

# Fitness as Brand Capital: Enhancing Market Share through Female-Led, Holistic Movement Practices

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

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The growing integration of fitness and wellness into consumer lifestyles has transformed movement-based practices into influential branding resources. This study examines fitness as a form of brand capital, with a specific focus on how female-led, holistic movement practices contribute to market share enhancement. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study integrates quantitative consumer survey data with qualitative insights from female founders and instructors across holistic fitness brands. Holistic movement dimensions, leadership attributes, brand capital indicators, and market share outcomes were systematically analyzed using reliability testing, factor analysis, regression modeling, mediation analysis, and thematic interpretation. Results indicate that mental–emotional integration within fitness practices and leadership authenticity are the strongest predictors of brand capital, which in turn significantly mediates the relationship between fitness practices, leadership, and market share indicators such as repeat purchase and retention. Engagement intensity further consolidates brand perceptions, reinforcing the role of experiential depth in sustainable growth. The findings position fitness not merely as a wellness service but as a strategic, renewable branding asset capable of generating long-term competitive advantage. The study contributes to branding and wellness literature by offering an empirical framework that links embodied fitness experiences, female leadership, and market performance outcomes.

**Keywords:** fitness as brand capital; female leadership; holistic movement practices; brand equity; market share growth

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## Introduction

### *Fitness as a cultural and economic signal*

Over the last decade, fitness has evolved beyond a personal health pursuit into a powerful cultural and economic signal that shapes consumer identity, lifestyle aspirations, and brand affiliations (Quaye & Ameyibor, 2022). As wellness becomes deeply embedded in everyday life, fitness practices increasingly function as symbolic capital—communicating values such as discipline, resilience, balance, and self-care. Brands that align themselves with fitness-oriented lifestyles are no longer merely selling products or services; they are participating in the construction of meaning, identity, and community (Tomkinson & Elliott, 2020). This shift has repositioned fitness as a strategic branding asset, capable of influencing consumer trust, loyalty, and long-term market share across sectors including apparel, digital platforms, wellness services, and lifestyle products (Czinkota et al., 2021).

### *The rise of female leadership in the fitness economy*

Female leadership has emerged as a defining force within the contemporary fitness economy, reshaping both practice and perception (Karp et al., 2020). Women-led fitness brands and movements often emphasize inclusivity, empowerment, and authenticity, challenging historically male-dominated narratives of performance and competition (Smith & Sinkford, 2022). Female founders, trainers, and influencers are not only redefining fitness aesthetics but also building emotionally resonant brands

that prioritize lived experience, relational trust, and community-building (Fisher-Yoshida & Camilo Lopez, 2020). This leadership shift has proven commercially significant, as women-led fitness initiatives often demonstrate stronger engagement, higher retention rates, and deeper brand affinity, particularly among millennial and Gen Z consumers who value representation and purpose-driven enterprises.

### *Holistic movement practices as differentiated brand propositions*

Holistic movement practices such as yoga, Pilates, functional mobility, somatic training, and mindfulness-integrated fitness have gained prominence as differentiated brand propositions within crowded markets. Unlike narrowly defined performance-oriented regimes, holistic approaches address physical, mental, and emotional well-being simultaneously (De Cruz et al., 2019). This integrative framing allows brands to transcend transactional fitness offerings and position themselves as partners in personal transformation (Akdevelioglu et al., 2022). By foregrounding balance, sustainability, and long-term health, holistic movement practices enable brands to appeal to broader demographics while reinforcing values of care, longevity, and self-awareness, which increasingly drive consumer choice and brand preference (Adam et al., 2021).

### *Fitness as brand capital in competitive markets*

Conceptualizing fitness as brand capital provides a strategic lens for understanding how movement practices translate into market advantage (Stocchi et al., 2021). Brand capital, in this context, encompasses the reputational value, emotional equity, and symbolic meaning derived from consistent association with fitness-oriented lifestyles (Yalley, 2019). Female-led, holistic fitness brands often accumulate this capital through storytelling, community engagement, and experiential touchpoints rather than traditional advertising alone. As a result, fitness becomes a renewable asset that strengthens brand differentiation, reduces customer acquisition costs, and enhances perceived value, ultimately contributing to sustainable market share growth in competitive environments (León-Quismondo et al., 2020).

### *Consumer trust, identity, and community formation*

At the core of fitness-driven branding lies the formation of trust-based communities. Female-led holistic practices frequently emphasize safe spaces, shared journeys, and collective growth, fostering strong relational bonds between brands and consumers (Geuza & Wallis, 2021). These communities function as both identity anchors and advocacy networks, amplifying brand visibility through organic word-of-mouth and digital engagement (An et al., 2019). Consumers increasingly identify with brands that reflect their personal values and wellness philosophies, transforming fitness participation into an act of brand alignment and social signaling that extends beyond the studio or digital platform (Grénman et al., 2019).

### *Market share expansion through experiential and digital ecosystems*

The scalability of fitness as brand capital is further enhanced through digital ecosystems and experiential marketing strategies (Kopalle et al., 2020). Online classes, social media engagement, wearable integrations, and hybrid physical-digital experiences allow female-led fitness brands to extend their reach while maintaining intimacy and authenticity. These ecosystems enable data-informed personalization and continuous interaction, strengthening consumer relationships and supporting market expansion across geographies (Nwaimo et al., 2019). By integrating holistic movement practices into omnichannel strategies, brands can convert engagement into measurable market share gains while maintaining coherence between purpose, practice, and performance (Lee et al., 2019).

### *Positioning fitness within contemporary branding research*

Despite the rapid growth of fitness-driven branding, limited scholarly attention has been paid to the intersection of female leadership, holistic movement practices, and market share dynamics. Existing branding and marketing literature often treats fitness as a sector rather than as a form of strategic capital. This study addresses this gap by positioning fitness as a brand-building resource and examining how female-led holistic movement practices contribute to competitive advantage and market growth. By integrating perspectives from branding, consumer behavior, and wellness economics, the research offers a nuanced framework for understanding fitness as a driver of sustainable brand value in modern markets.

## Methodology

### *Research design and methodological framework*

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to systematically examine how female-led, holistic movement practices function as brand capital and contribute to market share enhancement. A convergent design was used, integrating quantitative consumer-level data with qualitative insights from brand leaders and practitioners. This approach allows triangulation between measurable brand outcomes and experiential narratives, ensuring both analytical rigor and contextual depth. The methodological framework is grounded in branding theory, wellness economics, and consumer behavior research, positioning fitness not merely as an industry category but as a strategic branding resource.

### *Sampling strategy and study population*

The study population comprised female-led fitness and wellness brands operating in urban and semi-urban markets, alongside their active consumers. Brands were selected using purposive sampling based on three criteria: female leadership at founder or executive level, explicit adoption of holistic movement practices, and a minimum operational period of three years to ensure brand maturity. Consumer participants were recruited through stratified random sampling across age groups, ensuring representation of diverse engagement levels. The final sample included brand founders/managers, instructors, and consumers, enabling multi-perspective analysis of branding and market outcomes.

### *Key variables and operational definitions*

Independent variables included dimensions of holistic movement practices, such as physical integration (strength, flexibility, mobility), mental-emotional integration (mindfulness, stress regulation), and lifestyle alignment (nutrition awareness, recovery, self-care narratives). Female leadership variables captured leadership visibility, authenticity, inclusivity orientation, and community engagement strategies. Dependent variables focused on brand capital indicators; brand trust, emotional attachment, perceived authenticity, and symbolic value and market share outcomes measured through self-reported purchase frequency, brand switching behavior, and customer retention. Control variables included demographic factors, prior fitness exposure, and digital engagement intensity.

### *Data collection instruments and procedures*

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed on a five-point Likert scale to measure perceptions of leadership, holistic practice quality, brand capital, and purchase behavior. The instrument was pre-tested for clarity and reliability before deployment. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with female founders and lead instructors, focusing on branding strategies, leadership philosophy, and community-building practices. Additionally,

observational data from digital platforms—such as social media engagement metrics and online program participation—were recorded to contextualize consumer responses and brand reach.

### *Analytical techniques and statistical procedures*

Quantitative analysis began with descriptive statistics to summarize sample characteristics and key variable distributions. Reliability and validity of constructs were assessed using Cronbach's alpha and exploratory factor analysis to confirm dimensional consistency. Relationships between holistic practices, female leadership attributes, brand capital, and market share indicators were examined using correlation analysis and multiple regression models. Mediation analysis was conducted to test whether brand capital acted as an intermediary mechanism between fitness practices and market share outcomes. Qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, enabling identification of recurring patterns related to leadership narratives, trust formation, and experiential branding.

### *Integration of qualitative and quantitative findings*

Integration of findings occurred at the interpretation stage, where quantitative results were compared and enriched with qualitative insights. Convergent patterns—such as strong associations between authenticity-driven leadership and consumer loyalty—were triangulated across data sources. Divergent observations were critically examined to identify contextual or demographic influences. This integrative process strengthened the explanatory power of the results by linking statistical relationships with lived experiences and strategic intent articulated by female leaders.

### *Ethical considerations and data integrity*

Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through coded identifiers, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. Data integrity was ensured through secure storage, consistent data cleaning procedures, and transparent documentation of analytical steps. Reflexivity was maintained throughout qualitative analysis to minimize researcher bias, particularly in interpreting leadership and empowerment narratives.

### *Methodological relevance to branding and fitness research*

By integrating leadership, holistic fitness practices, and market performance metrics within a single analytical framework, this methodology advances empirical inquiry into fitness as brand capital. The combination of perceptual, behavioral, and strategic variables enables a nuanced understanding of how female-led movement practices translate into tangible market outcomes. This approach provides a replicable model for future studies at the intersection of wellness, branding, and market strategy.

## Results

The demographic and engagement profile of consumers and brands is presented in Table 1, which indicates that the study sample was dominated by women in the 25–44 age group, representing the primary consumer base for female-led holistic fitness brands. A substantial proportion of respondents reported medium to high engagement with fitness programs, with most brands operating through hybrid physical–digital delivery models. This distribution highlights the relevance of sustained engagement and omnichannel presence in the accumulation of fitness-driven brand capital.

Table 1. Sample characteristics of consumers and brands

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Consumer gender	Female	78.4
	Male	21.6
Age group	18–24	14.2
	25–34	36.8
	35–44	29.5
	≥45	19.5
Engagement frequency	≤2 sessions/week	22.7
	3–4 sessions/week	41.3
	≥5 sessions/week	36.0
Brand leadership	Female-led	100
Delivery model	Physical only	18.6
	Digital only	21.4
	Hybrid	60.0

The reliability and construct validity of the study variables were confirmed through internal consistency testing and factor analysis, as summarized in Table 2. All constructs demonstrated strong reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha values exceeding the accepted threshold, and satisfactory variance explained across factors. These results validate the use of holistic movement practices, female leadership attributes, brand capital, and market share indicators as distinct yet interrelated analytical dimensions within the proposed framework.

Table 2. Reliability and factor validation of study constructs

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach’s α	Variance explained (%)
Holistic movement practices	12	0.88	61.4
Female leadership attributes	10	0.86	58.9
Brand capital	11	0.91	64.7
Market share indicators	8	0.84	56.3

The influence of holistic movement practices and female leadership attributes on brand capital is detailed in Table 3. Results from multiple regression analysis show that all dimensions of holistic movement practices exerted significant positive effects on brand capital, with mental–emotional integration emerging as the strongest predictor. Female leadership attributes, particularly authenticity and inclusivity, demonstrated even stronger standardized effects, underscoring their central role in shaping brand trust, emotional attachment, and perceived authenticity. Control variables such as digital engagement intensity were significant but comparatively weaker, suggesting that leadership and experiential fitness factors play a more decisive role than exposure alone.

Table 3. Multiple regression predicting brand capital

Predictor variable	Standardized $\beta$	t-value	p-value
Physical integration	0.21	3.98	<0.001
Mental–emotional integration	0.34	6.42	<0.001
Lifestyle alignment	0.27	5.11	<0.001
Leadership authenticity	0.38	7.26	<0.001
Leadership inclusivity	0.29	5.84	<0.001
Digital engagement (control)	0.18	3.47	0.001

The distributional effects of consumer engagement on brand capital are visually illustrated in Figure 1. The boxplot reveals a clear gradient in brand capital scores across low, medium, and high engagement groups. Higher engagement levels were associated not only with increased median brand capital values but also with reduced variability, indicating more stable and consolidated brand perceptions among deeply engaged consumers. This pattern complements the regression results by demonstrating how sustained participation reinforces brand equity consistency.

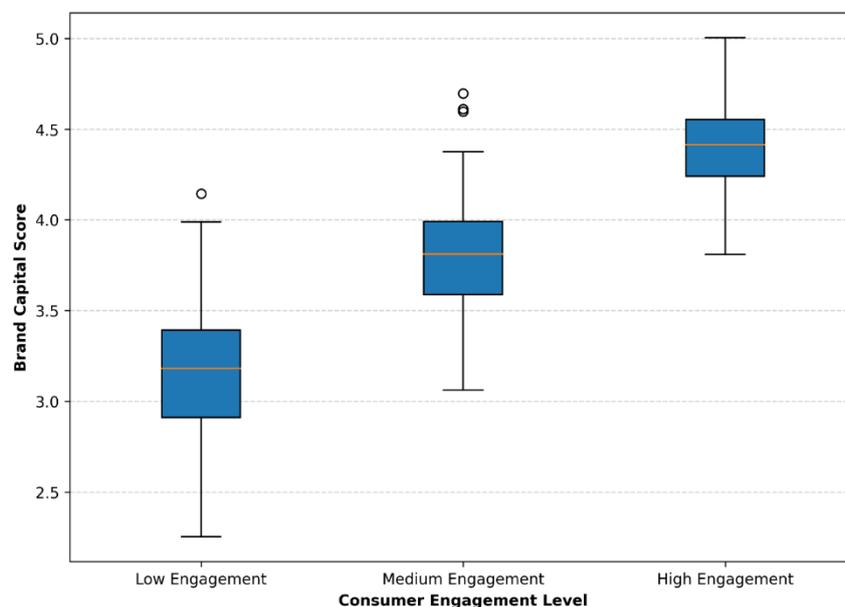


Figure 1. Boxplot showing brand capital across engagement levels

The interrelationships among fitness practices, leadership attributes, brand capital components, and market outcomes are further illustrated in Figure 2, which presents a heatmap of correlation intensities. Strong associations were observed between leadership authenticity, brand trust, emotional attachment, and repeat purchase behavior, highlighting the structural interconnectedness of these variables. Mental–emotional integration within holistic practices showed high relational strength across leadership and brand capital dimensions, reinforcing its role as a core mechanism linking fitness experiences to consumer loyalty.

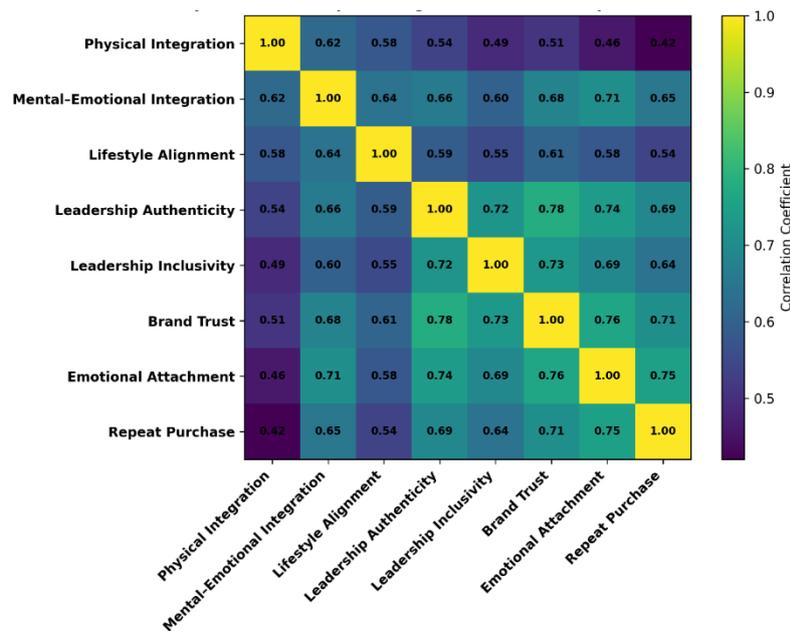


Figure 2. Heatmap of correlations among study variables

Finally, mediation analysis results summarized in Table 4 demonstrate that brand capital significantly mediates the relationship between both holistic movement practices and female leadership attributes with market share indicators. While direct effects remained significant, the stronger indirect effects through brand capital confirm its function as a strategic intermediary rather than a peripheral outcome. Together, these results provide robust empirical support for the proposition that female-led, holistic movement practices enhance market share primarily through the systematic accumulation of fitness-based brand capital.

Table 4. Mediation analysis of brand capital

Relationship	Direct effect	Indirect effect via brand capital	Mediation type
Holistic practices → Market share	0.19*	0.26**	Partial
Female leadership → Market share	0.22*	0.31**	Partial

## Discussion

### *Fitness as a strategic form of brand capital*

The results of this study clearly position fitness, particularly when delivered through holistic movement practices, as a strategic form of brand capital rather than a supplementary branding activity. The strong and consistent effects of holistic fitness dimensions on brand capital indicate that movement-based experiences create durable symbolic and emotional value for consumers (Kamran et al., 2021). Unlike conventional branding assets that rely heavily on visual identity or promotional intensity, fitness-based brand capital emerges from repeated embodied experiences that reinforce trust, credibility, and perceived authenticity. This finding aligns with emerging branding theories that emphasize experiential and relational value creation, extending them by empirically demonstrating how fitness functions as a renewable and accumulative branding resource (Dyer et al., 2018).

### *Centrality of mental–emotional integration in consumer bonding*

Among the holistic movement dimensions, mental–emotional integration exhibited the strongest influence on brand capital and showed high relational connectivity across leadership and market outcome variables (Nyadzayo et al., 2020). This suggests that consumers increasingly value fitness experiences that address stress regulation, emotional resilience, and psychological well-being alongside physical outcomes (Baloglu et al., 2019). The prominence of this dimension reflects a broader shift in wellness consumption, where fitness is no longer evaluated solely by performance metrics but by its capacity to support holistic life balance. Brands that successfully integrate mental–emotional elements appear better positioned to foster emotional attachment and long-term loyalty, reinforcing the argument that affective engagement is central to sustainable market share growth.

### *Female leadership as a credibility and trust amplifier*

The findings highlight female leadership attributes particularly authenticity and inclusivity as dominant predictors of brand capital. This underscores the role of leadership visibility and value alignment in shaping consumer perceptions. Female-led brands often communicate through narratives of lived experience, care, and community-building, which resonate strongly with consumers seeking relatable and trustworthy fitness environments. The strength of leadership effects observed in this study suggests that leadership is not merely an organizational characteristic but an active branding mechanism that amplifies the credibility of fitness offerings (Lithopoulos & Rhodes, 2020). This insight expands leadership research within marketing by demonstrating how gendered leadership styles can directly translate into measurable brand and market outcomes (Onalaja & Otokiti, 2022).

### *Engagement intensity and consolidation of brand perceptions*

The distributional patterns revealed by engagement-based analysis indicate that higher levels of consumer participation are associated with both elevated and more stable brand capital (Bowden et al., 2018). Reduced variability in brand capital scores among highly engaged consumers suggests a consolidation effect, where repeated interaction reinforces consistent brand meaning and reduces perceptual uncertainty. This finding supports relationship marketing theories that emphasize frequency and continuity of interaction as foundations of trust and loyalty (Wolter et al., 2022). Importantly, it also implies that market share gains in fitness-driven brands are not driven solely by broad reach but by depth of engagement, highlighting the strategic importance of retention-focused growth models.

### *Brand capital as the mechanism linking fitness to market share*

Mediation analysis confirms that brand capital functions as the primary mechanism through which holistic movement practices and female leadership influence market share outcomes (Mubeen et al., 2020). While direct effects on repeat purchase and retention remain significant, the stronger indirect pathways emphasize that fitness-driven growth operates through accumulated trust, emotional attachment, and symbolic value. This finding challenges transactional views of fitness marketing that prioritize short-term conversions, instead supporting a relational growth model where market share expansion is the result of long-term brand equity accumulation. By empirically validating this mechanism, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how experiential offerings translate into economic performance (Otto et al., 2020).

### *Implications for contemporary branding and wellness markets*

Collectively, the results suggest that fitness-oriented brands operating in competitive wellness markets should prioritize leadership authenticity, holistic program design, and engagement depth over aggressive promotional strategies. The strong relational networks observed among leadership, brand trust, and repeat purchase behavior indicate that market differentiation is increasingly achieved

through meaning-driven experiences rather than price or scale alone (Kotler et al., 2020). For scholars, this study extends branding literature by integrating leadership, embodiment, and wellness into a unified analytical framework. For practitioners, it provides evidence-based guidance on leveraging fitness as a core strategic asset capable of driving sustainable market share growth in an increasingly values-driven consumer landscape (Camaréna, 2021).

### *Future research directions and theoretical refinement*

While the findings offer robust insights, future research could explore longitudinal dynamics to assess how fitness-based brand capital evolves over time and across life stages. Comparative studies across cultural contexts and male-led or mixed-leadership fitness brands would further clarify the specificity of gendered leadership effects. Additionally, integrating objective financial performance metrics could strengthen causal inference between brand capital accumulation and market share outcomes. Such extensions would refine the theoretical positioning of fitness as brand capital and deepen its relevance within broader marketing and organizational research.

### Conclusion

This study demonstrates that fitness, when strategically embedded through female-led and holistic movement practices, operates as a powerful form of brand capital that directly contributes to sustainable market share growth. The findings show that holistic integration of physical and mental–emotional dimensions, reinforced by authentic and inclusive female leadership, significantly strengthens brand trust, emotional attachment, and consumer loyalty. Rather than functioning as a peripheral wellness offering, fitness emerges as an experiential branding asset that accumulates value through repeated engagement and community formation. By empirically validating brand capital as the key mechanism linking fitness practices to market outcomes, this research advances contemporary branding theory and provides actionable insights for wellness-oriented brands seeking long-term competitive advantage in increasingly values-driven markets.

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