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ATTRACTIVENESS FACTORS OF FITNESS YOUTUBERS TO AUDIENCES

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, with the widespread use of social media and the proliferation of healthy lifestyles, the influence of fitness YouTubers is increasing. While YouTube can reach almost all internet users worldwide, it remains relatively unclear how these fitness YouTubers can engage their audience. Addressing this gap is important given these YouTubers may drive the health-related behaviors and habits of their audience. Upon fostering the public to establish healthier habits, the government expenditure in healthcare services may be reduced. In this research-in-progress paper, we presented an ongoing qualitative study based on the seven YouTubers. We identified that fitness YouTuber that can engage audiences have demonstrated six characteristics, including (1) regular updates on their YouTube channels, (2) credibility, (3) attraction words and presentation, (4) social interaction, (5) informative and (6) entertainment. By successfully engaging the audience, it is hoped that audience's intention to perform health-related behaviors can increase.

Keywords

YouTuber, attractiveness, Media Influence, Social interaction, Health and Fitness, Motivation

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, internet users are increasingly adopting online video platforms such as YouTube (Bondad-Brown 2012). This has led to the proliferation of different media content creators, with those using YouTube to deliver their content as the sole or primary video platform known as YouTuber (Jerslev 2016). With the rise of fitness trends and emphasis on health (Kercher 2021), many health-themed YouTubers have become increasingly popular. They will provide a wealth of health and fitness training knowledge, such as correct exercise posture and nutrition information (Madathil 2015).

By acquiring the above knowledge, one may improve their health and reduce their chances of getting injured during exercises (Thompson 2005). The proliferation of this knowledge may also reduce government expenditure on healthcare policies (Madathil et al., 2015), which can be significant for many countries. Taking Taiwan as an example, the budget expenditure on healthcare policies reached 26.65 billion USD in 2022 (Welfare 2022). In fact, some countries' governments have recognized the role of YouTube in promoting the health of their citizens. For example, the Singapore Government has launched a campaign namely "ActiveSG", which included a wide range of YouTube videos promoting the habits of regular exercise and educating the public on correct fitness training (ActiveSG 2023).

To maximize the impact of YouTube videos and content creators, it will be desirable to explore how to attract audiences, motivate them in acquiring health and fitness knowledge, and thus make their behaviors healthier (Jorge 2018). However, there are only a few empirical studies which focus on fitness YouTube videos and content creators. This may, in turn, reduce the impact of health and fitness knowledge delivery, and thus the improvement of citizens' health.

This paper document an ongoing study which aim at identifying different characteristics of fitness YouTuber. It is hoped that our findings may hint at how YouTubers can affect audience intentions, and thus convert their behaviors to be healthier (Sokolova 2021). Accordingly, our research question (RQ): "In the health and fitness context, what characteristics of YouTubers drive audiences to switch their behaviors?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

YouTuber

YouTubers are content creators who regularly upload videos to YouTube. Usually, they will establish their own channels with a clear theme to solidify their audience. With enough subscriptions and views, they may secure an income through advertisements provided by Google placed in their videos, or by collaboration with different brands (Westenberg 2016; Jerslev 2016). In addition, they may gain a significant level of media influential power (García-Rapp 2016), which refers to the ability to influence the thoughts and actions of the audience through its own behaviors (Sokolova 2020; Nair 2010). Table 1 shows a table describing a list of characteristics related to YouTubers who can influence their audience.

Characteristics	Description
Expertise	Professional YouTubers can convince the audience. While they may not have a professional background, the information they provide must be accurate in order to convince the audience (Ladhari 2020; Allgaier 2020).
Attractiveness	Eisend (2010) and Kim (2022) believed that attractive appearance and personality appeals of the media influencers may positively impact the attractiveness of the video where they appeared in. In turn, audiences’ attitude and intention of watching can be increased.
Credibility	The willingness of audience to watch videos positively impacts the relationship between YouTubers’ credibility and the willingness of audience to exercise (Xiao 2018; Li 2015).
Entertainment	In addition to teaching sports knowledge, fitness YouTubers will also film videos related to topics of mass entertainment, such as gameplay and do-it-yourself (DIY) beauty (Cunningham 2017).
Informative	Related to credibility, in addition to providing practical and correct content, YouTubers must also present the content concisely and clearly with adoptable information for audiences (MacLeod 2015; Thomson 2019).

Table 1: A Selected List of Characteristics of Influential YouTubers

Relationship between Fitness and Social Media (Including YouTube)

Social media can be powerful in encouraging and influencing its users, especially the younger generation (Raggatt 2018). Among users on social media platforms, they will self-evaluate and compare with others, leading to progressive intentions in different aspects, such as their own health and fitness posture. Furthermore, positive fitness outcomes exhibited by YouTubers are likely to be viewed as 'attainable' and 'motivating' (Carrotte 2015). Table 2 shows a selected list of arguments related to the role of social media in fostering health habits and fitness training.

References	Argument
Frimming (2011)	Many individuals believe long-term use of social media benefits their fitness routine, gain more information and aware of proper fitness.
Carrotte (2015)	Social media is saturated with health and fitness-related content, which has received significant media attention, but nevertheless mixed with objectifying and inaccurate health messages.
Gui (2017)	Integrating fitness data-sharing functionalities into widely-adopted social networks can potentially help promote long-term fitness tracking by leveraging a pre-existing social network.
Deighton-Smith (2018)	The article demonstrates how text and images found in social media posts perpetuate pervading sociocultural appearance ideals for men and women, positioning exercise as a means to achieve these ideals.
Raggatt (2018)	The benefits of fitspiration (photos or videos intended to inspire a person physically fit through rigorous exercise and diet) through social media can increase social support and easier access to health information.
Sokolova (2020)	YouTube videos can be used to help sustain the exercise activities of people that need motivation or social and informational support.
Au (2021)	Internet may be a primary source for many people to seek for health information. However, healthcare misinformation has become a public

	concern, which may lead to delayed diagnosis or treatment of patients or even public health crisis.
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Table 2: A Selected List of Arguments related to the Role of Social Media in Fostering Health Habits and Fitness Training

As indicated in Table 2, social media has made the delivery of health and fitness knowledge easier. However, we still encountered some limitations, such as healthcare misinformation and objectifying fake news has leads to public concerns and health crisis. It will be desirable if correct health and fitness information can be presented in an engaging manner, possibly by fitness YouTubers. In turn, less people will become the victim of health misinformation while more people will build healthy living habits after receiving correct health and fitness knowledge.

RESEARCH METHOD

We adopted qualitative methods for a few reasons. First, since the targeted phenomenon is multidimensional and includes both external and technological dimensions, an objective approach may be too complex to be adopted (Gable 1994). Second, qualitative methods are more robust in identifying the development of specific outcomes (Markus 1988). Since the sector is still emerging, we analyzed multiple cases of recognizable Fitness YouTubers to identify more possibilities for their characteristics. We selected them based on multiple sources (such as YouTubers’ and “Health and Fitness” websites, social media channels and blogs). we consider not only what the YouTubers said in these videos or channels. Conversely, we will also include the responses of internet users. This will help us triangulate the data, thus building a more complete image. Selecting such recognizable cases would ensure the established implications are based on proven, if not the best practices (Pan 2011). We consider a YouTuber to be recognizable by considering different factors, such as their number of subscribers, media coverage and international competition track records. Currently, we have included 7 YouTubers (See Table 3).

YouTuber ID	YouTuber Name	Approximate No. of subscribers	Link of YouTube Channel
1	Shuaisoserious	1100000	https://www.youtube.com/@1
2	77 老大	1340000	https://www.youtube.com/@77boss
3	大 H	240000	https://www.youtube.com/@hsin0126
4	Coffee林芊妤	1680000	https://www.youtube.com/@Coffee89921
5	三個字 SunGuts	850000	https://www.youtube.com/@sunguts
6	健人蓋伊	860000	https://www.youtube.com/@user-rg3df4rz6e
7	健助師_小珂 Spotterlions_Ke	270000	https://www.youtube.com/@_spotterlions_ke3008

Table 3. The List of Youtubers Currently Covered in Our Study

To take advantage of the flexibility of qualitative research methods, we identified new recognizable Fitness YouTubers and analyzed their characteristic as data concurrently (Eisenhardt 1989). We established an initial set of theoretical lenses based on the literature of YouTubers and media influence (Pan 2011). Examples of lenses included characteristics of YouTubers and sources of media influence. The data collected was then coded using a mix of open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin 1998). More specifically, open coding was first used to apply conceptual labels to the relevant excerpts of our data to form first-order concepts (Van Maanen 1979). The first-order concepts were then grouped into second-order themes via axial coding. In particular, if the first-order concept fitted an existing second-order theme within our coding structure, the concept was assigned to the theme directly. Conversely, if the fit was not exact or if the concept related to a non-existing theme, an existing or new second-order theme would be modified or created before restarting coding based on the changes made. Finally, selective coding was used further to abstract the second-order themes into several aggregate dimensions. We also created visual maps, tables, and narratives to help us make sense of the data collected (Pan 2011). We will identify and analyze more of their characteristic until we reach the point of theoretical saturation, which means the induced implications comprehensively accounted for the data on-hand, and additional data will not provide new insights (Eisenhardt 1989).

PRELIMINARY RESULT

Our preliminary result suggested several characteristics of fitness YouTubers which attract more audiences to watch their videos, including (1) Regular updates, (2) Credibility, (3) Attractive words and presentations, (4) Social Interaction, (5) Informative, and (6) Entertainment. In turn, the media influence of these YouTubers is more effective. Table 4 shows further evidence related to these characteristics.

Characteristics	Example
Regular updates	Regular updates may contribute to higher exposure rates and number of subscribers. Taking YouTubers "6" and "3" as examples, they update their channels at least once a week. Therefore, they achieved a video exposure rate higher than other irregularly-updated video channels, as well as a higher number of subscribers, as indicated by the figures on their channels.
Credibility	We have identified credibility as a common characteristic among these Youtubers, possibly realized by, for example, scientific research articles. For example, YouTuber "1" once uploaded a video related to eliminating visceral fat. He quoted a study in 2007 about the role of trans-fats in obesity with monkeys used in A/B test experiment settings. This study suggested that the visceral fat index of monkeys who ingested trans fats was much higher than that of monkeys who only ingested unsaturated fatty acids after six years. In addition to quoting scientific research, it is also required for Youtubers to explain in a simple and clear way with professional analysis to the audience.
Attractive words and presentations	For YouTubers who can engage their audience, their in-video words and presentations are often attractive. For example, when YouTuber "2" discussed the issues of hair losses in a video, he explained the impact of diets, Chinese medicine therapy and acupoint massage before talking about the use of shampoo. Presenting his discussion with attractive words and presentations, he could engage some of his audience to purchase the shampoo products that he presented in the video.
Social Interaction	Successful YouTubers often interact with their audience actively, which may contribute their number of viewers. For example, YouTuber "4" constantly replied to her viewers with verbal encouragement in friendly tone and cheerful attitude in comment section rapidly or making QA video answering viewers' question.
Informative	Being informative is necessary for successful YouTubers, possibly related to credibility. For example, YouTuber "7" once uploaded videos explaining different issues in fitness training, such as noise generated during exercise and increment of physical activity level. His explanations were supported by scientific research and correct pose demonstration. With detailed information provided, Youtubers are perceived to be more credible, and thus more engaging.
Entertainment	Being entertaining is another indispensability characteristic of successful Fitness YouTuber. For example, Youtuber "6" once discussed a competition between three bodybuilders and cement workers to carry 50 kilograms of cement together within 15 minutes. Such content hybrid with different element creates dynamic to their audiences.

Table 4. The List of YouTuber Characteristics

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In our study, we studied the critical characteristics of attractive Fitness YouTubers. While this is ongoing research work, some of the identified characteristics included (1) Regular updates, (2) Credibility, (3) Attractive words and presentation, (4) Social Interaction, (5) Informative, and (6) Entertainment. These findings echoed some previous literature about YouTubers and the media influence (e.g., Xiao 2018), but we have also identified the role of Social Interaction. Engaging these Youtubers for delivering health information may be more effective. In response to the highlights of Carrotte (2015) and Au et al. (2021) related to the proliferation of online health misinformation, these effective YouTubers may even be treated as part of the solutions. In turn, less people may suffer from being fooled by health misinformation.

In the future, we will continue our study, possibly by covering non-Asian fitness YouTubers, so that we will broaden our findings and validate boundary condition of theoretical implication, so that a more comprehensive image of fitness YouTubers can emerge. For example, some distinctive factors for health and fitness YouTubers may be identified in our future studies. Last but not least, we would also like to encourage others with us to research this area.

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