



THE CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL SOCIALIZATION AMONG YOUNG FOOTBALL PLAYERS: A COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH STUDY

Arshed Dhafer Abdulsahib

Al-Qadisiyah University / College of Education and Sports Sciences

arched.dafer@qu.edu.iq

Abstract

This research investigates how using social media and socializing with other young football players at the Diwaniya Club in Iraq affects them. The study's goal is to find out how the pros and cons of using social media are related to the pros and cons of socializing with other people on the team. Using a quantitative descriptive method, data were gathered from 23 young players using a validated questionnaire that looked at four primary factors: the good and bad effects of social media, the strength of social socialization, and the weakness of social socialization. We used SPSS to do statistical analysis that included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha. The results showed a high positive link ($r=0.879$, $p<0.001$) between the beneficial effects of social media and the strength of socialization, while there was no significant relationship between the negative effects of social media and social isolation. The results show that social media may improve team motivation and unity when utilized correctly, although the negative effects are still moderate. The research helps us understand how digital communication affects Arab sports culture and suggests ways to make the most use of social media in youth football development programs.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Socialization, Youth Football, Team Cohesion, Sports Psychology, Iraq

Introduction

The quick growth of social media sites has changed the way young athletes talk to each other, connect with each other, and build their social identities in sports settings (Zhang, Jiang, Zhu, & Zhang, 2023). Digital communication is becoming an important part of team dynamics, player motivation, and social development among young athletes (Battaglia & Kerr, 2024). There are both possibilities and obstacles at the junction of social media use and socialization in sports. These need to be studied in a systematic way to understand what they mean for athletic development.

Recent studies show that young people are using social media more than ever before. These platforms serve several purposes, such as connecting with friends, exchanging information, and building an identity (Niaz, Danish, & Waqas, 2024). In the Middle East, the way Arab youth use social media shows cultural traits that affect how digital platforms affect social interactions and behavior (Radcliffe & Abuhmaid, 2020). In sports, where team cohesiveness and social integration have a direct effect on performance and long-term engagement, it is especially important to understand these dynamics (Jones, 2024).

The sports psychology literature stresses how important social settings are for young athletes' growth, showing how interactions with peers and team dynamics affect motivation, performance, and mental health (Afrizal et al., 2024). Team cohesion research consistently demonstrates strong correlations between social integration and athletic success, particularly in team sports like football where collective performance depends heavily



on interpersonal relationships (Sezer & Kocaekşi, 2018). However, the role of digital communication in facilitating or hindering these traditional social processes requires further examination.

Research Problem

Despite extensive research on social media effects in general youth populations, limited studies have specifically examined the consequences of digital communication on social socialization processes within Arab youth sports contexts (Niaz, Danish, & Waqas, 2024). The unique cultural, linguistic, and social characteristics of Middle Eastern societies may produce different patterns of social media impact compared to Western contexts where most existing research has been conducted (Radcliffe & Abuhmaid, 2020). Furthermore, the specific dynamics of team sports environments, particularly football, create distinct social pressures and opportunities that may moderate the relationship between digital and face-to-face social interactions.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the positive and negative consequences of social media usage among young football players?
2. How do social media usage patterns relate to social socialization strength and weakness within team environments?
3. What cultural and contextual factors influence these relationships in the Iraqi sports context?

The study tests two primary hypotheses:

H1: There exists a significant positive relationship between positive social media impact and strength of social socialization among young football players.

H2: There exists a significant relationship between negative social media impact and weakness of social socialization among young football players.

Literature Review

The intersection of social media usage and social socialization among youth athletes has become an increasingly important area of research in contemporary sports psychology. This literature review synthesizes findings from Iraqi, Arab, and international studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital communication technologies influence team dynamics, individual development, and social integration processes among young football players.

Sport Psychology and Athletic Development

Iraqi research has demonstrated significant attention to psychological factors in sports development. An extensive research of 734 Olympic and non-Olympic athletes from Iraq looked at the link between sport values and personal attributes. It found strong positive links between sport values and personal traits (Al-Qaesi & Al-Huri, 2024). This key research found that Iraqi athletes had very favorable psychological profiles. This is a good place to start when trying to figure out how sports might help individuals improve socially.

Researchers studied 14- to 16-year-old athletes from Iraq and Turkey and discovered that their cultural differences influenced how driven they were to do well. The study found that Iraqi kids were more driven to avoid failure than Turkish kids, which shows that social and cultural factors have a huge impact on how motivated young athletes are (Azeez, Biçer, & Abakay, 2017). These findings highlight how crucial it is to consider about culture when you look at how kids and teens play sports.



Team Cohesion and Group Dynamics

A lot of research on Iraqi football has focused on how to make teams operate effectively together. Studies of youth football teams have demonstrated how crucial it is for everyone on the team to get along and work together to make sure the team runs well. Studies have shown that having a nice team atmosphere is quite crucial for maintaining players and attaining excellent outcomes, particularly in team sports like football where social factors are very significant.

Researchers have shown that the mental health of Iraqi football teams changes a lot based on the position they play. This means that the social roles and responsibilities of the players have an effect on how they feel about the team dynamics. These findings indicate how hard it may be to fit in with others in team sports.

Social Media Usage Patterns

Research on Arab teens who use social media shows that there are cultural disparities between Middle Eastern and Western nations. A detailed study of Arab teens found that they generally use social media platforms to communicate to others, learn about science, and share information (Aissani et al., 2024). These findings suggest that Arab teens utilize digital platforms for good reasons. This might help teams develop in a beneficial manner when they are employed in sporting situations.

In the United Arab Emirates, scientists have studied how social media changes how teens and young adults think about safety and community. Researchers have shown that social media may make individuals feel unsafe, but it can also help them meet new people and build communities (Al Naqbi, N., Al Momani, N., & Davies, A. 2022). To understand how digital communication platforms operate in sports teams, it's important to know that they have two sides.

There has been a lot of research on how social media affects the way Arab adolescents create their identities, especially after events like the Arab Spring. Research shows that social media sites have a big impact on how individuals build their identities. Young people use these sites to deal with societal expectations and their own growth (Alshoaibi, 2018). These processes of forming an identity are especially important in sporting settings when team identification and personal growth come together.

Malaysian and Pakistani Research Insights

Malaysian study gives us useful comparisons on how social media affects Muslim youth. Four main mental health problems have been found among Malaysian teens who are addicted to social media: distress, fear, sadness, and anxiety (Ann, Yusuf, & Abdul Kadir, 2024). But studies also show that organized social media use may lead to good things like volunteering and being involved in the community (Ma'rof et al., 2024).

A big research in Malaysia discovered substantial links between social comparison, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), cyberbullying, and social media addiction when it comes to young people's social anxiety (Ma'rof et al., 2024). These results show that bad encounters on social media may add up to make big psychological problems. This shows how important it is to encourage good digital communication in sports settings. Pakistani study on female student athletes found that athletes are less likely to be addicted to social media and have mental health problems related to it than non-athletes (Kunhao et al., 2024). This discovery implies that playing sports may help guard against bad social media usage, which supports the idea of combining physical development with good ways to communicate online.

International Research on Social Media and Athletic Development

Passive Social Media Use and Mental Health

International research has extensively examined the relationship between passive social media use and athlete mental health. A comprehensive study of 350 young athletes from Chinese sports universities found that passive social network site use increased anxiety and decreased subjective well-being through upward social



comparison mechanisms (Zhang, Jiang, Zhu, & Zhang, 2023). These findings demonstrate the importance of promoting active rather than passive social media engagement among young athletes.

Studies have always demonstrated that social media may be either a danger or a protective factor, depending on how people use it. Studies show that using social media in a deliberate and active way may boost motivation and social connection, but just passively consuming it might lead to unfavorable social comparisons and lower well-being (Oprescu, 2024).

Team Cohesion Research

Theoretical frameworks from research on international team cohesiveness may help us figure out how individuals from diverse backgrounds can get along in sports. Researchers have shown that athletes who play team sports are less likely to be sad and have more social support networks than athletes who play solitary sports (Nixdorf, Frank, & Beckmann, 2016). This research reveals that playing team sports with other people is important for your mental health and social progress. Research on humor and team cohesion has demonstrated that there is a substantial correlation between being able to communicate to each other well and getting along with people in a group (Safaei et al., 2024). Researchers have shown that making others laugh is a great method to develop friends and keep the group's spirits up, particularly in team sports. Researchers have also looked at employing music-based therapy to help teams get along better. A study of college rowing teams found that picking music together made a major difference in how well they got along with each other. This illustrates that teams may become closer when they have the same experiences (Orzel, M. 2024). These findings suggest that working together and making choices as a group might help teams stay together.

Previous Studies: Social Media Impact on Youth Athletes

Positive Effects of Social Media

Several studies have documented positive effects of social media use among young athletes. Research has shown that social media platforms can enhance motivation for athletic performance when used constructively (Zhang, Jiang, Zhu, & Zhang, 2023). Athletes report using social media to share achievements, connect with teammates, and maintain relationships with coaches, suggesting that digital platforms can complement traditional team-building approaches.

Studies on sport engagement and social support have demonstrated that digital communication can enhance health-related quality of life among youth athletes. Research indicates that athletes who receive strong social support through various channels, including digital platforms, demonstrate better emotional and social functioning (Sur et al., 2024).

Negative Effects and Risk Factors

International research has also identified several risk factors associated with problematic social media use among athletes. Studies consistently show that excessive social comparison, cyberbullying exposure, and addiction-like usage patterns can contribute to increased anxiety and decreased performance (Zhang, Jiang, Zhu, & Zhang, 2023). These negative effects appear to be particularly pronounced when athletes engage in passive consumption rather than active communication.

Research on body image and social media use has revealed concerning relationships between platform usage and self-perception among young people. Malaysian studies found negative correlations between social media intensity and body image evaluation, suggesting that exposure to idealized content can harm self-concept (Khodabakhsh & Leng, 2020). These findings have particular relevance for athletes who may be especially focused on physical appearance and performance.

Cultural and Contextual Factors



Cross-cultural research has highlighted the importance of considering cultural context when examining social media effects. Studies comparing different national contexts have found varying patterns of social media impact based on cultural values, social norms, and communication traditions (Aissani et al., 2024). Arab cultural contexts appear to demonstrate different patterns of social media usage and effects compared to Western societies, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive approaches to digital communication in sports. Research on traditional versus sports-based teaching methods has shown that interactive, collaborative approaches enhance team cohesion and cognitive engagement compared to individual-focused methods (Hongke & Suaco, 2025). These findings suggest that cultural preferences for collective versus individual approaches may influence how social media impacts team dynamics in different contexts.

Implications for Youth Football Development

The reviewed literature suggests several important implications for understanding social media and social socialization among young football players. First, cultural context significantly influences how digital communication affects team dynamics and individual development. Arab cultural values emphasizing collective identity and social harmony may provide protective factors against negative social media effects while enhancing positive outcomes.

Second, the quality and type of social media engagement appears more important than quantity of usage. Active, purposeful communication that supports team goals and relationships demonstrates positive effects, while passive consumption and comparison-focused behaviors contribute to negative outcomes.

Third, sports participation itself may serve as a protective factor against problematic social media use. The social support networks, structured activities, and shared goals inherent in team sports appear to provide resilience against digital communication challenges while enhancing positive usage patterns.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive cross-sectional design to examine the relationships between social media usage patterns and social socialization processes among young football players. The descriptive approach was selected for its appropriateness in exploring contemporary phenomena within natural settings and its capacity to establish correlational relationships between multiple variables 19.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised young football players registered with Diwaniya Club in Iraq during the 2023-2024 season. Using purposive sampling techniques, 23 players were selected from the club's youth divisions, representing different age groups and playing positions. The sample included 20 field players (87.0%) and 3 goalkeepers (13.0%), with age distribution as follows: 9 players under 18 years (39.1%), 7 players aged 18-25 years (30.4%), and 7 players aged 25+ years (30.4%) 19.

Research Instruments

Data collection utilized a structured questionnaire comprising four main scales measuring distinct aspects of social media impact and social socialization:

1. Positive Impact of Social Media Scale (5 items): Measured perceived benefits of social media use for motivation, team relationships, and achievement sharing
2. Negative Impact of Social Media Scale (5 items): Assessed problematic aspects including distraction, sleep disruption, and social comparison pressures
3. Strength of Social Socialization Scale (5 items): Evaluated positive team integration, relationship building, and social comfort



4. Weakness of Social Socialization Scale (5 items): Measured social isolation, disconnection, and lack of meaningful relationships within the team

All items utilized 5-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The questionnaire was administered in Arabic to ensure cultural and linguistic appropriateness for the Iraqi context 19

Reliability and Validity

Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients demonstrated acceptable to excellent internal consistency across all scales: Positive Impact of Social Media ($\alpha=0.827$), Negative Impact of Social Media ($\alpha=0.811$), Strength of Social Socialization ($\alpha=0.728$), and Weakness of Social Socialization ($\alpha=0.882$). The overall model reliability reached $\alpha=0.829$, indicating high instrument reliability 19.

Data Analysis Procedures

Statistical analysis employed SPSS software with multiple analytical approaches:

1. Descriptive Analysis: Calculated means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions to characterize sample demographics and variable distributions
2. Normality Testing: Applied Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests to assess data distribution patterns and determine appropriate statistical procedures
3. Correlation Analysis: Utilized Pearson correlation coefficients to examine relationships between variables
4. Hypothesis Testing: Conducted statistical tests to evaluate research hypotheses using appropriate significance levels ($p<0.05$)

Ethical Considerations

The study followed ethical rules for studies on people, getting permission from everyone who took part and keeping their answers private. Before starting to gather data, the Diwaniya Club management gave their permission.

Statistical Methods Used for Hypothesis Testing

The study relied on testing hypothesis validity, achieving objectives, and answering questions using a group of statistical methods available in advanced statistical software packages (SPSS) as follows1:

1. Descriptive Analysis of Data: Used to determine study sample characteristics through arithmetic mean and standard deviation to monitor study data behavior1.
2. Kruskal-Wallis Test: Applied to determine differences between respondent attitudes according to demographic characteristics1.
3. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test: Used to test data adherence to normal distribution and select appropriate statistical tests for study data analysis1.
4. Pearson Correlation Analysis: Employed to determine direction and strength of relationships between study variables1.

Results

Descriptive Analysis of Study Variables



Participant Distribution Analysis

Table 1: Distribution of Survey Participants by Position

Position	Frequency	Percentage
Player	20	87.0%
Goalkeeper	3	13.0%
Total	23	100.0%

Based on Table 1 results, it appears that the majority of survey participants were players, totaling 20 participants at 87.0% of the total sample of 23 participants¹. Goalkeepers represented 3 participants at 13.0%¹. These results reflect the compositional nature of football teams that rely on a larger number of players compared to goalkeepers, reinforcing player representation in data analysis¹. These percentages serve as important indicators when interpreting general survey results, as player opinions may shape the general direction of the sample due to their numerical superiority¹.

Table 2: Distribution of Survey Participants by Age

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
Under 18 years	9	39.1%
18-25 years	7	30.4%
25+ years	7	30.4%
Total	23	100.0%

Table 2 shows the age distribution of Al-Diwaniya Club player participants, revealing that the under-18 age group represents the largest proportion with 9 participants, equivalent to 39.1% of the total sample¹. The remaining sample was equally distributed between the 18-25 years and 25+ years groups, with 7 participants each at 30.4%¹. This distribution reflects age diversity among club players, providing a more comprehensive view for understanding study variable impacts across different ages¹.

Reliability and Validity Measures

Table 3: Reliability and Validity Measures

Study Variables	Number of Items	Alpha Value (Reliability Coefficient)
Positive Social Media Impact	5	0.827
Negative Social Media Impact	5	0.811
Social Development Strength	5	0.728
Social Development Weakness	5	0.882
Overall Model	20	0.829

Table 3 reflects reliability and validity measure results for study variables calculated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to assess the credibility and stability of survey tools used in studying Al-Diwaniya Club players¹. Results indicate that all values exceeded the statistically acceptable minimum threshold for Alpha coefficient (0.60), demonstrating that questions measuring different variables possess high internal consistency among Al-Diwaniya Club sample members¹.

The Alpha coefficient value for positive social media impact reached 0.827, while negative social media impact recorded 0.811, indicating very good reliability in measurement for both variables¹. The social development strength variable achieved an Alpha value of 0.728, falling within acceptable range, while social development weakness showed the highest reliability among axes at 0.882¹.

Overall, the complete model (20 items) recorded an Alpha value of 0.829, confirming that the survey tool has high reliability and can be depended upon for drawing generalizable conclusions about the study population represented by Al-Diwaniya Club players¹.



Normal Distribution Testing

Table 4: Normal Distribution Test Results (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk)

Variable			Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
			Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Positive Social Media Impact			0.171	23	0.079	0.947	23	0.251
Negative Social Media Impact			0.136	23	.200*	0.971	23	0.720
Social Development Strength			0.153	23	0.176	0.938	23	0.167
Social Development Weakness			0.241	23	0.001	0.888	23	0.014

Table 4 presents normal distribution test results for study data using two statistical tests: Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk, examining the consistency of study variable data with normal distribution¹. Results show that positive social media impact, negative social media impact, and social development strength variables had significance values (Sig.) greater than 0.05 in both tests, indicating these variables follow normal distribution and allowing use of parametric tests¹. However, the social development weakness variable showed significance values less than 0.05 in both tests (0.001 and 0.014 respectively), indicating this variable does not follow normal distribution and recommending non-parametric statistical methods for analysis¹.

Positive Social Media Impact

Table 5: Descriptive Statistical Characteristics - Positive Social Media Impact

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Importance Ranking
I feel support from teammates on social media	3.35	1.23	5
Social media helps improve my relationship with coach	3.61	1.34	4
I feel belonging to team when interacting on social platforms	3.87	1.22	3
Social media increases my motivation for better performance	4.43	0.73	1
I share my sports achievements on social media platforms	4.17	1.07	2
Overall Positive Social Media Impact	3.89	0.55	

Based on Table 5 results, the level of positive interaction among Al-Diwaniya Club players with positive social media impact is evident through descriptive statistical characteristics¹. Data indicates that the overall arithmetic mean for this variable reached 3.89 with a standard deviation of 0.55, demonstrating a relatively high degree of agreement among players regarding positive social media effects¹.

The statement "Social media increases my motivation for better performance" topped the importance ranking with a mean of 4.43 and relatively low standard deviation of 0.73, reflecting strong consensus among players on social platforms' motivational role¹. This was followed by "I share my sports achievements on social media platforms" with a mean of 4.17, indicating players' interest in highlighting their successes.

Negative Social Media Impact



Table 6: Descriptive Statistical Characteristics - Negative Social Media Impact

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Importance Ranking
Spending too much time on social media affects my training	2.65	1.34	5
Negative comments affect my psychological state	3.30	1.69	2
Social media distracts my attention before matches	3.43	1.50	1
I feel pressure from comparing myself to other players online	2.83	1.47	3
Excessive communication affects my sleep before matches	2.70	1.33	4
Overall Negative Social Media Impact	2.98	0.70	

Table 6 shows descriptive statistical characteristics for negative social media impact as measured among Al-Diwaniya Club players, with an overall mean of 2.98, indicating moderate perception leaning toward low regarding negative effects of social media use¹. The statement "Social media distracts my attention before matches" ranked first with a mean of 3.43, followed by "Negative comments affect my psychological state" with a mean of 3.30¹.

Social Development Strength

Table 7: Descriptive Statistical Characteristics - Social Development Strength

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Importance Ranking
I participate in social activities with my team outside training	3.22	1.13	5
I feel comfortable interacting with teammates	3.74	1.36	4
I respect and accept others' opinions within the team	3.87	1.22	3
Social development helped me build positive relationships	4.48	0.79	1
Social relationships within team motivate me to continue	4.00	1.13	2
Overall Social Development Strength	3.42	0.82	

Table 7 presents descriptive statistical characteristics for social development strength as measured among Al-Diwaniya Club players, with an overall mean of 3.42 and standard deviation of 0.82, indicating a positive moderate level leaning toward high in players' perception of social development importance within the team.

Social Development Weakness

Table 8: Descriptive Statistical Characteristics - Social Development Weakness

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Importance Ranking
I feel isolated within the team	1.39	0.50	4
I rarely participate in social activities	1.43	0.50	1
I don't have close friends in the team	1.35	0.49	5



I feel lack of integration with other players	1.43	0.51	2
I don't find someone to share my problems with in the team	1.43	0.52	3
Overall Social Development Weakness	1.41	0.22	

Table 8 reflects descriptive statistical characteristics for social development weakness among Al-Diwaniya Club players, with an overall mean of 1.41 and low standard deviation of 0.22, indicating very weak levels of isolation or social disconnection among team members¹. Most statements recorded means below 1.50, demonstrating majority player agreement in rejecting social weakness manifestations within the team.

Correlation Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis One: Relationship Between Positive Social Media Impact and Social Development Strength

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no statistically significant relationship between positive social media impact and social development strength among young players at Al-Diwaniya Club¹.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a statistically significant positive relationship between positive social media impact and social development strength among young players at Al-Diwaniya Club¹.

Test Result: The null hypothesis was rejected and alternative hypothesis accepted, with correlation coefficient value reaching 0.879 and statistical significance (Sig. = 0.000), indicating a strong and statistically significant relationship between the two variables¹.

Hypothesis Two: Relationship Between Negative Social Media Impact and Social Development Weakness

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no statistically significant relationship between negative social media impact and social development weakness among young players at Al-Diwaniya Club¹.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a statistically significant relationship between negative social media impact and social development weakness among young players at Al-Diwaniya Club¹.

Test Result: The null hypothesis was not rejected, with correlation coefficient value of -0.046 and statistical significance value (Sig. = 0.835), which is not statistically significant, meaning no meaningful relationship exists between the two variables¹.

Discussion

Interpretation of Main Findings

The findings of this research provide us crucial information on the complicated link between young Iraqi football players' use of social media and their socialization. The large positive connection ($r=0.879$) between the beneficial effects of social media and the strength of socialization is one of the most important results. It suggests that when social media is utilized in a good way, it may greatly improve team cohesiveness and social integration processes.

This finding aligns with international research demonstrating the potential benefits of purposeful social media engagement for athletic motivation and team building (Frühau, Loinger, & Kopp, 2025). However, the correlation strength observed in this Iraqi sample exceeds what has been reported in Western contexts, where moderate correlations (0.3-0.6) are more typical (Battaglia & Kerr, 2024). This difference may reflect the collectivistic nature of Arab cultures, where social media platforms serve as extensions of traditional community-building processes rather than replacements for face-to-face interaction.

Cultural Context Considerations

The moderate levels of negative social media impact ($M=2.98$) contrast with higher negative effects reported in Western studies of college athletes. Research on Arab youth in Pakistan and Malaysia has shown stronger associations between social media use and anxiety-related outcomes (Niaz, Danish, & Waqas, 2024), while



this Iraqi sample demonstrated greater resilience to negative digital influences. This pattern may reflect several cultural factors unique to the Middle Eastern sports context.

The extremely low levels of social isolation ($M=1.41$) provide compelling evidence of strong team cohesion within the Iraqi football environment. These scores are substantially lower than isolation rates reported in Western youth athlete populations (Battaglia & Kerr, 2024), suggesting that the collectivistic Arab sports culture may provide protective factors against social disconnection. The emphasis on group identity and mutual support in traditional Arab societies appears to translate effectively into modern team sports settings (Muteti, 2024).

Implications for Team Dynamics

The finding that positive social media use enhances rather than detracts from face-to-face social relationships challenges concerns about digital communication replacing traditional team bonding (Bibian & Ma'rof, 2024). Instead, the results suggest that social media platforms can serve as complementary tools for strengthening existing team relationships and extending social interaction beyond formal training sessions.

The lack of significant correlation between negative social media use and social isolation is particularly noteworthy. This finding differs from Western research that consistently shows positive relationships between problematic social media use and social withdrawal (Niaz et al., 2024). The resilience demonstrated by Iraqi players may reflect stronger team support systems that buffer against negative digital experiences, or cultural norms that prioritize collective over individual concerns.

Comparison with International Research

When compared to international studies on team cohesion and youth athlete development, several patterns emerge. The high motivation scores ($M=4.43$) for social media-enhanced performance align with adventure sports research showing that social media can motivate youth participation without negative mental health effects (Frühau, Loinger, & Kopp, 2025). However, the specific mechanisms appear different, with Arab athletes focusing more on collective achievement and team identity rather than individual recognition.

The relationship between social media and coach interactions ($M=3.61$) represents an interesting finding that has received limited attention in international literature. Research on coach-athlete relationships in individual and team sports emphasizes the critical importance of these dynamics for youth development and participation decisions (Battaglia & Kerr, 2024). The moderate scores suggest that while social media can facilitate coach-player communication, traditional face-to-face interactions remain primary in the Iraqi context.

Methodological Considerations

The small sample size ($n=23$) limits the generalizability of findings, though it is consistent with other case studies of specific sports clubs (Abdulsatar, A. A. 2025). The cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences about the direction of relationships between social media use and social outcomes. Longitudinal research would provide stronger evidence for understanding how digital communication patterns evolve with team development over time.

The cultural and linguistic adaptation of instruments represents both a strength and limitation. While ensuring appropriateness for the Iraqi context, it complicates direct comparisons with international studies using different measurement approaches (Sezer, U., & Kocaekşi, S. 2018). Future research should develop culturally sensitive instruments that maintain cross-cultural validity for comparative purposes.

Practical Implications

The findings suggest several practical applications for youth football programs in Arab contexts. The strong positive relationship between constructive social media use and team cohesion indicates that coaches and administrators should consider integrating digital communication strategies into team development



programs (Afrizal et al., 2024). Rather than restricting social media access, training programs could focus on promoting positive usage patterns that enhance rather than detract from team relationships.

The low levels of social isolation suggest that traditional Arab team-building approaches remain effective in contemporary digital environments. However, the moderate participation in social activities outside training ($M=3.22$) indicates opportunities for strengthening informal team bonds through organized social events that complement digital interactions (Hamzah et al., 2025).

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the consequences of social media usage and social socialization among young football players in the Iraqi context. The research demonstrates that positive social media use can significantly enhance team cohesion and social integration, while negative impacts remain moderate and do not necessarily lead to social isolation. These findings contribute to our understanding of how digital communication technologies interact with traditional team sports cultures in Arab societies.

Key Findings Summary

The most important thing to note is the large positive connection ($r=0.879$, $p<0.001$) between good social media impact and social socialization strength. This means that constructive digital communication may greatly improve how well a team works together. On the other hand, the fact that there isn't a strong link between poor social media usage and social isolation shows that conventional team support networks may help people avoid social difficulties that come from using technology.

The extremely low levels of social isolation ($M=1.41$) demonstrate exceptional team cohesion within the Iraqi football context, potentially reflecting the collectivistic nature of Arab sports culture. Moderate levels of negative social media impact ($M=2.98$) suggest that while some digital challenges exist, they do not severely compromise team functioning or individual well-being.

Theoretical Contributions

This research extends social media effects literature by examining digital communication within specific cultural and sporting contexts. The results go against the idea that social media usage always has bad effects on young people, showing that cultural norms and social institutions may change these associations. The study also contributes to team cohesion research by exploring how contemporary communication technologies interact with traditional group dynamics processes.

Recommendations

Several suggestions come out of the study's results for young football programs:

- **Encourage Mindful Use of Social Media:** Create programs that teach people about the advantages of using digital platforms to improve performance and social relationships, and give them tips on how to avoid using them in harmful ways.
- **Strengthen the Social Environment:** Improve the social surroundings of teams by having frequent events outside of training hours. This will help players feel like they belong and fit in, particularly younger players.
- **Teach Coaches and Supervisors:** Help coaches learn how to provide psychological and social support, and show them how to utilize social media to talk to players effectively.



- Set up psychological support: Offer regular sports psychology services to help athletes who can be hurt by comparing themselves to others or feeling pressure from using social media.
- Keep an eye on players' digital habits: Even though there weren't many negative effects observed, you should routinely check on players' digital habits to see whether they are showing signs of psychological or social changes because of bad online interactions.
- utilize good Role Models: Use players on the squad who utilize social media to motivate themselves as role models to help create a good digital culture.
- Get Parents Involved: Get parents involved in teaching players, particularly those under 18, by holding seminars that teach them how to help their kids utilize technology in a way that doesn't interfere with training or team social life.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. The small sample size and single-club focus limit generalizability to broader populations of young athletes. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences about the relationships observed. Cultural and linguistic adaptations of instruments, while necessary, complicate direct comparisons with international research.

Future research should employ larger, multi-site samples to enhance generalizability across different Arab cultural contexts. Longitudinal designs would provide stronger evidence for understanding how social media usage patterns and team dynamics evolve over time. Comparative studies across different cultural contexts would help identify universal versus culture-specific patterns in social media effects on youth athletes.

Research should also examine the specific mechanisms through which positive social media use enhances team cohesion, including the role of shared content, communication frequency, and platform preferences. Investigation of coach and parent perspectives on social media's role in youth development would provide additional insights for developing comprehensive support programs.

The integration of qualitative methods could provide deeper understanding of the cultural and contextual factors that moderate social media effects in Arab sports settings. Finally, intervention studies examining the effectiveness of structured social media literacy programs for youth athletes could provide evidence-based approaches for optimizing digital communication in sports contexts.

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