

Experience-Led Brand Visibility in the Fitness Industry: A Female-Centered Engagement Model

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Abstract: Brand visibility in the fitness industry is increasingly shaped by the quality of consumer experiences rather than traditional promotional intensity, particularly within female consumer segments. This study examines how experience-led engagement influences brand visibility in the fitness industry through a female-centered engagement model. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, data were collected from female fitness consumers with sustained engagement across organized fitness centers. Experience-led engagement was conceptualized through service interaction quality, personalization, inclusivity and safety, emotional support, and physical-digital environment experience. Structural equation modeling was employed to analyze direct and mediated relationships among experience-led engagement, emotional connection, trust, community engagement, and brand visibility outcomes. The results reveal that experience-led engagement significantly enhances emotional connection and trust, with emotional connection and community engagement emerging as the strongest predictors of brand visibility. Trust plays a supportive but secondary role in translating experiences into visibility. Cluster analysis further identifies distinct female engagement profiles, underscoring heterogeneity in experiential pathways leading to advocacy and brand recall. The study contributes to branding and service marketing literature by advancing an integrative, female-centered framework that explains how emotional and social mechanisms convert experiential value into sustainable brand visibility. The findings provide actionable insights for fitness organizations seeking to design inclusive, experience-driven engagement strategies that foster long-term brand advocacy.

Keywords: Experience-led branding; female-centered engagement; fitness industry; brand visibility; emotional connection; community engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The Changing Landscape of Brand Visibility in the Fitness Industry

The global fitness industry has undergone a structural shift from product- and promotion-led branding toward experience-driven value creation. Fitness brands are no longer differentiated solely by equipment quality, pricing, or location, but by the lived experiences they create for their members (Anderson *et al.*, 2021). This transition is especially pronounced in urban and semi-urban fitness markets, where consumers seek emotional connection, trust, and identity alignment with brands. Brand visibility in this context is not limited to advertising reach or digital impressions; rather, it is constructed through repeated, meaningful interactions that shape perception, recall, and advocacy (Kumar & Gupta, 2016). Experience-led branding thus emerges as a strategic imperative for fitness organizations seeking sustained visibility and loyalty in competitive environments (Smilansky, 2017).

Women as a Distinct and Influential Segment in Fitness Consumption

Female consumers represent one of the fastest-growing and most influential segments in the fitness industry. Their participation patterns, motivations, and engagement behaviors differ significantly from traditional, male-centric fitness models (Corbett *et al.*, 2021). Women often

approach fitness not only as a physical activity but as a holistic practice encompassing wellness, confidence, safety, social belonging, and mental health. Consequently, generic branding strategies frequently fail to resonate with female audiences, leading to underutilization, disengagement, or brand switching (Brown & Butler, 2019). Recognizing women as a distinct segment necessitates a rethinking of engagement models that account for their experiential priorities, emotional responses, and social contexts within fitness spaces (Coen *et al.*, 2020).

Experience-Led Engagement as a Driver of Brand Visibility

Experience-led engagement refers to the deliberate design of interactions that create positive emotional, cognitive, and social responses among consumers (Wrigley & Straker, 2019). In the fitness industry, these experiences span multiple touchpoints, including onboarding processes, trainer-member interactions, facility design, class formats, community-building activities, and digital engagement platforms (Steuernagel, 2022). For female participants, experiences related to inclusivity, personalized attention, body positivity, and psychological safety play a critical role in shaping brand perceptions. When such experiences are consistently delivered, they enhance brand visibility organically through word-of-mouth,

social sharing, and long-term retention rather than relying solely on paid promotions (Zhang *et al.*, 2017).

The Role of Emotional Connection and Trust in Female-Centered Fitness Branding

Emotional connection and trust are central to experience-led branding, particularly in female-centered fitness environments. Women are more likely to engage deeply with brands that demonstrate empathy, authenticity, and alignment with their personal values. Trust is built through transparent communication, supportive coaching, and environments that reduce intimidation and judgment (Schiemann *et al.*, 2019). These emotional dimensions transform fitness brands into safe spaces rather than transactional service providers. As a result, brand visibility becomes relational, driven by emotional resonance and advocacy rather than short-term exposure metrics (Cheng *et al.*, 2019).

Community, Identity, and Social Reinforcement in Engagement Models

Community formation is a powerful mechanism through which experience-led branding amplifies visibility in the fitness industry. Female-centered fitness models often emphasize group identity, peer support, and shared narratives of empowerment and self-improvement. Such communities reinforce engagement through social validation and collective participation, making the brand an integral part of members' social identities (Black & Veloutsou, 2017). This identity-based engagement extends brand visibility beyond physical spaces into social networks, digital platforms, and everyday conversations, creating a multiplier effect that traditional marketing strategies struggle to achieve (Wan & Li, 2024).

Gaps in Existing Branding and Engagement Research

Despite the growing relevance of experience-led branding, existing research on fitness industry branding remains largely generic or performance-focused, with limited attention to gender-specific engagement dynamics. Studies often emphasize service quality, satisfaction, or loyalty without explicitly modeling how experiential factors translate into brand visibility, particularly for female audiences. Moreover, there is a lack of integrative frameworks that connect experiential design, emotional engagement, community dynamics, and visibility outcomes within a single model. This gap limits the strategic applicability of

existing insights for practitioners targeting women-centric fitness markets.

Purpose and Contribution of the Present Study

Against this backdrop, the present study proposes an experience-led, female-centered engagement model to explain brand visibility in the fitness industry. The study aims to conceptualize how experiential touchpoints, emotional connection, trust, and community participation interact to enhance brand visibility among female consumers. By foregrounding women's lived experiences and engagement patterns, this research contributes a structured framework that advances both branding theory and practical strategy. The findings are expected to offer actionable insights for fitness brands seeking to design inclusive, experience-driven engagement systems that translate into sustainable brand visibility and long-term growth.

METHODOLOGY

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RESULTS

The descriptive statistics of experience-led engagement dimensions are presented in Table 1, which indicate generally high levels of positive experiential perception among female fitness consumers. Among the measured dimensions, perceived inclusivity and safety recorded the highest mean value, followed closely by trainer emotional support and personalization of training programs. These findings suggest that female participants place greater emphasis on emotionally supportive and psychologically safe environments than on purely functional or infrastructural aspects. Service interaction quality also demonstrated a strong mean score, whereas the physical–digital environment experience showed comparatively lower values and greater variability, reflecting

differences in facility design and digital integration across fitness centers.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of experience-led engagement variables

Variable	Mean	SD
Service interaction quality	4.12	0.61
Personalization of training programs	4.28	0.58
Perceived inclusivity and safety	4.41	0.52
Trainer emotional support	4.35	0.55
Physical–digital environment experience	3.97	0.69

The reliability and construct validity assessment summarized in Table 2 confirms the robustness of the measurement framework used in this study. All constructs exhibited high internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability values exceeding recommended thresholds. Average variance extracted values further

established satisfactory convergent validity across experiential, emotional, social, and outcome variables. These results validate the suitability of the scales for examining experience-led, female-centered engagement and its influence on brand visibility.

Table 2. Reliability and validity metrics of study constructs

Construct	Cronbach’s α	CR	AVE
Experience-led engagement	0.89	0.91	0.62
Emotional connection	0.87	0.90	0.64
Trust	0.85	0.88	0.61
Community engagement	0.83	0.86	0.59
Brand visibility	0.88	0.90	0.63

Structural relationships among the study variables are reported in Table 3. Experience-led engagement demonstrated a strong and statistically significant effect on emotional connection and trust, confirming its foundational role in shaping female consumer perceptions. Emotional connection emerged as the most influential predictor of brand visibility, followed by

community engagement, indicating that affective bonding and social reinforcement are primary mechanisms through which experiences translate into visibility outcomes. Trust also showed a significant but comparatively weaker effect, suggesting that while credibility and reliability are important, they are less decisive than emotional resonance in female-centered fitness branding.

Table 3. Path coefficients from structural equation modeling

Path Relationship	β	p-value
Experience-led engagement → Emotional connection	0.71	<0.001
Experience-led engagement → Trust	0.64	<0.001
Emotional connection → Brand visibility	0.53	<0.001
Community engagement → Brand visibility	0.47	<0.001
Trust → Brand visibility	0.32	0.004

Mediation analysis results presented in Table 4 reveal that emotional connection, trust, and community engagement partially mediate the relationship between experience-led engagement and brand visibility. The indirect effect through emotional connection was the strongest, highlighting its dominant role in converting experiential interactions into brand recall,

advocacy, and recommendation behavior. Community engagement also contributed substantially to indirect effects, underscoring the importance of peer interaction and group identity in extending brand visibility beyond the physical fitness environment. Trust, while significant, played a secondary mediating role.

Table 4. Mediation analysis results

Mediator	Indirect Effect (β)	Significance
Emotional connection	0.38	Significant
Trust	0.21	Significant
Community engagement	0.29	Significant

The comparative intensity of experience-led engagement dimensions is visually illustrated in Figure 1. The radar chart demonstrates that inclusivity and safety, emotional support, and personalization form the outermost axes, reinforcing their dominance in shaping positive female fitness experiences. In contrast, the

physical-digital experience occupies a relatively smaller radius, visually supporting the statistical findings in Table 1 without duplicating numerical values. This figure highlights the experiential hierarchy that underpins female-centered engagement models.

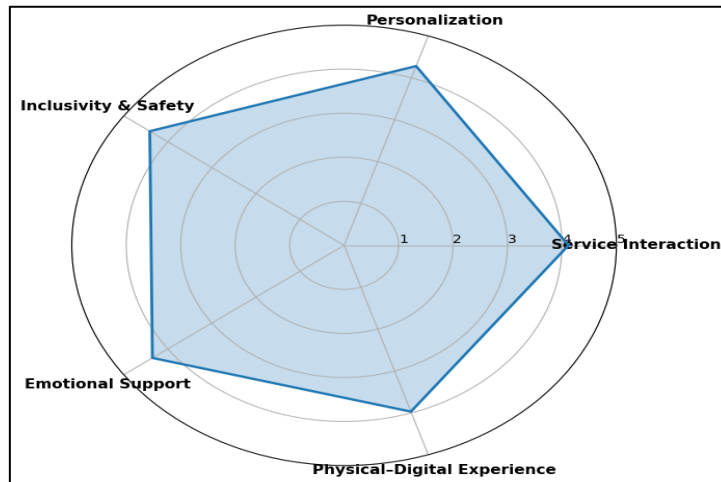


Figure 1. Radar chart of experience-led engagement dimensions

Engagement heterogeneity among respondents is further explored through the hierarchical cluster dendrogram shown in Figure 2. The dendrogram identifies three distinct female engagement profiles. One cluster represents emotionally driven advocates characterized by strong emotional connection and high visibility outcomes, another reflects community-oriented participants driven by

peer interaction and social belonging, and the third comprises functionally satisfied users who value service quality but exhibit lower advocacy behavior. This segmentation provides additional insight into how different experiential pathways lead to varying levels of brand visibility, complementing the structural relationships reported in Table 3.

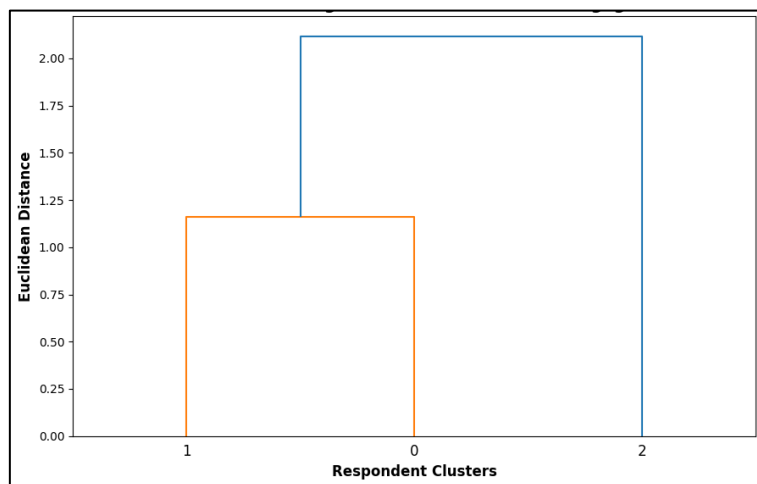


Figure 2. Hierarchical cluster dendrogram of female-centered engagement profiles

DISCUSSION

Experience-Led Engagement as the Foundation of Female-Centered Brand Visibility

The results of this study clearly demonstrate that experience-led engagement functions as the primary foundation of brand visibility in the fitness

industry when viewed through a female-centered lens. High mean values for inclusivity, emotional support, and personalization indicate that women evaluate fitness brands not merely as service providers but as experiential environments that shape confidence, comfort, and motivation (Paschalidou *et al.*, 2023). These findings align

with experiential marketing theory, which emphasizes that repeated, emotionally meaningful interactions strengthen brand recall and attachment. In female fitness contexts, experiential quality appears to outweigh transactional efficiency, reinforcing the argument that visibility is constructed through lived experience rather than promotional exposure alone (Kuuru & Närvänen, 2019).

The Central Role of Emotional Connection in Translating Experiences Into Visibility

Emotional connection emerged as the strongest predictor and mediator of brand visibility, underscoring its critical role in female engagement dynamics. The results suggest that experiences only become visible brands when they evoke emotional responses such as belonging, encouragement, and self-efficacy (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). This finding supports prior research indicating that women are more likely to develop enduring brand relationships based on emotional resonance and perceived empathy. In the fitness industry, where vulnerability and self-image are often involved, emotional safety and affirmation appear to amplify the likelihood of word-of-mouth advocacy and social sharing (Demsar *et al.*, 2023). Thus, emotional connection serves as the key mechanism through which experience-led engagement transforms into sustained brand visibility.

Trust as a Necessary but Secondary Mechanism

While trust was found to have a significant influence on brand visibility, its effect was comparatively weaker than that of emotional and community-related factors. This suggests that trust may function as a baseline requirement rather than a primary differentiator in female-centered fitness branding (Orr & Garland, 2017). Once credibility, reliability, and transparency are established, additional gains in visibility depend more heavily on emotional depth and social reinforcement. This interpretation aligns with service-dominant logic, where trust is a hygiene factor that enables engagement but does not, by itself, generate advocacy (Leckie *et al.*, 2019). In practice, fitness brands must ensure trustworthiness while simultaneously investing in emotionally rich experiences to achieve visibility advantages.

Community Engagement and Social Reinforcement as Visibility Multipliers

Community engagement emerged as a powerful contributor to brand visibility, highlighting the collective dimension of female fitness

participation. The cluster analysis revealed distinct segments driven by social belonging and peer interaction, indicating that community-oriented experiences extend brand visibility beyond individual-level engagement (Kairam *et al.*, 2022). Group classes, shared progress narratives, and digital communities appear to act as social amplifiers, transforming personal fitness journeys into shared brand stories. This finding resonates with social identity theory, which posits that individuals derive self-concept from group membership (Trepte & Loy, 2017). When fitness brands successfully foster inclusive communities, they become embedded in social networks, thereby multiplying their visibility organically.

Heterogeneity in Female Engagement Pathways

The identification of multiple engagement profiles underscores the heterogeneity of female fitness consumers and cautions against one-size-fits-all branding strategies. Emotion-driven advocates, community-oriented participants, and functionally satisfied users differ in how they translate experiences into visibility outcomes (Young, 2021). This segmentation suggests that fitness brands should adopt flexible engagement strategies that address varying motivational drivers. While emotional and community-focused initiatives may maximize advocacy among some segments, functional excellence remains important for maintaining baseline satisfaction among others (Bucy *et al.*, 2023). Recognizing these differentiated pathways enhances the strategic relevance of the proposed female-centered engagement model.

Implications for Experience-Led Branding Theory

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends experience-led branding literature by explicitly integrating gendered engagement dynamics into visibility outcomes. Existing models often treat experience, satisfaction, and loyalty as linear constructs without accounting for emotional and social mediators (Srivastava & Kaul, 2016). The present findings demonstrate that, for female consumers, experiential value operates through affective and communal mechanisms rather than purely cognitive evaluations. By positioning emotional connection and community engagement as central mediators, this study refines existing branding frameworks and provides a more nuanced understanding of how visibility is co-created between brands and female consumers (Rebelo *et al.*, 2020).

Managerial Implications for the Fitness Industry

The findings offer clear managerial implications for fitness organizations seeking sustainable brand visibility. Investments in inclusive design, emotionally supportive coaching, and personalized programming are likely to yield higher visibility returns than conventional advertising alone. Moreover, facilitating community interaction through group activities and digital platforms can significantly enhance organic brand reach (Isibor *et al.*, 2021). Managers should prioritize training staff in emotional intelligence and inclusivity, recognizing that frontline interactions play a decisive role in shaping female experiences (Mehmood *et al.*, 2020). By aligning operational decisions with experience-led, female-centered principles, fitness brands can achieve deeper engagement and long-term visibility.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study provides robust insights, its cross-sectional design limits causal inference over time. Future research could adopt longitudinal approaches to examine how experience-led engagement and brand visibility evolve across different stages of fitness participation. Additionally, comparative studies across genders or cultural contexts would further refine the generalizability of the female-centered engagement model. Integrating qualitative methods could also deepen understanding of lived experiences underlying the observed quantitative patterns.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that brand visibility in the fitness industry is fundamentally shaped by experience-led engagement when examined through a female-centered perspective. The findings demonstrate that inclusive environments, emotionally supportive interactions, and personalized fitness experiences are more influential in driving brand recall, advocacy, and recommendation than purely functional or infrastructural attributes. Emotional connection and community engagement emerge as the primary mechanisms through which experiential value is translated into visibility, while trust operates as an essential enabling factor rather than a dominant driver. By identifying distinct female engagement profiles, the study highlights the heterogeneous pathways through which women interact with fitness brands and convert experiences into visibility outcomes. Overall, the proposed female-

centered engagement model advances branding theory by integrating emotional and social dimensions into experience-led visibility frameworks and offers actionable insights for fitness organizations seeking sustainable, advocacy-driven brand growth.

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