

The 2025 Fitness Trend: Why Yoga and Pilates Have Become the Preferred Choice

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift in exercise practice, from a focus on physical strength to a more holistic and reflective approach. This study aims to explore why Yoga and Pilates are the main choices in exercise trends in 2025, especially in Indonesia. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, eight informants who regularly participate in Yoga or Pilates were interviewed in depth. The results show five main themes: (1) the search for holistic health that includes physical and mental balance; (2) the need for calm amidst the pressures of modern life; (3) flexibility in time, place, and access thanks to digital technology; (4) the influence of social media and online communities as agents of promotion and motivation; and (5) personal transformation and spiritual meaning felt by participants. These findings indicate that Yoga and Pilates are not just physical exercise, but also transformative, reflective, and inclusive self-care practices. The implications of this study point to the importance of supporting widespread access to mindfulness-based exercise, as well as the need for policies that bridge the gap in community participation.

Keywords: Yoga, Pilates, 2025 sports trends, holistic health, mindfulness, healthy lifestyle.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the paradigm of sports and health has undergone a significant shift. If in the past sports were often associated with heavy activities and oriented towards physical achievements such as muscle building, marathon running, or high-intensity training, now people are starting to realize the importance of maintaining health in a holistic manner. This concept includes not only physical fitness, but also mental, emotional, and spiritual stability. The year 2025 marks a time when sports trends reflect this shift in orientation. Sports such as Yoga and Pilates are the main choices for various groups, because they are considered able to answer the need for balance between body and mind. Amid rapid social change and high levels of stress in urban life, these two types of sports offer solutions that are not only healthy, but also calming.

The phenomenon of the increasing popularity of Yoga and Pilates did not appear suddenly, but rather is the accumulation of various interrelated factors. The modern lifestyle, characterized by dense activities, multitasking demands, and non-stop digital exposure, has triggered collective mental fatigue. In this situation, people are looking for a form of exercise that not only makes them sweat, but also provides a space for solitude, restores energy, and strengthens the relationship with oneself. Yoga and Pilates address these needs through structured movement exercises, conscious breathing techniques, and mindfulness practices. Research by Cramer et al. (2016) revealed that Yoga has a significant positive impact on reducing stress, anxiety, and sleep disturbances. Kloubec (2011) stated that Pilates, with its focus on core strengthening and body control, also provides similar benefits, especially for those experiencing muscle tension and postural disorders due to a sedentary lifestyle.

In Indonesia, awareness of the importance of mental health and life balance is increasingly prominent, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. A report from the Katadata Insight Center (2022) noted that more than 60% of Indonesians have begun to pay more attention to mental health after the pandemic, and most of them admitted to looking for physical activities that also have a calming effect. This has also driven interest in Yoga and Pilates, which are now found not only in exclusive fitness centers, but also in communities, city parks, and digital platforms. Access to exercise has also become more open thanks to the rise of online classes, app-based training, and free tutorials on YouTube. This is in line with Lupton's (2020) findings on the on-demand fitness trend, where exercise can now be done flexibly at home with the help of technology.

This change is not only happening in big cities like Jakarta and Surabaya, but is also starting to spread to other areas, along with the increasing internet penetration and ease of use of digital platforms. Applications like Strongbee, Yoganesha, and various local channels on TikTok have become new spaces for learning and practicing together. Data from Kominfo (2023) shows that consumption of health and sports content on social media has increased by 47% in the last two years, with Yoga and Pilates among the top five most frequently searched categories. This trend shows that people no longer see sports as just a physical routine, but also as part of creating identity, self-expression, and fulfilling psychological needs.

Social media has become one of the main driving factors in shaping public perception of a healthy lifestyle. Many public figures, celebrities, and health influencers share their exercise activities as part of a positive and inspiring daily narrative. This creates a domino effect among their followers. According to a Populix survey (2024), 7 out of 10 Indonesian respondents admitted to knowing Yoga or Pilates from social media, and almost half of them were interested in trying it because they saw the positive impacts shared by others. In this context, Yoga and Pilates are no longer just personal activities, but have become symbols of a modern lifestyle that is mindful, healthy, and has high aesthetic power both visually and emotionally.

This trend is also closely related to changes in people's perceptions of the body. If previously the ideal body was identical to a certain physical shape, now the concept of a healthy body is more associated with function, flexibility, and balance. The concept of strong is the new sexy has shifted towards calm is the new strong, showing that qualities such as calmness, self-control, and spiritual closeness are starting to find a place in the health narrative. Yoga and Pilates, which do not emphasize competition or extreme performance, have become inclusive spaces for anyone regardless of age, body shape, or physical background to move and be at one with themselves.

However, there are still challenges that need to be addressed, especially in terms of equal access and education. Yoga and Pilates practices are still often associated with the upper middle class, or are only available in city centers. Therefore, strategies are needed from various parties, including the government, health community, and fitness industry players, to support wider distribution. Several local initiatives such as the Free Yoga program in Menteng Park by the Jakarta Youth and Sports Agency or the training of community Yoga instructors by the Healthy Indonesia Movement Foundation are important initial steps that need to be replicated nationally.

Taking these factors into consideration, this paper aims to examine in depth why Yoga and Pilates are the main trends in sports in 2025. This research does not only capture the popularity aspect, but also tries to explore the personal, social, and cultural meanings that accompany it. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study explores the experiences of individuals who regularly practice Yoga or Pilates, and describes their motivations, perceptions, and the impacts they feel directly. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these practices shape today's healthy lifestyles that are more reflective, connected, and humane.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method to explore in depth the subjective experiences of individuals in undergoing Yoga and Pilates exercises as part of a healthy lifestyle in 2025. The study was conducted from January to May 2025 involving eight informants who were selected purposively, namely those who had routinely followed Yoga or Pilates for at least six months. Informants came from various backgrounds, such as office workers, housewives, students, and creative industry players, with the aim of capturing the diversity of experiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews directly and online, using a semi-structured guide so that informants could express their personal perceptions and meanings freely. In addition, researchers observed the activities of the Yoga and Pilates community on social media and documented quotes, narratives, and participant behavior. The analysis was carried out through the stages of phenomenological reduction, grouping themes, and compiling narrative descriptions based on the informant's experience. To maintain data validity, source triangulation techniques and reconfirmation with informants (member checking) were used. This study also

pays attention to ethical principles, such as voluntary consent, confidentiality of identity, and use of data only for scientific purposes. Through this approach, the research aims to understand essentially how and why Yoga and Pilates have become the main choice for people in answering the need for physical health and mental peace amidst the pressures of modern life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with eight informants who regularly follow Yoga or Pilates for at least six months, five main themes were found that explain the reasons they chose these two types of sports in 2025. These five themes are the foundation for understanding how Yoga and Pilates not only function as fitness activities, but also as a path to mental health, life balance, and personal transformation.

1. Holistic Health as the Main Orientation

Almost all informants in this study stated that their main motivation for choosing Yoga or Pilates was because the benefits were not limited to physical fitness alone, but also included peace of mind, emotional stability, and a feeling of being more in tune with oneself. They felt that these exercises provided a comprehensive recovery effect that they did not find in conventional strength- or speed-oriented sports. Informant 1, a 32-year-old startup worker, said that he had experienced work fatigue (burnout) due to the fast work rhythm and minimal rest time. He tried various types of sports, including training at the gym, but instead felt his body getting more tense. After switching to Yoga, he realized that his body became lighter, his mind was clearer, and his emotions were more stable without feeling physically drained.

This phenomenon indicates a shift in values in viewing fitness activities. If previously exercise was understood narrowly as an effort to shape an ideal body or burn calories, now exercise is understood more comprehensively as a practice that balances physical, mental, and emotional health. This concept is in line with the principle of mind-body connection, namely the belief that the body and mind are a unified system that influences each other. Physical movements carried out with full awareness and regular breathing can have a calming effect on the nervous system, activate the parasympathetic system, and reduce stress hormones such as cortisol (Harvard Health Publishing, 2021). Studies in Indonesia also show that people are now increasingly aware that reflective and comprehensive exercise has a greater impact on the quality of life in general (Katadata Insight Center, 2022).

In the context of Yoga, these benefits are inseparable from the integration of asana (body movements), pranayama (breathing), and dhyana (concentration or meditation). The combination of the three forms a practice that not only strengthens muscles, but also trains the mind to be fully present in the moment. This practice is known as a form of active mindfulness, which makes movement a medium for reflection and contemplation. Meanwhile, in Pilates, body

awareness and core control are the basis for fostering a healthy relationship between body and mind. Joseph Pilates himself designed this method as a complete coordination of body, mind, and spirit, a philosophy that is still relevant today and is increasingly appreciated amidst modern health trends.

The findings of this study are also supported by the results of empirical studies. Cramer et al. (2016), in their meta-analysis of more than 30 studies, stated that Yoga has a significant effect on reducing symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression. Kloubec (2011), in her study on the benefits of Pilates, also showed that participants experienced increased emotional balance and better body awareness, in addition to muscle strengthening. In Indonesia, the results of the Populix survey (2024) revealed that 68% of respondents aged 20–40 years said that they chose Yoga or Pilates because both helped them be more “emotionally calm and regulated,” not just because they wanted a more ideal body. Thus, it can be concluded that the practice of Yoga and Pilates in 2025 will not only be part of a physical routine, but has developed into a form of comprehensive self-care. Both are present as an answer to the needs of modern society for a balance in life where a healthy body, a calm mind, and regulated emotions are considered as one inseparable unit. This change in orientation reflects a shift in health culture to be more reflective, conscious, and humane, while making Yoga and Pilates symbols of contemporary fitness trends that emphasize quality, not just intensity.

2. Serenity Amidst the Pressures of Modern Life

This theme emerged strongly and consistently in the narratives of informants who experienced psychological stress due to their busy life rhythms, uncertain work demands, and digital fatigue, which has become a common problem in the post-pandemic era. Informant 5, a 27-year-old freelancer, said that he often had difficulty focusing and tended to overthink because he did not have fixed working hours and was often exposed to information from various digital media continuously. He admitted that after regularly taking online Yoga classes, he experienced significant improvements in sleep quality, concentration ability, and clarity of thought. He even called Yoga sessions a very rare and valuable “moment of silence” in his life full of distractions.

This experience is not isolated. Most informants reported that Yoga and Pilates activities helped them slow down, calm themselves, and release pent-up mental tension. The slow movements, focus on breathing, and rhythmic repetition create a state similar to active meditation, where the body and mind learn to be fully present in one moment. This is in line with the concept of mindfulness, which is a state of being fully aware of what is happening inside and outside of oneself without judgment. Both Yoga and Pilates have been shown to be effective physical exercises in supporting emotional regulation and long-term stress reduction (Pascoe et al., 2017).

Pilates, although known as a core strength training, also has characteristics that support psychological calm. The focus on movement control, stability, and rhythmic breathing makes it an exercise that requires deep concentration. Informants mentioned that they felt more “centered” after a Pilates session

because they were accustomed to shifting their focus from the chaos of the mind to the body. This supports the idea that consciously structured physical activity can be a form of somatic meditation, or body-based meditation, that has a positive impact on emotional stability (Schmalzl et al., 2015).

The pressures of modern life are increasingly complex because they are not only physical, but also psychological. In the context of Indonesian urban society, stress from work, social expectations, and uncertainty about the future is now widely experienced by the younger generation. A report from Populix (2023) shows that more than 65% of people aged 18–35 years admit to experiencing mild to moderate stress due to the demands of an unbalanced life, and around 40% say they are interested in trying activities such as Yoga to help calm themselves.

This is where Yoga and Pilates play a very strategic role as a form of non-pharmacological intervention against stress and mental fatigue. Unlike competitive sports that often add to the pressure of performance, Yoga and Pilates emphasize a reflective, non-competitive, and self-accepting approach. This allows practitioners to experience a complete relaxation experience, not only in the context of exercise, but also has an impact on their mindset and daily lives. Some informants even said that this routine practice helped them develop a slower, more conscious, and emotionally stable lifestyle. Thus, it can be concluded that in the context of the increasingly heavy and complex pressures of modern life, Yoga and Pilates function as a rare “pause space” where individuals can take a break from external demands and become one with their own body and mind. This practice not only provides short-term psychological recovery, but also forms new mental habits that are more balanced, conscious, and focused. This explains why both are the main choices for urban communities in maintaining peace of mind in the midst of a fast-paced life.

Flexibility in time, place, and access is one of the main reasons why Yoga and Pilates will be increasingly popular in 2025. Unlike other types of exercise that require presence at a specific location or use special equipment, Yoga and Pilates allow anyone to practice anywhere and anytime. Informant 3, a housewife, stated that she routinely follows Yoga practices in the evening after her children go to bed. She only uses a mat and follows videos on her cellphone. For this informant, Yoga is a realistic and efficient solution because it does not require additional costs, travel time to the studio, or fixed schedule commitments.

This phenomenon shows how digital technology has fundamentally changed the landscape of sports. Through platforms such as YouTube, Zoom, and applications such as Daily Yoga, Alo Moves, and Pilates Anytime, people can now access hundreds or even thousands of classes from professional instructors around the world. This convenience has given rise to a new model in the world of fitness called on-demand fitness, a concept where users can adjust their training sessions to their personal time and needs without geographical limitations or high costs (Lupton, 2020). This is especially relevant for urban Indonesians who often face dynamic work schedules, domestic responsibilities, and limited training space.

Yoga and Pilates also accommodate a variety of skill levels, from beginner to advanced. The availability of short classes (10–20 minutes) to full one-hour sessions allows anyone to choose a practice that suits their body condition and available time. Some informants even mentioned that this flexibility is what allows them to commit long-term, because they do not feel pressured to adjust to someone else's rhythm or schedule. Informant 4, for example, said that she felt more motivated to practice because she could choose a class based on her mood and body energy that day.

Another important aspect is inclusivity. Unlike sports that require gym membership fees, expensive equipment, or personal trainers, Yoga and Pilates can be done with minimal equipment and are widely available for free. This opens up access for groups of people from different economic backgrounds to get the benefits of quality exercise. In Indonesia, several community initiatives such as free Yoga classes in city parks (DKI Jakarta, 2023) and the Yoga for All movement initiated by local instructors in Bali and Yogyakarta have also helped expand access to various levels of society.

Data from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo, 2023) shows that the use of fitness applications in Indonesia has increased by more than 50% in the last two years, with Yoga and Pilates in the top three most frequently searched types of exercise. This shows that digital transformation has truly had an impact on equalizing access to a healthy lifestyle, including outside urban areas. Many people in the regions are now starting to practice through digital tutorials or joining online communities that are increasingly active on various social media platforms. In other words, flexibility and ease of access are not just technical advantages of Yoga and Pilates, but also symbols of the shift in values in exercise: from exclusive to inclusive, from formal to flexible, and from location-based to personal needs-based. This makes Yoga and Pilates an activity that is adaptive to changing times, able to reach more people, and remains relevant amidst the dynamics of life that continues to move quickly.

3. The Influence of Social Media and Online Communities

Social media has become a new space that not only disseminates information, but also shapes the preferences, identities, and lifestyles of modern society. In the context of fitness trends, the role of social media is very large in driving the popularity of Yoga and Pilates, especially among the younger generation and urban communities. Informant 6, a 25-year-old content creator, admitted that her interest in Pilates began with TikTok videos that showed Pilates movements that were aesthetic, slow, and gave the impression of being "graceful but strong." She felt compelled to try the #30HariPilates challenge and actively shared her training progress on Instagram Story and fitness community WhatsApp groups.

This phenomenon shows that Yoga and Pilates have transformed into more than just physical activities; both have become symbols of a healthy lifestyle integrated with visual aesthetic values, self-control, and a strong self-care narrative. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and WhatsApp have become not only information distribution channels, but also participatory spaces

where users can share personal experiences, motivate each other, and create emotional bonds through digital communities. A study by Djafarova & Trofimenko (2019) shows that the influence of social media on health behavior increases sharply when information is delivered by people who are considered relatable or influential, such as fitness influencers or local content creators.

Furthermore, this trend shows a cultural shift from "exercise as an obligation" to "exercise as self-expression." Many social media users make Yoga and Pilates part of their daily content, either in the form of movement videos, reflective captions, or visual documentation of body development and mental calmness. This practice reinforces the concept of digital self-presentation, where exercise activities function in two ways: as a form of self-maintenance and as an identity that is displayed. This also reinforces what Lupton (2016) calls the digital embodiment – when the body is not only felt, but also produced and shared digitally as part of a social construction.

In Indonesia, this phenomenon is also clearly visible. Data from Populix (2023) shows that more than 72% of internet users aged 18–35 have known or are interested in trying Yoga and Pilates through social media. Even 48% of them admitted to being more consistent in practicing because they are members of an online community that actively shares motivational content, testimonials, and daily challenges. This shows that digital social interaction creates an accountability effect, someone is more motivated to maintain habits because they feel part of a group that has similar goals.

Online communities also play an important role in supporting consistent practice. Many participants mentioned that the existence of WhatsApp groups, Telegram, or practice forums became a place to share stories, obstacles, and personal successes. This community not only strengthens motivation, but also builds a sense of close emotional connection, even without face-to-face meetings. As conveyed by Informant 7, "I don't know them in person, but it feels like having friends who encourage each other every day." This confirms that online Yoga and Pilates practices do not reduce social closeness, but instead form new solidarity based on interests and values.

Thus, it can be concluded that social media and online communities have become key elements in spreading and sustaining the practice of Yoga and Pilates. In addition to being a medium for dissemination, they also shape the new meaning of sport: not just an individual activity, but also a collective space for growth, self-expression, and social connection. In an increasingly digital world, this trend shows that technology is not only mediating body movement, but also shaping the way the body is interpreted and celebrated in the context of modern culture.

4. Personal Transformation and the Search for Spiritual Meaning

For most informants, the practice of Yoga and Pilates has gone beyond the physical dimension and developed into a deep reflective process of self. This activity is no longer just a routine exercise, but has become part of a personal transformation journey that touches on the inner and spiritual aspects. Informant

2, a 29-year-old lecturer, described Yoga as a “spiritual process” that helped him become more patient, calmer in dealing with difficult situations, and more able to accept himself as he is. He said that the practice session became a time to “retreat” from the hustle and bustle of outside life, and a safe space to listen to his own thoughts.

The spiritual dimension referred to by the informants is not in the formal religious sense, but rather in the form of secular spirituality, namely a personal inner experience, not bound by a particular religious institution, but still providing a sense of peace, connectedness, and meaning. Movements that are done consciously, breathing that is trained with a regular rhythm, and a non-competitive training atmosphere create a deep reflective atmosphere. This practice allows individuals to develop body-mind awareness, namely the connection between the body and mind that forms a full awareness of self-existence. Research by Park (2010) states that secular spiritual practices such as meditation and Yoga can help individuals manage identity crises, psychological trauma, and foster optimism and new meaning in life.

Several informants mentioned feeling “mentally lighter” after their practice, as if emotional baggage they had not previously been aware of was slowly settling and being digested. This suggests that physical practice not only has a physical impact, but also opens up pathways to emotional awareness that is often hidden in everyday life. In modern psychological literature, this is known as embodied cognition – the concept that the mind and body are connected and that physical experience can influence psychological processing (Shapiro, 2011). Yoga and Pilates, with their approaches emphasizing slowing down, repetition, and conscious breathing, allow for somatic release, or the release of pent-up emotional baggage through physical movement.

Within the framework of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1971), this experience is closely related to the highest level of self-transcendence, where individuals not only pursue self-actualization (achieving their potential), but also seek connection with a meaning greater than themselves. Yoga and Pilates are mediums for achieving this stage, as they provide a space for contemplation, introspection, and self-acceptance without external pressure. Even in stressful conditions, these practices provide an opportunity for individuals to return to their body and breath, and from there, strengthen their connection with their soul and purpose.

Local studies also support these findings. Research conducted by Susanti & Rofiah (2021) in Yogyakarta stated that participants in Yoga classes not only experienced improved physical health, but also showed changes in the way they think about life, emotional management, and healthier social relationships. Participants felt that through regular practice, they became more aware of their bodies, more patient, and more grateful – attitudes that are synonymous with spiritual experiences in a modern context.

Thus, it can be concluded that Yoga and Pilates are not only the choice of exercise because of their physical benefits, but also because of their ability to open up a spiritual space that is personal and transformative. In a fast-paced, stressful

life with little time for reflection, these practices become a kind of contemporary ritual that allows individuals to pause, listen to themselves, and cultivate a more harmonious relationship with their body, mind, and the world around them. This makes Yoga and Pilates an important part of the shift in the health paradigm from mechanical to existential and holistic.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Yoga and Pilates have become symbols of the shift in fitness culture towards a more holistic, conscious and personal approach. No longer just physical activities, they have become forms of practice that unite the body, mind and emotions while addressing the needs of urban communities for calm, balance and self-reflection. The findings show that engaging in Yoga and Pilates provides multiple benefits, from physical health to spiritual transformation. Factors such as easy access through digital technology, the influence of social media and the growth of online communities have accelerated the widespread adoption of these practices. However, challenges such as unequal access and perceptions of exclusivity still need to be addressed so that the benefits can be felt evenly. Therefore, collaboration between the government, community and industry players is needed to expand the inclusivity and sustainability of Yoga and Pilates practices in the future. With the right approach, Yoga and Pilates can continue to be a primary means of building a physically, mentally and spiritually healthy society amidst the complexities of the modern world.

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