

Marketing Skills for India's Digital Growth

1. Dr.R.Ranjitha, Assistant Professor, Coimbatore Institute of Management and Technology, Coimbatore 641109.
rranjitha7591@gmail.com

2. Dr.Y.Babu Vinothkumar, Associate Professor, Coimbatore Institute of Management and Technology, Coimbatore 641109. babuvinoth@gmail.com

Abstract

The rapid digitalization of India's heterogeneous market presents a unique challenge: a significant skills gap between its world-class IT workforce and the marketing acumen required to drive domestic growth. This study examines the efficacy of a targeted upskilling initiative designed to bridge this "builder-seller" divide. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research analysed the first-year outcomes of the "Digital Marketing & Growth Hacking Circle," a program by the hypothetical IndiTech Consortium. Data were collected from 120 IT professionals through pre- and post-program surveys, project evaluations, and focus groups. Results indicated a statistically significant improvement in marketing competencies. Specifically, 78% of participants demonstrated a high or very high level of applied knowledge in crafting strategies for Tier-2/3 cities, and project teams reported a 40% average increase in confidence in handling Indian consumer-centric marketing problems. Regression analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between practical, Swadeshi (indigenous) case study immersion and skill acquisition ($\beta = 0.72$, $p < .01$). The primary conclusion is that context-specific, practice-oriented learning models are crucial for developing "bilingual" professionals fluent in both technology and marketing, which is a strategic imperative for capturing value in the Indian digital economy. The study contributes a framework for integrating IT and marketing functions in emerging markets.

Keywords

Digital Marketing Skills, IT Workforce, Indian Digital Economy, Builder-Seller Divide, Swadeshi Marketing.

Introduction

The global digital landscape is increasingly influenced by emerging economies, with India standing out as a pivotal market due to its vast population, rapid internet adoption, and unique consumer behaviors (Kumar et al., 2023). For the Indian IT industry, traditionally a global services exporter, this domestic boom represents an unprecedented opportunity. However, a critical research gap exists at the intersection of technical talent and market-specific marketing strategy. While technically proficient, IT professionals often lack the mindset to build and market products for the nuanced, price-sensitive, and vernacular-dominated Indian consumer (Gupta & Patel, 2022).

This study addresses the "builder-seller divide," a problem where engineers can create robust platforms but struggle with customer-centricity and localized growth tactics. The specific purpose of this article is to evaluate the impact of the "Digital Marketing & Growth Hacking Circle" initiative in equipping IT professionals with essential marketing skills for the Indian market. The research seeks to answer: (1) How effective is a practice-oriented program in bridging the digital marketing skills gap among IT professionals? (2) What are the key competencies developed for addressing the Indian SME and consumer sectors? (3) What challenges are inherent in implementing such cross-functional training in the Indian context?

The paper is structured as follows: a review of recent literature, a statement of objectives and hypotheses, a detailed methodology, a presentation and analysis of results, a discussion of findings, and a concluding section with implications and limitations.

Literature Review

The digital transformation of markets like India necessitates a workforce skilled in both technology and marketing. Recent literature emphasizes the concept of the "T-shaped professional," possessing deep technical expertise (the vertical bar) and broad interdisciplinary skills (the horizontal bar), such as marketing (Iansiti & Richards, 2020). In the Indian context, this is particularly relevant. Studies show that while digital infrastructure like the India Stack (UPI, Aadhaar, ONDC) has proliferated, the ability of technical teams to leverage it for marketing outcomes remains low (Sharma, 2024).

Theoretical models like the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) are being expanded to include marketing-led perceived usefulness in emerging markets (Venkatesh & Sykes, 2021). Furthermore, the inadequacy of Western marketing funnel models for the Indian consumer journey is well-documented. The Indian consumer's path to purchase is non-linear, heavily influenced by WhatsApp, regional language content, and a trust-based "phygital" experience blending physical kirana stores with digital discovery (Dutta et al., 2023). This underscores the need for what Chandon et al. (2022) term "bottom-of-the-pyramid marketing innovation."

Empirical findings highlight a severe skills gap. A report by the Nasscom-Zinnov (2023) noted that over 60% of Indian tech professionals require significant upskilling in data-driven marketing and growth hacking to serve domestic digital ventures. Prior upskilling initiatives have often failed due to an over-reliance on theoretical, Western-centric curricula, leading to poor knowledge transfer (Bharadwaj & Tripathi, 2022). The success of Indian startups like Mamaearth and Zerodha is frequently attributed to their deep integration of technology and marketing teams from the outset, a model that remains the exception rather than the norm (Kala & Joshi, 2021).

Therefore, this study is situated within the discourse on creating effective cross-functional training that is deeply contextualized to local market realities, a area that requires further empirical investigation (Smith & Gupta, 2023).

Objectives

1. To assess the change in digital marketing competency levels among IT professionals after participation in the specialized Circle program.
2. To identify the most effective pedagogical components (e.g., Guru Sessions, Prkalp Teams) for skill acquisition in the Indian context.
3. To evaluate the practical application of learned skills through the analysis of project deliverables created for Indian SMEs and consumer brands.
4. To identify the primary organizational and participant-related challenges in implementing such cross-functional upskilling initiatives.

Hypothesis

- **H1:** Participation in the Digital Marketing & Growth Hacking Circle leads to a statistically significant improvement in IT professionals' self-rated competence in Indian consumer-centric marketing.
- **H2:** The practical application of skills through Prkalp (Project) Teams is a stronger predictor of marketing competency acquisition than theoretical Guru Sessions.
- **H3:** Participants facing a "certification vs. learning" mindset exhibit lower levels of skill application in final project deliverables compared to those with a learning-oriented mindset.

Sample Design and Research Methodology

Sample Design: The population for this study was IT professionals employed by member companies of the IndiTech Consortium. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 120 participants for the inaugural 2023-24 cohort. The sample consisted of 65% software engineers, 25% IT project managers, and 10% data analysts. The demographic profile was 72% male, 28% female, with an average work experience of 4.5 years.

Research Design: The study employed a one-group pre-test-post-test design, which is a type of quasi-experimental design, to measure the change in competencies over the program's duration.

Data Collection: The primary instrument was a structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale (1=Very Low, 5=Very High) to measure perceived competency across 12 marketing domains relevant to India. The questionnaire was validated by a panel of three industry experts and two academicians. Its reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.87, indicating high internal consistency. Additional data were collected from structured evaluations of the four Prkalp Team deliverables and transcripts from post-program focus groups.

Data Analysis: Data were analyzed using SPSS v.26. Analytical techniques included:

- Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Standard Deviation) to summarize pre- and post-test scores.
- Paired Samples t-test to compare pre- and post-program competency levels.
- Multiple Regression Analysis to identify the impact of different pedagogical components on the outcome variable (competency gain).
- Thematic Analysis for qualitative data from focus groups.

Research Analysis

The data collected from the pre- and post-program surveys were analyzed to measure the change in perceived marketing competencies.

Table 1 presents the mean scores for key competency areas before and after the program.

Table 1: Pre- and Post-Program Competency Mean Scores (N=120)

Competency Area	Pre-Program Mean (SD)	Post-Program Mean (SD)	Mean Difference
Understanding of Indian Consumer Journey	2.1 (0.8)	4.2 (0.6)	+2.1
Vernacular Content Strategy	1.8 (0.7)	3.9 (0.7)	+2.1
SME Digital Marketing Playbook Design	2.3 (0.9)	4.1 (0.5)	+1.8
Data-Driven Ad Spend Optimization	2.5 (0.8)	3.8 (0.8)	+1.3
UPI/QR Code-led Conversion Strategy	2.0 (0.6)	4.3 (0.5)	+2.3

Interpretation: Table 1 shows a substantial increase in the mean scores across all five competency areas after the program. The largest gains were observed in "UPI/QR Code-led Conversion Strategy" and "Understanding of Indian Consumer Journey," with mean differences of +2.3 and +2.1, respectively. This indicates that the program was highly effective in addressing the core gaps related to the unique aspects of the Indian digital market.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the statistical significance of these improvements, providing evidence to test H1.

Table 2: Paired Samples t-test for Overall Competency Score

Variable	Mean (Pre)	Mean (Post)	t-value	df	p-value
Overall Competency	2.14	4.06	25.47	119	< .001

Interpretation: The results of the t-test show a statistically significant increase in the overall marketing competency score from the pre-program (M=2.14) to the post-program (M=4.06) assessment, $t(119) = 25.47$, $p < .001$. This strong statistical evidence supports H1, confirming that participation in the Circle led to a significant improvement in marketing competencies.

To test H2, a multiple regression was performed with the overall competency gain as the dependent variable and the perceived effectiveness of different pedagogical components as independent variables.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Predicting Competency Gain

Predictor Variable	β	t	p-value
(Constant)		5.112	< .001
Guru Sessions (Theory)	0.18	2.101	< .05
Prakalp Teams (Practice)	0.72	8.745	< .001
Swadeshi Case Studies	0.41	4.892	< .001

$R^2 = .68$, Adjusted $R^2 = .67$

Interpretation: The regression model was significant and explained 67% of the variance in competency gain (Adjusted $R^2 = .67$). As shown in Table 3, the standardized beta coefficient (β) for Prakalp Teams ($\beta = 0.72$, $p < .001$) was substantially larger than that for Guru Sessions ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < .05$). This indicates that practical, project-based learning was a much stronger contributor to skill acquisition than theoretical sessions, thereby supporting H2.

Findings

The analysis provides clear evidence for the program's effectiveness. The key finding is a statistically significant improvement in the digital marketing competencies of IT professionals, directly supporting H1. The most substantial gains were in areas specific to the Indian context, such as UPI-led strategies and understanding the local consumer journey.

Furthermore, the regression analysis strongly supports H2, demonstrating that hands-on, practical application (Prakalp Teams) is a far more powerful driver of learning than theoretical instruction alone.

The qualitative data from focus groups reinforced this, with participants frequently citing the "Delhi Chai Wallah" project as a transformative learning experience.

Regarding H3, thematic analysis of project evaluations and focus groups identified a cohort of participants (approximately 15%) who were primarily motivated by certification. Their project deliverables were consistently rated 25% lower on average by evaluators on criteria of "practical applicability" and "innovation" compared to those from learning-motivated participants. This provides preliminary support for H3, highlighting the challenge of participant mindset.

Conclusions

This study concludes that the "Digital Marketing & Growth Hacking Circle" is a potent model for bridging the critical builder-seller divide in the Indian IT industry. The program successfully achieved its objectives by significantly upskilling IT professionals in contextually relevant marketing strategies, primarily through its emphasis on practical, Swadeshi-focused projects.

Theoretical Contribution: This research contributes to the literature on cross-functional training and T-shaped professionals by providing an empirical test of a localized model in an emerging market context. It validates the superiority of practice-based pedagogy over purely theoretical approaches for complex skill acquisition.

Managerial Implications: For Indian IT companies and industry bodies, the study underscores the strategic necessity of such initiatives. Managers should invest in creating internal "circles" that foster IT-marketing collaboration, mandate project-based learning, and develop metrics to measure not just participation but the practical application of new skills.

Limitations and Future Research: This study is limited by its focus on a single cohort and the use of self-reported measures for part of the data. Future research should track the long-term career impact on participants and the business outcomes of the projects they implement. A controlled study comparing this model with traditional training methods across multiple companies would also be a valuable extension.

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