

Leveraging business opportunities' in the fitness industry sector; Post pandemic perspective

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Abstract: *The fitness industry in India is witnessing a paradigm shift and is only poised to set milestones in the future too. The pandemic has instilled in the people a greater necessity for a healthier body and mind and has also resulted in the demand for fitness centres as well as wellness centres. However, the sector had been confronted with numerous socio-demographic trends on account of the pandemic situation. There is also a consciousness and growing recognition that fitness executives need to be prepared to work with special populations.*

Furthermore, we also study the attitude of the people towards fitness and the strategies that can be worked out to leverage the current position and during the post covid period.

Keywords: *fitness, strategies, post-covid, India, leveraging.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The outburst of COVID-19 pandemic has caused the fitness industry hit a major roadblock despite the fact that people have become more fitness conscious.

The lockdown orders by the government and social distancing norms resulted in a shift from on ground- gyms to digital platforms. It was surprising to see most of the players in the market moved to virtual platforms to cater to the changing needs of the clients, this included live streaming of fitness sessions, virtual personal training, consultations by nutritionists, mental health experts through online social and communication. Hence, making the virtual way of accessing fitness the new normal and a subsidiary to the on-ground fitness services.

In India the fitness industry has gained a lot of popularity in the recent past with individuals choosing to go the healthier way by changing their lifestyle that includes eating healthy and more of physical activity.

However the idea of a healthy mind and body is not something that is new to Indians, as we have our history filled with yoga, Ayurveda and meditation. Well, thanks to globalization and digital platforms that this information is reaching a large group of people in a more modernized and structured manner.

But with the pandemic, one of the hardest hit industry is the fitness industry, from individuals unable to attend yoga sessions to not lifting weights at the gym, this pandemic has not only impacted individuals but has had a massive impact on fitness centres too. It is to be noted that some giant players like cult have gone digital, but small players have hit a road block due to the bog costs involved in going digital. These big brands and players are constantly improving their game so has to ensure that their clients are still able to achieve their fitness goals, and of course to retain the consumer base.

They are focusing on providing online training sessions, offering both live and pre-recorded classes, where gym members are instructed on how to perform their workouts at home, with or without certain equipment. They have also been putting more into their digital marketing budget to make workout from home possible.

Objectives:

To examine the main drivers towards Fitness activities.

To examine the expectations of the individuals from the fitness sector.

To suggest strategies to bring a paradigm shift in the fitness sector.

2. LITERATURE REVIEWS:

(Oberg & Tornstam, 2001) in their article titled Youthfulness and Fitness—Identity Ideals for All Ages? Have discovered that for all age groups fitness activities are important and that their benefits are numerous.

In their article titled Physical Fitness and Exercise during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Enquiry (Kaur, Singh, Arya, & Mittal, 2020) have found out that the target respondents had displayed mental health issue and their dependence on social media was also more than usual during the lock down. However, it was also noticed that here was a considerable rise in their self-motivation which led to decreased dependence on gyms and at home exercises and this in turn helped them battle their mental health concerns while also catering to their fitness needs.

A study by (Sanda, Mathisen, Borgen, Borgen, & Tangen, 2020) on The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown During Spring 2020 on Personal Trainers' Working and Living Conditions has revealed that the Covid 19 has had a negative impact on the Personal Trainers in Norway, it was found out that the working hours for woman had reduced drastically in comparison to male PTs. It was noticed that 40% of the respondents were unable to continue own physical activity and exercise during the lockdown.

Flattening the curve of mental ill-health: the importance of primary prevention in managing the mental health impacts of COVID-19, a study conducted by (Carbone, 2020) in their study have opined that COVID-19 has resulted in various mental disorders that are an outcome of social isolation; unemployment; housing and income stress; domestic violence; work-related trauma; and grief and loss. Primary prevention is important to curb the mental disorders that are a result of COVID-19 pandemic. As a means to tackle these issues focus on self-care, mental health, social and emotional learning programs etc. should be there.

The possibilities of an increase in spending more time sitting, lying down activities, reduced physical activities, excessive food consumption is high due to the lock down which in turn may result in a sedentary lifestyle that will cause chronic health issues and that is why physical activity is all the more important during these testing times.

(Chen, et al 2020) are of the opinion that exercising at the comfort of the home and leading an active lifestyle will help in keeping the virus at bay besides reducing chronic health issues. The use of virtual exercise videos, which focuses on encouraging and delivering physical activity through the Internet, mobile technologies, and television other viable avenues for maintaining physical function and mental health during this critical period will only aid the process. They have quoted Dr Steven Blair's quote from Dr Ken Powell: "Some activity is better than none, and more is better than less". The aim should be to undertake at least 30 min of moderate physical activity every day and/or at least 20 min of vigorous physical activity every other day to reiterate the importance of physical activity. To maintain a regular physical activity is important for a healthy living during the crisis time.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Design

As outlined above, our goal is to identify the main drivers for change and development in The fitness sector as well as the drivers to fitness activities and the strategies to be adopted to bring about a makeover in the fitness industry. Here, we define fitness professionals as instructors, trainers, and other exercise specialists, qualified to deliver diverse, structured exercise programmes that help people of all ages and abilities to improve their fitness and physical health. The data has been gathered through Primary data collection as well as secondary sources. Specifically, respondents were asked to evaluate, on a five-point scale, if a particular trend or challenge was either significant (5 = Significant Impact to 1 = No Impact) or likely (5=extremely likely to 1 = Unlikely). Finally, it should be noted that our data was collected shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic showed a declining trend. Nevertheless, we analyse them later in the context of the needs and changes in the fitness sector caused by the situation.

Sampling

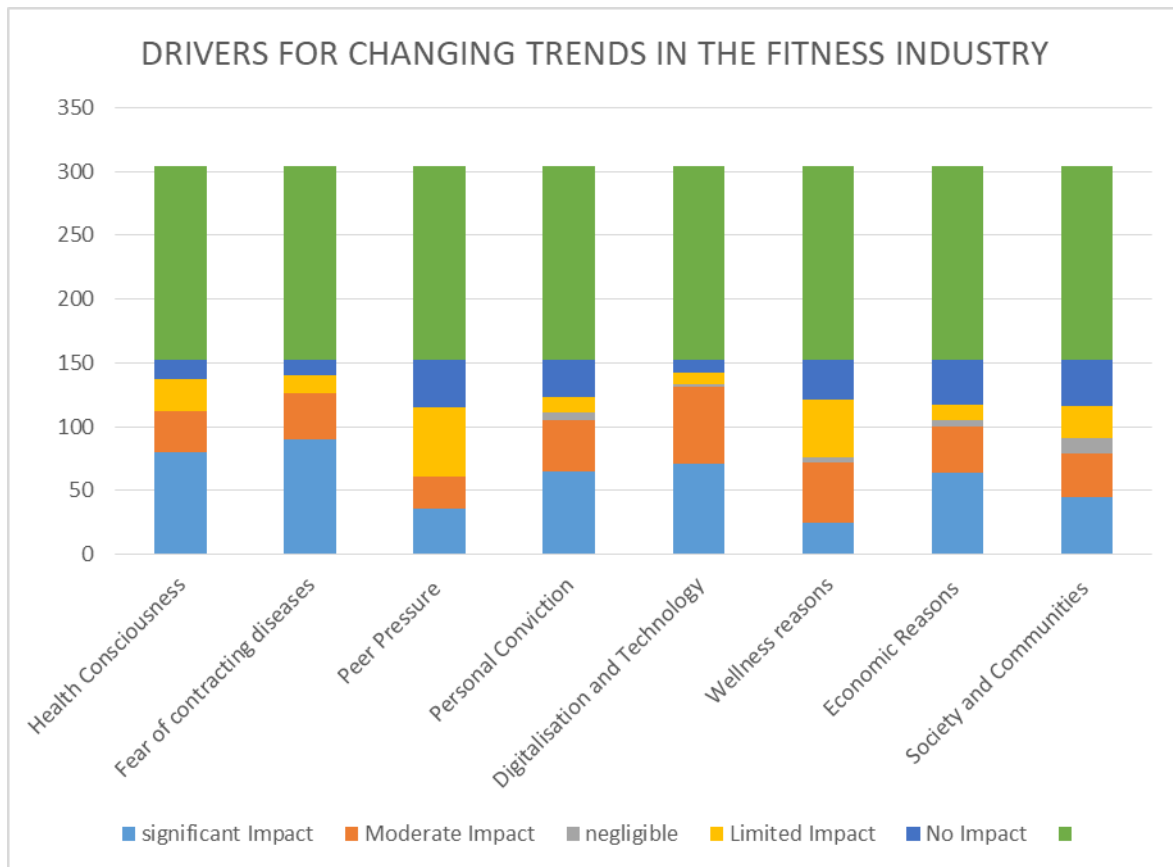
Purposive and snowball sampling were used to identify participants. We have aimed to achieve at least the recommended sample size of 152 respondents. The study of the driving forces towards fitness regimes, respondents were chosen on a convenience sampling mode from Bengaluru city. In order to examine the strategies adopted by the experts for revival of this sector were selected based on their experience and engagement in the fitness sectors, be it in terms of advocacy, management, implementation, or research. As such, experts could represent national fitness associations, fitness providers or academic institutions. Thus, the experts possessed both a wealth of experience as well as the diverse set of perspectives needed to build industry-wide consensus. Ultimately, this range of experts enhanced the credibility and applicability of the results, increasing the overall reliability of the findings. Similarly, the inclusion of experts who have knowledge of the sector and the multiple rounds of data collection support the validity of the results .Furthermore, all responses have been anonymised for publication.

2.3. Data Collection

2.3.1 Online Survey-The survey was sent out to the 52 identified experts.

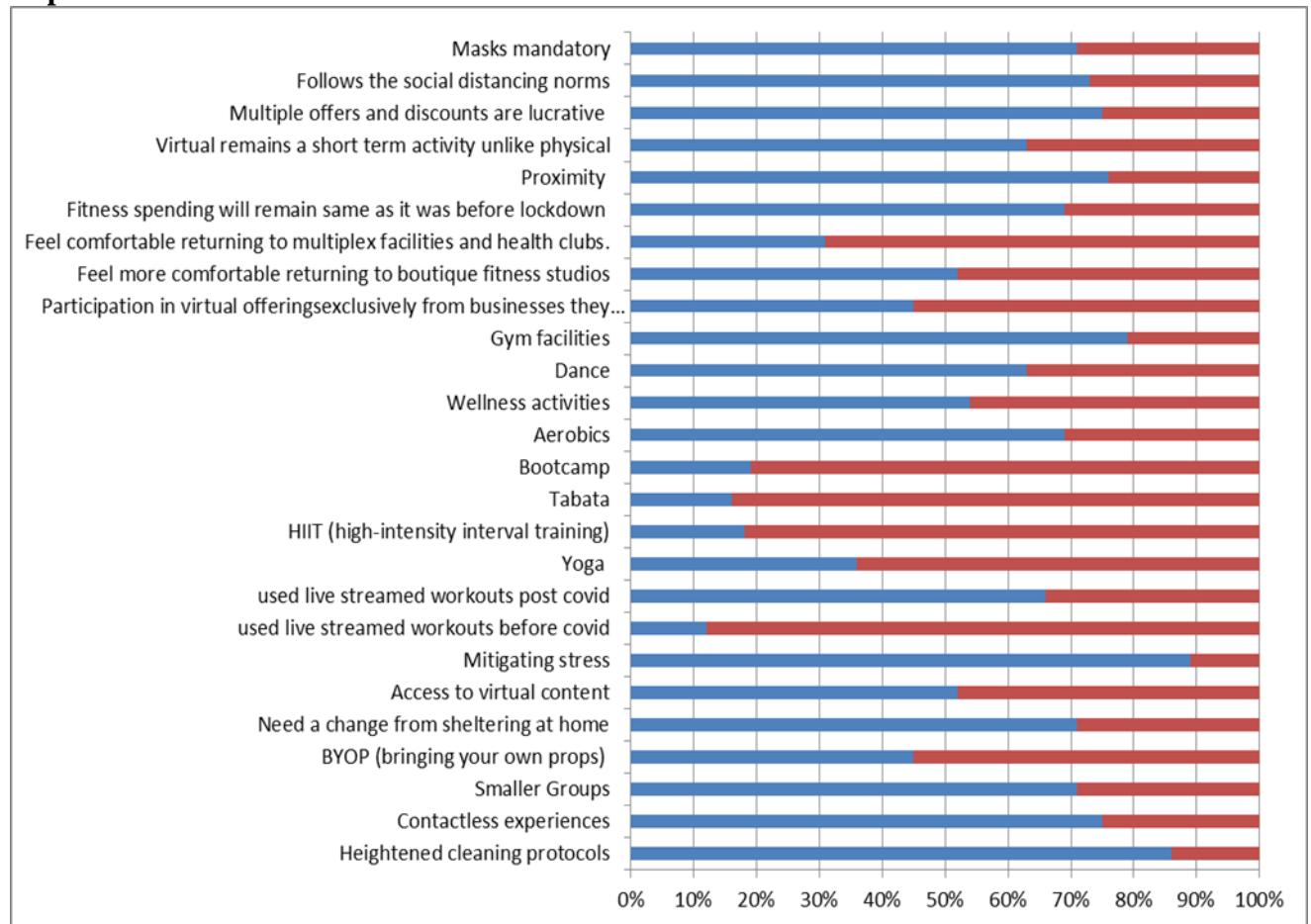
2.4. Data Analysis-Likert scale data obtained from the surveys were entered into a tabular format, and descriptive statistics were generated.

Main drivers for changing trends:



We surveyed over 120 app users and asked about their wellness routines during and post COVID-19 shelter-at-home. Have **virtual workout trends** changed? Are consumers maintaining their same workout schedules from home? Are they ready to return to their local fitness spots? What expectations do they have of these reopened fitness businesses? Will they continue to engage with virtual offerings moving forward?

Expectations from the fitness centres that lure the fitness conscious



4. SUGGESTIONS

From the research undertaken, we the authors have identified certain business models that the fitness industry can use to leverage business opportunities post pandemic.

a) Hybrid Business Models

Hybrid Business Models In this model, both the offline as well as the virtual studios should exist for the fitness freaks, so that they have an opportunity to choose from the most viable option. With the lockdown, many of the fitness geeks have got used to the virtual way of working out, which necessitates the culmination of both the options, both virtually and offline.

b) Cross Pollination of Services:

Creativity is essential for the fitness industry at this juncture when people are faced with options. They should venture across multiple mediums for attracting its customers and also for a better retention plan.

c) Personalised services: The fitness industry should offer more personalised services that are tailor made to suit the needs of the customers. Identification of the best routines for fitness, diet plans, online therapies and wellness plans should be integrated into the fitness plans of the fitness seekers.

d) Shift Back To Physical: For a gym enthusiast, the biggest concern at this present time is hygiene and sanitisation. The fitness studio should be able to install proper hand sanitizer

dispensers, entry only with masks on, adequate spacing and adherence to all the safety rules as prescribed by the government.

- e) **Smaller clusters:** The schedule for fitness sessions should be designed for smaller groups as personalised attention and safety norms can be followed if the groups are smaller. There should be arrangements for prior booking of fitness slots and a Standard Operating Protocol should be implemented so that the customers are satisfied with their fitness regime and stay on.
- f) **Holistic Wellness to be integrated:** In today's world fitness not only means physical fitness but also includes the wellbeing aspects, nutritional aspect and the spiritual wellness of beings. People have realised the importance of building immunity, staying fit and the importance of a holistic development of individuals. Coping with stress is another aspect that is redefining fitness to become more wellness oriented.
- g) **Business Avenue for Budding Entrepreneurs:** With the rising demand for fitness and wellness programs, there seems to be another avenue for a business opportunity that arises for the budding entrepreneurs. With an increasing consciousness on better health, the need for fitness services are also rising which becomes a potential opportunity for business seekers.
- h) **Mind mapping:** It is important to know the mind-sets of the people towards fitness and necessarily educate them and spread awareness of the importance of health in such daunting times. The stalwarts of the fitness industry have also been coming together to identify problem areas and chalk out developments and solutions to the ailing parameters. These initiatives may forever change the equation between the customer and industrialists and also stand as a precedent to quality consumer centric service.
- i) **Go digital:** One of the several places specified by the government to be closed down during the pandemic were the gyms and wellness centres. People were not allowed to go out and take necessary precautions. The situation though looks under control now, but future is uncertain. Therefore the service providers should also be prepared to go virtual in case the situation persists and not lose out on their customers.
- j) **The new norm:** The change in the fitness industry should not be taken as a temporary solution but incorporating new ideas in the industry should be done with a long term perspective in mind as we aren't sure as to how long the current scenario may last. New age fitness centres are becoming innovative and bringing the workout regimes right into the living rooms of people, adapting to what could very well become the new normal.
- k) **Campaigns:** Campaigns have become an effective way to arouse the customers. With a challenge to work out to standing out for a cause, the millennia generally respond to such massive movements and a good cause is meted out. For example the company Cure Fit had launched their #MovementForMovement campaign in order to support the fight on Covid-19.
- l) **Health Orientation in Fitness Offers Health** topic has now become the centre of focus during the pandemic. In principle, this is a good opportunity for the fitness industry to relook into the priorities of the customer and offer them a wholesome experience. Fitness would not only mean losing weight or staying in shape but has added a flavour of immunity development and better health. The need of the hour is that people get more prepared to battle the pandemic than just prevent getting sick.
- m) **Cut on duration:** People may not have the luxury of sparing an hour at the gym everyday however a 20 to 30 minute classes can do the magic. The short, high-intensity workouts can give a boost to the people who do not find enough time to hit the gym. It would assist in calorie burns and while increasing one's aerobic endurance and fat-burning capabilities.

5. CONCLUSION

The fitness industry has witnessed a gradual rise in its graph, with the current lifestyle, the need to be physically active is all the more important to live a healthy lifestyle. A quick flashback into the fitness and wellness industry in India, it is observed that this has been an unorganized sector, however with the advent of technology and digitization the industry is witnessing a progressive growth. Well, that was hindered by the pandemic and this caused a road block for the industry, with lock down being imposed across the globe and people wearing masks and practicing social distancing became the new normal, one of the industries that was affected was the fitness industry, owing to the humid environment, sharing of workout gear, exposed surfaces, and number of people in a small confined area, chances of transmission of virus was considered to be high. This led to a shift in the way fitness industry served its clients, many brand went virtual, live streaming of fitness sessions, virtual personal training, consultations by nutritionists, mental health experts through online social and communication platforms etc. were few of the techniques., which garnered great response from the public, people started logging onto fitness apps and continuing their fitness journey the digital way, ease of use, and low-cost subscriptions of online fitness sessions being the top advantages of going virtual. Sweating out from the comfort your living room or bed room was indeed appreciated and enjoyed. In conclusion it is observed that, considering the demand for physical activity and the fact that people have now tasted what it feels like to work out from the comfort of their homes, the fitness industry can devise strategies that would help them to bounce back into business and simultaneously satisfy their clients.

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