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A Systematic Literature Review of Advantages and Difficulties of Improving Athlete Performance with Mobile Smartwatch Health Apps

Moch Yunus[1]*, Ronal Surya Aditya[2], Nanang Tri Wahyudi[3], Nurul Ihsan[4], Lintang Nirmalasari Gemalochaya M[5], Farsya Hidayah Septiananda[6]
[1,2,3,5,6]Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia
[4]Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia
Corresponding Author: Moch Yunus moch.yunus.fk@um.ac.id

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A B S T R A C T
The potential of mobile smartwatch health applications to improve sports performance, avoid injuries, and aid in general health management has drawn a lot of interest in recent years. Through the integration of cutting-edge technologies, these programs offer athletes immediate feedback, real-time physiological and psychoemotional indicator monitoring, and customized exercise regimens. According to the review, individualized workout regimens and real-time feedback from mobile Smartwatch health applications greatly enhance sports performance, injury prevention, and motivation. Persistent issues were identified, nevertheless, such as the inability to tailor regimens for a variety of athletes, guarantee user compliance, and handle privacy and security issues with data management. To maximize these uses, the results highlight the necessity of strong privacy safeguards and interdisciplinary cooperation. wellbeing apps for mobile smartwatches are essential for improving athletes' mental and physical wellbeing. But for them to succeed going forward, they must address issues like data security, adherence, and customisation. In order to optimize the potential of these applications in athletic health management, future research should concentrate on developing AI-driven personalization, enhancing user engagement, and fortifying privacy safeguards.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, mobile health applications for smartwatches have gained widespread attention in the sports domain, particularly in enhancing athletic performance, preventing injuries, and managing general health (Aromatario et al., 2019). These applications leverage advanced technologies to provide real-time feedback, remote monitoring of physiological and psychoemotional indicators, and personalized workout regimens, offering comprehensive resources to improve both physical and mental health (Nussbaum et al., 2019). Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of these health apps in monitoring vital signs, streamlining training regimens, and fostering positive behavior changes, all of which contribute to the improvement of athletes' fitness levels. As interest in mobile health technologies has grown, features that customize workouts to the specific needs of athletes have expanded, making these apps essential resources in modern sports training (Grzebieluch et al., 2020).

However, despite the evidence of the benefits of smartwatch health apps in sports, significant challenges remain in achieving sustained user adherence and successfully tailoring workout programs to the unique attributes of each user (Pradal-Cano et al., 2020). A major challenge is the inability of some apps to maintain high levels of user adherence, particularly when the apps fail to fully customize the training programs according to individual preferences and needs. This highlights a gap in app design that may affect their long-term effectiveness in improving athletic performance.

Furthermore, with increasing regulations on data protection, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), privacy and security issues related to the processing of sensitive athlete data have yet to be adequately addressed (Carter et al., 2018). This issue is becoming more urgent as the potential risks associated with mishandling personal data are significant. Therefore, it is crucial to integrate knowledge from various disciplines—such as sports science, psychology, and legal frameworks—when designing apps that are not only effective in enhancing performance but also comply with data protection laws.

This study aims to analyze the key characteristics of mobile smartwatch health applications used by athletes, evaluate their impact on performance and fitness, and address the issues related to data security, user adherence, and customization. The study will also explore the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in designing more holistic apps that cater to athletes' mental and physical health needs while adhering to privacy regulations. By addressing these challenges, this research intends to improve the efficiency of mobile health applications in promoting athletes' overall well-being and provide viable alternatives in app design that are safer, more effective, and better accepted by users (Helbostad et al., 2017; Matthews et al., 2016).

It is expected that the findings of this study will not only provide a deeper understanding of the factors affecting the use of mobile health applications by athletes but also offer valuable recommendations for the development of more advanced, secure, and user-friendly applications that meet athletes' needs for performance enhancement and well-being.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Eligibility Criteria

This review included peer-reviewed studies published in English between 2013 and 2023 that specifically focused on mobile health applications designed for athletes. Eligible studies addressed core elements such as real-time monitoring of physiological and psychoemotional indicators, personalized training regimens, and adherence to privacy regulations, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Studies were excluded if they involved small sample sizes (less than 30 participants), lacked methodological rigor, or focused on general health and fitness applications that did not provide athlete-specific information or relevant outcomes.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple academic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and IEEE Xplore, using the following search terms: "athlete performance," "mobile health applications," "personalized exercise," "real-time monitoring," and "privacy compliance." The search strategy was refined to ensure that studies addressing the intersection of mobile health technology and athletic performance, as well as those adhering to inclusion criteria, were thoroughly identified.

Study Selection Process

The study selection process involved several stages. Initially, duplicate records were removed from the results. Subsequently, titles and abstracts of the remaining studies were screened to ensure alignment with the review's objectives. Full-text reviews were then conducted for studies that passed the initial screening to assess eligibility according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Reasons for exclusion were clearly documented, particularly for studies that did not focus on athletes or failed to meet the quality standards outlined in the criteria.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to guide the systematic literature review (SLR) methodology. The PRISMA methodology ensures a thorough, transparent, and reproducible process for identifying, assessing, and synthesizing relevant research on mobile smartwatch health applications for athletes. The primary objectives of this review were to identify the key features of these applications, assess their impact on athletic performance, and explore challenges such as privacy and security concerns, user adherence, and the customization of workout plans.

Data Extraction

Key data points were extracted from the selected studies using a standardized data extraction form. The following information was systematically collected: study objectives, participant demographics, features of the mobile

health application, outcomes related to athletic performance, and any discussions regarding privacy and security protocols. Additional data on strategies for improving user adherence, methods of personalizing workout regimens, and the application of interdisciplinary approaches (e.g., psychology, sports science, and law) within the studies were also emphasized during data extraction.

Quality Assessment

The quality of the included studies was assessed using established tools. Non-randomized studies were evaluated using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale, while randomized controlled trials (RCTs) were appraised using the Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool. The assessment focused on several key aspects: methodological rigor, risk of bias, clarity of outcome measurement, and robustness of findings. Only studies deemed to have high methodological quality were included in the final synthesis to ensure the reliability and validity of the conclusions drawn.

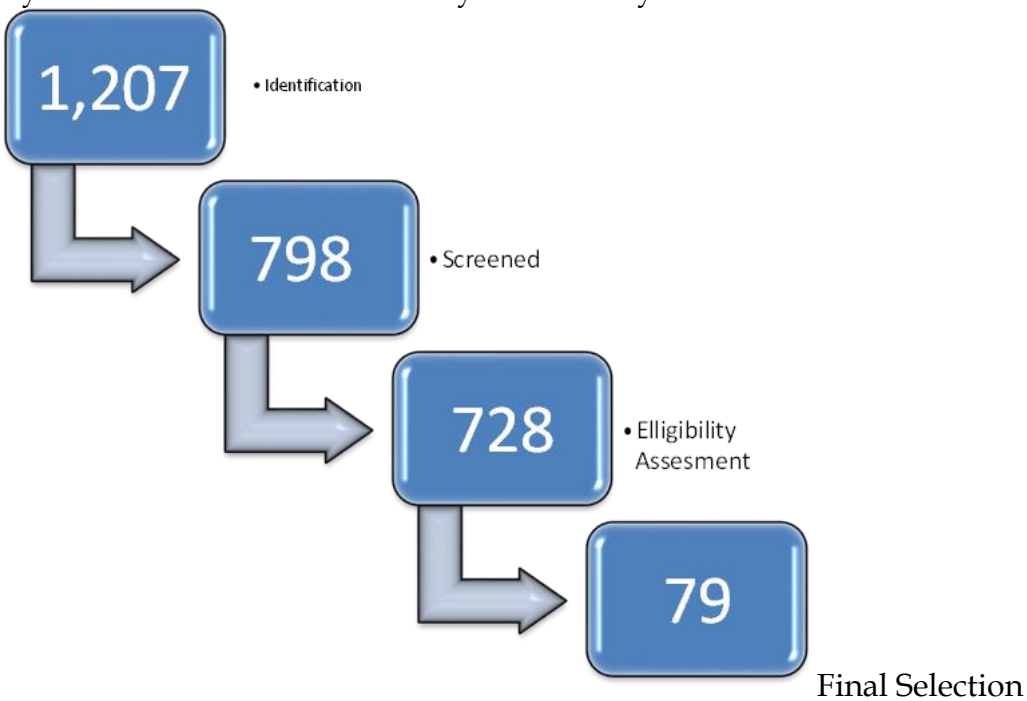

Figure 1. PRISMA Step

Synthesis of Results

The synthesis of the results was performed using thematic analysis. Key themes were identified based on the characteristics of the mobile health applications, their effects on athlete performance, the challenges related to privacy and security, and issues surrounding customization and user adherence. A narrative synthesis was employed to compare and contrast the findings from different studies, highlighting both the benefits and drawbacks of mobile health applications in the context of sports performance and athlete well-being.

RESEARCH RESULT

The way athletes maintain their fitness and health has been completely transformed by mobile health apps, which provide real-time feedback, remote monitoring, and customized workout regimens. These apps use cutting-edge

technology to monitor physiological and psychological markers, giving athletes a thorough understanding of their general health. Mobile health apps are essential for preventing injuries, increasing motivation, and promoting long-term behavior change in addition to boosting performance. However, issues like user adherence, customized plan creation, and privacy and security concerns continue to be major roadblocks despite their increasing popularity. The main characteristics of mobile health apps for athletes are examined in this study, along with how they affect performance and fitness, privacy and security issues, and design and implementation obstacles.

Table 1. Theme and Sub-theme

Theme	Subtheme
Key Features of Mobile Smartwatch Health Applications	• Features that are pertinent to health (e.g., blood pressure, pulse, fitness, and calorie tracking)
	• Remote observation of psychological and physiological markers
	• Individualized workout regimens
	• Feedback on exercise intensity in real time
Contribution to Athletes' Fitness and Performance	• Exercise regimens customized for each person based on their unique traits
	• Keeping an eye on psychological and physiological markers to avoid damage
	• Using real-time feedback to improve behavior change and motivation
Privacy and Security Considerations	• Including security features in the architecture of the application
	• Adherence to standards of privacy (such as the GDPR)
Challenges in Design and Implementation	• Customizing workout regimens based on personal traits and fitness requirements
	• Making sure users follow their daily workout regimens
	• Enhancing physical performance in dynamic and unpredictable settings

Table 2. Future-Ready Guide to Wearable Technology in Sports Performance Monitoring

Key Aspect	**Description**
Advanced Sensor Integration	Modern wearables combine multiple sensors (e.g., MEMS, IMU, PR) for real-time data collection, enabling comprehensive monitoring of both internal and external workloads.
Real-Time Feedback	Devices provide instant feedback through audible and vibratory alerts, helping athletes adjust movements without needing a coach's physical presence. This is especially useful in sports like baseball pitching and tennis serving.
Strength Training Insights	Smartwatches can accurately recognize strength exercises (88.4% accuracy) and count repetitions reliably, particularly for exercises like barbell squats and deadlifts.
AI-Driven Personalization	Artificial intelligence enhances training by creating personalized programs, managing workloads, and identifying fatigue to prevent injuries during training or competitions.
Physiological Tracking	Real-time monitoring of metrics like VO2MAX and heart rate allows for adjustments based on energy expenditure, improving performance and reducing injury risks.
Holistic Athlete Monitoring	Combining multiple wearable devices provides a complete picture of an athlete's physiological, biomechanical, and psychological responses, offering deeper insights into overall performance.
Rehabilitation Support	Wearables assist in tracking recovery progress and determining when an athlete is ready to return to play after an injury.
Trust and Transparency	To maximize adoption, it's essential to ensure athletes trust these tools by clearly explaining their benefits, such as enhancing performance and reducing injury risks.

Table 3. Future Directions for Smartwatch Health Applications in Athlete Performance Enhancement

Key Area	**Description**
Personalized Guidance	Future apps should use advanced algorithms to provide tailored training plans based on individual athlete profiles, including biomechanics, recovery rates, and performance trends.
Standardization of Protocols	Establish consistent and reliable measurement standards to ensure accuracy and repeatability, building trust among athletes and coaches.
Integrated Monitoring Systems	Combine multiple wearable devices into a cohesive body sensor network with centralized data synchronization for a holistic view of physiological, biomechanical, and psychological responses.
Extended Monitoring	Expand research on 24-hour monitoring during training, competition, and recovery to uncover patterns and insights not visible in isolated sessions.
Leveraging Wearable Advantages	Optimize smartwatches' unique features (e.g., proximity to the body, safety, battery life) while addressing limitations like sensor accuracy and user interface design.
Standardized Reporting Guidelines	Develop cross-disciplinary reporting standards to improve evidence synthesis and accelerate research progress in health and human-computer interaction fields.
Cost-Effective Solutions	Prioritize affordable monitoring devices or alternative solutions to make these technologies accessible to smaller sports organizations and individual athletes.
Trust and Transparency	Foster trust by clearly communicating the purpose and benefits of monitoring tools, involving athletes in development, and providing meaningful feedback to encourage adoption.

Why These Advancements Matter

According to the study's findings, athletes can benefit greatly from mobile health apps that offer individualized workout regimens, real-time feedback, and thorough tracking of physiological and psychological health metrics. These apps are vital resources for athletes since they help with increased motivation, injury prevention, and performance. But the difficulties in creating customized workout regimens, guaranteeing regular user compliance, and maximizing performance

in changing settings underscore the necessity of continual innovation and improvement. Furthermore, security and privacy issues continue to be crucial in the creation of these applications, requiring the adoption of strong security measures and rigorous adherence to privacy laws. By tackling these issues, mobile health apps can develop further and provide athletes with even more assistance in reaching their fitness and health objectives.

DISCUSSION

The advent of mobile health applications has significantly transformed how athletes manage their health, providing a comprehensive platform that integrates real-time feedback, remote monitoring of physiological and psychoemotional indicators, and customized training regimens. These innovations enable athletes to enhance their performance and prevent injuries while gaining a deeper understanding of their overall health (Carter et al., 2018). As highlighted by Seshadri et al (2019), mobile health applications have evolved into indispensable tools for athletes, offering personalized training programs tailored to individual needs and delivering real-time feedback that fosters motivation and encourages positive behavioral change.

One of the most notable achievements of these applications is their ability to monitor vital signs, such as heart rate, caloric expenditure, and emotional states. This real-time data allows athletes to adjust their training regimens based on informed decisions, which not only mitigates the risk of injury but also prevents overtraining, thereby enhancing performance (Sastre-Munar & Romero-Franco, 2024). Furthermore, the customization of workout regimens that take into account an athlete's unique physiological profile ensures efficiency and targeted progress, while the integration of advanced tracking devices facilitates a more adaptive and dynamic approach to fitness (Aromatario et al., 2019; Piqueras-Sola et al., 2024).

Despite these technological advancements, several challenges persist in the development and implementation of mobile health apps for athletes. One significant challenge is the customization of exercise regimens to meet each athlete's unique fitness needs and characteristics. This task requires not only adaptive technology but also ongoing improvements to accommodate the diverse requirements of different athletes. Moreover, ensuring sustained user adherence to daily workout routines remains a significant obstacle. Adherence, or the lack thereof, often stems from athletes' struggles with self-regulation, which negatively impacts their commitment to prescribed training regimens (Huifeng et al., 2020). This presents a major barrier in application design, as maintaining long-term user engagement is crucial for sustained performance enhancement.

In addition to design-related challenges, issues related to security and privacy are paramount. Given that mobile health applications collect and store sensitive personal and medical data, it is imperative to implement robust security measures to safeguard this information (Dehling et al., 2015). Protecting user data from misuse and unauthorized access necessitates compliance with privacy regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Hussain et

al., 2018; Martínez-Pérez et al., 2015; Nurgalieva et al., 2020; Papageorgiou et al., 2018). The effective implementation of these security protocols is essential not only to protect athletes' data but also to build trust in mobile health applications, which is critical for widespread adoption and usage (Mei et al., 2024).

Ultimately, mobile health apps represent a significant advancement in supporting athletes' performance and overall well-being. To fully realize the potential of these technologies, however, it is necessary to address the challenges of customizing workout plans, ensuring sustained user adherence, and safeguarding privacy. Further innovation and adaptation in mobile health technology are essential to enhance the effectiveness and reliability of these applications in promoting athletes' health and performance (Fortes et al., 2019).

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

To create a truly holistic mobile health application tailored to the specific needs of athletes, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration between app developers, sports scientists, psychologists, and legal experts is essential. By integrating expertise from various disciplines, these applications can simultaneously address the physical and mental health needs of athletes. This interdisciplinary approach facilitates the development of personalized training regimens, psychological support, and ensures compliance with data privacy regulations (Dudek et al., 2025; Li et al., 2023; Martino et al., 2024). By combining cutting-edge technology with comprehensive sports science, mental health strategies, and regulatory frameworks, this model moves beyond conventional health applications, offering a more complete, secure, and efficient solution for enhancing athletic performance and well-being (McDevitt et al., 2022; Passos et al., 2021; Rodríguez-González et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2024).

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the strengths of this systematic literature review (SLR), several limitations must be acknowledged. A potential source of bias in the review is publication bias, as studies with positive outcomes are more likely to be published, which may skew the overall findings. Additionally, the scope of the review may have been constrained by the exclusion of studies published in languages other than English, which could limit the breadth of perspectives and exclude relevant research from non-English-speaking regions. Another limitation is the variability in the quality of the included studies, as some did not adhere to rigorous scientific standards, potentially affecting the consistency and reliability of the results. Lastly, given the rapid pace of development in mobile health technology, some of the research reviewed may be outdated, thus limiting the relevance of the findings to current practices.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights the significant impact of mobile smartwatch health applications on enhancing athletic performance, preventing injuries, and promoting overall well-being. These apps offer real-time feedback, personalized training regimens, and valuable insights into vital signs, contributing to more effective and adaptive fitness strategies. However, challenges remain in

customizing training plans to individual needs and ensuring long-term user adherence, as athletes often struggle with self-regulation.

Privacy and security concerns, particularly related to the protection of sensitive data, also need to be addressed. Adherence to privacy laws such as the GDPR is crucial for gaining user trust and widespread adoption. Interdisciplinary collaboration among app developers, sports scientists, psychologists, and legal experts is essential to create comprehensive, secure, and effective applications.

In conclusion, while mobile health apps have great potential, overcoming issues related to customization, adherence, and data security is vital. Continued innovation and cross-disciplinary efforts are needed to fully realize the benefits of these technologies for athletes' performance and well-being.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research should delve deeper into developing adaptive algorithms powered by artificial intelligence and machine learning to enhance the personalization of smartwatch health applications, ensuring that training plans are tailored to individual physiological responses and performance goals. Investigating behavioral science approaches, such as gamification and motivational feedback loops, may also improve long-term user adherence. Moreover, comprehensive studies on data anonymization techniques and secure cloud infrastructures are essential to address escalating privacy concerns while maintaining compliance with global data protection regulations like the GDPR. Collaborative research involving experts in wearable technology, data science, behavioral psychology, and sports medicine can lead to more intelligent, secure, and user-centric health applications that effectively support athletic performance and holistic well-being.

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