Sport’s Branding Vs General Fitness Branding Promotion and Industry Positioning: A Myth, A Misnomer, or A Reality yet to come

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Abstract

Background: The objective of this study was to establish an Interface between sports-persons, fitness enthusiasts, general fitness equipment manufacturing industry and marketability of general sports brands & products for mass appeal. This study gains importance as there is a need of awareness of general fitness lifestyle (and products thereon) among the genre for reduction of medical exposure achievable through higher fitness levels and access to good quality products with an aim to develop the reach of general fitness equipment manufacturer through proper penetration into developing markets like India. Methods: The sample consisted of 80 individuals from a diverse age group ranging from 18 years to above 50 years who practice fitness and look at it as a way of healthy living. A questionnaire in the form of a google form was used to collect data. Conclusion: The results indicated that a huge potential exists for general fitness equipment industry in developing countries like India. With a greater involvement of the Indian working class contributing to most of the corporates worldwide, they also tend to be exposed to stress and start understanding the meaning of keeping fit in these taxing times. Also, with money to “spare” they are constantly seeking fitness gears which are suitable to their pockets hence the market opens up for general fitness equipment as suggested in this paper.

Keywords: Fitness apparel, Fitness equipment, Fitness gears, Sports goods

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1. Introduction:

1.1 Acceptability of general fitness goods in enhancing general fitness as a way of life

In today’s world the demand on every individual has increased multi-fold leading to stress in everyday life. So therefore, in this modern era, fitness has become more than important for every individual¹. To keep up with the times, a feather light regime of fitness has become essential to maintain productivity & relevance. A brisk run or walk of a short distance helps individuals release stress which has an impact in the general lifestyle & productivity.

Today, every Sports and Fitness equipment industry aims to cater to this changing need and taste of customers as per geographical, demographical, psychological, economical, physiological, and sociological factors and conditions. Recent years has seen a shift in the way advertising industry operates, previously they used to only focus on their product and its capabilities/characteristics but now it is targeting on everyday lifestyle of people. Popular brands like Nike have transformed/converted themselves and have become a part of personality of individuals through their innovative approach of advertising and creating brand campaigns according to culture that’s prevails over a particular society². In previous years it was observed that Sports & Fitness equipment sector in Indian Market often identified sportspersons as their target consumer. But according to changing trends of our society and market, they are now making attempts to influence and widen their range of customer base³. Also, it has been noticed from
response of the past surveyors that people are more influenced by information and the purpose served by the sports apparel/equipment rather than value-addition of a specific product\(^4\). Moderate aerobic exercises such as walking, jogging, swimming play a very crucial role in maintaining one's health and mind. Once an individual goes through a knee or hip surgery, the mindset of that person changes towards doing aerobic exercises and yoga as it creates a sense of fear of hurting themselves again after surgery. A person’s confidence as well as self-belief is lost through the process. But some of the health officials have proved that mild level of physical activities helps people who have just had a replacement or surgery\(^5\). Another segment which has seldom addressed is the spectrum of people who may have a medical condition and have been advised walking, jogging or running by their medical practitioners. But in India they never could ‘make it’. The ‘fear’ factor plays a very important role in their thought process. They are always weighing the gains against the pains. What if they start a fitness regime but their body doesn’t support them – people with knee problems, lumber issues, back pains and the like? Here we need to address the issue whether mild exercises actually help people regain a fitness which benefits them in fighting these ailments. Medically it is proved that a general high level of fitness helps up remain ailment free.

Previous studies emphasized about the association between brand positioning, brand image and brand equity. After conducting a deep research, it was observed that positioning of a brand helped in increasing customer loyalty. A brand also uses the tool brand image as it is a major factor in keeping up the loyalty of a customer towards the brand. By differentiating the pros and cons of the internal and external environment, they aimed to study the quality measurement in a brand\(^6\). Also, one particular study stated that a celebrity endorsed apparel or a sports shoes gained a higher sense of popularity among consumers who are willing to buy branded products of high quality as taking into consideration various determinants like brand image, brand salience, awareness of the brand and brand familiarity\(^7\). Major shift has been observed in brands of sports industry and how it has now become an identity for youth as well as fitness enthusiasts. Advertisements are a medium of vehicle for the brands to showcase social, motivating and emotional messages in the form of a story untold\(^8\). Also need for brand strategies to create an effect in consumer behaviour pattern by applying different concepts of brand management was done by developing countries like China who had targeted the female as to increase their interest in physical exercises such as jogging on treadmill, cross trainer etc to increase manufacture of fitness equipment as well fitness apparels\(^9\).

### 1.2 Precedence

It would surprise us all that Sports Celebrity promotions only cater to 60% (value wise, 2017-18 figures) of the top-end-market whereas the balance of 40% (value wise, 2017-18 figures) is still deemed to be a virgin market. People go for ‘High End’ brands because they have not been offered a choice.

The below report depicted and assessed the market for sports comprehensively\(^{10}\). It covered two five-year time frames, 2014 - 2018, named the memorable period, and 2018 through 2022, the future. The global sports market reached a value of nearly $488.5 billion by the closure 2018, having grown at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.3% since 2014, and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 5.9% to nearly $614.1 billion (conservatively valued at 578.10 billion, 2021-22)\(^{10}\).

Breakdown of sports Market by kind of engagement into participatory sports and spectator sports where participatory sports market had 56.4% of share. As mentioned in the below table, it can be said that fitness and recreational market had major share which was perched at 39.8% (in 2018) as compared to others. It is expected to grow the fastest going forward at a CAGR of 8.4%.
Table No.1 - Current Breakdown of Global Sports Market value in relation to Fitness Market

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FY</th>
<th>Global Sports Market</th>
<th>Fitness Market</th>
<th>% Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>*488.50</td>
<td>*194.42</td>
<td>*39.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-2019</td>
<td>509.51</td>
<td>210.75</td>
<td>41.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>531.42</td>
<td>228.45</td>
<td>42.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-2021</td>
<td>554.27</td>
<td>247.64</td>
<td>44.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-2022</td>
<td>578.10</td>
<td>268.44</td>
<td>46.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig in (Billion USD)

*Figures may vary from different sources

Going forward, it was noted that Asia-Pacific is expected to be one of the fastest growing regions in this market with a larger focus on general fitness products where growth is expected to be 9.04% Year on year. These are only but conservative figures keeping in view the population having spare funds in hand owing to economic growth.

From the literature review it can be observed that brand building and management need to be endorsed by sports celebrities and sports brand owners who finance huge budgets for such endorsements. The past literature also tell about how brand positioning is important but studies have been done only on brand positioning of top brands according to quality of the product – price being in tag with quality. However today a general shift was noted in the market specific to Asia-pacific wherein Brand promotion by celebrities hardly makes a dent by the fact that it is perceived as a “Rich Man’s endeavor”. Most products that sell today in these markets are ‘utilities’ which do not carry a price tag edition brought in by celebrity’s promotions. A vivid example of acceptability of “non celebrity promoted brands” was confirmed when a French general fitness utility overtook the market share of leading celebrities promoted brands in INDIA as “Decathlon overtakes Adidas, Nike in sports gear retailing”

2. Material & methods:

This section describes the methodology utilized in this research study. The three sections presented are: Selection of sample, Data Collection Procedure and the Statistical techniques used.

2.1 Sample

The samples were selected randomly to include individuals showing enhanced interest in general fitness. The total number of respondents were to the tune of 114. The study was done randomly to include both Males and Females, also with age group splicing i.e. 18 yrs to 25 yrs; 25 yrs to 32 yrs; 32 yrs to 50 yrs and 50 yrs above. Also, in consideration was employment status of the respondent i.e. Students, Employed, Unemployed and retired. However, to justify the equanimity of a proper response, priority of selection of equal number of respondents based on age groups was more justified to provide proper meaning and direction to this survey. Therefore, Stratified Random Sampling was used in this study. In the sample size of 80, there were 80% males (n=64) and 20% females (n=16). With regards to employment status, 23%(n=18) are students;60%(n=48) are employed; 11%(n=9) are retired and remaining 6%(n=5) are unemployed.

2.2 Data collection Procedure

2.2.1 Nature of Data

The data collected for this study was primary data. The data collection procedure was formulated through a self-administered questionnaire in a structured form with a series of closed-ended questions “YES” or “NO” was circulated using Google Form. Care was taken for the
purpose of this study to ensure that the respondents whose feedback were erratic and non-sequential in nature were excluded to give more meaning and direction to this research paper.

2.2.2 Questionnaire Design

In a total questionnaire of 20 questions, the first 11 were set in such a way as to arrive to a conclusion of the respondent having a general fitness tendency mind. A clear demarcation was seen in the type of questionnaire setting in order to lead the participant to an “Either/ or” conclusion. The respondents were psychologically led (through questionnaire pattern) to verify that in today’s world general fitness has become a mandate for a meaningful professional output through a general fitness regime. Subsequent questions were set in such a way to get a clear demarcation and favourism of the respondent either towards celebrity promoted world class brands (irrespective of price tag) or towards general fitness wear reasonably priced for a general fitness workout.

2.3 Statistical Techniques

Descriptive statistics was used to check percentages of “YES” and “NO” for all 20 questions for 80 samples in this study. Chi Square Goodness of fit was used for data analysis. SPSS V 24 was used and the level of significance was kept at 0.05.

3. Results and Discussion:

The important findings of this research are indicated in the form of Pie charts as the study was explanatory in nature through the Results and Discussion section.

3.1 Relationship between “Brand loyalty” and “Fitness product” Market Acceptability

![Figure 1. Effect of Reasonable priced general fitness equipments on Branded products](http://doi.org/10.36295/ASRO.2020.231736)

In Figure.1, it was observed that 91% of the respondents responded positively (p<0.05) on preference of Reasonable priced, Reasonable quality General Fitness Products over Premium/Branded Fitness Products whereas only 9% responded as “NO”. The Results in this study reflected that the major causes for understanding behaviour of a consumer is satisfaction, investment in the brand and the quality of competitor brand. An individual’s commitment towards a brand is affected due to the high-priced products which leads him to choose the low priced or reasonable investment brand which in turn decreases his intention of buying the same costly product again. So, we can safely construe that size of investment, satisfaction and more alternate varieties of a sports apparel would decrease the brand value and loyalty for premium brands of sports such as Nike, Adidas, Puma. The same sentiments were reflected when
respondents were asked on preference of Reasonable priced, Reasonable quality General Fitness Products over Premium/Branded Fitness Products in the survey as depicted in Figure.1.

### 3.2 Favourism of Economic pricing rather than Brand image

The above figures 2 (a) indicated that around 68% respondents (p<0.05) had awareness of Indian sports fitness product whereas other 32% were still not aware of any Indian Brand. The other figure 2 (b) indicates preference of respondents for “Made in India” fitness products/brand/manufacturer, to this a huge percentage of people i.e. 93% of respondents (p<0.05) answered “YES” in the survey and only 7% did not prefer an Made in India fitness brand. A clear favourism was noted from the respondent’s end for the need of pricing to be economically set, it gave us enough indication that maximum number of respondents were of the view that celebrity endorsement may add up to cost substantially. This was clearly evident when the respondents answered question no.15 to 16 where reduced pricing factor gained prominence in the feedback, 80% respondents were in favour of the economic pricing rather than brand image. This is clearly supported by the fact that a general fitness equipment companies turnover exceeded 13. The following Favoured combinations came to light from these respondents:

a) Q1P2 product line  
b) Q2P3 product line  
(Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4…being Quality Levels of Products) Vs. P1, P2, P3, P4…being Price of Products both in reducing order, where most celebrity endorsed brands fall in the category of Q1P1 (High quality, High Price).
3.3 Psychology of Indian people towards Fitness Tendency

Table No. 2 – Representation of Fitness Tendency among Indian People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Gender (in %)</th>
<th>Age Group (in %)</th>
<th>Employment Status (in %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General fitness is a major player in a disease-free family lifestyle</td>
<td>99.22</td>
<td>98.75</td>
<td>95.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance and Preference of Yoga and Aerobic exercises</td>
<td>84.38</td>
<td>82.50</td>
<td>82.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for Outdoor exercises such as Jogging and Walking</td>
<td>99.22</td>
<td>98.75</td>
<td>99.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table No. 2 shows the three important statements that were placed in the survey to check fitness tendency among Indian masses in terms of Demographic Profile i.e. Gender, Age Group and Employment Status. Almost 92% respondents combined, showed inclination towards different forms of outdoor (jogging and walking) and indoor fitness (Yoga and Aerobic Exercises).

A clarity on the psychology of individuals towards “Fitness as a way of life” and the importance of “Remaining Fit” was noticed because of the positive responses to the statements indicated in the above represented table. Around 95% individuals these days believe that any form of fitness is vital to have a disease-free lifestyle(12).

3.4 Change in Brand Positioning Strategies

At the start of this advent the whole exercise was done to establish which was a stronger pitch for brands, products and market penetration. In all the years up to this start of the decade (i.e. 2010-20) we saw brands with limited line of products rule the market since the early 1990s(15). These brands, with a diversification of line-of-business (LOB) expected growth by adding accessories to the original brand name (1990-2010).

Up to the 1990’s leading brands of the world used to concentrate on their core competencies; Adidas, Nike, Reebok tended to be competitors being the leading footwear brands worldwide(14). We also had other examples like “Kettler” being the leading brand in gym equipment’s.

However, by the mid 1990’s these leading brands and their marketing advisors thereon felt a need of surpassing the saturation point of a single line of business. We saw additional fitness gears come in to market under the same brand name. One such example is Reebok. In 1990, Reebok established itself as a “Fitness Brand” also, through a product called “Reebok Step” to develop fitness culture and venture into fitness equipments(16). Yet the expected growth could not come to terms in many years.

3rd party Manufacturers in the Asia pacific region did enough research to understand market dynamics of marketing general fitness goods under newer blanket banners. Multi-utility stores of general fitness goods started popping up in the developing countries because of lenient quality controls maxims in these geographies(14). The same multi utility fitness goods stores were not visible in the developed markets though.

However the investment required for such multi utility fitness stores promotion, required investments and blocking of capital for a longer period of time as it was felt that acceptability of non- celebrity promoted general fitness goods markets will be slower in growth. But with adequate investments with a longer period of ROI promoters from developed countries started investing in this idea.
Multi utility equipment stores such as Decathlon in the last 10 years have grown bigger than the branded stores market and the growth is sustainable year on year as per projections\textsuperscript{(14)}.

3.5 Indications observed contrary to the Survey

According to a survey conducted by Duff & Phelps on “Celebrity Endorsements”, contrary to what indications we had obtained by the survey done in this research, it was found that celebrity endorsement has been a major game changer in the Indian industry with 50% of endorsements being done through celebrities\textsuperscript{(17)}. When we dwelled deeper into the study, we found that a major chunk of endorsements was being done by film celebrities up till 2016 in India (both value & number wise). Post 2017, a dramatic change happened when sports celebrities overtook the arena as observed in the below Figure 4. If we compare value-based status, value of sports celebrity endorsements has more than tripled in the period of 2016-2018 whereas film-based celebrity’s endorsements have only grown at a nominal pace. So, to safely construe whether sports celebrity endorsements are ringing the bells, going deeper into the report it was observed that there’s an inverse relationship between size/appeal of the product brand and the endorsement fee charged in exchange for the intangible value of being associated with that brand\textsuperscript{(17)}.

![Figure 4. Brand valuation of Sports Celebrities from year 2014 – 2018](image)

4. Conclusion:

Change in economic scenarios happens at a faster pace today than 20 years earlier. This especially holds true for a fastly paced developing country like India. More to it is added when the recent developments of China (being the world-wide manufacturing hub) facing a backlash from the “customer” economies in the last decade. Through this study it was identified that the current Indian market was inclined towards fitness lifestyle and was ready to accept an Indian general fitness equipment brand which would be for masses at a reasonable price than the branded products.

The fact that home consumption in India itself is one of the highest in the developing countries listing indicating that a huge market or multi utility fitness stores is but developing at a phenomenal pace as observed in this study, where the target population for general fitness products could be 48 respondents who fall between the age group 25-50 and >50 above.and are employed. Thus we can see that the targeted samples used for analysis had already exceeded the half of the total samples studied i.e. 80 samples. Coupling this with the recent impetus of the government of...
India to perch India also as a manufacturing hub gives feathers to the concept that we are administering herewith in this paper. “Made in India” and “Consumed in India” is the mantra in the present scenario. Meanwhile it also seems true that world markets are also looking for an alternative to single sources. The time is right, the market is ready, investments are adequately available, only the need is to make a logical and economical equation work, with the support of home consumption being more than adequate it seems the right time to make India a strong contender as a manufacturing hub for the global market. India already has trained manpower to get this going in the shortest possible time.

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