No Pain, All Gain: Re–Shaping Fitness Communication.

How can gym and fitness studios textually communicate their offerings in a way that promotes healthy behavior without causing psychological harm to consumers?

BSc Thesis in Retail Management

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Submitted
May 20th, 2025

Examiner
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Abstract

The textual framing of advertisements in the fitness industry and its impact on consumer well-being remains unexplored. While previous research has extensively explored visual elements and the portrayal of idealized bodies and its psychological effects, the role of textual health communication has received comparatively little attention. In the light of growing digitalization, increasing sedentary lifestyles and rising mental health concerns – the need for ethical fitness communication is crucial. This study employs a mixed-method-approach starting with a qualitative market scan to map the current landscape of fitness marketing. Building on these insights, a quantitative experimental study was conducted to examine the effects of identified textual framings on consumer well-being. The findings uncover two contrasting marketing approaches in the current landscape, (1) External Health, where physical well-being is emphasized and (2) Internal Health, which centers around mental well-being. The experimental study demonstrates a significant difference in well-being outcomes based on the textual framing – where exposure to Internal Health messaging results in higher levels of well-being compared to the exposure to External Health. These findings imply both theoretical and practical contributions, particularly by providing guidance for fitness actors in how to communicate their offerings through text in ways that support consumer well-being and reduce potential harm. Furthermore, these findings open avenues for future researchers to explore the research questions across diverse demographic, cultural, generational, and commercial contexts.

Key words: *fitness marketing, well-being, textual framing, physical health, mental health, ethical communication, internal health, external health*

Acknowledgements

We are beyond grateful for the invaluable guidance and support from our supervisor Karina Liljedal. Your support, knowledge and feedback has been an important cornerstone in the progress of this thesis.

Furthermore, we want to express our gratitude to Sara Rosengren and Fredrik Lange for your expertise and guidance during the writing process of this thesis.

Lastly, we want to thank Ebba Laurin for the emotional support during our final semester at Stockholm School of Economics. Your kind words and solicitude gave us the motivation to finalize this thesis.

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1. Introduction

Constantly plugged in, yet increasingly tuned out from our health. This is the paradox of our time. While the need to promote physical movement and healthy habits has never been more urgent, digital feeds overflow with idealized bodies and unattainable standards. From *"Burn and Sculpt Your Body"* to *"Take Care of Your Heart"*, the tone of health communication varies dramatically. While the former reflects an appearance-focused approach, the latter emphasizes holistic well-being. The outcome? A distinct dichotomy in messaging and a growing tension between motivation and mental illnesses, where the push for wellness may equally trigger anxiety, body dissatisfaction, and undue pressure.

So, how can gyms and fitness actors gain movement while causing no pain?

1.1 Background

In an increasingly digital world, each generation becomes more connected than the last (Falch-Eriksen et al., 2022). While digitalization offers numerous benefits (Abdullayeva Sabir, Muradov Niyaz and Guliyeva Bakhtiyar, 2022), it also presents certain downsides (Byron, 2008) – one of which is maintaining a healthy lifestyle (Falch-Eriksen et al., 2022). Growing social media usage, sedentary work environments, and digital communication do not offer ideal conditions for people to live a healthy lifestyle (Ardesch, Denise and Kiefte-de, 2023; Owen et al., 2010; Stieger, Lewetz and Willinger, 2023).

Furthermore, the concept of health encompasses several dimensions (World Health Organization, 2022b), with physical and mental well-being being two components that are both affected by today's digital world (World Health Organization, 2024; World Health Organization, 2022a). This is highlighted as 31% of adults and 80% of adolescents do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity (World Health Organization, 2024), and 1 out of 8 in the world suffers from mental illness as of today (World Health Organization, 2022a).

While the importance of living a healthy lifestyle is evident, promoting fitness can have negative effects such as exercise addiction, body dissatisfaction, and appearance-related anxiety (Cataldo et al., 2021). This leaves fitness actors in the market in a complicated trade-off. Marketers have the possibility to encourage people to live a healthier lifestyle, but how can this be done without arousing negative effects for the customers?

1.2 Current Research & Research Gap

Extensive research has explored the psychological impact of visual fitness content on individuals (Blond, 2008; Cataldo et al., 2021; de Lenne et al., 2021). Studies have shown that image-based content, in particular, can contribute to several negative effects, such as body dissatisfaction and appearance-related anxiety (Boepple et al., 2016).

While Blond (2008) highlights the psychological effects of showcasing an idealized body image in advertising, the impact of textual content remains unexplored. This research gap indicates a need to investigate two aspects. Both how textual elements are currently used in fitness marketing, and how this influences the receiving consumer. In addition to the academic contribution, this research holds practical relevance for guiding fitness actors in the market on how to promote their offerings in an ethical manner.

1.3 Purpose & Research Questions

This study aims to deepen the understanding of current fitness marketing and the psychological effects of the textual content of their communication. The aim is to investigate whether certain types of textual content have a more negative impact on consumer well-being than others, and to explore if specific types of words may be psychologically harmful. Therefore, the overarching purpose of this thesis is to examine how gym and fitness studios can textually communicate their offering to promote healthy behavior without causing psychological harm to consumers.

Thus, the research questions for this thesis are;
RQ1: *How do gym and fitness studios textually communicate their offering?*

RQ2: *What is the impact of fitness studios' textual communication on consumers' psychological well-being?*

This will be examined through a mixed method approach, investigating current marketing communication in the fitness industry and how these textual framings impacts customers.

1.4 Delimitations

Due to limitations in time and resources, the scope of the study has been narrowed.

Firstly, the concept of health is central to this study. Given the focus on ethical fitness marketing, this thesis solely includes mental and physical well-being. Although social well-being is recognised as a component of overall health (Wang et al., 2023; World Health Organization, 2022b), it is not considered relevant within the specific context of this research. Although this implies that the study does not capture the full scope of health, narrowing the focus allows for a deeper exploration of the relevant dimensions, making the delimitation both purposeful and justified.

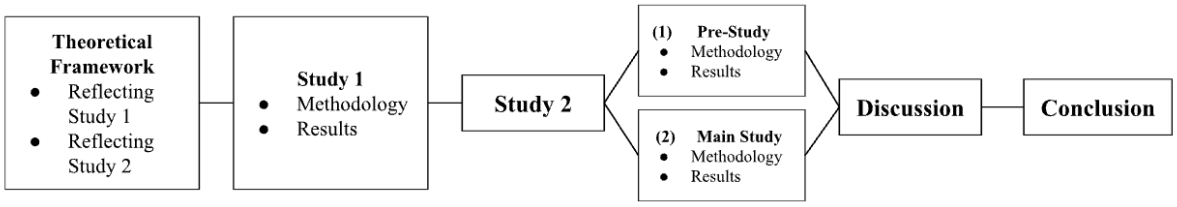
Secondly, the textual content used in the main study is derived from a qualitative content analysis focused on gyms and fitness studios located in Stockholm. While geographically limited, the analysis includes a diverse range of fitness concepts – such as commercial gyms, boutique gyms, pilates and yoga studios, CrossFit boxes, and fight clubs – thereby incorporating multiple approaches and offerings to enhance the possibility for broader generalizability.

Lastly, this study does not consider profit-related factors relevant to the fitness studios. Instead, the focus is placed on ethical marketing, more specifically, the psychological impact on customers. This approach allows for a more in-depth analysis of how fitness marketing communication affects customer well-being.

1.5 Disposition

This thesis is structured as follows: Firstly, the theoretical framework is outlined, divided into two sections corresponding to Study 1 and Study 2, respectively. This is followed by Study 1, including its methodology and results. Thereafter, Study 2 is presented, covering the methodology and results of the Pre–Study followed by the methodology and results of the Main Study. Lastly, the thesis presents a discussion and ends with a conclusion. An overview of the thesis structure is provided in Figure 1.

Fig. 1



2. Theoretical Framework & Hypotheses

The theoretical framework will cover two key aspects. Firstly, communication of physical activity will be discussed, reflecting the focus of Study 1. This is followed by the psychological effects of promoting physical health, aligned with Study 2.

2.1 Communicating Physical Activity

Physical activity has several positive health benefits (Gualdi-Russo and Zaccagni, 2021). Regular physical activity and exercise does not only prevent diseases, but also positively impacts physical well-being and mental health (Gualdi-Russo and Zaccagni, 2021). This highlights the importance of promoting physical activity (Fletcher et al., 2018), which is commonly done by gyms and fitness studios. Given its many health benefits, advertisers have a choice in what health benefits to highlight when promoting physical activity.

However, health is a widely discussed subject. An early definition of health; '*health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'* is still used as an international standard (World Health Organization, 2022b; Krahn

et al., 2021). The definition includes both (1) physical well-being, and (2) mental well-being, which are both seen to benefit from physical movement (Gualdi-Russo and Zaccagni, 2021). However, several researchers have criticized the definition, where some argue for reconsideration (Leonardi, 2018; Krahn et al., 2021).

For example, Saylor (2004) presents a more holistic view of health, namely the *"Circle of Health."* This model contains several aspects of health, which are categorized into two dimensions: (1) Renewal & Recovery and (2) Activity & Performance. The first dimension includes aspects such as relaxation, peacefulness, nourishment, social support, and balance (Saylor, 2004). The second dimension, on the other hand, includes aspects such as energy, strength, fitness, satisfaction, growth, and development (Saylor, 2004).

With growing research, the definition of health can be argued to be further developed (Krahn et al., 2021). Thus, if solely one definition of health is considered, a very narrow view will be obtained. To avoid this, a more broad division of health will be done, where physical well-being and mental well-being will act as the foundation. Therefore for the purpose of this study, promotion of health will be looked at through the following aspects; (1) External Health, where physical well-being will act as the foundation and (2) Internal Health, where mental well-being will act as the foundation.

While previous research proves that physical activity enhances both physical and mental well-being, there is limited understanding of how these aspects are currently communicated by fitness actors. Thus, by investigating real-world marketing material through the lens of Internal and External Health, this study bridges the gap between conceptual definitions of health and their application in fitness communication. Specifically, by addressing RQ1: *How do gym and fitness studios textually communicate their offering?*

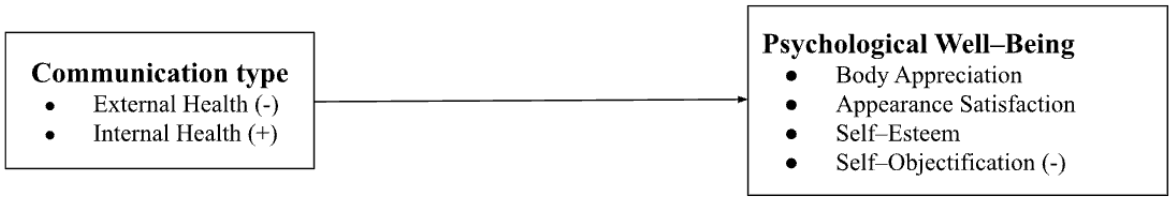
2.2 Psychological Effects of Fitness Communication

In the context of fitness, several aspects of well-being have been explored. De Lenne et al. (2021) presents how several measures of well-being are impacted by the framing of ideal

bodies compared to non-ideal bodies, which will act as a foundation for the aspects of well-being included in this study.

When exposed to fitness communication that emphasizes External Health, it is hypothesized that wellbeing will be lower than when exposed to communication that emphasizes Internal Health. This relationship is summarized in Figure 2, and will be further examined below.

Fig. 2



2.2.1 Effect of visual and textual cues

The visualization and exposure of ideal bodies is a widely researched subject (Blond, 2008) where much research has explored the psychological effects on consumers when including a visual element in marketing communication (de Lenne et al., 2021; Mellor et al., 2010; Monro and Huon, 2006). More specifically, substantial research has studied how well-being is affected when shown an idealized body vs. a non-idealized body (Azevedo and Azevedo, 2023; de Lenne et al.,2021).

In contrast, the impact of textual elements on well-being is hardly researched. However, it is evident that the use of text within marketing impacts the receiver of the communication (Berger et al., 2019). The text attached to an advertisement shapes the consumer's purchase behavior, intention, and attitudes (Berger et al., 2019). When examining visual elements, particularly representations of bodies, it is relatively straightforward to distinguish between different types of content, such as idealized versus non-idealized body portrayals. Conversely, categorizing textual content poses a greater challenge due to its interpretive nature. However, in the context of this thesis, a categorization of External Health focused versus Internal Health focused is done as described in 2.1.

2.2.2 Body Appreciation

Linardon et al. (2022) present a definition for Body Appreciation as *"accepting, holding favourable attitudes towards, and respecting the body."* Body Appreciation has been a widely adopted variable when studying psychological well-being and physical health (Piran, 2019, pp.22–25). It has been shown to be positively associated with psychological well-being (Piran, 2019, pp. 22–25; Lindaron et al., 2022), while being negatively associated with depressive symptoms (Niva Piran, 2019, pp.22–25). Furthermore, Lindaron et al (2022) present that a Body Appreciation focus is a suggested implication for mental health promotion initiatives and eating disorder prevention programs. De Lenne et al. (2021) demonstrate that exposure to appearance-focused visual elements leads to reduced Body Appreciation, whereas Alleva et al. (2015) find that emphasizing body functionality, everything that the body can do, enhances Body Appreciation. Similarly, shifting the focus from physical attributes to focus on Internal Health is expected to produce comparable positive effects for Body Appreciation. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been proposed:

H_1: *When exposed to communication emphasizing External Health, Body Appreciation will be lower than when exposed to communication emphasizing Internal Health.*

2.2.3 Appearance Satisfaction

Body image is recognized as a multidimensional concept including thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to one's appearance (Rodgers et al., 2023). To understand one's body image, you can assess their satisfaction with their appearance (Rodgers et al., 2023). Research has shown that a negative body image, reflected in low Appearance Satisfaction (Rodgers et al., 2023), is linked to poor mental health (Soltani et al., 2017), whereas a positive body image is associated with greater psychological well-being (Rodgers et al., 2023). In the context of advertising, appearance focused communication often activates appearance schemas on the customer (de Lenne et al., 2021). When being exposed to visual elements in advertising, individuals tend to compare themselves and integrate the presented standards into their self-schemas (de Lenne et al., 2021). Therefore, when being exposed to advertising

showcasing idealized bodies, Appearance Satisfaction has been seen to be negatively affected (Brown and Dittmar, 2005). As External Health messaging is rooted in physical attributes – much like the portrayal of idealized bodies – the communication of External Health is expected to generate comparable outcomes. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been developed.

H_2: *When exposed to communication emphasizing External Health, Appearance satisfaction will be lower than when exposed to communication emphasizing Internal Health.*

2.2.4 Self-Esteem

Bailey (2003) defines Self-Esteem as a "*simplistic term for varied and complex mental states pertaining to how one views oneself*". A low Self-Esteem is associated with high body dissatisfaction, which implies risk of body image disturbances and eating disorders (Mellor et al., 2010). The exposure to unrealistic standards of beauty and lifestyles is seen to negatively impact Self-Esteem (Consiglio and van Osselaer, 2022). While these effects have not been widely researched within the context of marketing (Consiglio and van Osselaer, 2022), the effect of an externally focused message is expected to have a similar effect as it may evoke similar emotions. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been formulated.

H_3: *When exposed to communication emphasizing External Health, Self-Esteem will be lower than when exposed to communication emphasizing Internal Health.*

2.2.5 Self-Objectification

The "Objectification Theory" is rooted in feminist perspectives, asserting that the objectification of women poses significant mental health risks (Jones and Griffiths, 2015). Calogero (2017) presents the definition of Self-Objectification as *"the adoption of a third-person perspective on the self as opposed to a first-person perspective such that girls and women come to place greater value on how they look to others rather than on how they feel or what they can do."* Research indicates that Self-Objectification leads to depression with mediators like shame and anxiety (Jones and Griffiths, 2015). Monro and Huon (2006)

discuss that the exposure to idealized images promotes comparisons between the ideal body and oneself. While Prichard and Tiggemann (2008) highlight how many fitness centers provide an objectifying nature, in which weight loss and ideal bodies is the focus. This atmosphere may increase Self-Objectification (Prichard and Tiggemann, 2008). Further research indicates that individuals with high Self-Objectification that are exposed to ideal body visualizations are at high risk of changing eating behaviour (Monro and Huon, 2006). However, research shows that focusing on how one's body functions rather than how it looks decreases Self-Objectification (Alleva et al., 2015). Therefore, to steer the focus away from the external benefits of health, and rather focusing on internal benefits, individuals are expected to obtain lower levels of Self-Objectification, resulting in the following hypothesis:

H_4: *When exposed to communication emphasizing External Health, Self-Objectification will be higher than when exposed to communication emphasizing Internal Health.*

3. Study 1

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Purpose & Study Design

Study 1 addresses RQ1: *How do gym and fitness studios textually communicate their offering?*

The purpose of Study 1 was to explore the current landscape of fitness marketing by identifying the most frequently used words in textual communication of gyms and fitness studios. By analysing real-world fitness actors, the study aimed to capture how health is textually framed, with a focus on External Health or Internal Health.

A qualitative approach was adopted to enable an in-depth understanding of the textual framing currently used in the landscape of fitness marketing. This was essential for gaining a clear understanding of how fitness communication is currently presented. The results of Study 1 formed the empirical foundation for Study 2.

3.1.2 Sample Selection

To select relevant sites, a purposive sampling method was used, which is commonly used within qualitative research (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019 pp.391-395). Relevant sites were identified using Google Maps, focusing on gyms and studios located in the Stockholm area. These included commercial gyms, boutique gyms, CrossFit boxes, Pilates studios, and similar fitness venues. Actors without any online marketing communication were excluded from the sample. A final sample size of n=60 was obtained, which captures the majority of fitness actors in Stockholm. Furthermore, this sample size was considered justifiable as 60 observations is seen to produce convincing conclusions (Bell, Bryman, and Harley, 2019 p.397). For details See Appendix 1.

3.1.3 Market Scan

To collect relevant data, namely, the textual elements of fitness studios, a qualitative content analysis approach was utilized as this is the most commonly used approach when qualitatively analysing documents (Bell, Bryman, and Harley, 2019, pp.510-512). This was done by examining online channels including websites, Instagram, and Facebook. Text was gathered from the most recent marketing communications, such as homepage content, Instagram bios, stories, and captions. The goal was to identify recurring themes in the messaging, with keywords extracted accordingly. For details See Appendix 1.

3.1.4 Analytical Approach & Validity

A deductive coding method was used to rank the words used on the predetermined scale of 1–7 (1= promoting Internal Health, and 7= promoting External Health) as this is considered a reliable scale (Joshi et al., 2015). The scale was developed using a deductive approach, where the scale was based on established literature and theories as described in 2.1. The authors coded all observations of keywords separately and ranked them on the scale to then consolidate. To ensure coding validity between the authors, a reliability analysis was conducted. The results showed a high level of agreement between the independent codings (Cronbach's alpha = 0.946), indicating strong consistency (Malhotra, 2020 pp.303-304). The codes were then consolidated into an index, producing a single unified code.

A hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted, and three clusters were formed based on coefficient distance as this number produced the most coherent groupings (Malhotra, 2020, p. 642). To investigate the difference in means between the groups, K-independent Kruskal-Wallis was utilized (Malhotra, 2020 p.450), indicating a strong difference between the clusters ($p < 0.001$) (Malhotra, 2020 pp.475-476). The mean of the clusters was obtained through a one-way ANOVA (See Table 1).

Table 1: Summary Clusters

Cluster	Mean (sd)
CLU1	$\mu = 3.20$ (sd = 0.65)
CLU2	$\mu = 1.36$ (sd = 0.42)
CLU3	$\mu = 6.19$ (sd = 0.70)

To examine the clusters on the lower and upper end of the predetermined scale, CLU2 ($\mu = 1.36$) and CLU3 ($\mu = 6.19$) were further investigated. A thematic analysis was done where repetition of words as well as similarity and differences served as a basis of the analysis (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2019 p.519). Line by line coding was conducted where repeated words in each group were noted.

3.2 Results

The results reveal the most frequently occurring words in the current marketing of fitness studios promoting Internal Health (CLU2) and External Health (CLU3). Thus, the conclusions can be used to answer RQ1: *How do gym and fitness studios textually communicate their offering?* which are summarized in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2: Internal Health

Words used	Frequency
Happiness	8
Together / Community	8
Strength	6
Energy / Endorphins	5
Mind / Soul / Euphoria	4

Table 3: External Health

Words used	Frequency
Burn, Burn fat, Burn calories	7
Muscles / Strength	6
Shape / Sculpt / Design	6
Results	3
Sweat	3

3.3 Discussion

The results from Study 1 answer RQ1: *How do gym and fitness studios textually communicate their offering?* as they reveal two contrasting approaches in the marketing of fitness offerings: one centered on External Health and the other on Internal Health.

The External Health messaging had a strong emphasis on physical attributes such as appearance and body shape. This is strongly connected to physical well-being as the physical benefits are promoted. The other type of messaging emphasized Internal Health, with a focus on softer benefits of physical activity. These include feelings and thoughts such as inner peace, belonging, and happiness which can be aligned with mental well-being.

These contrasting messaging types reflect the dual benefits of physical activity as discussed in 2.1, where the findings highlight how current fitness actors promote different aspects of health. These insights form the foundation for Study 2, which aims to examine how these textual framings used by fitness actors influence consumers' perceived well-being.

4. Study 2

The following section will cover the methodology and results of two studies; (1) The Pre–Study, and (2) The Main Study.

4.1 Pre–Study

4.1.1 Methodology

4.1.1.1 Purpose

A pre-study was conducted to ensure the reliability of the findings in Study 1. Qualitative research has previously been criticised as the findings might be subject to researcher bias (Noble and Smith, 2015). Thus, to ensure reliability, it was crucial to verify that the words identified will be assigned the same category (Internal Health/External Health) by multiple external observers (Long and Johnson, 2000). The pre-study serves as a form of respondent validation (Noble and Smith, 2015), as sending out a questionnaire is one way of doing this (Long and Johnson, 2000).

4.1.1.2 Survey Design

The pre-study was distributed as an online experimental study, with two treatment groups. The treatments are based on the results of Study 1. The three most frequently used words were applied for each treatment. Where *"Happiness, Community, and Strength"* was most commonly used when promoting Internal Health and *"Burn, Sculpt, and Strength"* was most commonly used when promoting External Health (See Appendix 2). Furthermore, the treatments included visual elements, opening hours, and a fictional address (See Appendix 2) to enhance the realism of the ads.

The survey was designed so that participants first received a set of instructions before being randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups, where they were exposed to either an internally focused or an externally focused promotional message (See Appendix 2). Thereafter, respondents were asked about their age to ensure that no respondents were under the age of 18 (See Appendix 3). Lastly, respondents were asked to answer the question *"To what extent do you perceive this marketing to promote Internal Health compared to External Health?"* on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = Internal Health, 7 = External Health).

4.1.1.3 Sample Selection

A convenience sample consisting of 51 respondents was used. Although convenience samples limit the generalizability of findings to a broader population, they are suitable for the purpose of a pre-study (Malhotra, 2020, p.363). Additionally, the use of a convenience sample was deemed appropriate due to its time efficiency. The study was conducted as an experiment with two treatment groups within the online environment. While this allowed for a wider geographical sample, a self–selection bias might be present given the nature of a convenience sample (Malhotra, 2020 p. 363).

4.1.2 Results & Analysis

The results reveal a difference in how the two treatment groups evaluated the advertising based on Internal versus External Health. The group exposed to *"Happiness, Community, and Strength"* had a mean value of 4.15 in contrast to the group exposed to *"Burn, Sculpt, and Strength"* with a mean value of 6.00 where the difference between the groups was seen to be significant ($p = <0.001$) (Söderlund, 2018 pp.155–156), See Table 4.

Table 4: Pre–Study, Treatment Groups

	Mean Value
"Happiness, Community & Strength"	$\mu = 4.15$ (sd=2.03)
"Burn, Sculpt & Strength"	$\mu = 6.00$ (sd=0.96)
Sig.	$p < 0.001$

4.1.3 Discussion

Although a significant difference between the groups was observed, it was not as pronounced as in the original coding conducted by the authors. Three key factors were identified that likely influenced this outcome, and adjustments were made to the Main Study treatments accordingly.

(1) The authors viewed all promotional messages simultaneously, allowing for direct comparison between different formulations. This likely introduced bias, as earlier codings influenced later ones. In contrast, respondents were exposed to one of the two treatments, with no comparison, resulting in a lack of reference point. However, as there was a significant difference, the same words will be used for the purpose of the Main Study. However, to verify that participants perceive the treatments as promoting Internal versus External Health as intended, the same question will be included in the Main Study.

(2) To mirror real-world fitness promotions, a visual element was added to the stimuli However, it was deemed that these strongly influenced the overall rating, which will hide the real effects of the stimuli. Thus, the visual elements were excluded in the Main Study.

(3) The Pre–Study was presented in English. However, the choice of language was identified as a potential source of misunderstanding among respondents. To ensure reliable responses the Main Study was presented in Swedish (Heinritz, 2025), as the survey was distributed in Sweden. To ensure accurate translation, two native Swedish speakers translated the material independently before consolidating their versions.

Insights from the Pre–Study reveal that respondents interpret the two treatments as contrasting. The treatments were adjusted based on these key insights, both in terms of language and imagery (See Appendix 4) for the Main Study.

4.2 Main Study

4.2.1 Methodology

4.2.1.1 Purpose

Study 2 aims to answer RQ2: *What is the impact of fitness studios' textual communication on consumers' psychological well-being?*

4.2.1.2 Study Design & Approach

To answer the research question, a quantitative research method was chosen and an experimental study developed. This was achieved through a marketing experiment designed to compare two groups' responses to different textual messages, enabling a reliable assessment of how the treatment influences consumer reactions (Söderlund, 2018, p. 139). The aim was to measure psychological effects of the consumer, and for this, experimental studies are often employed (Hackett, 2019 p.5). However, new variables are empirically tested, where data is collected from real life to be able to draw conclusions (Hackett, 2019 pp.23–24).

A deductive approach was chosen to effectively answer the research question where hypotheses were developed based on existing research and theory (Aidley, 2018, p.40; Young et al., 2019). Furthermore, a deductive approach is deemed viable as it is the most commonly used approach in quantitative research (Barroga et al., 2023).

4.2.1.3 Survey Design

The three most commonly repeated words were applied in an advertising context for a hypothetical gym. These advertisements were distributed to participants in a survey format organized into (1) introduction, (2) treatment, and (3) questions. Participants were randomly allocated to one of the two groups, which is seen to cancel out the differences of individuals, fostering more reliable results (Söderlund, 2018 p.34). Half of the participants were exposed to a hypothetical campaign showcasing Internal Health, where *"happiness, community, and strength"* acted as lead words. In contrast, the other half of the participants were exposed to an advertisement showcasing External Health, where "*burn*, *sculpt*, *and strength"* were visible lead words (See Appendix 4).

This research is focused exclusively on textual content, intentionally excluding any visual elements within the experiment. While this may impact the perceived realism of the advertisement used in the experiment, it is essential to eliminate potential bias and isolate the effects solely to the formulation of the offering.

The words presented in the treatment were communicated in English, while the survey was conducted in Swedish. This decision was based on findings from the market scan, which revealed that the majority of fitness marketing communication in Sweden is presented in English. Hence, to enhance the realism, the language was aligned to what is currently presented in the market. Additionally, presenting the marketing material in an online format aligned with industry standards, as digital platforms represent a predominant channel in contemporary fitness marketing. This insight was also supported through the market scan, which revealed that english advertisements in an online setting are predominant in current communication strategies.

After the exposure to the treatment variable, all participants were asked the same questions, aimed to capture a holistic part of well-being in the context of fitness marketing. The measures of well-being have been inspired by the study conducted by de Lenne et al (2021), who explored how several aspects of well-being were affected by the framing of idealized bodies in advertising.

To overcome the social desirability bias, respondents are continuously encouraged to answer based on their initial thoughts. It is common that individuals respond in a way that they want to be perceived rather than answering honestly (Hackett, 2019, p.12). Larson (2019) emphasizes the importance of creating an environment that encourages honesty within the survey to avoid biases. Encouraging respondents to continuously think about their initial thoughts might mitigate this effect, which is crucial to unfold the true relationship between the variables.

4.2.1.4 Measures

To understand the psychological effect on respondents, several aspects of well-being were being measured. The measures are based on well-established scales (de-Lenne et al., 2021; Rosenberg, 2006; Tylka and Wood-Barcalow, 2015; Wollast et al., 2021) to ensure validity (Eliasson, 2013, pp.16–17).

To further ensure validity, multi-item measurements have been used for all variables (Eliasson, 2013, p.36). A likert scale has been used, aiming to uncover to what extent the respondent agree or disagrees with the statements. For the purpose of this thesis, the likert scale is treated like an interval scale, as commonly done (Wu and Leung, 2017). This is usually utilized when measuring attitudes (Aidley, 2018, pp.17–21). To ease the process for the respondents, the scales were standardized to 1–7 (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree), which is argued to be a preferable scale to ensure reliability (Joshi et al., 2015).

Body Appreciation

When exploring the psychological consequences of showing idealized bodies in marketing, BAS-2 has been widely adopted (Avalos, Tylka and Wood-Barcalow, 2005; de Lenne et al., 2021). The measure aims to capture individuals' *"acceptance of, favorable opinions toward, and respect for their bodies"* (Tylka and Wood-Barcalow, 2015). Thus, to measure body appreciation, the measurements used in the questionnaire are based on the Body Appreciation Scale–2 (BAS–2). For details, see Appendix 5. A reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.91, indicating that the questions were sufficiently reliable and could be combined into a total Body Appreciation variable (Malhotra, 2020 pp.303-304).

Appearance satisfaction

To measure appearance satisfaction, the survey items are based on the Body Image States Scale (BISS) as done by de Lenne et al., (2021). For details, See Appendix 5. A reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.91, indicating that the questions were sufficiently reliable and could be combined into a total Appearance satisfaction variable (Malhotra, 2020 pp.303-304). Cash et al. (2002) conducted a validation of the measurement, where BISS was shown to be applicable to a wide range of contexts, further supporting the choice of measurement.

Self-Esteem

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) has been used as a reference point to measure Self-Esteem. The measurement has been shown to be both reliable and valid in previous research (Rosenberg, 2006). For details, See Appendix 5. A reliability analysis showed a

Cronbach's Alpha of 0.87, indicating that the questions were sufficiently reliable and could be combined into a total Self-Esteem variable (Malhotra, 2020 pp.303-304).

Self-Objectification

Self-Objectification is widely recognized as a significant factor influencing well-being (de-Lenne et al., 2021; Mercurio and Landry, 2008) and can be measured based on the Likert Self-Objectification Questionnaire (LSOQ) (Wollast et al., 2021; Vandebosch et al., 2015). See Appendix 5.

The interpretation of the LSOQ is divided into two parts, where half of the items measured are related to appearance, whilst the other half is related to competence (Wollast et al., 2021). Thus, two scores are obtained, namely an appearance score and a competence score (Wollast et al., 2021). These are summed separately, followed by a subtraction of the competence score from the appearance score (Wollast et al., 2021). Naturally, high results indicate high levels of Self-Objectification, and conversely (Wollast et al., 2021). See Appendix 5. A reliability analysis showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.62 for the appearance score and 0.81 for the competence score, indicating that the questions were sufficiently reliable and could be combined into two single indices (Malhotra, 2020 pp.303-304); total competence score and total appearance score. These were later combined into a single variable, Self-Objectification, by subtracting the total competence score from the total appearance score.

Demographics

Two demographic measures were also included in the main study, namely, gender and age. This is commonly measured in experimental studies (Söderlund, 2018 pp.124-125) and was therefore considered essential to include. Incorporating age and gender will also indicate to what extent the findings can be generalisable (Aidley, 2018, p.72). When asking for gender, four options are presented: female, male, non-binary, and prefer not to say (Aidley, 2018, pp.72-73). When asking for age, a multiple choice question was presented, ranging from 18–85+. See Appendix 5.

4.2.1.5 Sample Selection

A convenience sampling method was employed. While the use of a convenience sample may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population (Malhotra, 2020, p.363) it was deemed viable given the scope of the thesis. Responses were collected through an online anonymous link between April 15th 2025 and April 28th 2025 where participants were allocated to one of two treatment groups. The distribution of gender and age was balanced across the two treatment groups, supporting the assumption that participants were randomly assigned to one of the two groups (Söderlund, 2018, pp. 124–125).

Furthermore, the survey was distributed within Sweden, resulting in a sample of Swedish respondents. A total of 220 responses were collected. However, responses were excluded if deemed incomplete, specifically when the control question was answered incorrectly or questions were ignored (See Appendix 5). The final sample included 156 valid respondents, consisting of 127 women (81%), 28 men (19%), and 1 individual who preferred not to disclose their gender (<1%). The age distribution ranged between 18 and 84 years old. For details, see Appendix 6.

4.2.1.6 Reliability & Validity

Manipulation check

Participants were exposed to one of the two treatments: a fitness studio communicating either Internal Health or External Health. The results indicate that the textual communication effectively conveyed contrasting perspectives. This was highlighted by a mean comparison showing a significant difference between the two treatment groups. See Table 5.

Table 5: Main–Study, Treatment Groups

	Mean Value
Internal Health	$\mu = 3.42$ (sd = 1.60)
External Health	$\mu = 5.93$ (sd= 1.35)
Sig.	$p < 0.001$

Factor Analysis

A factor analysis was conducted to explore whether the measured variables reflect a single underlying construct or distinct aspects of well-being. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure yielded a value of 0.94, indicating sampling adequacy and confirming the appropriateness of factor analysis (Malhotra, 2020, p. 610). Based on eigenvalues, all variables loaded onto a single factor, suggesting that they collectively measure one overarching construct.

However, when specifying the number of factors to extract based on theoretical expectations, the variables aligned with the intended dimensions of well-being. This highlights a tension between data-driven results and the theoretical model: while the empirical findings suggest a unified factor, the theoretical foundation supports the interpretation that the variables tap into distinct facets of well-being. Therefore, it can be concluded that although the aspects are empirically interconnected, they still represent conceptually different components of well-being.

4.2.2 Findings

The empirical results will be presented in the following section. The aim is to determine whether the hypotheses presented in section 2.2 are supported or rejected. The significance level is set to be 0.05 as this is commonly used when performing experimental studies (Söderlund, 2018 pp. 155-156).

To investigate the psychological effects of the treatments, a mean comparison was conducted. An independent samples t-test was employed to assess whether there were statistically significant differences in the mean responses between the two treatment groups (Söderlund, 2018, pp. 145–147; Malhotra, 2020, pp. 486–491).

4.2.2.1 Summary of findings

An overview of the empirical differences between the treatment groups is presented in Table 6 and will be further discussed below.

Table 6: Mean Comparison

	Body Appreciation	Appearance Satisfaction	Self Esteem	Self Objectification
Internal Health	μ = 4.76 (sd=1.46)	μ = 4.61 (sd=1.42)	μ = 5.61 (sd=1.12)	μ = – 0.75 (sd=1.29)
External Health	μ = 4.20 (sd=1.54)	μ = 4.00 (sd=1.53)	μ = 5.07 (sd=1.54)	μ = 0.18 (sd=1.74)
Sig.	p = 0.023	p = 0.011	p = 0.013	p < 0.001
Null Hypothesis Rejected	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

4.2.2.2 Body Appreciation

Body Appreciation was ranked significantly ($p = 0.023$) lower when exposed to External Health communication ($\mu_{external} = 4.20$), compared to the ranking when exposed to Internal Health communication ($\mu_{internal} = 4.76$). Thus, the null hypothesis can be rejected and H_1 confirmed.

4.2.2.3 Appearance Satisfaction

Appearance satisfaction was seen to be significantly ranked lower when exposed to the External Health communication, compared to Internal Health communication ($\mu_{external} = 4.00,\ \mu_{internal} = 4.61,\ p = 0.011$). This indicates that H_2can be confirmed and the null hypothesis rejected.

4.2.2.4 Self-Esteem

Participants exposed to the External Health treatment ranked their Self-Esteem significantly lower than those exposed to the Internal Health treatment ($\mu_{external} = 5.07,\ \mu_{internal} = 5.61$). A significance level of 0.007 indicates that the null hypothesis can be rejected and thus H_3 confirmed.

4.2.2.5 Self Objectification

The final hypothesis suggested that participants exposed to External Health communication would score higher on Self-Objectification than participants exposed to Internal Health communication. The results revealed a significant difference between the groups ($\mu_{external} = 0.18,\ \mu_{internal} = -0.75,\ p = \ < 0.001$). Thus, H_4 is supported.

4.2.2.6 Summary of Hypotheses

A summary of the hypotheses outcomes, including corresponding p-values and confirmation status, is provided in Table 7.

Table 7: Hypotheses

	Hypothesis	Significance	Confirmed
H_1	When exposed to communication emphasizing External Health, Body Appreciation will be lower than when exposed to communication emphasizing Internal Health.	p = 0.023	Yes
H_2	When exposed to communication emphasizing External Health, Appearance Satisfaction will be lower than when exposed to communication emphasizing Internal Health.	p = 0.011	Yes
H_3	When exposed to communication emphasizing External Health, Self-Esteem will be lower than when exposed to communication emphasizing Internal Health.	p = 0.013	Yes
H_4	When exposed to communication emphasizing External Health, Self-Objectification will be lower than when exposed to communication emphasizing Internal Health.	p < 0.001	Yes

5. Discussion

5.1 Addressing the Research Questions

At the beginning of this thesis, two research questions were posed to deepen the understanding of textual marketing communication in the fitness industry and its psychological consequences. These questions have been explored through two studies. This discussion will address RQ1, followed by RQ2.

RQ1: How do gym and fitness studios textually communicate their offering?

The results of Study 1 revealed that there is a difference in how gyms and fitness studios communicate their offering. A distinct difference between the communication types were identified, where External Health and Internal Health act as opposites. These findings laid the foundation for the experimental study where participants confirmed that the different treatments promoted different aspects of health, one with focus on Internal Health while the other on External Health – more specifically advocating for physical health or mental health in the advertisement. Thus, RQ1 is addressed through the findings of Study 1, confirmed by the Pre–Study, which demonstrate that fitness actors predominantly adopt one of two distinct textual communication styles: one emphasizing physical (external) health, and the other focusing on mental (internal) health. These communication types form the basis of how gyms and fitness studios currently present their offerings, highlighting a clear division between the promotion of physical versus mental health attributes.

RQ2: What is the impact of fitness studios' textual communication on consumers' psychological well-being?

RQ2 aims to capture the different psychological effects of internal and External Health textual communications. For the experimental study, a total of four well-being dimensions have been examined, namely (1) Body Appreciation, (2) Appearance Satisfaction, (3) Self-Esteem, and (4) Self-Objectification. The results revealed that exposure to externally

focused fitness messaging indeed negatively affects customers' psychological well-being to a higher extent than internally focused communication. A significant difference in mean values was found between the treatment groups across all measures, thereby supporting all hypotheses. The findings thus provide an answer to RQ2; Fitness studios textual communication does influence consumers' well-being, depending on how health is textually framed. Specifically, internally focused health messaging enhanced wellbeing across all measured dimensions, showing significantly higher scores compared to externally focused communication.

By addressing these research questions, the overarching purpose of the thesis can be answered.

How can gym and fitness studios textually communicate their offering to promote healthy behavior without causing psychological harm to consumers

Marketers have the possibility to encourage people to live a more healthy lifestyle. However, this thesis was grounded in a central dilemma; How can this be achieved without triggering negative effects for consumers? This thesis aimed to examine how gyms and fitness studios textually communicate their offering and how this communication impacts customers' psychological well-being. Thus, the purpose is addressed through the findings of RQ1 and RQ2, showing that fitness studios can promote healthy behavior without causing psychological harm by emphasizing internally focused health in their messaging.

5.2 Dominant Effect

Self-Objectification showed the strongest significant result. As previously mentioned, this measurement encompasses two distinct aspects: competence and appearance scores. This suggests that exposure to various forms of communication (internal vs. external) affects whether consumers lay focus on their appearance or competence. Connecting back to literature, this measure encompasses the idea that people with higher Self-Objectification tend to prioritize how they look over how they feel (Calogero, 2017). Results suggest that

Self-Objectification is higher after being exposed to an ad with textual content emphasizing External Health compared to Internal Health.

5.3 Theoretical Contributions

This thesis is based on previous theory and aims to fill a research gap, namely, the need to investigate how textual framing in fitness marketing affects the receiving consumer.

As previously noted, earlier research has primarily examined how visual elements in fitness advertising influence different dimensions of well-being. This thesis contributes to marketing theory by exploring how textual content within advertising psychologically affects well-being. In line with de Lenne et al. (2021), who recommend that future research move beyond the focus on idealized bodies and instead explore media formats that enable more storytelling, this thesis contributes by focusing on textual elements. Incorporating text-based messaging offers a new lens through which to investigate similar questions, highlighting how textual content can function in ways comparable to visual cues. In doing so, this study broadens the understanding within this research field. The findings indicate a significant effect on consumers' well-being when communicating internal versus External Health through textual framing, thus contributing to the field.

Furthermore, the four aspects of well-being identified in existing theory – Body Appreciation, Appearance Satisfaction, Self-Esteem, and Self-Objectification – have been examined in a new context. This contributes to a broader theoretical understanding of how they are individually influenced by textual content in advertisements. Since each measurement was significantly influenced by the type of treatment (External versus Internal Health messaging) this suggests a theoretical contribution to the understanding of each individual construct.

5.4 Practical Contributions

Beyond theoretical implications, this thesis offers practical contributions to the retail sector. Several key insights emerge that can guide the development of a more ethical fitness landscape. Gyms and fitness actors can use the findings of this thesis to avoid using harmful textual content in their advertising.

The market scan in Study 1 identified the most commonly used words in current fitness communication, while the Main Study demonstrated how these words influence consumers' psychological well-being. The treatment group exposed to externally focused health messaging showed a lower impact on well-being compared to the group exposed to internally focused messaging. Thus, if gyms and fitness actors within the retail sector aim to promote a sustainable and healthy lifestyle, they should be mindful of the psychological effects of their communication and prioritize messaging emphasizing Internal Health. These findings highlight a practical need for change in how many gyms currently promote their offerings.

Thus, these findings can ultimately support the development of more ethical advertising within the fitness industry. Prioritizing marketing that promotes well-being in an ethical manner contributes not solely to more sustainable advertising within the industry, but also addresses two current societal issues: The lack of physical activity (World Health Organization, 2024), and the growing prevalence of mental health issues (World Health Organization, 2022a). Encouraging movement without causing psychological harm represents a meaningful contribution for retailers operating in the fitness sector.

5.5 Limitations & Future Research

Firstly, the sampling in Study 2, resulted in a skewed distribution, with approximately 80% of the respondents identifying as female and solely 20% as male (See Appendix 6). To enhance generalizability and support broader population-level conclusions, future research should replicate this study with a more balanced and diverse sample. Additionally, future research could benefit from focusing specifically on male participants, as this is scarcely researched.

Furthermore, both Study 1 and Study 2 were conducted using samples based in Sweden, which limit the generalizability of the findings. To enhance the general applicability of the results, future research is encouraged to replicate the study in cross-cultural settings. This would provide deeper insight into how health-related messaging in fitness marketing is interpreted across different cultural contexts.

Due to the limited scope of this thesis, age-related differences could not be explored in depth, however, the data indicated a possible connection. This raises the question of whether the psychological impact of advertising changes over time. Further exploration and future research is therefore encouraged. Future research in this area could offer valuable insights for developing ethical marketing strategies that are sensitive to generational differences.

Lastly, this study did not include profit-related factors, such as how different textual framings may influence consumer behavior from a commercial standpoint. Future research should therefore explore how Internal versus External Health messaging affects key business outcomes. Incorporating these indicators would provide valuable insights for fitness studios aiming to align their marketing communication with both consumer well-being and profitability.

6. Conclusion

This study addresses a previously underexplored research area by examining how textual framing in fitness advertising influences consumer well-being. By initially exploring how the current landscape of fitness marketing is presented, Study 1 acted as a foundation where communications focused on either Internal or External Health became the basis of an experimental study. These types of textual framings were identified as contrasts of each other, where they either focused on external (physical) health, or internal (mental) health. Study 2 aimed to examine how the different textual framing treatments influenced consumer well-being across four dimensions: (1) Body Appreciation, (2) Appearance Satisfaction, (3) Self-Esteem, and (4) Self-Objectification. The findings from Study 2 showed a significant difference for all measurements, where well-being was lower for those exposed to External Health than Internal Health.

Beyond filling an existing theoretical gap, the findings of this study offer practical insights by guiding fitness industry actors in how to use textual marketing in ways that support consumer well-being. Our population needs to increase physical activity to meet the WHO's targets, whom are also presenting growing mental health challenges. Fitness advertising can evoke negative emotions. Therefore, industry actors must communicate responsibly. These practical insights are particularly relevant in a context where fitness advertising may carry greater influence than ever, due to rising digitalization, increasingly sedentary lifestyles, and growing concerns around mental health.

The message is clear: textual framing matter. Our findings indicate that how we talk about health can either lift people up or break them down. It's time to reshape the fitness industry.

No Pain, All Gain.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Appendix 1: Market Scan, Study 1

**C1 = Code Author 1, C2= Code Author 2, C3 = Consolidated Coding*

Gym/Studio	Words used in recent marcom	Source	C1	C2	C3
Acid Training	challenge, extreme, "are you up for it"	Instagram	3	4	3.5
Actic	"ta hand om ditt hjärta", sömn, utmaning	Instagram	1	2	1.5
Barrys	strength, fit fam, legend journey, elevate, abs and ass	Instagram	5	7	6
BeCore	pump it up, sweat it out, tone, feel that burn, sunday sculpt	Instagram	7	7	7
Bionic	build muscle, burn fat, prevent injuries	Instagram	7	6	6.5
Burner	hot burn sculpt, feel the burn	Instagram	7	7	7
Crossfit Solid	The energy, the sweat, the shared suffering, motivation, we build more than muscles – we build unstoppable willpower.	Instagram	5	4	4.5
Delta Gym	Träning, styrka och motivation	Instagram	1	3	2
Drivkraft	familjärt, gemenskap, glädje, kraft, fokus	Instagram	1	1	1
Fight Club	kropp, själ, teamwork	Instagram	1	1	1
Fightbox	train, recover, booty bootcamp, push your limits, build strength, achieve your fitness goals	Instagram	3	3	3
Fit4life	energi, kom igång	Instagram	1	2	1.5
Fitness 24/7	mycket träning, kom igång, bli starkare, träningsmål	Instagram	2	4	3
Forever Fitness	balans, inre harmoni, starta din resa	Instagram	1	1	1
Friskis	lustfylld träning, glädjeruset, få hjärtat att slå volter	Instagram	1	1	1
FSA	recovery, vibe, level up, athlete, performance	Instagram, website	3	2	2.5
HYPOXI Studio	design your body, how are your summer clothes fitting?, targeted centimetre loss, fettförbränning, synliga resultat	Instagram, website	7	7	7
Hälsokällan	svettas, hälsosamt liv, good vibes only	Instagram, website	1	3	2
Ignite	success, daily routine, full body burn, abs and ass, no excuses, challenge you, change you	Instagram	6	6	6

InMo Medveten Träning	glada miner, livskvalitét, ta det första steget	Instagram	1	1	1
Intense	brunch, burn, biocentric, energy boost, transformation	Instagram	4	5	4.5
Itrim	kilo, vikt, kropp, sinne, kom i form, BMI, målvikt	Instagram	7	7	7
Jympa 3000	stretch, happy, euphoric, every body is welcome	Instagram, website	1	1	1
Levels Health Club	sweat, transform, strength, health, happiness, focus, energy, build muscle, lose fat	Instagram	4	4	4
Metropolis	health club, fresh start	Instagram	3	3	3
MittGym	glädjekick, styrketräning, teknik	Instagram	2	3	2.5
Motion Health Club	intention, mål, energi, rörelse, unleash your potential	Instagram	3	2	2.5
MåBra	styrka, kondition, hälsa	Instagram	3	4	3.5
Nordic Wellness	strong together, kärlek, svett, tårar	Instagram	2	2	2
Orkanen Gym	tappa fett, öka styrkan, motiverad, utvecklas, mål	Instagram	5	6	5.5
pa:trop	Hög puls, djupa andetag, styrka i harmoni, self care	Instagram	2	2	2
Pace Gym	rutiner, träning, komma igång	Instagram	3	2	2.5
Progress by All	dagsform, förutsättningar, optimerad prestation	Website	3	3	3
Remedy	sweat, detoxify, sculpt, find your alignment	Instagram	6	6	6
Rosa Skrot	styrka, inspirera, tjejer, empowering, happy, ambition, intention, stark&smidig	Instagram	2	5	3
Saga Motion	Träningsglädje, vi är nära	website	1	1	1
Sats	träningsglädje, måndagspepp, endorfin boost, energikick, fredagspepp, gemenskap	Instagram	1	1	1
SPR	Control your breath, control your lift, Inhale, Brace, Press, Exhale, Strength starts from within, warm environment, Burns calories fast	Instagram	5	6	5.5
STC	moving people, träna är roligare tillsammans, träningstips, pepp	Instagram	1	2	1.5
sthlm barre	styrka, balans, elegans, achieve goals, take care of yourself, balance	Instagram	3	2	2.5
Studio Day	håll dina mål, sculpt, sweat, power, tonar hela kroppen, lekfullhet, trygghet	Instagram	6	6	6

Studio l'Echelon	gemenskap, prestigelöst, passion, kärlek, bli ditt starkaste	Instagram	1	1	1
Sturebadet	hälsosamt liv, bli starkare, må bättre, orka mer	Instagram	1	2	1.5
Sweden Barbell Club	tunga lyft, gemenskap, endorfinkick, utmaningar, motivation	Instagram	2	3	2.5
Switch Gym	aktiv livsstil, motivation, gemenskap, familjärt, personligt	Instagram	1	2	1.5
Take 5 Fitness	starting strong, get stronger, feel more energy, fortifying you body and mind	Instagram	4	4	4
The Place	gain confidence, get your heart racing, make it a habit, Feel the burn, find your strength	Instagram	5	5	5
The Workout Plan Studio	motivation, oh my booty, more than just a workout, tänk inte kör bara	Instagram	5	5	5
Trime	power, strength, challenge, push, empower, community	Instagram	4	3	3.5
True Workout	bli starkare, smidigare, få mer energi, bli av med smärta	Instagram	1	3	2
Träningsbyrån	sommarformen, energifylld start, gemenskap, kärlek	Instagram	4	4	4
Träningslabbet	gemenskap, glädje, resultat, träning för alla	Instagram	3	3	3
Under Contruction	hjärta, gemenskap, känsla, lust, sinne, skadefri, motivation, energi, glädje	Instagram	1	1	1
Vardagsrummet	move, strengthen, energi, simplicity, Salubrity	Instagram	3	2	2.5
Viitalize Gym	mindfulness, breath, spa, wellness	Website, instagram	1	1	1
W8 Club Gym	health, convenience	Website, instagram	2	4	3
W8 Powerclub	modern, gym	Bruce	2	4	3
World Class	physical, mentally, health, fit, strong, weight loss	Website, instagram	6	6	6
X-Force	results, effective, health, beauty, negative training	Website, Facebook, Instagram	6	7	6.5
X-shape	shape, results, facelift, effective	Website, Facebook, Instagram	7	7	7

8.2 Appendix 2: Pre–Study Treatments

Treatment 1: External Health



Treatment 2: Internal Health



8.3 Appendix 3: Pre–Study, Survey Questions

1. What is your age?
    a. 18–24
    b. 25–34
    c. 35–44
    d. 45–54
    e. 55–64
    f. 65–74
    g. 75–84
    h. 85+

2. To what extent do you perceive this marketing to promote Internal Health compared to External Health?
    - 1 = Internal Health
    - 7 = External Health

8.4 Appendix 4: Main Study Treatments

Treatment 1: External Health



Treatment 2: Internal Health



8.5 Appendix 5: Survey Questions

As presented in the survey

Manipulation Check
Till vilken utsträckning anser du att gymmet kommunicerar inre respektive yttre hälsa? (1 = inre hälsa, 7 = yttre hälsa)

Body Appreciation
På en skala från 1–7, ange i vilken utsträckning du instämmer med de följande påståendena. (1 = Instämmer inte alls, 7 = Instämmer helt)

Svara baserat på din initiala tanke.

1. Jag respekterar min kropp
2. Jag känner mig nöjd över min kropp
3. Jag är bekväm i min kropp

Appearance Satisfaction
På en skala från 1–7, ange i vilken utsträckning du instämmer med de följande påståendena. (1 = Instämmer inte alls, 7 = Instämmer helt)

Svara baserat på din initiala tanke.

1. Mitt utseende
2. Min kroppsform
3. Min vikt
4. Min allmänna fysiska attraktivitet

Self–Esteem
På en skala från 1–7, ange i vilken utsträckning du instämmer med de följande påståendena. (1 = Instämmer inte alls, 7 = Instämmer helt)

Svara baserat på din initiala tanke.

1. I det stora hela är jag nöjd med mig själv
2. Jag kan göra saker lika bra som de flesta andra kan
3. Jag känner att jag är en värdefull person

Self–Objection
På en skala från 1–7, ange i vilken utsträckning du instämmer med de följande påståendena. (1 = Instämmer inte alls, 7 = Instämmer helt)

Svara baserat på din initiala tanke.

1. Hälsa
2. Vikt
3. Styrka
4. Fysisk Attraktivitet
5. Att ha fasta/skulpterade muskler
6. Fysisk form

Demographics
Age

Hur gammal är du?
1. 18–24
2. 25–34
3. 35–44
4. 45–54
5. 55–64
6. 65–74
7. 75–84
8. 85+

Gender

Vilket kön identifierar du dig med?

1. Kvinna
2. Man
3. Icke–Binär
4. Föredrar att inte säga

Control

Vad handlade denna studie om?

1. Marknadsföring inom fitness
2. Online shopping

Translated

Body Appreciation

On a scale of 1–7, please indicate to what extent you agree to the following statements (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree).

1. I respect my body
2. I feel good about my body
3. I am comfortable in my body

Appearance satisfaction

On a scale of 1–7, please evaluate your satisfaction of the following attributes right now (1= not at all, 7=very much),

1. My appearance
2. My body shape
3. My weight
4. My general physical attractiveness

Self Esteem

On a scale of 1–7, please indicate to what extent you agree to the following statements (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree).

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
2. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
3. I feel that I’m a person of worth

Self Objectification

Please indicate the extent to which each of these body attributes has an impact on your perception of yourself. For each attribute, please indicate whether the attribute has an extremely low or extremely high impact on your physical self–concept (1 = Extremely Low, 7 = Extremely high).

1. Health
2. Weight
3. Strength
4. Physical attractiveness
5. Having firm / Sculpted muscles
6. Physical fitness

Appearance score questions: 2, 4, 5
Competence score questions: 1, 3, 6

Demographics
Age

What is your age?

9. 18–24
10. 25–34
11. 35–44
12. 45–54
13. 55–64
14. 65–74
15. 75–84
16. 85+

Gender

1. Female
2. Male
3. Non–Binary
4. Prefer not to say

8.6 Appendix 6: Sample, Main Study

Age and Gender

Age / Gender	Total Respondents	Male Respondents	Female Respondents	Prefer to not say
18-24	58	13	45	0
25-34	33	6	27	0
35-44	25	2	23	0
45-54	27	4	22	1
55-64	9	1	8	0
65-74	1	0	1	0
75-84	3	2	1	0
85+	0	0	0	0
Total	156	28	127	1

Treatment Groups

Treatment Exposure	No. Of Respondents
Internal Health Communication	79
External Health Communication	77
Total	156

8.7 Appendix 7: AI Transparency Note

AI has been used for two purposes in the thesis process. More specifically ChatGPT-4 has been utilized.

(1) Recommendations of enhanced academic language and flow. The suggestions were then evaluated by the authors and incorporated in the text if deemed suitable.

(2) The “deep research” function was employed as an initial tool to facilitate the search for academic literature on niche topics, particularly by identifying relevant keywords. This approach functioned solely as a preliminary step and the suggested sources were later evaluated carefully with human force.