

Running Culture: A Sociological Study of the Rise of Marathon Culture in Manipur

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ABSTRACT

In Manipur, Long distance running as a recreational and fitness activity has gained popularity in the recent years. However, there is limited research in this regional context. Therefore, this study tries to understand the rise of marathon culture in Manipur from sociological perspective. Our study aims to understand the factors contributing to the rise of marathon events in Manipur and to find out what motivates people to participate and the broader social and cultural significance of this emerging trend. The study used a mixed method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collected through interviews, participant observation, questionnaires and secondary sources. The analysis is guided by Bourdieu's habitus, Durkheim's collective effervescence and Mead's Symbolic interactionism. The study findings imply that Marathon participation is influenced by individual motivation such as health, personal challenges and enjoyment and broader social influences such as peer networks and social media. Marathon events promote social cohesion and identity formation with participants identifying themselves as "runners". However, the question of sustainability, accessibility and organisational constraints remain, showing how marathon culture act as a site of social change.

Keywords: Community engagement; Fitness and lifestyle; Half-marathon; Long-distance running; Manipur; Marathon culture

INTRODUCTION

Sport has been playing an important role in shaping cultural identity, social life and community interaction across different societies. Commonly, sports are portrayed as a social institution which is the product of human endeavours and enterprise manufactured in particular historical and social circumstances (Cashmore, 2002). Sociological studies emphasise that sport is not merely a form of physical activities but rather a social institution that shows broader cultural values and social relationships. Jay Coakley (2015) asserts that sport gives contributions to socialisation, community bonding and the formation of identity within societies. Subsequently, examining the patterns of sports participation gives perspective into the social and cultural dynamics of a specific place. Grant Jarvie (2006) further gives importance to understanding sporting practices within their historical context and tells us regarding how and why people created particular forms of sports. So, the sociological study of sport gives valuable perspective on broader social relationships and cultural values. In anchor these theoretical insights in a concrete sociocultural setting, it is crucial to examine a region where sport is deeply woven into daily life. One such region is Manipur, a state in Northeast India. Manipur's geographical area is 22,327 sq. km, comprising only 0.7% of India. The total population of Manipur was 28.56 lakh, as per the 2011 census. The state is rich in biodiversity, as it is situated in the North Eastern India Hotspot, which is in the transitional zone of Indian and Malayan biodiversity (Govt. of Manipur, 2011:273). Manipur is well-known in India for its vibrant sports culture and it is known as sport house of India. The state has a long history of tradition of indigenous games that are closely connected to its social and cultural life. Traditional sports such as Mukna (wrestling) and Sagol kanjei (polo) are connected with community festivals and local practices, showing the deep interrelationship between sport and culture in Manipur. In Manipur, a community which is called a "leikai" has

its own local club to organise sports in many cultural events. The “local club” played a significant role in encouraging sports participation and supporting emerging sports person. This local clubs serve as a social institution that encourage people to get involve in sports and physical activity. This has made sport an integral component of youth culture and community identity in the state (Singh, 2021). While traditional and modern competitive sports have been part of Manipur’s sporting landscape, recent years have witnessed a significant shift toward new form of recreational sporting activity. In particular, long-distance running events, especially half marathon has become increasingly popular recreational activity associated with fitness awareness, personal achievement, and community participation. Studies on marathon participation has shown that individual frequently take part in long-running for various motivations or reasons, such as enhancing health, pursuing personal challenges, and developing social relationships with other runners. (Shipway & Holloway, 2010; Stevinson & Hickson, 2014). In India, over the past decade, there is growing popularity of marathons which events like Tata Mumbai Marathon, Delhi Half Marathon and Bengaluru 10K. In cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru, this is fuelling a growing interest in fitness-driven lifestyles and a more participative sports culture. (Nathan Flear, 2024)

Marathon Culture and the Transformation of Leisure, Identity and Community

Existing literature indicates that long-distance running is not merely a physical activity rather a complex social, cultural, and psychological phenomenon which is shaped by various motivations and social context. Instead of being seen as something purely a personal endeavour, marathon running is now increasingly being looked at as a social activity that reflects bigger shifts in people’s lifestyle, identity and connection with others. In the broader level, studies show running’s reach and its historical importance. Running is among the most popular sports and recreational activities globally, with over 64 million people taking part in the U.S alone in 2016 (Nikolaidis et al., 2018b). From an evolutionary perspective, running has been a fundamental locomotion mode for more than two million years dating back to primitive societies in which land travel required walking or running to travel long distances (Bramble and Lieberman, 2004). However, with the advent of modern means of transportation have lessened the need to run and walk as part of our daily life. Expanding on this foundation, further research focuses on the psychological and experiential aspect of marathon running. Studies proposed that proving the ability to run a marathon race established an important life event for a person, unless this person had already completed many other comparable athletic achievements, and that it could greatly affect one’s beliefs about life in general and potential future achievements (Gorczyca et al., 2016). Participation in active leisure is one of the most crucial parts of healthy behaviour and research have showed that physical activity improves overall psychological well-being (Lawlor and Hopker, 2001; Penedo and Dahn, 2005). In this sense, running serves not just as a physical activity, but also as a coping strategy through which individual handles stress and navigate the pressures of modern life.

While earlier research primarily focused on individual motivations, subsequent studies have also shifted attention on the role of mass participation events in promoting physical activity and public health. For instance, Stevinson and Hickson (2013) have studied park-run as a community-based running initiative and has argue that regular, inclusive and socially embedded events can enhance physical activity levels among participants. This study suggest that such events can attract individuals who were not active previously in their social environment, and sustained engagement, rather than one-time events, becomes a key factor in keeping them involved. Thereby the study contributes to long term behavioural change and improved physical fitness.

Building on this perspective, researcher have further investigated the motivations behind marathon participation, showing that the reasons go beyond individual motivation rather it is influenced by their social context, especially family dynamics and major life changes. Partyka and Waskiewicz (2024) pointed out various factors of motivations which involves intrinsic factors like fun and personal satisfaction, along with extrinsic factors such as achievement and social recognition, the study stresses that intrinsic motivation plays an important role in long-term participation, on the other hand, social and health related factors further help in keeping people involved and engaged. Adding to this, Waszkiewicz et el. (2019) found that health, achievement and psychological benefit play a key role in marathon participation, though depending on factors like age, gender, and experience level. Therefore, these studies shows that marathon running is driven by a complex interplay of health, psychological and social motivation. In addition to motivational factors, qualitative research has provided deeper insight into the lived experiences of runner. For instance, Shipway and Holloway (2010) in their study

provides a deeper understanding of lived experience of runners, so the study shows that running has become a meaningful lifestyle practice rather than simple exercise routine and participant often form a strong sense of identity as a runner and experience significant psychological benefits. Running is also a coping mechanism, a personal strategy of handling modern pressure. This study reveals the growth of serious leisure, where individuals integrate running as a structured and meaningful part of daily life. Recent studies have reconceptualised marathon and running events as an active leisure rather than simply a competitive sport. Hillman et al., (2021) challenged the focus on competition by showing how people choose to take part, enjoy themselves and finding personal meaning showing how such events encourage social interaction, identity formation and well-being. So, their work on parkrun as a “shared leisure space” also show how these events bring people together and create a sense of community. However, while this perspective broadens the analytical lens, it tends to generalise participant’ experiences and does not fully address different cultural settings.

The importance of community and social interaction in running culture is also well-established. Studies have shown that participation help to promotes social bonding and a shared sense of identity. Couture (2021) expands on this by showing how digital platforms sustain running communities which leads to hybrid forms of participation but this growing focus on digital connectivity remains tied to technological advance settings limiting its applicability to less digitally integrated settings. Further extending on this, Banerjee et al. (2024) research explores the emotional and experiential aspects of marathon running and look at how marathon running influence people's identity, personal challenges and psychological contentment. their study shows that running is not merely a physical exercise or sport but rather it holds a deep meaning for participants influences by both internal and external factors. Reflecting the Changing nature of endurance sports participation. Hence, people’s motivations for running do not remain same. Taken together, these studies show that marathon running is driven by a complex interaction of physical, psychological and social influences. However, despite this growing body of literature on marathon running and mass participation events, most studies are heavily concentrated on western context or urban settings with limited attention to regional and cultural variations. In the Indian context, existing studies on marathon participation and sport culture are concentrated on metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Delhi, where organized running events and a fitness culture are more visible (Jaychandran, n.d; Philip, 2018). Furthermore, scholars have pointed out that sociology of sports in India remains an underdeveloped field with significant regional gaps (Tewari, 2025; Patelis, 2023). While marathon participation among Indian youth is rising as a part of emerging leisure and fitness culture (Modi & Vivek, 2018), there is still lack of sociological research, understanding the growing popularity of recreational running and marathon culture in smaller regions like Manipur, so this gap shows the need for a sociological study on the rise of marathon culture in Manipur, particularly, in understanding how global trends in running intersect with local culture, youth participation and community life. This study seeks to examine the rise of marathon culture in Manipur as a socially constructed phenomenon that lies at the junction of culture, identity and community life. Rather than understanding marathon participation as a personal decision, this study positions it under a larger societal context and symbolic dynamics. In order to address this gap, the study uses a theory-driven approach based on Bourdieu’s (1977) “habitus” the study explores how running turns into a practiced, embodied behaviour shaped by dispositions, resources and social positioning. To understand how participation in marathon promotes shared emotional energy and how marathon events can be a space which helps to contribute to social solidarity. So, we use Durkheim’s (1955) concept of “collective effervescence” from his work, “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life”, to understand this aspect. On the other hand, G.H. Mead’s (1934) symbolic interactionism helps us understand how people create meaning and identity through marathon participation, especially as they take on the identity of a runner. Based on these theoretical approaches, the study tries to understand the factors which are contributing the growth of marathon events in Manipur and what motivates the participants and how this growing trend fits into the social and cultural life in Manipur. In doing so, it will also make a contribution to the sociology of sport by presenting a context-specific analysis of marathon culture, showing how global trends in fitness and leisure are reworked within local social worlds.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a mixed approach combining both qualitative and quantitative research technique with a descriptive and analytical method and data were collected through primary and secondary method. Primary data were collected through semi structured interview, participant observation for the qualitative part and

questionnaire for the quantitative part. Secondary data were collected through social media posts or event posters and any other material relevant to this study. Our study adopted a mixed- method approach combining both quantitative and qualitative, the qualitative part of the data was collected through snowball and purposive sampling covering 10 respondents including participants and organiser actively involved in running communities. This sample size was considered adequate as interview were conducted until thematic saturation was achieve, where no new significant theme emerges, allowing for an in-depth understanding of participants’ experiences, meanings, and motivations. Participant observation during marathon events was conducted to understand the pattern of interaction, collective participation, symbolic practices and social atmosphere surrounding marathon events to provide context to supplement the interview narrative. For the quantitative part of data, questionnaire survey was administered to 57 respondents recruited through convenience and snowball sampling using online running group and participant networks. The survey was distributed via marathon focused WhatsApp groups, running communities and personal networks to reached individual actively participating in marathon in Manipur. This design enables both depth and representativeness allowing for meaningful understanding on the topic. For this study, the data was collected over a period of three months, starting from January to march 2026. This time-period was taken because it coincides with many marathon events and running activities in Manipur.

DISCUSSION

Before we look into the main themes from the data, it is important to situate the rise of marathon culture in Manipur in a broader context of contemporary society’s practices of sport, leisure and exercise. Marathon running has gradually have shifted from a purely competitive to a recreational and leisure activity over the time (Shipway & Holloway,2010; Stevinson & Hickson, 2013; Hillman et al., 2021; Partyka & Waśkiewicz, 2024). In Manipur, this transformation is ongoing in a society which already has a rich sporting heritage. The study shows that marathons in Manipur are not merely a fitness trend but a social process shaped by habits, experiences and meaning. Therefore, by combining narratives, Participant observation and quantitative findings with sociological theory, the study showed how running transform lifestyles, identities and community in Manipur

Emergence of marathon culture

The growing number of marathon participation, especially among young participants shows that marathon running in Manipur is moving from a trend to a lasting lifestyle and this fits with Bourdieu’s idea of Habitus which says that repeated actions become part of who we are.

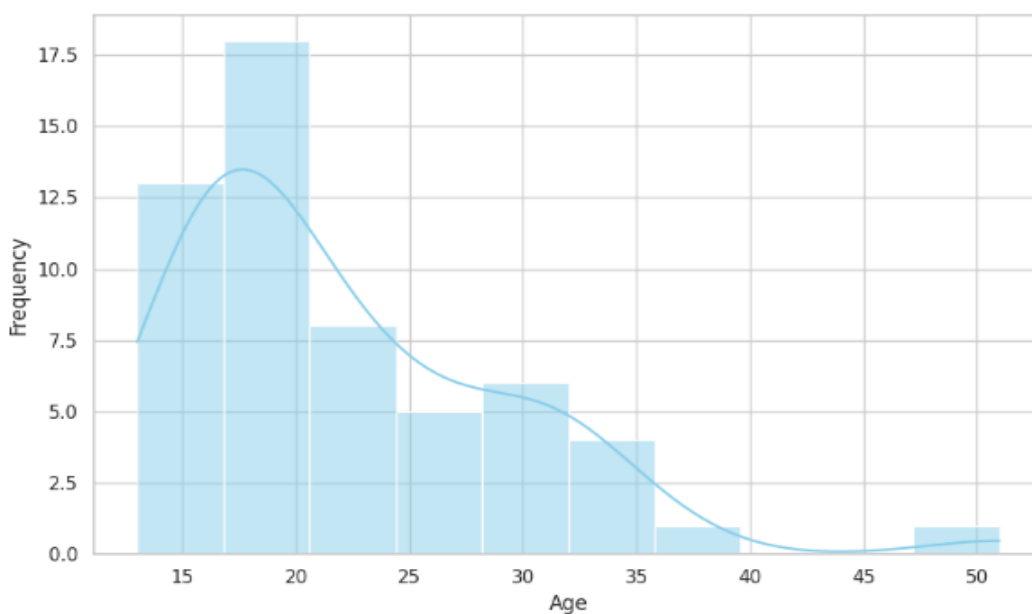
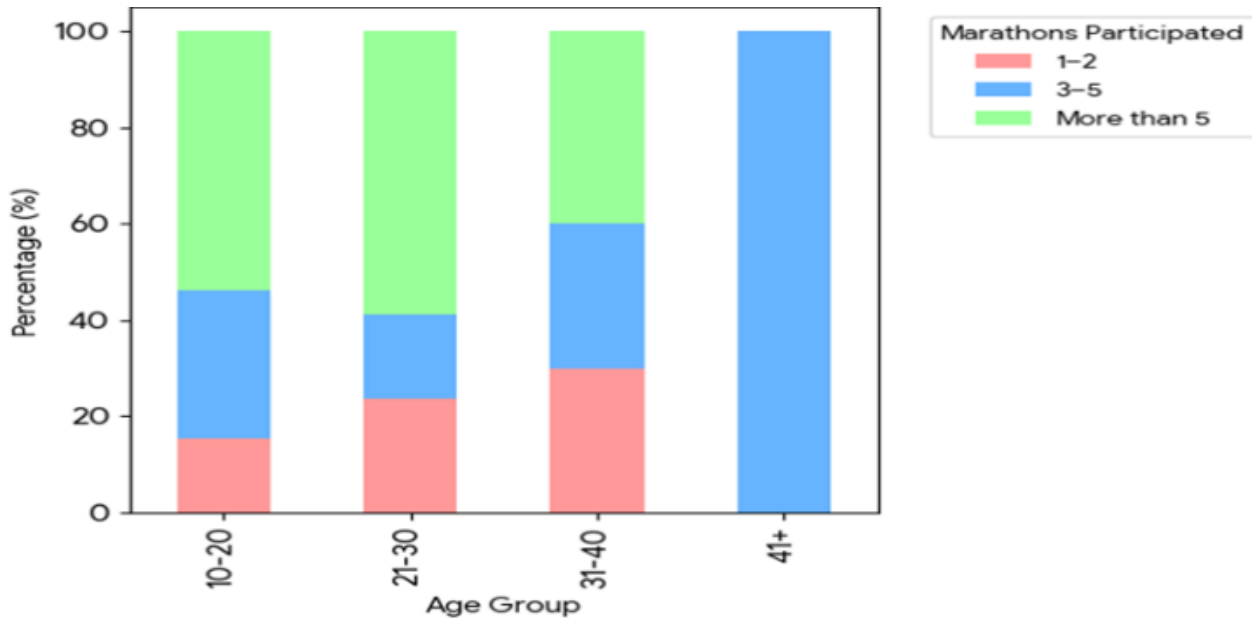


Figure 1: Distribution of Age among Participant

Source: Field data

Figure 2: Marathon participant level by Age group



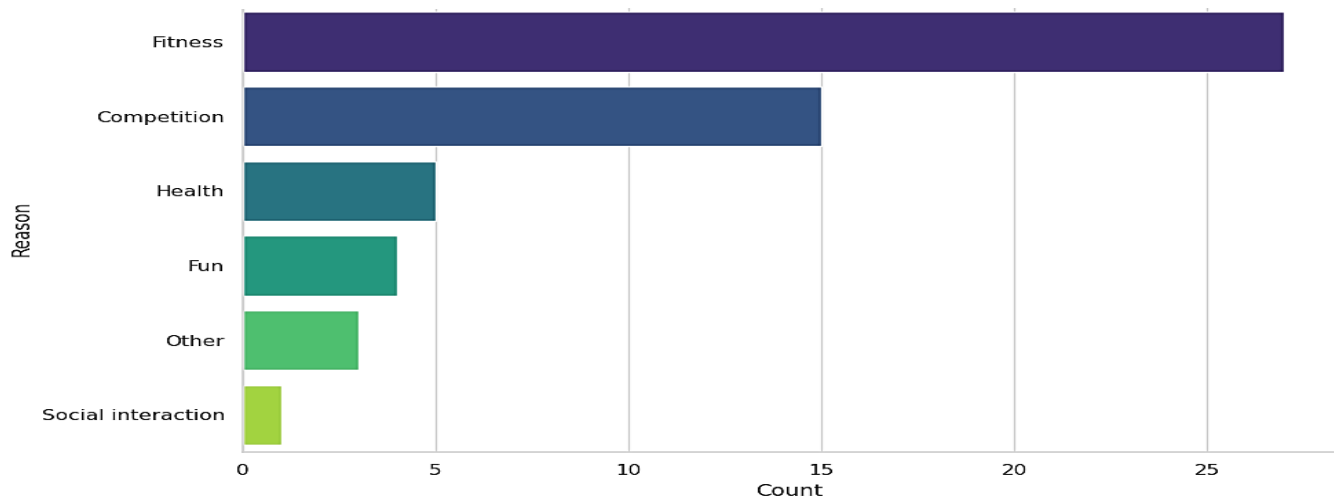
Source: Field data

The finding reveals that marathon participation in Manipur is largely dominated by younger age group (10-30 years) have completed more than five marathon which shows that running is no longer occasional activity and it has become a routine lifestyle practice among youth. This is further supported by the narration from the field, where participant describe that running has become part of daily routine and self-discipline so such pattern that formation of a running habitus where fitness, discipline and self-improvement are embodied over time. However, this habitus is not organically produced alone but rather shaped by new social conditions, particularly the influence of social media such as Facebook group like Manipur Running Team, Team195bpm, Sangai Run, Kakching runners, as well as Instagram pages like @team195bpm, @imphalhalfmarathon, @Forgedrunclubimphal, and through peer network. Marathon event Organisers and runners consistently highlight how their exposure to running content and peer participation encourages individuals to adopt running practices and unlike traditional sporting practices rooted in local institutions, contemporary marathon participation is dominantly influenced by social media visibility which align with broader global trend noted in studies of running culture (Shipway & Holloway, 2010). Thus, this emerging running habitus is not entirely new but it is been built upon pre-existing cultural disposition towards physical activity, as we can see in traditional practices like Lamjel and Yaoshang sports. At the same, the data suggested that this habitus remains fragile and contingent. One of the organisers, Vishal Yumlebam, founder of Team195bpm, a running club based in Imphal, noted that “Manipur has a culture of quitting in the middle... earlier there was a cycling era around 2016–17 where people bought geared cycles, but it disappeared before the pandemic; similarly, gym culture also rose and gradually declined.” (V. Yumlebam, personal interview, April 4, 2026). In conclusion, the future sustainability of marathon culture in Manipur remains uncertain and it raises a question about whether marathon participation represent a lasting lifestyle change or is primarily maintained by novelty, visibility and changing social trend.

Motivation: Beyond Individual Choice to Structure Dispositions

This study pointed out that motivations for marathon participation vary from person to person and are not fixed. These motivations may be personal in nature like fitness, competition, personal fulfillment etc. However marathon participation may appear to be based on individual decision but in reality these motivations are often socially influence rather than purely autonomous.

Figure 3: Reason for running



Source: Field data

To support this argument, the findings show that fitness is the main motivating factor among the participants and gender-based differences were also evident, where men are showing more interest in competition, while some are participating for job aspect like those who are preparing for arm forces job. Women, on the other hand, focuses more on health and enjoyment showing socially shaped gender dispositions in sport participation and field narratives also provide deeper insight on this by showing that motivations are not fixed but change over time. Many of the participants initially they joined due to external influences like peer pressure, social media or their curiosity. however, over time they also started to develop some kind of internal motivations, like wanting to make self-improvement, discipline themselves or overcoming personal challenges through participation.

Len Mayengbam, a regular runner, explained that “In every marathon event, there are always some winners, but at the same time every finisher receives medal and for some they may participate to have a competiton, particularly those for the professional runners, but for runners like us, it is all about improving our pace and challenging the previous performance, so it becomes more of a ‘me vs me’ challenge” (L. Mayengbam, personal interview, April 9, 2026). The runner’s narrative pointed toward the shift from externally motivated participation to internalised commitment, where running is not limited to competitive activity but becomes part of personal commitment.

This supplement the existing work (Stevinson and Hickson,2013; Partyka and waskiewicz,2024) as they claimed that long-term participation in running is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Alongside these motivations, the data also further indicate a serious tension between intrinsic motivation and commodification like the growing emphasis on running gear and other material aspects indicating that participation is rooted within consumer culture, where belonging to running communities may depend on economic investment raising the question of accessibility and inequality, which is often ignored or overlooked in positive accounts of marathon culture.

Moreover, symbolic rewards like medals, certificates and other forms of recognition function as expressions of symbolic capital which reinforces participants’ sense of achievement and social value. Such rewards encourage long term participation, showing that motivation is closely interrelated with systems of recognition and status systems.

Marathon as a Space of Collective Effervescence and Social Integration

One of the important aspects of the findings is that marathon events function as a site of intense energy and solidarity generated during collective gathering which align with Durkheim concept of collective effervescence.

Figure 4: Participant responses regarding the role of marathon events in fostering social unity.

Source: Field data



The finding shows that 96% of respondent believe marathon bring people together, which highlight the centrality of social cohesion and through participant observation during the Imphal Half Marathon 1st Edition which was organised by Team19bpm on, 8 February 2026 (Team195bpm, 2026), the researcher could directly see how marathon events help to create a powerful sense of collective participation and emotional solidarity among runners and spectators. Runner of all age including children, youth, middle aged adults and elderly runners, actively interacted, motivated and supported each other throughout the entire event. During field observation, the researcher could see that younger runners often encouraged the older participants as they approached the finishing line, reflecting a sense of collective encouragement and intergenerational support. For example, when an elderly woman runner was nearing the finish line, she was cheered by the crowd with a slogan like “Show the Meitei Chanu power,” invoking the cultural image of the strength and resilience associated with Meitei women. Such moments not only motivated the runner but also demonstrated how marathon spaces can become a site for expressing ethnic pride and gender identity. Furthermore, spectators and participants were seen constantly encouraging one another throughout the race, creating an atmosphere of solidarity rather than just individual competition. These interactions provide evidence of shared emotional experiences, mutual encouragement and intergenerational interaction, representing how marathon events can create temporary yet meaningful forms of solidarity and foster a sense of unity and belonging. Interview data reinforces this, with participants noting that individual from different profession, ethnic group and social backgrounds interact freely in marathon space. In Manipur, where ethnic tensions and identity divisions are significant, marathon events functions as spaces of symbolic integration, where individual “run as one”, which transcend the everyday social divisions. Here this aligns closely with Durkheim’s idea that collective rituals reinforce social solidarity. Furthermore, the thematic orientation of many marathon events such as promoting peace, anti-drug awareness and environmental protection extend this collective effervescence into moral and civic domains. Running thus becomes a ritualised practice through which collective values are expressed and reinforced.

Meaning, Identity and the social construction of the “Runner”

The findings also strongly support Mead’s (1934) symbolic interactionism, which emphasises how individuals construct meaning and identity through social interaction. Participant consistently describe running as more than physical activity so it has become a meaningful practice through which they define themselves. Many explicitly state that being a “runner” has become part of their identity which influences their routines, habits and self-perception. Thus, reflecting Mead’s idea that the self is constructed through social emerges processes of recognition and interpretation. Marathon events provide a symbolic environment where meaning is continuously negotiated. For instance, the medals and certificates symbolise achievement and recognition, running gear signifies commitment and belonging to a fitness-oriented community and social media posts reinforces identity

as a runner. Therefore, these symbols contribute to the construction of shared “runner identity”, which is both individually experienced and socially validated. Importantly, interaction within the marathon spaces also shapes behaviour. Participants report that running encourages them to abandon unhealthy habits and adopt disciplined lifestyles. Thus, this transformation is evident in runner’s personal narratives. Rina Thounazam described how participating in the marathon gradually fostered behavioural changes, leading to a healthier routine within the marathon culture. She narrates that “when we join such marathon events with bad habits that may sleeping late, drinking alcohol, smoking we can’t run much,” and seeing participant of similar age or even older age groups perform better motivates runners to leave unhealthy habits and adopt more healthier, more discipline lifestyle” (R. Thounazam, personal interview, April 13, 2026). Similarly, Len Mayengbam describes how running helped reduce stress and reorganise her daily schedule while preparing for competitive exam. She mentioned that after regular running, “I don’t have time to overthink at night and I naturally feel sleepy” (L. Mayengbam, personal interview, April 9, 2026), highlighting how running became integrated into everyday self-discipline and emotional well-being. Thus, this shows how meaning attached to running such as health, discipline and self-improvement translate into behavioural change through social interaction.

Community Engagement, Institutional Support and Structuration

Figure 5: 4th ‘Run Chandel Run’ Marathon Held Fostering Peace and Harmony



Source: Ukhrul times



Figure 6: Participants at the Gunchu Marathon In Kangpokpi.

Source: INDIA TODAY NE

Marathon culture in Manipur is not only socially constructed but it is also institutionally supported and structured. Participant observation and secondary data reveal that involvement of government bodies, police, local clubs and sponsors in organising events. This shows the increasing use of sports as a tool for public health promotion and social regulation. Post-race health awareness programmes and anti-drug campaigns shows how marathon events are mobilised to promote normative ideals of healthy and disciplined citizenship so this aligns with broader sociological argument that sports can function as a mechanism of biopolitical governance, shaping individual behaviour in line with societal goals. However, this also raises critical concerns. The emphasis on health and discipline may inadvertently marginalise those who are unable to participate due to physical, economic or social constraints. Thus, while marathon culture promotes inclusion at one level, it may also produce new form of exclusion. This exclusion becomes visible through the material and lifestyle expectations increasingly connected with marathon participation. Participant Observation also reveals that many runners used branded running shoes such as New Balance, Nike, Adidas and fitness accessories such as smart watch, trackers, highlighting the increasing impact of consumer culture on the dynamics of running communities. These branded products serve as symbolic indicators of belonging to a higher socio-economic class, implying not only commitment to fitness but also distinction within the running communities. This is evident in field interviews, for instance, in the words of the runner, Len Mayengbam, who stated that people tend to avoid participation in marathons since they believe that they need high end running shoes before they can join and she also says, in particular, that in her social circles; her friends would often say that “only after getting costly shoes” they would join, which shows how access to marathon culture is shaped by economic consideration (L. Mayengbam 2026, Personal Interview) and another runner, Rina Thounazam added that one needs to be capable to maintain appropriate diet and running clothes to keep going, stating that “I can afford my diet and shoes” (R. Thounazam 2026, Personal Interview). All these observations lead to the conclusion that despite being accessible to everyone, participating in a marathon becomes easier for people with advantageous socio-economic background and flexible lifestyle. At the same time, the increasing focus on discipline, fitness, and self-regulation might alienate people who cannot satisfy these requirements owing to their employment and family obligations, lack of financial resources, or poor health condition. In this way, it suggests that marathon culture may not only be fostering collective well-being and civic health, but it is also subtly promoting certain social differences associated with physical capabilities, economic resources and lifestyle choices.

Structural Constraints and the Question of Sustainability

Now talking about its rapid growth in the region, marathon culture in Manipur faces many problems like financial constraints, organisational limitations and uneven event quality. Participants' have shown pointed out about the poor management during the marathon events, showing the marathon event's organisers flaws and these challenges are serious because when runners experience such problems during the events it may discourage constant participation particularly for those first-timer which may become the trend killer. Also, the dependence on social media visibility and trend dynamics raises question about long term sustainability. As organisers themselves mentioned about the previous fitness trends in Manipur have declined over time, such narration also pointing toward the marathon culture which is on rise in Manipur may also be subject to such decline in trend, so the future remains uncertain.

Observing Marathon culture from a sociological lens

In the context of Manipur, the growth of marathon culture can be viewed as part of the broader changes in community dynamics and social relationship in Manipur. So, moving beyond its growth and structural limitations, the rise of marathon culture in Manipur show a broader change in community life and social relationships, making marathon events not only spaces for participation but also spaces where new forms of social interaction, belonging, and collective identity are formed and expressed. At one level, marathon events encourage new forms of social interaction that go beyond traditional social boundaries. They bring together people from different professions, age groups, and ethnic communities without the usual social hierarchies and distinctions. This temporary suspension of social division can be understood as a form of collective effervescence, a concept by Durkheim, where shared participation creates a sense of unity and shared emotions that strengthens social relationship. Therefore, these marathon events represent a modern and secular form of collective gathering based on leisure and shared purpose. From the perspective of Mead, this marathon events are playing an important role in the construction of meaning and self. Participants do not simply engage in running but they also make participation part of a larger narrative of self-improvement, discipline and social connection. The repeated interactions within the marathon space help create a shared identity as runners, which is strengthened through collective participation, mutual encouragement and symbolic rewards. Furthermore, marathon culture mirrors a changing attitude toward the body, health and lifestyle in modern society. The growing focus on fitness, discipline and well-being signals a shift toward a more health-conscious and self-regulated way of life, where individual actively transform their bodies as a part of self-improvement. This is evident in participants' choices to give up unhealthy habits, manage stress and adopt structure routines through running. These practices show how marathon culture is part of a broader process of lifestyle transformation and self-discipline. However, this transformation is not without its contradictions. While marathon events encourage inclusivity and collective participation, they also create new forms of differentiation linked to access, experience and commitment. As participation become increasingly associated with particular lifestyles and practices, the running community may develop its own internal hierarchies, even though it appears equal on the surface and a closer examination of the data also reveals subtle but important class-based differentiation in participation. Participant Observation showed that runners frequently use branded athletic gear and indicating that participation is associated with particular consumption practices and this was further supported by field narrative, where respondent noted that some individuals hesitate to join marathon events without first getting proper running shoes. This suggest that economic factors influence participation so people belonging from lower class or poor people it becomes a question of accessibility to those marathon event. Extending on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, this pattern suggests that participation in a given culture is shaped not only by personal motivation but also by unequal access to resources and broader social structures. Participation in running demands not only physical commitment but also familiarity with fitness practices, access to appropriate gear and the support needed to maintain such a routine. As a result, participation in marathons becomes easier for those individual with greater economic and social advantages. In addition, these dynamic fosters a subtle hierarchy within the running community, where regular participation, performance and access to proper gear become markers of commitment and status. Thus, although marathons may appear open and inclusive, they simultaneously reflect underlying social inequalities, demonstrating that class continues to influence participation even in recreational and community-based spaces.

CONCLUSION

The discussion suggests that the phenomenon of marathon culture in Manipur is not just about sport but a complex social phenomenon related to culture, identity and community life. From different sociological perspective, marathon participation may be regarded as something that is socially structured, individually experienced and symbolically constructed so making marathon spaces an important site for understanding contemporary social change in the region. The findings also indicates that how this rise of marathon culture in Manipur is shaped by the ongoing interaction between global trends and the region's sporting traditions. Social media, peer network and fitness-focused lifestyle have further promoted participation in Manipur. Marathan events also act as a powerful form of collective solidarity, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds through shared experience and emotional energy. Concurrently, the study reveal that marathon culture reflects broader social shift toward health awareness, self-improvement, and lifestyle change, aligning closely with global scholarship on running culture (Shipway & Holloway, 2010; Hillman et al., 2021, Partyka, & Waśkiewicz, 2024), our findings suggest that running has increasingly become an important lifestyle practice which closely connected with personal identity, well-being and community belonging. However, we also argue that marathon culture contains internal contradictions as unequal access to resources, fitness knowledge and consumer practices produce subtle class-based inequalities. Overall, this study contributes to sport studies by offering a context-specific understanding of marathon culture in Manipur is largely missing in existing scholarship. It shows how global fitness and running practices are adapted and reinterpreted within Manipur's specific cultural and social landscape.

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