

Gender Targeting of Fitness Facebook Pages: A Linguo-Stylistic Perspective

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Bachelor's Thesis
2022/2023



Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně
Fakulta humanitních studií
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Akademický rok: 2022/2023

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení: Nikola Mareková
Osobní číslo: H190305
Studijní program: B7310 Filologie
Studijní obor: Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi
Forma studia: Prezenční
Téma práce: Genderové cílení facebookových fitness stránek: Lingvostylistická perspektiva

Zásady pro vypracování

Shromáždění materiálů k tématu
Studium odborné literatury
Formulace cílů práce
Analýza vybraných facebookových fitness stránek
Vyození a formulace závěrů práce

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

Seznam doporučené literatury:

- Crystal, David. 2006. *Language and the Internet*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dworkin, Shari, and Faye Wachs. 2009. *Body Panic: Gender, Health, and the Selling of Fitness*. New York: New York University Press.
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- Pilcher, Jane, and Imelda Whelehan. 2016. *Key Concepts in Gender Studies*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE.

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Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **7. listopadu 2022**
Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **9. května 2023**

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ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá problematikou genderových rozdílů na online Facebookových stránkách, které se zabývají fitness. Práce se skládá z teoretické části a analýzy. Teoretická část popisuje tématické okruhy jako je pohlaví a gender, sféru sociálních medií a jak fungují, a dále se pak zabývá fitnesssem. Analytická část pak obsahuje analýzu genderových rozdílů v příspěvcích na fitnessových Facebook stránkách a to z lingvo-stylistické perspektivy.

Klíčová slova: gender, genderové rozdíly, fitness, představy o těle, sociální media, Facebook, stylistika, lingvo-stylistika, analýza, jazyk

ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis deals with linguistic aspects of gender targeting on fitness Facebook pages. The thesis consists of a theoretical and an analytical part. The theoretical part focuses on the topics such as sex and gender, the sphere of social media and how they work, and then it describes fitness. The analytical part then includes an analysis of linguistic differences in addressing different genders in fitness posts on Facebook from linguo-stylistic perspective.

Keywords: gender, gender differences, fitness, body image, social media, Facebook, stylistics, linguo-stylistics, analysis, language

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would sincerely like to thank to Dr. Svitlana Shurma for her guidance, patience and valuable advice.

I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's/Master's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a significant platform for businesses to connect with their target audience and promote their products or services. One industry that has been thriving on social media is the fitness industry. With the rise of fitness influencers and the increasing importance of a healthy lifestyle, fitness Facebook pages have become an essential tool for promoting fitness and wellness products. However, the content of these pages is not always gender-neutral and often targets specific genders in its language use and stylistic features. This phenomenon raises questions about the linguistic strategies used to appeal to particular audiences and the ways in which gender is constructed on these fitness Facebook pages.

This bachelor thesis aims to analyse the linguo-stylistic features of fitness Facebook pages, focusing on gender targeting. Specifically, this study will examine the differences in language use and communication strategies on fitness Facebook pages that target women and men.

The theoretical part is divided into 3 sections. The first chapter explores gender, different ways of defining it and explains gender stereotypes. The second chapter discusses social media and language variations on the internet. And lastly, this chapter outlines the characteristics of fitness discourse.

The analytical part of the thesis features an analysis of differences in language use when targeting either men or women in fitness discourse.

This thesis ends with a conclusion, which contains the summary of the data gathered and final remarks on the results achieved.

1 AN OVERVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES

1.1 Approaches to defining gender

Sex and gender are two categories often confused by general public. While “sex” refers to biological differences such as different reproductive organs, levels of hormones and number of chromosomes of a male and a female, “gender” refers more to the socially constructed characteristics and social roles of being a woman or man in a society, and these roles might change over a period of time. Nowadays the society sees gender as a spectrum rather than two categories, where women can freely show their masculine traits and vice versa (McLeod, 2014).

Perceptions of women’s and men’s behaviours are gendered and people tend to expect that many characteristics between men and women differ way more than has actually been documented by DeFrancisco and Palczewski’s research (2007). We can spot these characteristics in daily conversations between men and women. Allegedly women complain and gossip a lot, men on the other hand do not know how to listen. But it was suggested that these characteristics are likely influenced by socialization toward stereotypical preferences rather than by biology (DeFrancisco and Palczewski, 2007).

According to V. P. DeFrancisco and C. H. Palczewski (2007) sex and gender are primary social categories in most cultures. For example, when a child is born, the first question asked is, if it is a boy or a girl. So, one of the first things toddlers learn about their identities is their gender. Society sexes and genders infants solely based on their genitals, only under the assumption that there are two genders that correspond with the two sexes.

The current approaches to understanding and definition of sex and gender discipline generally fall into three areas: biological, psychological and cultural. Even if it does not seem like it, these three categories are not so distinct in actual practice, they are hardly separable and have a huge influence on each other. Communities have a certain view on gender, and it’s probably influenced by a combination of the three categories.

1.1.2 Biological approach

In terms of biological approach (McLeod, 2014) there is no distinction between sex and gender. According to Dr. Saul McLeod (2014) biological sex creates gendered behaviour and we can determine gender by two biological factors: hormones and chromosomes.

Males and females tend to have same sex hormones, but they differ in amounts and in the effect they have on a body. Even though we consider oestrogen and progesterone as female sex hormone, and testosterone as male sex hormone, both men and women produce small amounts of the opposite sex hormones. They all play an essential role in reproduction and sexual development.

Chromosomes are found in the nucleus of each cell and they are made up of DNA. Human body has 23 pairs of chromosomes that are packed into a thread-like structures. The 23rd pair of chromosomes determines the biological sex of a human.

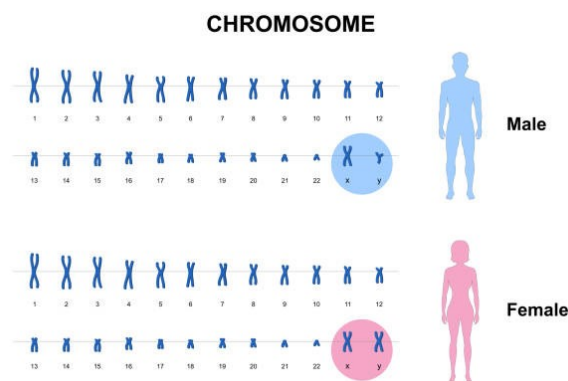


Figure 1: Chromosomes
(Olando, 2020)

Dr. McLeod (2014) also mentions the evolutionary theory as a part of biological approach. It explains why men and women differ psychologically and have different social roles. It argues that because our ancestral humans had to face different challenges our brains now adapted and developed different strategies to problem solving. As women were the only ones who could get pregnant, they were stay at home mothers who were looking after the children and their households. Men on the other hand had to bring food home, so they were viewed as a hunters and breadwinners. This theory basically suggest that our human behaviour has been coded by our genes over the past 10, 000 years.

1.1.3 Psychological approach

The psychological approach explains that gender is influenced by one's personality development. Some experiences in early childhood might leave a strong and permanent imprint on one's development of a feminine and masculine identity. This approach is primarily concerned with how early bodily and emotional experience is transformed into

unconscious ways men and women live out their lives in “masculine” or “feminine” energy within a culture (DeFrancisco and Palczewski, 2007).

For example, according to Nancy Chodorow’s theory (1978), mother is the primary caretaker and because the mother herself is a gendered person, she interacts with boy and a girl differently forming very different relationships. And each child is trying to create a separate identity from the mother. Because the daughter can see that they are overtly similar with the mother, she will identify with mother’s feminine energy and thus create a feminine identity. While the boy child recognizes that he is not like his mother, he is going to resolve his internal conflict by rejecting the mother so he can create his independent masculine identity.

1.1.4 Cultural approach

The cultural approach explains that gender is constructed by one’s interpersonal interactions and it is socially influenced, through reinforcement and children learning either male or female “role”. They internalize it as their identity, develop traits associated with that role and then carry these throughout their adulthood. This approach portrays how children learn by watching and imitating others how to act gender-appropriately and they are being rewarded for that. As opposed to biological approach that explains for example aggressiveness with levels of testosterone, cultural approach and socialization locate the source of this difference in parenting practices, which celebrate and reward aggressive behaviour in boys and sanction it in girls (Correll, 2007).

These theories implicate that the gender is not a trait of individuals. It is an organizing principle of all social systems and everyday interactions. And since the gender is imposed on individuals by social systems, the gender is not who a person is but what a person does (DeFrancisco and Palczewski, 2007).

1.2 Social aspects of gender: stereotypes

As stated earlier, gender refers to socially constructed characteristics and social roles of being a male or a female. The assumption now is that gender is a spectrum, and a person can identify to varying degrees with masculinity or femininity. Nowadays we tend to look at gender as someone’s self-identity, someone’s internal experience of gender. Because these characteristics are cultural rather than biological, the public perception of gender is reflected in the gender stereotypes.

According to United Nations Human Rights (2014) gender stereotype is a generalised view or assumption about characteristics, traits and behaviours that ought to be possessed by women and men. Gender stereotypes influence our lives on a daily basis, in the way we communicate, socialize or even dress. It basically describes how feminine women and masculine men should look.

Lloyd B. Lueptow (1995) in his article summarised the most frequent stereotypical traits of men and women:

For women he chose the following:

- Emotional
- Submissive
- Sympathetic
- Gentle
- Affectionate
- Talkative

And for men he mentioned the following:

- Ambitious
- Independent
- Adventurous
- Decisive
- Dominant
- Aggressive
- Competitive
- Self-confident

These traditional gender stereotypes only emphasize the differences between men and women. According to gender, society then assigns ways of behaviour and forms of interaction to their members. These traits can be found in social institutions such as educational and political systems, religion and family background.

We as a society assign to our members certain behaviours, characteristics and forms of interaction that are based on gender. This can be seen in social institutions such as educational and political system, religion or family background. This is why society

considers some people who do not fit to these stereotypes to be abnormal or even deviant (Renzetti and Curran, 2005).

1.3 Linguistic aspects of gender

Linguistic aspects of gender refer the ways in which gender is expressed through language. These include grammatical gender, social gender, semantic gender and genderlects.

1.3.1 Grammatical gender

Grammatical gender is a system used in many languages to classify nouns into different categories based on their gender. This system assigns a gender to every noun, and the gender determines the agreement between the noun and other parts of the sentence, such as adjectives, articles, and pronouns (Luraghi, 2014).

But unlike many other languages, English does not have a grammatical gender system. This means that nouns in English are not classified into categories based on their gender, and there are no gender-specific forms of adjectives, articles, or pronouns that agree with nouns. Instead, English uses natural gender, which means that nouns are classified as male, female, or neuter based on their actual gender. For example, the noun "man" is male, the noun "woman" is female, and the noun "desk" is neuter. However, not all nouns in English have an inherent gender, and for these nouns, gender pronouns such as "he" and "she" are not used. Instead, the gender-neutral pronoun "they" is used to refer to people or objects when their gender is unknown or irrelevant (Hall, 1964).

Overall, grammatical gender is a complex system that can vary widely across different languages and can be influenced by factors such as morphology, phonology, and semantics.

1.3.2 Social gender

Social gender refers to the culturally and socially constructed roles, behaviours, and expectations associated with being male, female, or non-binary in a particular society. It is distinct from biological sex, which refers to the physical differences between males and females. Social gender is a dynamic and complex concept that is influenced by factors such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and age (Renzetti and Curran, 2005).

For example social gender includes gendered expectations around clothing, hobbies, and interests, such as the idea that boys should play with trucks and girls should play with dolls. It also includes expectations around behaviour, such as the idea that women should be

nurturing and emotional, while men should be assertive and competitive (Eckert and McConnell, 2013).

Another aspect of social gender is the gendered division of labour, which refers to the ways in which certain types of work are seen as more appropriate for men or women. For example, in many societies, men are expected to work outside the home in paid employment, while women are expected to perform domestic labour and care for children. In addition, English also has a number of gendered nouns, such as "businessman" and "actor" or "fireman" and "policeman" which imply a particular gender for the person performing the job, which is exclusionary and limiting for women and other gender minorities (Talbot, 2020).

1.3.3 Semantic gender

Semantic gender refers to the grammatical gender that is assigned to nouns in certain languages based on their meaning, rather than the biological sex of the referent. In languages with semantic gender, nouns are classified into categories based on certain features, such as animacy, shape, or size. These categories are then assigned a grammatical gender, which affects the form of other words in the sentence, such as adjectives and pronouns. Even though English does not have a semantic gender system, there are other languages such as Spanish or French that do (Aikhenvald, 2000).

1.3.4 Genderlects

Just as people from other cultures use different dialects, women and men have very different communication styles, so-called "genderlects". That is why communication between men and women can look very similar to conversation between people from different cultures – it is full of misunderstanding (Renzetti and Curran, 2005).

In many societies, there are differences in the way that men and women are expected to communicate. For example, men are often socialized to be more assertive and direct in their speech, while women are socialized to be more polite and deferential. These differences can manifest in specific linguistic features, such as the use of tag questions or the frequency of interruptions (Renzetti and Curran, 2005).

Genderlects can also be influenced by the social and cultural expectations placed on individuals based on their gender. For example, women may be expected to use language that emphasizes nurturing and emotional expression, while men may be expected to use language that emphasizes dominance and control. Another feature of genderlects is the use of different vocabulary and grammar. For example, women may be more likely to use words

that emphasize emotions and interpersonal relationships, while men may be more likely to use words that emphasize competition and achievement. Similarly, women may use more tag questions and qualifiers, such as "don't you think?" or "maybe," while men may be more likely to use imperatives and commands. It is important to note, however, that these patterns are not universal and may not hold true for all individuals or cultures. Additionally, the ways in which gender influences language use can be complicated by factors such as identity, context, and power dynamics (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2013). For example, a woman who holds a position of authority may be more likely to use more assertive language, while a man who is socialized to be more emotionally expressive may use more language that emphasizes relationships and emotions.

2 SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE

2.1 General characteristics of social media

Adam Hayes (2022) describes social media as a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of thoughts, ideas and information through virtual networks and communities. Social media platforms typically provide users with a range of tools and features to create and share content, including status updates, tweets, photos, videos, and other media. Users can also engage with others through comments, likes, shares, and other forms of interaction, allowing for the creation of social networks and communities that span geographical and cultural boundaries.

According to Antony Mayfield (2008) modern social media share most or all of the following characteristics:

- Participation – it encourages feedback and contributions from everyone and blurs the line between the media and audience.
- Openness – there are rarely any barriers to accessing and making content.
- Conversation – it is mostly about two-way conversation rather than broadcasting that traditional media use.
- Community – it allows to create communities with common interests very quickly.
- Connectedness – they thrive on connectedness by making links to other sites, resources and people.

On the other hand, social media can also pose various risks, including privacy and security concerns, online harassment and bullying, the spread of misinformation and disinformation, and the potential for addiction and other negative impacts on mental health and well-being.

After all, the use of social media has grown rapidly in recent years, with billions of people around the world using these platforms to connect with others, share information, and engage in various forms of social, cultural, and political activity. Social media has also become an increasingly important tool for businesses, marketers, and other organizations to reach and engage with consumers and stakeholders to disseminate information and mobilize support for various causes (Hayes, 2022).

2.2 Social Media Marketing (SMM)

Nowadays, SMM is used by companies to build their brands, increase their sales, to drive website traffic and engage with existing and new customers. SMM's purpose is also to gather data from which the marketers can track the success of their strategies and identify more ways to engage (Hayes, 2022).

Marketing as such is well-developed methodological science. In the development of business, the role of marketing stays the same but the way it is executed has radically changed. It has to constantly change according to the developments taking place around it. Thanks to the new web technology, advertisers no longer have to pay huge sums of money to publishers and distributors. They can simply create and issue their own content that will be of interest to their viewers. Social media comes in many forms and the eight most popular are (Saravana and Sugantha, 2012):

- Blogs
- Microblogs
- Social networks
- Media-sharing sites
- Social bookmarking and selection sites
- Analysis sites
- Forum and effective worlds

Social media is used by almost everyone in the world; even companies irrespective of their size have also started using social media for advertising and promotion. The main goal of retailing is to put stores near customers. Now that over 600 million potential customers are on social media and mainly on Facebook, it is easier for retailers to experiment with new strategies (Saravana and Sugantha, 2012).

According to Datareportal overview from July 2022, social media growth has continued to increase and now more than a half of the world uses it. As we can see in the picture below, there is 4.70 billion media users who spend on average 2.5 hours online on various social platforms.

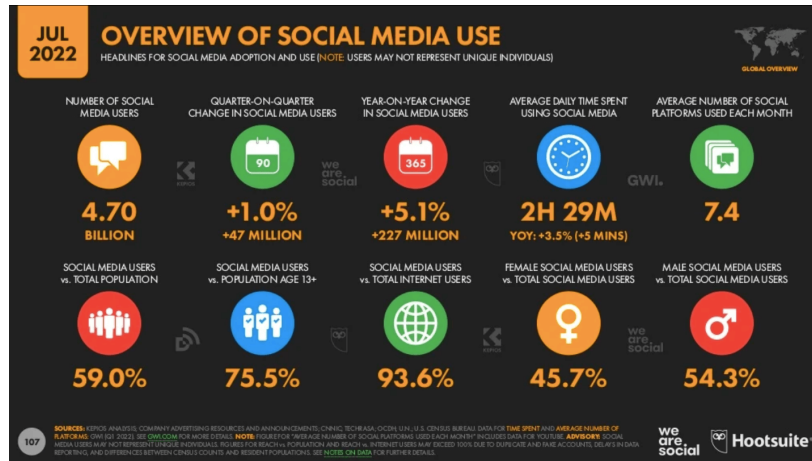


Figure 2: Overview of Social Media Use
 (Walker and Matsa, 2021)

From figure 3 below it is visible that the three most used social media platforms are WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook, however for marketers it is crucial to also consider different trends of usage for different demographics, such as age, gender, ethnicity, etc.

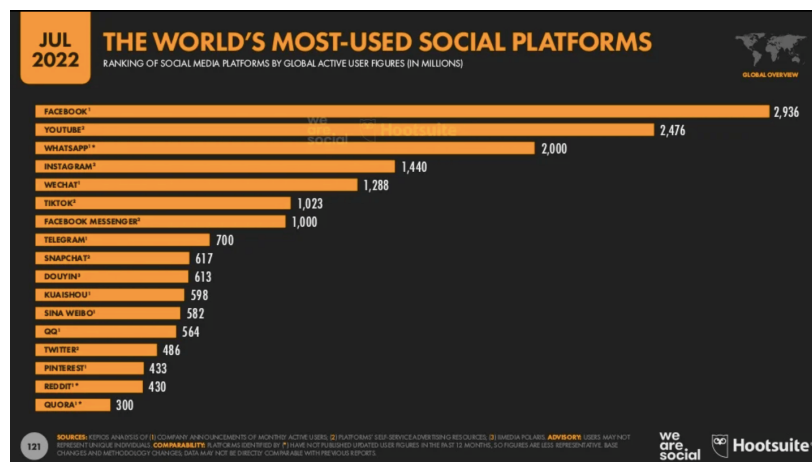


Figure 3: The World's Most-Used Social Platforms
 (Walker and Matsa, 2021)

Marketers have to take into consideration their target audience and choose the platform accordingly. For example, if someone's target audience is mainly women in the ages of 30-49, the best option to choose is Facebook because that is the platforms these women get news from. Or if the target audience is primarily teenagers, the best option is either Snapchat or TikTok.

To make social media marketing work, it is necessary to do regular research on current trends and on usage of social media (see Fig. 4) that can help marketers better assess their strategies.

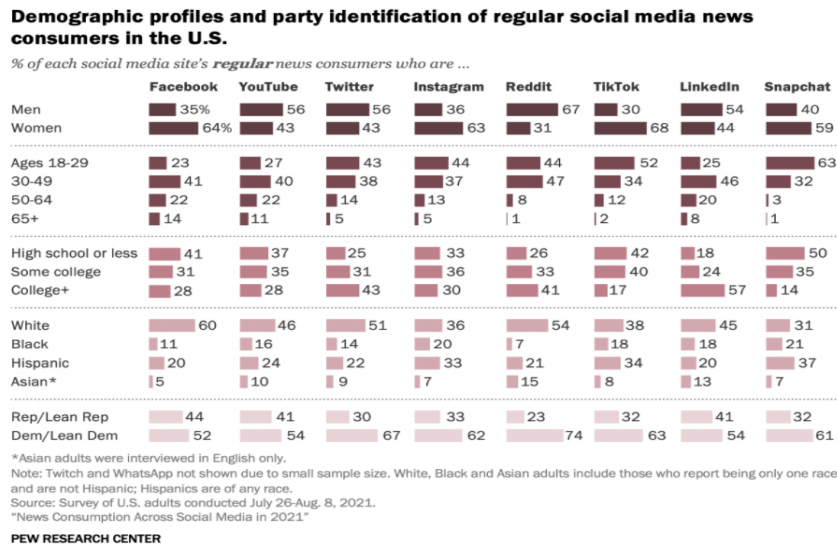


Figure 4: Demographic Profiles of Regular Social Media Consumers in U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2021)

2.3 Gender and social media

Gender is an important factor in social media use and engagement, as it shapes the ways in which users interact with and experience social media platforms. Women and men tend to have different patterns of social media use, with women generally being more active and engaged than men. Additionally, gender identity and expression can influence the ways in which users present themselves online and the types of content they share and engage with (Penny, 2013).

According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2021, women are more likely to use social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest for socializing and connecting with others, as well as for sharing and consuming visual content. Specifically, 77% of women use Facebook compared to 61% of men. Similarly, 44% of women use Instagram compared to 36% of men, and 46% of women use Pinterest compared to 16% of men. However, men are more likely to use certain platforms such as LinkedIn (31% of men compared to 26% of women) and Reddit (23% of men compared to 12% of women).

Women are also more likely to engage in activities such as commenting, liking, and sharing content, and to use social media to express emotions and opinions, while men are more likely to engage in debates and arguments. Women and men also differ in the contents of posting: women share more personal information, they share information about their relationships and family, but men on the other hand share news, political opinions, and information related to their interests (Pew Research Center, 2021).

At the same time, women also face unique challenges and risks in social media use, including online harassment, cyberstalking, and gender-based violence. Women are more likely than men to experience harassment and abuse online, and to feel unsafe or uncomfortable using social media platforms as a result. The increased harassment, bullying, and cyberstalking of women on the internet can be attributed to a complex set of factors, including traditional gender stereotypes which are discussed in previous chapter, online anonymity which allows individuals to say and do things that they might never say in person, and also power dynamics between men and women, where men perceive themselves as being in a position of power, and they are taking advantage of that (Pew Research Center, 2021).

2.4 Language variation on social media

A term “language variety” refers to a particular system of linguistic expression that is influenced by situational factors. It encompasses various forms of communication, including both spoken and written language, regional and social dialects, professional jargons (such as legal and scientific language), literary language, and other styles of expression. Language varieties are typically organized and can be predicted to some extent. For instance, it is possible to anticipate how individuals from a specific region will speak, how lawyers will write, or how sports commentators will present a particular sport in a given language (Crystal, 2006).

One of the most notable features of language variation on the internet and social media is the use of digital language, which includes acronyms, shortenings, contractions, emoticons, and slang. These forms of language have become omnipresent in online communication, and have been described as creating a new digital dialect. Young people in particular are proficient at using digital language, and that it has become a crucial aspect of their communication practices (Herring, 1996).

In internet communication, we refer to words written in these ways as “textism” and they are used to convey meaning quickly and efficiently. This use of textism can help to save

time and streamline communication, particularly in text-based formats such as instant messaging and texting. Here are some most commonly used textisms (Georgakopoulou and Spilioti, 2016):

Table 1: Types of textisms

Types of textisms	Examples
Shortenings	sis – sister, bro – brother app - application
Contractions	msg – message, pls – please B4 – Before , L8r - Later
Acronyms	LOL – laugh out loud BRB – be right back BTW – by the way
Slang words	Lit – something exciting Yeet – throw something Bae – significant other

However, the use of slang and acronyms can also create challenges for communication. For example, someone who is unfamiliar with a particular acronym or slang term may have difficulty understanding a message or conversation. Additionally, the use of slang and acronyms can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, particularly if the intended meaning of a term is ambiguous or subject to interpretation (Georgakopoulou and Spilioti, 2016).

3 FITNESS DISCOURSE

3.1 General characteristics of fitness

Fitness can be described as a person's ability to perform physical activity or exercise. It is a multifaceted concept that includes various components. These components are interdependent and contribute to overall fitness. (Newman, 2021):

Cardiorespiratory performance: It is a key component of overall physical fitness. Cardiorespiratory performance indicates how well your heart, lungs and muscles work together while exercising for a period of time. It shows how efficiently your circulatory and respiratory systems work and it is an indicator of how physically fit and healthy a person is. Activities that help improve cardiorespiratory performance are for example cycling, running, aerobic or swimming. It is important to do these exercises regularly, begin slowly and then gradually increase the intensity.

Muscular strength: Muscular strength is an important component of physical fitness and refers to the amount of force that a muscle can produce in a single maximal effort. Improving muscular strength can have a variety of benefits, including improved athletic performance, increased bone density, and reduced risk of injury. To improve muscular strength, it is important to perform exercises that target the major muscle groups of the body, including the chest, back, shoulders, arms, legs, and core. Some of the most effective exercises for improving muscular strength include:

- Resistance training with weights or resistance bands: This involves lifting weights or using resistance bands to provide resistance against the muscles, which helps to build strength.
- Bodyweight exercises: These exercises use the weight of the body as resistance, such as push-ups, pull-ups, and squats.
- Plyometric exercises: These exercises involve explosive movements, such as jumping or hopping, which can help improve muscular power and strength.
- Isometric exercises: These exercises involve holding a static position, such as a plank or wall sit, which can help improve muscular endurance and strength.

It is important to perform these exercises with proper form and technique, and to gradually increase the intensity and weight over time to continue to challenge the muscles and promote strength gains.

Muscular endurance: Muscular endurance is the ability of a muscle or group of muscles to sustain repeated contractions over an extended period of time without fatiguing. It is an

important component of physical fitness, particularly for athletes and individuals who engage in activities that require prolonged periods of physical effort. Improving muscular endurance can help individuals perform everyday tasks with greater ease and efficiency, as well as enhance athletic performance.

To improve muscular endurance, it is important to perform exercises that target the major muscle groups of the body and involve a high number of repetitions or a sustained period of activity. Some of the most effective exercises for improving muscular endurance again include bodyweight and aerobic exercises. But also circuit training that involves performing a series of exercises in a circuit, with minimal rest between each exercise.

Body composition: Body composition refers to the proportion of fat, muscle, bone, and other tissues that make up a person's body. It is an important component of physical fitness, as excessive body fat can increase the risk of health problems such as heart disease, diabetes, and certain types of cancer. Improving body composition involves reducing body fat while increasing lean muscle mass. To improve body composition, it is important to engage in a combination of cardiovascular exercise and strength training, as well as maintain a healthy and balanced diet. It is important to maintain a balanced diet that includes a variety of nutrient-dense foods, such as fruits, vegetables, lean protein sources, and whole grains, to support overall health and fitness goals.

Flexibility: Flexibility refers to the ability of a joint or series of joints to move through their full range of motion without pain or discomfort. It is an important component of physical fitness, as it can improve overall mobility and reduce the risk of injury. Improving flexibility involves regular stretching and mobility exercises. To improve flexibility, it is important to perform exercises that stretch the major muscle groups of the body, as well as exercises that improve joint mobility. Some of the most effective exercises for improving flexibility include for example yoga, Pilates or foam rolling, but mostly you can increase your flexibility by performing static and dynamic stretching.

- Static stretching involves holding a stretch for a period of time, typically between 10-30 seconds, to lengthen the muscles and improve flexibility. Examples of static stretches include hamstring stretches, quadriceps stretches, and shoulder stretches.
- Dynamic stretching involves moving the joints through a range of motion, typically in a controlled and deliberate manner, to improve joint mobility and prepare the muscles for exercise. Examples of dynamic stretches include walking lunges, high knees, and arm circles.

It is important to perform these exercises regularly, ideally on a daily basis, to maintain and improve flexibility. It is also important to perform stretches and mobility exercises safely, with proper form and technique, to avoid injury.

3.2 Target audience of fitness discourse

The target audience for fitness discourse can vary depending on the specific type of discourse being used. However, in general, the target audience for fitness discourse includes individuals who are interested in improving their physical health and fitness level through exercise and healthy lifestyle choices. Fitness discourse can include a wide range of messages and content related to health and wellness, including fitness tips, workout plans, diet and nutrition advice, body positivity, and more. Some common examples of fitness discourse include fitness magazines, social media influencers, personal trainers, health coaches, and online communities dedicated to fitness and wellness.

While fitness discourse can be geared towards individuals of all ages and genders, it is often targeted towards younger adults, particularly those in their twenties and thirties. This is because this age group tends to be more active on social media platforms, which are often used to share and promote fitness-related content. In addition, younger adults may be more likely to prioritize physical fitness and wellness as part of their lifestyle and identity (IHRSA, 2017).

More specifically, the target audience may include:

- **Athletes:** These are individuals who engage in sports and physical activities at a competitive level and need to maintain high levels of fitness and performance.
- **Fitness enthusiasts:** These are individuals who engage in regular physical activity for health and wellness purposes and may have a strong interest in exercise science, nutrition, and other related topics.
- **Health professionals:** These are individuals who work in the health and fitness industry, such as personal trainers, physical therapists, and sports medicine professionals.
- **General population:** These are individuals who are interested in improving their physical health and fitness level but may not have a specific interest or background in fitness-related topics.

3.3 Fitness and media

Fitness has become a popular topic in the media, with various forms of content promoting and discussing different aspects of physical activity and health. These include social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok, as well as traditional media outlets, such as television and magazines.

Social media platforms have been a particularly popular medium for fitness-related content, with many influencers and fitness professionals sharing their workouts, diet tips, and lifestyle advice with their followers. While social media can provide a wealth of information and inspiration for individuals looking to improve their fitness, it is important to be discerning and critical of the information being presented. Some content may promote unhealthy or unsustainable practices, or may not be backed by scientific evidence (Aguilar and Arbaiza, 2021).

Professors Diego Aguilar and Francisco Arbaiza (2021), conducted a case study analysis of three fitness influencers on Instagram, examining the content they posted and the engagement they received from their followers. They found that the influencers often promoted an idealized and unattainable image of health and fitness, which was achieved through extreme dieting, excessive exercise, and the use of photo editing and filters. The authors argue that this distorted imagery can have negative consequences for both individuals and brands. Individuals may feel pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards, leading to negative body image and self-esteem. Brands that associate themselves with fitness influencers promoting distorted imagery may also suffer from a loss of credibility and trust.

3.3.1 Body Image

Body image is a complex and multifaceted construct that encompasses various psychological and social dimensions. According to Cash and Pruzinsky (1990), body image can be described as a person's subjective perceptions, thoughts, and attitudes about their own physical appearance. This includes how they feel about their body size and shape, as well as their physical attributes such as hair, skin, and facial features. Additionally, body image can be influenced by a range of external factors, such as cultural norms, media images, and social interactions. Body image is also closely linked to a range of psychological and social outcomes, such as self-esteem, mood, and interpersonal relationships. Individuals who have a negative body image may experience a range of negative psychological symptoms, including anxiety, depression, and eating disorders.

Men and women have different body image experiences in the context of fitness and social media. While both genders are subject to idealized beauty standards, women tend to face greater pressure to conform to narrow and unrealistic body ideals, which can have negative consequences on their physical and mental health.

Women's perspectives on body image and fitness are shaped by a range of factors, including social and cultural norms, personal experiences, and media influences. In many cultures, the ideal body for women is one that is thin, toned, and youthful (Grogan, 2017).

Looking at fitness pages that are targeting women, most of them are featuring small, tight and toned woman without any visible rips or cuts. And the muscles are certainly not so big and visible as we can see in men: they are rather long and lean, and female body is usually subtly curved. This ideal has been perpetuated by media representations of beauty (see e.g. Fig. 5), including models and actresses who are often very thin and heavily photo-shopped. This narrow standard can have negative consequences for women's physical and mental health, including increased risk of eating disorders, body dysmorphia, and low self-esteem (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009).

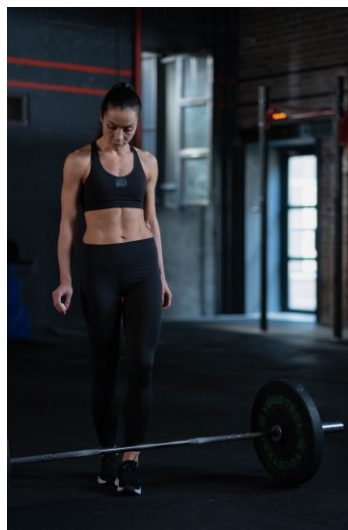


Figure 5: Women's body

As well as women's perspective, men's perspectives on body image and fitness can vary widely depending on cultural and societal expectations, as well as individual experiences and values (Grogan, 2017).

One of the most prevalent ideals for men's bodies is muscularity. Men are often encouraged to have a lean, muscular physique that is seen as strong, powerful, and attractive. This ideal is reinforced through media representations of male bodies in advertising,

television, and movies, as well as in the fitness industry. The fitness pages of men's magazines feature athletically looking man with bulging biceps, broad shoulders and a six pack abs (see Fig. 6). This ideal can also have negative consequences for men's physical and mental health. Men who do not meet the ideal may experience body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and even depression. There is also increasing evidence that extreme muscle-building behaviours, such as the use of anabolic steroids, can have serious health consequences (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009).



Figure 6: Men's body

Overall, media can play an important role in promoting fitness and healthy lifestyles, but it is important to approach the information presented with a critical and discerning mind-set. It is important for men to recognize the diversity of body types and to embrace healthy habits and self-care practices that promote physical and mental wellbeing, rather than conforming to narrow and unrealistic beauty standards.

4 METHODOLOGY OF ANALYZING GENDER TARGETING IN FITNESS DISCOURSE

The analytical part aims to analyse the gender differences in language use on fitness Facebook pages. Analysis was done with the help of AntConc software, which allowed to collect the data about the most frequent words or collocates in the corpus or finding the position of the word in a sentence.

This analysis was performed on two fitness Facebook pages that focus on helping people with their workouts, post diet tips or motivational speeches. One page targets women and the other one, men. From each page, 50 random posts were selected for the linguo-stylistic analysis. Links to those two Facebook pages are mentioned in the Appendix.

The corpus of female-targeted posts consists of 1579 words and male-targeted, of 899 words. The posts were collected from January 2022 until very recent April 2023. Thus, the analysis focuses not only on gender differences in language use but also on the modern internet language. The authors of those post are unknown, and the age range of the target audience can be from young adults to elderly citizens interested in sports and fitness.

As a first step, I collected 50 random posts from each Facebook page and used AntConc software to find the most frequently used nouns, adjectives and verbs. Because, as I mention elsewhere, men and women are claimed to use different vocabulary, I mainly focused on the differences between those. Then I analysed the difference between usages of slang words and phrases. And additionally, I looked at the other features of the posts, such as usage of emoticons.

5 LINGUO-STYLISTIC FEATURES OF FITNESS FACEBOOK PAGES

The analysed posts are all written message on Facebook Women's Fitness and Men's Fitness magazines pages. Because we are dealing with online communication, which is wildly known for being very informal, brief and easy to read, they are mostly just one- or two-sentence posts. They also do not follow any specific structure: there is no introduction nor conclusion, just a simple statement which carries some message. In terms of the functional style of the texts analysed, they belong to non-fictional written publicist style. This style is known for its pragmatic function of persuasion and influencing the reader. The online Facebook posts aim at a large audience and the main goal is to influence public opinions in the matter of fitness.

The vocabulary of the analysed texts includes slang, terminology, descriptive, emotive, formal and informal words.

5.1 Nouns

5.1.1 Women's Fitness Facebook Page

In the analysed Women's Fitness Facebook posts, the most frequently used word (see Table 2) was *body* (16x), which was mainly used in conjunction with the second most used noun *workout* or with adjectives such as *full*, *lean* or *incredible*. The word was also often used with a pronoun *your*. The authors of these posts always use second person singular to give the reader an impression like they are talking specifically to that one individual, making that conversation more personal.

The next most popular noun was *fitness*. *Fitness* occurred in the text 9 times, mostly in conjunction with the pronoun *our*, in the context of promotion of some service to their target audience.

The next most popular word is *health* (6x) which 5 times out of 6 is connected to the adjective *mental* or noun *stress* (4x) – always in association with the concept of self-love and mental health. As stated in the previous chapters, men and women use different vocabulary when communicating, and since women use more supportive and collaborative language, there are more posts discussing topics such as managing emotions and stress and taking care of their mental health.

Table 2: The most frequently used nouns

Body	16	Health	6
Workout	15	Muscle	5
Fitness	9	Stress	4

5.1.2 Men's Fitness Facebook Page

On Men's Fitness page, the most commonly used noun (see Table 3) was the word *strength*, used 16 times in total. As was mentioned earlier, men's goals in Fitness are to be strong and big, and have great muscles, so these fitness pages are trying to get attention of men by discussing their strength trainings.

Second most commonly used noun was same as in women's posts – *workout* (12x), but it was not connected to the “*body workout*” as in women's pages. It was used with other nouns, verbs and demonstrative pronouns, such as

Words such as *muscle* and *body* also appeared on men's fitness page. *Muscle* was used 11 times mainly along with nouns such as *strength*, *growth* or *gain*, and *body* was only used 9 times mainly in conjunction with the words *strength* or *exercise*.

Another highly used noun was the word *training* (10x); and again it was mainly together with the noun *strength* as in “*strength training*”.

And lastly, the noun *bands* was used 5 times in the analysed texts, referring to fitness equipment.

Table 3: The most frequently used nouns

Strength	16	Training	10
Workout	12	Body	9
Muscle	11	Bands	5

5.2 Adjectives

5.2.1 Women's Fitness Facebook Page

Table 4 shows similar results to Table 2. Most of the adjectives carry positive meaning, and as stated earlier women tend to use more supportive language, especially when it comes to body positivity, self-love and mental health. That is why one of the most used adjectives

was the word *best* (6x), and it was mainly used to enhance the greatness of the workouts and the exercises.

Another highly used adjective was the word *mental* that was only used along with the noun *health* because for women in fitness it seems that mental health is an important and frequently discussed topic.

The word *healthy* appeared in the analysed text five times, and it was used while talking about losing weight or having a healthy body.

Surprisingly, the word *lovely* that appeared in the text only four times, was not used in association with the topic of mental health or self-love. It was used to refer to people, specifically the fitness coaches. For example, “*words of the lovely Sophie Butler*”.

The next adjective *better*, was used in the text four times, and it was connected to different nouns such as *days* or *posture*.

And lastly, since women’s goals in fitness are somewhat different from men’s (getting bigger and stronger), the usage of adjective *strengthen* (1x) was at the bottom of the list.

Table 4: The most frequently used adjectives

Best	6	Lovely	4
Mental	6	Better	4
Healthy	5	Strengthen	1

5.2.2 Men’s Fitness Facebook Page

Table 5 shows that the occurrence of adjectives and emotional vocabulary in posts for men is very low, unlike in women’s pages. When a topic is being discussed, the authors get straight to the point and do not use much descriptive language. That is why the most frequently used adjective *valuable* has only appeared three times in total. Other adjectives, such as *adjustable*, *better*, *bigger*, *healthy* and *incredibly*, were used twice in the analysed texts. In addition, the adjective *incredibly* was always used with the word *valuable*, creating a cumulative adjective.

Words like *better* and *healthy* were used to target both genders with similar connotations and with the same goal.

Table 5: The most frequently used adjectives

Valuable	3	Bigger	2
Adjustable	2	Healthy	2
Better	2	Incredibly	2

5.3 Verbs

5.3.1 Women's Fitness Facebook Page

As can be seen from Table 6, the verb *do* was used in the analysed texts ten times in total. Considering the fact that these Facebook posts are mainly trying to give the audience advice and some tips on how to do something, it is natural that it is the most commonly used verb. This verb expresses a command and encourages the readers to take action, and the same goes for the second most frequently used verb *be*.

Next, there was a high occurrence of the word *love* (8x) in association with pronoun *yourself* as in "*love yourself*" or it was a part of the word and created a compound noun "*self-love*". Again, this verb was always used while discussing the topic of mental health.

Another verb *work* (8x) was used in form of *to work*, with the purpose of convincing the reader to take action.

This was followed by the word *help* (6x). As stated earlier, fitness Facebook pages are giving its readers advice, therefore trying to help.

And lastly, the word *feel*, used 4 times in the text, encouraged women to feel loved and comfortable in their bodies.

Table 6: The most frequently used verbs

Do	10	Work	8
Be	8	Help	6
Love	8	Feel	4

5.3.2 Men's Fitness Facebook Page

The usage of verbs in male-targeted messages is also different (see Table 7). Only one verb was equally used in messages for both men and women, the verb *be*. Unlike in female-targeted messages, the verb *be* is at the top of the list; it was used 9 times in total for the

same purpose, to encourage people to take some action. In fact, only the verb *look* (2x) did not give the audience any command: it was only used in questions.

In the whole analysed corpus, not even once was the verb *do* used. Rather than that, to express command, the verbs such as *get* as in “*get a full-body muscle burn*”, *improve* as in “*improve your squat*” or other verbs like *keep* and *give* were used.

Table 7: The most frequently used verbs

Be	9	Improve	2
Get	3	Keep	2
Give	2	Looking	2

5.4 Slang

5.4.1 Women’s Fitness Facebook Page

Slang was used in the analysed online Facebook posts 12 times in total. Since the posts are trying to target a large audience, the occurrence of the modern internet slang was not that frequent here, and more neutral vocabulary was preferred. For example:

1. *With images of roses and romantic meals **flooding our Insta feeds** this month, we revel other ways you can feel loved on Valentine’s Day – and beyond – with these healing self-love practices.*

Flooding our Insta feeds meaning that on Valentine’s Day there are tons of different people posting photos on their personal accounts spamming your main Instagram page.

2. *In a world of **Instagrammable workouts**, effectiveness can sometimes be mistakenly measured in **sweaty selfies** and the number of **burpees** completed.*

In this post, the author refers to the superficiality of some workouts that are posted by influencers, and how fake they can be. Meaning that sometimes, when fitness influencers post sweaty pictures of themselves with tips for the best workout plan, you cannot tell whether to believe them or not.

On the other hand, many of the slang words and phrases belong to the fitness discourse, which should be known by anyone who shows interest in fitness. Most commonly used slang words were *cardio*, where in the gym this word refers to equipment such as treadmills or bicycles, and *dumbbells* which refers to the small hand-size bar with weights on.

Usage of commonly known colloquial slang was very frequent, such as “*nailing the basic*”, “*grilling her with questions*” or “*hit every muscle*”.

Overall slang in general is a very useful marketing tactic because it makes the post seem friendly and informal.

5.4.2 Men’s Fitness Facebook Page

On men’s pages slang words were used only 9 times in total. Unlike in women’s posts, in the analysed corpus no usage of specifically modern internet slang language was traced. This might be due to the fact that women on the internet are using more supportive and friendly language compared to men.

Posts analysed used fitness-related slang, same as in women’s post. The word *cardio* was used xx times so as the word *dumbbell*, which also refers to a fitness equipment and *deadlift*, which refers to a training exercise. Some idiomatic phrases were also used by the creators. For example:

3. *You’ll struggle to **make gains** if you don’t stay supple.*

Making gains, meaning getting physically healthier and mainly putting on muscle mass.

4. *But there are other supplements you can use to help you **stay in shape**.*

Getting in shape can mean something different to everyone, for some it can mean losing body fat, for some gaining muscle mass and for some improving cardiovascular fitness.

5.5 Emoticons

It is important to mention that for online communication and Facebook posts in particular usage of emoticons is common. Mainly they are used for emphasis of the statement or for the aesthetic look of the post. Emoticons are colourful symbols or characters on digital

keyboards. They are used in internet conversations to express feelings or thoughts that cannot be fully manifested in the written text (Evans, 2017).

For these to have a real effect, it is important to choose the ones that have some relations to its topic. As for fitness posts on Facebook, the usage of emoticons is lower compared to private messages, for example, mainly because these pages are used to advise people on health so their posts have to appear credible and trustworthy. However, if used properly and in the right amount, the emoticons can make the posts seem aesthetically good, friendly and approachable, so people could feel more open to communicate and debate on the topics.

Highly used emoticons on both men's and women's pages are a clenched arm (see Fig. 7) with a biceps at the end of the post, to put emphasis on the whole concept of working out.

There was found no specific gender difference in the usage of emoji, although on women's pages there was a higher occurrence of emoticons such as flowers or hearts with regard to topic of mental health and self-love.

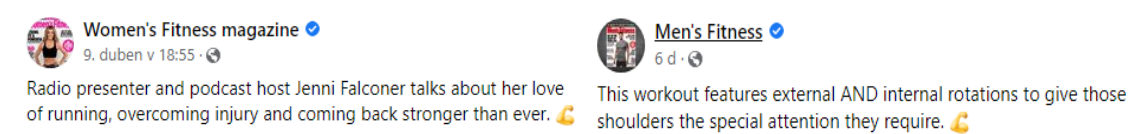


Figure 7: Examples of Women's and Men's Facebook Post

CONCLUSION

The thesis aimed to analyse and characterise gender differences in the use of language on fitness Facebook pages.

One hundred randomly chosen Facebook posts written for Men's and Women's Fitness pages over a period of 4 months were analysed. With the help of AntConc software, the main trends in the choice of vocabulary were traced. This analysis allowed to see how gender stereotypes still perpetuate in the fitness discourse which, some might expect, should be more egalitarian.

Fitness messages targeted at women seem to place much effect on the female body, which is evidenced by high usage of the noun body. The fact that this noun was used almost twice as often as in the posts targeted at males ... Men's body is stereotypically associated with the noun strength. This is a result of the social and cultural pressure that is put on young girls and boys about women being thin and skinny, and men being strong and muscular. Therefore, these fitness pages know how to target each insecurity.

As women are stereotypically expected to be affectionate and sympathetic, emotionally charged adjectives help to trigger this image, such as adjectives "better", "best" and "lovely". As men are expected to be dominant and decisive, the adjective "valuable" seems to address the need for some tangible valuation of some sort. I have pointed out to a noticeable difference between the frequencies of adjective use: women are expected to communicate more and extensively talk on various topics, such as their emotional or mental state, so using more adjectives should target this psychological traits and make the message more appealing.

With verbs, the analysis revealed that men tend to use more imperative verbs such as give, keep, or get that gives clear commands since they are more assertive and direct in their speech, while women tend to use more emotional verbs such as love, help and feel because they are socialized into being more polite and putting more emphasis on emotions.

As the messages are trying to be more appealing to the audiences, they use informal language such as idioms and slang. Women's Fitness page appears to use more colloquial language than Man's Fitness. One of the reasons for this is Men on the other hand, tend to emphasize competition and achievement that is why the language use is more serious in messages targeted at men.

Finally, while analysing non-verbal features of the texts, there were no major gender differences in usage of emoticons. The frequency of usage is very similar, even the types of emoticons are mainly the same with a few exceptions.

Overall, the analysis of differences in gender-targeting in messages on fitness Facebook pages highlights the importance of considering the context of communication when examining language use. The analysis of the data revealed that pages for men interested in fitness and exercises tend to use language that emphasizes strength, competition, and domination, while female pages focus on community, support, and positive body image.

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6 APPENDIX

Women's Fitness magazine. "Facebook page."

<https://www.facebook.com/womensfitnessmagazine/>

Men's Fitness. "Facebook page."

<https://www.facebook.com/MensFitnessMagazine/>