

## Appraisal In Threads: Digital Persona Construction of Indonesian Fitness Influencers

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores how Indonesian fitness influencers create digital personas using evaluative language on Threads by drawing upon Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal framework comprised of Attitude, Engagement and Graduation. Following a qualitative netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2015), data was collected from six selected influencer posts based on their activity and relevance to fitness-oriented discourse. Findings reveal that Attitude (Affect) is the most prominent resource, emphasizing emotional expression as key to establishing relatability and engagement, while Judgement and Appreciation reinforce fitness discipline and its worth. Engagement leans towards authoritative positioning, tempered by inclusivity to align audiences, and Graduation strengthens evaluative meanings for more impactful persuasion. These patterns produce three dominant digital personas, namely Motivator, Coach, and Companion, showing how evaluation serves as a strategic device for identity enactment and audience engagement in digital communication.

**Keywords:** Appraisal, digital persona, fitness influencers, Threads, netnography

### ABSTRAK

*Studi ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana influencer kebugaran Indonesia menciptakan persona digital menggunakan bahasa evaluatif di Threads dengan mengacu pada kerangka Penilaian Martin dan White (2005) yang terdiri dari Attitude, Engagement, dan Graduation. Mengikuti pendekatan netnografi kualitatif (Kozinets, 2015), data dikumpulkan dari postingan enam influencer terpilih berdasarkan aktivitas dan relevansinya dengan wacana berorientasi kebugaran. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Afek (Attitude) paling dominan digunakan, menekankan ekspresi emosional sebagai kunci untuk membangun keterkaitan dan keterlibatan, sementara Penilaian (Judgement) dan Apresiasi (Appreciation) memperkuat nilai disiplin kebugaran. Engagement cenderung pada posisi otoritatif, diimbangi dengan inklusivitas untuk menyelaraskan audiens, dan Graduation memperkuat makna evaluatif untuk persuasi yang lebih berdampak. Pola-pola ini menghasilkan tiga persona digital dominan yaitu Motivator, Pelatih, dan Pendamping. Hal ini menunjukkan bagaimana evaluasi berfungsi sebagai perangkat strategis untuk perwujudan identitas dan keterlibatan audiens dalam komunikasi digital.*

**Kata kunci:** Appraisal, persona digital, influencer kebugaran, Threads, netnografi

### A. Introduction

The increasing use of social media has changed how people construct identity in digital spaces. Platform like *Threads* provide a space for short, frequent, and conversational interactions, enabling

influencers to always be engaged with their audience. Thus, language becomes both an important medium for communication as well as for crafting one's digital persona—a mixture of authenticity and performance (Khamis et al., 2017; Page, 2012;

Zappavigna, 2018). The concept of persona entails the notion that we are all actors on stage, constantly performing our identities and managing impressions in our social interactions (Goffman, 1959). In the digital realm, this idea evolves into “digital persona,” which refers to the identity constructed and projected through our words and interactions online (Page, 2012). However, unlike their offline counterparts, digital personas are not fixed identities. They are dynamic, constructed through repeated linguistic choices, audience expectations, and platform affordances.

In social media, an individual’s digital persona is closely related to self-branding. Khamis et al. (2017) claimed that influencers carefully craft their online identity to capture and hold audience’s interest, combining genuine expression with strategic display. Meanwhile, Zappavigna (2018) stated that personas are created through evaluative language that makes “ambient affiliation” possible in which people connect to others by expressing shared attitudes, feelings, and values. Based on this point of view, then, persona results as much from what is said or communicated as from how the evaluation is linguistically encoded. Finally, Georgakopoulou (2021) stated that online identities are shaped through “small stories” and routine exchanges, further suggesting that persona is continuously negotiated rather than fixed. These insights highlight the need to examine linguistic resources, especially evaluative language, in understanding digital persona construction.

As fitness influencer culture thrives within digital culture, where every form of communication is inherently persuasive and inspiring, their posts typically serve to inspire, educate, and influence their followers’ lifestyles (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015). Hence, they are rich with evaluative language and thus important to study through the lens of Appraisal, a Systemic Functional Linguistic framework used to analyse how speakers convey attitude, negotiate interpersonally, and intensify meanings (Martin & White, 2005; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson, 2014). Appraisal theory’s three interrelated

‘subsystems’ of Attitude, Engagement and Graduation collectively explain how speakers express emotions, evaluate people and things, position themselves with respect to other voices, and amplify meanings. It is especially important for influencer discourse, where subtle evaluative choices are key to shaping credibility, relatability and persuasive power. By analysing appraisals, it is possible to reveal how influencers build identities and engage audiences through everyday talk.

Recent studies have shown some increasing emphasis on evaluative language’s centrality across various discourses. Jombabdi (2022) found that evaluative language plays a crucial role in asserting authority, reinforcing leadership, and shaping public perception during times of crisis. Similarly, Sekarsari (et al., 2024) found that affect is the most dominant category used to express emotional alignment and build rapport, while Judgement and Appreciation are strategically employed to construct authority and shared values in by the former Indonesia’s president in his Speeches. This study shows that evaluative language shapes interpersonal meaning, even in formal political discourse. Septiana (2021) highlighted how appraisal resources position readers ideologically in news discourse while Marpaung (2022) showed that evaluative language is central to interpersonal meaning-making in texts.

In digital settings, Reza (2025) found that Instagram captions use Affect and Judgment to generate emotional connection and build solidarity with audiences. Fanani (2025) argued that evaluative language is performative, used to build identities and manipulate audience’s perceptions. Umam et al (2026) showed an emerging trend towards heightened, empathetic evaluation in digital advertisement. Furthermore, evaluative positioning is critical to create relatable digital personas through micro interactions. (Georgakopoulou, et al., 2023)

While past studies have documented the construction of authenticity and engagement (Abidin, 2016; Zappavigna, 2012), little attention has been paid to how evaluative language works in newer

platforms like Threads, specifically in the Indonesian fitness context. Most prior research has focused on platforms like Instagram, Twitter, or political discourse, leaving Threads underexplored despite its unique affordances (e.g., brevity, immediacy, conversational interaction), which may shape how appraisal resources are deployed and how digital personas are built up in high-frequency communication environments. Furthermore, few studies have directly linked micro-linguistics analysis with persona building at the macro-level, and our study aims to bridge this gap

This study fills this gap by analyzing how Indonesian fitness influencers appropriate Appraisal resources in crafting their digital persona on Threads. This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How Appraisal resources are manifested in influencer posts.
2. How they shape digital persona building. This paper sheds light on language use in online communication, specifically as used by fitness influencers.

## **B. Research Method**

This study adopts a qualitative approach using an ethnography-based approach known as netnography, a method designed to study online communities and digital interactions (Kozinets, 2015) in order to capture how digital communities interact naturally. Netnography is therefore an suitable for this study as it enables the observation of genuine, spontaneous language usage on social media platforms without intervention by the reserachers.

The data were drawn from the profiles of six Indonesian fitness influencers, purposively sampled. The creators were selected based on frequent posts, large numbers of followers, and consistent discussion about fitness. Additionally, the influencers selected actively use Threads as a platform for communication, ensuring that the data reflects platform-specific discourse practices. A set of posts was compiled within a time frame from March until May 2026 that highlights motivational stories,

personal reflections and fitness related experience.

Data were analysed using Appraisal theory (Martin & White 2005; Martin & Rose, 2007), made up of three subsystems: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation. This framework is grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics, which views language as a resource for meaning-making in social contexts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson, 2014). Attitude concerns how evaluation is presented and has three categories: Affect, which encompasses emotional reactions (“I’m really excited about trying out my new workout at the gym.”), Judgement, which evaluates behaviours and personal qualities (“You need to be disciplined to see results”) and Appreciation, which appraises the worth or quality of things and processes (“This article is very informative”).

Engagement relates to how speakers place themselves in relation to others. This could involve monoglossic assertions that declare ideas as true or factual (“Our company went bankrupt”) or heteroglossic statements that acknowledge multiple points of view or call for participation from readers (“We can do this together!”).

Finally, Graduation describes how meanings are ranked in terms of strength or precision. Force intensifies or diminishes an evaluation (changing “bad” to “really bad” or “slightly bad”) and Focus sharpens or softens category edges (calling someone a ‘true’ professional (exact match) vs. ‘a professional of sorts’ - vague match).

To strengthen the analytical framework, this study also adopts the qualitative data analysis procedures proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which consist of three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The data analysis was conducted through the following steps:

1. Data Familiarisation: Posts were read repeatedly, and only those containing evaluative language were selected.
2. Segmentation: The data were divided into smaller units (clauses or phrases).

3. Coding: Each unit was coded using a deductive Appraisal framework (Attitude, Engagement, Graduation).

4. Data Display: The coded data were organised into categories and tables to identify patterns.

5. Interpretation: Patterns were analysed to explain how digital personas (e.g., motivator, coach, companion) are constructed.

6. Contextual Analysis: Findings were interpreted within the socio-discursive context of Threads.

7. Verification: The coding was reviewed to ensure consistency and reliability.

After each post was coded manually for evaluative expressions and then categorized accordingly, the results were iteratively analysed for their consistency and reliability. Netnographically, the analysis also considers the socio-discursive context in which the texts are produced, aligning with computer-mediated discourse analysis perspectives (Herring, 2004; Kozinets, 2015).

**C. Result and Discussion**

This study examines 60 Threads posts (10 posts per influencer) produced by six Indonesian fitness influencers, namely Vinnie Hasan, Sally Tanudjaja, Dr. Maria Lestari, Teuku Aufra Mareto, Enrique Dustin, and Dr Tirta. The data were collected between March and May 2026. From the dataset, 18 posts were identified as containing Appraisal resources, indicating that evaluative language is used selectively rather than uniformly.

**Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Appraisal Resources**

Appraisal	Categories	Frequ-ency (n=18)	Percent-age
Attitude	Affect	12	66.7%
	Judgement	10	55.6%
	Appreciat-ion	8	44.4%

Engage-ment	Monogloss	14	77.8 %
	Hetero-gloss	6	33.3%
Graduat-ion	Force	13	72.2 %
	Focus	5	27.8%

The findings show that all three Appraisal subsystems Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation are present, with Attitude emerging as the most dominant category, particularly Affect (66.7%). Influencers often use emotional expressions to build relatability as reflected in expression “capek banget tapi worth it” (really exhausted, but it’s worth it.) in the first place.

Judgement accounting for 55.6% of the data is used to frame fitness as a matter of discipline and personal responsibility as seen in clauses “Harus disiplin kalau mau hasil” (You need to be disciplined to see results.), “Jangan jadiin genetic sebagai excuse”(don’t use genetics as an excuse).

Appreciation representing 44.4% of the data appears in evaluations of workouts and events as seen in expressions “workout ini efektif banget” (this workout is very effective), “eventnya keren banget” (the event is really great)

In terms of Engagement, monogloss, at 77.8%, dominates suggesting that influencers tend to present their statements as factual and authoritative as reflected in the clause “konsistensi adalah kunci” (consistency is key). Heteroglossic elements are also present, particularly through inclusive expressions like “kita pasti bisa” (we can definitely do this), which creates a sense of shared experience and community.

Graduation, especially Force (72.2%), plays a key role in amplifying meaning, the frequent use of intensifiers like “banget” (very) and “luar biasa” (extraordinary) enhance the emotional and persuasive impact of posts, making them more engaging and motivational.

These findings suggest that evaluative language is used strategically rather than randomly, demonstrating that influencers deliberately choose linguistic tools according to their communicative ends. The

prevalence of Affect underscores the significance of emotional connection in digital fitness talk, where relatability and mutual struggle are integral to captivate an audience. In line with prior work (e.g., Reza 2025; Zappavigna 2018), this reinforces the relevance of emotional alignment in building online affiliation.

Moreover, the relatively high use of Judgement also reflects a moral framing of fitness culture where success is equated with discipline, effort and personal responsibility, which mirrors broader discourses of self-improvement that position individuals as responsible for their own physical outcomes. It shows that influencers do not just share experiences, they reproduce dominant ideologies around health and body management.

The prominence of monoglossic Engagement thus consolidates influencers' authorial status, framing them as the credible sources of expertise. However, the presence of heteroglossic resources showed that the influencers attempt to combine authoritativeness with engagement in order to make the discourse of influencers seem knowledgeable and friendly.

It can also be observed that intensification, represented mainly by force the more extreme variant of Graduation, helps influencers build on evaluation by elevating intensify as a device that adds emphasis and increases the reader's emotional state, implying that intensity is not necessarily stylistic, but instrumental in stimulating engagement.

Together, these patterns point to three recurring digital personas, namely the Motivator relying heavily on Affect and Graduation to inspire audiences; the Coach constructed through Judgement and monoglossic authority; and the Companion emerging through inclusive Engagement strategies. These personas are not fixed but shift depending on the communicative goal of each post.

Overall, the results reveal that the digital persona construction is dynamic and context-reliant on the exploitation of evaluative language. By using emotional appeal, and authoritative positions together, an influencer can achieve emotional

involvement, instructional ability, and intimacy for an audience, and further bolster themselves as authoritative leaders as well as peers within the digital sport and fitness ecosystem.

## D. Conclusion and Suggestion

This study demonstrates that Threads' Appraisal resources are essential for Indonesian fitness influencers' creation of digital persona. While Attitude (specifically Affect) is the most prominent, indicating the significance of emotional involvement in influencer communication, Judgement and Appreciation accentuate values and desirability, whereas Engagement and Graduation emphasise authority and persuasiveness.

The findings reveal that evaluative language serves both as a medium for expressing ideas and as an instrument for identity performance and audience engagement. The uncovering of three dominant personas, namely the Motivator, the Coach, and the Companion, revealed how influencers balance authority, relatability, and persuasion across digital spaces.

However, the study is restricted by its limited sample size and textual focus. Further research could draw on larger datasets, cross-platform analyses, and multimodal approaches. Furthermore, future studies could examine the combination of Appraisal with other linguistic characteristics such as code-mixing or storytelling.

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