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YouTube Fitness Videos and Exercise Motivation among Civil Servants in Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of YouTube fitness videos on exercise motivation among civil servants in Edo State, Nigeria. The study adopted the survey research design. The population comprised 45,000 civil servants in Edo State, while a sample size of 381 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan table. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select respondents from ministries, departments and agencies across the three senatorial districts of the state. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, while the reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study, which produced a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.89. Data were analysed using frequency distributions, percentages and descriptive statistics, while the study was anchored on Cultivation Theory. The findings showed that respondents had relatively high exposure to YouTube fitness videos and generally perceived the videos as having considerable motivational value for engaging in physical exercise and maintaining healthy lifestyles. However, work schedules, lack of time, internet and data costs, and difficulty maintaining exercise consistency constituted major challenges to translating online motivation into regular physical activity. The researchers conclude that YouTube has considerable potential as a source of fitness motivation among civil servants, but exposure and motivation alone are insufficient to guarantee sustained exercise practices. The researchers recommend workplace fitness programmes, realistic exercise routines that accommodate civil servants' schedules, and the promotion of credible and locally relevant fitness content.

Keywords: Civil servants; Cultivation Theory; Exercise motivation; Fitness videos; YouTube



Introduction

The growth of digital media has changed how people access information, learn new skills and make decisions about their lifestyles (Asemah& Nwaoboli, 2022). Among the various digital platforms, YouTube has become an important source of video-based information, entertainment and self-improvement (Asemah et al., 2022). Its fitness content provides users with access to exercise demonstrations, workout routines, stretching exercises, aerobics, strength training and general wellness information without requiring physical attendance at a gym. According to Adebayo and Ogunlade (2022), the accessibility, visual appeal and flexibility of YouTube fitness content have expanded opportunities for Nigerians to participate in exercise from their homes and at times that fit their schedules. The platform also provides motivational content through fitness instructors, transformation stories and demonstrations that may encourage viewers to begin or continue physical exercise. Adediran and Fashola (2021) similarly note that social media platforms can support behavioural change by combining information, interaction and emotional support. For civil servants, who often spend considerable periods engaged in sedentary office activities, such easily accessible fitness content may provide an alternative means of receiving exercise guidance and motivation.

The relevance of YouTube fitness videos is particularly important among civil servants in Edo State because the nature of their work may limit opportunities for regular physical activity. Civil servants often have demanding schedules, spend long hours in offices and may have limited time for organised exercise. Adewale (2023) reports that the average Nigerian civil servant engages in less than two hours of structured physical activity weekly, which is below the World Health Organisation's (2024) recommendation of at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity per week. Although YouTube can provide convenient exercise motivation, exposure to fitness videos does not necessarily guarantee regular participation in physical exercise. Ekanem and Yusuf (2024) observe that digital fitness engagement can generate temporary enthusiasm without producing sustained behavioural change. Factors such as work schedules, lack of time, internet access, data costs and difficulty maintaining consistency may prevent users from translating motivation received from online content into actual exercise practices. In addition, Aremu (2025) argues that the emphasis on body appearance and physical transformation in some fitness content may shift attention away from long-term health and wellbeing. These concerns make it necessary to examine not only whether civil servants are exposed to YouTube fitness videos, but also whether they perceive the content as motivational and whether such motivation can be converted into consistent exercise behaviour.

Despite the growing availability of YouTube fitness content and increasing awareness of the importance of physical activity, there is still a need to understand its practical influence among civil servants in Edo State. Existing discussions have established the potential of digital media to provide health information, motivation and social support, but the presence of fitness content does not automatically mean that viewers will develop regular exercise habits. Adegoke and Balogun (2022) caution that online motivation may remain fragile when it is not supported by realistic goals and personal commitment, while Olumide and Ekpenyong (2021) identify internet connectivity and data costs as continuing barriers to sustained engagement with digital content. Furthermore, Eze and Adeyemi (2024) observe that many Nigerian public institutions lack structured workplace wellness programmes that could complement individual efforts towards physical activity. Thus, a gap remains concerning the extent to which YouTube fitness videos reach civil servants in Edo State, the motivational value they derive from such content, and the challenges that prevent them from turning that motivation into regular exercise. It is against this background that this study examines the influence of YouTube fitness videos on exercise motivation among civil servants in Edo State, with particular attention to their level of exposure, perceived



motivational value and the challenges affecting the translation of such motivation into consistent physical exercise practices.

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the level of exposure of civil servants in Edo State to YouTube fitness videos.
2. Assess the perceived motivational value of YouTube fitness videos among Edo State civil servants.
3. Determine the challenges that affect Edo State civil servants' ability to translate YouTube fitness motivation into consistent physical exercise practices.

Theoretical Framework

Cultivation Theory

The Cultivation Theory was developed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross in 1976 as part of their research on television's long-term effects on audiences (Asemah et al. 2017). They argued that continuous exposure to media content shapes individuals' perceptions of reality, a phenomenon known as "cultivation. According to Gerbner, heavy media consumption can lead audiences to internalise mediated representations as authentic depictions of the real world. Over time, these perceptions influence beliefs, attitudes, and behavioural expectations. As Ekanem (2023) explains, cultivation is not a sudden process but a gradual conditioning that occurs through repetitive and consistent media exposure. The theory highlights the symbolic power of media as a storyteller that constructs social norms and shared meanings about the world.

The key assumption of the theory is that media do not simply reflect reality, they construct it. Through repetition of themes, values, and imagery, media content cultivates shared worldviews that align with its representations. According to Mabaso (2022), audiences who consistently consume particular types of content develop perceptions consistent with those portrayals, even when they diverge from actual experiences. In the context of YouTube fitness videos, repeated exposure to idealised images of health, discipline, and physical perfection may gradually influence how viewers perceive their own bodies and lifestyles. Viewers who spend significant time watching such videos may begin to internalise fitness-oriented norms, believing that regular exercise, healthy eating, and self-discipline are essential markers of success and attractiveness. This demonstrates how digital media can cultivate health consciousness and behavioural aspiration among viewers.

Applications of Cultivation Theory have evolved beyond traditional television to include social media, advertising, and digital culture. For example, Owusu (2023) found that prolonged exposure to beauty and wellness content on digital platforms significantly influenced young adults' self-image and lifestyle decisions. Similarly, Chukwuma (2024) observed that social media users who frequently consumed fitness and nutrition content were more likely to adopt exercise routines and dietary changes, even without direct interpersonal persuasion. This demonstrates the cultivation effect of digital environments, where continuous exposure to particular narratives leads to the internalisation of associated values and practices. In these spaces, media act not merely as conveyors of information but as socialising agents that construct desirable standards of behaviour and identity.

Despite its explanatory power, the theory has been criticised for assuming homogeneity in audience interpretation. As Nyambura (2022) notes, media users do not always absorb content uniformly; factors such as culture, education, and personal experience mediate how messages are internalised. Furthermore, in interactive digital environments, audiences are both consumers and producers of content, which



complicates the traditional unidirectional assumption of cultivation. Nonetheless, the theory remains valuable in understanding the subtle, cumulative influence of media on attitudes and behaviour. In relation to this study, Cultivation Theory provides explanation on how continuous exposure to YouTube fitness content can shape civil servants' perceptions of exercise, health, and body image. Over time, this exposure may cultivate a mindset that values physical activity as integral to personal and professional wellbeing. Thus, the theory shows the long-term media effects that transform digital fitness consumption into lifestyle adoption.

Method

The study adopted the survey research design. The choice of the design was based on the fact that it provides a suitable framework for collecting quantifiable data from a relatively large population and examining the attitudes, perceptions, exposure patterns and behavioural tendencies (Asemah& Nwaoboli, 2024), and in this case, civil servants YouTube fitness videos exposure and exercise motivation. The population comprised all civil servants employed in ministries, departments, agencies and parastatals under the Edo State Civil Service, which was put at 45,000 according to the Edo State Civil Service Commission (2025). A sample size of 381 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the respondents. First, Edo State was stratified into Edo South, Edo Central and Edo North senatorial districts; second, two major ministries or government agencies were selected from each district through purposive and simple random sampling; third, staff lists obtained from the administrative or human resources units of the selected ministries served as sampling frames, from which respondents were proportionally allocated according to staff strength; and fourth, systematic random sampling was used to select individual respondents, with representation across gender, age groups and employment ranks considered in the final sample. The researchers, assisted by two trained research assistants, personally distributed and retrieved the copies of questionnaire through the administrative offices of the selected ministries. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study involving 20 civil servants in a neighbouring state who were not included in the main study. The pilot responses were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha in SPSS, and the resulting coefficient of 0.89 indicated a high level of internal consistency, with the acceptable threshold set at 0.70 based on Nunnally (1978). Data collection was conducted through face-to-face administration after obtaining the necessary permission from the Edo State Civil Service Commission and the administrative heads of the selected ministries. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of the confidentiality of their responses and given adequate time to complete the questionnaire, which were retrieved immediately or within an agreed period. The completed questionnaires were coded, edited and entered into SPSS Version 25 for analysis. Frequency distributions, percentages and mean scores were used as descriptive statistics to summarise the demographic characteristics and response patterns. Sequel to the distribution of the questionnaire, 8 copies were lost. The results obtained from the field work are presented in tables and interpreted in relation to the research objectives of the study.



Findings

Table 1: Level of Exposure to YouTube Fitness Videos among Civil Servants in Edo State

S/N	Exposure Items	Every Day	4–6 Days a Week	2–3 Days a Week	Once a Week	Once a Month	Total
1	I am exposed to fitness-related videos on YouTube.	164 (44.0%)	137 (36.7%)	31 (8.3%)	25 (6.7%)	16 (4.3%)	373 (100%)
2	I deliberately search for fitness or exercise videos on YouTube.	149 (39.9%)	143 (38.3%)	37 (9.9%)	28 (7.5%)	16 (4.3%)	373 (100%)
3	I watch workout routine videos such as aerobics or strength training on YouTube.	157 (42.1%)	131 (35.1%)	43 (11.5%)	26 (7.0%)	16 (4.3%)	373 (100%)
4	I watch health-related fitness videos such as stretching, yoga or wellness routines on YouTube.	153 (41.0%)	139 (37.3%)	35 (9.4%)	29 (7.8%)	17 (4.6%)	373 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 1 indicates that respondents generally have regular exposure to fitness-related content on YouTube. The pattern shows that exposure is concentrated around frequent use of the platform, although the level of engagement differs across the various forms of fitness content. The findings suggest that YouTube provides repeated opportunities for civil servants to encounter exercise demonstrations, workout routines and health-related fitness information.

Table 4.2: Perceived Motivational Value of YouTube Fitness Videos among Civil Servants in Edo State

S/N	Motivational Statements	Very High	High	Can't Tell	Low	Very Low	Total
1	YouTube fitness videos motivate me to engage in physical exercise.	171 (45.8%)	134 (35.9%)	23 (6.2%)	29 (7.8%)	16 (4.3%)	373 (100%)
2	Watching fitness videos on YouTube encourages me to start exercising.	162 (43.4%)	146 (39.1%)	19 (5.1%)	28 (7.5%)	18 (4.8%)	373 (100%)
3	YouTube fitness videos increase my interest in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.	166 (44.5%)	137 (36.7%)	25 (6.7%)	27 (7.2%)	18 (4.8%)	373 (100%)
4	Fitness videos on YouTube make exercise appear achievable and realistic.	159 (42.6%)	144 (38.6%)	21 (5.6%)	30 (8.0%)	19 (5.1%)	373 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 2 shows that YouTube fitness videos are perceived to have considerable motivational value among the respondents. The responses indicate that the videos can encourage interest in exercise, support the decision to begin exercising and make physical activity appear more achievable. The findings therefore suggest that YouTube fitness content may serve as an important source of encouragement for civil servants seeking to adopt or maintain healthier lifestyles.



Table 4.3: Challenges Affecting the Translation of YouTube Fitness Motivation into Consistent Exercise Practice

S/N	Challenge Statements	Very High	High	Can't Tell	Low	Very Low	Total
1	My work schedule limits my ability to exercise regularly.	178 (47.7%)	129 (34.6%)	24 (6.4%)	26 (7.0%)	16 (4.3%)	373 (100%)
2	Lack of time prevents me from practising exercises seen on YouTube.	169 (45.3%)	138 (37.0%)	22 (5.9%)	27 (7.2%)	17 (4.6%)	373 (100%)
3	Internet access and data costs limit my use of YouTube fitness videos.	155 (41.6%)	142 (38.1%)	28 (7.5%)	31 (8.3%)	17 (4.6%)	373 (100%)
4	I find it difficult to remain consistent with exercises learnt from YouTube.	161 (43.2%)	135 (36.2%)	26 (7.0%)	32 (8.6%)	19 (5.1%)	373 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 3 indicates that respondents encounter several challenges in converting the motivation obtained from YouTube fitness videos into consistent exercise practices. Work demands and limited time appear to be important barriers, while access to internet services and difficulty maintaining consistency also affect exercise practice. The findings suggest that motivation generated through online fitness content may not always translate into sustained physical activity because of practical and behavioural constraints.

Discussion

The study found that civil servants in Edo State have a relatively high level of exposure to YouTube fitness videos. A substantial proportion of the respondents reported frequent exposure to fitness-related content, including workout routines, exercise demonstrations and health-related fitness information. This indicates that YouTube has become an important source of fitness information among the respondents. The finding agrees with Adebayo and Ogunlade (2022), who found that digital fitness content has increasingly influenced health behaviours in Nigeria, and Adebisi (2021), who linked digital media consumption with fitness behaviour among urban professionals. The finding is also consistent with Salami (2022), who reported that YouTube fitness videos provide working adults in Benin Metropolis with regular exposure to exercise information. From the perspective of Cultivation Theory, the repeated exposure observed in this study is important because continuous media exposure can gradually shape audience perceptions and orientations. Gerbner and Gross (1976) explain that repeated exposure to media representations can cultivate particular perceptions of reality, while Ekanem (2023) notes that such conditioning occurs gradually through repetitive exposure. Therefore, frequent exposure to fitness content may contribute to making exercise and healthy living more familiar and acceptable to civil servants. However, high exposure should not be interpreted as evidence that respondents necessarily exercise regularly, since exposure to fitness content represents media consumption rather than actual physical activity.

The second finding established that YouTube fitness videos have considerable perceived motivational value among civil servants in Edo State. Most respondents indicated that the videos motivate them to exercise, encourage them to begin exercising, increase their interest in healthy living and make exercise appear achievable. This suggests that YouTube performs a motivational as well as an informational function in the fitness behaviour of the respondents. The finding supports Adediran and Fashola (2021), who identified social media as a motivational tool for fitness in Nigeria, and Danjuma and Ibe (2024),



who found a relationship between online video exposure and exercise motivation among public employees. Salami (2022) similarly reported that YouTube fitness videos could encourage exercise engagement among working adults. The finding can also be explained by Cultivation Theory because repeated exposure to demonstrations of exercise, healthy lifestyles and physical transformation may gradually cultivate the perception that exercise is desirable, achievable and necessary. Ekanem (2023) argues that repetitive media exposure can contribute to the development of shared perceptions, while Nwankwo (2024) notes that visual illustrations can simplify information and facilitate behavioural imitation. Nevertheless, the motivational influence of YouTube should not be considered uniformly positive. Adegoke and Balogun (2022) observe that the strong aesthetic emphasis of online fitness content can influence how audiences perceive fitness and body image. Thus, while YouTube can stimulate motivation, the nature and credibility of the content consumed may determine whether such motivation is constructive and sustainable.

The third finding revealed that civil servants encounter important challenges in translating YouTube-based motivation into consistent exercise practices. Work schedules and lack of time were prominent barriers, while internet access and data costs and difficulty maintaining consistency also affected respondents. This finding demonstrates that motivation alone does not guarantee behavioural change. It supports Adewale (2023), who identifies sedentary lifestyles as an increasing concern among Nigerian civil servants, and Eze and Adeyemi (2024), who emphasise the importance of institutional support for fitness motivation among civil servants. Olamide and Ekpenyong (2021) similarly identify internet access and data costs as barriers to sustained engagement with digital fitness content. The finding is also important to the application of Cultivation Theory because repeated exposure does not mean that audiences will automatically reproduce the behaviours presented in media content. Nyambura (2022) notes that audience interpretation and responses to media are influenced by individual and social circumstances. In this study, YouTube may cultivate positive perceptions of exercise, but demanding work schedules, limited time and financial or technological constraints can prevent those perceptions from becoming regular physical practices. Ezeonye (2023) further identifies self-efficacy as important in converting motivation into sustained action, while Adebisi and Olanrewaju (2025) argue that long-term behavioural change requires more than digital exposure and initial motivation. The findings therefore suggest that the major limitation of YouTube fitness motivation is not necessarily the inability of the platform to motivate users, but the difficulty of sustaining the motivation under real-life occupational and environmental conditions.

The findings demonstrate that YouTube occupies an important position in the fitness communication environment of civil servants in Edo State, but its influence operates through a process rather than a direct relationship between exposure and exercise. The high level of exposure provides repeated contact with fitness messages, while the high perceived motivational value indicates that these messages can shape attitudes towards exercise. However, the identified challenges show that positive perceptions and motivation may not always translate into consistent physical activity. This supports the central argument of Cultivation Theory that media exposure can gradually influence perceptions without necessarily producing identical behavioural outcomes among all members of an audience. It also reflects Asemah's (2022) broader position that communication should be understood within the social context in which messages are produced, received and acted upon. For civil servants, the effectiveness of YouTube fitness communication is therefore influenced not only by the content of the videos but also by workplace demands, available time, access to digital resources and individual capacity to maintain exercise routines. The study consequently establishes that YouTube has meaningful potential as a source of fitness motivation, but its contribution to sustained physical exercise is strengthened when the motivation generated by the platform is supported by favourable personal and workplace conditions.



Conclusion and Recommendations

The researchers conclude that civil servants in Edo State are considerably exposed to YouTube fitness videos and generally perceive the videos as useful sources of exercise motivation. The videos provide accessible fitness information, encourage interest in physical activity and make exercise appear more achievable. However, exposure and motivation alone are not sufficient to ensure consistent exercise practices. Work schedules, lack of time, internet and data limitations and difficulties with maintaining consistency remain important barriers. YouTube therefore has significant potential to support exercise motivation among civil servants, but its effectiveness depends on the ability of users to overcome the practical challenges that stand between motivation and regular physical activity. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Civil service authorities should introduce regular exercise breaks and workplace fitness programmes to provide civil servants with practical opportunities to act on the motivation obtained from YouTube fitness videos.
2. Civil servants should be encouraged to adopt short and realistic YouTube exercise routines that can be performed within their available time rather than relying on lengthy or demanding workout programmes.
3. Government and workplace health units should provide access to credible and locally relevant YouTube fitness content and educate civil servants on how to identify reliable fitness information while avoiding misleading or unsafe exercise recommendations.

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