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Social Influence or Lifestyle? Motivational Drivers of Trail Running Participation Among Young Adults in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon

Dissi Jill B. Antipasado [1], Juzanne Guille D. Guipetacio [2], Angel Lejoy S. Vega [3], Jessel Ann I. Bello [4], Erwin H. Moneva II [5], Cyjun Cj A. Calida [6], Buddy Jeson L. Tuquib [7], Evan P. Taja-on [8]

[1] School of Nursing, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines djantipasado@sic.edu.ph
[2] School of Nursing, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines jgguipetacio@sic.edu.ph
[3] School of Nursing, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines alvega@sic.edu.ph
[4] School of Nursing, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines jabello@sic.edu.ph
[5] School of Nursing, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines emoneva@sic.edu.ph
[6] School of Nursing, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines cccalida@sic.edu.ph
[7] School of Arts and Sciences, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, bjtuquib@sic.edu.ph
[8] School of Education, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, etajaon@sic.edu.ph

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ABSTRACT

Trail running has become increasingly popular among young adults in Malaybalay City, blending recreation, wellness, and community engagement. This growing interest raises questions about whether participation stems from genuine lifestyle commitment or the influence of social trends and peer groups. Using a phenomenological approach, the inquiry drew from in-depth interviews with young adult trail runners in Malaybalay City to uncover their lived experiences and motivations to highlight both personal lifestyle choices and social influences shaping participation. The findings reveal that trail running participation among young adults is driven by interconnected personal motivations, lifestyle integration, and social support. Engagement is sustained through health benefits, emotional well-being, goal achievement, enjoyment, and strong community connections. The results suggest that promoting trail running should focus on both personal well-being and community engagement to support sustained participation. Programs and initiatives that highlight health benefits, goal

setting, and inclusive social environments may encourage more young adults to adopt trail running as a long-term lifestyle practice.

Keywords: Trail Running, Recreational Sports, Physical Activity Participation, Health and Wellness, Community Sports.

Corresponding Author:
(Evan P. Taja-on)
- Affiliation: School of Education, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, 8700
- Email: etajaon@sic.edu.ph

1. INTRODUCTION

- ***Background of the Study***

In recent years, trail running has grown into a thriving activity among young adults in Malaybalay City, reflecting a broader national and global trend toward outdoor recreation and holistic wellness. This form of running, which takes place on natural terrains such as hills, forests, and mountain paths, offers participants not only physical endurance and strength but also a connection to nature and a break from the busyness of urban life (Pawid, 2023; Van de Velde, 2024). For many enthusiasts, trail running has evolved into more than a sport—it has become a lifestyle. It represents a commitment to health, adventure, and environmental appreciation, often associated with values of discipline, resilience, and mindfulness (Martinez & Scott, 2016). The increasing number of local events, social media communities, and organized runs in Malaybalay City illustrates how trail running has become deeply woven into the social and recreational fabric of the youth.

Despite its popularity, trail running participation presents an interesting question about what drives individuals to engage in it. Some young adults embrace trail running as part of their lifestyle, an intentional choice rooted in personal health goals, passion for nature, or pursuit of inner growth (Malchrowicz-Mośko et al., 2020). Others, however, may be influenced by social factors such as peer encouragement, group belonging, or the desire to be part of a rising trend (Perić & Slavić, 2019). This duality between lifestyle commitment and social influence highlights a growing concern: Are young adults in Malaybalay City genuinely integrating trail running into their way of life, or are they participating mainly due to external pressures or social motivations? Understanding this distinction is important, as it reflects how

motivations shape both the sustainability of participation and the authenticity of engagement in the sport (Mlodzik et al., 2024).

While interest in trail running has clearly surged, there remains a gap in understanding the underlying motivational drivers behind participation, particularly among young adults in smaller urban settings like Malaybalay City. Most existing research has focused on urban or elite athletes, often overlooking local populations where culture, community, and environment play distinct roles in shaping recreational choices (Godtman Kling et al., 2017; Pereira et al., 2021; Desjardins & Ketterling, 2024). The lack of studies exploring whether participation is driven by lifestyle values or social influence limits the understanding of how young adults form their identities around this activity. Addressing this gap is crucial to developing insights into the interplay between personal motivation and collective influence, providing a richer perspective on the meaning of trail running within the local context.

Exploring these motivations carries both theoretical and practical importance. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of youth behavior, wellness, and identity formation by examining whether trail running participation stems from intrinsic lifestyle choices or extrinsic social factors. It also offers valuable insights for community organizers, sports advocates, and wellness programs seeking to promote meaningful engagement in recreational activities. Understanding these motivational patterns can help design initiatives that foster sustainable participation, grounded not only in social excitement but also in personal growth and long-term lifestyle commitment. In due course, this exploration encourages a balance between the social enjoyment of group activities and the authenticity of self-driven fitness and wellness pursuits.

Given this background, the study seeks to examine the motivational drivers of trail running participation among young adults in Malaybalay City, determining whether their engagement is primarily influenced by lifestyle choices or shaped by social factors. It aims to identify the underlying motivations and understand how these influences interact to shape the meaning of trail running in their lives.

2.Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Social Influence Theory, and Lifestyle Theory, which together provide a

comprehensive lens for examining the motivations behind trail running participation. SDT (Standage & Ryan, 2020) emphasizes the role of intrinsic motivation, engagement driven by autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which aligns with the idea of trail running as a lifestyle choice rooted in personal fulfillment and self-growth. In contrast, Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958) highlights how external factors such as peer pressure, social norms, and group belonging affect individual behavior, shedding light on participation that arises from social connections rather than internal motivation. Lifestyle Theory (Cockerham, 2025) complements these perspectives by examining how consistent behaviors, values, and choices, such as regular trail running, reflect one's identity and sense of self. Together, these theories offer an integrated framework for exploring both internal and external factors influencing participation.

The combination of these theoretical perspectives allows the study to examine how lifestyle commitment and social influence coexist and interact in shaping behavior. Self-Determination Theory provides insight into the personal and psychological aspects of motivation, while Social Influence Theory contextualizes how social environments and peer dynamics contribute to decision-making. Meanwhile, Lifestyle Theory bridges these concepts by framing trail running as both a behavioral pattern and a cultural identity. Through this integration, the study acknowledges that motivation is rarely singular; it often emerges from the intersection of personal values and social experiences. The research aims to capture the complexity of why young adults engage in trail running, whether as a meaningful lifestyle choice, a response to social trends, or a blend of both, by applying these theories in dialogue.

- ***Statement of the Problem***

In recent years, trail running has gained remarkable attention among young adults, blending recreation, wellness, and social engagement into one activity. However, questions remain about what truly drives participation in this growing trend, whether it stems from a genuine lifestyle commitment centered on health and self-fulfillment or from social influences shaped by peer involvement, social media, and community events. Understanding these motivations is essential to identifying whether participation reflects personal values or external expectations. Specifically, this study seeks to address the question:

1. What motivates young adults to participate in trail running activities?

- ***REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES***
- ***Trail Running and Its Emergence in Local Contexts***

Trail running has increasingly emerged as a popular form of physical activity in many local communities, particularly in areas with accessible natural landscapes. Literature describes trail running as a blend of exercise and outdoor engagement, where individuals run on natural terrains such as mountains, forests, and unpaved paths (Pawid, 2023; Rosenkrantz et al., 2024). Unlike road running, it offers varied physical demands and a closer connection to nature, which many participants find more meaningful and enjoyable. Studies note that in local settings, trail running often grows through informal groups, community-led events, and shared outdoor spaces rather than through highly structured systems (Smiley et al., 2020; Fruchart, 2021; Hernandez, 2024; Myburgh & Hallmann, 2025). This localized development allows the activity to take on meanings shaped by community values, personal experiences, and environmental conditions, making it both a recreational practice and a growing lifestyle choice for young adults (Van de Velde, 2024).

- ***Social Influence and Group Dynamics in Sport Participation***

Existing literature highlights that social influence plays a significant role in encouraging individuals to participate in sports and physical activities. Friends, family members, and peer groups often serve as initial motivators, especially for young adults who are exploring new interests (Malchrowicz-Mośko et al., 2020). Research shows that seeing others engage in an activity can reduce hesitation, increase confidence, and create a sense of belonging. In group-based sports, shared experiences and mutual encouragement often strengthen commitment, making participation more enjoyable and sustained over time (Perić & Slavić, 2019; Mlodzik et al., 2024).

Beyond initial participation, group dynamics continue to shape how individuals remain involved in sports activities. Studies emphasize that support from running groups, clubs, or informal communities fosters accountability and motivation. Social interactions during training and events also create emotional connections that go beyond physical activity (Matos et al., 2019; Couture, 2021; Fruchart, 2021; Thornton, 2025). These shared experiences can influence how individuals view the activity, whether as a casual social engagement or as a meaningful part of their routine. As such, social influence does not only attract

participants but also shapes the depth and longevity of their involvement (Smiley et al., 2020; Pereira et al., 2021; Hock, 2025).

- ***Cultural and Environmental Contexts of Outdoor Recreation***

Research on outdoor recreation consistently points to the importance of cultural and environmental contexts in shaping participation. Natural environments such as mountains, trails, and open spaces provide both opportunity and motivation for outdoor activities (MacBride-Stewart, 2019; Myburgh & Hallmann, 2025). Studies suggest that individuals who live in areas with rich natural resources are more likely to engage in activities like trail running, as these environments make physical activity more accessible and appealing (Godtman Kling et al., 2017; Davies et al., 2019; Rosenkrantz et al., 2024). The natural setting itself often contributes to feelings of relaxation, adventure, and escape from daily stress.

Cultural values further influence how outdoor activities are perceived and practiced within communities. Literature indicates that in many local contexts, outdoor recreation is tied to ideas of wellness, resilience, and connection to place (Desjardins & Ketterling, 2024; Hernandez, 2024). Community traditions, shared respect for nature, and local narratives around health and discipline shape how individuals relate to activities such as trail running. These cultural and environmental factors work together to influence whether participation is viewed as a temporary activity or as part of a broader lifestyle, reinforcing the need to understand motivation within a specific local setting.

- ***METHODOLOGY***
- **Research Design and Locale**

This study employed a phenomenological design (Pilarska, 2021), which seeks to explore and understand the lived experiences of individuals engaging in trail running. The phenomenological approach allowed the researchers to capture the meanings and motivations behind participation, emphasizing the personal perspectives of the participants rather than imposing predetermined categories. Through this design, the study sought to uncover how young adults make sense of their engagement, whether as an expression of lifestyle or as a response to social influences. The research was conducted in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, a location recognized for its natural landscapes and growing trail

running community, providing a fitting context for examining the phenomenon within real-life settings.

- ***Sampling Method and Participants***

The study utilized purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020) to identify participants who could provide meaningful insights, selecting individuals who met specific criteria relevant to the inquiry. Participants were young adults aged 18 to 35 who were actively engaged in trail running activities within Malaybalay City. This method ensured that the selected participants possessed firsthand experience of the phenomenon under investigation, allowing for richer and more authentic narratives. The purposive approach was chosen to gather diverse yet relevant perspectives that reflect both the lifestyle-oriented and socially influenced motivations associated with trail running participation.

Table 1. ***Demographic profile of the runners.***

Participants	Age	Sex
Runner 1	20	Male
Runner 2	24	Male
Runner 3	25	Female
Runner 4	28	Male
Runner 5	19	Male
Runner 6	19	Male
Runner 7	24	Male

The participants of the study, as presented in Table 1, consisted of young adult runners from Malaybalay City who are actively involved in trail running activities. They represent a segment of the local community that balances recreation, health, and social connection through outdoor sports. The study was able to capture experiences grounded in the local cultural and environmental context, offering a nuanced understanding of what drives individuals to engage in trail running by focusing on this group. Their insights contributed to a comprehensive exploration of how personal and social factors intertwine in shaping participation.

- ***Data Gathering Procedure***

Data were gathered using a researcher-made interview questionnaire, carefully developed to elicit detailed accounts of participants' experiences and motivations. The instrument was reviewed by three experts in the fields of qualitative research, psychology, and sports studies to ensure clarity, content

validity, and relevance to the study's purpose. The review process yielded a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.940, indicating a high level of agreement among experts and confirming the instrument's suitability for data collection. The questionnaire served as a guide for semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share their stories while enabling the researchers to probe deeper into emerging themes.

Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews to allow for direct interaction and a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. Each interview lasted between twenty to thirty minutes, providing sufficient time for participants to share their thoughts in a relaxed and open manner. With the permission of the participants, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate documentation of responses and to capture details that might be missed through note-taking alone. This approach helped preserve the authenticity of the participants' narratives and supported careful review during data analysis.

Prior to the conduct of each interview, the researchers clearly explained the purpose of the inquiry, the nature of participation, and the procedures involved. Participants were informed of their rights, including confidentiality and the option to withdraw at any time, and were asked to sign an informed consent form before proceeding. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no pressure was placed on individuals to take part or to answer any question they were uncomfortable with. This process helped establish trust, encouraged honest sharing, and ensured that the data gathering was conducted in an ethical and respectful manner.

- **Data Treatment**

The researchers utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021) to systematically examine and interpret the participants' narratives. This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences, focusing on how participants make sense of their motivations and involvement in trail running. Through careful reading, coding, and theme development, the researchers identified patterns that reflected both lifestyle-oriented and socially influenced drivers of participation. The interpretative process ensured that findings remained grounded in participants' voices while allowing for meaningful insights into the shared and unique aspects of their experiences.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the account of the shared experiences and perspectives of the participants as drawn from the data. The discussion that follows highlights patterns that emerged from their narratives, offering a structured understanding of the factors that shape participation in trail running. These findings are presented in a way that reflects the voices of the participants while maintaining coherence and clarity for readers.

- ***Health Improvement and Physical Well-being***

This theme focuses on how physical health concerns and the desire for bodily strength are closely tied to participation in trail running. The narratives reflect an emphasis on physical readiness, improved stamina, and overall care for the body, showing how running becomes linked with everyday health practices.

- ***Desire to Improve Health and Fitness***

The findings indicate that a strong motivation for participation is the desire to improve overall health and physical fitness. As stated by the runners:

> "*... it [running] can also boost the immune system... as long as it's about health*." (Runner 2)
>
> "*I want to improve my health, my lifestyle… I lost 10 kilograms*." (Runner 3)
>
> "*... it [trail-running] can help your health... strengthen your cardiovascular system*." (Runner 5)
>
> "*I prepared my physical self... a peaceful body brings forth a peaceful mind*." (Runner 7)

Runners described trail running as a meaningful activity that supports bodily strength, endurance, and general wellness. Their accounts emphasize physical benefits such as improved immunity, weight management, cardiovascular strength, and preparation of the body for daily demands. These responses show that engagement in trail running is often driven by personal awareness of health needs and a deliberate effort to adopt healthier routines through consistent physical activity.

These results suggest that trail running is not viewed merely as exercise but as a practical way to sustain physical well-being over time. The emphasis on health improvement reflects a sense of personal responsibility toward the body, where participation is guided by internal commitment rather than short-term

interest (Matos et al., 2019; Malchrowicz-Mośko et al., 2020; Smiley et al., 2020; Rosenkrantz et al., 2024). This finding highlights how physical activity becomes integrated into daily habits, supporting long-term engagement and reinforcing trail running as a purposeful and health-oriented practice among young adults. •

Prevention of Illness and Addressing Family Health Patterns

Another important finding under this category is the motivation to prevent illness, particularly in response to observed family health conditions. As stated by a runner:

> "*There are illnesses in my family... diabetes and high blood pressure... I don't want that*." (Runner 7)

Runners expressed awareness of hereditary risks and the desire to avoid similar health outcomes. This awareness shaped their decision to engage in trail running as a proactive measure, suggesting that participation is informed by reflection on personal and family health histories rather than immediate social trends. The implication of this finding is that trail running serves as a preventive health practice rooted in long-term thinking. Engagement is guided by foresight and self-care, where physical activity is used to manage future health risks (Smiley et al., 2020; Hernandez, 2024). This reinforces the idea that trail running becomes part of a broader health-focused way of living, supporting sustained participation grounded in personal meaning and responsibility.

Synthesizing these points, the results under this category show that trail running participation is strongly motivated by the desire to improve physical health, maintain fitness, and prevent illness. Runners view the activity as a way to strengthen the body, manage health risks, and build habits that support long-term well-being. These motivations reflect a deep integration of physical activity into daily life, where trail running is valued as both a personal commitment and a sustainable health practice.

- ***Mental and Emotional Well-being***

This theme focuses on inner balance and emotional release as important aspects of participation. The experiences shared point to how trail running provides space for mental clarity, stress relief, and emotional refreshment, especially in response to daily pressures.

- ***Stress Relief and Emotional Release***

The findings indicate that trail running plays a significant role in helping runners manage stress and release emotional tension. As stated by the runners:

> "*It [running] is a very big help... that's where I can express myself, especially when I'm very stressed*." (Runner 1)
>
> "*Trail running is an option for me to unwind… if I'm stressed from school or personal things*." (Runner 6)

Runners described the activity as an outlet where they could express emotions, cope with academic and personal pressures, and temporarily distance themselves from sources of stress. Trail running provided a space for reflection and emotional balance, allowing runners to process challenges in a calm and constructive manner. This result implies that participation extends beyond physical benefits, offering emotional support that encourages continued engagement. The ability of trail running to serve as a stress-relief activity strengthens its value in daily life, making it more than a recreational choice (MacBride-Stewart, 2019; Desjardins & Ketterling, 2024; Thornton, 2025). This emotional function contributes to sustained participation, as individuals associate the activity with personal comfort and mental stability.

- ***Feeling of Happiness and Mental Refreshment***

Runners also highlighted feelings of happiness, mental clarity, and refreshment as key outcomes of trail running. As stated by the runners:

> "*Your mind gets refreshed... the feeling you get is very good*." (Runner 4)
>
> "*There's this hormone… dopamine… it [running] makes you happy and makes you feel alive*." (Runner 6)

They described a sense of enjoyment, renewed energy, and positive mood after engaging in the activity. These experiences suggest that trail running offers psychological rewards that reinforce participation and make the activity personally fulfilling. The implication of this finding is that positive emotional experiences help sustain motivation over time. When trail running is associated with enjoyment and mental renewal, it becomes a valued part of everyday routines rather than an obligation (MacBride-Stewart, 2019; Fruchart, 2021; Hernandez, 2024). This emotional satisfaction strengthens commitment and supports the integration of trail running into a balanced and meaningful lifestyle.

Synthesizing these points, the findings show that trail running contributes significantly to mental and emotional well-being by helping runners manage stress, release emotions, and experience happiness. These benefits reinforce continued engagement, as the activity supports both emotional balance and positive outlook. Together, these results highlight trail running as an activity that nurtures mental health while naturally becoming part of everyday life.

- ***Lifestyle Integration and Personal Identity***

This theme focuses on how trail running becomes woven into daily routines and personal values. The accounts suggest that participation goes beyond activity alone and becomes part of how individuals see themselves and shape their personal goals.

- ***Adoption of Trail Running as a Lifestyle***

The findings indicate that trail running has been adopted by runners as a regular and meaningful part of their daily lives rather than a temporary activity. As stated by the runners:

"*Yes ma'am, this is already part of my lifestyle now*." (Runner 1)
"*It's already a part, it's truly included in my lifestyle*." (Runner 2)
"*Yes bro! Trail running has been part of my lifestyle now, for three years*." (Runner 6)
"*As of now, yeah, it really seems to have become my lifestyle... I'm exploring mountain ridges*." (Runner 7)

Runners described consistent engagement in trail running through routine practice, participation in events, and personal commitment to training. Their accounts reflect how trail running gradually became embedded in their schedules, preferences, and priorities, indicating that participation extended beyond casual interest. This pattern suggests that trail running functions as a stable practice that shapes how individuals organize their time and manage their physical activity. The implication of this finding is that trail running serves as a long-term personal commitment rather than a short-term response to trends. When integrated into everyday life, participation becomes sustained and self-directed, reinforcing consistency and personal ownership (Rosenkrantz et al., 2024; Myburgh & Hallmann, 2025). This supports the understanding that trail running can develop into a defining aspect of personal identity, where engagement is maintained through routine, habit, and personal meaning.

- ***Personal Growth and Self-Improvement Goals***

The findings further indicate that trail running is closely tied to personal growth and self-improvement. As stated by the runners:

> "*I want to be the best version of myself… I will run 21 kilometers*." (Runner 3)
>
> "*It depends on how you use trail running... you want to apply it in your life... so you can enjoy your life*." (Runner 5)

Runners described the activity as a way to challenge themselves, set personal goals, and strive for improvement over time. Their engagement was linked to self-reflection, discipline, and the pursuit of becoming better versions of themselves. Trail running was not limited to physical movement but was viewed as a process of applying effort, persistence, and purpose in everyday life. These results imply that participation is sustained by clear personal goals and a desire for self-development. Trail running becomes a platform for testing limits and achieving progress, which strengthens commitment and motivation (Pereira et al., 2021; Desjardins & Ketterling, 2024; Mlodzik et al., 2024). This reinforces the idea that lifestyle integration is supported by meaningful personal goals, allowing trail running to serve as both a physical activity and a tool for long-term self-improvement.

Synthesizing these points, the results demonstrate that trail running is integrated into runners' lives through routine practice and personal meaning. The activity supports both lifestyle formation and self-identity by providing structure, purpose, and opportunities for growth. Through consistent engagement and goal-oriented participation, trail running becomes a lasting part of how individuals view themselves and manage their well-being.

- **Social *Influence* and Community Connection**

This theme focuses on the role of shared experiences and relationships in sustaining participation. The narratives reflect how interactions with peers, groups, and supportive networks shape involvement and create a sense of connection within the activity.

- ***Influence of Friends and Peers***

The findings indicate that friends and peers play an important role in introducing runners to trail running. As stated by the runners:

"*I was influenced by my companions who run*." (Runner 1)
"*My male friends and female friends are trail runners*." (Runner 2)
"*My friend encouraged me to try*." (Runner 6)

Many runners began their involvement after encouragement from people within their social circles, suggesting that initial participation was shaped by shared experiences and trust. This influence often lowered hesitation and provided reassurance, making trail running more accessible and appealing during the early stages of engagement. The implication of this finding is that social connections act as entry points rather than sole motivators for continued participation. While friends and peers encourage initial involvement, engagement gradually becomes guided by personal interest and commitment (Rosenkrantz et al., 2024; Hock, 2025; Myburgh & Hallmann, 2025). This shows that social influence helps open opportunities for participation while allowing individuals to later develop their own reasons for staying involved.

- ***Belongingness to Running Groups or Communities***

The findings indicate that belonging to running groups or communities contributes to continued participation. As stated by the runners:

"*Now I have a lot of friends who are into running*." (Runner 3)
"*My groupmates in trail running... it's like they were recruiters for me to join*." (Runner 5)
"*I was encouraged by the community which is very welcoming... it's like they've known me for a long time*." (Runner 7)

Runners described being part of informal groups or circles that provided companionship, shared experiences, and a sense of acceptance. These communities created welcoming spaces where individuals felt comfortable joining events and maintaining involvement without pressure or competition. The implication of this finding is that community belonging strengthens participation by creating social environments that support consistency. Being part of a group provides motivation through shared goals and collective experiences, reinforcing engagement over time (Couture, 2021; Hock, 2025; Myburgh & Hallmann, 2025). This sense of belonging allows trail running to become both a social and personal activity, supporting its integration into daily life.

- ***Social Support and Encouragement***

The findings highlight the role of social support, particularly from family members, in sustaining participation. As stated by the runners:

"*My older sister is the one who sponsors me*." (Runner 1)

"*Regarding my family... sometimes they sponsor me*." (Runner 3)

Runners noted receiving encouragement and practical support, such as financial assistance for registration or equipment. This support helped reduce barriers to participation and allowed individuals to remain engaged without added stress. The implication of this result is that encouragement from close social networks strengthens commitment and continuity. Supportive relationships create a stable environment where participation is valued and sustained (Rosenkrantz et al., 2024; Hock, 2025; Thornton, 2025). This reinforces the idea that trail running is not practiced in isolation but is shaped by relationships that enable and affirm continued involvement.

Synthesizing these points, the results show that social influence and community connection play key roles in both the initiation and continuation of trail running participation. Friends, groups, and family support create opportunities, encouragement, and a sense of belonging that complement personal motivation. Together, these social factors help sustain engagement while allowing individuals to gradually develop trail running as a meaningful part of their lives.

- ***Enjoyment, Adventure, and Connection to Nature***

This theme focuses on the sense of pleasure and exploration associated with trail running. The experiences shared reflect appreciation for outdoor settings and the sense of freedom that comes from engaging with natural spaces.

- ***Enjoyment of the Running Experience***

The findings indicate that enjoyment is a central reason for continued participation in trail running. As stated by the runners:

"*It [running] is enjoyable because you get to meet many people*." (Runner 2)

"*Trail running is very nice and enjoyable, why? It [running] can bring goodness/well-being*..." (Runner 5)

Runners described the activity as pleasant, fulfilling, and socially engaging, emphasizing how the experience itself provides satisfaction. Enjoyment was linked not only to the act of running but also to meeting people and sharing experiences during runs. These accounts suggest that trail running offers positive experiences that naturally encourage participation without the need for external pressure. The implication of this finding is that enjoyment plays a key role in sustaining engagement over time. When individuals associate trail running with positive feelings and meaningful experiences, participation becomes self-driven and consistent (MacBride-Stewart, 2019; Fruchart, 2021). This enjoyment supports long-term involvement, as trail running is seen as an activity that brings personal satisfaction rather than obligation.

- ***Appreciation of Nature and Scenery***

The findings also highlight the importance of nature and scenic surroundings in motivating participation. As stated by the runners:

"*The view that you get to see is very beautiful*." (Runner 4)

"*My goal is to enjoy and see the view of the earth while I'm still young*." (Runner 5)

Runners expressed appreciation for the views, natural landscapes, and outdoor setting that trail running provides. These elements made the experience more rewarding and distinct from other forms of running, adding value to their participation. This result implies that the natural environment strengthens engagement by enhancing the overall experience. Exposure to scenic views and open spaces encourages runners to return, reinforcing trail running as an enjoyable and meaningful activity (Davies et al., 2019; MacBride-Stewart, 2019; Rosenkrantz et al., 2024). The connection to nature contributes to a deeper attachment to the practice, supporting its integration into everyday life.

Synthesizing these points, the findings indicate that enjoyment and connection to nature are strong motivators for trail running participation. Positive experiences, social interaction, and appreciation of natural surroundings work together to make the activity rewarding. These factors encourage sustained involvement and support trail running as a meaningful and enjoyable part of daily life.

- ***Intrinsic Motivation and Personal Discipline***

This theme focuses on the personal drive and self-control as central elements of continued participation. The narratives point to inner commitment, focus, and personal standards that guide consistent engagement over time.

- ***Internal Drive and Discipline***

The findings indicate that participation in trail running is largely guided by personal drive and discipline. As stated by the runners:

"*Myself [describing motivation source]*." (Runner 1)

"*Ah... it's really for personal enjoyment... it's not just for a social media 'myday' post*." (Runner 5)

"*It's always personal because discipline comes first*." (Runner 6)

Runners described their motivation as coming from within, emphasizing self-control, commitment, and personal enjoyment rather than external recognition. Trail running was viewed as a personal choice that reflects individual values and priorities. The implication of this finding is that internal drive supports consistency and long-term participation. When engagement is guided by discipline and personal meaning, individuals are more likely to maintain the activity despite challenges (Fruchart, 2021; Hernandez, 2024; Thornton, 2025; Hock, 2025). This reinforces trail running as a practice that is sustained through personal commitment rather than social approval.

- ***Personal Mindset, Fortitude, and Mental Strength***

The findings further indicate that trail running contributes to the development of mental strength and perseverance. As stated by the runners:

"*It built my physical endurance and my mental fortitude*." (Runner 5)

"*Every step… closer to the finish line*." (Runner 7)

Runners described how the activity builds endurance and encourages a focused mindset, where progress is achieved step by step. These experiences reflect how trail running becomes a space for building resilience and maintaining determination. The implication of this result is that mental strength developed through trail running extends beyond physical activity. The ability to endure difficulty and remain focused strengthens personal confidence and commitment, supporting continued participation (Smiley et al., 2020; Myburgh & Hallmann, 2025; Thornton, 2025). This reinforces trail running as an activity that shapes both physical and mental aspects of personal growth.

Synthesizing these points, the findings show that internal motivation and discipline are key factors in trail running participation. Personal drive, enjoyment, and mental strength support consistent engagement and long-term commitment. Together, these elements highlight trail running as an activity grounded in self-direction and personal meaning, reinforcing its role in everyday life.

- ***Escape from Negative Habits and Negative Environments***

This theme focuses on how trail running is linked to positive redirection in daily life. The accounts show how participation offers an alternative path away from unproductive routines and environments, supporting healthier choices.

- ***Shift from Unhealthy Behavior to Productive Activity***

The findings indicate that trail running served as a productive alternative to previously unhealthy behaviors. As stated by a runner:

"*Before, I was a heavy drinker, a smoker... then I stopped because of this trail running*." (Runner 1)

Participants described how engagement in trail running led to a clear change in daily habits, replacing harmful practices with regular physical activity. This shift reflects a conscious effort to adopt healthier routines through sustained participation, where trail running became a constructive focus that reshaped lifestyle choices and daily behavior. The implication of this finding is that trail running functions as a positive replacement activity that supports healthier living. By providing structure and purpose, participation encourages individuals to redirect their energy toward beneficial practices (Pereira et al., 2021; Desjardins & Ketterling, 2024; Rosenkrantz et al., 2024). This reinforces trail running as a meaningful activity that supports long-term lifestyle change and personal responsibility.

- ***Avoidance of Drugs and Negative Environments***

The findings further show that trail running helped participants distance themselves from negative environments and harmful influences. As stated by a runner:

"*It keeps me far from drugs... if I'm stressed, I go back to trail running for my recovery*." (Runner 5)

Engagement in running provided a healthier space for coping with stress, allowing individuals to step away from environments associated with unhealthy

behaviors. Trail running was described as a safe and constructive option that offered recovery and balance during times of pressure. The implication of this result is that trail running supports resilience by offering a stable and healthy alternative during stressful moments. By choosing physical activity over exposure to negative environments, participants demonstrate sustained commitment to well-being (MacBride-Stewart, 2019; Rosenkrantz et al., 2024). This highlights trail running as a supportive practice that encourages positive decision-making and personal stability.

Synthesizing these points, the results show that trail running plays a significant role in helping individuals move away from unhealthy behaviors and negative surroundings. Participation supports healthier choices by offering structure, focus, and positive coping strategies. These findings emphasize trail running as an activity that contributes to long-term lifestyle improvement and personal growth.

- ***Sense of Achievement and Goal-Oriented Mindset***

This theme focuses on the progress and accomplishment as meaningful outcomes of participation. The experiences shared reflect how setting personal targets and reaching milestones contribute to motivation and a forward-looking mindset.

- ***Goal Setting and Achievement Motivation***

The findings indicate that setting personal goals is a key factor in trail running participation. As stated by the runners:

"*I will run 21 kilometers... full marathon next year*." (Runner 3)

"*You need to set goals... my goal is to enjoy and see the view*." (Runner 5)

Participants described having clear targets related to distance, performance, and future challenges, which guided their continued involvement. These goals provided direction and purpose, allowing participants to measure progress and remain committed to training and participation over time. The implication of this finding is that goal setting strengthens engagement by giving individuals a clear sense of direction. When participation is guided by personal targets, trail running becomes a structured and meaningful activity (Davies et al., 2019; Fruchart, 2021; Hernandez, 2024; Hock, 2025). This supports

consistency and encourages long-term involvement through self-directed progress.

- ***Desire to Feel Accomplishment and Progress***

The findings also show that participants are motivated by the desire to experience accomplishment and improvement. As stated by a runner:

"*I want to feel the thrill again... my body was healthy at that time*."
(Runner 7)

Trail running was associated with feelings of excitement, progress, and satisfaction when personal milestones were reached. These experiences reinforced continued participation by linking effort with positive outcomes. The implication of this result is that feelings of accomplishment support sustained motivation. When individuals recognize their progress, trail running becomes rewarding and meaningful (Davies et al., 2019; Fruchart, 2021; Hernandez, 2024; Hock, 2025). This reinforces commitment and strengthens personal engagement through ongoing self-evaluation and growth.

Synthesizing these points, the results demonstrate that trail running participation is supported by clear goals and a strong desire for accomplishment. Progress and achievement reinforce motivation, encouraging individuals to remain engaged over time. These findings highlight trail running as a purposeful activity grounded in personal challenge and growth.

- ***4. CONCLUSION***

Considering all factors, the findings collectively show that trail running participation among young adults is shaped by a combination of physical health benefits, emotional well-being, personal identity, social connection, enjoyment, and inner discipline. Participants described how trail running supports health improvement, stress management, lifestyle integration, and positive social experiences. These elements work together to create a balanced and meaningful engagement, where participation is sustained through both personal commitment and supportive social environments.

Across all themes, trail running emerges as an activity that supports long-term engagement by aligning personal goals with enjoyable experiences and healthy routines. It provides structure, purpose, and positive alternatives to unhealthy behaviors while fostering growth, resilience, and accomplishment.

Together, the results highlight trail running as a multifaceted practice that integrates health, identity, community, and personal motivation into everyday life.

The study provides new insight into how trail running participation is motivated by the combined influence of lifestyle integration and social connection. The findings show that young adults engage in trail running not only to improve health and manage stress, but also to build discipline, achieve personal goals, and maintain supportive relationships. Trail running emerges as a meaningful activity that supports long-term well-being by aligning personal values with positive social environments, highlighting its role as both a lifestyle practice and a socially supported pursuit.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be acknowledged in interpreting the findings. The study relied on a small group of participants who were already active in trail running, which may limit the range of perspectives captured, particularly those of individuals who are inactive or have discontinued participation. Most participants were male, which may have influenced the themes that emerged and reduced the visibility of motivations that may be more common among female runners. In addition, the use of self-reported experiences may have introduced recall bias or selective sharing, as participants described their motivations based on personal reflection. The focus on a single local setting also limits the transferability of the findings to other areas with different cultural or environmental contexts.

- ***Recommendations of the Study***

Based on the findings, efforts to promote trail running may benefit from approaches that balance personal well-being with social engagement. Community-based programs that emphasize health improvement, stress management, goal setting, and inclusive group activities may help sustain participation among young adults. Encouraging mentorship, peer support, and accessible running groups may further strengthen commitment, especially for new participants. Attention may also be given to creating spaces and activities that are welcoming to women to encourage more balanced participation.

Future research may explore trail running participation using a more diverse group of participants, particularly by including more female runners and individuals from different age groups or skill levels. Comparative studies across different locations may help identify how cultural and environmental factors shape motivation. Further studies may also consider mixed or quantitative approaches to examine how common certain motivations are and how they relate to long-term participation, health outcomes, and community involvement.

- ***Contributorship:***

Dissi Jill B. Antipasado, Juzanne Guille D. Guipetacio, Angel Lejoy S. Vega, Jessel Ann I. Bello, Erwin H. Moneva II, Cyjun Cj A. Calida: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Literature Review, Data Curation, Visualization, Validation, Correction and Edit of the Subsequent Drafts, and Approval; and **Buddy Jeson L. Tuquib** and **Evan P. Taja-on**: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Tools Construction, Literature Review, Contribution in the First Draft, Final Corrections, and Approval. All authors approved the final version of the article.

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- ***Informed consent:***

Informed consent was obtained from all experts prior to their participation in the study. The experts were provided with a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, and their expected contributions, ensuring they fully understood their roles and rights, including the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation.

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- ***Data availability and sharing policy:***

Due to data-sharing restrictions, individual-level data cannot be publicly posted. However, the datasets used and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

- ***AI-Disclosure Statement:***

The authors acknowledge the use of AI tools (ChatGPT and Grammarly) to enhance the readability and presentation of the study. These tools did not influence the original content, analysis, and/or conclusions. The authors affirm that all analyses and interpretations were conducted with strict adherence to research ethics and academic standards.

- ***Ethical Statement:***

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards and institutional research protocols of San Isidro College; the study was registered under Research ID No. SIC-092725-SON1121-27. Informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection, and confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

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