

The Comparative Analysis Of The Commercialization Of The Health And Fitness Industry

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I. Introduction

From a niche market to a multi-billion-dollar global phenomenon, the world health and fitness industry has dramatically transformed over the last couple of decades. This fast-growing field-encompassing wellbeing programs, dietary supplements, and digital solutions-offered through gyms has grown exponentially due to increased awareness of good health, improving technology, and changing lifestyle concepts. It has further extended to include mental and spiritual well-being over the years, as the priorities of people began to shift away from physical improvements in the past decade.¹

Most of the traditional fitness practices have their roots traced back to ancient cultures, where it forms part of the essential component of cultural, social, and spiritual life. For example, physical fitness in ancient Greece was closely connected with the values of the society: Olympic Games were a celebration of athleticism and physically strong individuals.² In contrast, ancient China had exercises that targeted a balance in physical health through mental and spiritual exercises, such as Tai Chi, while ancient India had its own form called Yoga.³ These few ancient practices laid the groundwork for modern fitness regimes; it wasn't until the 20th century that the industry took to large-scale commercialization with the rise of bodybuilding culture, fitness magazines, and the introduction of modern gym chains.

The commercialization of the fitness industry-the provision of exercise services for monetary and financial purposes-accelerated rapidly in the late 20th and early 21st centuries because of influences including bodybuilding icons such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, fitness-focused media, and home workout videos.⁴ The entry of the digital era in the early 2000s also introduced new dimensions in the field of fitness through online workout programs, apps related to fitness, and wearable devices. The revolution has further made fitness more accessible, customized, and goal-oriented for the individual needs of people, really altering the face of this industry.

In tune with this global trend, the Indian health and fitness industry has also shown rapid expansion. Thus, the Indian fitness sector is a rapidly growing and diversified market with a growing middle-class population, a rise in disposable incomes, and increased awareness of the benefits of physical fitness and wellness.⁵ However, India's unique socio-economic and cultural landscape presents opportunities but also challenges for commercializing these services and products in the fitness market. This includes traditional yoga and Ayurveda that are targeted for holistic well-being and have now merged into the modern concept of a fitness regime, hence creating a hybrid market in India that knits ancient wisdom with contemporary trends in fitness.

The present study has proposed a comparative analysis of commercialization trends in the global health and fitness industry with special attention being given to the Indian context. The present research work attempts to trace the growth path, the present scenario, and the emerging outlook of the fitness sector in the world as well as in India, besides highlighting the chief drivers, barriers, and opportunities that mark this vibrant industry. In essence, the objectives of the study are to examine the pattern of market growth, consumer behaviour, assessment of regulatory frameworks, and the impact of technological innovations on the fitness industry. In the

¹ Millington, Brad. "Smartphone Apps and the Mobile Privatization of Health and Fitness." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 2014.

² Breesch, D., S. Vos, and J. Scheerder. "The Financial Viability of the Fitness Industry in Belgium." *Sport, Business and Management*, 2015.

³ Sharma, P., and J. Clarke. *Ayurveda and the Modern World: Transformation, Commercialization, and Wellness*. 2014.

⁴ Borgogni, A., S. Digennaro, and G. Russo. *Fitness in Italy: Body Culture, Well-Being and Active Lifestyles*. 2020.

⁵ Rossi, L., C. Breuer, and S. Feiler. "Determinants of Non-Profit Sports Clubs' Perceived Competition from Commercial Sports Providers." *Sport Management Review*, 2020.

end, this will add substantial knowledge that shall help policymakers, business leaders, and researchers whose area of interest covers the commercial line of health and fitness.

II. Literature Review

Historical Overview of the Practice of Fitness in Ancient India

The history of fitness practices in India emanates from the old traditions of ancient Indians, wherein physical, mental, and spiritual well-being were considered the elements of health in a holistic manner. One of the most long-standing contributions that have been made by India in the field of global fitness culture is yoga, which can be traced back over 5,000 years. It was originally developed as a spiritual practice with the aim of achieving unity among the body, mind, and soul.⁶ Detailed descriptions of various yogasanas, pranayama exercises, and meditation practices that can help in building physical strength, mental clarity, and spiritual enlightenment have been described by ancient texts in the form of Vedas and Upanishads.⁷

Along with yoga, the other instance of ancient fitness, which is very culturally deep-rooted, is a martial art known as Kalarippayattu. It originated in the southern state of Kerala. Kalarippayattu is one of the oldest fighting systems in the world, teaching one flexibility, speed, and strength combined with philosophical self-discipline and harmony. Likewise, Ayurveda—an ancient Indian treatment system—includes physical exercises as an intrinsic constituent in health management. According to the Ayurvedic texts, some form of exercise should be done daily to balance the three doshas of the body: vata, pitta, and kapha, for wellness.

In the light of these statements, traditional physical activities were not driven by commercial ends but were about keeping the physical, mental, and spiritual in equilibrium. Undeniably, such methods have developed and influenced modern conceptions of fitness in India and the rest of the world. The global popularity of yoga, in particular, created a multi-billion-dollar industry based on classes, retreats, merchandise, and wellness tourism. However, this commercialization of ancient practices also initiated debates about the commodification of cultural heritage and dilution of traditional values.⁸

Comparison of Traditional Fitness Practices with Modern Fitness Industry Trends

While the traditional Indian exercises essentially honed the body for overall well-being, the contemporary fitness industry in India—and indeed the world over—has been influenced by several extraneous factors, with major contributions from Western fitness trends. Commercialization of fitness in India started gathering steam post-economic liberalization of the 1990s, which opened the country's gates to international markets and rising urbanization. As disposable incomes went up and urban lifestyles became sedentary, people started asking for more structured fitness programs that could address the needs of the growing middle class. It was during this period that international chains like Gold's Gym, Fitness First, and Anytime Fitness entered, offering gym-based workout routines with world-class equipment to Indian consumers.⁹

Therefore, contemporary Indian fitness became hybridized where traditional influences impacted modern workouts and vice versa. On one hand, many consumers continued turning to yoga because of perceived mental and spiritual benefits; on the other hand, the predisposition towards gym-based workouts, personal training, and digital fitness solutions increased. With increased access to means of monitoring progress and setting personalized goals for fitness, added to the ease of access to workout programs from their living rooms, technology has, to say the least, helped make exercising easier. The changes in technology have played a significant role in the commercialization of health and fitness, catering to a generation of youth accustomed to advanced technology.

Social media outlets like Instagram and YouTube have commercialized the concept of fitness even further, giving a voice to every type of fitness influencer and guru hawking everything from workout regimes to particular types of fitness products. All these individuals can turn everything into markets for merchandise—ranging from gym clothes to supplements—further confusing the idea of fitness as a personal enterprise and not some kind of corporate business.¹⁰

Key Factors that Have Contributed to Commercialization of Fitness

1. **Economic Liberalization:** Opening of the Indian economy in the 1990s became a watershed moment for the fitness industry, which opened the doors for the entry of international brands into the Indian market and

⁶ Sharma, P., and J. Clarke. *Ayurveda and the Modern World: Transformation, Commercialization, and Wellness*. 2014.

⁷ Vivekananda, Swami. *Yoga and Its Spiritual Dimensions*. 2019.

⁸ Stein, A. "The Transformation of the Fitness Industry during the COVID-19 Pandemic." 2021.

⁹ KPMG India. *India Fitness Services and Equipment Industry Outlook to 2019*. KPMG, 2020.

¹⁰ Oymak, C. "The Impact of Exposure to Ideal-Sized vs. Average-Sized Influencers on Purchase Intention and Consumer Well-Being in Fitness Industry." 2022.

increased the exposure to global trends on fitness. An increase in disposable incomes amongst the urban middle class led to increased expenditure on services and products related to fitness, thus further feeding the growth of this industry in a big way.¹¹

2. Urbanization and Lifestyle Changes: As more people started to shift to cities, there was an increase in sedentary lifestyles and growing awareness of the need to engage in regular physical activity. It is this urbanization that has brought a shift in consumer behaviour for whom fitness is a cardinal element in contemporary life.¹²

3. Technological Advancements: Workout regimes have changed with the introduction of fitness apps, wearable technology, and digital fitness platforms. Today, consumers can avail custom-built workout plans, track their fitness progress, and even enroll themselves in virtual fitness classes, making fitness more accessible and convenient than ever before.¹³

4. Social-media and Influencers: The rise of social media has promoted some so-called fitness influencers who have gained a considerable number of followers online. Most of them use that platform to sell products and services related to fitness. In this way, a highly commercial culture has been developed in a sector such as fitness, where the influencers themselves act as brand ambassadors, selling sporting goods, supplements, and exercise programs.¹⁴

5. Government Initiatives: Initiatives by the Indian government, such as the Fit India Movement, launched in 2019, to encourage people to be fitter, have also shaped the growth of the industry. Such government-endorsed initiatives have been creating awareness about being physically fit and have further contributed towards increasing the industry's growth.¹⁵

III. Methodology

A qualitative research design is especially befitting for ascertaining the socio-economic and cultural drivers of commercialization for the health and fitness industry in India. Qualitative research allows a deep and rich understanding of complex interactions between traditional and modern fitness practices, trends, and consumer response. Both sources of primary and secondary data are considered in the present study with a view to comprehensively analysing the growth and commercialization of the fitness industry.

Data Collection

The process of data collection would involve a literature review of available research, books, and scholarly articles on the traditional and modern aspects of fitness. The literature review would be a good foundation to understand how fitness has evolved from being a personal pursuit into a commercialized industry, with particular emphasis on the Indian context.¹⁶

IV. Historical Analysis

More traditional workouts, such as Yoga, Kalarippayattu, and Ayurveda, were the center of India's holistic health concept for many millennia. Of these, Yoga happens to be one of the most ancient and possibly most durable contribution of India towards global health and wellness practices.¹⁷ While the inspiration of yoga is rooted in ancient texts like the Vedas and Upanishads, in practice, yoga goes beyond the realm of mere physical fitness and turns out to be an enduringly spiritual discipline committed to unifying the mind, body, and

¹¹ KPMG India. *India Fitness Services and Equipment Industry Outlook to 2019*. KPMG, 2020.

¹² Rossi, L., C. Breuer, and S. Feiler. "Determinants of Non-Profit Sports Clubs' Perceived Competition from Commercial Sports Providers." *Sport Management Review*, 2020.

¹³ Millington, Brad. "Smartphone Apps and the Mobile Privatization of Health and Fitness." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 2014.

¹⁴ Oymak, C. "The Impact of Exposure to Ideal-Sized vs. Average-Sized Influencers on Purchase Intention and Consumer Well-Being in Fitness Industry." 2022.

¹⁵ Government of India. Fit India Movement. 2020, <https://fitindia.gov.in>.

¹⁶ Bryman, Alan. *Social Research Methods*. 5th ed., Oxford University Press, 2016.

¹⁷ Sharma, P., and J. Clarke. *Ayurveda and the Modern World: Transformation, Commercialization, and Wellness*. 2014.

soul. The practice of yoga seeks to balance the physical and mental faculties of individuals through physical postures, breathing techniques, and meditation practices.¹⁸

Kalaripayattu is believed to be one of the oldest fighting systems of the world, born in Kerala, and it represents a tradition marked by physical agility, strength, and flexibility, integrated into philosophical principles of self-discipline and inner harmony. Competitions and tournaments have kept this ancient martial art spiritual and meditative and untouched by business interests of any kind.

Ayurveda is an ancient Indian treatment, and it has included physical fitness as its prime aspect in the routine to keep people healthy. It recommends daily exercises according to the constitution, or dosha, a person has, aimed at fostering longevity and energy. It synthesizes diet, exercise, and mental well-being in arguably one of the most well-rounded wellness systems in the world.¹⁹

Evolution of Traditional Practices and Their Influence on the Modern Fitness Industry

In the economic and social changes of the 20th and 21st centuries, most of these practices harnessed themselves to the demands posed by modern consumers. Of these, Yoga has become an international fad, from branded yoga studios and yoga retreats to yoga merchandise of all kinds that sell and exploit the practice. While the traditional form of yoga focuses on spiritual enlightenment and general body health, modern yoga projects health and body flexibility; most studios advertise this through several forms of exercises like power yoga, hot yoga, and aerial yoga.²⁰ The trend has further been driven by social media influencers and celebrities through proclaiming yoga as one of their go-to means in maintaining good health.²¹

Similarly, Ayurveda has been put into practice in the modern wellness industry, with Ayurvedic treatments, dietary supplements, and retreats gaining momentum in the consumer market both in India and the world over. On the other hand, such commercialization also triggers debates on the commodification of cultural heritage and loss of traditional values.²²

Current State of the Fitness Industry in India

The modern fitness industry in India has grown considerably because of factors like urbanization, rising disposable incomes, and growing awareness about health. The industry today is a mix of traditional know-how related to yoga and modern trends of fitness related to gym-based workouts, personal training, and digital fitness platforms. According to a report by KMPG, the Indian fitness market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 20 per cent in the next five years led by growth in gym chains, fitness apps, and wellness products.²³

Similarly, the industry is inclusive in India, too, as more and more women and elderly individuals are getting involved in the different exercise programs. The scenario is further facilitated by the special sessions and arrangements provided by these exercise centers according to the needs of individuals based on their demographic backgrounds, including prenatal yoga, senior fitness classes, and women-only gyms.²⁴

Major Players, Trends, and Market Dynamics

The Indian fitness industry primarily includes players operating both internationally and domestically. International brands like Gold's Gym and Anytime Fitness are already present in metros, touting high-end gyms with top-class equipment. Homegrown brands such as Cult fit and Talwalkar's have well-established digital fitness solutions integrated with offline services, using which a consumer can access workout programs, nutrition advice, and mental wellness content on their smartphones.²⁵

For the last couple of years, one of the big trends has been the rise in digital fitness platforms. Due to the COVID-19 virus, many consumers have had to put lockdowns and social distancing into place, which forced a move toward online classes, virtual personal training, and fitness apps as a way to keep their exercise routine intact. This further accelerates the adoption of technology in the fitness industry and opens new avenues for relevance with consumers for fitness brands.²⁶

¹⁸ Vivekananda, Swami. *Yoga and Its Spiritual Dimensions*. 2019.

¹⁹ Webb, J. B., E. R. Vinoski, and J. Warren-Findlow. "Is the 'Yoga Bod' the New Skinny?" *Body Image*, 2017

²⁰ Webb, J. B., E. R. Vinoski, and J. Warren-Findlow. "Is the 'Yoga Bod' the New Skinny?" *Body Image*, 2017

²¹ Oymak, C. "The Impact of Exposure to Ideal-Sized vs. Average-Sized Influencers on Purchase Intention and Consumer Well-Being in Fitness Industry." 2022.

²² Stein, A. "The Transformation of the Fitness Industry during the COVID-19 Pandemic." 2021.

²³ KPMG India. *India Fitness Services and Equipment Industry Outlook to 2019*. KPMG, 2020.

²⁴ SAGE Journals. "Young Middle-Class Women, Consumption, and Fitness in India." *SAGE Journals*, 2020.

²⁵ Research and Markets. *India Gyms, Health and Fitness Clubs Market to 2027*. Research and Markets, 2021.

²⁶ Stein, A. "The Transformation of the Fitness Industry during the COVID-19 Pandemic." 2021.

While modern trends of fitness practices in India are highly influenced by Western trends, traditional forms of practices such as yoga and Ayurveda form an important constituent of the fitness landscape. However, commercialization of all these traditional practices has shown to occur at the cost of a trade-off: how well they can maintain their authenticity in light of demands for modernist variants by the modern consumer. For example, yoga is remade from its spiritual roots into a fitness routine, and many studios have variants where the latter is not only dominant but alone.²⁷ Similarly, too often the presentation of Ayurvedic treatments has tended to reflect a bias toward 'wellness' services rather than locating these as an integral part of a system concerned with health management.²⁸

V. Case Studies

Case Study 1: Cult fit

Amongst the fittest fitness startups, Cult fit belongs to India. The organization offers an offline fitness space: Cult fit, with an online solution through its Cult fit app. Starting operations in the year 2016, within a short time period, Cult fit attained the top position in the Indian fitness companies with over 200 fitness centers across major cities. According to Research and Markets, this was estimated in the year 2021. Its innovative approach to fitness could be greatly contributory to the success of the company. In all, the company integrates workouts, mental well-being, nutrition, and coaching on lifestyle.²⁹

For the gym lovers who couldn't spend enough time going to the gym, the COVID-19 pandemic made Cult fit a saviour. The company's digital platform offered customers live sessions, on-demand classes, and personal training virtually, hence allowing them to work out from the comfort of their homes. In fact, this hybrid model-offering both offline and online-fitness services by the company positioned them as one of the leaders in the digital fitness space.

Case Study 2: Gold's Gym India

As an international fitness chain that entered the Indian market in the early 2000s, it was soon followed by quite a few. Gold's Gym has carved a niche as a premium fitness brand associated with high-quality equipment, competent trainers, and various fitness programs. Being adaptable to the local market conditions and standards yet maintaining international standards helped Gold's Gym succeed in India.³⁰

Following the trends of the digital workout, online workout programs and virtual personal training sessions via mobile apps are offered. In this respect, increasing demand for digital fitness services enabled the company to expand the business beyond the physical confines of a gym.³¹

VI. Conclusion

The whole health and fitness industry has been passing through a sea of change for the last couple of decades or so, both globally and in India-from a very esoteric, 'personal good health' market to one that is of high commercial value and profit-oriented. This blending of traditional workouts, such as yoga and Ayurveda, with modern ones, which are brought about by technology and globalization, presents an exciting and eclectic landscape for fitness in India. Opportunities and barriers that have, in a nutshell, pushed through with the commercialization of the fitness industry, have been elaborated in this paper in detail, particularly with respect to the Indian context.

The study shows how technology democratizes fitness to make it accessible for all. Digital fitness platforms, along with fitness apps and wearables, allow the consumer to create and track their own personalized routines.

The rapid commercialization of fitness in India is simultaneously attributed to international brands of fitness and the influence of fitness-chalking social media influencers.

This is commercialization of the traditional workout, like yoga, and raises serious questions on the commodification of cultural heritage and the need for preserving such practices in their originality. While the business of fitness will continue to evolve, the striking of balance between commercial interests and preservation of values will be highly crucial to the stakeholders in this industry.

²⁷ Oymak, C. "The Impact of Exposure to Ideal-Sized vs. Average-Sized Influencers on Purchase Intention and Consumer Well-Being in Fitness Industry." 2022

²⁸ Sharma, P., and J. Clarke. *Ayurveda and the Modern World: Transformation, Commercialization, and Wellness*. 2014.

²⁹ Research and Markets. *India Gyms, Health and Fitness Clubs Market to 2027*. Research and Markets, 2021.

³⁰ KPMG India. *India Fitness Services and Equipment Industry Outlook to 2019*. KPMG, 2020.

³¹ Research and Markets. *India Gyms, Health and Fitness Clubs Market to 2027*. Research and Markets, 2021.

Further study will be focused on the possibilities of expanding rural markets in India and the influence of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality in the next phase of development in the fitness industry. Further studies need to be conducted to analyze the impact that government initiatives, such as the **Fit India Movement**, can have on the growth of the industry while contributing toward public health.

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