

The body as spectacle in the age of fitness influencers: Ordinarity and extremity in the media

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ABSTRACT

The mediatization of physical exercise and its transformation into a routine, everyday activity through digital media is one of the most striking developments in contemporary representations of the human body. In the 21st century, the pursuit of the “legitimate body” remains central, with physical exercise and media-driven self-optimization becoming key avenues for acquiring symbolic social capital. The practices of today’s fitness influencers illustrate how, in the visual culture of platforms like Instagram, the body is expected to “speak” for itself. Rather than focusing on narrative coherence or measurable achievement, content production and consumption center around curated representations that simulate presence and convey an ideal of health, desirability, and aesthetic appeal. In contrast, the growing community of amateur athletes – particularly those engaged in endurance sports and quantified self-practices via applications like Strava – cultivate what might be described as a “functional body,” emphasizing performance, discipline, and data-driven self-improvement. This study explores both the parallels and distinctions between these two modalities with the methodology of text analysis, ultimately seeking to shed light on how digital media are reshaping contemporary perceptions and cultural meanings of the human body. The analysis focuses on Central European, mostly Hungarian and Polish examples.

Keywords: social media, fitness, deep mediatization, self-tracking, technologies of the self

INTRODUCTION

Regular physical activity has been a component of preventive public health programs since the emergence of modernity – occasionally even without explicit military or political motivations. However, in the past two to three decades, recreational sports enthusiasts have increasingly become target demographics for global brands. As a result, initiatives and infrastructures designed to support so-called health or recreational sports have taken on a growing role in the service economy. These developments reflect a broader shift in which physical activity is no longer merely a matter of health policy or national fitness, but a significant economic and cultural force.

One of the most critical milestones in civilizational development concerning individual well-being was the institutionalization of leisure time following the Second Industrial Revolution. This transformation not only stimulated cultural production but also – through its close association with urbanization and tourism – made possible the emergence of mass sport. By the final third of the 20th century, a health- and body-conscious lifestyle had ceased to be a privilege reserved solely for elites; it became accessible to the middle and working classes as well.

Simultaneously, the transformation of the media landscape – first through radio and later television – shifted public attention toward professional athletes, major competitions, and large-scale tournaments. In this context, Mohácsi’s (2002) study titled *Szép, erős, egészséges* (“Beautiful, strong, healthy”) highlights that the foundations for a modern body culture had already been laid in Central European urban centers like Budapest until the mid-20th century. Mohácsi (2002) writes:

“[...] the economic institutional system and social base of the organized spending of leisure time were formed, which created the social basis for the development of the modern body cult through the need for a useful and healthy body in sport and work” (p. 45).

Maybe one of the most pivotal phase in the history of Western body culture is the spread of capitalist mass production models in the United States and their subsequent adoption in Europe. This period marks a transformation in the embodied experience of individuals, as bodily presentation became increasingly commercialized and subordinated to the demands of industrial society.

As Mohácsi (2002) puts it: “The fundamental practices of modernity are investments that serve the purpose of making the body presentable (plastics, cosmetics, diet, clothing, etc.), that is, of transforming the actual body into a legitimate body” (p. 36).

This transformation – or more precisely, this struggle for social status – is perhaps most clearly reflected in the routines of everyday physical exercise, as Bourdieu (1978) famously argued. In his conceptualization, the body is a socially constructed object, gradually shaped by its relationship to the symbolic expectations of its environment:

“[...] the gradually acquired relationship to the body, which gives the body its socially determined image, is nothing other than the comprehensive way of presenting self-behavior to other bodies, in which, among other things, the specific relationship – of conformity or non-conformity – between the actual and the legitimate body (in the sense defined by a specific class of perceptual schemes) is expressed” (Bourdieu, 1978, p. 73).

BODIES ON DISPLAY: THE GYM AS A STAGE

Achieving a “legitimate body” – and, by extension, a higher position in the social hierarchy or at least the appearance of such – has become attainable for increasingly diverse social groups through targeted investments and body techniques. Among these, perhaps the most complex and visually striking is bodybuilding, particularly within gym culture. This modern form of aesthetic self-discipline brings together the most advantageous features of recreational sports: it fits neatly into a post-industrial schedule, it can be practiced outside of working hours, it has well-established health and developmental benefits (when done in moderation), it supports social interaction, and it is optimally aligned with the urban lifestyle, having developed in tandem with urban infrastructure and culture.

Meanwhile, activities such as running, cycling, or hiking – less equipment-intensive and requiring minimal prior knowledge – have also become widespread. While these forms of movement are often associated with accessible, everyday fitness, gyms cater to those pursuing more targeted, specialized physical transformation. Broad social groups have emerged around each of these practices. With the advent of social media, we now see a proliferation of content in which everyday individuals document and elevate their physical achievements – sometimes to extreme levels. Both men and women increasingly embody the “athlete” archetype online, promoting products through their toned and muscular appearances, or offering fitness advice as personal trainers, often monetizing their influence through subscriptions and exclusive content.

Despite the widespread visibility of these non-professional¹ figures – who engage in endurance sports, high-intensity physical exertion, and other strenuous bodily practices – scholarly interest in their media representation has been relatively limited within sports and media studies. It is primarily psychology that has responded with concern, due to the growing prevalence of body image disorders and other psychosocial issues linked to these mediated body ideals in the age of Web 2.0.

In recent decades, the gym has emerged as a powerful symbol of consumer society. The roots of what we now call “gym culture” can be traced back to the first third of the 20th century, when it began to develop alongside niche sports such as bodybuilding. In the United States, interest in hyper-developed bodies, especially those that could be displayed as visual spectacle, peaked with the rise of Hungarian-born bodybuilder and later actor, Miklós “Mickey” Hargitay. After emigrating in 1945, Hargitay achieved international fame when he won the Mr. Universe title in 1955. Around this time, Hollywood also took notice of his well-defined physique, casting him as a symbol of masculine strength and beauty. Although bodybuilding had already become known in the U.S., it was still widely viewed as a marginal or extreme practice within mainstream culture. Interestingly, famous Hungarian filmmaker György Szomjas later directed a film titled *Mr. Universe* (1988), shot mainly in New York, in which Hargitay briefly appears. In a contemporary interview, Szomjas recalled:

“Mickey Hargitay was the ideal of the 1940s and 1950s; a true sportsman. We still believed in those ideals – athletic achievements mattered to us. Mickey was not just a bodybuilder, but a complex athlete who could accurately assess his strength, continuously controlled himself, and was capable of great accomplishments. He was a statue of identity, which is rare today” (Koltai, 1988, p. 18).

In Hungary, the movement began to spread under the name “bodybuilding”, a term that also reflects the Latin root of culture: “to cultivate.” Here, the practice embodied a reversal of Cicero’s classical notion of *cultura animi* (the cultivation of the soul), instead prioritizing the intentional and aesthetic cultivation of the body. The rise of natural bodybuilding in Hungary during the 1960s saw determined athletes building their physiques according to self-devised regimens, often breaking away from traditional combat sports like boxing in pursuit of aesthetics over functionality. The first Hungarian Bodybuilding Championship was held in 1970 (Tóth & Szemethy, 2012). Around this time, *Élet és Irodalom* literary magazine even conducted an interview with István Bitter, a student at the college of physical education and founder of the Acélizom Sportklub (“Steel Muscle Sports Club”). Drawing on available tools and techniques, Bitter helped establish Hungary’s first gym specifically for bodybuilders in Szeged in 1978, bringing together equipment and practices into a concentrated space dedicated to the aesthetic transformation of the body.

¹ It is very important to carefully consider the use of the terms professional and amateur, and their relationship to each other, because it is far from clear where professional fitness training begins and on what basis it can be judged, and another important term is needed here: ‘business’. After all, we can come across many business profiles with promotional activities and professional content production work. In terms of the quality of the posts, it is also a professional activity, but an average user has no idea whether the given influencer is doing physical exertion professionally or not. And here we simultaneously reach the dilemma of competitive sport/leisure sport.

Gyms, which for a long time – even in the United States – were often relegated to basement spaces, became important nodes of urban life during the 1980s. In Hungary and across Central and Eastern Europe, it was not until the post-socialist transition that gyms emerged in more central, visible, and urbanized environments. This shift marked a significant breakthrough: spaces once hidden became embedded in the public fabric of city life. The gym, in this context, can be considered a non-lieu (non-place), a standardized and transitory environment in which the pursuit of physical self-optimization takes precedence. Like airports or shopping malls, gyms are traversed by “passers-by” rather than “residents.” While this classification may seem reductive – given the daily routines and social networks often formed in these spaces – a comparison with other, more structured physical disciplines such as martial arts (e.g., boxing and jiu-jitsu), bodybuilding, or newer practices like CrossFit helps underscore the gym’s unisex, accessible, and commercialized nature (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 5). Unlike these specialized practices, which often take place in suburban or industrial buildings with tight-knit communities and rigid codes of behavior, fitness-oriented gyms are commonly found along bustling, shop-filled inner-city streets, behind large glass facades. These are deeply embedded in the visual and spatial rhythm of contemporary urbanity. Just as beach baths and public toilets in the early 20th century came to reflect and reproduce the everyday discourse and practice of modern body culture (Mohácsi, 2002), so too did the gym, by the end of the century, become a central site for the public display and cultivation of the body, amid the broader trajectory of urbanization.

Italian sociologist Sassatelli (2010) offers a comprehensive exploration of the spatial and temporal structures of gyms in her study *Fitness culture: Gyms and the commercialisation of discipline and fun*. Drawing on Norbert Elias’s civilizing process, Sassatelli (2010) links the evolution of body-consciousness with the modern development of functionally specialized spaces. The gym exemplifies this, and she pays particular attention to the locker room as a liminal space – positioned between the routines of everyday life and the gym’s microcosmic world. The locker room enables a gradual transition into the embodied, performative logic of the gym while also maintaining a tether to one’s public identity and socioeconomic status. It becomes, as Sassatelli (2010) notes, a space where expressions of gender and wealth are often more visible than in the training areas themselves. Her interviews suggest a polarizing experience: while some gym-goers embrace the rituals of the locker room, treating it as a site of community and self-presentation, others prefer to pass through it as quickly as possible (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 50). These observations held particularly true into the early 2000s – until around the early 2010s in Hungary – when gyms still functioned as relatively mixed social spaces. However, in recent years, polarization has intensified. Fitness centers have increasingly split into two distinct categories: affordable, mainstream facilities catering to the general public, and high-end clubs often connected to wellness services and exclusive amenities. This stratification reflects broader trends of commodification and social segmentation within contemporary urban environments.

The latter group of gyms tends to include those located in city centers, often occupying upper floors of shopping malls. These spaces function as literal showcases for the bodybuilder (or perhaps more appropriately, the body builder), who, despite operating within a rule-bound environment that temporarily suspends the social logic of everyday life, voluntarily relinquishes privacy in favor of public visibility. The spatial aspect of these gyms has become even more intriguing since the 2010s, as online media technologies have increasingly assumed the role of primary mediator. In contrast to the glass walls of commercial buildings, social media platforms now allow bodybuilders to present themselves in highly curated, filtered, and performative forms. Here, the stakes of performance, self-optimization, and the visual representation of the body – understood as a kind of primary medium – have intensified. Posts tagged with hashtags such as #fitness, #gym, #thinspiration, or #body are emblematic of the expanded regimes of physical visibility and mediated corporeality (Volkwein-Caplan, 2014, p. 259).

According to many authors critical of capitalist modernity, the late-modern individual equates well-being with the accumulation of material goods. With the decline of traditional religious frameworks, existential focus has shifted from the future to the present, and an ethic of limitless consumption has been supplemented by a heightened attention to physical health and the body. In this way, the imperative of health preservation itself re-centers the body in cultural discourse. Herbert Marcuse’s one-dimensional man, living within industrialized consumer societies, becomes increasingly vulnerable to previous and new models of power, as the self is subsumed into a sea of commodified desires. As Volkwein-Caplan (2014) argues, the contemporary subject is “not only concerned about material goods, but also his own body has become a material consumer good” (p. 260).

These critiques, rooted in the leftist philosophical tradition and cultural theory, remain strikingly relevant when analyzing fitness culture today – especially its reconfiguration in the digitally expanded public sphere. Newer health-oriented body practices, such as gym-based training, have become increasingly popular in consumer societies not only as health-promoting routines, but also as avenues for constructing and projecting one’s identity. In the hybrid media environment of Web 2.0, the act of building stamina or muscle mass transcends symbolic struggles for a “legitimate body” in the Bourdieusian sense. These techniques have become central to the performance of the self and the economy of appearance, from which both fitness institutions and consumer industries (e.g., sports apparel and nutritional supplements) make profit.

Nonetheless, rather than approaching fitness culture solely through the lens of critical social science or anti-capitalist critique, it may also be valuable to consider it as a “lived culture,” in which consumers and producers collaboratively shape the practices, meanings, and futures of recreational physical activity (Sassatelli, 2010, p. 3). This interpretive shift allows for a more nuanced understanding of fitness not merely as a form of submission to neoliberal body norms, but also as a space of agency, community, and embodied self-expression.

DEEP MEDIATIZATION AND THE SELF IN NUMBERS

With the emergence of social media and the onset of what Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp have described as the era of deep mediatization, we can trace the expansion and transformation of body culture – an institutionalized phenomenon since the final

third of the 20th century – into new and increasingly immersive terrains. The rise of recreational sports has unfolded in parallel with a radical reconfiguration of the media environment, wherein the construction of everyday social reality is now deeply embedded within the institutional, infrastructural, and material logic of various media systems. As emphasized by Andok (2022), daily routines like the moment we wake up with digital alarms to monitoring our step count or checking the weather, are mediated by digital platforms and smart technologies. Practices that once bore little or no relation to media or telecommunications just two decades ago are now increasingly intertwined with applications on smartphones and other digital devices.

In this context, Han's (2021) reflections on digital media and liberal psychopolitics provide a critical framework for understanding the commodification and surveillance of the body in late capitalism. In *The palliative society*, Han (2021) warns: "The Internet of things extends surveillance to real life. Wearables make our bodies accessible to commerce. We will hang like puppets on algorithmic strings. Big data, as a tool of psychopolitics, makes human behavior predictable and controllable" (p. 87). While Han's (2021) texts are often metaphorical and essayistic, this passage highlights a crucial insight: the intimate relationship between wearable technology and the human body. Devices such as smartwatches, fitness trackers, and chest-strap monitors now maintain direct physical contact with the human organism, interfacing with skin, muscles, and even circulatory functions, while also providing real-time feedback on physical performance. These tools – once foreshadowed by rudimentary technologies like the pocket calculator – now operate as extensions of bodily awareness and tools for continual self-assessment.

In the age of dense mediatization, a growing share of everyday practices through technology revolves around the body and its performance. The late-modern individual is increasingly inseparable from self-quantification applications, which deliver feedback through visualized metrics on smartphones or smart devices. These data outputs not only validate users' behaviors but also serve as motivational tools for self-improvement. From pedometers and heart rate monitors to calorie counters and sleep tracking apps, even the most mundane bodily activities have become measurable, visualized, and controllable, integrating seamlessly into a culture of self-surveillance and optimization.

Andreas Hepp and Nick Couldry, in their analyses of the individual's role in the era of deep mediatization, emphasize that the tools developed for self-measurement and self-optimization are significant not merely because of their technical capabilities, but because they are also inherently communicative. This communicative function is, in fact, central to their cultural importance. Fitness applications such as Strava exemplify this dual function: they allow for the precise tracking of physical activity (including heart rate, elevation gain, and distance) but also offer users the opportunity to share these data with friends, peers, and broader social networks. While the act of saving and analyzing one's own performance data represents an important phase in the technologically mediated process of self-optimization, it is through the act of sharing that these metrics enter a broader discourse on normative and idealized physical performance. Here, notions of the "average" body or ideal metabolic function are rearticulated considering new data flows, often reconceptualizing what is considered healthy or aspirational. As Hepp (2020) suggests, such mediated practices contribute to the reconstruction of our cultural understanding of human performance, based increasingly on software-generated data.

To deepen this analysis, Foucault's (1988) later work offers an insight, particularly his essay *technologies of the self* and his final lectures at the Collège de France. In these writings, scholars have noted a significant shift in Foucault's (1988) approach: moving from an "archaeology of knowledge" and the study of power/knowledge formations to a more material and embodied focus on subjectivity and ethical self-practices. As Hermann (2011, p. 110) observes, this shift marked Foucault's (1988) movement "from anthropology to genealogies," which entailed greater attention to the individual's relationship with non-discursive fields. Within this framework, Foucault (1988) identifies technologies of the self as a fourth major category, alongside technologies of production, sign systems, and power. These are the means "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves" in pursuit of happiness, wisdom, or self-perfection (Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

In this light, the quantified self-practices enabled by wearables and fitness platforms can be interpreted as contemporary manifestations of these technologies of the self. The everyday *work* individuals perform on and through their bodies – encoded in metrics like heart rate, calories burned, or sleep quality – is no longer just private bodily maintenance, but a public affirmation of identity and value through data production. The mediatization of these self-tracking practices turns even mundane activities into symbolic acts of self-development and moral self-fashioning. As data increasingly circulate online, they not only influence individual self-perception but also shape public discourses around physical performance, health, and identity, thereby participating in their transformation into a technology of the self.²

Applications designed for self-optimization, while simultaneously enabling the extreme visibility of the body and physical performance, are not unprecedented within Western culture. The early decades of bodybuilding, along with the emergence of CrossFit or Spartan Race prior to the widespread use of social media, can be seen as early manifestations of this process. What platforms like Facebook, and more significantly Instagram and TikTok, have contributed is not the inception of body-centered identity construction, but rather its amplification and spectacularization. These platforms intensify long-standing cultural practices of striving for physical perfection, rendering them more visible, performative, and commercially potent.

A key feature of self-presentation in the *attention economy* is the sexualization of mediatized bodies. What users now regard as trendy and desirable increasingly aligns with the athletic physique: a shift that has led to the objectification and sexualization of athletes, especially elite female athletes, who are frequently subjected to the male gaze in both media and public discourse. While body positivity and inclusive discourses on physical diversity have grown in parallel with the rise of fitness influencers, and

² See also: Lupton, Deborah, *The diverse domains of quantified selves: self-tracking modes and dataveillance*. *Economy and Society*, 2016, 45:1, 101-122.

although their core message –celebrating bodily uniqueness and self-acceptance – has become more culturally embedded, the dominant body ideal in a deeply mediatized society continues to trend toward the highly curated and perfected.

Furthermore, even body positive rhetoric is not immune to the forces of commercialization. Campaigns promoting acceptance and inclusivity often replicate the same market logics as those they ostensibly critique. The female body remains a key advertising surface. A prominent example is the *Real Beauty* campaign by Ogilvy for Dove, which was among the first major campaigns to align itself with body positivity. Despite its focus on women of various ethnicities and body types, the aesthetic of its messaging – women appearing in lingerie in controlled, stylized environments – continues to affirm the visual grammar of commodified beauty.

LONELINESS, SURVEILLANCE, AND THE COST OF VISIBILITY

From the vantage point of cultural studies, especially within Central and Eastern Europe, this phenomenon remains underexplored. Most existing analyses are found in educational or journalistic formats, or in documentary and narrative cinema. A particularly telling example is the film *Sweat* (2020), directed by Magnus von Horn, which offers a cinematic reflection on the interrelation between the mediatized body, social media visibility, and personal identity. The Swedish-Polish coproduction becomes a lens through which we can observe the mutual influence between media representations of the body, audience reception, and mediated self-perception.

Sweat (2020) functions as a kind of cinematic chamber piece, closely following the protagonist, Sylwia Zając, a successful fitness trainer and Instagram influencer, over the course of three days. The camera rarely leaves her; her presence dominates the visual field, and viewers are placed in the position of constant observers. This condition of perpetual exposure mirrors the experience of social media celebrities, who are always under the scrutiny of the public gaze. The film subtly implicates the viewer in this gaze, transforming us into voyeurs – much like the stalker who watches Sylwia from his car. Although their relationship initially appears to represent the main conflict, by the end of the narrative it reveals itself to be the most human connection in Sylwia's isolated and fragmented world.

Ultimately, *Sweat* (2020) is a portrait of crisis: Sylwia, despite her vast digital reach and public image of strength and confidence, faces a profound emotional and relational void. Through her impersonal ties with sponsors, her strained family interactions, and the unresolved experience of harassment, the film captures the tensions at the heart of influencer culture: the contradiction between hypervisibility and isolation, between the performance of intimacy and the reality of loneliness. In doing so, *Sweat* (2020) invites viewers to reconsider the psychological cost of mediatized fitness culture and the evolving nature of bodily representation in the digital age.

The film poignantly reveals the loneliness and emotional fragility often hidden behind the polished image of influencer culture. Sylwia, the protagonist, is shown alone in various public and private spaces throughout much of the film's runtime – wandering through the city, isolated in her apartment – highlighting her detachment from meaningful human connection. This solitude not only emphasizes the emotional toll of performative self-branding, but also exposes Sylwia's helplessness in navigating unfiltered, everyday interactions, especially when confronted with the vulnerabilities of others. Her apparent inability to respond authentically to situations outside her controlled digital sphere underscores a deeper psychological paralysis brought about by the expectations of perpetual self-curation.

This becomes particularly evident in her strained relationship with her mother, characterized by both emotional distance and communicative breakdown. Sylwia tentatively seeks connection, but when faced with a lack of understanding or empathy, she withdraws—symbolized quite literally when she retreats to her childhood bedroom and shuts the door. Their interactions are filled with unspoken tensions, marked by the absence of shared language for expressing emotions. This inability to articulate or receive emotional nuance is mirrored again in a scene at a shopping mall, when a woman (perhaps a former schoolmate) starts a conversation with Sylwia and quickly reveals she has recently suffered a miscarriage. Sylwia's lack of recognition and emotional reciprocity is evident; instead of engaging empathetically, she shifts the conversation back to herself, vaguely expressing a desire to escape her life and delete her Instagram account. The stark contrast between the woman's raw confession and Sylwia's glamorized, stagnant existence underscores the isolating nature of her curated identity.

The film's aesthetic and technical choices reinforce these themes of alienation and emotional constraint. The frequent use of cold, desaturated color palettes, reflective surfaces like mirrors and glass, and uncomfortably long handheld close-ups evoke a mood of psychological tension and introspection. In this context, mirrors – iconic in fitness culture as tools of self-surveillance – and reflective windows become more than just physical settings; they operate as symbolic media that both project and distort the self. They reflect not only Sylwia's carefully maintained physical image but also the fragmentation and performativity underlying her public persona.

Similarly, the smartphone screen becomes a key medium through which Sylwia engages in ritual acts of self-affirmation. She frequently logs in often during mundane activities such as driving or returning from shopping. These gestures are also important for her, because she always re-watch her own posts, re-consuming the self she projects. This repetitive gaze reflects an internalization of external surveillance, where the line between the observer and the observed collapses. Her public identity, shaped by algorithmic logic and branding obligations, encroaches upon and eventually overwhelms her private self. This is most powerfully illustrated in the scene where Sylwia records a tearful video about her loneliness, prefacing it with: "Today's video is going to be a little different, because not everything has to be about fitness." The fact that this video is later shown being replayed by Sylwia herself reflects the paradox of mediated vulnerability: even her most emotional, "authentic" confession is folded back into the cycle of content production, where pain itself becomes performance or spectacle.

Over the past two decades, the idealized female body image has undergone a marked transformation: from the super-thin silhouette epitomized by 1990s runway models to a more athletic, well-toned physique. Today, features such as a larger, rounded buttocks paired with slimmer hips, alongside muscularity and an aura of confidence and independence as embodied by social media fitness influencers, have become central markers of the desired female form. This shift is shaped by multiple interrelated factors: the widespread expansion of recreational sports, a growing societal emphasis on health and bodily care, and profound changes in the media environment, particularly the rise of social media platforms like Instagram. These platforms have become historically significant arenas for the staging and performance of individual identity.

CONCLUSION

As observed in the practices of contemporary fitness influencers, the body is made to “speak for itself” through visual content that prioritizes carefully curated aesthetics designed to simulate presence and embody the contemporary ideal of a healthy, desirable body. In this context, neither quantification nor narrative is primary; instead, the focus lies on composition, lighting, and pose to convey an idealized embodiment. In contrast, amateur athletes engaged in endurance sports often pursue a functional body, whose value lies in measurable performance rather than spectacle. This distinction manifests clearly in representational conventions: aesthetic bodies dominate through selfies and staged photographs that highlight physical form, whereas functional bodies are represented primarily through data (wattage, kilometers, average speeds, etc.) where images of running, cycling, or training act merely as supplementary documentation. Despite this divergence, both forms of representation share a commitment to immediate sharing and social interaction.

Hungarian media researcher Guld's (2022) analysis of the attention economy illuminates broader cultural dynamics at play. He argues that the traditional model of the classic attention economy is in crisis, accompanied by individual psychological effects such as screen fatigue, frustration, and depression, as well as social dysfunctions including polarization, moral crises, and the proliferation of misinformation (Guld, 2022, p. 341). In response, Guld (2022) identifies the rise of the passion economy, where content creators cater to well-defined, smaller niche audiences characterized by high loyalty and engagement. Within this paradigm, micro-influencers, typically with followings up to 100,000, thrive by addressing specialized interests; fitness and healthy lifestyle content rank prominently among these. These niche channels often bridge the aesthetic and functional body ideals, offering followers a blend of dietary advice, workout techniques, and motivational support. Crucially, this shift emphasizes passion – the embodied engagement of the everyday individual with their own body, who is increasingly exposed to diverse models of bodily care and representation within digitally mediated cultural practices.

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