Social media and community engagement's impact on student health and activity

El impacto de las redes sociales y la participación comunitaria en la salud y la actividad física de los estudiantes

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Abstract

Introduction: This study presents one of the first attempts to systematically examine the influence of football media content and community on young students' healthy lifestyles and physical activity. Football media, as a unique phenomenon at the intersection of sports, entertainment, and social media, has significant, albeit ambiguous, potential to promote healthy lifestyles among young people.
Objective: The study aims to assess the impact of participation in football media communities on students' physical activity and adherence to a healthy lifestyle.
Methodology: Research methods include an online survey (n=500), in-depth interviews (n=20), content analysis of football media resources, and a case study (n=30).
Results: Results show a moderate positive association between participation in football media communities and physical activity levels (r=0.56, p<0.01).
Discussion: Offline activities have a greater influence on a healthy lifestyle than passive content consumption. Given that students view media-based football as entertainment rather than preparation for professional sports, the greatest barriers to increasing physical activity are lack of time (80%) and financial constraints (56.7%).
Conclusions: The study concludes that the effectiveness of the proposed recommendations can be increased if media-based football influencers more actively promote content on healthy lifestyles.

Keywords

Media football; sports; education; ethnicity; nationality; influencer.

Resumen

Introducción: Este estudio presenta uno de los primeros intentos de examinar sistemáticamente la influencia del contenido mediático del fútbol y la comunidad en el estilo de vida saludable y la actividad física de los jóvenes estudiantes. El fútbol mediático, como fenómeno único en la intersección de los deportes, el entretenimiento y las redes sociales, tiene un potencial significativo, aunque ambiguo, para promover un estilo de vida saludable entre los jóvenes.
Objetivo: El estudio pretende evaluar el impacto de la participación en comunidades de fútbol mediático en la actividad física de los estudiantes y su adhesión a un estilo de vida saludable.
Metodología: Los métodos de investigación incluyen una encuesta en línea (n=500), entrevistas en profundidad (n=20), análisis de contenido de los recursos del fútbol en los medios de comunicación y un estudio de caso (n=30).
Resultados: Los resultados muestran una asociación positiva moderada entre la participación en las comunidades futbolísticas de los medios de comunicación y los niveles de actividad física (r=0,56, p<0,01).
Discusión: Las actividades offline influyen más en un estilo de vida saludable que el consumo pasivo de contenidos. Dado que los estudiantes consideran el fútbol mediático como un entretenimiento más que como una preparación para el deporte profesional, los mayores impedimentos para aumentar la actividad física son la falta de tiempo (80%) y las limitaciones económicas (56,7%).
Conclusiones: El estudio concluye que la eficacia de las recomendaciones propuestas puede aumentar si las personas influyentes en el fútbol mediático promueven más activamente los contenidos sobre estilos de vida saludables.

Palabras clave

Fútbol mediático; deportes; educación; etnia; nacionalidad; influencer.

Introduction

In the age of digital technology, social media have become an indispensable part of young people's lives, significantly impacting various aspects of their behavior (Akimov & Kadysheva, 2024; Baskynbayeva et al., 2024; Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018), including attitudes towards healthy lifestyles and sports activities. Numerous studies confirm the significant role of social media platforms in developing attitudes and practices relating to health and physical activity among young people, especially students (Dilmukhametova & Talipova, 2023; Linxian et al., 2024).

Welch et al. (2016) review studies covering interactive social media interventions to promote health and reduce inequality in healthcare. The review demonstrates that interactive social media can become an effective tool to improve population health, especially among young people and groups with limited access to traditional health systems. The authors emphasize that such interventions can expand people's knowledge about health, change behaviors, and improve health outcomes in many areas, including physical activity and healthy eating.

Traditionally, research on the impact of social media on youth health has focused mainly on the negative aspects, such as the spread of misinformation, the formation of unrealistic body standards, and the promotion of risky behaviors (Moorhead et al., 2013). Goodyear et al. (2019) have proposed a more balanced perspective on how young people interact with health-related content on social media. Unlike previous works, the authors emphasize the active role of young people in interpreting and using health-related information from social networks. Social media platforms can be a source of risk and a powerful tool to generate knowledge (Auyelbek et al., 2022; Eskerkhanova et al., 2023) and support and motivate efforts to achieve better health and physical activity (Almazova et al., 2022). This approach allows for a more comprehensive assessment of the impact of social media, considering potential risks and opportunities for positive impacts on young people's health (Ibrahim et al., 2024; Tarasova et al., 2024).

Research highlights both the potential benefits and risks of social media's influence on health behaviors. Raggatt et al. (2018) examined fitness content's impact on perceptions of health and well-being, finding that while many young people draw inspiration from such posts, they also face risks of unrealistic expectations and diminished self-esteem. Similarly, Zhang et al. (2015) demonstrated in a randomized controlled study that social media can effectively increase physical activity, particularly when fostering social connections and mutual support among users. These contrasting findings underscore the dual nature of social media as a tool for motivation and a potential source of pressure.

Of special interest for our research is a study by Durau et al. (2022). It focuses on the influence of social media fitness influencers on users' intent to engage in physical exercise. The authors found that the reliability, expertise, and attractiveness of fitness influence in the users' eyes affect attitudes toward them and their power to motivate their audience. Importantly, it is the influencer's motivating power and not just positive attitudes toward them that is the key factor behind users' intent to exercise.

In this connection, we decided to focus our investigation on the possibilities of media football as a new phenomenon that took its current shape about five years ago in Russia (Mitrofanov, 2021). Media football is a variety of football in which the teams are comprised of bloggers, media personalities, musicians, and other influencers along with professional football players. This combination of players allows the teams to attract an audience, form their community, find sponsors, and appeal to young people, including students (which is especially important in the context of our research) (Mitrofanov, 2021).

The year 2022 marked the organization of the Media Football League in Russia, which began to hold regular competitions between media football teams. Team members actively run blogs, recording reality-show-style videos about the teams' lives and covering both positive and negative moments (MFL, n.d.). Numerous Internet projects analyze the teams' football achievements, the organization of clubs, and the relationships and deeds of particularly famous participants (IMG, 2024; Sports.ru, n.d.). This approach helps attract the youth audience, fight for their support, and organize events in real life and on the Internet to form a sustainable community. The most active members of the community organize their teams to participate in friendly matches with the media football team they support (Barinova, 2020; Gadzhiev, 2022). Thus, an important tool to develop this type of football is social media, which gather a large audience of young people. Importantly, media football is not limited by national or ethnic

boundaries; this trend is becoming international (Mirolyubov, 2024). For example, in 2023, the debut draw of the media football tournament was held. Eight teams from Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan took part in it. Media football tournaments are also held in Spain. Their main difference from Russian and Kazakh competitions is that media personalities do not play but work as club managers (Maslov, 2023).

The viewership numbers of media football matches are approaching those of national professional soccer championships (excluding the most popular teams), creating opportunities to engage audiences interested in media football and team-related activities. Football's digital transformation has cultivated a global, technology-oriented audience with distinct demographic characteristics. Elite clubs such as Real Madrid and Barcelona now function as media empires, each boasting over 100 million Instagram followers and generating more than 1 billion annual interactions (IMG, 2024).

Tournament-level engagement metrics are particularly notable. The 2023 Africa Cup of Nations garnered 2.2 billion Instagram Reels views and 3.6 billion TikTok hashtag views, demonstrating significant penetration in emerging markets including India and Brazil (IMG, 2024). Furthermore, the Premier League's international revenue now surpasses domestic income, indicating a strategic shift toward global digital audiences (IMG, 2024).

Of particular relevance to this study are the generational consumption patterns revealed in the IMG (2024) report. Generation Z drives growth, with 72% consuming football content weekly and 26% intending to increase their engagement. This demographic's preference for short-form videos, data-driven content, and interactive experiences is transforming content distribution. While younger fans (under 35 years) dominate engagement on Instagram and TikTok (65%), older demographics maintain traditional broadcast viewing habits (IMG, 2024).

Geographically, while Europe remains the revenue leader, African and Asian markets show remarkable growth potential. Continental federations like CAF are investing in emerging technologies including artificial intelligence, mobile applications, and Web3 platforms for future tournaments (IMG, 2024). Industry projections indicate digital revenue may account for 40% of non-broadcast income by 2027, fueled by AI-personalized content, virtual reality experiences, and blockchain integrations (IMG, 2024). The media football audience now represents a convergence of sports enthusiasts and entertainment consumers, creating demand for large-scale innovation that the industry is actively pursuing.

The existing literature on football fandom demonstrates that sports culture influences lifestyle, identity, and behavioral patterns (Giulianotti, 2002). Traditional football fandom is often linked to collective identity formation, with studies showing that strong team allegiance correlates with both positive and negative behavioral outcomes (Wann et al., 2001). Such fandom can foster aggressive behaviors in high-rivalry contexts (Numerato, 2015), while also potentially encouraging physical activity through team affiliation. The emerging phenomenon of media football represents a potential paradigm shift through its emphasis on influencer-mediated engagement. Research on parasocial relationships suggests that media personalities can develop influential one-sided bonds with audiences (Marwick & Boyd, 2011), which may translate to health behavior promotion when applied to sports contexts. Recent studies of fitness influencers demonstrate their capacity to motivate exercise intentions (Durau et al., 2022), suggesting similar potential for sports-focused digital communities. Unlike traditional football's often tribalistic fan culture, early observations suggest that media football's digital-native environment may foster more inclusive participation. This aligns with broader findings about how digital platforms can transform sports engagement (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012), particularly among youth populations (Goodyear et al., 2019). The intersection of sports participation and social media interaction presents new opportunities for health promotion, though further empirical research is needed to fully understand media football's specific impacts.

We decided to focus our research on understanding how it is possible to influence the formation of students' healthy lifestyle and their involvement in sports activities through social media related to media football. Unlike fitness influencers who broadcast unidirectional content, media football fosters bidirectional engagement (e.g., fan matches, reality-style vlogs), deepening community ties. In our study, we proceed from the fact that the phenomenon of media football and its potential impact on developing a healthy lifestyle culture among students is virtually unexplored. We identified the following aspects that need to be investigated:

1. The influence of engagement in media football communities on the development of students' sporting activity.
2. The role of media football-related content in building a culture of healthy lifestyle among student audiences.
3. The relationship between activity in media football communities and changes in students' lifestyles.
4. Assessing the impact on students' attitudes toward physical activity and healthy lifestyles depending on the degree of their engagement in media football communities.

Our study aims to fill these gaps by examining how participation in media football communities and the consumption of related content influences the development of a healthy lifestyle culture and sports activity among students.

To achieve this goal, we used the following research methods:

1. An online survey of students (with a sample of at least 500 students) to analyze the popularity of media football content and its impact on lifestyle.
2. In-depth interviews with active members of media football communities (15-20 interviews) to understand their motivations and lifestyle changes in more detail.
3. Content analysis of popular media football resources to identify key topics and messages related to a healthy lifestyle.
4. Case study: selecting participants within the university involved in the media football community and tracking their behavior to identify attitudes toward a healthy lifestyle.

This comprehensive approach can reveal correlations between participation in media football communities and adherence to healthy lifestyle, as well as provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind this influence. The results can be used to develop programs to promote healthy lifestyle among students using elements of media football: thematic social media content and participation in sports events of the media football community.

Method

Participants

The study involved 500 students from higher education institutions aged 18 to 25 (M = 21.3, SD = 2.1). The participant selection criteria included subscription to channels and communities about media football, participation in discussions at least two times a week, and at least six months of interaction with media football content.

Procedure

The study was conducted over one semester with assessments at the beginning (weeks 1-2), in the middle (weeks 7-8), and at the end of the semester (weeks 14-15).

Research hypotheses were formulated as follows:

H0 – Students' regular consumption of media content associated with media football does not affect the formation of a healthy lifestyle and students' physical activity and does not increase interest in sports activities.

H1: Students' regular consumption of media content associated with media football and the influence of relevant influencers' opinions positively affect their attitudes to a healthy lifestyle.

H2: Students' regular participation in community events held by media football teams (online and offline) positively affects their physical activity and increases interest in regular sports exercises.

The studied parameters were measured using the following instruments:

1. An online survey to assess students' engagement in media football communities and their attitudes towards healthy lifestyle. The survey included 15 questions rated on a 7-point Likert scale (Appendix 1).
2. A physical activity diary that participants filled out daily for two weeks at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the semester (Appendix 2).
3. The scale of interest in sports activities (adapted version of the Sport Interest Inventory, Wiley et al., 2000).
4. A healthy lifestyle questionnaire (our development), including questions about diet, sleep regime, harmful habits, and physical activity (Appendix 3). The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were tested in a pilot study (n=50, Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$).
5. The healthy lifestyle index was developed to comprehensively assess participants' commitment to a healthy lifestyle. It was calculated based on the following components (Table 1).

Table 1. The weighting of components in comprehensive assessment

Component	Weight
Level of physical activity	30%
Quality of nutrition	25%
Sleep schedule	20%
Abandonment of bad habits	15%
Stress management	10%

Each component was rated on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 corresponding to the least healthy behavior and 5 – to the healthiest behavior. The resulting healthy lifestyle index was calculated as a weighted average of these components and ranged from 1 to 5.

6. In-depth interviews with 20 active members of media football communities to reach a better understanding of their motivation and lifestyle changes (Appendix 4).
7. Content analysis of popular media resources (10 YouTube channels, 20 VK.com accounts, and 5 Telegram channels) to identify key themes and messages related to a healthy lifestyle.
8. Thirty students actively involved in the media soccer community were selected for the case study. Their behavior and attitudes toward healthy lifestyles were monitored throughout the semester through weekly mini-surveys and three structured interviews (at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the semester). Particular attention was paid to the difference between passive content consumption and active participation in community activities, such as discussions, meetings with players, and participation in friendly matches.

All surveys were conducted online using the Google Forms platform. Interviews were conducted via Zoom.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. Given the abnormal distribution of most measured variables (confirmed by the Shapiro-Wilk test, $p < 0.05$), we applied the following nonparametric statistical methods:

1. Descriptive statistical methods: median (Me) and interquartile range (IQR) for quantitative variables and frequencies and percentages for categorical variables.
2. Correlation analysis using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (rs) to assess the relationship between different indicators.
3. The Wilcoxon test for related samples to compare indicators before and after the intervention or between different time points.
4. The Mann-Whitney test to compare two independent variables (active and passive participants in media football communities).

5. The Kruskal-Wallis test to compare three or more independent groups (when analyzing the influence of different levels of engagement in media football).
6. χ^2 (chi-squared) test to analyze the relationships between categorical variables.

For all statistical tests, the level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$. The Chaddock scale was used to assess the strength of the relationship.

Qualitative analysis of interview data and content analysis of media football resources were conducted using thematic analysis according to the method of Braun & Clarke (2006). The analysis process included the following stages (Table 2).

Table 2. The stages of analysis.

No.	Stage title	Description
1	Familiarization with data	Reading the transcripts several times
2	Generation of initial codes	Highlighting key ideas and concepts
3	Theme search	Grouping codes into potential themes
4	Revision of the themes	Checking themes against the coded extracts and the whole dataset
5	Definition and naming of the themes	Clarifying the specifics of each theme and the general history of the analysis
6	Report generation	Final analysis and reporting of the results

The study was approved by the university's ethical committee. All participants were briefed about the study goals and gave informed consent to participate. The data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

Results

The data analysis confirms the absence of normal distribution for most of the measured variables (the Shapiro-Wilk test, $p < 0.05$), which warranted the use of non-parametric statistical methods.

Correlation analysis using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient reveals significant relationships between various aspects of media football engagement and healthy lifestyle indicators (Table 3).

Table 3. Correlations between media football engagement indicators and the aspects of a healthy lifestyle

Indicator	Physical activity	Healthy eating	Giving up bad habits	Overall healthy lifestyle index
Watching matches	0.38** (moderate)	0.25* (weak)	0.18 (weak)	0.32** (moderate)
Activity on social media	0.42** (moderate)	0.31** (moderate)	0.22* (weak)	0.37** (moderate)
Participation in events	0.56** (evident)	0.43** (moderate)	0.35** (moderate)	0.51** (evident)
Overall engagement	0.48** (moderate)	0.35** (moderate)	0.28** (weak)	0.42** (moderate)

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ Interpretation of relationship strength using the Chaddock scale: 0.1-0.3 – weak, 0.3-0.5 – moderate, 0.5-0.7 – evident, 0.7-0.9 – high, 0.9-1.0 – very high

Correlation analysis shows that the correlations between engagement with media football and the aspects of a healthy lifestyle range from weak to evident. The strongest correlation is observed between participation in events and physical activity ($r = 0.56$, evident correlation) and between participation in events and the overall healthy lifestyle index ($r = 0.51$, evident correlation).

Most other correlations are in the range of moderate strength of association (0.3-0.5), indicating that media football engagement has some influence on the various aspects of a healthy lifestyle, but it is not strong or determinant.

Weak correlations (less than 0.3) are observed predominantly in relation to the abandonment of bad habits, which may indicate a limited influence of media football on this aspect of a healthy lifestyle.

These results emphasize that although media football engagement is associated with some aspects of a healthy lifestyle, the association is not strong and is likely mediated by other factors.

The analysis of data from the weekly mini-surveys shows that students who actively follow media football news (mean score > 4) score higher on the healthy lifestyle questionnaire (Me = 3.8) compared

to less active participants (Me = 3.2). The Mann-Whitney test confirms the statistical significance of these differences (U = 8452, p < 0.01).

The analysis of physical activity diaries shows a significant increase in the time devoted to physical activity among students who regularly participate in media football community activities (Table 4).

Table 4. Change in physical activity levels over the course of the semester.

Period	Median	Interquartile range	Z-test	p-value
Early in the semester	120	90-150	-	-
Mid-semester	150	120-180	-3.24	<0.01
End of the semester	180	150-220	-4.62	<0.001

Analyzing the healthy lifestyle questionnaire, we find a significant improvement in the scores of active participants in media football communities from the beginning to the end of the semester (Table 5).

Table 5. Changes in healthy lifestyle indicators

Indicator	Early in the semester	End of the semester	Z-test	p-value
Physical activity	3.2 (2.8-3.6)	3.8 (3.4-4.2)	-3.85	<0.001
Healthy eating	2.9 (2.5-3.3)	3.5 (3.1-3.9)	-3.62	<0.001
Abandonment of bad habits	3.4 (3.0-3.8)	3.7 (3.3-4.1)	-2.94	<0.01
Overall healthy lifestyle index	3.2 (2.8-3.6)	3.7 (3.3-4.1)	-4.18	<0.001

Note: The data are reported in the format: Median (Interquartile range)

A comparison of the groups of students who mostly passively consume content and those who actively participate in activities shows significant differences in physical activity levels and healthy lifestyle indicators (Table 6).

Table 6. Comparison of healthy lifestyle indicators between groups with different levels of engagement

Indicator	Passive consumers	Active participants	U-test	p-value
Physical activity (min/max)	130 (100-160)	190 (160-220)	6,234	<0.001
Overall healthy lifestyle index	3.3 (2.9-3.7)	3.9 (3.5-4.3)	6,812	<0.001

Note: The data are reported in the format: Median (Interquartile range)

Case Study Analysis

Analysis of the data collected over the semester shows several key trends and patterns.

Heterogeneous change patterns are revealed in the analysis of physical activity diaries. An increase in the time devoted to physical activity by an average of 30-45 minutes per week is observed in 60% of participants (n=18) by the end of the semester. Notwithstanding, 30% (n=9) show no significant change, and a decrease in physical activity is noted in 10% (n=3) (Table 7).

Table 7. Changes in the level of physical activity among case study participants

Change in activity	Number of participants	Percentage
Increase	18	60%
No change	9	30%
Decrease	3	10%

Table 8. Results of thematic interviews

1.	Motivation through identification (mentioned by 22 participants)
2.	Social pressure and community norms (20 participants)
3.	Informational influence on healthy habits (18 participants)
4.	Conflict between online activity and real physical activity (14 participants)
5.	Short-term vs long-term motivation (12 participants)

Based on the data from weekly mini-surveys and interviews (Table 8), we identified three basic patterns of behavior:

1. "Active adherents" (40%, n=12) demonstrate a consistent increase in physical activity and changes toward a healthier lifestyle.
2. "Moderate enthusiasts" (37%, n=11) show periodic bursts of activity, often connected with specific events in the media football community, but no consistent long-term change.
3. "Passive observers" (23%, n=7) show interest in the content, but it has little impact on their physical activity and healthy lifestyle behaviors.

The analysis shows several key factors in the effectiveness of the impact of media football on students' lifestyles. The relationship between these factors and changes in students' way of life was assessed with the χ^2 (chi-squared) test (Table 9).

Table 9. Analysis of key factors in the effectiveness of the impact of media football on students' lifestyles

1.	Engagement in the community ($\chi^2 = 15.47$, df = 4, $p < 0.01$)
2.	Starting level of physical activity ($\chi^2 = 9.83$, df = 4, $p < 0.05$)
3.	Having friends in the media football community ($\chi^2 = 7.23$, df = 1, $p < 0.01$)
4.	Academic load ($\chi^2 = 8.56$, df = 3, $p < 0.05$)

For the analysis, the level of engagement, initial physical activity levels, and academic load were categorized (low, average, and high levels), which allowed us to apply the χ^2 test to all factors.

The level of engagement in the community demonstrates the strongest correlation with lifestyle changes. Students with high levels of engagement are more likely to demonstrate positive changes in their lifestyle.

The starting level of physical activity also is a significant factor. Students with a low initial level of physical activity show more evident changes in their lifestyles under the influence of media football.

The fact of having friends in the media football community also significantly affects the effectiveness of the influence of media football. Students who have friends in the community are more likely to demonstrate positive lifestyle changes.

Finally, academic load proves to be a significant factor. Students with a high academic load are less predisposed to experiencing significant lifestyle changes due to the influence of media football.

These findings point to a complex impact of different factors on the effectiveness of the influence of media football on students' lifestyles. The leading barriers to increasing physical activity levels according to our study participants are as follows (Table 10).

Table 10. Key barriers to increased physical activity among students

Barrier	Number of mentions	Percentage of the total number of participants
Lack of time	24	80%
Financial limitations	17	56.7%
Lack of support from the immediate environment	13	43.3%
Low motivation to be physically active in real life	11	36.7%
Lack of proper infrastructure for year-round participation in team sports	9	30%

Note: The case study included a total of 30 participants. Participants could specify more than one barrier

The case study analysis indicates that the impact of media football on students' physical activity and healthy lifestyle is heterogeneous and depends on multiple factors. Although most participants demonstrate positive changes, these changes are often moderate and not always consistent in the long term.

Results of Content Analysis of Media Football Resources

The analysis covers three months and includes 1,000 units of content (videos, posts, articles).

The analysis shows the following distribution of the leading topics in media content (Table 11).

Table 11. Distribution of topics in media football content

Topic	Percentage
Match results and betting odds for the outcome of matches, discussions of media football events and future tournaments	87%
Transfer fees, the income of media football players	72%
Personal lives of players and Influencers	51%
Exercise and physical training to increase physical activity, participation in sports events with media football teams	11%
Proper healthy diet and lifestyle to improve performance in football	10%
Teams' tactics on the football field, players' training program, athletic characteristics	15%
Discussion of various aspects of life related to media football (in public and non-public spaces) with influencers	19%
Other	2%

Note: The sum of percentages exceeds 100% because the content may relate to multiple themes at once

Of the analyzed content, only 21% contains posts related to exercise, healthy lifestyle, and sports activity. The major topics within the content on training, healthy lifestyle, and sports have the following distribution (Table 12).

Table 12. Healthy lifestyle content topics in media football resources

Theme	Percentage
Importance of regular exercise/engaging in fitness or playing sports	18.0%
Building relationships with the environment to find support: friends, relatives	16.8%
Healthy eating	17.2%
Recovery and rest	16.0%
Mental health	15.5%
Abandonment of bad habits	14.9%
Other	1.6%

The analysis uncovers a significant role of influencers in the media football space:

1. 70% of the content was created by or related to specific influencers, as evidenced by the high percentage of content dedicated to the personal lives of players and influencers (51% according to Table 7).
2. The top 50 Influencers generated 25% of the content, which correlates with a high focus on match results and discussions of media football events (87% of the content).
3. Influencer posts about personal experiences in sports and a healthy lifestyle receive 12% more engagement (likes, comments, reposts) than other posts. However, according to Table 7, content related to exercise and physical fitness accounts for only 11% of the total.
4. Only 11% of influencer content directly promotes healthy lifestyle ideas, which is consistent with the data in Table 7, where the topics of proper nutrition and healthy lifestyle account for only 10% of the content.
5. A significant part of the content (72%) is devoted to the financial aspects of media football, such as transfer fees and the income of media football players, which highlights the importance of the economic component in the interest of the audience and the entertaining nature of the content.
6. 19% of the content is associated with discussions of the various aspects of life related to media football, which highlights the importance of influencers' role in shaping public opinion and supporting interest in media football.

These findings suggest that influencers play a key role in content generation and audience engagement in media football, yet their impact on health promotion remains limited and requires further development.

Qualitative content analysis reveals several key narratives:

1. "Discussion of favorites": about the successes of media football players and teams in the sport (mentioned in 90% of the channels).

2. "The backstage of media football": an emphasis on the personal and everyday lives of the players (present in 65% of the resources).
3. "Disputes and bets": disputes between influencers about various media football events and bookmakers' bets on the outcomes of matches (85% of the resources).
4. "Sport as a lifestyle and healthy lifestyle as a path to success": indirect promotion of the importance of physical activity (found in 40% of the content).

Analyzing comments and reactions, we found that:

- Posts about players' and influencers' personal lives and scandalous situations receive an average of 40% more engagement than other types of content.
- Content related to healthy lifestyle and physical activity, although not the most popular, has a stable level of audience engagement.

Discussion

Our study provides a comprehensive perspective on the impact of media football on students' healthy lifestyles and sports activity. The results show a complex pattern of interactions between media content consumption, community engagement, and lifestyle changes among youth. The results highlight the importance of an integrated approach to the use of media football to promote a healthy lifestyle, considering individual characteristics and the external factors influencing student behavior.

The results of correlation analysis (Table 3) show a moderate relationship between engagement in media football and various aspects of a healthy lifestyle, which partially confirms our hypothesis H1. However, the degree of influence is less pronounced than originally hypothesized. This is consistent with the findings of Durau et al. (2022) on the influence of fitness influencers on users' intent to be physically active. In our study, the effect is weaker.

An interesting comparison can be drawn between our findings and a study by Thornton et al. (2017), who found a stronger association between using fitness apps and physical activity in young people. The difference may be explained by the fact that media football does not focus exclusively on fitness or the development of football players' professional qualities but has a more entertaining nature.

The strongest association is observed between participation in events and physical activity ($r = 0.56$), which supports the H2 hypothesis. This is consistent with the findings of Zhang et al. (2015) on the role of social connections in increasing physical activity and supported by the study of Cavallo et al. (2012) on the importance of social support in online communities. However, our study indicates that the effect is stronger for offline interactions, which is a unique feature of media football. This can be attributed to the fact that in Russia and Kazakhstan, interaction between players in professional teams is very limited. Not only are professional players unable to organize joint sporting events with their fans, but at times they cannot even comment on the work of the club and personal attitudes in the public and media sphere. Media football, in contrast, attracts students because of its openness to communication (Abdullayev et al., 2024), collaborative forms of activity, and its focus on low barriers between players and fans.

The analysis of changes in physical activity levels (Table 6) and healthy lifestyle indicators (Table 7) over the semester shows a marked improvement. This agrees with the findings of Vaterlaus et al. (2015), who report a positive effect of social media on the physical activity of young people in the short term. Our study, however, demonstrates a more lasting effect, possibly due to the regularity of media football activities.

The analysis of barriers to increasing physical activity (Table 10) shows that the lack of time and financial limitations are the main obstacles. This is consistent with the general trends described in the literature on student physical activity (Fomicheva et al., 2021; Tsartsapakis & Zafeiroudi, 2024; Moorhead et al., 2013; Khakimovich and Rozmatovich, 2022) and is supported by a study by Ashton et al. (2017) among young men. Unique to our study is the identification of "low motivation for physical activity in real life" as a significant barrier despite interest in online media football.

The analysis of the content of media football resources (Table 11) shows that about 21% of the material is directly or indirectly related to a healthy lifestyle, including 11% of content about training and physical fitness and 10% about proper nutrition and healthy lifestyle. For comparison, in a study by Boepple & Thompson (2016) analyzing fitness content on Instagram, about 30% of the posts contained direct messages of encouragement for a healthy lifestyle. This difference emphasizes the uniqueness of media football as a phenomenon where health is not the main focus of content but is still a significant element.

The role of influencers in media football is significant (70% of the content is related to them), but their influence on promoting healthy lifestyle behaviors is limited. This contrasts with the findings of Pilgrim & Bohnet-Joschko (2019) suggesting that fitness influencers have a strong impact on health-related behaviors. This discrepancy can be attributed to the specifics of media football, where entertainment and competitive aspects prevail over the explicit promotion of a healthy lifestyle. Nevertheless, considering the overall popularity of media football, even 21% of healthy lifestyle content can have a significant reach and influence on the audience.

The discovered patterns of behavior ("Active adherents", "Moderate enthusiasts", and "Passive observers") are consistent with the typology proposed by Vandelanotte et al. (2016) for users of online resources about health. However, our study shows that in the context of media football, these groups have more blurred boundaries, and it is possible to shift between them.

Factor analysis demonstrates that the level of engagement in the community and having friends in the media football community are significant predictors of lifestyle changes. This emphasizes the importance of the social aspect of media football, which agrees with social influence theory and the findings of Goodyear et al. (2019) on the active role of young people in interpreting health-promoting information on social media.

In contrast to traditional sports content, media football combines the elements of sports, entertainment, and social interaction. This provides a unique context for influencing a healthy lifestyle that has not been previously explored in research. Our findings suggest that this hybrid format may have advantages (a wider audience reach that can be managed) and disadvantages (less focus on a healthy lifestyle, raising the need to introduce communication formats that are interesting to students) for promoting a healthy lifestyle.

It is important to highlight that media football, unlike professional football, does not focus on rigorous training or preparation of professional athletes (Babaskin et al., 2024). Its main goal is to entertain the audience, which creates unique opportunities and challenges for promoting a healthy lifestyle.

The practical significance of the study consists in the identification of specific mechanisms of influence of media football on students' healthy lifestyle. This knowledge can be used to develop more effective strategies to promote healthy lifestyles through social media and sports communities. It is recommended to:

1. Increase the share of healthy lifestyle content on media football media resources from the current 21% to at least 30%, while maintaining their entertaining nature.
2. Develop programs to encourage active participation in offline activities of the media football community, as they have a stronger impact on the physical activity of participants.
3. Utilize the motivational influence to promote healthier lifestyles in a more targeted way by integrating healthy lifestyle content into their regular publications and activities.
4. Create content to help overcome the identified barriers to physical activity, especially considering the climates of Russia and Kazakhstan.

Conclusions

The uniqueness of media football as a phenomenon lies in its hybrid nature. On the one hand, media football attracts a wide audience and creates active communities, which can contribute to the

popularization of healthy habits. On the other hand, the predominance of entertainment content may hinder its direct influence on a healthy lifestyle.

The key conclusions of the study are as follows:

1. Engagement in media football communities shows a moderate positive relationship with various aspects of a healthy lifestyle, especially physical activity levels.
2. Active participation in offline events of the media soccer community has a stronger impact on physical activity than passive content consumption.
3. Although only about 21% of media football content is directly connected with a healthy lifestyle (11% about training and physical fitness, 10% about proper nutrition and healthy lifestyle), there is a significant indirect influence through the general context of sports activities and the popularity of influencers.
4. The role of influencers in media football is significant, yet their influence in promoting healthy lifestyles is limited and requires a more targeted approach. Given their popularity, even a small increase in healthy lifestyle content can significantly impact the audience.

Our study has several limitations. First, it focuses on short-term changes (over one semester) and may thus fail to capture long-term effects. Second, the sample is limited to students, which makes it difficult to generalize the results to other population groups.

Future studies may focus on examining the long-term effects of media football engagement, expanding the sample to other age and social groups, and comparing the impact of media football and other forms of sports content on social media. Of particular interest is the investigation of the potential of media football to promote healthy lifestyles among less active population groups.

Our study emphasizes the complexity and multifaceted impact of new media formats, such as media football, on the health and lifestyles of young people. It opens new perspectives on the role of social media in the formation of healthy habits and emphasizes the need for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of contemporary phenomena at the intersection of sports, media, health, and education.

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