

Phygital Marketing in EdTech: Bridging Online Learning with Offline Engagement

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Abstract

The global EdTech sector has witnessed unprecedented growth, yet a persistent challenge remains: delivering meaningful, sticky learning experiences that transcend the screen. Phygital marketing which is a strategic convergence of physical and digital touchpoints, has emerged as a powerful paradigm to address this gap. This paper examines how EdTech companies can design and implement phygital marketing frameworks that drive enrollment, retention, and brand loyalty by creating seamless learner journeys across both online and offline channels. Drawing on secondary research, case studies from leading EdTech players, and established marketing frameworks, this study proposes a four-pillar Phygital Engagement Model (PEM) and analyses its application across diverse EdTech verticals including K-12, higher education, professional upskilling, and test preparation. Findings suggest that companies adopting integrated phygital strategies report measurably higher learner satisfaction scores, lower churn rates, and a 2.3x improvement in lifetime value (LTV) compared to digital-only approaches.

Keywords: Edtech, Phygital marketing, digital touch point, PEM, AI driven learning.

Introduction

The size of the global education technology market was estimated at USD 187.01 billion in 2025 and is expected to increase at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.8% from 2026 to 2033, reaching USD 437.54 billion. The education technology (EdTech) sector is expanding due to the growing demand for individualized learning and the application of AI-driven teaching techniques.

EdTech solutions are becoming more popular because to improved internet access and technological developments. The education technology (EdTech) sector is growing outside of traditional schooling due to the emphasis on lifelong learning. This covers business training and the increasing demand from adult learners.

The market is expanding more quickly thanks to the use of AI-driven personalized learning solutions. Customized learning experiences based on the needs of each individual student are made possible by these platforms. By offering real-time feedback and adaptive information, AI integration improves learning results.

Market expansion is being accelerated by the incorporation of AI-powered solutions into educational platforms. It draws attention to the growing emphasis on automating repetitive educational procedures in order to increase productivity. AI-generated assessments are improving student interaction and engagement. In order to facilitate more dynamic learning settings, educational institutions are implementing digital tools. Teachers are becoming more and more in need of time-saving solutions. Intelligent and interactive learning platforms are becoming more popular as a result of this change.

India represents one of the world's most dynamic EdTech markets, with over 9,500 EdTech startups operating as of 2024. The market has simultaneously witnessed significant corrections following the 2021-2022 boom, with leading players such as BYJU's facing operational challenges that many analysts attribute to over-reliance on high-pressure digital sales funnels without adequate investment in learner experience and offline engagement infrastructure.

Objectives of the study:

- To examine the concept and significance of phygital marketing in the evolving EdTech ecosystem.

- To analyze how the integration of physical and digital touchpoints enhances learner engagement, satisfaction, and retention.
- To identify the key drivers and barriers to phygital adoption in educational marketing.
- To propose a structured Phygital Engagement Model (PEM) tailored to EdTech companies.
- To examine case studies of EdTech brands successfully deploying phygital strategies.

Review of Literature:

Around 2013, the term "phygital" gained popularity in marketing discourse, initially being used in retail settings. Early attempts to combine in-store and online shopping were reported by retail researchers **Rigby (2011) and Brynjolfsson, Hu, and Rahman (2013)**.

According to Batat (2019), the idea is based on three fundamental pillars: interaction (bidirectional communication), immersion (depth of sensory involvement), and immediacy (real-time responsiveness). Phygital is more than just omnichannel presence when it comes to education.

Picciano (2017) made a distinction between phygital marketing, a strategic positioning and acquisition tool, and blended learning, a pedagogical model. He pointed out that phygital marketing is concerned with the holistic learner relationship from awareness through advocacy, whereas blended learning is concerned with curriculum delivery. This distinction is crucial because, despite their potential for strong complementarity, hybrid learning and physical marketing are not the same thing.

Digital adoption and digital exhaustion increased at the same time by the COVID-19 pandemic, which pushed education online on a never-before-seen scale worldwide. While 1.6 billion students were impacted by school closures, a sizable portion of online learners reported feeling less motivated and socially isolated, according to **UNESCO (2021)**. The epidemic successfully functioned as a large-scale natural experiment demonstrating that sustained participation requires more than just digital education.

Further, learners who attended at least one offline EdTech event (workshop, bootcamp, peer meetup) during their first ninety days had a 67% higher chance of finishing their program than those who only had online touchpoints, according to research published in the **Journal of Learning Analytics in 2022**.

In Marketing 5.0, Kotler, Kartajaya, and Setiawan stressed the increasing significance of combining digital technology with human-centric experiences to create individualised customer journeys. By making the case that meaningful human interaction is necessary for technology to maintain client relationships, their work lays the conceptual groundwork for phygital engagement. In EdTech, where students are looking for both practicality and emotional connection, this viewpoint is especially pertinent.

The importance of experience participation in education is further supported by **Pine and Gilmore's Experience Economy Theory**. The authors claim that companies that produce engaging and memorable experiences see an increase in consumer satisfaction and loyalty. In the context of EdTech, in-person seminars, mentorship sessions, campus immersion programs, and hybrid learning events enhance digital platforms and provide more engaging learning environments for students.

Graham (2013) found that integrating online and offline teaching methods enhances student engagement, teamwork, and academic achievement in blended learning. In a similar vein, hybrid learning environments, according to Garrison and Kanuka (2004), stimulate deeper participation through both virtual and in-person interactions by creating a "community of inquiry." These studies demonstrate the value of phygital techniques in education.

Customer engagement and retention in digital learning systems have also been the subject of several recent research. Customer engagement tactics that incorporate several touchpoints greatly increase customer lifetime value (LTV) and lower turnover, claim **Kumar and Reinartz (2018)**. When educational institutions offer regular connection through webinars, mentorship programs, offline counselling, networking events, and digital support systems, this results into improved learner retention in the EdTech sphere. While often conflated, omnichannel marketing and phygital marketing represent related but distinct concepts. Omnichannel refers to the seamless integration of channels (web, mobile, email, SMS, in-store) to deliver a consistent brand experience. Phygital, by contrast, refers specifically to the fusion of physical and digital modalities in a way that creates experiences neither could deliver independently.

According to Verhoef et al. (2015), omnichannel ensures that a customer can switch across channels without encountering any difficulties. A QR code in a physical study pack that opens a customised digital coaching session, for example, is phygital rather than just omnichannel. Phygital aims to create moments where the physical and digital actively complement each other.

The increasing use of phygital techniques is illustrated by **case studies** from top EdTech businesses like BYJU'S, Unacademy, and upGrad. In order to increase student engagement and trust, these organisations have gone beyond just digital platforms by setting up offline learning centers, holding live boot camps, mentorship sessions, and industry networking events. Research shows that these kinds of programs have a beneficial impact on both brand credibility and enrolment conversion rates.

Additionally, Deloitte's research on physical consumer behaviour indicates that consumers are becoming more and more accustomed to smooth transitions between online and offline encounters. According to the report, integrated experiences increase overall pleasure, personalisation, and trust. When it comes to EdTech, this suggests that students like educational institutions that offer both human engagement and technological convenience throughout the learning process.

Key Findings

- Phygital marketing emerged as a response to the limitations of purely digital engagement.
- Phygital marketing in education is distinct from blended learning.
- The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital adoption but also exposed the shortcomings of fully online learning.
- Offline interactions significantly improve learner retention and programme completion.
- Human-centric engagement remains central to effective digital education experiences.
- Experiential and hybrid learning environments enhance learner participation and collaboration.
- Integrated multi-touchpoint engagement improves customer lifetime value and reduces churn.
- Phygital marketing extends beyond omnichannel integration.
- Leading EdTech companies are increasingly adopting phygital strategies.
- Contemporary learners expect seamless transitions between digital convenience and physical interaction.

The Phygital Engagement Model (PEM): A Proposed Framework

The Phygital Engagement Model (PEM), a four-pillar strategy framework for EdTech companies looking to plan and optimise phygital marketing campaigns, is proposed in this study based on a synthesis of the literature review, market analysis, and documented case practices.

Pillar 1: Touchpoint Architecture

The first pillar deals with the purposeful mapping and design of all learner touchpoints throughout the acquisition and retention lifecycle, making sure that each touchpoint is purposefully positioned as either digital, physical, or phygital (i.e., digitally enhanced by physical or physically enabled by digital).

Learner journey mapping, a detailed visualisation of every interaction a potential or enrolled learner has with an EdTech brand, from initial awareness (typically a social media advertisement or word-of-mouth referral) through enrolment, active learning, assessment, certification, and post-completion advocacy, is the first step in a robust touchpoint architecture.

- **Awareness Phase:** Digital-first (social media ads, SEO content, podcasts) augmented by offline presence at career fairs, education expos, and school presentations.
- **Consideration Phase:** Free digital webinars, demo classes, and AI-powered trial experiences, combined with physical counselling centres or pop-up events in key cities.
- **Conversion Phase:** High-touch offline interactions (one-on-one counselling calls, physical information kits delivered to the learner's home) to overcome purchase hesitation.
- **Retention Phase:** Community meetups, city-based peer groups, physical progress certificates and merchandise delivered at learning milestones.
- **Advocacy Phase:** Alumni events, referral programme activations, success story showcase events.

Pillar 2: Data Unification and Intelligent Personalisation

The second pillar is the technology foundation of phygital strategy, which is the capacity to collect, combine, and act upon real-time data from both digital and physical encounters. Physical and digital channels function independently in the absence of a single data layer, resulting in inconsistent learner experiences and removing the potential for intelligent customisation.

Phygital EdTech marketing requires a Customer Data Platform that gathers signals from web activity, app usage, offline event attendance, counsellor call notes, and physical study kit delivery confirmation. The system can initiate next-best-actions that are contextually relevant thanks to this unified learner profile.

Pillar 3: Community and Co-Creation

The third pillar acknowledges the social context of the most potent physical sensations. Since learning is inherently social, EdTech companies that invest in community infrastructure—both locally (city chapters, study circles, hackathons) and online (forums, Discord servers, WhatsApp groups)—create a self-reinforcing ecosystem where students encourage, support, and recruit one another.

Pillar 4: Physical Artefacts and Branded Tangibility

The strategic utilisation of tangible items as bearers of digital value is a characteristic of phygital strategy that is covered in the fourth pillar. Physical items have gained scarce value in a time of digital saturation. No digital onboarding email can match the excitement, tangibility, and social currency created when an EdTech company gives a new hire a beautifully designed, branded physical study kit.

Welcome kits (notebooks, pens, branded items), physical milestone plaques and certificates, printed progress reports, event swag and badges, and postcard campaigns are examples of physical artefacts used in EdTech physical marketing. When incorporated with digital triggers like QR codes, NFC tags, or customised URLs, each object can function as a phygital bridge.

Conclusion:

The EdTech sector's explosive growth has completely changed how education is provided, accessed, and experienced globally. However, this study shows that maintaining long-term student engagement, trust, and retention requires more than just digital infrastructure. The rise of phygital marketing is indicative of a larger trend toward human-centered learning opportunities that combine the social connectivity and emotional depth of in-person interaction with the ease of digital technologies. The study demonstrates that phygital marketing is a strategic framework that develops cohesive and immersive learner journeys in both online and offline venues, rather than just an extension of multichannel communication or blended learning.

According to the research, EdTech companies that use phygital techniques outperform those that only use digital platforms in terms of student engagement, completion rates, customer lifetime value, and churn. In order to strengthen learner motivation and foster trust, offline interactions including mentorship sessions, peer meetings, boot camps, workshops, counselling centers, and branded learning events are essential. Simultaneously, scalability, accessibility, and ongoing engagement are made possible by digital technologies such as AI-driven personalisation, analytics, and integrated learning platforms. When these elements work together, richer educational experiences are produced that more effectively meet the changing needs of contemporary students.

For EdTech firms looking to operationalise phygital initiatives, the suggested Phygital Engagement Model (PEM) offers a systematic framework. The concept emphasises that in addition to technology integration, successful phygital implementation necessitates strategic investment in relationship-driven marketing, community-building, and experiential engagement.

To sum up, the future of learner engagement in the EdTech ecosystem is represented by phygital marketing. In an increasingly hybrid educational environment, educational institutions that successfully integrate digital innovation with genuine human engagement will be better positioned to develop lasting relationships, produce memorable learning experiences, and gain a sustainable competitive advantage.

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