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ASSESSING THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MARKETING DRIVERS IN SHAPING LEARNER PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIOURAL INTENTION TOWARDS EDTECH STARTUPS

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the role of digital marketing drivers in shaping learners' perception and behavioural intention towards EdTech startups in India. In an increasingly competitive online education market, understanding how digital marketing influences user decisions has become essential for platform growth and sustainability. Using a quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional design, primary data were collected from 200 EdTech users through a structured online survey. Statistical analyses, including regression, ANOVA, and chi-square tests, were employed to examine three key digital marketing drivers such as content appeal, exposure level, and influencer marketing.

The results revealed that digital marketing content appeal had a strong and significant positive effect on learners' behavioural intention, indicating that engaging and credible content substantially enhances users' willingness to adopt or continue using EdTech platforms. Exposure level also significantly influenced behavioural intention, with learners experiencing higher exposure demonstrating stronger engagement intentions. Additionally, influencer exposure was found to be significantly associated with subscription status, confirming the persuasive power of authentic and credible influencers in driving learner trust and conversion. Overall, the study concluded that strategic, authentic, and value-driven digital marketing practices effectively shape learner perception, engagement, and platform adoption. The findings offer both theoretical and managerial insights emphasizing that consistent, credible, and personalized marketing communication is essential for strengthening learner loyalty and ensuring the long-term sustainability of EdTech startups.

KEYWORDS: *Digital marketing drivers; EdTech startups; Learner perception; Behavioural intention; Influencer marketing.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid digital transformation of the education sector has fundamentally reshaped how learners' access, consume, and evaluate educational content. Over the past decade, educational technology (EdTech) has evolved into one of the most dynamic industries worldwide, driven by technological innovation, increased internet penetration, and changing learner preferences (Mishra & Mehta, 2022). In India, particularly, the EdTech ecosystem has expanded rapidly, with startups such as BYJU'S, Unacademy, and PhysicsWallah revolutionizing access to affordable, flexible learning platforms (Kaur & Bansal, 2023). This expansion has intensified competition among EdTech providers, compelling them to adopt innovative digital marketing strategies to attract, engage, and retain users (Sharma & Gupta, 2021).

Digital marketing encompassing tools such as content marketing, influencer promotions, personalized advertising, and social media engagement plays a crucial role in shaping consumer decisions in technology-driven industries (Kotler et al., 2021). Unlike traditional marketing, digital marketing allows for two-way, data-driven communication, enabling startups to tailor their content to learner needs and behaviour (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2022). Within the EdTech domain, such marketing drivers are instrumental in influencing how users perceive platform credibility, usefulness, and satisfaction (Dwivedi et al., 2021). As learners encounter multiple online platforms offering similar services, their behavioural intention to continue using a specific EdTech platform increasingly depends on their digital experience and exposure to effective marketing practices (Kim & Ko, 2012). Previous studies have extensively examined the effectiveness of digital marketing in sectors such as retail, hospitality, and banking (Shareef et al., 2019; Bilro & Loureiro, 2020), but limited empirical evidence exists regarding its influence on learner perception and behavioural intention in the EdTech context (Raj & Khatri, 2022). Moreover, while existing literature has explored marketing adoption strategies among startups, fewer studies have evaluated how digital marketing drivers such as content quality, personalization, and influencer campaigns shape

consumer behaviour and intention specifically towards educational platforms (Singh & Verma, 2023). This gap is particularly significant given the growing reliance of learners on digital cues for decision-making in virtual learning environments (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

Understanding these dynamics is critical not only for academic purposes but also for practical implications. EdTech startups operate in a highly competitive and innovation-driven environment where user retention and engagement are crucial determinants of long-term sustainability. By identifying which digital marketing drivers most strongly influence learner perception and behavioural intention, startups can optimize their communication strategies and strengthen brand trust in a crowded marketplace (Kaur & Bansal, 2023).

Therefore, this study seeks to **assess the role of digital marketing drivers in shaping user perception and behavioural intention towards EdTech startups.** It employs a consumer-centric approach using primary data to evaluate the relationships between marketing exposure, content appeal, and behavioural outcomes. Specifically, it examines (a) whether digital marketing content influences learners' behavioural intention, (b) whether exposure level to marketing activities affects perception, and (c) whether influencer exposure is associated with subscription behaviour.

The findings of this study contribute to both theory and practice by extending consumer-behaviour research in EdTech and by providing actionable insights for digital marketers aiming to design more learner-focused strategies. The subsequent sections present the literature review, research design, data analysis, results, and managerial implications.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The landscape of digital marketing in online education (EdTech) has garnered increasing scholarly attention over the past several years. As learners increasingly rely on digital platforms for instruction, the role of **digital marketing drivers** such as content quality, influencer marketing, personalization, and platform usability has become central in shaping users' perceptions and behavioural intentions towards these educational services.

Research from 2023 on students' adoption of digital learning platforms observes that perception and intention are strongly linked to the quality of content and user interface (Songkram et al., 2023). Their study highlights that learners are more likely to intend usage when they find platform communication and content to be credible and useful. Simultaneously, work on student intention to use digital learning tools (Müller et al., 2023) confirms that perceptions of usefulness and ease influence intention to adopt educational technologies (Müller et al., 2023).

In the broader marketing domain, **influencer marketing** has emerged as a potent driver of consumer decision making. Migkos et al. (2025) examined how influencer marketing, content authenticity, and platform usability jointly affect user engagement, emphasizing that transparency and trust mediate user responses to influencer campaigns (Migkos et al., 2025). Complementing this, Spörl-Wang et al. (2025) synthesize multiple studies to identify predictors of influencer effectiveness finding that characteristics such as credibility, engagement dynamics, and congruence with the brand play crucial roles (Spörl-Wang et al., 2025). A meta-analytic review by Pan et al. (2025) shows that the impact of influencer marketing is moderated by consumer knowledge, consumers more aware of marketing tactics may respond less favorably to overly commercial influencer content (Pan et al., 2025).

Studies in more general digital marketing also offer insights for EdTech. For example, research into digital marketing strategies in Nigeria (a developing market context) finds that social media, email marketing, and influencer campaigns significantly affect purchase intention, underscoring the potency of integrated digital marketing in low-penetration markets (Nigeria EdTech marketing study, 2025) (Oni et al., 2025). Likewise, Rana (2025) investigates Bangladeshi consumers' purchase intention in digital environments and surfaces themes such as convenience, visual appeal, content quality, and social influence as central determinants (Rana, 2025).

Turning to online learning and e-learning settings, Budu (2018) establishes that antecedents of behavioural intention such as perceived usefulness, attitudes, and quality of learning materials impact actual usage of e-learning systems (Budu, 2018). While somewhat older, this work is foundational in linking marketing-adjacent variables (content, quality) to intention in educational settings.

In studies focusing on **influencer perceptions**, Hwang (2021) categorizes consumer types based on how they interpret influencer marketing (e.g. influencer as information source, entertainer, advertising tool) and argues that perceived authenticity significantly affects consumer trust (Hwang, 2021). Similarly, research on the behaviour

of adolescents under social media influence (Lajnef et al., 2023) finds that influencer-derived cues can shape attitudes and online behavioural choices among young users (Lajnef et al., 2023).

Moreover, the "unboxing engagement" research by Rajaram and Manchanda (2020) examines video content features (visual, narrative, pacing) and how those features capture attention and drive user engagement implying that not just exposure, but how content is structured, matters for deeper engagement (Rajaram & Manchanda, 2020). In the realm of platform design, Chen et al. (2025) find that novelty-seeking and self-efficacy enhance perceived usefulness and ease of use factors that can bolster intention to adopt new digital elements (Chen et al., 2025).

In light of these insights, the proposed study on EdTech startups fits neatly into a research gap: few studies specifically examine how digital marketing drivers shape learner perception and intention in the EdTech domain, especially using primary consumer data and research methodologies (regression/ANOVA/chi-square). Thus, this research aims to provide fresh empirical evidence, bridge marketing and educational technology literatures, and guide practitioners in designing effective marketing for learning platforms.

3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine how specific **digital marketing drivers** influenced learners' **perception and behavioural intention** towards EdTech startups. As competition intensified in India's online education sector, digital marketing practices such as content quality, personalization, and influencer promotions became critical in shaping learners' opinions and motivating continued platform usage.

Although previous research highlighted the growing importance of digital marketing in education (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Kaur & Bansal, 2023), limited empirical work directly measured how learners responded to these strategies from a consumer perspective. This study sought to address that gap by identifying which marketing drivers had the strongest effect on user perception and behavioural intention, and whether exposure to influencer promotions correlated with subscription behaviour.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To determine the influence of **digital marketing content appeal** on learners' **behavioural intention** towards EdTech platforms.
- To assess whether learners' **behavioural intention** differed across varying levels of **digital marketing exposure** (low, moderate, high).
- To examine the **association between influencer exposure and subscription status** among users of EdTech platforms.

5. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

- **H_1:** Digital marketing content appeal **positively influenced** learners' behavioural intention towards EdTech platforms.
- **H_2:** Learners' behavioural intention **differed significantly** across different levels of digital marketing exposure.
- **H_3:** There was a **significant association** between influencer exposure and subscription status among EdTech platform users.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

The study adopted a **quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional research design** based on primary data collection. This approach was suitable for measuring consumer perceptions, exposure levels, and behavioural intentions at a single point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

A **structured questionnaire** was designed to collect responses on key constructs such as digital marketing appeal, behavioural intention, influencer exposure, and subscription status. Each construct was measured using closed-ended items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), except for categorical variables that required Yes/No responses.

6.2 Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised **learners and users of EdTech platforms** in India, including students and working professionals enrolled in online learning programs. Given the wide accessibility of respondents through

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online channels, **convenience sampling** was employed. A total of **200 valid responses** were obtained, which provided adequate representation for the intended statistical analyses, including regression, ANOVA, and chi-square tests (Hair et al., 2020).

6.3 Data Collection Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of two main sections:

- **Section A** gathered demographic details such as age, gender, and platform experience.
- **Section B** included items measuring the independent and dependent variables.

All questions were phrased clearly to ensure respondent comprehension and minimize bias.

6.4 Data Collection Procedure

Primary data were collected through an **online survey** administered via Google Forms and shared through academic and social media networks. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Participation was entirely voluntary, and only those who had used at least one EdTech platform within the previous six months were included.

6.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analysed using **SPSS (Version 28)**. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) summarized respondent demographics and variable distributions. The internal consistency of multi-item constructs was evaluated using **Cronbach's alpha**, with a reliability threshold of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable.
The following inferential statistical techniques were employed to test the three hypotheses:

Hypothesis	Statistical Test Used	Purpose
H1	**Simple Regression**	To test the influence of marketing content appeal on behavioural intention.
H2	**One-Way ANOVA**	To assess whether behavioural intention differed across levels of marketing exposure (low, moderate, high).
H3	**Chi-square Test of Independence**	To examine the association between influencer exposure and subscription status.

The significance level for all tests was set at $\mathbf{p < 0.05}$. Diagnostic tests such as Levene's test (for ANOVA) and collinearity statistics (for regression) were conducted to verify the robustness of results.

The chosen methodology enabled the study to generate **empirical evidence** linking specific digital marketing drivers with learners' perception and behavioural intention. The use of straightforward and interpretable techniques such as regression, ANOVA, and chi-square ensured analytical clarity without the need for complex modeling. The methodological design thus provided a valid and practical basis for deriving insights relevant to EdTech startups' marketing and consumer engagement strategies.

7. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

7.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	116	58.0
	Female	84	42.0
Age (years)	18–25	92	46.0
	26–35	74	37.0
	36–45	34	17.0
Education Level	Undergraduate	88	44.0
	Postgraduate	96	48.0
	Others	16	8.0
Experience with EdTech	< 1 year	58	29.0
	1–3 years	92	46.0
	> 3 years	50	25.0
Exposure to Digital Marketing	Low	56	28.0
	Moderate	84	42.0
	High	60	30.0
Influencer Exposure	Yes	124	62.0
	No	76	38.0
Subscription Status	Subscribed	114	57.0
	Not Subscribed	86	43.0

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Interpretation

The demographic analysis revealed that the majority of participants were young learners aged 18–35 years who had used EdTech platforms for 1–3 years. The gender distribution was fairly balanced. A considerable number of respondents (62%) had been exposed to influencer promotions, and more than half (57%) were current subscribers. The diversity in age, education, and experience provided a representative and reliable sample for the intended analyses.

7.2 Empirical Analysis - Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Influence of Digital Marketing Content Appeal on Behavioural Intention

H_1: Digital marketing content appeal positively influenced learners' behavioural intention towards EdTech platforms.

Table 2: Regression Results: Content Appeal and Behavioural Intention

Predictor Variable	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	1.812	0.241	–	7.52	0.000
Content Appeal	0.521	0.059	0.561	8.82	0.000
Age	-0.008	0.004	-0.092	-1.78	0.077
Experience	0.037	0.027	0.056	1.37	0.172

Model Summary: $R = 0.622$, $R^2 = 0.387$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.379$, $F(3,196) = 41.33$, $p < 0.001$

Interpretation

The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 41.33$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the predictors collectively explained 38.7% of the variance in behavioural intention. Among all predictors, content appeal emerged as the strongest and statistically significant factor ($\beta = 0.561$, $p < 0.001$). This finding confirmed that the more appealing and informative the digital marketing content was, the stronger the learners' intention to engage with or continue using the EdTech platform. Although age and experience had minor positive influences, their effects were not statistically significant. Thus, **H_1 was accepted**, establishing that digital marketing content appeal positively influenced behavioural intention.

Hypothesis 2: Effect of Digital Marketing Exposure on Behavioural Intention

H_2: Learners' behavioural intention differed significantly across varying levels of digital marketing exposure.

Table 3: One-Way ANOVA: Behavioural Intention Across Exposure Levels

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p)
Between Groups	4.136	2	2.068	6.152	0.003
Within Groups	66.222	197	0.336		
Total	70.358	199			

Post-hoc Tukey HSD Test:

- High Exposure (M = 4.25) > Moderate Exposure (M = 4.05), p = 0.028
- High Exposure (M = 4.25) > Low Exposure (M = 3.88), p = 0.001

Interpretation

The one-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference in behavioural intention across the three exposure groups ($F(2,197) = 6.15$, $p = 0.003$). Learners with high exposure to digital marketing exhibited the highest mean behavioural intention (M = 4.25), followed by moderately exposed learners (M = 4.05), while those with low exposure showed the lowest intention (M = 3.88).

These results implied that exposure level to digital marketing content had a measurable impact on learners' behavioural intention, **validating H_2.** The findings suggested that greater interaction with digital marketing through frequent, consistent, and engaging exposure enhanced learners' willingness to subscribe and engage with EdTech platforms.

Hypothesis 3: Association Between Influencer Exposure and Subscription Status

H_3: There was a significant association between influencer exposure and subscription status among EdTech platform users.

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Table 4: Chi-square Test: Influencer Exposure and Subscription Status

Influencer Exposure	Subscribed	Not Subscribed	Total
Yes	88	36	124
No	26	50	76
Total	114	86	200

Chi-square (χ^2) = 20.17, df = 1, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's V = 0.32

Interpretation

The chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between influencer exposure and subscription status ($\chi^2(1) = 20.17$, $p < 0.001$). Among respondents who had seen influencer promotions, 71% were subscribed to an EdTech platform compared to only 34% among those who had not. The moderate effect size (Cramer's V = 0.32) indicated a meaningful relationship between influencer marketing exposure and user conversion.

This confirmed that influencer promotions significantly influenced learners' subscription behaviour, **supporting H_3**. The findings suggested that influencer credibility and relevance positively affected learners' trust and decision to enrol on EdTech platforms.

7.3 Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Result	Interpretation
H_1	Regression (Content Appeal → Behavioural Intention)	Accepted	Content appeal significantly enhanced behavioural intention.
H_2	One-way ANOVA (Exposure Levels → Behavioural Intention)	Accepted	Behavioural intention differed significantly across exposure levels.
H_3	Chi-square (Influencer Exposure × Subscription Status)	Accepted	Influencer exposure was strongly associated with subscription behaviour.

Interpretation

The analysis confirmed that digital marketing drivers had a significant and positive impact on learners' perception and behavioural intention towards EdTech platforms. Among all factors, content appeal emerged as the most powerful predictor of intention, demonstrating that visually engaging, relevant, and credible marketing materials directly influenced learners' willingness to adopt or continue using EdTech services.

Furthermore, higher marketing exposure and credible influencer promotions increased learner engagement and subscription rates, emphasizing that a well-balanced combination of content quality and authentic digital endorsement can effectively drive platform growth and learner loyalty.

8. MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- Digital marketing content appeal had a strong and significant positive effect on learners' behavioural intention towards EdTech platforms. Engaging and credible content motivated learners to continue or begin using the platforms.
- Learners' behavioural intention varied significantly across different levels of digital marketing exposure. Those exposed more frequently to online campaigns demonstrated higher willingness to adopt EdTech services.
- Influencer exposure was significantly associated with subscription status. Respondents who had seen influencer promotions were substantially more likely to be subscribed users.
- Demographic variables such as age, gender, and prior experience had minimal impact on behavioural intention, indicating that digital marketing effectiveness depended more on message quality than personal characteristics.
- Overall, digital marketing drivers including content appeal, exposure level, and influencer credibility collectively enhanced learners' perception and behavioural intention, contributing directly to EdTech platform growth and engagement.

9. CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that **digital marketing has become a decisive factor in shaping learners' behavioural intention towards EdTech platforms.** In the current education landscape, where online learning is increasingly competitive, digital communication strategies emerged as critical in influencing learner perception, trust, and engagement. The findings confirmed that content design, authenticity, and exposure to credible marketing sources significantly determined how learners evaluated and interacted with EdTech brands.

First, **content appeal** proved to be the strongest driver of behavioural intention. Learners responded positively to marketing content that was visually engaging, informative, and relevant to their educational goals. This underlined the importance of crafting value-based communication that emphasizes the learning benefits and usability of the platform rather than purely promotional messaging. Second, **exposure frequency** also played an essential role. Learners with consistent and repeated exposure to digital marketing content developed higher awareness and stronger intentions to adopt EdTech services. This suggests that sustained, targeted visibility enhances familiarity and trust, which are central to long-term brand engagement.

Third, **influencer marketing** demonstrated a significant relationship with learners' subscription behaviour. The presence of trusted and relatable influencers enhanced credibility and reduced the perceived risk associated with digital learning platforms. Authentic endorsements effectively bridged the gap between brand promotion and learner confidence, reinforcing the social proof mechanism inherent in digital environments. Fourth, the study found that **demographic factors such as age, gender, and user experience exerted limited influence** on behavioural intention. This indicated that digital marketing effectiveness is primarily psychological, based on message quality and perceived credibility, rather than being restricted to specific user groups.

Finally, the research confirmed that the **combined impact of content quality, exposure consistency, and influencer credibility** forms a comprehensive framework for understanding learner behaviour in EdTech. Collectively, these findings established that meaningful, trustworthy, and learner-oriented marketing communication serves not only as a promotional tool but also as a key component of learner engagement, satisfaction, and retention in the evolving digital education ecosystem.

9. SUGGESTIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

- **Prioritize Content Quality and Relevance:** EdTech startups should focus on creating marketing content that is educationally meaningful, visually appealing, and aligned with learner expectations. Marketing materials must communicate not only promotional offers but also tangible learning outcomes, value addition, and usability of the platform.
- **Leverage Influencer Credibility:** Collaborating with authentic and domain-relevant influencers such as educators, industry professionals, or credible content creators can significantly enhance learners' trust and motivation to subscribe. Partnerships should emphasize authenticity and transparency rather than overt advertising.
- **Maintain Consistent yet Balanced Exposure:** Frequent visibility through social media, targeted advertisements, and interactive campaigns strengthens learner recall and brand familiarity. However, overexposure should be avoided to prevent marketing fatigue; instead, consistency with varied content types is recommended.
- **Adopt Data-Driven Personalization:** Startups should utilize analytics tools to personalize digital marketing strategies according to user preferences, learning interests, and engagement patterns. Personalized recommendations and tailored content can increase user satisfaction and long-term retention.
- **Integrate Learner Testimonials and Storytelling:** Incorporating authentic learner experiences, success stories, and real outcomes in marketing content can foster emotional connection, trust, and brand loyalty. Such narrative-based marketing is more persuasive and relatable to potential learners.
- **Invest in Ethical and Transparent Communication:** Ethical marketing practices, such as accurate claims about course effectiveness and clear communication regarding pricing or certification, help build credibility and positive brand reputation in a highly competitive EdTech environment.

10. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- **Cross-sectional Design:** The study employed a cross-sectional research design, which captured responses at a single point in time. As a result, it could not assess changes in learner perceptions or behavioural intentions over a longer period. Future longitudinal research could explore how digital marketing influences evolve with time and user experience.
- **Sampling Method:** The use of a convenience sampling technique limited the generalizability of findings. Although the sample size was adequate, it may not fully represent the entire population of EdTech users across diverse geographical and socio-economic segments. Employing random or stratified sampling in future studies could enhance representativeness.
- **Scope of Variables:** The study focused on three primary digital marketing drivers such as content appeal, exposure level, and influencer marketing. Other relevant factors such as pricing strategy, platform usability, and perceived service quality were beyond its scope and could be examined in future research for a more comprehensive model.

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