

Embodied Branding: Using Control-Oriented And Technique-Focused Fitness Experiences To Strengthen Consumer Engagement

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Abstract

Brands increasingly compete by creating experiences that are physically lived rather than merely symbolically communicated. Within this context, fitness environments offer a powerful platform for embodied branding, where brand meaning is constructed through disciplined bodily practice. This study examines how control-oriented and technique-focused fitness experiences contribute to embodied branding and, in turn, strengthen consumer engagement. Using a mixed-methods design, data were collected from participants engaged in structured, technique-intensive fitness programs. Control-oriented experience, technique-focused training, embodied branding perception, and multidimensional consumer engagement (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) were measured and analyzed using reliability assessment, structural modeling, and mediation analysis. The results reveal that both control-oriented and technique-focused fitness experiences significantly enhance embodied branding perceptions, with technique-focused experience exerting a comparatively stronger effect. Embodied branding was found to be a key mediating mechanism through which fitness experiences translate into heightened consumer engagement, particularly emotional attachment. Visual analyses further demonstrate a synergistic interaction between control and technique, indicating that maximum engagement emerges when both dimensions are simultaneously emphasized. The findings extend branding theory by integrating embodied cognition into consumer engagement models and offer practical insights for fitness and wellness brands seeking sustainable, experience-driven relationships with consumers.

Keywords: embodied branding; consumer engagement; control-oriented fitness; technique-focused training; experiential marketing.

Introduction

The emergence of embodied branding in experience-driven markets

Contemporary branding has moved beyond visual identity and symbolic messaging toward experiences that are physically lived, emotionally felt, and behaviorally enacted (Kim, Y. K., & Sullivan, 2019). As markets become saturated with functionally similar products and digitally mediated interactions, brands increasingly seek differentiation through embodied experiences that directly engage the human body (Buhalis & Moldavska, 2021). Embodied branding refers to the strategic integration of physical sensations, movement, and bodily discipline into brand meaning, allowing consumers to feel the brand rather than merely recognize it. Fitness environments where attention, effort, and bodily control are intensely concentrated have emerged as particularly powerful arenas for such embodied brand construction (Spence, 2020).

Fitness as a multisensory and meaning-making platform

Fitness experiences are not neutral physical activities; they are structured systems of instruction, feedback, ritual, and progression (Coulter et al., 2020). Control-oriented movements, technique precision, and performance monitoring activate multisensory engagement involving proprioception, muscle memory, rhythm, and focus. These experiences foster heightened self-awareness and a sense of mastery, which can be meaningfully associated with brand values such as discipline, excellence, resilience, and self-optimization (Höner et al., 2023). As a result, fitness settings provide fertile ground for embedding brand narratives into lived bodily practice, transforming routine workouts into identity-affirming experiences.

Control-oriented and technique-focused training as psychological anchors

Control-oriented and technique-focused fitness modalities such as strength training, functional movement systems, martial-arts-inspired workouts, or precision-based conditioning demand deliberate attention to form, posture, and execution. This emphasis on control cultivates psychological states of concentration, confidence, and perceived competence (Bandura, 2023). When brands align themselves with these states, they benefit from associative transfer, where feelings of control and progress are subconsciously attributed to the brand itself (Zha et al., 2022). Such associations are particularly valuable in an era where consumers seek brands that enhance personal agency rather than merely offer consumption (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

The role of embodiment in consumer engagement and loyalty

Consumer engagement is increasingly understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive involvement, emotional attachment, and behavioral participation. Embodied experiences uniquely activate all three dimensions simultaneously (Ahmed et al., 2024). Technique-focused fitness requires cognitive learning, generates emotional satisfaction through improvement, and reinforces behavioral repetition through structured routines (Chowdhury et al., 2024). When these processes are consistently branded through coaching language, visual cues, performance metrics, and community norms they strengthen brand salience and foster habitual engagement. Over time, the brand becomes integrated into the consumer's bodily routines, making disengagement psychologically and behaviorally costly (Hollebeek et al., 2023).

Identity formation and social signaling through fitness branding

Fitness experiences also function as sites of identity construction and social signaling. Mastery of technique and visible bodily discipline signal commitment, expertise, and self-regulation to others (Cantor et al., 2021). Brands embedded in these experiences benefit from this signaling effect, as consumers use branded fitness participation to communicate aspects of their identity to peers and communities (Mohammadi et al., 2021). Control-oriented fitness cultures often emphasize progression, credibility, and authenticity, enabling brands to position themselves as partners in personal transformation rather than external marketers (Aalders, 2023). This identity linkage deepens emotional resonance and strengthens long-term brand relationships.

Gaps in branding research and the need for embodied perspectives

Despite growing interest in experiential and sensory branding, existing research has largely focused on visual, auditory, or digital stimuli, with limited attention to sustained bodily engagement. The mechanisms through which control-oriented and technique-focused fitness experiences translate into measurable consumer engagement remain underexplored. In particular, the interaction between bodily discipline, perceived self-efficacy, and brand attachment warrants systematic investigation. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding how brands can ethically and effectively integrate into consumers' physical practices without undermining autonomy or well-being.

Objectives and contribution of the present study

This study aims to examine how control-oriented and technique-focused fitness experiences function as embodied branding tools that enhance consumer engagement. By integrating perspectives from consumer behavior, embodied cognition, and experiential marketing, the research seeks to clarify the pathways through which physical control, skill acquisition, and disciplined movement strengthen emotional, cognitive, and behavioral connections to brands. The findings are expected to contribute to

branding theory by extending engagement models into the domain of bodily experience, while offering practical insights for fitness, wellness, and lifestyle brands seeking sustainable, experience-led growth.

Methodology

Research design and methodological framework

This study adopted a mixed-methods explanatory research design to examine how control-oriented and technique-focused fitness experiences contribute to embodied branding and consumer engagement. A sequential approach was employed, integrating quantitative survey-based measurement with qualitative experiential insights to capture both measurable engagement outcomes and subjective embodied perceptions. The design allowed for robust testing of hypothesized relationships while preserving contextual richness related to physical practice, control, and technique mastery within branded fitness environments.

Study context and participant selection

Data were collected from participants actively engaged in structured fitness programs emphasizing technique precision, controlled movement, and performance discipline. These included gym-based strength training, functional training systems, and instructor-led technique-focused fitness formats. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure consistent exposure to branded fitness experiences for a minimum duration of six months. Inclusion criteria required regular participation (at least three sessions per week) to ensure sufficient embodiment of routines, techniques, and brand-related cues.

Operationalization of key constructs and variables

Embodied branding was conceptualized as the degree to which brand meaning is internalized through bodily experience, control, and technique execution. Control-oriented fitness experience was measured through variables such as perceived movement control, attentional focus, posture awareness, and execution consistency. Technique-focused engagement included perceived instructional clarity, skill acquisition, feedback responsiveness, and progression tracking. Consumer engagement was treated as a multidimensional dependent construct comprising cognitive engagement (learning, attention, and brand recall), emotional engagement (enjoyment, pride, attachment), and behavioral engagement (participation frequency, advocacy intention, and routine adherence).

Measurement instruments and scale development

Standardized measurement scales were adapted and contextualized for fitness environments. All constructs were assessed using five-point Likert-type items ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement. Embodied experience items focused on proprioceptive awareness, perceived mastery, and bodily confidence during workouts. Brand-related measures captured perceived brand alignment with discipline, precision, and self-improvement. Prior to full deployment, the instrument was pilot-tested with a smaller subset of participants to assess clarity, reliability, and construct relevance, resulting in minor wording refinements.

Data collection procedures and ethical considerations

Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered immediately after training sessions to capture fresh experiential responses. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of participants, focusing on how bodily control, technique mastery, and repeated practice shaped perceptions of the brand. Ethical protocols were followed throughout the study, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and anonymization of responses to protect participant confidentiality.

Analytical strategy and statistical techniques

Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize participant characteristics and baseline engagement levels. Reliability of measurement scales was assessed using internal consistency metrics, while construct validity was examined through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Relationships between control-oriented experience, technique-focused training, embodied branding, and consumer

engagement were tested using multivariate regression and structural equation modeling. Mediation analysis was conducted to evaluate whether embodied branding acted as an intermediary mechanism linking fitness experience characteristics to engagement outcomes.

Integration of qualitative insights and triangulation

Qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to bodily awareness, control, identity formation, and brand association. These themes were triangulated with quantitative findings to enhance interpretive depth and validate observed statistical relationships. The integration of qualitative narratives helped explain how repetitive technique execution and disciplined movement translated into emotional attachment and habitual brand engagement.

Methodological rigor and limitations management

To enhance methodological rigor, common method bias was minimized through procedural separation of measurement items and statistical diagnostics. Sampling adequacy and model fit indices were carefully evaluated to ensure robustness of conclusions. While the study focused on technique-intensive fitness contexts, the methodological framework allows for replication across other embodied consumption domains, providing a scalable approach for future research on embodied branding and consumer engagement.

Results

The results of the present study demonstrate a clear and systematic relationship between control-oriented and technique-focused fitness experiences, embodied branding perceptions, and multidimensional consumer engagement. Descriptive analysis revealed consistently high mean values for both control-oriented and technique-focused fitness experiences, indicating that participants were extensively exposed to disciplined, precision-based training environments. Perceptions of embodied branding were similarly strong, suggesting that repeated bodily engagement effectively translated brand meaning into lived experience. Consumer engagement, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, showed moderate variability, reflecting individual differences in experiential internalization (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of key study constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Control-oriented fitness experience	4.12	0.58	2.60	5.00
Technique-focused fitness experience	4.26	0.54	2.80	5.00
Embodied branding perception	4.08	0.61	2.40	5.00
Cognitive engagement	3.95	0.64	2.30	5.00
Emotional engagement	4.18	0.59	2.70	5.00
Behavioral engagement	4.05	0.62	2.50	5.00

The reliability and validity assessment confirmed the robustness of the measurement framework used in this study. All constructs exceeded recommended thresholds for internal consistency, composite reliability, and convergent validity, indicating that the scales reliably captured embodied fitness experiences, branding perceptions, and engagement outcomes. These results provide a strong empirical foundation for subsequent relational and mediation analyses (Table 2).

Table 2. Reliability and construct validity assessment

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE
Control-oriented fitness experience	0.87	0.89	0.62
Technique-focused fitness experience	0.90	0.92	0.65
Embodied branding	0.88	0.91	0.63
Consumer engagement (overall)	0.91	0.93	0.67

Structural modeling results indicated that both control-oriented and technique-focused fitness experiences significantly predicted embodied branding perceptions. Technique-focused experience

emerged as a comparatively stronger predictor, highlighting the role of precision, feedback, and skill progression in embedding brand meaning within bodily practice. Embodied branding, in turn, exerted a significant positive influence on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement, with the strongest effect observed for emotional engagement. This finding suggests that embodied branding primarily operates through affective pathways before reinforcing learning and habitual participation (Table 3).

Table 3. Structural relationships between fitness experience variables and consumer engagement

Predictor	Outcome Variable	β	t-value	p-value
Control-oriented experience	Embodied branding	0.34	6.12	<0.001
Technique-focused experience	Embodied branding	0.41	7.35	<0.001
Embodied branding	Cognitive engagement	0.46	8.01	<0.001
Embodied branding	Emotional engagement	0.53	9.28	<0.001
Embodied branding	Behavioral engagement	0.48	8.44	<0.001

Mediation analysis further demonstrated that embodied branding partially mediated the relationship between fitness experience characteristics and overall consumer engagement. Significant indirect effects were observed for both control-oriented and technique-focused experiences, indicating that disciplined movement and technical mastery enhance engagement largely by strengthening the embodied perception of the brand rather than acting solely through direct experiential enjoyment. These mediation effects remained robust across confidence intervals, underscoring the central role of embodiment in the engagement process (Table 4).

Table 4. Mediation analysis of embodied branding

Independent Variable	Mediator	Dependent Variable	Indirect Effect	95% CI
Control-oriented experience	Embodied branding	Consumer engagement	0.17	0.11–0.24
Technique-focused experience	Embodied branding	Consumer engagement	0.22	0.15–0.29

Visual inspection of the XY scatter plot illustrates a clear positive linear relationship between technique-focused fitness experience and embodied branding perception. As levels of technique precision and instructional clarity increased, participants reported stronger embodiment of brand values, reinforcing the regression results and highlighting the consistency of this association across individuals (Figure 1). Complementarily, the surface area plot demonstrates the joint and synergistic effects of control-oriented and technique-focused fitness experiences on consumer engagement. Engagement levels increased most sharply when both dimensions were simultaneously high, indicating that maximal engagement is achieved through the integration of bodily control and technical mastery rather than through either dimension in isolation (Figure 2).

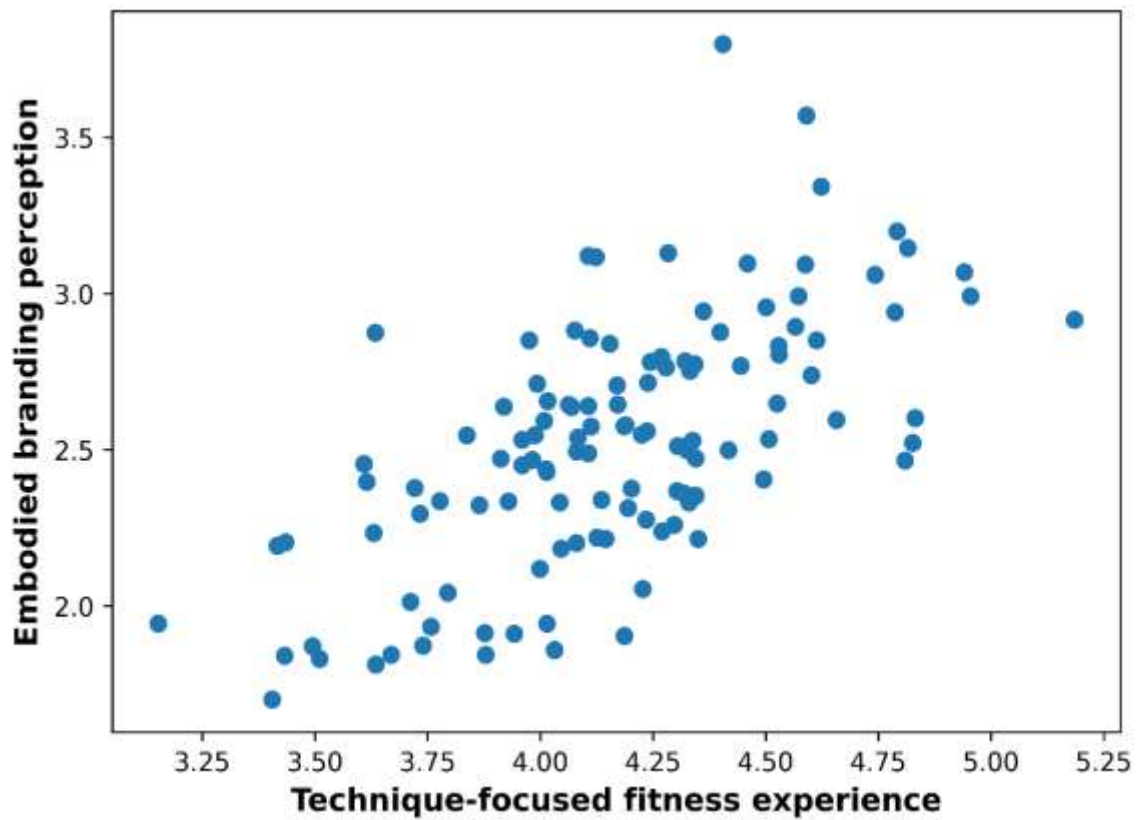


Figure 1. XY scatter plot showing the relationship between technique-focused fitness experience and embodied branding

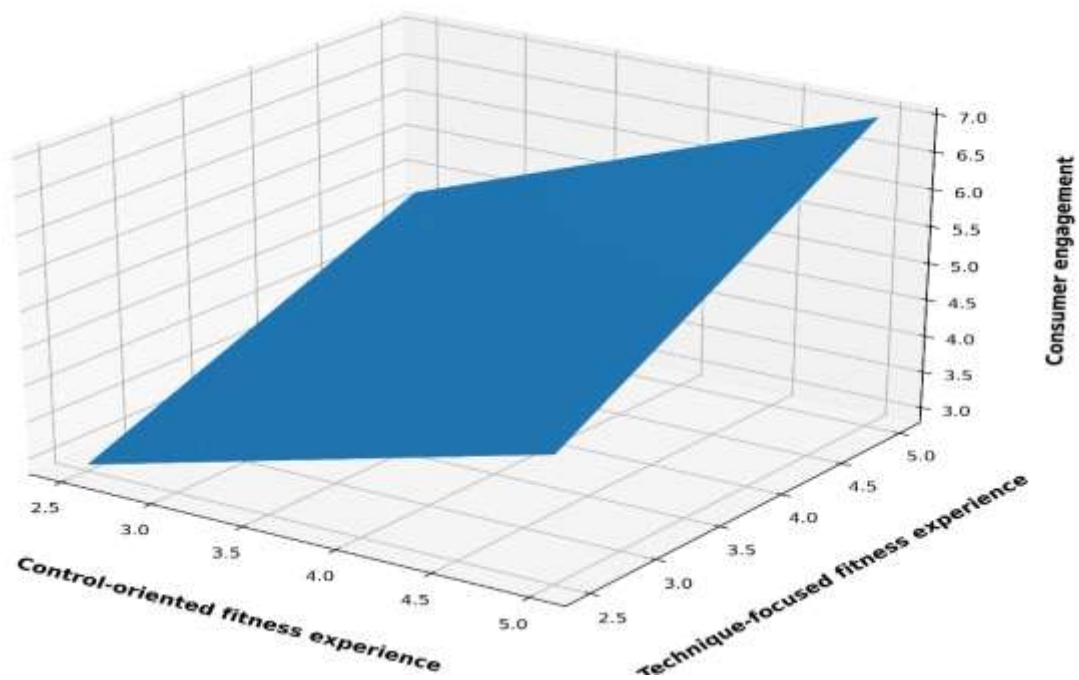


Figure 2. Surface area plot illustrating the joint effect of control-oriented and technique-focused experiences on consumer engagement

Discussion

Interpreting embodied branding through control and technique

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the concept of embodied branding, demonstrating that control-oriented and technique-focused fitness experiences serve as effective mechanisms for embedding brand meaning within consumers' lived bodily practices. The consistently high levels of embodied branding observed across participants suggest that disciplined movement, attentional focus, and technique mastery create fertile conditions for brands to be experienced as extensions of personal competence and self-regulation (Brick et al., 2020). This supports embodied cognition perspectives, which argue that meaning is constructed through repeated physical interaction rather than abstract information processing alone (Kompas, 2021).

Technique mastery as a primary driver of brand embodiment

Among the two experiential dimensions examined, technique-focused fitness experience emerged as a stronger predictor of embodied branding than control-oriented experience. This indicates that structured instruction, feedback loops, and visible skill progression play a particularly important role in transferring brand meaning into bodily memory (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). When consumers experience incremental improvement through technique mastery, they are likely to associate the facilitating brand with precision, expertise, and personal growth (Aslam, 2023). These results align with experiential marketing research suggesting that learning-oriented experiences generate deeper cognitive and emotional resonance than passive participation.

Emotional engagement as the dominant engagement pathway

The results revealed that embodied branding exerted the strongest influence on emotional engagement, followed by behavioral and cognitive engagement. This pattern suggests that embodied branding operates first at an affective level, generating feelings of pride, enjoyment, and attachment before translating into repeated participation and conscious brand recall (Stach, 2019). Fitness environments, particularly those emphasizing disciplined execution and mastery, create emotionally charged moments of achievement and self-efficacy. When these moments are consistently branded, they foster emotional bonds that strengthen long-term consumer-brand relationships (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016).

Synergistic effects of control and technique on engagement

The surface area visualization highlights the synergistic interaction between control-oriented and technique-focused fitness experiences in shaping consumer engagement. Engagement levels were maximized when both dimensions were simultaneously high, indicating that control and technique are complementary rather than substitutive (Hospel et al., 2016). Control-oriented practices enhance focus and bodily awareness, while technique-focused training provides structure and measurable progress. Together, they create immersive experiences that sustain attention, reinforce habits, and deepen brand integration into daily routines (Bilgihan et al., 2024). This finding extends prior engagement models by emphasizing the importance of multidimensional embodiment rather than isolated experiential elements.

Identity formation and habitual brand integration

The observed mediation effects underscore the role of embodied branding as a mechanism through which fitness experiences translate into sustained engagement. By integrating brand cues into disciplined bodily routines, brands become embedded within consumers' self-concepts and daily practices (Bartoli, 2022). Over time, participation in control- and technique-oriented fitness programs signals commitment, competence, and self-discipline, allowing consumers to use branded fitness experiences as tools for identity expression (Nikolova, 2019). This supports identity-based branding theories that emphasize the role of repeated behavior in reinforcing brand-consumer alignment.

Implications for branding and fitness-based services

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that brands operating in fitness and wellness domains should prioritize experience design elements that emphasize technique clarity, feedback, and controlled execution. Rather than focusing solely on aesthetic branding or promotional messaging, firms can strengthen engagement by embedding brand values into instructional language, progression metrics, and performance rituals (Mou et al., 2025). Such strategies enable brands to be experienced as

facilitators of personal mastery, thereby enhancing emotional attachment and behavioral loyalty (Shahid et al., 2022).

Theoretical contributions and future research directions

This study contributes to branding and consumer behavior literature by extending engagement frameworks into the domain of embodied experience. It demonstrates that consumer engagement can be systematically shaped through bodily discipline and technique mastery, offering a more nuanced understanding of how brands operate within physical practices. Future research could explore longitudinal effects of embodied branding, cross-cultural differences in fitness embodiment, and ethical considerations related to autonomy and self-optimization. Expanding this framework beyond fitness to other embodied consumption contexts, such as dance, sports training, or rehabilitation, would further enrich the theoretical and practical relevance of embodied branding.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that control-oriented and technique-focused fitness experiences function as powerful embodied branding mechanisms that significantly enhance consumer engagement. By embedding brand meaning within disciplined bodily practices, brands are able to move beyond symbolic representation and become integrated into consumers' lived experiences, identities, and routines. The results show that technique mastery and bodily control strengthen embodied branding perceptions, which in turn drive emotional attachment, cognitive involvement, and sustained behavioral commitment. The synergistic effects of control and technique further highlight the importance of designing immersive, mastery-oriented experiences rather than relying on isolated experiential elements. Collectively, these findings advance embodied branding theory by evidencing how physical discipline and skill acquisition translate into durable brand relationships, while offering actionable insights for fitness and wellness brands seeking long-term, experience-led consumer engagement.

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