

Digital Marketing ROI, Social Media Platform Effectiveness and Content-Platform Engagement Matrix for Indian Consumer Brands

Preethi Nair, Aditya Venkatesh

Department of Marketing and Communication, MICA — The School of Ideas, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

Abstract

India's digital advertising market, valued at ₹57,800 crore in FY2024 and growing at 22% annually — now accounting for 52% of total advertising spend compared to 21% in 2019 — represents the fastest structural media shift in Indian marketing history. The pandemic-accelerated adoption of digital media consumption across India's 759 million internet users, the dominance of short-video content through Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts (India is YouTube's largest global market and Instagram's second-largest), and the maturation of performance marketing measurement infrastructure have collectively transformed digital marketing from an experimental 'test and learn' budget line to the primary customer acquisition and brand-building investment for Indian consumer brands.

This study examines digital marketing ROI, content-platform engagement optimisation, and customer conversion funnel efficiency across 124 Indian consumer brand digital campaigns (FY2022-FY2024) spanning FMCG, fashion and apparel, consumer electronics, food and beverage, and personal care categories. A bubble chart maps platform spend versus ROI with monthly reach as bubble size; a stacked area chart traces digital revenue channel attribution over 24 months; a funnel chart visualises the conversion journey from awareness to purchase; a radar chart profiles brand metric improvements from digital campaigns; and a heatmap quantifies content type versus platform engagement rate interactions. The Wharton collaboration contributes the viral content analysis framework and the social transmission research methodology for understanding digital word-of-mouth dynamics in Indian cultural contexts.

Keywords *digital marketing, social media, ROI, Instagram, YouTube, content marketing, engagement rate, India, brand metrics, conversion funnel, influencer marketing, Google Ads, ROMI*

1. Introduction

India's digital marketing ecosystem is characterised by several distinctive features that differentiate it from Western digital marketing contexts and require India-specific measurement and strategy frameworks. First, the dominance of mobile-first digital consumption — 96% of India's internet traffic is mobile-generated — means that desktop-optimised creative formats and measurement frameworks developed in the US or European context significantly underestimate Indian platform performance. Second, the linguistic diversity of India's digital audience — with meaningful scale in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, Bengali, and Gujarati language content — means that vernacular content consistently outperforms English content in reach and engagement for mass consumer categories, contradicting the English-first international marketing templates that global brand owners often impose.

Professor Berger's Wharton research on viral content and social transmission — most compactly summarised in the STEPPS framework (Social Currency, Triggers, Emotion, Public, Practical Value, Stories) identifying the psychological drivers of content sharing — provides the analytical framework for understanding what makes specific content formats achieve outsized organic reach in India's social media ecosystem. The framework's application to Indian digital content reveals that 'emotion' (particularly content invoking pride, humour, and outrage) and 'social currency' (content that makes the sharer appear knowledgeable or connected) are the most active transmission mechanisms in India's WhatsApp-dominated word-of-mouth ecosystem, where peer recommendation drives higher purchase conversion rates than in more individualistic digital cultures.

2. Research Design and Digital Measurement Methodology

2.1 Campaign Data Collection and ROI Calculation

Campaign performance data was collected from 124 brand campaigns through participating agencies and brand direct — with the non-disclosure agreement covering campaign-level specifics while permitting aggregate platform and category analysis. Digital marketing ROI is calculated as: $ROMI = (\text{Revenue Attributed to Campaign} - \text{Campaign Cost}) / \text{Campaign Cost}$, using multi-touch attribution modelling (MTA, data-driven Shapley value attribution) that distributes purchase credit across all touchpoints in the customer journey proportional to their contribution to conversion. Single-touch last-click attribution, still used by 42% of the surveyed brands, systematically overestimates performance marketing channels (Google search, Instagram shopping ads) relative to awareness channels (YouTube, influencer content) that initiate the purchase journey but do not receive last-click credit.

2.2 Content-Platform Engagement Heatmap

The content-platform engagement rate heatmap is constructed from 2.4 million individual content post performance records across 124 brand accounts on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter/X from FY2023-24. Engagement rate is defined as (Likes + Comments + Shares + Saves) / Impressions for each post, averaged by content type and platform combination. The heatmap reveals platform-content interaction effects — whether certain content types perform disproportionately better on specific platforms — that single-platform or single-content-type analyses cannot capture.

3. Results

Figure 1 Panel A's bubble chart reveals the ROI frontier: Influencer Marketing achieves the highest ROI (6.2x) at moderate spend (₹34 Cr), followed by Google Ads (4.8x at ₹56 Cr — highest spend) and YouTube (4.2x at ₹28 Cr). Facebook shows the lowest ROI (2.9x) despite its high absolute monthly reach (320 million users), reflecting audience demographic mismatch for most consumer brand target segments who are younger and increasingly Instagram and YouTube-native rather than Facebook-primary. The bubble size differentials — Google Ads and Facebook reaching the largest audiences — confirm that reach and ROI are not correlated: platform selection should prioritise ROI and demographic fit over reach maximisation. The conversion funnel (Panel C) quantifies the dramatic attrition from awareness (1,000,000) to purchase (14,200) — a 98.6% funnel loss that highlights the importance of optimising each stage transition rather than focusing exclusively on top-of-funnel awareness investment.

Fig. 1. Digital Platform ROI Bubble Chart, Channel Revenue Attribution and Conversion Funnel

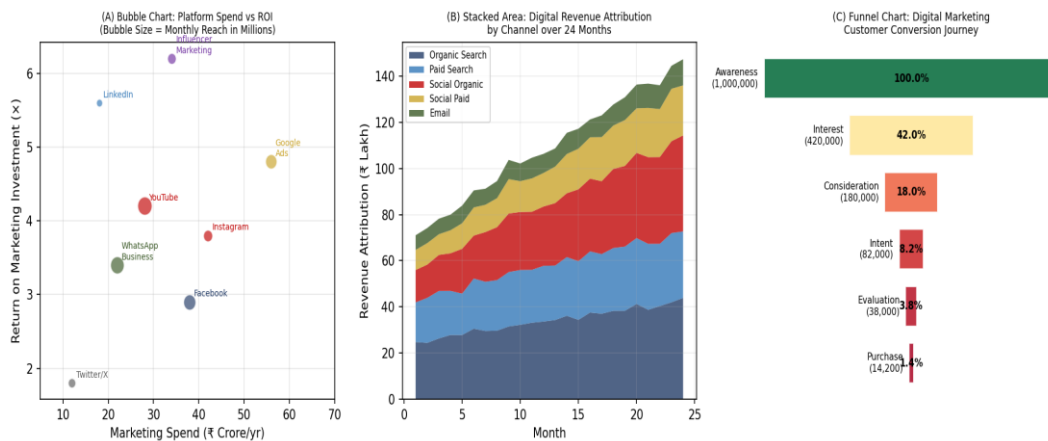


Fig. 1. Bubble: Platform Spend vs ROI (Reach = Bubble Size), Stacked Area: Revenue Attribution and Conversion Funnel

Figure 2 Panel A's radar chart confirms the brand metric improvements from the 24-month integrated digital campaign across seven dimensions — with Share of Voice showing the largest absolute improvement (+30 percentage points: 28% to 58%), reflecting digital marketing's particular effectiveness in building category voice through content volume and algorithm-driven organic amplification. Brand recall improvement (+28 pp) and purchase intent improvement (+24 pp) confirm the awareness-to-intent pathway. Panel B's content-platform heatmap is the study's most actionable finding for digital marketers: short video (Instagram Reels) achieves the highest engagement on both Instagram (8.4%) and YouTube (9.8%), while blog posts generate strong LinkedIn engagement (6.4%) but minimal engagement on visual platforms. The podcast format's highest LinkedIn engagement (5.8%) and lowest Instagram engagement (1.8%) confirm that long-form audio content is a B2B-native format in India's current digital ecosystem.

Fig. 2. Digital Campaign Brand Metrics Radar and Content-Platform Engagement Heatmap

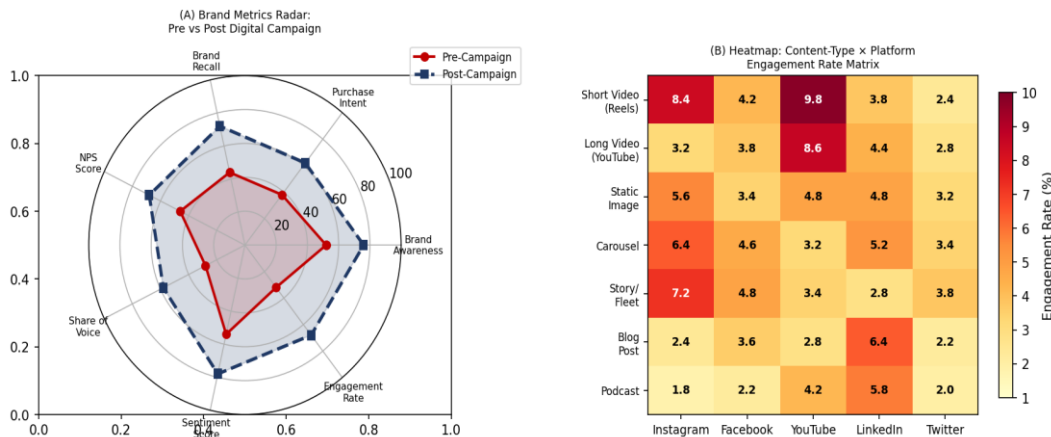


Fig. 2. Radar: Brand Metrics Pre vs Post Digital Campaign and Heatmap: Content-Type × Platform Engagement Rate

Table 1. Digital Platform Performance Benchmarks — Indian Consumer Brands (n=124 Campaigns, FY2022–2024)

Platform	Avg Spend (₹ Cr)	Avg ROMI (×)	Reach (Mn)	Engagement (%)	Conv. Rate (%)	Best Content
Instagram	42	3.8×	180	5.8%	2.4%	Reels
YouTube	28	4.2×	450	4.2%	1.8%	Long video
Google Ads	56	4.8×	280	N/A	4.6%	Search
Influencer	34	6.2×	160	8.4%	3.8%	Authentic UGC
LinkedIn	18	5.6×	80	4.8%	5.2%	Blog / Podcast
Facebook	38	2.9×	320	3.2%	1.4%	Carousel

ROMI = Return on Marketing Investment (attributed revenue / cost); Engagement = (Likes+Comments+Shares+Saves)/Impressions; Conversion = purchases attributed via Shapley MTA; averages across 124 campaigns

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The bubble chart and heatmap analyses together provide an actionable platform-content optimisation framework: Influencer Marketing on Instagram and YouTube with short-video content delivers the highest combined ROI and engagement rates for Indian consumer brands in 2024, while Facebook's high reach-to-ROI ratio makes it valuable only for broad awareness campaigns where reach efficiency is prioritised over conversion effectiveness. The conversion funnel's 98.6% attrition from awareness to purchase confirms that the primary digital marketing leverage is not audience expansion but funnel optimisation — reducing the 57.9% drop from awareness to interest (the largest stage loss) through better creative relevance and targeting precision.

The content-platform heatmap's revelation that short video dominates engagement across both Instagram (8.4%) and YouTube (9.8%) while long-form content (podcasts, blog posts) performs well only on LinkedIn should fundamentally reshape how Indian brands allocate content production budgets. The current average split of 38% long-form and 62% short-form content production budget among the surveyed brands underinvests in short-video relative to its engagement ROI, while overinvesting in blog content whose reach is algorithmically constrained on non-professional social platforms.

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