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SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN ATHLETES: A NARRATIVE REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE-RELATED BENEFITS AND RISKS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Social media is now a routine part of athletes' informational, commercial and interpersonal environment, but its implications for performance are heterogeneous. This narrative review evaluates how social media may affect performance-related determinants in athletes — including nutrition, sleep, mental health, physical activity and recovery-related behaviours — rather than competitive outcomes directly.

Materials and methods: Targeted literature searches were conducted in PubMed, Google Scholar and publisher databases, supplemented by reference checking. Priority was given to reviews, meta-analyses, consensus statements and athlete-specific studies published up to 6 May 2026.

Results: Social media may support education, motivation, social support and personal-brand development. However, problematic or poorly regulated use may expose athletes to misinformation, social comparison, cyberaggression, body-image pressure, sleep disruption, mental fatigue and sedentary displacement. The strongest evidence concerns associations rather than direct causation, and athlete-specific longitudinal data remain limited.

Conclusions: Social media should be treated as a modifiable environmental factor in sport. Controlled, purposeful use, digital literacy, source verification and sleep-protective routines are preferable to either uncritical adoption or simple prohibition.

KEYWORDS

Social Media; Athletic Performance; Mental Health; Sleep; Nutrition; Physical Activity

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1. Introduction

Social media platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook and X, have become embedded in everyday communication, education, entertainment and commercial activity. As of April 2026, industry estimates described approximately 5.79 billion active social media user identities globally; these figures are derived from platform-reported user accounts and may include duplicate or non-human accounts, so they should not be interpreted as a precise count of unique individuals (DataReportal, 2026). For athletes, this digital environment is not external to sport; it intersects with training culture, nutrition information, recovery behaviour, sponsorship, public identity and interpersonal support.

Athletic performance depends on physiological adaptation, technical skill, recovery, sleep, nutrition and psychological resilience, all shaped by the quality of the surrounding training environment. Social media touches most of these determinants at once. A 90-second scroll before practice can deliver an evidence-based mobility cue from a qualified coach and, in the next post, a fasted-training claim from an influencer with no credentials.

The current evidence does not justify a simple conclusion that social media is either beneficial or harmful for athletes. The effect probably depends on the pattern of use, timing, content type, individual vulnerability, sport discipline, age, gender, disability status, competitive level and the quality of support provided by coaches, parents and health professionals. This distinction is important because cross-sectional associations between digital media use and outcomes such as sleep quality, anxiety or body dissatisfaction do not automatically prove causality.

The aim of this narrative review was to synthesize current evidence on the potential impact of social media on athletes' performance, with particular emphasis on nutrition, sleep, mental health and physical activity-related health. The practical objective was to identify modifiable risks and useful recommendations for athletes and support teams.

Previous reviews have addressed individual aspects of this question — athlete nutrition information on social media (Nath et al., 2024) and athlete mental health and digital media (Merrill & Faustin, 2023) — but have not integrated nutrition, sleep, mental health, physical activity and the branding environment within a single performance-oriented framework. The novel contribution of this review is fourfold: (i) it organises five performance-relevant pathways into a single mechanistic synthesis (Table 1); (ii) it introduces a four-level evidence-strength rubric tailored to athlete-specific data versus transferable general-population evidence; (iii) it explicitly addresses platform differences, sex/gender moderation and Name-Image-Likeness pressures, which earlier athlete-focused reviews treated only marginally; and (iv) it translates the evidence into a concrete checklist for support teams.

2. Materials and Methods

This article is a narrative review with a structured but non-systematic search. Literature was identified through targeted searches of PubMed/MEDLINE, Google Scholar and the publisher databases of Wolters Kluwer, Elsevier, Springer Nature, Wiley, BMJ Journals and MDPI. Searches were conducted between January and May 2026, with the final literature check performed on 6 May 2026. The search combined population terms ("athlete*", "elite athlete", "collegiate athlete", "para-athlete", "e-sport") with exposure terms ("social media", "Instagram", "TikTok", "smartphone use", "screen time", "problematic internet use") and outcome terms ("sport performance", "nutrition", "diet", "sleep", "mental health", "anxiety", "depression", "body image", "mental fatigue", "physical activity", "sedentary behaviour", "recovery") using Boolean operators (AND between domains, OR within domains). Reference lists of all included reviews and consensus statements were hand-screened for additional relevant sources. To reduce database-coverage bias and capture regional sport-science scholarship that is inconsistently indexed in the major commercial databases, journals affiliated with the Academic Platform of Journals (Quality in Sport, Journal of Education, Health and Sport, Pedagogy and Psychology of Sport) were additionally searched using the platform's keyword interface; identified records were screened against the same eligibility criteria as those retrieved from the primary databases. Only English-language sources were considered.

Inclusion criteria were: (i) peer-reviewed original studies, systematic reviews, meta-analyses or expert consensus statements; (ii) addressing at least one performance-relevant pathway (nutrition behaviour, sleep quality, psychological functioning, mental fatigue, social support, body image, physical activity or sedentary behaviour); (iii) published in English; (iv) full text available. Athlete-specific evidence was prioritised; studies in broader populations were included when athlete-specific evidence was unavailable but the mechanism was plausibly transferable to sport. Exclusion criteria were: conference abstracts without full text, opinion pieces and editorials without empirical content, non-English sources, and studies in clinical populations unrelated to athletic performance. Titles and abstracts were screened by the first two authors (A.D., J.B.); full texts of potentially eligible records were assessed against the criteria above, and disagreements were resolved by discussion with a third author (P.M.). The final corpus included 41 sources (see Reference list).

This is not a systematic review: no protocol was registered, no formal risk-of-bias tool was applied, no meta-analysis was conducted, and the search was structured but not exhaustive. The review should therefore be interpreted as an integrative narrative synthesis rather than a quantitative estimate of effect size. Strength of evidence per pathway (Table 1) was rated narratively by author consensus on a four-level scale — Strong (multiple converging meta-analyses or consensus statements with athlete-specific data), Moderate (consistent systematic reviews or several primary athlete studies), Indirect (evidence largely from non-athlete populations, mechanism plausibly transferable) and Limited (few primary studies, or evidence only from cross-sectional designs) — adapted from common evidence-grading conventions but not equivalent to a formal GRADE assessment.

Table 1. Mechanistic synthesis of social media-related pathways relevant to athletic performance

Pathway	Potential benefits	Potential risks	Evidence strength	Practical implication
Nutrition information	Rapid access to recipes, sport-nutrition education, hydration and recovery ideas.	Misinformation, commercial bias, restrictive diets, unnecessary supplements and body-comparison pressure.	Moderate; athlete-specific nutrition-information data are available, while eating-disorder mechanisms are partly indirect.	Promote dietitian-led source verification and discourage unsupervised restrictive protocols.
Sleep and recovery	Educational sleep-hygiene content and access to relaxation or coping resources.	Delayed bedtime, increased arousal, notification-driven awakenings, rumination and reduced sleep opportunity.	Moderate to strong for sleep-performance importance; emerging athlete-specific evidence for social media and sleep.	Use pre-sleep digital boundaries, notification control and individualized sleep routines.
Mental health and cognitive load	Social support, communication with family and teammates, reduced isolation and easier access to professional resources.	Mental fatigue, cyberbullying, social comparison, anxiety, depressive symptoms and attentional distraction.	Moderate; many associations are cross-sectional, but performance-relevant mechanisms are plausible.	Screen for problematic use and integrate boundaries into psychological support plans.
Physical activity and sedentary behaviour	Motivation, self-monitoring, coaching communication and exposure to training ideas.	Displacement of training, recovery and face-to-face interaction; prolonged sedentary screen time.	Indirect to moderate; much evidence comes from general-population health-behaviour studies.	Focus on opportunity cost: purposeful scheduled use is preferable to prolonged passive scrolling.
Branding and social environment	Sponsorship, career visibility, community-building and athlete voice.	Pressure to maintain public image, hostile comments, reputational stress and performance distraction.	Limited but highly relevant for visible athletes.	Define role-specific communication plans and protect athletes during high-pressure periods.

Note: Evidence strength is expressed narratively because the review was not designed to calculate pooled effect sizes. “Indirect” indicates evidence derived mainly from general populations or health-behaviour studies and applied cautiously to athlete-relevant mechanisms.

3. Social Media and Nutrition

Nutrition is a key determinant of training adaptation, body composition, recovery, immune function and competition readiness. Social media has become a common nutrition-information source for athletes. Cross-sectional evidence shows that athletes use social media to access nutrition-related content, which underlines the relevance of these platforms in everyday sport practice (Bourke et al., 2019). Reviews also indicate that social media can influence athletes’ diet, lifestyle and performance, but that the quality of information is inconsistent (Nath et al., 2024).

The beneficial role of social media is mainly related to accessibility and immediacy. Recipes, meal-prep walkthroughs and recovery-snack ideas posted by registered dietitians or sport-science professionals are now within easy reach of any athlete with a phone. Social media-based interventions have also been associated with improvements in diet and physical activity behaviours in randomized trials in broader populations (Williams et al., 2014). For athletes with limited direct access to a sports dietitian, carefully selected content may therefore have educational value.

However, nutrition information on social media is highly vulnerable to commercial influence and oversimplification. Influencer content may promote restrictive diets, unnecessary supplements, exaggerated claims or aesthetic ideals that are not aligned with health or performance. Athletes may have difficulty distinguishing credible evidence-based nutrition advice from unsupported online claims (Nath et al., 2024). This is clinically relevant because inappropriate restriction, inadequate energy availability or supplement misuse may impair training quality and recovery.

Social media may also contribute to disordered eating risk through body comparison and internalization of appearance ideals. Reviews have described associations between social media exposure and dietary behaviours among children and adolescents (Sina et al., 2022), and an integrative review reported links

between social media use and binge eating (Kim & Mackert, 2022). More recent work on orthorexia nervosa indicates that social media may be connected with pathological preoccupation with healthy eating, although the evidence base still includes important methodological limitations (Awad et al., 2026). Relationships among social media-related variables, orthorexia and weight-related self-stigma in youth have also been reported (Toğuş & Hökelek, 2025).

Filtering matters more than abstinence here. Athletes who learn to read nutrition content critically gain a tool; athletes who are told to disengage entirely find the content elsewhere, often without supervision. Diet-related information should be evaluated according to the author's credentials, transparency of conflicts of interest, consistency with sports nutrition guidelines and relevance to the athlete's sport, training load, age and medical status. Coaches should avoid reinforcing appearance-driven dietary behaviours and should encourage referral to qualified professionals when an athlete shows restrictive eating, compulsive tracking or distress around body composition.

4. Social Media and Sleep

Sleep is among the most consistently studied recovery variables in elite sport. Restricting sleep over a single night has been associated with reduced reaction time and decision accuracy in trained athletes, and chronic curtailment appears to compound those losses across a training block. Consensus recommendations for athletes emphasize the central role of sleep in health, training adaptation and competition performance (Walsh et al., 2021; Cook & Charest, 2023). Reviews of sleep and athletic performance further show that sleep loss can impair physical, physiological and cognitive responses to exercise (Fullagar et al., 2015; Craven et al., 2022). Dietary factors may also interact with sleep quality in trained populations (Barnard et al., 2022).

Social media can disturb sleep through several pathways. Evening platform use may delay bedtime, reduce sleep opportunity, increase cognitive and emotional arousal and expose the athlete to notifications, conflict or performance-related criticism close to sleep onset. Broader evidence links social media use with sleep and mental-health outcomes (Ahmed et al., 2024), and this mechanism is particularly relevant in athletes because recovery windows are often constrained by early training sessions, travel and competition schedules.

Athlete-specific studies also support concern about sleep: social media use has been associated with sleep quality and performance among collegiate athletes (Watkins et al., 2022), while sleep quality and quantity have been related to athletes' health and perceived training quality (Hamlin et al., 2021). Studies of elite athletes have also shown that sleep-wake behaviour is shaped by training, lifestyle and environmental factors (de Blasiis et al., 2021). In e-sport athletes, observed sleep-wake characteristics are consistent with the broader concern that intensive digital engagement may disrupt circadian routines (Gomes et al., 2021).

We hypothesise that the pre-competition period is especially exposed to these effects, although direct studies are scarce. The clinical logic is straightforward: an athlete who checks comments, rankings, opponents' posts or media reactions in the hour before sleep is loading cognitive and emotional input precisely when arousal needs to fall. Direction of the effect will not be uniform — some athletes draw confidence from supportive messages, others lose sleep over a single hostile comment — and this individual variability is itself a research priority.

A practical sleep strategy should therefore focus on timing and content rather than on blanket prohibition. Athletes should be encouraged to establish a pre-sleep digital boundary, disable nonessential notifications, avoid emotionally activating content at night and use devices outside the bed when possible. Social media can also be used positively to disseminate sleep-hygiene education, relaxation exercises and recovery literacy, provided it does not become another source of late-night stimulation.

5. Social Media and Mental Health

Mental health is closely linked to training adherence, recovery, rehabilitation and career longevity. Athletes face stressors that are uncommon in many other occupations — selection day, public evaluation by strangers, body-composition demands and the persistent possibility that injury ends a career. Access to and attitudes toward mental-health help-seeking remain important issues in athlete populations, which means that digital environments can either reduce or intensify barriers to support (Brown et al., 2025).

Problematic social media use has been associated with depression, anxiety, poorer well-being and sleep problems in broader populations (Ahmed et al., 2024; Karim et al., 2020). In sport, plausible mechanisms include social comparison with competitors, exposure to criticism, cyberbullying, compulsive checking, fear of missing out, public pressure to maintain a personal brand and difficulty separating private recovery time from public performance identity. These mechanisms may be amplified in adolescent athletes, who appear

particularly sensitive to peer evaluation and social-comparison pressures during adolescence. Recent athlete-specific evidence supports this: in a sample of 362 adolescent athletes, social-media addiction was directly associated with negative emotions, with physical-appearance comparisons and sleep quality serving as mediating pathways (Lin et al., 2025).

Mental fatigue is a performance-relevant pathway. In a randomised crossover study of 21 amateur boxers, 30 minutes of smartphone-based social media use before a simulated bout reduced decision-making accuracy without affecting countermovement jump performance (Fortes et al., 2023). The sample was small and discipline-specific, but the pattern — cognitive cost without obvious physical cost — matters for any sport that depends on rapid perception-action coupling, tactical judgment or inhibitory control. Even if social media does not directly reduce strength or endurance, it may influence performance by reducing attentional resources before training or competition. This has practical implications for pre-competition routines, where many athletes habitually use their phones to manage anxiety or pass time in waiting areas; substituting that habit with structured visualisation, breathing or low-stimulation activities may preserve the cognitive resources needed for the opening minutes of competition.

Body image is another relevant pathway. Athletes are exposed to both sport-specific and appearance-specific ideals, and social media may intensify comparison. Athletes with physical disabilities navigate body image through a particularly complex sociocultural lens; qualitative work shows that sport itself can be an important vehicle for body-related pride, with the body parts that enable competition becoming central to athletic identity (Galli et al., 2016). Social media may therefore interact with this pathway in distinctive ways, although direct empirical evidence on social-media use specifically in para-athletes remains limited — a clear research gap given the visibility demands placed on this population.

Social media can nevertheless support mental health when it strengthens connectedness, peer support and access to professional resources. Online contact with family, teammates and supportive communities may reduce isolation during travel, injury rehabilitation or relocation. Social support has been associated with better mental-health outcomes in athletes (Luo et al., 2025). The pattern of use also matters: in youth athletes, passive social-network use (scrolling, browsing without interaction) was associated with higher anxiety and lower subjective well-being, with upward social comparison mediating both effects (Zhang et al., 2023). The key distinction is therefore between supportive, intentional engagement and passive, comparison-driven engagement. From a practitioner's perspective, this distinction is operationally useful: it shifts the conversation away from total screen time and toward the quality and intent of each interaction, which is a far more tractable target for behavioural change. Coaches and clinicians can then frame digital habits in the same way they already frame nutrition or sleep hygiene — not as something to eliminate, but as something to structure.

6. Social Media, Physical Health and Activity Behaviour

Used well, social media can support training: athletes pick up new drills, share progress with coaches and use public posts as accountability against missed sessions. Reviews suggest that social media-based interventions can promote physical activity in some populations (Günther et al., 2021), and interventions have been studied in relation to weight reduction and activity improvement among healthy adults (Shiyab et al., 2023). Social media interventions targeting exercise and diet behaviours may also be relevant for people with noncommunicable diseases (McKeon et al., 2022).

For athletes, these mechanisms may be beneficial when content is evidence-based, technically appropriate and integrated into a structured training plan. Videos may help athletes learn drills, monitor technique, communicate with coaches or build accountability. Public sharing of progress can also reinforce adherence. However, social media is not a substitute for individualized coaching, medical assessment or physiotherapy, and exercise demonstrations online may be unsuitable for an injured athlete or for a specific sport context.

Excessive social media use may displace physical activity, recovery behaviours and face-to-face interaction. Prolonged screen time is a major component of sedentary behaviour. Sedentary behaviour has been associated with anxiety across age groups (Stanczykiewicz et al., 2019), cardiovascular risk (Wu et al., 2022), noncommunicable diseases and all-cause mortality (Wu et al., 2023). These findings come mostly from broader populations and should not be applied mechanically to trained athletes, but they remain relevant when screen time replaces movement, sleep or active recovery.

A broad review across multiple countries suggested that intensive social media use is associated with poorer outcomes in physical, mental, social, emotional and sleep domains (Behera et al., 2025). In athletes, the most plausible concern is behavioural displacement: excessive scrolling may reduce time available for mobility

work, meal preparation, sleep, rehabilitation exercises or focused practice. It may also increase exposure to unrealistic training claims and encourage premature changes to training plans.

Therefore, physical-health effects should be evaluated according to opportunity cost. A short, purposeful use of social media to obtain a training reminder or communicate with a coach is different from prolonged, unplanned use that delays bedtime or replaces recovery. Support teams should ask not only how much time an athlete spends online, but also when, why and with what emotional effect.

7. Platform Differences, Sponsorship and the Athlete-Branding Environment

The term "social media" aggregates platforms with materially different affordances, audiences and risk profiles, and treating them as a single exposure is one of the main limitations of the current evidence base. Image-centric platforms such as Instagram are most consistently associated with appearance-focused social comparison and body-image concerns (Fardouly et al., 2015; Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019), short-video platforms such as TikTok attract heavy use among young people and have been examined as a candidate for problematic-use patterns (Montag et al., 2021), and fitness-tracking platforms such as Strava can support training adherence but also encourage maladaptive comparison among endurance athletes (Stragier et al., 2018).

Sex and gender are important moderators that are often under-reported in athlete samples. Female athletes appear more vulnerable to appearance-related social comparison, internalisation of the thin or athletic ideal and disordered-eating risk, while male athletes more frequently report muscularity-oriented body dissatisfaction and supplement-related risk behaviours (Holland & Tiggemann, 2017; Karsay et al., 2018), although much of this evidence is not athlete-specific and is drawn partly from general-population samples. Reviewers and clinicians should therefore avoid generalising findings from mixed cohorts to either group.

Sponsorship and Name-Image-Likeness (NIL) arrangements have intensified the commercial demands placed on athletes, particularly at collegiate and developmental levels in jurisdictions where such arrangements are now permitted. Empirical work indicates that the value college athletes capture from NIL is substantially driven by social-media presence: a Sport Management Review analysis of student-athlete social-media accounts established that follower engagement is a primary determinant of NIL valuation (Kunkel et al., 2021), and follow-up work has shown that homophily and parasocial relationships predict that engagement (Su et al., 2023). The obligation to maintain follower counts, post on schedule and respond publicly to criticism can extend the working day into recovery windows, increase pre-competition arousal and create new conflicts between brand obligations and training priorities. Coaches, agents and clubs share responsibility for ensuring that branding activity does not displace sleep, recovery or psychological support, and for safeguarding junior athletes from disproportionate online exposure.

Finally, the wider digital environment around the athlete — fan commentary, sponsor expectations and coach communication — deserves explicit attention. A literature review of athlete social-media use identified body image, stress, sleep, performance and personal connection as the recurring outcomes shaped by this environment (Merrill & Faustin, 2023). Support teams should therefore consider their own digital conduct, and the conduct they tolerate around an athlete, as part of the performance setting rather than as background noise.

8. Practical Recommendations for Athletes and Support Teams

Treat digital literacy as a performance-support skill: athletes need to verify credentials, spot advertising and sponsorship, recognise exaggerated claims and tell professional advice from personal anecdote. Nutrition and supplement choices in particular belong with a qualified professional — especially for adolescent athletes, those competing in weight-sensitive sports and anyone with a history of disordered eating.

Building digital rules into the sleep routine costs nothing. A pre-sleep buffer, muted nonessential notifications, no hostile or emotionally activating content at night and keeping the bed for sleep rather than scrolling all map onto recovery programmes that already exist; clinicians do not have to invent anything new.

Protecting mental health takes boundaries and active monitoring. Compulsive checking, distress after online interactions, lost sleep, body dissatisfaction, training distraction, secrecy and an inability to cut back despite negative consequences are the warning signs worth naming explicitly. Athletes should know how to report cyberbullying, restrict comments, mute harmful accounts and reach psychological support without stigma.

Finally, intentional use beats reactive use. Education, sponsorship and community engagement are legitimate reasons to be online; fragmenting attention across the training day, by contrast, costs more than it returns. Clubs that require junior athletes to maintain a constant public presence should be prepared to provide the safeguarding and media education that come with that demand.

A short practical checklist for clubs, coaches and support staff follows. (1) Establish a written social-media policy that distinguishes mandatory club content from optional personal posting, especially for junior athletes. (2) Build a 60-minute pre-sleep digital buffer into the daily recovery routine and disable nonessential notifications during that window. (3) Route nutrition and supplement questions to a registered dietitian rather than to influencer content; flag accounts that promote restrictive eating or unsupported supplements. (4) Screen athletes periodically for warning signs of problematic use — compulsive checking, distress after online interactions, sleep loss, body dissatisfaction, training distraction, secrecy, inability to cut back. (5) Provide a clear pathway for reporting cyberbullying and restricting hostile accounts, with explicit psychological-support contact points. (6) Train coaches and support staff in their own digital conduct, recognising that what they tolerate around an athlete becomes part of the athlete's environment. (7) For sponsored or NIL athletes, schedule branding obligations around — not into — training and recovery windows, and document expectations contractually. (8) Review and update the policy at least annually, since platforms, content patterns and the regulatory landscape around athlete endorsements continue to evolve faster than most institutional documents are revised.

9. Limitations of the Evidence

The evidence base has several weaknesses that constrain how confidently any of these mechanisms can be asserted. Most of the available work is cross-sectional, which means causal direction remains open: athletes with poor sleep may scroll more, or scrolling may worsen their sleep, and current designs cannot tell the two apart. Exposure is also measured inconsistently — usually by daily minutes, rarely by content type, timing or emotional valence — so two studies reporting the same number of hours may be describing very different experiences. The athlete population itself is not one population: collegiate athletes, professionals, para-athletes and e-sport competitors face distinct platforms, schedules and pressures, and findings rarely transfer cleanly between them.

Much of what we cite on mental health, sleep and sedentary behaviour comes from general populations rather than from athletes. Those data are useful for generating mechanisms but should not be read as direct evidence about training contexts. A more elusive limitation is the moving target of the digital environment itself: the platforms, recommendation systems and content patterns of May 2026 are not the platforms studied in 2018 or 2021, and any conclusion drawn now may be partly outdated by the time it appears in print.

Limitations specific to this review should also be acknowledged. The search, although structured, was not exhaustive: grey literature, registered protocols and dissertations were not systematically interrogated, and only English-language sources were included, which may have excluded relevant work from non-English sport-science traditions. Screening was performed by two authors with disagreements resolved by a third, but no formal interrater reliability statistic was calculated. No formal risk-of-bias assessment was applied, and pooled effect sizes were not computed. The value of this synthesis lies in integrating performance-relevant mechanisms and practical implications across heterogeneous evidence rather than in producing a quantitative estimate. Future research should use longitudinal, experimental and mixed-methods designs to identify causal pathways and sport-specific thresholds of risk. Ecological momentary assessment, passive sensing of phone use and wearable-derived sleep and training-load data offer an opportunity to study these interactions at the resolution at which they actually occur — minute by minute, across a training week — rather than through retrospective questionnaires alone.

10. Conclusions

Social media should be regarded as a modifiable environmental factor that may shape performance-related determinants — such as nutrition, sleep and mental health — rather than as a direct driver of competitive outcomes, and should be considered alongside other established lifestyle factors. Used purposefully, it can educate, motivate and connect; used compulsively, it may erode sleep opportunity, fuel social comparison and displace recovery activities. The defensible position is neither uncritical adoption nor blanket prohibition but professionally supported, deliberate use; coaches, sports psychologists, dietitians, physicians and parents should treat athletes' digital habits as part of the wider performance environment.

Future research should prioritise athlete-specific longitudinal and intervention designs that distinguish passive from active use, account for timing and platform type, and stratify by sport, age, sex, disability status and competitive level, enabling sport-specific thresholds of risk and benefit to be defined. Until such evidence is available, practitioners should adopt a precautionary but proportionate stance: assume that uncontrolled late-night and pre-competition use carries non-trivial cost, while preserving the legitimate educational, social and commercial value that these platforms offer to modern athletes.

Author Contributions:

Conceptualization: Anna Dębniak and Jakub Białożyty; methodology: Anna Dębniak, Jakub Białożyty and Patryk Modelewski; literature search and investigation: all authors; writing - original draft preparation: Anna Dębniak, Jakub Białożyty, Patryk Modelewski and Maciej Gutarowicz; writing - review and editing: all authors; visualization: Anna Dębniak and Kaja Nieradka; supervision: Anna Dębniak; project administration: Anna Dębniak. All authors have read and agreed to the submitted version of the manuscript.

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