current study will address this gap by focusing directly on gym-specific exposure among a wider youth population in Jalingo, linking it to perceptions and attitudes.

Jerónimo et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review of studies on fitspiration and image-based fitness content, analysing evidence of its influence on body image, mood, and exercise behaviour. The review concluded that such content can inspire physical activity but is consistently linked to negative body satisfaction and poor mood outcomes. However, the review highlighted inconsistencies across studies, particularly in measurement approaches, and pointed out the lack of research in African or semi-urban contexts. This limitation shows a gap in understanding how such exposure plays out in places with unique cultural and socio-economic conditions like Jalingo. The current study will fill this gap by investigating not only exposure to gym content but also the challenges and implications for youths in Jalingo.

Okoye and Nwankwo (2023) investigated the influence of fitness-related YouTube content on exercise adoption among young Nigerians. The study used an online survey of 400 respondents across Lagos and Abuja to assess viewing

frequency, perceived motivation, and exercise participation. Findings revealed that consistent exposure to gym tutorials and body-transformation videos encouraged regular workouts but also heightened anxiety about appearance among some participants. However, the study focused mainly on metropolitan cities and did not capture experiences of semi-urban or smaller towns. This leaves a gap in understanding how such exposure affects youths outside major cities. The present research will address this by concentrating on Jalingo, providing insights on gym content exposure in less metropolitan areas.

Similarly, Adebayo and Yusuf (2022) carried out a mixed-methods study on Instagram's role in shaping lifestyle and body ideals among Nigerian undergraduates. Using questionnaires and focus group discussions, the researchers found that while fitness content inspired dieting and exercise, it also reinforced unrealistic beauty standards, leading to stress and disordered eating habits. Although comprehensive, the study concentrated on body ideals without paying attention to the broader social or psychological challenges faced by youths in relation to gym exposure. The present research bridges this gap by exploring not only perceptions but also the challenges that gym content poses to young people in Jalingo.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study will adopt a cross-sectional survey design, relying on structured questionnaires to generate quantitative data at a single point in time, as this design is most suitable for examining exposure levels, attitudes, and perceptions within a large population in a relatively short period. The population of the study is made up of youths in Jalingo aged 18–29 years who are active on social media and likely exposed to gym-related content. According to recent demographic estimates, Jalingo has about 51,754 youths within this age

bracket, forming the target population for the research (BDEEX, 2025). From this population, a representative sample will be drawn using Taro Yamane’s formula and a multistage sampling approach, beginning with the selection of wards or communities and narrowing down to households or social media-active youths. The survey design is appropriate because it enables the collection of measurable data on how often young people encounter gym-related content online, how it shapes their perceptions of fitness culture, and the challenges they face. A sample size of 437 was drawn using the Taro Yamane’s Formula.

3.1 Data Presentation

Table 1: What is your gender?

GENDE R	FREQUENC Y	PERCENTAG E (%)
Male	262	60.0
Female	175	40.0
Prefer not to say	0	0.0
Total	437	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Out of 437 respondents, 60% were male and 40% were female. This shows that young men are more represented in this study.

Table 2: What is your age range?

Age range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–25 Years	284	65.0
26–35 Years	153	35.0

36–45 Years	0	0.0
46 Years+	0	0.0
Total	437	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

A majority (65%) were within 18–25 years, followed by 35% aged 26–35 years. This reflects the youth focus of the study.

Table 3: What is your highest educational qualification?

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Secondary	131	30.0
Tertiary	262	60.0
Postgraduate	44	10.0
Primary/other	0	0.0
Total	437	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Most respondents (60%) had tertiary education, showing that educated youths dominate gym content engagement.

Table 4: How often do you come across gym-related content on social media?

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	219	50.1
Weekly	153	35.0
Occasionally	65	14.9
Rarely	0	0.0
Never	0	0.0
Total	437	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Half of the respondents (50.1%) reported daily exposure, while 35% had weekly exposure.

Table 5: Which of the following activities do you engage in most when exposed to gym-related content?

Activity	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Watching exercise tutorials	175	40.0
Sharing gym motivation posts	109	25.0
Following fitness influencers	87	20.0
Commenting or interacting on posts	44	10.0
All of the above	22	5.0
Total	437	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

The most common activity was watching tutorials (40%), followed by sharing motivational posts (25%).

Table 6: How would you describe your perception of gym-related content on social media?

Perception	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very positive (motivating)	262	60.0
Positive but stressful sometimes	109	25.0
Neutral	44	10.0
Negative(unrealistic expectations)	22	5.0
Total	437	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Most (60%) viewed gym content positively as motivating, though 5% saw it negatively.

Table 7: What challenges do you face when engaging with gym-related content on social media?

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Misinformation about fitness	131	30.0
Internet cost/data issues	109	25.0
Unrealistic body expectations	87	20.0
Time constraints	65	15.0
All of the above	44	10.0
Total	437	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Misinformation (30%) and internet cost (25%) were the leading challenges identified by respondents.

Table 8: How has gym-related content on social media influenced your motivation to exercise?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Greatly increased motivation	175	40.0
Moderately motivating	131	30.0
Neutral	87	20.0
Not motivating at all	44	10.0
Total	437	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

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40% reported that gym-related content greatly increased their motivation to exercise.

Table 9: Do you think gym-related content on social media promotes realistic fitness culture in Jalingo?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	197	45.1

Table 10: What solutions do you think can address the challenges of gym-related content among youths?

Solution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Promoting accurate fitness information	153	35.0
Affordable access to local gym facilities	109	25.0
Encouraging holistic health awareness	87	20.0
Regulating misleading online content	44	10.0
All of the above	44	10.0
Total	437	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

The most common solution proposed was promoting accurate information (35%), followed by access to affordable gyms (25%).

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

i. Objective One: To examine the extent of youths' exposure to gym-related content on social media in Jalingo

This objective was aimed at determining how frequently youths in Jalingo come across gym-related content on social media. Data presented in Table 4 addressed this objective. The findings showed that 50.1% of respondents are exposed to gym-related content daily, while 35% indicated weekly exposure. A further 14.9% reported occasional exposure, while none selected rarely or never. These results suggest that gym-related content is a regular and dominant part of youths' online activities in Jalingo. The high levels of daily and weekly exposure underscore the prominence of fitness-related posts on social media and show that young people consistently

NO	153	35.0
NOT SURE	87	19.9
TOTAL	437	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

Nearly half (45.1%) believed gym content promotes realistic fitness culture, but 35% disagreed.

encounter such content, making it a significant influence in shaping their lifestyles and attitudes.

ii. Objective Two: To analyse how exposure to gym-related content on social media shapes youths' perceptions of fitness culture in Jalingo

This objective sought to assess the effect of exposure on youths' perceptions and motivation toward fitness culture. Data in Tables 6, 8, and 9 provided insight into this. Table 6 revealed that 60% of respondents perceived gym content very positively as motivating, while 25% felt it was positive but sometimes stressful, 10% were neutral, and 5% considered it negative. Table 8 further showed that 40% of respondents stated that gym-related content greatly increased their motivation to exercise, 30% said it moderately motivated them, 20% were neutral, while 10% felt it was not motivating. Table 9 indicated that 45.1% of respondents believed that gym content promotes realistic fitness culture in Jalingo, whereas 35% disagreed and 19.9% were unsure. Taken together, these findings suggest that

exposure to gym-related content largely influences youths positively, motivating them towards fitness practices, though a significant proportion expressed doubts about the realism of the ideals being promoted.

iii. **Objective Three:** To identify the challenges and implications associated with youths' perceptions of fitness culture formed through social media exposure

This objective focused on the obstacles and issues that come with exposure to gym-related content. Table 7 showed that misinformation about fitness was the most common challenge, reported by 30% of respondents, followed by internet cost and data issues (25%), unrealistic body expectations (20%), and time constraints (15%), while 10% identified all of the above challenges. Table 10 provided further detail by highlighting solutions suggested by respondents: 35% recommended promoting accurate fitness information, 25% suggested affordable access to local gyms, 20% emphasised encouraging holistic health awareness, 10% called for regulating misleading content, while another 10% selected all solutions. These findings show that although gym-related content motivates youths to consider fitness, challenges such as misinformation, financial barriers, and unrealistic expectations could limit its positive impact. Addressing these challenges through improved information, accessible facilities, and awareness campaigns would help make fitness culture more sustainable and relevant to the Jalingo context.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has shown that youths in Jalingo are highly exposed to gym-related content on social media, with most encountering such

content daily or weekly, making it a central part of their online experience. The findings also revealed that exposure generally motivates positive perceptions of fitness culture and increases interest in exercise, although a portion of respondents expressed concerns about unrealistic expectations and the sustainability of ideals portrayed online. Furthermore, challenges such as misinformation, high internet costs, and limited access to affordable gym facilities were identified as barriers that reduce the positive impact of gym content. Based on these findings, the study recommends, first, that accurate and context-specific fitness information should be promoted to counter misinformation and unrealistic body standards; and second, that affordable and accessible gym facilities should be developed in Jalingo to help youths translate online inspiration into practical fitness practices, thereby fostering a healthier and more realistic fitness culture.

6. Recommendations

- i. Stakeholders such as health professionals, fitness trainers, and media organisations should provide credible and evidence-based content on social media to counter misinformation and unrealistic body ideals.
- ii. Government agencies, NGOs, and private investors should collaborate to establish affordable and youth-friendly fitness centres in Jalingo, ensuring that online inspiration can be matched with practical opportunities.
- iii. Campaigns should shift the focus from aesthetics and body image to overall wellbeing, including mental health, balanced nutrition, and sustainable lifestyle practices, so that fitness is understood beyond physical appearance.

- iv. Training programmes and workshops should be organised to equip young people with the skills to critically evaluate social media content, enabling them to filter harmful messages, make informed fitness choices, and reduce the negative psychological effects of online comparisons.

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Appendix I: The Questionnaire

Exposure to Social Media Contents On Gyiming and Youths Perception of Fitness Culture in Jalingo

Faculty of Communication and Media Studies,
Department of Mass Communication,
Taraba State University, Jalingo
September, 2025.

Dear respondent,

I am a Postgraduate (M.Sc) student of the above-mentioned faculty and department. I am carrying out a research on “*Exposure to social media contents on gyming and youth’s perception of fitness culture in jalingo*”. This research serves as part of the School of Postgraduate Studies requirement in the course Advance Communication Theories of Mass Communication Department, Taraba State University.

I solicit cooperation in attending to this questionnaire in view of helping me complete my research. Please, kindly note that the information you will provide will be used for no other purpose than for this research.

Thank you for your understanding as I look forward to your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Abanda Allen Youngnwi

(Researcher)

08165061961

Instruction:

Please tick (√) in the box as appropriately representing your response.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Gender
 - (a) Male
 - (b) Female
 - (c) Prefer not to say
2. Age Range
 - (a) 18–21 years
 - (b) 22–25 years
 - (c) 26–29 years
3. Highest Educational Qualification
 - (a) Primary education
 - (b) Secondary education
 - (c) Tertiary education (NCE, OND, HND, BSc, etc.)

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- (d) Postgraduate education
 - (e) Others (please specify) _____
4. Employment Status
- (a) Student
 - (b) Self-employed
 - (c) Salaried worker
 - (d) Unemployed
 - (e) Other (please specify) _____

Section B: Research Questions

5. How often do you encounter gym or fitness-related content on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok)?
- (a) Daily
 - (b) Weekly
 - (c) Occasionally
 - (d) Rarely
 - (e) Never
6. Which of the following types of gym/fitness content do you mostly come across? (Tick as many as may apply)
- (a) Workout tutorials or demonstrations
 - (b) Fitness challenges and trends
 - (c) Body transformation posts
 - (d) Nutritional/meal plan advice
 - (e) Gym advertisements and promotions
 - (f) All of the above
7. How has exposure to gym-related content influenced your perception of fitness and body image?
- (a) Significantly positive influence
 - (b) Moderately positive influence
 - (c) No noticeable effect
 - (d) Negative influence
8. What challenges do you face in engaging with gym or fitness-related content? (Tick as many as may apply)
- (a) Lack of access to gym facilities
 - (b) High cost of gym membership/equipment
 - (c) Time constraints
 - (d) Unrealistic body standards on social media
 - (e) Limited guidance from professionals
 - (f) All of the above

9. In your view, how does gym-related content on social media shape the fitness culture among youths in Jalingo?
- (a) Promotes healthy lifestyle choices
 - (b) Encourages body consciousness and pressure
 - (c) Creates motivation for exercise
 - (d) Leads to misinformation about fitness
 - (e) All of the above
10. What is your overall perception of gym-related content on social media in relation to youths in Jalingo?
- (a) A vital tool for promoting fitness and health
 - (b) A platform for self-motivation and personal growth
 - (c) A space that creates unnecessary pressure on body image
 - (d) A tool for both positive and negative influence
 - (e) Other (please specify) _____