

# Habit strength in physical activity: Exploring the role of social influence

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Cite as:

Leszkiewicz Agata, Minguez Ana, Sese F. Javier, Kumar V (2024), Habit strength in physical activity: Exploring the role of social influence. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 53rd, (119647)

Paper from the 53rd Annual EMAC Conference, Bucharest, Romania, May 28-31, 2024



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## **Abstract**

Encouraging people to engage in regular physical exercise has become an important public policy issue. However, many individuals find it difficult to maintain regular physical activity over the long term. To address this challenge, in this study, we focus on the development of exercising habits. Specifically, this study derives a measure of habit strength that incorporates temporal stability together with frequency as relevant determinants of habit strength in the long-term and explores the role of a key dimension that can influence the development (or breakdown) of stronger habits: social influence (e.g., training with a personal trainer, training with a partner, going to group classes). Using longitudinal objective exercising behavioral data from five fitness studies in the US over a four-year period (2013-2016), the findings suggest that different sources of social influence such as personal trainers, other co-exercisers, and exercise groups can lead to different levels of habit strength over time.

**Subject Areas:** *Consumer Behaviour, Consumer Services, Public Policy, Sports Marketing*

**Track:** Public Sector and Non-Profit Marketing