

Emoji and Text as Tools to Frame Gender Stereotypes in Instagram Captions

A Critical Discourse Analysis of @gymshark and @gymsharkwomen

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This thesis analyzes emoji use and textual elements in the Instagram captions of Gymshark's two accounts, @gymshark and @gymsharkwomen. Gymshark is a retail company who produces athletic clothing items and accessories. The goal of this study is to first analyze whether emoji use is different in the two accounts and their target audience of mostly male followers versus primarily female followers. The second object of this thesis is to detect how gender stereotypes are framed and reinforced with the use of emoji and text in the captions, first analyzing the emoji and then the textual elements. The theoretical framework for this thesis is based on Critical Discourse Analysis and Goffman's (1974) frame analysis, and Brummett's (2019) definition of close reading is used as a method for analyzing the material.

The results of the study indicate that in both Instagram accounts the captions reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, with @gymshark embodying more masculine characteristics through emoji and textual features, while @gymsharkwomen includes more feminine characteristics. The use of the emoji in the captions is different in the two accounts, and the textual style and grammatical features differ considerably depending on which account the captions are posted. Both accounts frame the genders in the context of sports in accordance with stereotypical media representation of athletes, where female athletes are not given equal recognition for their athletic competencies compared to male athletes. This thesis fills a research gap in studying emoji within linguistics, especially how they are used as framing tools, as well as how their use varies according to a target audience, which offers possibilities for future research on this topic.

Key words: emoji, gender stereotypes, CDA, social media, frame analysis.

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List of Abbreviations

CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

GS - @gymshark

GSW - @gymsharkwomen

1 Introduction

Gender stereotypes have multiple ways of materializing within society, with language being one of them. According to Maass, language is a major tool in discourse by which stereotypes are communicated and social groups are represented (1999, 79). How stereotypes about men and women are reproduced within language can be approached through the concept of gendered language. Lakoff's influential work on women's language in 1973 has paved the way for the ever-continuing research on the differences in language use among the genders and how language plays an integral part in constructing gender. Bamman, Eisenstein and Schnoebelen (2014, 136) claim that "many sociolinguists have come to see gender as constructed, maintained, and disrupted by linguistic practices, which, in turn, shape language". Language helps create mental frames around ideologies and stereotypes, and hence it is a key element to study when looking to discover these ideologies.

One component of modern language is the emoji. Even though emoji have been studied increasingly with the rise of digital communication and social media, there seems to be a gap within the field of linguistics on the subject of how emoji are used to frame gender norms. While there are no specific gendered classifications for different emojis, I argue that the way they are used can bear connotations with stereotypical feminine and masculine characteristics. For example, the choice of using a pink heart emoji as opposed to a black heart can reinforce the feminine characteristics, whereas using a black one can add masculinity to the tone of the message. Previous research on emoji use shows that women are more frequent emoji users (Chen et al. 2018, 3). Additionally, Herring and Dainas state how graphical icons, such as emoji, are associated with femininity and young users, especially teenage girls (2020, 2). These suggest that there is a difference of emoji use between the genders, but the findings alone do not indicate how that difference might affect the reproduction of gender stereotypes. Similarly, there is no research on how emoji are used differently when the user is unknown, but the target audience is gender specific. Both of these are phenomena that this thesis will touch on.

Representation matters when it comes to how the different genders are portrayed. If women are constantly represented in a way that adheres to a traditional stereotype of being emotional, weak, and domestic while men are portrayed in the traditional way as strong, athletic, and

powerful, it becomes the ideology that is normalized within society. One aspect of society in which the gender stereotypes are present and reproduced in, is sports. How athletes are portrayed based on their gender has been subject of research, and it is a topic that has also gained attention within sports institutions, with attempts to move toward a more inclusive and gender-equal way of representing athletes. For example, The International Olympic Committee (IOC) created guidelines for portrayal in 2018, which aims to provide instructions to the representation of the Olympic Games, the Olympic Movement, and the athletes in a gender-equal and fair way in all communications (IOC 2024, 2). The newest version, which is the third edition of the guidelines, was published in 2024. The guidelines include instructions such as which kind of visual imagery should be used, what kind of language and terminology to use in articles or headlines, and how to make sure that women's and men's sports events are given equal coverage. It also includes notes on how to interview athletes without using gender-driven questions.

Media and companies that cater to the field of sports, such as athletic wear companies and news media outlets, are responsible for how they portray male and female athletes, as they have a significant impact on the gendered narrative of athletes and the sports industry. Gymshark, an athletic wear retail company, is an interesting brand to focus on in this regard, since they have a strong social media presence. Gymshark uses Instagram as one of their main marketing platforms, and as a way to connect with consumers. At the time of writing this at the end of 2025, they have over 12 million followers collectively on all of their Instagram pages. The company has three different profiles aimed at different consumers: their main page, @gymshark, which has nearly 8 million followers, @gymsharkwomen with 3.6 million followers, and @gymsharklifting, which currently has one million followers. The last one will not be included in this study due to the limited space, and because it is an account which features content that focuses only on powerlifting, whereas the first two accounts have more general content posted on them. The accounts will from now on be referred to by the abbreviations GS for @gymshark and GSW for @gymsharkwomen.

The different profiles are aimed at different audiences, and the distinction is seen not only on the visual content, but also on the captions of the posts. The main account has a darker tone in the pictures and videos that feature both men and women, mostly within a gym environment, and the captions include motivational phrases, information on new product launches and overall captions that place emphasis on the hard work and consistency of fitness. For

example, a typical caption from the main account is as follows: “[d]iscipline looks good in any light 🔥” (@gymshark 2025, n.p.). The account for women is visually more colorful and light-toned, with the posts including women, mostly at a gym, but also in different settings such as at home or out running errands. The captions of this account are usually something relating to the post that they are linked to and not necessarily related to the gym or fitness, and they are more informal in general. They also include information of the products and sales. As an example, a caption from this account reads “2026 rebrand loading...what is your 2026 going to look like? 🙌” (@gymsharkwomen 2025, n.p.). While this distinction in the accounts and their target audiences of mixed-gender and women only is probably part of the company’s identity and a way to make women feel as included into the sports environment as men, it sparks questions on why the decision has been made to create a separate account for women, but not one for men. Further, what does the quite notable difference in the contents of these accounts tell us about Gymshark’s ideologies and their views on different genders and their participation in fitness?

The analysis of this thesis takes into consideration the emoji present in the captions of the Instagram posts. My interest within this study is to examine how Gymshark uses emojis in the captions of their Instagram accounts; for instance, what kind of emojis are used, and what is their role within the captions. Further, this thesis incorporates emoji into the analysis by examining how the use of emoji can be seen as framing the captions of Gymshark’s Instagram posts to represent gender stereotypes. Along with the emoji, textual elements of the captions will be analyzed as well in relation to the gender stereotypes. The theoretical framework of this study is based on Critical Discourse Analysis, and more specifically frame analysis by Goffman (1974). The research questions of this thesis are as follows:

1. How does Gymshark use emoji in their Instagram captions?
2. Do the emoji reinforce the ideology of traditional gender stereotypes?
3. Do the textual elements in the captions reinforce the ideology of traditional stereotypes?

My hypothesis is that Gymshark uses emoji more frequently in the GSW captions than on the GS ones, and that different emoji are used in the accounts. I propose that the emoji that are used in the GSW account have more feminine connotations, while the ones on the GS account have more masculine connotations, and that this helps reinforce traditional gender stereotypes.

As for the textual elements, I suggest that on GSW the captions embody and convey the ideological stereotype of women by incorporating traditionally feminine characteristics with the use of features such as lexical choices, grammatical features, and the style of the text. Similarly, I hypothesize that GS constructs the captions with features that help reinforce the traditional masculine stereotype. I suggest that the captions and their conveyed ideological meanings frame the image of women, especially within sports, according to traditional stereotypes, where women are not taken as seriously as men. The use of different Instagram accounts to reach consumers based on gender and the content of these accounts varying significantly helps upkeep the gap between the genders among the athletic environments.

In the following sections I first explain the background of this research and discuss gender stereotypes, Gymshark, and offer a brief overlook on the history of women's participation in sports. Then on section 3 I present the theoretical background used in this study and discuss emoji and their significance within linguistics. In section 4, I move on to material and methods. Following this is the analysis section of this study, in which I analyze the emoji, and the textual elements used in the data. The discussion section extends the findings from the analysis and discusses them in more detail. Finally come the conclusion and references, and the appendix.

2 Background

In this section I expand on the background of this topic, discussing gender stereotypes, representation of women and their participation in sports, as well as giving more information on Gymshark.

2.1 Gender stereotypes

Hilton and von Hippel define stereotypes as “beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups” (1996, 240). Furthermore, Eagly and Steffen note that stereotypes project how people perceive other people’s daily life; if a group is often observed doing a particular activity, it likely leads to the belief that the attributes that are required to engage in said activity are typical to said group (1984, 735). Simultaneously, I suggest, this excludes other groups from those attributes and activities. For example, if men are often observed engaging in sports that require strength and stamina, it becomes a stereotype that those are typical attributes for men, and women cannot take part in such activities that require these ‘masculine’ qualities. Stereotypes about gender are especially harmful to the equality of men and women, because they are often based on a traditional power structure where men hold the power over women.

Some of the common feminine characteristics that are seen as stereotypical include being affectionate, childlike, compassionate, feminine, gentle, shy, warm, and not using harsh language (Prentice and Carranza 2002, 269). Stereotypical masculine characteristics then are being aggressive, ambitious, athletic, competitive, masculine, willing to take risks, and individualistic (Prentice and Carranza 2002, 269–270). Ridgeway also includes characteristics such as emotional expressiveness, interpersonal sensitivity and kindness as feminine attributes, and forcefulness, confidence, and assertiveness as masculine characteristics (2011, 59). Similarly, colors are also linked to gender stereotypes, with pink shades often attributed with femininity, while blue shades are associated with masculinity (Wang, Zhu and Zuo 2025, 710). Eagly and Steffen distinguish a division between *communal* and *agentic* qualities, in accordance with their establishment within research and theoretical discussions. It is generally presumed that women are more oriented toward communal qualities, whereas men are oriented toward agentic ones (1984, 735–736). Communal qualities are expressed by “selflessness, concern with others, and a desire to be at one with others” (Eagly and Steffen

1984, 736), and agentic qualities by “self-assertion, self-expansion, and the urge to master” (ibid.).

The dominant groups that tend to be in advantaged positions within institutions, such as the government, media, and education, are often the ones whose perceptions of stereotypes become the mainstream representations (Ridgeway 2011, 68). That is to say, stereotypes are a product of the cultural hegemony and thus these views of the people in higher positions in society become the blueprint of how men and women are perceived. The groups that Ridgeway defines as the dominant ones are whites, middle-class, and heterosexuals (ibid.). These classifications are in the context of the United States, but I would argue they apply to most western societies. When the frame of what is considered masculine and feminine, and how men and women should act comes from the central institutions, it becomes normalized and is further reinforced through things like educational textbooks and policies, commercials, and media representations (ibid.). These stereotypes and their deep integration into the society affect the way women and men are perceived within different contexts, such as women’s inclusion into sports and the mental frames of gendered representations surrounding the athletic setting, for example how ice hockey might be seen as a masculine sport, whereas gymnastics is perceived as a feminine one.

2.2 Women in sports

The first time women participated in the Olympic games was in 1900, when out of the 997 participants there were 22 women competing in five sports; tennis, sailing, golf, croquet, and equestrian sports (IOC 2025, 3). Women were not allowed to take part in the Olympic marathon until 1984. It is only fairly recent that women’s right to participate in sports was recognized. For example, a federal law enacted in 1972 in the US, Title IX, was a vital part in the rise of women’s participation in sports. Title IX states that “[n]o person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (U.S Department of Education 2026, n.p.). This legislation ensured protection against discrimination based on gender. In 1979, the right for women to participate in sports was, for the first time, formally included in an international *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (IOC 2025, 1). However, the Paris summer Olympics in 2024 was the first time when there was a gender equality in the participants, with female athletes accounting for 49% of the participants (IOC 2025, 3). As a

more general observation, “[r]ecent research has found that women comprise 40% of all sport participation in the United States” (Lough and Geurin 2019, 2).

Even though women’s participation in sports has risen, it is still shadowed by the traditional gender stereotypes that women are weaker and not as athletic as men. The Sports Financial Literacy Academy (SFLA) states that “[f]emale athletes are frequently rated based on their appearance, with physical skill being commonly overlooked” (Gregoriou 2023, n.p.). It is not unusual for media representations of athletes to differ based on their gender; while male athletes are praised for their skills and sportsmanship, female athletes are discussed in relation to their personal lives or how they look (Knight and Giuliano 2001, 218-219). It is these stereotypes that play part in upholding the ideology that women are lesser than men and should not be taken seriously within sports.

2.3 Gymshark

Gymshark began in 2012 in the UK as a small company founded by Ben Francis. The idea of starting his own company came from “realising that there wasn’t any gym clothing that he actually wanted to wear” (Foley 2023, n.p.). They operated first only as an online store but opened their first physical store in London in 2022, and since then have opened six more, including stores in Dubai, New York, and Amsterdam. The company initially sold athletic clothes for men, but later on included products for women. The brand recounts the shift toward expanding the product lines to women as wanting to cater to the community of weightlifters, but at the time “only showing up for half of the lifting community “ (Foley 2023, n.p.), referring to providing clothing only for men. This sparked the introduction to @gymsharkwomen, which, according to the brand, is now a vital part of the company and its identity (ibid). On the 23rd of November 2025 the Gymshark EU website offered a selection of 1240 product items for women, and 795 items for men. The difference in product item numbers is related to there being more separate categories for women’s products. There are five different categories alone for women’s tops: crop tops, hoodies and jackets, sports bras, T-shirts and tops, and tank tops. To compare, there are only three categories in the men’s products for tops, which are hoodies and jackets, tank tops, and T-shirts and tops. Adding to the gender respective product lines, the brand also sells accessories, which range from water bottles and gym bags to socks and headwear. There are a total of 208 items available in the accessory category on the website.

Gymshark's marketing is partly based on fitness influencers that share their content on social media and promote Gymshark's products within that content. These influencers are called Gymshark athletes, and they are also the faces Gymshark uses on their Instagram. In the early days of the brand Francis used to send their clothes to influencers who posted fitness content, such as training videos or clothing reviews, in order to gain attention to Gymshark (Foley 2023, n.p.). The influencers became taken with the clothes, and presented them in their own social media accounts, and this boosted Gymshark's exposure within the athletic clothing field. (ibid.). Nowadays the influencer program works differently, with content creators having to apply to be a Gymshark athlete whenever the brand is looking for new faces. The use of Instagram and influencer marketing has arguably been a big part of Gymshark's success. The main Instagram account @gymshark was created in May 2013, less than a year after the brand's creation. The account for women was created in January 2015. Both accounts post on a daily basis.

3 Theoretical background

In this section I explain the theoretical background of this thesis and its key concepts. I am using Critical Discourse Analysis as the approach for my study, with a focus on frame analysis and gendered language. This section also includes explanation of emojis and how they are relevant to this study and the field of linguistics.

3.1 Emoji

In today's world, emoji are an essential part of digital communication. They have evolved from emoticons, which are representations of facial expressions used in the early days of computer-mediated communication (Bai et al. 2019, 2). Emoticons are formed by using punctuation marks, letters, and numbers in order to create different emotional expressions. Examples of emoticons are a smiley (: -), tongue hanging out (: -P) and a heart (<3). The evolution of emoticons into the emoji dates back to 1999, when the first emoji were created by Japanese Shigetaka Kurita (Bai et. al. 2019, 4). Emoji are graphic icons which are given a predefined name and a code, and they are used to represent everything from facial expressions and hand gestures to objects, food, activities, and symbols (ibid.). The respective emoji for the earlier mentioned emoticons would be a smiling face (😊), face with stuck-out tongue (😜), and a red heart (❤️). It is important to note that while the emoji have a Unicode that allows them to be coded into different platforms, the presentation style of the emoji differs depending on the platform on which they are used due to the use of different developers (Bai et. al. 2019, 6). Because I am writing this thesis on a computer that operates on an macOS system, the emoji used in the text are the visual renderings of an Apple platform, however, they might appear different on a Windows or an Android system.

Due to the relevance of emoji in digital discourse, they can be considered to be meaningful to linguistic studies, especially because of their relatively recent emergence. Kaiser and Grosz state how the rising frequency of emoji use indicates that there is a gap within non-face-to-face communication that is being filled by emoji (2021, 1010), and they continue by arguing that studying emoji can be insightful for the linguistic part of human communication (ibid.). According to Herring and Dainas, "emoji do not only function on the semantic level, and the reasons for their use do not derive solely from their meaning in isolation. Context shapes emoji interpretation" (2020, 2). Similarly, Zappavigna and Logi mention how, when combined with a co-text, emoji "can make a range of complex meanings" (2024, n.p.).

Some research has been done on the differences in emoji use and how they are interpreted between men and women, such as Herring and Dainas' 2020 study about how gender and age affect the way how different functions of emoji are interpreted by users. The results of the study found that while the gender of the user does not significantly affect how the emoji function is interpreted, there are differences between frequency of emoji use between genders; women are found to use emoji more frequently in digital communication than men (Herring and Dainas 2020, 9). However, within my knowledge, little to no research has focused on emoji as part of framing gender stereotypes within discourse studies. Closely related, a study by Wolf (2000) examined the gender differences in expressing emotion through emoticon use in online newsgroups. The study found that in female-dominated newsgroups women used emoticons to express emotion with more variation, including expressing solidarity, positive feelings, and support. In contrast, in male-dominated newsgroups, the emoticons were used with less variation, and the main purposes of use were to express sarcasm, teasing, or humor (ibid.). The study concluded that the findings reinforce typical gender stereotypes where women are deemed more emotional than men (Wolf 2000, 830–831). While Wolf's work is situated within the field of psychology, and deals with emoticons instead of emoji, it offers useful insights into the differences of how men and women use these non-verbal expressions within digital communication and their relation to gender stereotypes, which can be applicable to linguistics as well.

There is a multitude of ways to use emoji within text. They can be used to modify the tone of a message, for example by using a smiley face emoji or a sad face emoji. They can also be used as substitutes for lexical items, where the emoji represents a noun or action, such as using a heart emoji in place of the word *love* in the phrase *I love you (I ♥ you)*. Another way to utilize emoji is what Kaiser defines as *focus emoji*, where they are used to mark focus within a text (2024, 463). Kaiser establishes at least two emoji that are related to focus, which are the sparkle (🌟) and pointing hands (👉 👈) (ibid.). The way these emoji are used as focus markers is that they are used as brackets, so to say, wherein the part of the text that the author wants to highlight is placed inside two of the emoji. An example of emoji as focus markers from the material of this thesis can be seen as follows:

(1) up to 70% off 🌟 everything 🌟 (@gymsharkwomen 2023, n.p.)

The example is from a caption from the GSW account from November 2023, where the text promotes an upcoming sale. In the caption the focus is placed on the fact that everything is

included in the sale and can be purchased for as much as a 70% discount. The use of emoji as focus markers can be considered equal to placing italics on the word that is emphasized.

3.2 Gendered language

A prominent area of interest within linguistics is the construction and representation of gender in texts. This is approached, for example, by using critical discourse analysis and feminist theory to study how spoken, written, or multimodal forms of language contribute to the maintenance of ideologies about gender (Jones 2016, 219). In addition to the interest in how gender is constructed within discourse, the differences in how women and men use language has been subject to research. Lakoff has been a key contributor to the beginning of discussions about gendered language, with their work in 1973 that considers the relationship between gender and language (Litosseliti and Sunderland 2002, 3). Lakoff introduced the concept of *women's language*, which is based on an attitude that women are marginalized in relation to men, and this marginal position and powerlessness are reproduced both in the language used by women, but also the language that is used about women (Lakoff 1973, 45). For example, Lakoff mentions differences in lexical choices between men's and women's language use, which are inherently connotated with either gender. One of these disparities is the use of adjectives. Lakoff provides examples of some adjectives that seem to largely appear in women's speech instead of being used equally by everyone; adjectives such as *adorable*, *sweet*, or *lovely* are part of this group (1973, 51).

According to Coates, studies regarding differences in communicative behavior between genders show that women are more inclined to give and receive compliments than men, and women usually give compliments to each other on physical appearance, whereas men give compliments to each other on things or skills ([1986] 1993, 128). Coates also points out a difference in women's and men's language use, referencing a study by Deborah Jones (1980) which found that "men pursue a style of interaction based on **power**, while women pursue a style based on **solidarity** and **support**" (Coates [1986] 1993, 136, emphasis as in original). This is in line with the stereotypical characteristics assigned to men and women, such as that feminine characteristics include being warm and compassionate, whereas masculine features are ambitiousness and competitiveness. According to Oancea, studies have confirmed a stereotype that women use more grammatically correct language than men (2016, 33). I would argue that there has been a shift, at least within social media and digital communication, that women are increasingly using language with a more flexible style. This would seem to be

supported by some research, which claims that studies about how gender affects digital communication have found that “women are more likely to use pronouns, emotion words [...] emoticons, and abbreviations [...] while men tend to use higher frequency standard dictionary words, proper names [...] technology words” (Jurgens, Tsvetkov and Jurafsky 2017, 539). These can be also linked to the typical gender norms of women being perceived as more emotional and men as more serious.

Lakoff’s theories on Women’s Language have also received critique. Coates criticizes Lakoff’s work as lacking empirical evidence ([1986] 1993, 116–119). Even Lakoff themselves attests to this: the data used in *Language and Woman’s Place* (1973) was collected by examining Lakoff’s and their acquaintances’ speech and analyzed by using their own intuition (Lakoff 1973, 46). However, it is noted that the study and its results are not meant to act as a perfect approach to the subject of differences in men’s and women’s language, but rather as one possible viewpoint and a base for further research (Lakoff 1973, 47). Even considering this possible limitation, Lakoff’s work offers a solid base for approaching the concept of gendered language.

3.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA from here on, is an approach which, at its core, aims to unveil ideologies and power structures within society. Wodak defines CDA as an approach that “specifically considers institutional, political, gender and media discourses [...] which testify to more or less overt relations of struggle and conflict” (2001, 2). They continue by expanding this statement: “CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signalled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use” (ibid.). Fairclough defines CDA as an approach that contributes to how discourse relates to social elements, such as power and ideologies, and that its contribution is “offering critique of discourse as a way into wider critique of social reality” (2018, 13). He emphasizes that “[t]he focus is not just on power *in* discourse but also power *behind* discourse” (Fairclough 2018, 14, italics as in original). Critical Discourse Studies, CDS, is a more recent term than CDA, and has been adopted by some scholars, but it bears no significant difference to CDA. In this thesis I opt to use the term CDA, as it is an established term and sufficient to use.

There is no single method or theoretical framework for using CDA, which makes it a suitable approach for different types of analyses, since it can be modified according to the type of data

or the aim of the research (van Dijk 2008, 2). While the aim of the approach remains the same, the analysis itself can be done by studying different aspects of data. One can conduct a grammatical analysis, focusing on syntax, lexical items or phonology, or the researcher can choose to focus on rhetoric elements within a text (van Dijk 2008, 3). Other types of analysis include semiotic analysis of multimodal assets of discourse, or pragmatic analysis, such as speech acts (van Dijk 2008, 3). While CDA is an approach to linguistics that offers many different methods for analyzing language and discourse, its broadness and lack of concise definitions are also cause for critique (Wodak 2013, n.p.). Another point of criticism toward CDA is how explicit it is about its goals and stances. This leads to arguments that the research within CDA sets the analysts' own interpretations in the priority with lack of regard to the reality that different people interpret texts differently (ibid.). As van Dijk states, “[c]ritical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose and ultimately resist social inequality” (2008, 85). In other words, when using CDA, it is imperative to recognize your own stance and position within the society. This is taken into consideration with this thesis, as I recognize my own position as someone who finds gender stereotypes problematic. I strive to be objective within my analysis, in order to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the material.

3.3.1 Key concepts

The central concepts within CDA, as already mentioned, are *discourse*, *ideology*, and *power*. All of these are broad terms that need defining in relation to CDA. The term *discourse*, while being the key concept of CDA, is a term that does not have one clear definition, but rather its meaning varies according to in which context it is used (Baxter 2003, 7). A general and simple definition is that discourse refers to all kinds of text, spoken and written. Within CDA, the term is used to refer to “forms of knowledge or powerful sets of assumptions, expectations and explanations, governing mainstream social and cultural practices” (ibid). In other words, discourse denotes the ways that people use language in certain situations, and it is done through the conventions that apply to the social and cultural contexts that people are part of. By using this definition, discourse can be used in the plural sense and thus it may be suitable to talk of different discourses, such as gendered discourse or racist discourse (Flowerdew, Richardson 2018, 2). The latter definition is the one that is used within this study.

Ideology is another term that is linked to CDA, since the principal goal of it is to uncover the ideologies through discourses. Johnstone states that the texts within discourses are one of the

main ways for ideologies to be reproduced (2018, 53). They define ideologies as systems of belief that tend to be seen as selective and likely misleading (ibid). This can be specified to mean that these sets of beliefs and values are often reproduced by different social groups, and the ideologies of a certain group affect both how they see the world and relate to other people, and how they use discourses (Flowerdew and Richardson 2018, 3).

Last, a concept that CDA is interested in is *power*. According to Wodak and Meyer, “[p]ower is about relations of difference, and particularly about the effects of differences in social structures” (2001, 11). One notion of power that has been relevant in CDA comes from Gramsci’s ‘Selection from Political Writings’ in 1978, which states that “the maintenance of contemporary power rests not only on coercive force but also on ‘hegemony’” (Gramsci in Wodak 2013, n.p.). *Hegemony* refers to the situation where a majority holds the power over others. An example of how power is reproduced in discourse, more specifically within gender discourse, is how occupational titles such as *fireman* or *businessman* have the *-man* suffix. While it is becoming common for gender neutral titles (*firefighter*, *businessperson*) to replace these, the old versions are reminiscent of the patriarchal ideology that men were the ones working, and the group in power. Lazaar states that “[g]ender ideology is hegemonic in that it often does not appear as domination at all; instead it seems largely consensual and acceptable to most in a community” (2005, 7). This goes to show how the power structure of men dominating over women has been normalized.

3.3.2 Frames

Frames are cognitive structures that shape our view of the world by linking together separate entities within our mind into different frames (Bloor and Bloor 2007, 11). Goffman ([1974] 1976) introduces the concept of *primary frameworks*, for which he makes a distinction between *natural* and *social frameworks* (21–22). Natural frameworks are defined as identifying events which are “undirected, unoriented, unanimated, unguided” (Goffman [1974] 1976, 22), and which no external agency or actor interferes with (ibid.). Social frameworks, then, offer understanding for events that include “the will, aim, and controlling effort of [...] a live agency” (ibid.). This is further defined as there being an intent included whose attribution to the situation guides the social framework which is applied (ibid.). While these frames often are subconscious thought structures in our minds that stem from the ideologies that are present in our social groups, the concept of framing can also be utilized within discourse. Bloor and Bloor state that “[f]raming is important in CDA because the way

we view the world carries cultural messages that become normalized and accepted as everyday common sense [...] and they affect the way we view authority, social groups and identity” (2007, 11). Additionally, Hart states how CDA researchers are interested in the linguistic and semiotic sites where framing takes place in discourse (2023, 248).

Frames within discourses can be realized and analyzed through lexical choices or grammatical units, for instance (ibid.). Words carry meaning within them, and these meanings carry ideologies. One way to distinguish meaning is connotation. It is defined as taking into consideration the emotional charge of a word, and what it is associated with (Bloor and Bloor 2007, 129). For example, the general connotations for the word *heart* would be things such as *love*, *caring*, and *emotion*. By choosing to use lexical items with emotional and feminine connotations, for example, one can create the discourse around the cognitive frame of an emotional woman, which reinforces the common stereotype where women are perceived as more emotionally expressive than men. Emoji can also be used as tools to create frames. Danesi writes as follows: “In emoji-using texts [...] the framing of one’s perspective is easier to do, via the choice of visual tokens, with their inherent nuances” (2017, 59). Emoji, as visual representations of facial expressions and concepts, are one way to create the frames around ideologies, such as gender stereotypes.

4 Material and methods

This section will introduce the material of this study in more detail, and the methods for analyzing the data. It also includes the ethical considerations and possible limitations regarding the material.

4.1 Material

The material for this thesis is collected from the two Instagram accounts of Gymshark. Instagram is a visual social media platform that is used to share pictures or videos by either private users or businesses. According to Business of Apps (2026, n.p.), Instagram has approximately three billion active users as of 2025, which makes it the third most popular social media application. The photos and videos can be uploaded to an Instagram account, and they will also appear on a feed, where they appear to the followers of the poster. If the account is public, they can also be visible to everyone. The videos are referred to as *reels*, and they can be up to 3 minutes long. In addition to the feed posts, visual content can be posted to *stories*, which are up for 24 hours and then they disappear, unless they are saved to *highlights*, which are collections of stories that can be saved and are visible on the profile. Other features of Instagram include adding links to external websites on the *biography* of your account. The biography, or *bio* as it is often referred to as, is a space at the top of an Instagram profile, which includes the accounts name and any additional information that one might want to add to help identify your profile.

The content posted on Gymshark's Instagram accounts consists of pictures, reels, and stories. The posts contain pictures of the Gymshark athletes posing in the brand's clothes in various settings, often in a gym, reels of the athletes working out, and posts about new product launches. Some of the posts are humorous memes or screenshots of posts from Gymshark's X, former Twitter, or pictures of the products. Nearly all of the posts are what are called *carousels*, which are posts that include more than one picture or video.

All of the posts include written captions, the length of which range from just one word to multiple sentences. While analyzing the visual posts and stories would offer insightful data, the material of this current study is composed of the captions from the accounts. The material was collected in December 2025 and early January 2026. The captions from Instagram were copied to an Excel file for analyzing. Some of the captions include a hashtag, #Gymshark in

the captions on GS, and #GymsharkWomen in the captions on GSW. I have left these hashtags out of my analysis because they are not relevant for this study. The hashtags have also not been used in posts after March 31, 2025, so it is more coherent if they are omitted from the data. The posts were also saved to my personal account on Instagram for easier access after the data collection process. Due to the high frequency of posts on both accounts, it was decided to choose one post from both GS and GSW accounts from every Monday, with the time period of the selected posts ranging from January 2023 to December 2025. This allows for an equal amount of data from both GS and GSW and excludes a biased method of choosing which posts to analyze, and it helps narrow the scope of material. Additionally, the time range of three years gives a comprehensive picture of the content posted by Gymshark; hence, the analysis is more reliable as opposed to analysing material from a shorter period of time. In total, the number of captions studied is 314, with 157 captions from each account. Examples of a post and its caption by both GSW and GS are included below in Figure 1 and Figure 2.



Figure 1. Example post from @gymsharkwomen

Figure 1 exemplifies a typical post on the GSW account. It features a female athlete wearing Gymshark's clothing, and she is posing for a mirror picture inside a gym. The tone of the picture is light, and the situation is more casual than staged. The caption of the post is short, with multiple emoji and the hashtag #GymsharkWomen. As mentioned above, the hashtag however has not been added to posts that have been uploaded after March 31, 2025. The caption states that the color red is the *it girl* color, which means that it is trendy and popular, and it is followed by a sequence of different red emoji. In the photo the athlete is wearing a red sports bra and sweatpants with red details, hence the reference to the color in the caption.



Figure 2. Example post from @gymshark

Figure 2 above is a typical post on the GS account. The photo is of a male athlete, also wearing Gymshark's clothing, posing in the gym. The picture is darker than the one in Figure 1, and the athlete is not taking the picture himself, but rather flexing his muscles for the camera, even though he is not looking at the lens. This is giving the picture a more staged feeling rather than spontaneous. The caption is short, with a motivational tone to indicate that one has to put in the work to gain muscles such as the athlete has, and it has no emoji. The male athlete is tagged in the caption, and it has the hashtag #Gymshark. Similar to GSW, the hashtag has not been included in the posts added after March 31, 2025. While the photos are not included in my analysis, these pictures are used to give an example of what the posts as a whole might look like.

The analysis is conducted with using close reading as a method. Close reading is defined as being a mindful reading of a text with the aim of understanding the deeper meanings within said text (Brummett 2019, 8). The method can be used either as a *deductive* or an *inductive* approach. The first one is characterized as a “top-down, theory-driven approach” (Brummett 2019, 27), meaning that the close reading of a text is done on the basis of a theoretical framework. The second approach is when the analysis begins without a theory, but rather the text is examined “to see what can be learned that will be useful” (ibid.). In this study I have opted to use the deductive approach. I started the analysis with familiarizing myself with the material that had been collected. After this, I started going through the dataset multiple times, focusing on different elements on each round. I first went over the captions from GSW and then GS captions, and after familiarizing myself with these respectively and identifying the different emoji and textual features in both materials, I compared them to each other. This study is qualitative for the most part but has quantitative aspects when analyzing the emoji in the data, for example when inspecting the frequencies of emoji use overall and the frequencies of certain emoji. The first part of the analysis focuses on the quantitative features, and the second part will consider the qualitative analysis.

4.2 Ethical considerations

Due to the nature of this study in using social media as material, it is especially wise to acknowledge the ethical considerations of what is used as data and how it is collected. Due to Gymshark being a company that uses Instagram as one of their main platforms for marketing and communication, the contents of these accounts are publicly available to anyone on the internet. While the content includes people and occasionally their usernames tagged in the pictures or captions, these people that appear within Gymshark’s Instagram are also public figures in that they are fitness influencers that collaborate with Gymshark and have their own accounts which are public as well. It is safe to assume that these people are aware that their pictures are used as public material and thus available for anyone to access and analyze. Furthermore, the material in my analysis primarily consists of the captions of the posts, with the exception of some pictures included as an example. Therefore, I conclude that there are no ethical obstacles in using the Instagram accounts of Gymshark as my material.

For the sake of clarity regarding use of AI, during the process of writing this thesis the AI platform Keenious was used to assist in finding research related to the topic of this study.

However, none of the attempts to find suitable research to use as sources came up with results that I found sufficient for my use. Hence, while AI was utilized, the thesis does not include content or sources that have been produced by artificial intelligence.

5 Analysis

This section will go over the analysis of the material. First, I will go over the quantitative findings of the material, analyzing how many emoji are present in the captions, how many distinctive emoji there are, and how the frequencies of the emoji differ in the GS and GSW accounts. Then, I will move on to the qualitative analysis, where I will analyze the five most frequent emoji on both accounts in more detail, along with an overview of the less frequently used emoji. Last, I will analyze the textual elements in the captions.

5.1 Quantitative analysis of the emoji

In the 314 captions that compose the material of this study, emoji are used a total of 476 times. Out of these times, 323 instances are found within the GSW captions, and the remaining 153 are in the GS captions. This means that nearly 68% of the times that emoji appear in the data are in the captions from the GSW account. Out of the 157 captions that were collected from the GSW account, 150 contain at least one emoji, with 74 captions including more than one. The respective numbers for the GS account are 113 captions with at least one emoji, and 26 of them containing more than one.

When inspecting how many different emoji are present in the data, the number is 116, with 89 of them found in the GSW captions and 47 of them in GS captions. Some of the emoji have different variations of them, such as the different colors of a heart emoji, or a sun emoji with a face, or a regular sun emoji (☀️/🌞). These variations, however, are not counted in the total amount different emoji. This finding means that there is a large variety of different emoji that are used in the Instagram captions. The emoji that appears most in the GSW captions is the heart emoji and its variations, which is present in 32 different captions, 46 times in total. The most used in the GS captions is the flexed bicep emoji, which appears in 20 captions, with 21 instances overall. See Table 1 for the list of the five most used emoji in both accounts.

The analysis of the frequencies of the emoji indicates a notable difference in the use of emoji between the two accounts. While the clear majority of captions in both accounts include at least one emoji, there is a stark difference between the total frequency of emoji use within these captions. With emoji occurring 323 times in the captions of GSW as compared to the 153 times in the captions of GS, it indicates that emoji use is more prevalent when it is aimed at an audience that consists of women versus at a mixed-gender audience. An indicator of this

is also the variety of emoji that are present in the two accounts: GSW features 89 different emoji, whereas the number for GS is 47. This difference is illustrated by the examples below:

(2) the lift:nyc aesthetic 🦋🌟📝 tell us your fave part 📍 (@gymsharkwomen 2024, n.p.)






(3) New York: Lifted 💪 (@gymshark 2024, n.p.)

These captions are posted on the same day in September 2024. Both captions are referring to a post about a weightlifting event hosted by Gymshark in New York. In example (2) the caption has 4 different emoji in total, with the first three used to illustrate the first part of the caption, and the last emoji used to signal to the reader to answer to the comment section below the caption what was their favourite part of the event. Example (3), on the other hand only has one emoji at the end of the short caption.

Table 1. The five most frequently used emoji in the material and how many times they are used

	@gymshark	@gymsharkwomen
1.	💪 21 (13.7%)	❤️ 46 (14.2%)
2.	🔥 18 (11.8%)	🌟 26 (8.1%)
3.	🔗 17 (11.1%)	🔗 18 (5.6%)
4.	👁️ 15 (9.8%)	📍 13 (4%)
5.	🧡 14 (9.2%)	👁️ 12 (3.7%)

As can be seen in Table 1 above, the five most frequently used emoji differ in the GS and GSW accounts, with the chain link emoji (🔗) being in the third place in both accounts. The eyes emoji (👁️) is also among the most frequently used emoji in both accounts, on the fourth place on the GS captions and on the fifth place on the GSW captions. Other than these two, the top emoji are different. These differences can be insightful when studying how emoji are used within a female demographic versus a mixed gender demographic. Just by inspecting the emoji that are the most frequent in the material, a difference can be perceived that suggests some underlying ideology about traditional gender representations: in captions that are aimed toward a mixed gender audience, the most used emoji is the flexed bicep emoji (💪).

Emojipedia is an online site which provides information on existing emoji, such as the history of the emoji and their meanings and functions (Emojipedia n.d.). According to the definition by Emojipedia, the flexed bicep emoji signifies strength, and can be used to highlight the physical, mental, or symbolic “feats of strength” (Emojipedia n.d.). In contrast to this, the emoji that is used most in the GSW captions is the heart emoji and its variations. These variations include the different colors of the traditional heart (e.g. , ) , but also other variations of a heart, such as a heart with sparkles () or a double heart (). This distinction represents the stereotype that women are more emotional, hence the use of emoji that has a significant emotional undertone in captions that are created for women. For contrast, the heart emoji variations appear only four times in the GS captions, and three of these times the blue heart emoji () is used. If assuming that a major portion of the followers and the desired audience of the GS account are male, since there is a separate account for female followers, these kinds of emoji that represent strength or the use of a stereotypically masculine colored heart emoji can place emphasis on the idea of a traditional male characteristics.

5.2 Qualitative analysis

The qualitative part of the analysis will focus on what emoji are used and how they are used in the captions. I will present a more specific analysis of the five most frequent emoji in both accounts respectively, but also a brief overview of the rest of the emoji that are used less frequently to see what types of emoji are used by the accounts. The aim is to analyze how the emoji are used within the written captions and whether or not they are used to frame gender representations. According to Danesi (2017, 87), emoji are used as enhancers that maintain or reinforce the sense of togetherness. By the use of emoji in the captions of Gymshark’s Instagram posts they can create a community among the followers and the company that is built around the common interest in fitness and the fitness apparel offered by Gymshark. While the scale of different emoji in the captions is large, the different types of emoji can create mental frames together with their co-text, influencing the image of Gymshark in social media, and especially among different audiences.

5.2.1 Analysis of the emoji on GS

As mentioned in section 5.1, there are 47 different emoji that are present in the captions of GS. The most frequently used emoji in the GS account is the flexed bicep emoji. It is used for

the most part in captions that mention something related to strength or working out, such as in the examples below:

(4) Hit the gym 🦵 (@gymshark 2025, n.p.)

(5) The season of growth 🦵 (@gymshark 2024, n.d.)

In (4) the phrase *hit the gym* is used instead of saying *going to the gym*. By using more colloquial language in the caption the tone is more relaxed, but still assertive. The verb *hit* has an aggressive tone, and the emoji at the end of the caption helps create the impression that going to the gym is done with the intention and goal to work out and gain strength. In example (5) the emoji at the end helps illustrate and strengthen the message of the caption. *The season of growth* refers to growing muscles, which is achieved through working out. Both these captions can be described as promoting motivation and ambitiousness, stereotypically masculine characteristics.

The flexed bicep emoji is also used in captions that are not explicitly about working out, as in a caption below:

(6) Iconic trio 🦵 (@gymshark 2024, n.d)

Example (6) is a caption that is under a post with a picture of three athletes, two men and a woman, posing for the camera. While the text is a reference to the post, the emoji is not explicitly semantically related to the caption. However, it can be interpreted as a way to add a tone of ambitiousness to the caption, referring to the athletes as being strong, which in turn makes them iconic. This reinforces an image of masculinity and its desired qualities, even though the picture includes a mixed gender group.

The second most frequently used emoji is the fire emoji (🔥). While this emoji can be used to literally represent the flames of fire, it can also be used as a reaction to something, and it can express that something is exciting, impressive, or hot, as in attractive (Emojipedia n.d.). By indicating that something is *fire*, or *lit*, it usually means that something is cool. The fire emoji appears 18 times in the GS captions. It is mostly placed at the end of a sentence to express a reaction either to the caption or the post it is linked to or enhance the tone of the text.

(7) The energy at Lift Manchester was unmatched 🔥 (@gymshark 2023, n.p.)

(8) Look good in Vital 🔥 @guusje (@gymshark 2023, n.p.)


Example (7) illustrates how the emoji is used to represent excitement about the weightlifting event. Simply stating that the energy was unmatched could be enough to express that the atmosphere at the event was lively and energetic, but the fire emoji at the end further emphasizes the positive tone of the caption. In example (8), on the other hand, the emoji is used as reaction to the post. The post has a picture of a female athlete, who is tagged in the caption. *Vital* refers to one of Gymshark's product lines, indicating that the clothes that the athlete is wearing are from that line. The caption indicates that not only does the athlete look good in the clothes from the Vital collection, but also that the consumer will look attractive in them. The fire emoji at the end of the phrase *[l]ook good in Vital* enhances the message of looking good while wearing the specific collection from Gymshark. While the fire emoji is associated with positive emotions, like attraction and excitement, it has a different tone than if the emotions were expressed with the smiley emoji. For example, consider the text in (7) and (8) if they had a smiley emoji instead of the fire emoji:



(9) The energy at Lift Manchester was unmatched 🤩


(10) Look good in Vital 😊


The smiling face with heart eyes emoji (😊) in (10) expresses attraction, but it can also signify feelings of adoration and love (Emojipedia n.d.), whereas the fire emoji has a more superficial feel to it when used to refer to the way someone looks. Consider the phrases *you look beautiful* and *you look hot*, for example. The star-struck emoji (🤩) in (9) bears no significant difference to the fire emoji in the caption semantically, but there is a slight difference in nuance: the fire emoji has the association that something is cool and impressive, while the star-struck emoji is more of a general feeling of excitement, a wow-effect so to say. These examples have a more relaxed tone with the smiley emoji, and they express distinctly positive emotions. I would argue that this is because the smiley emoji are made to mimic the facial expressions of humans, hence they are easier to interpret as certain emotions.


Considering that there are only seven facial emoji, from which the most frequent is used five times in all of the 157 captions, it seems that GS prefers emoji that do not express explicit emotions. If Gymshark wants to appeal to an audience that presumably consists of a male majority, using a non-facial emoji, such as the fire emoji, gives an impression of a more controlled expression of emotion, which adheres to the stereotypical frame of a stoic man.

The link emoji () is the third most used in the captions of GS. As opposed to most of the emoji that are placed at the end of the caption, the link emoji is also used in the middle of a sentence, such as in (11). By using a different placement, the intended use and meaning of the emoji is different. In example (11) the emoji is used for the purpose of replacing the word *link* in the captions that guide the reader to the Gymshark website or app. *Link in bio* is a common phrase in Instagram captions on business accounts, as it directs the consumer to an online shop. If the link is added to the caption, it is not clickable and it would have to be copied and then pasted onto a browser, making it more difficult for a consumer to go to the website. However, the link can be added to the biography of the account. When the link is added to the bio, it takes the consumer directly to the website that the link directs to. In example (12) the link emoji is at the end of caption, and while it is also used to indicate to the consumer that they can buy the products from the Gymshark online shop, it does not have the additional meaning of replacing a word in the sentence. It is more so used in a similar way as the fire emoji, for example, to enhance the meaning of the text it is embedded in.


(11) The Gymshark Sale just got even bigger  We've added more discounts on your favourites...  in bio to shop (@gymshark 2025, n.p.)

(12) Tactical. Performance you can wear anywhere. Shop Tactical now  (@gymshark 2025, n.p.)

Following the link emoji, in the fourth place is the eyes emoji (). This emoji in its literal meaning indicates the act of looking at something or someone. It may also be used to convey intrigue or curiosity in something, and the emoji is used in texts where the aim is to tell the reader that something is interesting, and they should pay attention. In GS the eyes emoji is primarily used in captions that refer to something new or exciting, as shown in example (13), and in example (11).

(13) Get ready world, something's coming  and it's gonna be big... (@gymshark 2023, n.p.)

It is also used in a more playful way, like in example (14):

(14) Did you train today?  (@gymshark 2024, n.p.)

Here the emoji is placed after a question, and it is used to create the impression that the writer, or GS in this case, is looking at you and is interested in your answer. Because the assumption is that the Gymshark consumer who follows the company on Instagram does train and go the gym, this type of question in the caption with the eyes emoji can be read as a playful remark, in a similar way that a mother would ask their children if they have done their homework. This creates a connection between the recipient and Gymshark, with addressing the reader by using the personal pronoun *you* in a question that comes across like a casual discourse between friends, and the emoji at the end of the question.

Last, the fifth most used emoji on the GS captions is the handshake emoji (🤝). Emojipedia defines this emoji to indicate “a cordial greeting between friends or associates” (n.d.). It has, however, also established its place in social media and casual discourse to indicate agreement about something, or that something works well together. In the example (15) below, the emoji is placed at the end of the caption. The placement at the end helps reinforce the meaning of the text, which places emphasis on the community and doing things together. The *community* in the caption can be interpreted to refer to the Gymshark community, most probably the Gymshark athletes, but also the community of the followers of Gymshark’s Instagram pages and the athletes together. The handshake emoji therefore visualizes this togetherness and indicates that the community that trains together works well as a team.

(15) A community that lifts together 🤝 (@gymshark 2023, n.p.)

(16) New gym fits 🤝 new motivation[.] Grab your new favourite fits in the Gymshark Black Friday sale 📍 in bio to shop up to 50% off everything (@gymshark 2025, n.p.)

Example (16) has the emoji in the middle of the first line of the caption. This is a common placement for the handshake emoji when the aim is to emphasize that two things go well with each other or are associated with each other. In this caption the message is that new training clothes and motivation go hand in hand, indicating that buying items from the Gymshark sale will increase your motivation to train.

5.2.2 Analysis of the emoji on GSW

This section focuses on the qualitative analysis of the five most frequently used emoji on the GSW captions. The captions feature 89 instances of different emoji, which is almost double the amount that is present in the GS captions. The most frequently used emoji with 46

appearances in total in the GSW captions is the heart emoji (❤️). This includes also the color and style variations of the heart. The heart emoji is often used in the captions in different colors in connection to the caption and the picture of the post, like in the examples below.

- (17) Roses are red, today's gym 'fit is blue 💙 Link in bio for latest Adapt.
@lisavandervalk_ (@gymsharkwomen 2023, n.p.)
- (18) running errands never looked so good 🤎 @erikaholguinn in our retro track set
(@gymsharkwomen 2023, n.p.)

In the latter example, the brown heart is in reference to the picture of the post, where the athlete mentioned in the caption is wearing a brown track suit along with a brown sports bra. The caption in the first example is also connected to a post with a picture of the mentioned athlete wearing light blue clothing, but here the blue heart is also connected to the text of the caption, with the phrase *today's gym 'fit is blue*.

The heart emoji is also used in a decorative way, in which it is not semantically linked to either the post or the text of the caption, but rather is added to bring visual value to the caption, or to soften the tone. This is illustrated in the examples below. In example (19) the white heart emoji is used together with the sparkle emoji to create a visual aesthetic to the caption. Example (20) features a variation of the basic heart emoji, with the two hearts revolving around each other. In both examples the heart emoji creates a softer tone to the caption, but it does not add nor take away from the meaning of the text.

- (19) pov: manifesting our dream wardrobe 🤍 ✨ shop your faves with up to 50% off everything in our black friday sale 📅 nov 16th ⌚ 4pm gmt | 11am est | 9am mst | 8pm aedt (@gymsharkwomen 2025, n.p.)
- (20) nothing says bestie like matching fits 🧡 shop our NEW adapt prints in bio (@gymsharkwomen 2024, n.p.)

The second most used emoji in the GSW is the sparkle emoji (✨). This emoji is mostly used as a visual addition, like the heart emoji in the examples above, either alone at the end of a caption or in a sequence of emoji:

- (21) Sand, sea, sunsets, seamless. ✨ (@gymsharkwomen 2023, n.p.)
- (22) girls supporting girls >>> @dianaconforti.fit signature series got them looking 🧡 ✨ 🤍 🧡 📦 available to shop now, while stocks last 🙏 (@gymsharkwomen 2024, n.p.)

Another way the sparkle emoji is used in the captions is that they are used as focus emoji, which was introduced in section 3.3. This is done, when the aim is to place emphasis on a certain word or phrase, and two emoji are used as brackets outside the phrase. An example of this is below in example (23), where the word *everything* is placed in focus with the sparkle emoji around it, highlighting the fact that all items on the Gymshark sale will be discounted.

- (23) get in loser we're shopping the gymshark sale 🛍️ up to 50% off ✨ everything ✨ dropping on... 📅 june 26th 🕒 4pm bst | 5pm cest | 11am edt | 6pm aest | 9am bst in uk stores (@gymsharkwomen 2025, n.p.)

On the third place, just as in GS captions, is the link emoji (🔗). It is used in the same way as in the captions of GS, as was explained in section 5.2.1; hence it comes as no surprise that this emoji is also in the top five most frequently used emoji. It has been established in Gymshark's Instagram captions as an alternative way to tell the recipient that there is a link in the page's biography that will take you to the online shop (see example 25).

The fourth most frequently used emoji is the shopping bags emoji (🛍️). It is important to note that this emoji is not used in the GS captions. The emoji is used in the GSW account similarly to the link emoji, in captions that mention a sale or Gymshark items. In some cases this emoji is used as a replacement for the verb *shop*, such as in the next example:

- (24) at least we're not alone... AND there's a black friday sale 🛍️ link in bio to 🛍️ (@gymsharkwomen 2023, n.p.)

It is also used to reinforce the text of the caption and add meaning to it, as is shown in example (25):

- (25) when the sale's just too good 🛍️ 🔗 in bio to shop up to 60% off (@gymsharkwomen 2024, n.p.)

In example (25) the shopping bags emoji placed after the clause *when the sale's just too good* indicates that the writer has shopped in the sale and has the figurative shopping bags due to it. The use is figurative in the sense that there are probably no physical shopping bags due to most of Gymshark's business happening through their online shop, but the shopping bags emoji illustrates the products purchased.

Last on the list of five most frequently used emoji in the GSW captions is the eyes emoji (👁️), which was on the fourth place in GS captions.

(26) it's true what they say... it really does shape & snatch in all the right places 👁️👁️👉
lift seamless bodysuit (@gymsharkwomen 2023, n.p.)

Whereas the eyes emoji in the GS captions was used primarily to convey that something is interesting, the same emoji in GSW, such as in example (26), can be read as expressing approval of something. In the example above, the first part of the caption refers to the bodysuit product mentioned at the end of the caption. The eyes emoji placed after the phrase *it really does shape & snatch in all the right places* creates the idea that the bodysuit makes you look at the “right places”.

5.2.3 Overview of other emoji in GS and GSW

Both accounts have emoji that are used less frequently, with most of them appearing only once in the data. These emoji are presented below in Table 2. I will give a brief overview on them to analyze the variation in the emoji in both GS and GSW.

Table 2. Emoji variation in GS and GSW

Emoji type	GS	GSW
Smiley		
Other		

These emoji include, for instance, smiley emoji which represent facial expressions, inanimate objects, nature emoji and body parts. This glance at the emoji shows how GSW has more variation in the emoji used. Both accounts feature many emoji that represent inanimate objects, but only some that directly refer to sports, contrary to what one would assume from an athletic wear company. In GS the emoji that refer to sports are mostly object emoji, such as the basketball (🏀) or trophies (🏆, 🏅), whereas GSW has sports-related emoji that represent action: a yoga pose (🧘), a running woman (🏃), a person doing acrobatics (🤸), and a weightlifter (🏋). This seems to go against the traditional stereotype where women are not perceived as athletic; the emoji in GSW represent diverse athletic forms. However, the trophy and medal emoji in GS refer to winning and also have a connotation with motivation, and these emoji are lacking from the GSW captions, suggesting that winning is still reserved for men.

GSW also use more emoji that are colorful, especially red and pink emoji. There are also more emoji that represent items relating to appearance, such as a lipstick (💄) or a handbag (👜). This hints both at the phenomenon that female athletes receive focus through their appearance, and the stereotype that women are more concerned with their looks.

To conclude the analysis on the emoji in the data, there is a major difference in the number of emoji used in the GS and GSW accounts, with the latter featuring more emoji in the captions

overall, but also more variation in the emoji used in the captions. When inspecting the five most frequently used emoji in both accounts, the link emoji (🔗) and the eyes emoji (👁️) appear in both accounts' captions, but otherwise the top emoji are different in the captions. The GSW captions feature emoji that are used in a decorative manner without adding semantic value to the caption, and also in a semantic way to connect the caption to the pictures of the post or to reinforce the message of the caption. The GS captions have less emoji that are used as a purely visual additions, but otherwise the emoji function in a similar way to those in the GSW captions. What is notable is that the number one emoji in the GS captions is the flexed bicep emoji, which signifies strength and the physical act of working out, while on the same spot in the GSW captions is the heart emoji, which is associated with positive emotions and affection. This difference embodies the associations with traditional gender stereotypes, where strength equals masculinity and affection equals femininity. The variety in the less frequently used emoji is considerably larger in GSW captions than in those by GS. The overall picture of the emoji variation also hints at a representation of traditional gender stereotypes. These stereotypes and how they appear in the Instagram captions of Gymshark's accounts are approached in the Discussion section.

5.3 Analysis of textual elements

The textual elements, while not the main focus of this study, are also of interest to me. I will briefly analyse the written text of the captions here and discuss the textual features in more detail in the Discussion section. When analyzing the content of the captions, both accounts create captions that are related to Gymshark and training, which is to be expected. However, the GS captions more often consist of phrases and clauses that have a tone of motivation and ambitiousness, and they seem to emphasize the progress that comes with training. On the other hand, the GSW captions approach the topic of working out from the focus of the training clothes, emphasizing the products shown in the posts and their role in the fitness space. The GSW captions have more mentions of the Gymshark products, and the clothes shown in the pictures of the posts than the GS captions, even though both accounts showcase these products in the posts. This is illustrated below in examples (27) and (28):

(27) confidence looks good on you 🌟 our new slim fit elevate tracktop is 🔗
 (@gymsharkwomen 2024, n.p.)

(28) Confidence comes with hard work 🏋️ (@gymshark 2023, n.p.)

Here, the first example states how *confidence looks good*, associating it with appearance, and further strengthening this by mentioning the *slim fit elevate tracktop*, which the athlete is wearing in the pictures of the post. Example (28), on the other hand, simply states how confidence is the product of *hard work*, giving more emphasis on the actual characteristic features of confidence.

Another notable difference in the captions in the two accounts is their style. The captions in the GS account are more formal and they are grammatically more correct as compared to the captions from GSW. For example, comparing the examples (29) from GS and (30) from GSW, this difference is illustrated.

- (29) The Gymshark Sale just got even bigger 🤩 We've added more discounts on your favourites... 👁️ in bio to shop (@gymshark 2025, n.p.)
- (30) pov: manifesting our dream wardrobe 💖🌟 shop your faves with up to 50% off everything in our black friday sale 📅 nov 16th 🕒 4pm gmt | 11am est | 9am mst | 8pm aedt (@gymsharkwomen 2025, n.p.)

First, GS uses capital letters at the beginning of the sentences and with proper names, such as *Gymshark*, while GSW uses nearly exclusively lower-case letters. GSW does also have captions that capitalize the first letters, but there is a shift in mid-July 2023, when the account switches to using lower-case. GSW captions also feature linguistic elements, such as word choices, that make the style of the text more casual. They use more slang words and abbreviated forms of words. In example (30) the use of the word *faves* instead of *favourites* like in example (29) is a difference that affects the tone of the caption. Both accounts use the emoji as punctuation between sentences, which also makes the style more informal, and considering that GSW uses more emoji than GS, it also makes the captions appear more casual.

The difference between the accounts and their captions can be illustrated also by looking at the following examples:

- (31) waiting for gym laundry never looked so good 🤩 have you heard about our new underwear? 🤩 😊 psst, here's a little monday treat... use code FLASH-20 at checkout for 20% off site wide (@gymsharkwomen 2024, n.p.)

- (32) POV: it's gym laundry day [.] Who's heard about our new underwear? 🙈🙈 P.S. today only you can get 20% off site wide with code FLASH-20 - link in bio (@gymshark 2024, n.p.)

These captions are from the same day, and they both refer to a new product launch of underwear by Gymshark. The pictures in the posts are both of Gymshark athletes wearing the new underwear in a laundry room, with the GSW pictures featuring only women, and the GS pictures having one man and one woman. The captions are very similar in content, but there are some differences. The caption by GSW in example (31) states how waiting for laundry *never looked so good*, referring to the women in the pictures. It continues by addressing the reader directly with a second person pronoun *you*, creating a friendly tone. The caption uses the sentence *psst, here's a little monday treat* as a way to indicate that the discount code is a secret that will be a positive surprise for the recipient, also enforcing the sense of familiarity and connection between Gymshark and the followers of the Instagram account of GSW. Example (32) from GS uses the phrase *POV: it's gym laundry day* to refer to the pictures of the post, which does not directly mention the athletes, like in (31). It also does not address the reader directly, but in a more collective way, with asking who has heard of the new products. The mention of the discount code is added with the acronym P.S., which creates a tone that is not as familiar as in the first example. This also conveys the discount code more as a side note, whereas example (31) has a more positive and exciting feeling connected to it.

One stylistic feature that GSW captions have that GS ones do not, is intertextuality. GSW captions sometimes refer to phrases from movies or use phrases that have been trending on social media, especially TikTok. Examples (33) and (34) have phrases that are references to the 2004 movie *Mean Girls*:

- (33) we saw @whitneysimmons wearing army pants & flip flops, so we bought army pants & flip flops 🙈 drop us your fave fit and we'll give you the deets (@gymsharkwomen 2024, n.p.)
- (34) get in loser we're shopping the gymshark sale 🛒 up to 50% off ✨ everything ✨ dropping on... 📅 june 26th 🕒 4pm bst | 5pm cest | 11am edt | 6pm aest | 9am bst in uk stores (@gymsharkwomen 2025, n.p.)

The phrase *we saw @whitneysimmons wearing army pants & flip flops, so we bought army pants & flip flops* is a modification of the movie's phrase *I saw Cady Heron wearing army pants & flip flops, so I bought army pants and flip flops*, referring to a character in the movie

who has influenced others to dress the same way as her. Similarly, the phrase *get in loser we're shopping the gymshark sale* in example (34) is a reference to *get in loser, we're going shopping* from the same movie.

(35) it's giving... gym baddies 🧑💃 (@gymsharkwomen 2023, n.p.)

(36) ultimate gym rizz ❤️ how you movin on your gym crush 👉 (@gymsharkwomen 2024, n.p.)

(37) see how we're celebrating our @whitneysimmons x adapt launch? very cutesy, very mindful, very demure... which is your fave? 🍪: @maybeacookie (@gymsharkwomen 2024, n.p.)

Examples (35) - (37) illustrate how GSW uses trending language in their captions. In the first example, the phrase *it's giving* is a common way to express the impression that something gives; in the example the impression is that the women in the post's pictures are *gym baddies*. Merriam-Webster defines the slang word *baddie* as “a confident, stylish and attractive woman” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “baddie” (n.), April 2026, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/slang/baddie>). In example (36), *ultimate gym rizz* is another expression that has been popular in social media. *Rizz* is a slang word for *charisma*, or “romantic appeal or charisma” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “rizz” (n.), April 2026, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rizz>). Last, in example (37) *very cutesy, very mindful, very demure* is a reference to a video that was trending on TikTok, where a person was describing how they go to work. The original video begins with the phrase “[y]ou see how I do my makeup for work? Very demure. Very mindful.” (@joolieannie 2024, n.p.). This sound then became popular, and the phrase was widely used in social media, including in Gymshark's Instagram captions.











To summarize the analysis of textual elements of the captions, in addition to the content, the style and tone of them are notably different in GSW than in GS. The grammatical correctness and formal language in GS captions give them a more serious tone as compared to the GSW captions, which come across as more casual and playful. Lexical choices and references to pop culture and social media in GSW captions add to this, and the captions convey more familiarity and connection with the followers, whereas the GS captions, while also creating a connection with the followers, do so in a more discreet and formal way.

6 Discussion

The previous section included the analysis of the most frequently used emoji in the captions of both GS and GSW accounts, as well as the textual styles of the captions. This section discusses these findings in relation to previous research and the research questions of this thesis. The aim of this section is to discuss whether the Instagram captions of Gymshark's accounts reinforce the traditional gender stereotypes, and how these are realized through the use of emoji and textual elements. I first discuss the emoji in the captions, and then the textual elements. This section also discusses the limitations of this study, as well as possibilities of future research on this topic.

6.1 Emoji in the captions

The analysis found that the emoji use in the GS and GSW captions has differences in both the frequency of emoji and the type of emoji that are used. Out of the 157 captions that were collected from each account, GSW has 150 captions that have at least one emoji in it, and GS has 113 captions that contain at least one emoji. This finding is in line with previous research, which finds that women are more frequent emoji users than men (Herring and Dainas 2020, 9; Chen et al. 2018, 3). At this point, I emphasize that it is unknown who writes the captions of Gymshark's Instagram pages, so it is not possible to claim that the captions in GSW are created by a woman, or that the ones on GS are created by a man. However, I do claim that the audience for whom the captions are directed at has an effect on the way emoji are utilized, implying that the gender differences in emoji use are integrated enough into the phenomenon that they direct the way emoji are used in among the genders in brand communications. Hence, since the consensus in previous research seems to be that women are more frequent emoji users than men, it makes sense that the expectation is that more emoji are used in social media posts aimed at women, than in those that are aimed at a mixed-gender audience.

The most frequently used emoji in GS captions are , , , , and . The most used emoji in GSW captions, on the other hand, are , , , , and . The different emoji hint at representing traditional gender roles. First, GS uses most an emoji that directly conveys strength, a characteristic that is associated with masculinity. The other top emoji are more neutral, but the fire emoji seems to have a more masculine connotation within the context of the captions. The emoji is used as a reaction emoji, conveying the feeling of excitement or attraction to something or someone. Instead of using a smiley emoji to convey

the reaction, the fire emoji does not come across as emotional, which aligns with the idea that men are not as emotional as women. The heart emoji that is the most frequently used by GSW, on the other hand, is explicitly associated with emotionality and affection, traits which are traditionally feminine. While the heart emoji is frequently used as a way to add a color reference to the pictures of a post, it adds a soft and affectionate tone to the captions. The shopping bags emoji also represents a stereotype of women, as shopping is associated with women. While the GS captions encourage the followers to buy items and spend money on the Gymshark products as well, the GSW captions emphasize this, or perhaps appeal to the female audience with the actual act of shopping, with the shopping bags emoji.

There were also emoji that were not used as frequently. The variation in emoji is notably larger in the GSW captions than it is in the GS ones. Chen et al. (2018, 4) conducted a study about gender differences in emoji use, and they presented a classification of female and male emoji, based on the likelihood of an emoji being used by either a female or a male. They found that “*female* emojis are fancier and more colorful than *male* emojis” (ibid. italics as in original). While I would refrain from labelling individual emoji as female or male emoji, my findings in the analysis are that the captions aimed at a female audience by GSW are more colorful than those by GS. According to Danesi (2017, 27), emoji are perceived to be “laden with emotional and discourse functions of all kinds, including the conveyance of intent, mood, and state of mind”. Following this, by using emoji that vary in color and type, the tone of the captions in GSW conveys a cheerful and expressive feeling to the recipient. At the same time, on a deeper level, this expressiveness is tied with the idea that women are more emotional and “do not use harsh language”, as Prentice and Carranza (2002, 269) point out as one feature that is stereotypically perceived as feminine. Similarly, the emoji used by GSW included multiple ones that are related to appearance, such as clothing items or a lipstick emoji. The GS captions, on the other hand, did not include any emoji that would be associated with appearance. This is problematic in that it adheres to the inequality of the fitness environment, where female athletes are scrutinized for their appearance, at the same time that men are praised for their achievements. (Knight and Giuliano 2001, 218–219). Another finding that attests to this inequality is the use of emoji relating to competition and winning in GS captions, and these emoji missing from the GSW captions. However, this stereotype seems to be contradicted by GSW using more directly sports-related emoji, with the action emoji representing different sports. The overall result from my analysis of the emoji is that

they can be used to frame ideologies around traditional gender stereotypes, when different emoji are used in Instagram captions for audiences of different gender demographics.

6.2 Textual elements in the captions

The analysis of the textual features found that the content as well as style of the captions differs between the accounts. The captions on the GS account are shorter, grammatically correct and are written with standard language, which makes them come across as formal, even though the use of emoji does reduce the serious tone slightly. The topic of these captions is related to working out and the motivation and work that leads to progress, as well as some mentions of the Gymshark products and sales. This distinctive tone and emphasis on the mental and individual development helps reinforce the traditional gender stereotypes where men and masculinity are characterized as ambitious, competitive, and individualistic (Prentice and Carranza 2002, 269–270). The captions on the GSW account are longer, with a more casual tone to them. The content in these captions, while also related to fitness, places more emphasis on the Gymshark products and the physical appearance of the female athletes presented in the posts. It seems that GSW represents the idea that the progress and success in the training environment and personal development is achieved with the use of the products from Gymshark, whereas this ideology is not present in the GS account, at least on the same level as it is on the GSW account. This diminishes the value of hard work of female athletes and does not represent them as equal to the male athletes, which reinforces on its part the stereotypes where women are characterized as gentle (Prentice and Carranza 2002, 269) and not given an equal amount of recognition for their athletic skills, as compared to men, in media. These kind of cognitive frames around female athletes versus male athletes reveal the underlying ideology that Gymshark has about the genders.

Another difference between the accounts' captions found in the analysis was in the grammatical features of the captions. My findings contradict previous research on gendered language, which has found that language used by women is more likely to be grammatically correct and adhere to the standard language than language used by men (Oancea 2016, 33). However, some research does claim that within digital communication, women use more colloquial language, whereas men use more standard language (Jurgens, Tsvetkov and Jurafsky 2017, 539). My analysis found this to be the case, where the captions by GS feature a correct use of capital letters and standard language, for example, whereas the captions by

GSW lacks capitalization entirely, after July 2023, and have informal language. I suggest that this change has been made to further distinguish the GSW account's style from the GS account, and to add more of the casual and friendly tone in the captions. Again, I cannot make a certain statement about the author of the captions on Gymshark's Instagram accounts, and my analysis takes into consideration the targeted audience of the captions, not who is behind them. However, a key notion about this is that the GSW account targets only women, so it is logical to assume that while the GS account does not have a specified target audience, it might consist mostly of men, due to there being a separate account for a female audience.

The analysis also found that captions in GSW feature intertextuality, with references to pop culture and social media trends, and that this is lacking from the captions in GS. This is interesting, because Gymshark's target audience consists of young people, around 18–25 years of age (Cook 2020, n.p.), so it would not be wrong to assume that the targeted consumers are interested in social media and popular culture and have knowledge on trends. Still, only GSW uses references to trending TikToks or movies, for example, as part of their Instagram captions. This would suggest that this kind of pop culture knowledge and interest in such things is seen as a feminine trait, which would be in line with the previous notions made in this discussion that Gymshark represents men and male athletes as more serious and motivated, and the females as more casual and light-hearted and emotional, adhering to and creating a mental frame of traditional gender stereotypes. This type of distinctive communication for different genders and the language, as well as emoji, used within that communication is problematic due to its effect on the already prevailing stereotypes of the different genders in sports. Gymshark has millions of followers on their Instagram. When these followers are subjected to the content on these Instagram pages, where the fundamental message seems to be that while women are involved in sports and training, they are not taken as seriously as they should be, millions of these followers are likely to have that frame integrated into their thoughts and own discourse around the topic.

6.3 Limitations of the study and future research

This study does have some limitations to consider. The amount of data is fairly small to get a complete view of how gender stereotypes are generated by Gymshark. Considering the scope of this thesis the defining decisions made for the material for this study are sufficient enough, and they work in producing an analysis with results that offer significant information of how stereotypes can be reproduced in discourse. Moreover, considering the relationship of the

captions with the pictures or videos they relate to would provide a bigger understanding of how gender norms are constructed, as visual elements can add to the message of the caption. However, due to the limited time and space of the thesis, I decided to focus only on the written captions, which allows me to focus on the emoji. Because emoji are visual representations of emotions and objects, this study can be characterized as multimodal. However, conducting a study that also considers the pictures would be cause for future research.

Important to note, still, is that a major amount of research about differences in women's and men's language, for example, is focused on how different genders use language themselves. It is unknown who exactly is the one producing the text that is seen on Gymshark's social media posts so it cannot be claimed, in the context of the Instagram captions, that the captions are written by a woman or a man or even that they are written by different people. It can, however, be claimed that the captions are written with their target audience in mind, and thus can be assumed to adopt features that make it seem like they are generated by people of different genders. The important notion is that these captions, regardless of who their author is, represent the ideology that Gymshark is enforcing through their social media.











The topic of using emoji as a tool to create and reinforce ideological frames around gender is one that would benefit from further research. This study focused on what kind of emoji were used by the two Instagram accounts of Gymshark in the captions of posts, leaving out the pictures of the posts. A multimodal study, where the visual features of social media posts are taken into consideration, as well as the connection between the emoji and pictures, is a possibility for future study. Furthermore, since this study analyzed the captions on the accounts run by Gymshark, and there is no knowledge of the author of these captions, a similar study might be conducted where the material analyzed comes from individual influencers' social media. This would allow for a proper comparison between emoji used by different genders, since the research could be specified to include material from both female and male users. Another possibility for future research might be to conduct empirical research, with the aim to study whether consumers who follow Gymshark, or another brand, in social media, interpret the emoji that are used by the brand differently, and whether the emoji along with text are perceived to frame ideologies around gender stereotypes.

7 Conclusion

Women's position in sports is undoubtedly better than it was in the last century, but the representation of female athletes and women's participation in sports still lags behind. News media, athletic companies, and social media embody traditional stereotypes regarding the genders when representing athletes or creating content around sports. These stereotypes are often realized through language, and Critical Discourse Analysis helps unveil them and the ideologies behind them. A key element in language, especially in social media, is the emoji, which brings visual enhancement to texts, adds meaning or modifies the tone of a message, or are used to replace text. In this thesis, I studied how these stereotypes are constructed and framed within Instagram captions of Gymshark's two accounts, GS and GSW. The main goal of my research was to find how these accounts use emoji and whether the emoji reveal and reinforce the underlying ideologies regarding gender stereotypes. The aim was to fill a gap in linguistic research about emoji and their use as framing devices. In addition to the emoji, I also analyzed the textual elements of the captions. The research questions of my thesis were as follows:

1. How does Gymshark use emoji in their Instagram captions?
2. Do the emoji reinforce the ideology of traditional gender stereotypes?
3. Do the textual elements in the captions reinforce the ideology of traditional stereotypes?

The study was done by using CDA and research on gendered language as the theoretical base, focusing especially on the meanings represented by the emoji and the content and style of the captions and how they frame the gender stereotypes within different audiences. My hypothesis for this study was that the account aimed at female followers, GSW, includes more emoji in their captions, as well as emoji that might carry feminine connotations, whereas the GS, which targets a mixed-gender audience, will have fewer emoji and ones with masculine connotations. I suggested that these differences in the emoji will reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. Similarly, with the textual elements, I hypothesized that on both accounts the captions frame the genders through traditional stereotypes, and that this is performed through different features, such as lexical choices, style of the text and the grammatical features.

The results from my analysis found that GSW does use more emoji in their captions, and that there is more variation in the emoji as compared to GS. Overall, there were a total of 476 emoji uses in the data, with 323 of them found in the GSW captions, and 153 in the GS captions. Some emoji overlap between the accounts, but there are also emoji that are used only by one account. I analyzed the five most frequently used emoji from both accounts, which found that the most frequently used in the GS account were , , , , and . In the GSW account, on the other hand, the five most frequently used emoji were , , , , and . These emoji, along with those that were used less, indicate a lean toward the gender stereotypes, with the flexed biceps emoji and the fire emoji carrying a connotation with masculinity, whereas the heart, sparkles and shopping bags have more feminine connotations. The analysis of the emoji found that GSW used more emoji that represent sports, but GS had some emoji that represent competitiveness and winning, such as a trophy emoji, which were lacking from the GSW captions. On the other hand, GSW used emoji with more colors, especially typically feminine colors such as shades of red, and emoji related to physical appearance, which GS captions did not have. These findings suggest that women are framed, with the use of emoji, as athletic, but not competitive, whereas men are framed as athletic and ambitious. Additionally, women's position as athletes is framed to place emphasis on their physical appearance, adhering to a stereotype where female athletes are represented through their looks instead of their athletic achievements, whereas this frame is not present in the captions that are aimed at a mixed-gender audience.

The analysis of the textual elements found that the captions on the two accounts differ from each other, both in style and content of the captions. While the general topic of the captions in both accounts is related to sports and the Gymshark products, the way in which these are approached is different. GSW has longer captions which use primarily lower-case letters instead of correct capitalization, slang words and language that is associated with social media and pop culture, and the captions place a significant emphasis on the Gymshark products and the physical appearance of the female athletes overall. GS, on the other hand, has shorter captions, which are grammatically correct in regard to capitalization, and they use standard language with no references to social media trends or pop culture, and the emphasis on physical appearance or products from Gymshark is significantly smaller than in the GSW captions. This difference where female athletes' achievements within sports are associated with the clothes that they are wearing and overall focus on their physical appearance, at the

same time that male athletes' participation in sports is associated with ambition and hard work, is reinforcing the gender stereotypes that are associated with women and men in sports. My findings were mostly in line with previous research on gendered language and stereotypes, with the exception of the differences in the style of the language used. This finding contradicts with research that suggests that women are more likely to use standard language than men. However, according to some research, the language used in digital communication by women has more colloquial features, and standard language features are found more in language used by men. This, along with my analysis, would suggest a shift, at least in social media and digital communication, where more casual and flexible language use is associated with women.

Limitations on this study are in regard to the size of the data, as well as the fact that it cannot be claimed that the captions by GSW and GS are created by either a woman or a man, as it is unknown who is behind the accounts. Most of the research about gendered language and difference in emoji use between genders has focused on how language or emoji are used by the genders, not how they are used when they are aimed at an audience of a certain gender. This is a research gap which this study aimed to fill, with the help of the existing research. Overall, the analysis of Gymshark's Instagram captions found that both emoji and textual elements were used to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, and that involvement in sports was framed in adherence to these stereotypes, depending on whether the target audience was mixed gender or female-only. Possibilities for further research on this topic include multimodal studies, where visual features are analyzed in connection to the emoji and text, as well as a study on how individual influencers of different genders use emoji in their social media in order to frame gender.

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Appendix 1 Finnish summary

Johdanto

Tämän pro gradu -tutkielman aiheena on tutkia, miten perinteiset sukupuoliroolit ja stereotyyppit niihin liittyen ilmenevät sosiaalisessa mediassa emojiiden ja tekstin välityksellä. Tarkastelussa on kaksi urheiluvaatteisiin ja -varusteisiin erikoistuvan yrityksen, Gymsharkin, ylläpitämää Instagram-tiliä ja niiden julkaisuihin liitetyt kuvatekstit. Tutkimuksen kohteena olevat tilit ovat @gymshark, (GS), joka on yrityksen yleinen, näennäisesti kaikille suunnattu Instagram-käyttäjä, sekä @gymsharkwomen, (GSW), jonka kohderyhmänä ovat naispuoliset seuraajat. Väitän kuitenkin sen perusteella, että yrityksellä on erikseen naisille suunnattu käyttäjätili, että yleisen, GS-tilin seuraajakunta koostuu pääosin miespuolisista seuraajista. Tutkimukseni tavoitteena on tutkia näiden kahden Instagram-käyttäjän julkaisujen kuvatekstejä, ja etenkin sitä, miten kuvateksteissä käytetään emojiita ja miten niiden käyttö eroaa kohderyhmittäin. Tutkimuksen avulla selvitän, miten emojiita voidaan käyttää kehystämään ja ilmentämään perinteisiä sukupuoliin liittyviä oletuksia. Lisäksi kuvatekstejä analysoidaan niiden kielellisten ominaisuuksien kautta, ja tarkastellaan näiden stereotyyppien ilmentymistä ja kehystämistä kielen ja tekstin välityksellä. Tutkielma pyrkii vastaamaan seuraaviin tutkimuskysymyksiin:

1. Miten Gymshark käyttää emojiita Instagramin kuvateksteissä?
2. Ilmentävätkö emojiit perinteisiä sukupuoliin liittyviä stereotyyppioita ja niiden ideologiaa?
3. Ilmentävätkö kuvatekstien kielelliset ominaisuudet perinteisiä sukupuoliin liittyviä stereotyyppioita ja niiden ideologiaa?

Tutkielman tavoitteena on täyttää aukko kielitieteellisessä tutkimuksessa, joka käsittelee emojiita ja niiden roolia sukupuolittuneiden kehysten vahvistamisessa ja luomisessa sekä eriävyyksiä emojiiden käytössä, kun kohderyhmänä on pääosin nais- tai miesseuraajista koostuva seuraajaryhmä. Teoreettisena pohjana tutkielmalle toimii Kriittinen Diskurssianalyysi (KDA) sekä Erving Goffmanin (1974) työhön perustuva kehysanalyysi.

Tausta

Sukupuoliin liitetyt stereotyyppit ovat haitallisia sukupuolien väliselle tasa-arvolle, sillä ne perustuvat perinteisiin valta-asetelmiin, joissa miehet nähdään korkeampi-arvoisina kuin

naiset. Hilton ja von Hippel määrittelevät stereotyyppien olevan tietyn ryhmän jäsenien ominaisuuksiin, ominaispiirteisiin, ja käytökseen liittyviä uskomuksia (1996, 240). Eagly ja Steffen puolestaan huomauttavat, että stereotyyppit kuvastavat sitä, miten ihmiset näkevät toisten ihmisten päivittäisen elämän; mikäli tietty ryhmä nähdään usein saman asian äärellä, todennäköisesti tämä johtaa olettamukseen, että tähän asiaan vaadittavat ominaisuudet ovat tyypillisiä kyseiselle ryhmälle (1984, 735). Esimerkkinä voidaan pitää tilannetta, jossa miehet nähdään usein osallistumassa urheilulajeihin, jotka vaativat voimaa ja kestävyyttä, jolloin syntyy stereotyyppiä, että nämä ominaisuudet ovat tyypillisiä miehillä, eivätkä naiset voi osallistua niitä edellyttäviin aktiviteetteihin.

Yleisiä naiseuteen liitettyjä stereotyyppisiä piirteitä ovat esimerkiksi hellyys, tunteellisuus, lapsenomaisuus, myötätuntoisuus, lempeys, ujous, feminiinisyys sekä vahvan kielenkäytön välttäminen, kun taas stereotyyppisesti miehuuteen liitettyihin piirteisiin kuuluvat esimerkiksi aggressiivisuus, kunnianhimoisuus, atleetisuus, kilpailullisuus sekä valmius ottaa riskejä (Prentice ja Carranza 2002, 269–270). Samalla tavoin tietyt värit ovat stereotyyppisesti sukupuolittuneita, kuten esimerkiksi vaaleanpunainen, punainen ja vaaleat pastellin sävyt, jotka nähdään usein feminiinisinä väreinä, ja sininen, vihreä ja tummat sävyt, jotka mielletään maskuliinisina. Valtaa pitävät ryhmät, jotka ovat edullisessa asemassa eri instituutioissa, kuten valtionjohdossa, mediassa, sekä kouluissa, ovat usein niitä, joiden stereotyyppisistä näkemyksistä tulee valtavirran edustus asiaan liittyen. Näiden instituutioiden esittämät kehykset sukupuolista ja niihin liittyvistä stereotyyppioista normalisoituvat ja vahvistuvat esimerkiksi opetusmateriaalien ja -suunnitelmien, mainosten, sekä median kuvausten kautta (Ridgeway 2011, 68). Nämä stereotyyppit vaikuttavat siihen, miten naiset ja miehet nähdään eri konteksteissa, kuten esimerkiksi naisten osallistuminen urheiluun ja sen ympärille rakentuvat kehykset sukupuolittuneista kuvauksista.

Naisten osallisuus urheilussa on lisääntynyt esimerkiksi uusien säännösten ja ohjeistusten kautta. Naiset osallistuivat ensimmäistä kertaa Olympialaisiin vuonna 1900 (IOC 2025, 3), kun taas vuoden 2024 Pariisin Olympialaisten osallistujien kesken oli ensimmäistä kertaa sukupuolten välinen tasapaino, kun osallistujista 49 % oli naisia (IOC 2025, 3).

Naisurheilijoiden osallistumista urheiluun varjostavat kuitenkin edelleen stereotyyppioihin nojaavat ajatukset, joiden mukaan naiset ovat heikompia eivätkä yhtä atleetisia kuin miehet. Naisurheilijoiden kuvaus mediassa keskittyy usein heidän ulkonäköönsä tai henkilökohtaiseen elämäänsä, kun taas miesurheilijat saavat ylistystä urheilu-urituksistaan (Knight ja Giuliano 2001, 218–219).

Gymshark on urheiluvaatteita ja -varusteita myyvä yritys, joka sai alkunsa vuonna 2012. Yrityksen alkuaikoina sen tuotanto keskittyi pääosin miesten vaatteisiin, mutta myöhemmin se alkoi tuottaa myös naisten vaatteita. Gymsharkin markkinointi perustuu osittain sosiaalisen median vaikuttajiin, jotka mainostavat yrityksen tuotteita omilla kanavillaan sekä toimivat Gymsharkin sosiaalisen median kasvoina.

Teoreettinen tausta

Tutkielman pääaiheena on tutkia emojiä ja niiden käyttöä. Emojit ovat nykyään olennainen osa digitaalista kommunikointia, joten niiden merkitys kielitieteelliselle tutkimukselle on huomattava. Edeltävät tutkimukset emojiin liittyen käsittelevät esimerkiksi eroavaisuuksia emojiä käytettäessä sukupuolten välillä sekä miten sukupuolet tulkitsevat emojiä (Herring ja Dainas 2020). Oman käsitykseni mukaan lähes yhtään tutkimusta ei ole tehty siitä, miten emojiä käytetään kehystämään sukupuoliin liittyviä stereotyyppioita. Wolfin tutkimus, joka sivuaa aihetta, keskittyi sukupuolten välisiin eroihin tunteiden ilmaisemisessa hymiöiden kautta verkossa olevissa uutisryhmissä ja löysi, että tulokset vahvistivat tyypillisiä stereotyyppioita, joissa naiset nähdään tunteellisimpina kuin miehet (Wolf 2000, 830–831). Vaikka kyseinen tutkimus sijoittuu psykologian tieteenalaan ja käsittelee perinteisiä hymiöitä emojiä sijaan, se tarjoaa hyödyllisiä näkemyksiä siihen, miten sukupuolet käyttävät sanattomia ilmaisuja digitaalisessa kommunikaatiossa. Emojia voi käyttää teksteissä eri tavoin, kuten esimerkiksi mukauttamaan viestin sävyä tai korvaamaan sanoja lauseen sisällä.

Kielitieteessä huomattava aihealue liittyy sukupuolen kuvaukseen ja rakentamiseen teksteissä. Tämän lisäksi on tutkittu eroavaisuuksia naisten ja miesten kielen käytössä. Merkittävänä edistäjänä tämän suhteen on ollut Lakoffin (1973) työ, joka käsittelee sukupuolen ja kielen välistä yhteyttä. Lakoff esittelee ajatuksen, että naiset ovat väliinputoajia miehiin nähden, ja että tämä sivullinen asema jäljentyy naisten käyttämässä kielessä sekä naisista käytetyssä kielessä (Lakoff 1973, 45). Lisäksi tutkimukset osoittavat, että naiset antavat sekä saavat kehuja enemmän kuin miehet, ja että naiset usein kehuvat toistensa ulkonäköä, kun taas miehet kehuvat toistensa omistamia asioita tai kykyjä (Coates [1986] 1993, 128). Tutkimukset vahvistavat myös stereotypian sukupuolien välisestä erosta kielen käyttöön liittyen, että naiset käyttävät kieliopillisesti oikeaa kieltä enemmän kuin miehet (Oancea 2016, 33). Minä puolestani väitän, että etenkin digitaalisen kommunikaation ja sosiaalisen median kohdalla tässä on tapahtunut muutos, jonka myötä naiset käyttävät yhä enemmän kieltä vapaamuotoisemmin. Tätä tukee tutkimus, jonka mukaan naisten on huomattu käyttävän

enemmän tunnesanoja, pronomineja ja lyhenteitä, kun taas miehet käyttävät enemmän standardeja sanakirjasanoja, erisnimiä sekä teknologiasanastoa (Jurgens, Tsvetkov ja Jurafsky 2017, 539).

Tutkielman teoreettinen tausta ja tulosten käsittely pohjautuu KDA:han, jonka keskeinen tavoite on paljastaa yhteiskunnassa piileviä ideologioita ja valta-asetelmiä. KDA on tässä tutkielmassa määritelty lähestymistapana, joka ottaa huomioon institutionaaliin, politiikkaan, sukupuoleen, ja mediaan liittyvät diskurssit (Wodak 2001, 2). Lisäksi tutkielmassa hyödynnetään Fairclough'n määritelmää, jonka mukaan KDA on osallisena siihen, miten diskurssi liittyy sosiaalisiin tekijöihin, kuten valtaan ja ideologioihin (2018, 13). KDA:n keskeisiin käsitteisiin kuuluvat diskurssi, ideologia, ja valta. Diskurssi määritellään kuvaamaan sitä, miten ihmiset käyttävät kieltä eri tilanteissa, mikä tapahtuu niiden tapojen kautta, jotka koskevat sosiaalisia ja kulttuurisia konteksteja, joiden osaksi ihmiset sijoittuvat. Ideologiat ovat uskomuksista koostuvia järjestelmiä, jotka usein nähdään valikoivina ja harhaanjohtavina (Johnstone 2018, 53). Valta on määritelty tarkoittamaan eroavaisuuksien vaikutuksia sosiaalisiin rakenteisiin (Wodak ja Meyer 2001, 11). KDA on laaja ja monipuolinen lähestymistapa diskurssianalyysiin, eikä sille ole vain yhtä tiettyä metodologiaa (van Dijk 2008, 2). Tämä kuitenkin osaltaan synnyttää kritiikkiä, kuten myös se, että KDA on hyvin avoin tavoitteistaan. Tämä on otettu huomioon tätä tutkielmaa tehdessä. Tunnistamalla kantani sekä lähtökohtani aiheeseen nähden pyrin toteuttamaan kattavan analyysin pysyen mahdollisimman puolueettomana.

Tutkielma hyödyntää Goffmanin (1974) esittelemää kehysanalyysiä osana KDA:n lähestymistapaa. Goffman erottelee toisistaan luonnolliset ja sosiaaliset kehykset ([1974] 1976, 21–22). Kehykset määritellään tässä tutkielmassa Bloorin ja Bloorin luonnehdinnan mukaan, joka määrittelee kehykset kognitiivisiksi rakenteiksi, jotka muovaavat näkemystämme maailmasta yhdistelemällä toisiinsa erillisiä itsenäisiä kokonaisuuksia erilaisiin kehyksiin (2007, 11). Kehystäminen on merkittävä osa KDA:ta, sillä se, miten näemme maailman välittää mukanaan kulttuurisia viestejä, jotka vaikuttavat siihen, miten katsomme sosiaalisia ryhmiä ja identiteettiä (Bloor ja Bloor 2007, 11). Diskursseissa olevat kehykset voivat ilmentyä esimerkiksi sanavalintojen tai kieliopillisten yksiköiden kautta (Hart 2023, 248). Lisäksi emojit voivat toimia välineinä kehysten rakentamiseen, sillä omien näkemysten kehystäminen on helpompaa visuaalisten merkkien kautta (Danesi 2017, 59).

Materiaali ja metodit

Tutkielman aineisto koostuu Gymsharkin kahdelta Instagram-käyttäjältä, GS ja GSW kerätyistä kuvateksteistä. Aineisto on kerätty joulukuun 2025 sekä tammikuun 2026 aikana, ja sen julkaisuaika sijoittuu kolmen vuoden ajalle, välille tammikuu 2023–joulukuu 2025. Kuvateksteistä on jätetty pois tunnisteet #Gymshark ja #Gymsharkwomen, sillä niiden ei nähty olevan tutkimukselle olennaisia, mutta muuten kuvatekstit ovat alkuperäisessä muodossaan. Molempien Instagram-käyttäjien päivittäisen julkaisutahdin vuoksi, aineiston rajaamisen helpottamiseksi kuvatekstit on valittu jokaisen viikon maanantaina julkaistuista postauksista kummaltakin käyttäjätilitä. Kuvatekstit on kopioitu Excel-tiedostoon, ja postaukset on tallennettu omalle Instagram-käyttäjälleni erillisiin kansioihin helpottamaan niiden löytämistä. Yhteensä analysoitavien kuvatekstien määrä on 314, joka koostuu 157 tarkasteltavasta kuvatekstistä kummaltakin käyttäjältä. Analyysiprosessi alkoi tutustumisella kerättyyn aineistoon. Sen jälkeen kävin materiaalin läpi useamman kerran, keskittyen eri asioihin jokaisella kierroksella. Kävin ensin läpi GS ja GSW materiaalit erikseen, ja tunnistettuani molemmissa esiintyvät emojiit ja kielelliset ominaisuudet, vertailin niitä toisiinsa. Tämä tutkielma on pääasiassa laadullinen tutkimus, mutta sisältää myös määrällistä tutkimusta emojien määrään liittyen.

Tutkielmassa on otettu huomioon eettiset näkökulmat materiaalin sekä tekoälyn käytön suhteen. Aineiston suhteen eettisiä ongelmia ei ilmaantunut. Koska Gymshark, joka on tutkielman tarkastelun kohteena, on julkinen yritys, joka käyttää Instagramia yhtenä pääasiallisista alustoistaan markkinoinnissa ja viestinnässä, sen julkaisut ovat avoimesti saatavilla kenelle tahansa. Vaikka heidän julkaisemassaan sisällössä esiintyy erillisiä vaikuttajia, vaikuttajan oma sisältö on myös julkisesti saatavilla, joten voidaan olettaa, että he ovat tietoisia siitä, että Gymsharkin Instagram-julkaisut ovat julkista materiaalia ja saatavilla analysoitavaksi. Lisäksi tässä tutkielmassa kuvat eivät ole tarkastelun kohteena, vaan analyysi keskittyy kuvateksteihin. Tutkielman prosessin aikana tekoälytyökalu Keeniousta on käytetty apuna aiheeseen liittyvien lähteiden etsinnässä, mutta yksikään yritys löytää sopivia lähteitä ei tuottanut tuloksia, jotka olisivat olleet vartenotettavia tässä tutkimuksessa. Tutkielma ei sisällä materiaalia tai lähteitä, jotka olisi tuotettu tekoälyllä.

Tulokset

Tutkielman analyysin tuottamat tulokset paljastavat, että GS:n ja GSW:n kuvateksteissä löytyvissä emojissa on eroavaisuuksia sekä niiden määrässä että variaatiossa. GS-tilin 157

kuvatekstistä 113 oli sellaisia, joissa esiintyi vähintään yksi emoji, kun taas GSW-tilin kuvateksteissä luku oli 150. Tämä on linjassa edeltävien tutkimusten kanssa, joiden mukaan naiset käyttävät useammin emojeita kuin miehet (Herring ja Dainas 2020, 9; Chen et al. 2018, 3). Vaikka pääasiassa emojien käyttöön ja sukupuolien välisiin kielellisiin eroon liittyvät aiemmat tutkimukset käsittelevät sitä, miten eri sukupuolten edustajat käyttävät itse emojeita tai kieltä, oma tutkimukseni käsittelee sitä, näkyvätkö nämä samat erot silloinkin, kun käyttäjän sukupuoli ei ole tiedossa, mutta kohdeyleisön sukupuoli on. Jos olemassa oleva ymmärrys on, että naiset käyttävät emojeita useammin kuin miehet, on loogista ajatella, että naisille suunnatuissa kuvateksteissä on enemmän emojeita kuin miehille suunnatuissa.

Ensimmäiset tutkimuskysymykseni koskivat sitä, miten Gymshark käyttää emojeita Instagramin kuvateksteissään, ja ilmentävätkö ne perinteisiä sukupuoliin liittyviä stereotyyppioita. Analyysin tuloksena on, että GS- ja GSW-käyttäjien kuvateksteissä viisi eniten esiintyvää emojiä ovat pääosin erilaiset. GS-käyttäjien eniten käyttämät emojiä ovat 🤝, 🔥, 🌀, 👁️, and 🧡, kun taas GSW:n viisi eniten käytettyä emojiä ovat ❤️, 🌟, 🌀, 📦, and 👁️. Näiden emojien voidaan katsoa vahvistavan perinteisiä sukupuoliin liittyviä stereotyyppioita, kuten GS:n käyttämät hauis-emoji sekä tuli-emoji, jota käytetään reaktiona johonkin, sekä GSW:n käyttämät sydän-emoji sekä ostoskassi-emoji. Sydän symbolina assosioidaan usein tunteiden ja hellyyden kanssa, kun taas hauis kuvastaa voimaa ja fyysisyyttä, joten näiden voidaan nähdä ilmentävän sukupuoliin liitettyjä olettamuksia. Lisäksi analyysissä tarkasteltiin emojeita kokonaisuudessaan, eli myös niitä, joita käytettiin vähemmän. Emojien variaatio on huomattavasti suurempaa GSW:n julkaisemissa kuvateksteissä kuin GS:n julkaisemissa. Tulokset paljastavat, että emojiä, jotka esiintyvät GSW kuvateksteissä ovat värikkäämpiä kuin GS kuvateksteissä esiintyvät. Tämä on linjassa aiempien tutkimuksien kanssa, joiden mukaan naisten käyttämät emojiä ovat koristeellisempia ja värikkäämpiä kuin miesten käyttämät (Chen et al. 2018, 4). Analyysini tulosten perusteella väitän, että käyttämällä emojeita, joissa on suurempi variaatio, GSW:n kuvatekstien sävy välittää iloista ja ilmeikästä tunnetta lukijalle, mikä kytkeytyy ajatukseen siitä, että naiset ovat tunteellisia ja eivät käytä voimakasta kieltä (Prentice ja Carranza 2002, 269). Samoin GSW:ssä esiintyvät emojiä sisältävät useita ulkonäköön liittyviä emojia, joita ei juurikaan löydy GS:n kuvatekstien emojista. Tämä on haitallista, sillä se noudattaa urheiluympäristölle tyypillistä epätasa-arvoa, jossa naisurheilijoiden ulkonäköä tarkastellaan samalla kun miesurheilijoiden saavutuksia kehuaan (Knight ja Giuliano 2001, 218–219). Yhteenvetona

emojien analyysistä voidaan todeta, että emojiä voidaan käyttää kehystämään sukupuoliin liittyviä stereotyyppioita silloin, kun kohderyhmänä on eri sukupuolta edustavat ryhmät.

Tutkielman kolmas tutkimuskysymys koski kuvatekstien kielellisiä piirteitä ja niiden käyttöä stereotyyppioiden vahvistamiseen. Tulokset osoittavat, että kuvatekstien tyyli ja sisältö vaihtelevat käyttäjätilien kesken. GS:n julkaisujen kuvatekstit ovat lyhempiä ja noudattavat kielioppisääntöjä sekä yleiskieltä, minkä kautta niiden sävy on vakavampi. Näiden kuvatekstien sisältö liittyy yleisesti urheiluun ja Gymsharkin tuotteisiin, mutta niitä lähestytään motivaation kautta ja korostetaan omaa fyysistä ja henkistä kehitystä. Tämä tulos osoittaa, että GS:n kuvatekstit ilmentävät maskuliinisia stereotyyppioita ja kehystävät miehet ja miehisyuden, etenkin urheilun kontekstissa, näiden stereotyyppioiden kautta. GSW:n julkaisujen kuvatekstit sen sijaan ovat pidempiä, ja niissä on kevyempi sävy. Vaikka myös näiden kuvatekstien sisältö liittyy urheiluun, niissä korostetaan huomattavasti useammin Gymsharkin tuotteita ja kuvissa esiintyvien naisten ulkonäköä. GSW:n kuvatekstien analyysin perusteella vaikuttaa, että GSW esittää idean, että urheiluun liittyvä kehitys ja saavutukset on mahdollista Gymsharkin tuottamien urheiluvaatteiden kautta, sen sijaan että korostettaisiin naisten vahvuutta ja omaa tahdonvoimaa kuten GS:n käyttäjän julkaisuissa. Tämä vähättelee naisten panostuksen ja työn merkitystä ja asettaa nais- ja miesurheilijat epätasa-arvoon vahvistaen perinteisiä sukupuoliollettamuksia. Nämä kehykset nais- ja miesurheilijoiden ympärillä paljastavat Gymsharkin piilevän ideologian.

Lisäksi analyysin tulokset paljastavat eroavaisuuksia kuvatekstien kielipillisissä piirteissä. GSW:n kuvatekstit sisälsivät vapaamuotoisempaa kieltä, lyhennettyjä muotoja sanoista, ja niistä puuttuivat isot kirjaimet, kun taas GS:n kuvateksteissä käytettiin oikeaoppisesti isoja alkukirjaimia ja yleiskieltä. Lopuksi analyysissä tarkasteltiin intertekstuaalisuutta, jota esiintyi GSW:n kuvateksteissä esimerkiksi viittauksina elokuvaan ja sosiaalisen median trendeihin, mutta GS:n kuvateksteissä intertekstuaalisuutta ei ollut havaittavissa. Nämä löydökset vahvistavat tutkielman aiempia tuloksia siitä, että GS:n kuvatekstit ovat sävyiltään vakavampia, kun taas GSW:n kuvateksteissä on rennompaa sävyä. Gymsharkin käyttäessä huomattavasti erilaista viestintää eri kohderyhmille emojiiden ja kielen avulla on haitallista ja sillä on vaikutuksia jo valmiiksi esiintyviin sukupuoliin liittyviin stereotyyppioihin. Kun Gymshark altistaa miljoonat seuraajansa Instagramissa GS- ja GSW-tilien sisällölle, minkä pohjimmainen viesti ja ideologia tuntuu olevan se, että naisurheilijat eivät ole yhtä vakavasti otettavia kuin miehet, on todennäköistä, että nämä miljoonat seuraajat omaksuvat tämän kehyksen ja vahvistavat sitä omassa diskurssissaan.

Yhteenveto

Vaikka naisten asema urheilun parissa on väistämättä parempi kuin mitä se on ollut, naisten osallistuminen ja naisurheilijoiden esittäminen mediassa kulkee silti jäljessä. Uutismediat, urheiluyritykset sekä sosiaalinen media ilmentävät perinteisiä stereotyyppioita sukupuoliin liittyen tuottaessaan sisältöä, ja nämä stereotyyppiat ilmenevät kielen kautta. KDA ja kehysanalyysi tarjoavat työkalun näiden stereotyyppioiden ja niiden takana olevien ideologioiden paljastamiseen. Nykykielen oleellinen osa, etenkin digitaalisessa kommunikaatiossa, on emoji, jotka lisäävät visuaalisuutta ja muovaavat tekstien sävyä.

Tässä tutkielmassa pyrittiin tarkastelemaan emojetteja ja tekstiä ja miten niiden avulla rakennetaan ja kehystetään sukupuoliin liittyviä stereotyyppioita Gymsharkin kahden käyttäjätilin julkaisujen kuvateksteissä. Tutkielman tavoitteena oli ensinnäkin tarkastella, miten kuvateksteissä käytetään emojetteja ja käytetäänkö niitä apuna perinteisten stereotyyppioiden vahvistamiseen, kun kohderyhmänä on eri sukupuolen edustajista koostuvat seuraajaryhmät. Lisäksi tutkielmassa analysoitiin kuvatekstien kielellisiä ominaisuuksia ja niiden vaikutusta stereotyyppioiden vahvistamiseen. Tutkimus tehtiin hyödyntäen KDA:ta ja kehysanalyysia, ja tulokset osoittivat, että sekä GS- että GSW-käyttäjätilien kuvatestit ilmensivät perinteisiä sukupuoli-oletuksia ja kehystivät nais- sekä miesurheilijat niiden kautta. Tutkimukseen liittyvät rajoitukset otettiin huomioon tutkimuksen aikana, kuten esimerkiksi se, että tutkimuksessa ei voida tehdä oletuksia Gymsharkin julkaisujen kuvatekstien kirjoittajan sukupuolesta. Voidaan kuitenkin todeta, että tämä tutkimus täyttää aukon kielitieteellisessä tutkimuksessa, joka käsittelee kielen ja emojien käyttöä silloin, kun kohderyhmänä on eri sukupuolen edustajat. Lisäksi tutkielma tarjoaa ehdotuksia tuleviin tutkimuksiin aiheeseen liittyen, kuten multimodaalinen tutkimus tai eri sukupuolta edustavien yksittäisten sosiaalisen median vaikuttajien emojien käyttö sukupuolen kehystämisen välineenä.