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Research on the Shaping of Sports Emotional Pathways for College Students through Wearable Devices from a Digital Body Perspective

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Abstract

This study adopts a qualitative research method to analyze the influence of wearable devices on shaping sports emotional pathways for college students from a digital body perspective. The main content of the research is to deeply investigate the subjective emotional changes and cognitive attitudes of college students when using wearable devices for sports. By combining in-depth interviews and questionnaire surveys, the study actively attempts to comprehensively clarify the micro-level ways in which wearable devices impact students' sports emotional pathways and explore the nuanced changes in these pathways. The research results significantly expand the research boundaries of the digital body perspective, enhance understanding of how wearable devices shape students' sports emotions, and may potentially strengthen students' overall perception of the digital body, optimize and stabilize their sports emotions, and potentially drive wearable device optimization to comprehensively improve the quality and effectiveness of college students' sports participation. In summary, this study fully demonstrates the importance of considering college students' fundamental perspectives and emotional attitudes in shaping sports emotional pathways through wearable devices, while also providing a novel perspective on the development of student sports.

Keywords: *Digital body perspective, Wearable devices, College students, Sports emotions*

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1. Introduction

College students' sports emotions are a key element in the continuity of sports participation and holistic

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physical and mental development, directly related to the cultivation of lifelong sports awareness and the improvement of sports performance. Currently, college students often face situations of low sports emotions during participation, such as easily diminishing sports enthusiasm, tendency to give up when encountering setbacks, insufficient emotional regulation capabilities, and biased cognitive attitudes towards physical education (Miao, 2024). With the rapid development of intelligent hardware technology, wearable devices (such as Apple Watch, Huawei Sport Bands, smart watches, heart rate chest straps, etc.) can real-time collect physiological and sports data like heart rate, movement trajectories, energy consumption, and sleep quality (Qiao, 2025). These devices present a visualized body movement status for college students, transforming real physical movement states into concrete, visible data, and through precise perception and dynamic capture, form a "digital body" that influences students' sports emotional transitions. The digital body perspective, as an important theoretical viewpoint in the digital era, emphasizes the deep integration of body and digital technology, advocating the visualization, analyzability, and controllability of body movement states through digital tools. It provides a novel theoretical framework for interpreting the interaction between body and mind during sports, making wearable devices a typical application tool for the digital body perspective in the sports field, which holds significant importance for promoting modern development in college physical education.

Facing the current sports emotional state of college students, wearable sports devices can continuously monitor sports data and push personalized sports recommendations. Relying on the "digital body" formed through data integration, these devices can influence students' judgments of their own sports status, thereby affecting the generation and regulation of sports emotions. They help students alleviate the problem of diminishing sports enthusiasm, enhance emotional regulation capabilities when facing setbacks, and promote students' sports emotions towards a positive and stable ideal state. In this process, wearable devices transform from passive tools for recording sports data to active carriers guiding sports emotions, becoming crucial technical support for optimizing college students' sports emotional experiences. However, current research predominantly focuses on wearable devices' data collection and sports performance assessment, with few studies deeply exploring their impact on college students' sports emotions from a digital body perspective, resulting in the devices' potential for optimizing emotional experiences and stimulating continuous sports motivation not being fully realized.

Therefore, this research takes "the influence of wearable devices on college students' sports emotions from a digital body perspective" as its research subject. It comprehensively employs semi-structured interviews to understand students' detailed sports emotional experiences when using devices, such as how data feedback establishes sports confidence and how devices assist in regulating frustration emotions. Simultaneously, it conducts actual tracking investigations to observe the dynamic changes in students' sports emotions with device usage. Additionally, it uses questionnaire surveys to collect quantitative information like users' evaluations of the device's emotional regulation effects, usage satisfaction, and functional requirements. The aim is to systematically assess the actual role of wearable sports devices in cultivating college students' sports emotions, focusing on analyzing the specific pathways of device influence on sports emotions from a digital body perspective, while also exploring students' acceptance, usage attitudes, and psychological experiences of device-assisted emotional regulation.

The research results are also of significant value to college physical education teachers, wearable device developers, sports education researchers, and college students. By considering the influence and perception of wearable devices on college students' sports emotions from a digital body perspective, it will better help integrate emotion-guided physical education approaches into the comprehensive teaching process and develop sports guidance strategies more tailored to individual student situations. Simultaneously, it comprehensively promotes the optimization of wearable devices' data feedback functions and enhances emotional interactivity, providing design directions for practicality. This research seeks to enrich the application of the digital body perspective in sports science by analyzing the shaping of college students' sports emotional pathways, improve students' sports emotions and experience quality, and provide theoretical and practical support for constructing high-level reforms in college physical education.

2. Literature Review

Intelligent fitness equipment and systems can not only interact efficiently, real-time, and targeted with users

through more powerful functions but also enhance the entertainment and fun of sports participation, helping to increase interaction between fitness enthusiasts and intelligent sports devices, enhance the enjoyment and entertainment of fitness methods, stimulate sports enthusiasm, and encourage more people to actively participate (Han and Qiao, 2022). In recent years, with the continuous development of sports technology, various intelligent sports devices have emerged and continuously updated with breakthroughs in artificial intelligence technology. Wearable devices with portable, practical, and easily accessible attributes have become the preferred equipment for sports enthusiasts. Wearable devices are portable electronic devices that can be directly worn as accessories and can perceive, record, and analyze vital signs under software support (Xie and Zhang, 2015). Wearable devices have advantages of low maintenance and connectivity costs (Page *et al.*, 2016), better meeting daily sports needs. Current main types include hand-worn, head-worn, foot-worn, and devices worn on other body parts. With technological progress, wearable devices are developing towards more miniaturization, intelligence, and multi-functionality, providing better training perception and health management models for the public (Qiao, 2025). Due to their diverse categories and different price levels, they are also deeply loved by college students, providing different sports emotional motivations.

The use of wearable devices has transformed bodily movement emotions from a private "subjective experience" into "emotional data" that can be real-time visualized, socially compared, and algorithmically analyzed and intervened. The physical body is transformed into a "digital body" in the data space, and movement emotions undergo path changes with data construction. With the popularization of wearable devices, the concept of digital body view has been concretely embodied. Deborah Lupton believes that the digital body view is about converting the body into a series of data streams that can be read, analyzed, compared, and optimized through continuously collected quantitative data from wearable devices (such as step count, heart rate, sleep quality). This means that individuals' perception and understanding of their own body increasingly depend on the "objective" data provided by devices, rather than internal, subjective bodily sensations (like fatigue or pleasure) (Deborah, 2016). With the prevalence of wearable devices among college students, they not only serve as exercise monitoring tools but also as technical interventions that shape new body experiences and cognition, constructing a data body in the data space. The transformation of the data body influences changes in physical body behavior, from single autonomous exercise goal setting to digital space network community motivation. Wearable devices continuously promote the path shaping of exercise behavior and emotional world for college students from multiple perspectives.

Wearable devices have evolved from simple data collection tools to intelligent assistants that provide personalized feedback and real-time guidance, with a significant shaping effect on college students' exercise behavior (Yang and Tang, 2025). Wearable devices can analyze users' heart rate changes, exercise trajectories, and other data, systematically evaluating the reasonableness of exercise intensity and predicting potential exercise injury risks (Liu, 2022). By directly outputting results to students, they enable students to reasonably arrange exercise content without professional guidance. As the depth of wearable device usage continues to be explored and usage scenarios expand, there is enormous potential to improve college students' exercise quality and efficiency, capturing users' preferences and providing adapted exercise modes for college student athletes. The emergence of wearable devices has optimized the existing exercise patterns of college students, greatly improving exercise efficiency and quality, providing more intelligent and personalized exercise assistance. The exercise scenarios inherent in smart wearable devices allow college students to effectively utilize "fragmented venues" and enhance sports effects while providing real-time feedback. Data is no longer an objective mirror but becomes "motivational capital," stimulating exercise passion and reshaping exercise meaning (Song and Xu, 2020). In terms of usage content and scenarios, by real-time recording exercise data and setting goals, coupled with vibration reminders and visual feedback upon goal completion, devices help students establish clear exercise cognition and significantly enhance their exercise self-efficacy by increasing their perception and control of bodily activities (Yang, 2025). Through data-based practices, wearable devices profoundly reconstruct college students' cognitive framework of health, physical fitness, and exercise results. Positively, long-term, systematic self-tracking enables students to "see" their progress trajectory, greatly enhancing their sense of body control (Cui *et al.*, 2023). Smart wearable devices effectively enhance students' exercise confidence by providing visualized progress feedback, thereby promoting sustained exercise behavior (Creaser *et al.*, 2022). By sharing results on social platforms associated with wearable devices or personal social media, students can share achievements with friends, participate in team challenges, or make

comparisons. Social interaction functions strengthen emotional connections, provide social support, create a sense of community belonging, and introduce the fun of healthy competition, further consolidating their exercise enthusiasm (Li *et al.*, 2023). Thus, wearable devices' goal setting and instant feedback functions can improve college students' exercise motivation, activate their interest in learning sports skills, and provide personalized task settings for different scenarios, offering powerful technical support for better sports participation.

As college students increase their frequency and depth of wearable device usage, potential issues gradually emerge. When a small number of students excessively pursue data targets, it can lead to exercise alienation, ignoring actual bodily sensations to "complete data," resulting in compulsive exercise or increased exercise injury risks (Yang, 2025). Meanwhile, individual differences in technology acceptance significantly affect device usage, with students having higher technology acceptance more likely to persist and benefit from device use, while those with higher technology anxiety are more prone to midway abandonment (Cheng and Zhang, 2025). This indicates that wearable devices come with potential usage risks, easily producing data anxiety. The frustration of not achieving targets and the shame of lagging in social rankings can transform into persistent psychological pressure. When the primary exercise motivation shifts from internal enjoyment to external data, students might experience erosion of internal exercise motivation, losing the ability to find pleasure in exercise itself and consequently losing long-term participation interest.

In conclusion, wearable devices can provide positive promotion for college students' exercise emotions, but also present some potential problems. Existing research predominantly focuses on short-term effects and single mechanisms when discussing wearable devices' impact on college students' exercise behavior, lacking in-depth analysis of multiple factor interactions affecting exercise emotion path changes. Particularly in the Chinese higher education context, unique factors such as academic pressure and campus sports culture interact with wearable device usage to shape students' exercise emotions. Therefore, there is an urgent need to explore wearable devices' shaping of college students' exercise emotion paths, including bodily perception, cognitive feedback, and emotional changes, to provide comprehensive guidance for college students' sports participation. Current literature more often uses case analysis and logical argumentation to discuss wearable devices' impact on college students' exercise, lacking profound exploration from the digital body view perspective. Thus, by obtaining relevant data through interviews and questionnaire surveys, exploring wearable devices' role in shaping college students' exercise emotion paths from the digital body view perspective is crucial. This can enrich existing research systems and content, providing theoretical support and practical reference for college students' use of wearable devices in exercise.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This research aims to explore from an educational anthropological holistic perspective how the "digital body" constructed by wearable devices reshapes college students' exercise emotion paths. To better investigate emotion path changes, this study adopts a qualitative research paradigm, using integrated online and offline fields as a comprehensive cultural exploration site. The research's composite field consists of offline sports venues like playgrounds and gyms, and online device app community scenarios. To better clarify research data, the study will collect data from survey respondents through questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews, and field observations, extracting meaningful, directional, and structured cluster themes.

3.2. Survey Subjects

The research survey targets undergraduate students from different majors. In subject selection, the study fully considers objective factors such as age, gender, professional background, and sports participation level to ensure overall representativeness. The selection requirements for survey subjects include:

- Continuous use of smart watches or sports wristbands for regular exercise (at least twice a week) for over 3 months.
- Cover different types of sports.
- Consider the differences in gender, grade, and academic background.

3.3. Data Collection

The research conducted observations on the subjects through physical field sites (university playgrounds, gymnasiums, fitness centers, student dormitories, etc.) and digital field sites (internal communities within sports apps used by research participants), and distributed questionnaires. Based on this, in-depth interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with interviewees to gain an in-depth understanding of college students' thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and current status regarding wearable devices such as smart watches or fitness trackers. All interviews were conducted in a one-on-one format, with interview locations placed in spacious, relaxed, and non-office environments, aiming to enable participants to complete the interviews in a non-task-oriented manner and obtain their true, free, and comprehensive thoughts. To ensure the reproducibility of interview content, audio recordings were made throughout the entire interview process to guarantee the authenticity and accuracy of the data. Interview questions covered multiple aspects of using wearable devices such as smart watches or fitness trackers, including:

- The sustained usefulness of wearable devices for exercise.
- The physical perception of wearable devices for exercise.
- The cognitive feedback of wearable devices for exercise.
- The social impact of wearable devices on exercise.
- The attitude orientation of wearable devices towards exercise.
- The systemic limitations of wearable devices for exercise.

During the research process, data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. To ensure the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the research, with participants' consent, exercise data summary screenshots, electronic badges, and exercise route maps were collected. Participants' sports-related statuses, diaries, or notes posted on social media were also gathered. The questionnaire survey and interviews would provide basic data on the survey subjects' perceived attitudes, satisfaction levels, and shortcomings regarding wearable devices for exercise. The questionnaire design aimed to measure the survey subjects' overall perceptual orientation towards wearable devices for exercise and their preference tendencies for the impact of wearable devices on exercise.

4. Data Analysis

4.1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Survey Subjects

In this study, strictly following the principles of research theme and subject selection, university undergraduate students aged 18-22 were selected, with a total of 32 participants. In this survey, the gender distribution showed that male participants outnumbered female participants, with 19 males and 13 females (Figure 1).

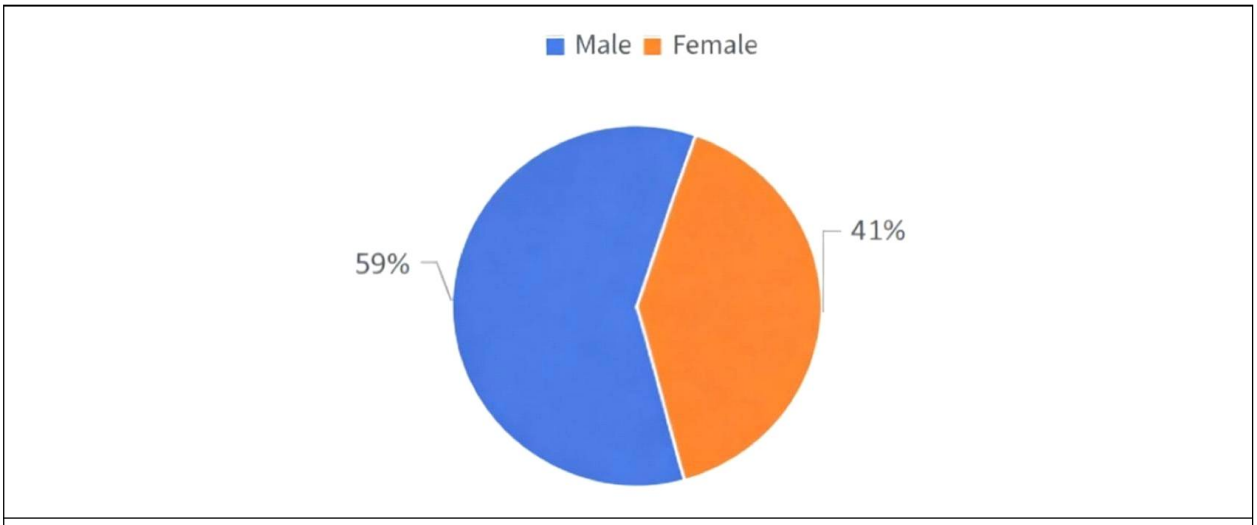

Figure 1: Gender Ratio of Survey Subjects

Among all survey subjects, 7 were from the first year of university, 12 from the second year, 10 from the third year, and 3 from the fourth year (Figure 2). The survey subjects had different exercise frequencies. All participants had a habit of continuously and regularly using wearable devices such as smartwatches or fitness trackers for over 3 months, covering various sports including ball games, dance, track and field, etc. (Figure 3), which could meet the research requirements. Additionally, the results showed significant differences in the learning time of sports skills, with most participants having more than one year of experience.

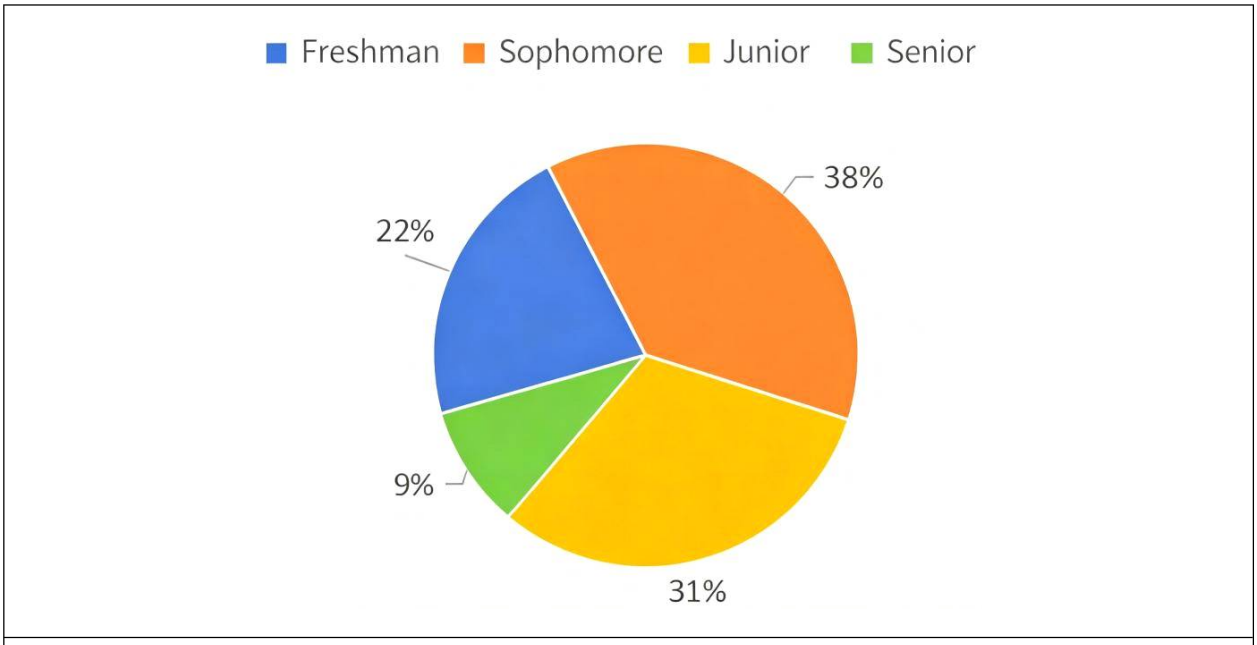

Figure 2: Grade Ratio of Survey Subjects

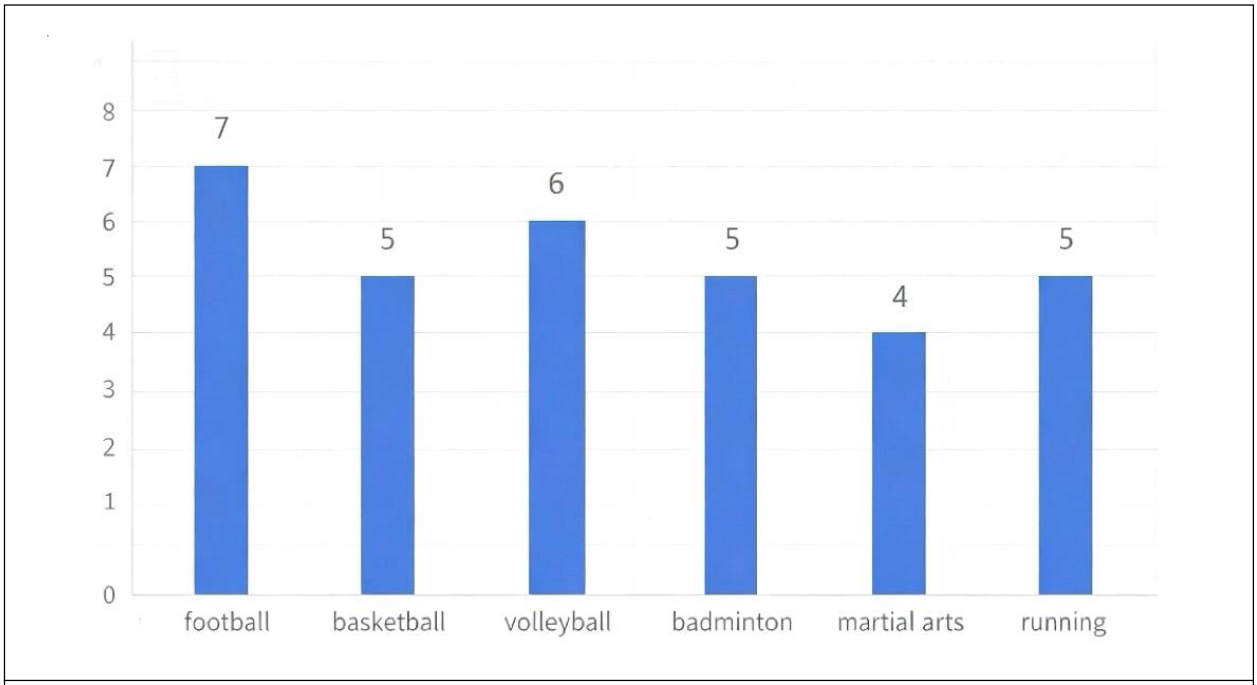

Figure 3: Sports Category Ratio of Survey Subjects

4.2. Text Data Analysis

This research employed text mining and content analysis methods, extracting key theme words and clustering themes through content coding and text mining of interview transcripts. Screenshots of participants' sports data, app achievement badges, and social media sports sharing posts were collected as "emotional texts" to analyze the emotional narratives, self-presentation strategies, and shared value concepts behind them. All

interview recordings were transcribed, and physical materials were digitally archived. Using thematic analysis, the researchers carefully read the original materials, initially labeling meaningful phenomena and statements, discovering and establishing logical connections between concept categories, identifying core categories, and systematically linking core categories with other categories. Three core themes were extracted: "sports emotional motivation conversion", "real-time body perception regulation", and "sports emotional behavior reinforcement". This process focused on systematically identifying and integrating repeatedly mentioned concepts and ideas through targeted dialogue recognition.

The thematic analysis comprehensively revealed the participants' experiences using wearable devices, including the value existence, realistic challenges, and influences of factors such as gender, sports categories, and majors. This study not only solidified the foundation of the sports emotional pathway system but also provided practical references for future research on sports emotional habits.

Every stage of the research process strictly adhered to ethical guidelines. All participants signed informed consent forms before the study began, clearly understanding their right to withdraw at any time, the research purpose, voluntary participation principle, and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Pseudonyms were used, and information that could potentially identify individuals was blurred. The study followed data protection and privacy regulations, effectively ensuring the anonymity and information confidentiality of the participants.

5. Discussion

In this section, I will elaborate on the data analysis results regarding how wearable devices reshape the emotional pathways of sports for college students. Through wearable devices that can influence students' sports emotional pathways to varying degrees before, during, and after exercise, this pathway is no longer a simple biological bodily response, but a product of biological body, digital data, and technological interfaces—a typical "digital body" practice.

5.1. Data Realization: Transformation of Sports Emotional Motivation from "Body Sensation" to "Data Sensation"

Survey results show that most respondents believe wearable devices can stimulate exercise enthusiasm, displaying a clear supportive tendency towards device usage (Figure 4). These respondents believe wearable devices can strongly guide their exercise motivation before sports, triggering anticipation through data visualization. This includes setting goals based on historical exercise data (such as running twice last week, aiming for three times this week), which stimulates self-challenge desires and forms exercise motivation.

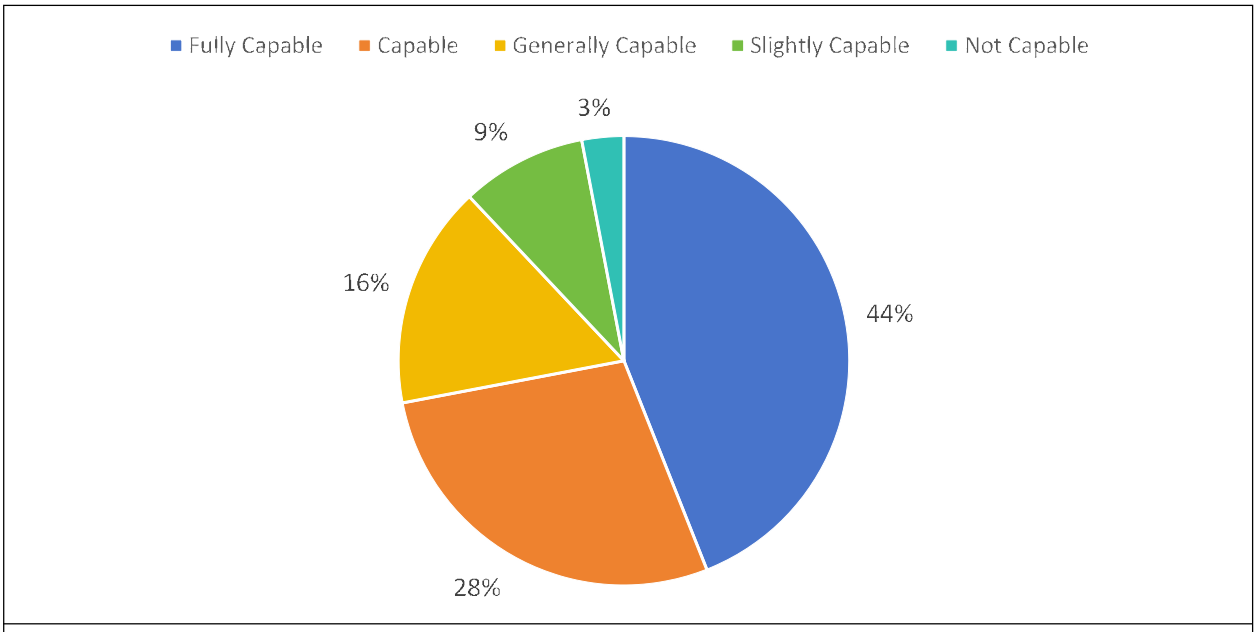

Figure 4: Wearable Devices Can Stimulate Exercise Enthusiasm

Beyond self-motivation and challenge, the social domains created by some wearable devices also drive users' exercise motivation. The targeted and purposeful virtual social spaces brought by wearable devices strengthen emotional connections in digital social interactions. Some respondents indicated that meeting like-minded exercisers in virtual communities created by wearable devices, device-set friend rankings, and exercise check-in supervision can unconsciously generate exercise motivation, forming a "peer encouragement-internal drive release - emotional resonance" sports motivation mechanism. Notably, respondents generated different internal and external exercise motivation drives through interactions with smart devices, forming a new "data-based body sensation". They comprehensively perceived their sports attributes before exercise, bringing a sense of control and security. However, some respondents noted that failing to complete set tasks or missing appointments with peers can lead to "data compulsion" and clearly perceive "data threats", thereby causing anxiety.

5.2. Process Goal-Orientation: Real-Time Data Completion Perception and Body Sensation Adjustment

In the survey results, some respondents indicated that after using wearable devices, they pay more attention to goal completion during exercise and can noticeably perceive emotional attitude changes upon achieving goals (Figure 5). Wearable devices' sensing chips can provide real-time feedback to users, such as heart rate and pace during running, helping users adjust exercise rhythm and precisely control exercise intensity, reducing fatigue. Real-time adjustments keep users' emotions positively guided. Wearable devices segment exercise goals, setting different completion markers at various times and frequencies. When users complete a task, devices display real-time "ring closure" or "achievement badges", transforming monotonous exercise into a gamified reward setting, allowing users to perceive the transformation from simple exercise to game-like rewards. Within the device-created game narrative, users can instantly perceive their exercise status due to real-time goal feedback, clearly understanding their changes. This immediate positive "task completion" feedback shapes users' embodied emotional pathways. Simultaneously, some respondents reported over-relying on wearable device data indicators, experiencing emotional alienation. The real-time data display causes some users to excessively focus on data achievement, performing ineffective exercises to meet step count goals, losing exercise's real objectives and overlooking authentic exercise emotional experiences. In extreme device data dependence, a "perception disconnection" between digital and real bodies might occur, creating a "data blind obedience" phenomenon where users continue exercising despite muscle soreness or altered breathing rhythms, potentially risking sports injuries.

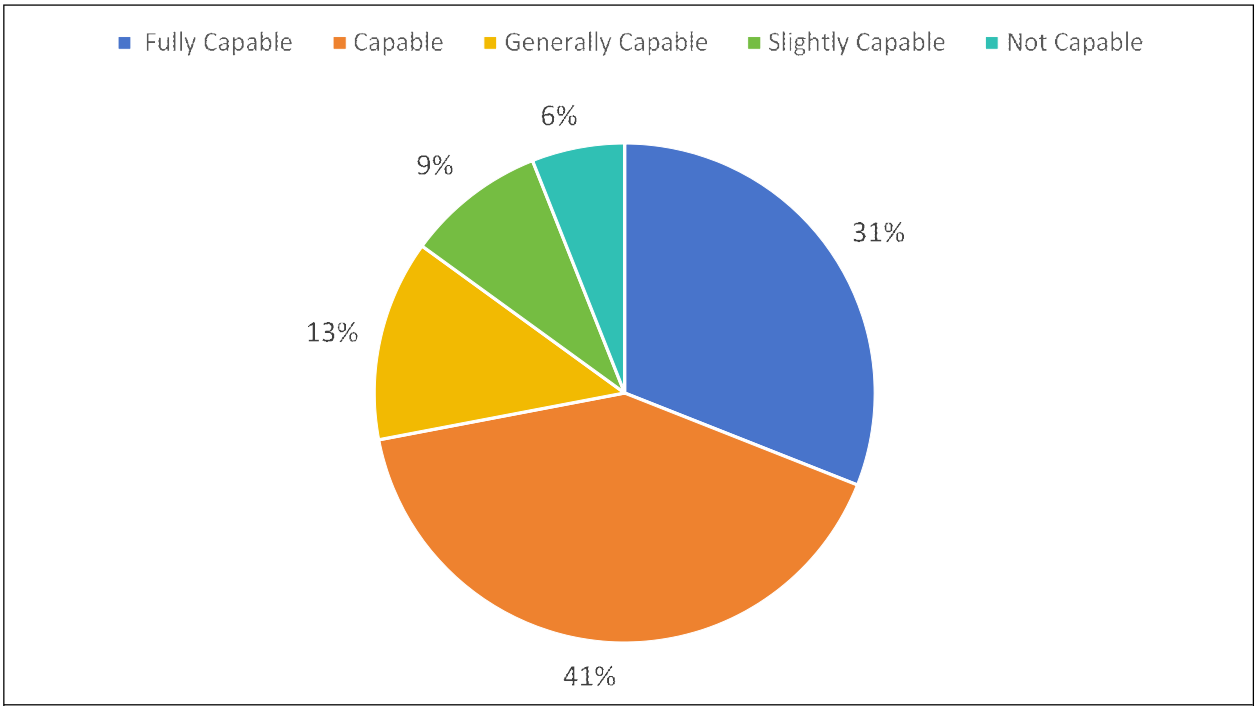

Figure 5: Goal Achievement Can Perceive Personal Emotional Attitude Changes

5.3. Result Visualization: Sports Emotional Behavior Reinforcement through Exercise Data Retrospective Sharing

The survey revealed that wearable device users pay more attention to the real existence of exercise results, emphasizing recording and strengthening exercise's real existence. Most users frequently review their exercise using wearable devices after completing sports (Figure 6), such as reviewing exercise frequency and calories burned, forming a sense of achievement and confidence for continuous exercise, further solidifying the emotional foundation of exercise persistence. The cloud recording technology of wearable devices comprehensively enhances result realization, enabling full recording of weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual exercise data for anytime review. This transforms "exercise experience" into "digital memory", making sports emotions traceable and identifiable, allowing users to clearly perceive exercise results. Some respondents noted that device-generated completion records, check-ins, and exercise trajectories can be shared on public social platforms, producing social recognition through likes and comments, which can reinforce exercise choices and guide positive sports emotions for better future engagement. In this process, individual sports achievements are no longer momentary self-appreciation but continuously receive group resonance and affirmation across an extended time-space, creating an asynchronous emotional relay that significantly alleviates solo exercise loneliness and provides continuous external emotional fuel for exercise persistence. Based on group goal consistency and shared data language, a "data-based empathy" emerges, making emotional support more professional and targeted, generating strong group belonging and reinforcing positive feelings of being understood. Importantly, in pursuit of displaying a "perfect digital body" in communities and continuous comparisons, users might feel unsatisfactory and experience data anxiety, consuming general exercise emotions.

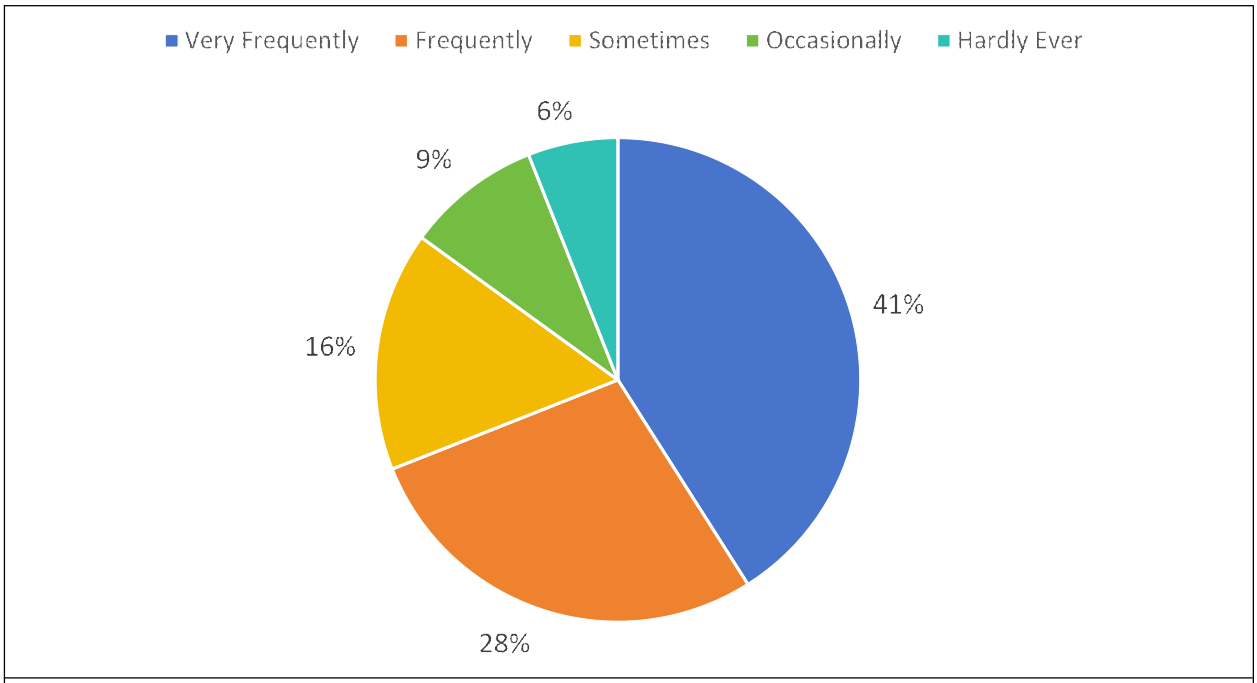

Figure 6: Using Wearable Devices for Post-Exercise Retrospective

6. Conclusion

In summary, wearable devices can guide college students towards positive emotional orientation by digitizing body data, objectifying processes, and realizing results, bringing a novel emotional experience path to students' sports engagement. However, certain alienation phenomena exist in the specific usage process. Wearable devices guide students to self-supervise and self-optimize in a gentle, internalized manner, representing an evolution of modern disciplinary technology in the digital era. Simultaneously, wearable devices serve as tools for students' self-construction and self-understanding, enabling them to recognize, manage, and construct an "ideal body" through data. These devices create a digital greenhouse of sports emotions, allowing users to find their positioning and clarify their sports emotions. Yet, the presence of data quantification during usage can produce different "data anxiety" phenomena, with this complex emotional interweaving being a core

characteristic of digital body practices. This requires higher education to guide students in developing critical "digital body literacy"—adeptly utilizing technology-expanded social networks to obtain positive emotional support while remaining aware of data quantification pitfalls, advocating a "data-assisted rather than data-driven" embodied sports concept. By protecting their body's subjectivity and emotional health amidst the data wave, students can ultimately find a dynamic, healthy balance in the symbiosis of humans and technology.

Regarding this research, it is crucial to recognize its limitations. The research conclusions must be interpreted and referenced within the specific sample inventory and specialized context of college students' wearable device usage, requiring a cautious approach to broad result application. To further refine the research findings, future studies should extensively incorporate student groups from diverse universities, attempting to cover more learning levels to more comprehensively and clearly elucidate the influence mechanism of wearable devices on college students' sports emotional pathways. Simultaneously, research should include a clear focus on the long-term guidance of wearable devices on college students' sports emotions, conducting prolonged observations of the dynamic trends affecting students' sports emotional changes to more completely understand the peripheral influencing factors of these pathways. By studying these aspects, future research can provide practical support for transforming and reshaping college students' sports emotional pathways, thereby offering more realistic guidance for developing and optimizing student sports engagement.

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