

FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY, NOT FOR SALE

FOUNDERLABS

AUGUST 2025 | ISSUE #03

“
**YOU DON'T
NEED TO BE LOUD
TO BE LEGENDARY**”

An in-depth conversation with
Dr. Satyendra Patnaik, CEO – JSS STEP NOIDA



THE CREATOR
ECONOMY IN INDIA

ZERO TO FIRST
100 CUSTOMERS

E CAFE NCR
MEET UP

DEFY : DRONES, DISRUPTION AND
A DRIVE TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

TalentOnLease

A new age online platform providing
"TECHIES ON DEMAND"

Our Motto

Making available the Right Resources at
the Right Time and at Right Cost

Our UPS



A strong founding team,
comprising of Technology
Industry veterans



Verified and vetted
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Our Industry Coverage

- ✓ Consulting (Including big 4)
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- ✓ Travel & Hospitality
- ✓ Healthcare
- ✓ Ecommerce
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Technologies



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From the Editor's Desk



At FounderLabs, we don't just report on startups—we champion the spirit behind them. This August issue celebrates the founders who are building with purpose, not just profit.

Our cover story takes us inside JSS STEP NOIDA, where Dr. Satyendra Patnaik is quietly reshaping India's incubation model—one rooted in empathy, inclusion, and real-world support for tier-2 and tier-3 founders. It's a timely reminder that India's next wave of innovation won't come from cookie-cutter accelerators—it will come from belief, patience, and grassroots action.

We also turn the spotlight on India's creator economy, a goldmine of micro-entrepreneurs, regional influencers, and DIY visionaries turning mobile screens into monetized platforms. For startups aiming to power this movement, the opportunities lie in building tools, trust, and technology that help creators become sustainable businesses.

A recurring theme in this issue is deep tech with heart. Whether it's Dr. Deepika Singh, who is using AI and thermal imaging to fight breast cancer, or Defy, a drone-tech startup reimagining agriculture and logistics—every story is a masterclass in impact-driven innovation. Technology here is not just a buzzword; it's a bridge to better futures.



This is India's startup decade. It will be defined by the intentions we hold, the communities we uplift, and the voices we amplify.

The pulse of the startup ecosystem was on full display at vibrant community events—from CMD Club's Leadership Mixer to eCafe NCR Meetup and Guftagu's Prime Meets. These weren't just networking opportunities—they were reminders that business growth begins with authentic connection. In a world of algorithms and automation, human trust remains the greatest currency.

Finally, the TRL (Technology Readiness Level) framework has been reframed to assess social innovations—because not all startups chase profit. Some chase change. And those too deserve structured pathways to scale.

As we move into the latter half of the year, the message is clear: this is India's startup decade. But it will be defined not just by the technologies we build, but by the intentions we hold, the communities we uplift, and the voices we amplify.

To all our readers, contributors, and believers—thank you for being part of this journey.

Keep building. Keep believing.

Happy Reading

MANOJ PAL
Managing Editor

August 2025

07

Lead Story
JSS STEP NOIDA



11

The Founder's Digest
The month's must-reads highlights



13

Upcoming Events
List of upcoming startup events



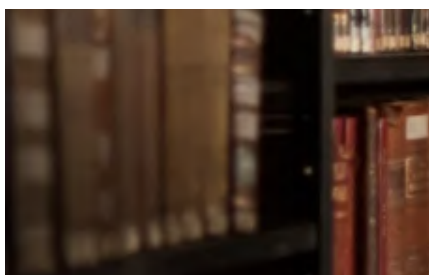
15

The Creator Economy
India's creator economy is the goldmine for startups



18

Books That Shaped India's Startup Leaders
Timeless Reads Powering Entrepreneurial Minds



21

How to Price Your Product for the Indian Market
Set the right price for your product and win over markets



24

Top Trends In Indian EdTech Startups

The next phase of education will be powered by AI



28

Zero to first 100 customers

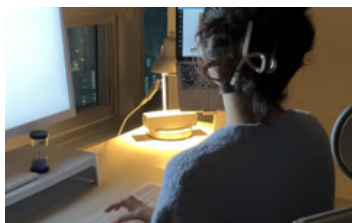
How Indian Startups Found Their First Tribe



31

How to build a remote first Startup Team

Begin enjoying your work and feel less burnout



34

eCafe NCR Meetup 2025

A Celebration of Startup Camaraderie, Community, and Collective Growth



38

Dr. Deepika Singh and DG Rakshak

Using AI, Empathy, & Innovation to Fight Breast Cancer



41

Defy

Drones, Disruption, And a Drive Toward Sustainability



August 2025

44

From Insight to Impact :
Advancing Social Innovation
(A TRL Framework)



48

Recent Guftagu Events
Buzz : Highlights Of the
Guftgu Events



50

CMD Business Club Events Buzz : Highlights
of the Networking Event



founderlabs

VOL 1, ISSUE 2

MANAGAING EDITOR

Manoj Pal

SENIOR EDITOR

Vandana

EDITORIAL TEAM

Ravi Kumar

Anshika Aggarwal

Swati Mandal

An initiative of
FounderLabs and
TalentOnLease

Registered Office:

A-130, A Block,
Sector 63, Noida, Uttar Pradesh,
201301

For Editorial,
write us at:
info@founderlabs.in

For Advertising,
write us at
adv@founderlabs.in

For any query,
please contact us at:
9910382912

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LEAD STORY

JSS STEP

NOIDA



You Don't Need to Be Loud to Be Legendary

An in-depth conversation with

Dr. Satyendra Patnaik CEO - JSS STEP NOIDA

➔ What was the founding vision behind JSS STEP, and how has it evolved with India's startup boom?

The founding vision was rooted in access and inclusion. When we began, "entrepreneurship" was limited to urban pockets and elite circles. Our goal was to democratize innovation — to make it accessible to anyone with an idea and the courage to pursue it.

Over time, we've evolved — not just in size but in mindset. We've adapted to India's rapidly changing startup landscape, but we've always remained grounded in our belief that every founder, no matter where they come from, deserves a shot. Today, we focus heavily on Tier 2 and Tier 3 innovators, deep tech, and sustainable solutions — because that's where the future lies.

➔ What makes JSS STEP's support model different from others?

We see startups as people, not just projects. Our support model is deeply personalized. We don't believe in a one-size-fits-all framework. Every founder has a different journey, and our job is to meet them where they are.

We offer more than infrastructure — we offer insight, patience, and presence. Whether it's helping someone refine their pitch at midnight or giving honest feedback after a failed prototype, we walk the journey with them. Our hybrid support (physical and virtual), grassroots outreach, and deeply engaged mentor pool create a holistic support system that's rare in incubators today.

➔ How do you know when a startup is ready to scale or pitch to investors?

For me, readiness isn't defined by revenue — it's defined by clarity and conviction. If a founder can articulate what problem they're solving, how their solution works,



In a world where headlines chase unicorns, JSS STEP NOIDA quietly nurtures entrepreneurs solving real, ground-level problems. Founded in 2000 and backed by the Department of Science & Technology, JSS STEP has helped over 240 startups grow — not just in valuation, but in purpose.

We spoke with **Dr. Satyendra Patnaik**, the driving force behind this incubator, about what it really takes to build something from scratch — and to keep believing when no one else does.

and why it matters — without slides, just with raw clarity — that's a sign they're ready.

We also look for traction, even in small forms. Are customers engaging? Is feedback positive? Are the founders consistent in execution? These signals matter more than spreadsheets. We follow a simple philosophy: grow steady before you go big.



➔ **How do you curate your mentor network, and what kind of mentorship has been most effective?**

We focus on real-world wisdom. Our mentors aren't chosen for the brands on their resumes, but for the scars on their journey. We look for individuals who've built, failed, rebuilt, and succeeded — because they understand the emotional and strategic rollercoaster of entrepreneurship.

The most effective mentorship is never prescriptive — it's empathetic. It's someone asking the right questions, not giving all the answers. Some of our best mentor moments have happened over chai, not conference rooms.



➔ **How do you bridge the gap between academia and entrepreneurship?**

That gap is real — and it often stems from fear of the unknown. We work with academic institutions not just as knowledge providers but as launchpads. We design interventions — idea sprints, early validation labs, student innovation fellowships — that allow students to explore entrepreneurship hands-on.

We also encourage faculty to engage with startups — co-create, co-mentor. This builds a culture where innovation is no longer a side activity, but a parallel track to academics.

➔ **What mindset shifts do you try to instill in first-time founders?**

First, we tell them: let go of the idea of perfection. A startup is a living organism — it evolves. You don't need a perfect product; you need a working version that solves something, even if imperfectly. Second, we emphasize humility and curiosity. Founders often come in with energy, but real success comes when they also learn to listen — to customers, to feedback, to failure. Third, we remind them to focus on why they started. When things get hard (and they will), purpose is what keeps you going.

➔ **Startups from non-metro areas face unique challenges. How do you support them?**

Startups from rural and semi-urban areas often struggle with confidence, exposure, and access — but they bring unmatched grit and creativity. At JSS STEP, we make it a point to onboard such founders into our cohorts, especially through outreach programs and local partnerships.

We help them with language, legal basics, digital tools — things that are often taken for granted. But more than anything, we give them the belief that their ideas are just as valid — and often, more relevant — than urban-centric models.



To every founder reading this, the world may not understand your idea today, but that's okay. If you're building something only you can see, you're already ahead. Stay grounded, stay curious, and don't chase noise. Impact speaks louder — always.

--- **Dr. Satyendra Patnaik**
CEO, JSS STEP NOIDA



Which sectors do you believe are ripe for disruption, and how is JSS STEP aligning with these?

I believe the next wave of innovation will come from agri-tech, sustainable packaging, diagnostics, bio-AI, and climate resilience. These sectors aren't just growth markets — they're mission-critical for India's future.

We're already aligning our focus through the **BioNEST** initiative, the NIDHI programs, and our Bharat Tech Accelerator, where we guide startups building for real India — not just for investors, but for impact.



What's one leadership lesson that's stayed with you through this journey?

Be there when it matters. A lot of people show up when things go right. But true leadership is about being the quiet support when everything feels like it's falling apart.



How do themes like AI, sustainability, and deeptech fit into your incubation model?

We never lead with the tech — we lead with the problem. If AI or deeptech is the best solution, we support that. But what we really care about is impact. Sustainability, for instance, isn't a vertical at JSS STEP — it's a mindset. We ask every startup: Can your product last beyond you? Can it create value without creating harm? These are the conversations we push early.



Quick Takes with Dr. Patnaik

- **A book every founder should read:**

Rework by Jason Fried. It simplifies the hustle and reminds you to keep things real.

- **A startup you admire (outside JSS STEP):**

icreate. Built slowly, grown deeply — solving core problems without the noise.

- **One skill every entrepreneur must build:**

Self-awareness. It's the compass that helps you navigate everything else.

- **One thing incubators often get wrong:**

Too much structure. Founders need freedom to think, not frameworks to follow blindly.

- **One word that defines your journey:**

Rooted. In people, in purpose, in possibility.

The Founder's Digest

This Month's Must-Reads from FounderLabs



AWS BACKS INDIA'S BOOMING SPACETECH SECTOR, EXPANDS GLOBAL ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME

In a move that further strengthens its commitment to the spacetechn ecosystem, Amazon Web Services (AWS) has launched the AWS Space Accelerator (APJ 2025), a 10-week program aimed at supporting early and growth-stage startups across India, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.

founderlabs.in/aws-backs-indias-booming-spacetechn-sector-expands-global-accelerator-programme/



META DROPS AI DEAL, HIRES CEO INSTEAD

Meta shifted from acquiring Safe Superintelligence to hiring its leadership after failed talks due to valuation and strategic differences.

<https://founderlabs.in/meta-shifts-gears-from-buying-ai-startup-to-hiring-its-ceo/>



MAMAEARTH PARENT APPOINTS NEW CBO

Honasa Consumer Ltd, the parent company of Mamaearth, The Derma Co., Aqualogica, and BBlunt, has appointed Yatish Bhargava as its new Chief Business Officer (CBO).

<https://founderlabs.in/mamaearth-parent-appoints-new-cbo/>



LENSKART SET TO ACQUIRE GEOIQ

In a strategic move to deepen its technological edge, omnichannel eyewear retailer Lenskart is set to acquire location AI startup GeoIQ.

<https://founderlabs.in/lenskart-set-to-acquire-location-ai-startup-geoiq/>



MYNTRA GOES LIVE IN SINGAPORE

Myntra, a part of the Flipkart Group, has officially launched cross-border shipping to Singapore, marking the start of its global expansion in Singapore.

<https://founderlabs.in/from-sarees-to-sneakers-myntra-sends-indian-style-to-singapore/>

UPCOMING EVENTS

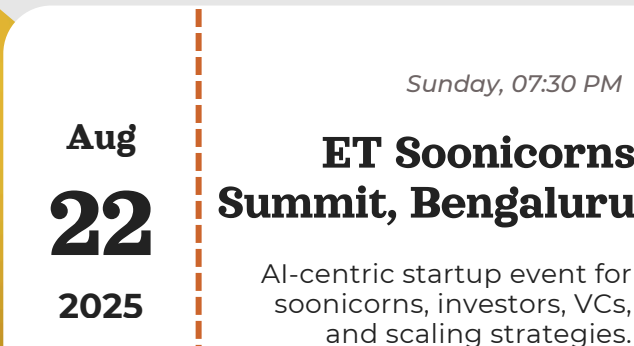


Thursday, 10:00 AM

Integrate 2025, Mysuru

CII-led MSME and startup summit on procurement, supply chain, and industrial innovation.

Aug
21
2025



Aug
22
2025

ET Soonicorns Summit, Bengaluru

AI-centric startup event for soonicorns, investors, VCs, and scaling strategies.

Sunday, 07:30 PM



Wednesday, 10:00 AM

All About Music, Mumbai

Music-tech startup conference focused on streaming, rights, sync licensing, and artist innovation.

Aug
20
2025

YOURSTORY
Tech Sparks
2025 • BENGALURU

Wednesday, 09:30 AM

TechSparks 2025, Bengaluru

India's flagship startup event with founders, SaaS, fintech, and deep-tech showcases.

Sept

10

2025

Sept

18

2025

Thursday, 10:00 AM

SaaSBoomi Annual 2025, Chennai

Premier SaaS founders' summit with product scaling sessions, GTM strategies, and networking.



INDIA INTERNET DAY
PRESENTS

INDIA 2030
FROM
DIGITAL ECONOMY TO
TECH SUPERPOWER

2ND
MAY 2025

VENUE:
THE LEELA AMBIENCE,
GURUGRAM

Friday, 09:30 AM

India Internet Day 2025, Delhi

Digital-first startup event focused on D2C, Web3, AI, and consumer internet growth.

Sept

26

2025



The Creator Economy in India

Goldmine for Startups



India's creator economy is exploding—with millions of individuals turning their passions into monetized micro-businesses—sparking a wave of startup innovation in SaaS, fintech, analytics, and community platforms.

Brands increasingly allocate budget to micro- and nano-influencers. Their high engagement and niche audiences deliver better ROI than traditional ads. Startups that match creators with brands, verify authenticity, and manage campaign analytics are thriving. While metro creators still dominate, the real growth lies in Tier-2 and Tier-3 India. Regional creators—in local dialects—are

\$350–500 Million Creator Economy

 **8-10** Million Active Creators at YouTube

 **15–20** Million Active Creators at Insta

building devoted and monetizable audiences. This makes startups that simplify onboarding, vernacular support, payment, and legal compliance

“ I used to stitch my clothes because I couldn't afford the latest trends. One day, I posted a video showing how I turned an old saree into a stylish dress. I woke up to thousands of likes and comments. Today, I share my DIY fashion with over 350,000 people — and brands now send me outfits I once only dreamed of wearing.





Opportunities and Risks

- **Empowered audience:** India has over 2.5 million active creators, and its creator economy influences hundreds of billions in spending.
- **Brand adoption:** Nearly half of brands now prefer micro-influencer campaigns for their authenticity and cost-efficiency.
- **New verticals:** As creators become solopreneurs, there's rising demand for creator-specific banking, insurance, IP tools, and financial services.

At the same time, challenges abound: many startups struggle to achieve product-market fit, as platform giants build similar capabilities; creator income streams remain volatile; and sustainability can't be assumed without robust support ecosystems.

for regional creators especially promising.

Startups are building tools that empower creators to launch and run their own enterprises: premium subscription communities, content apps, analytics dashboards, and monetization engines. For example, companies now enable creators to directly sell courses, subscriptions, fan-access passes, merchandise, or even their own apps.

India's creator economy isn't just a trend—it's a transformative wave. For entrepreneurs, the key lies in enabling creators to become micro-businesses: tools that help them monetize, scale, and diversify reliably. With deepening regional reach and rising brand budgets, the next unicorns won't just build apps—they'll be building the backbone of the creator-led revolution.



TOP
10

Timeless Reads Powering Entrepreneurial Minds

Books That Shaped India's Startup Leaders

Behind every great founder is a library of ideas—books that sparked breakthroughs, offered comfort during failures, or shaped the way they lead their teams. Across India's fast-growing startup ecosystem, many of the most respected founders credit books as silent mentors guiding their journey through uncertainty and growth.



1 The Hard Thing About Hard Things by Ben Horowitz

This brutally honest guide on leading startups through chaos is a favorite among Indian founders. It doesn't sugarcoat leadership challenges and teaches how to make tough decisions when everything is on the line.

2 Zero to One by Peter Thiel

A foundational read on creating truly innovative products and startups. Thiel's bold perspectives encourage founders to think beyond incremental change and build monopolies, not just compete in crowded markets.

3 Atomic Habits by James Clear

For entrepreneurs, success often hinges on mastering small, consistent habits. Clear's book simplifies behavior change and productivity in a practical, actionable way.

4 Shoe Dog by Phil Knight

The candid autobiography of Nike's co-founder resonates with founders facing financial struggles and tough choices. It's a raw, behind-the-scenes look at how one of the world's biggest brands was built from scratch.

5 Deep Work by Cal Newport

In the distraction-heavy world of startups, Deep Work reminds founders of the value of focused, meaningful effort. Many credit it with helping them reclaim their productivity amidst chaotic schedules.

6 Start With Why by Simon Sinek

This book sparked a cultural shift in leadership thinking. Founders who build purpose-driven startups often cite Sinek's insights as the reason they focus on mission first, profits second.

7 Atomic Habits by James Clear

An unconventional favorite among Indian founders, this book distills the wisdom of entrepreneur and investor Naval Ravikant—covering wealth creation, happiness, and clear thinking.

8 Rework by Jason Fried & David Heinemeier Hansson

For founders rejecting conventional startup hustle culture, Rework advocates for simplicity, profitability, and doing less but doing it better.

9 The Lean Startup by Eric Ries

An essential playbook for early-stage founders. It teaches how to validate ideas quickly, iterate fast, and avoid building products no one wants.

10 Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman

This book on human psychology and decision-making has influenced product and business strategy thinking in many startups. Founders reference it when speaking about customer behavior and leadership judgment.



How to Price Your Product for the Indian Market

Setting the right price for your product is one of the toughest—and most crucial—decisions for any founder. Price too low, and you leave money on the table. Price too high, and your potential customers might walk away.

In India, the pricing challenge is not just economic, it's deeply psychological. People value affordability but will pay for quality if they truly feel it's worth it

- **Deepinder Goyal**
CEO, Zomato

In India, the pricing equation becomes even trickier. With its vast, diverse consumer base—ranging from price-conscious small towns to premium-seeking metros—finding the sweet spot requires deep market understanding, cultural nuance, and sharp business instincts.

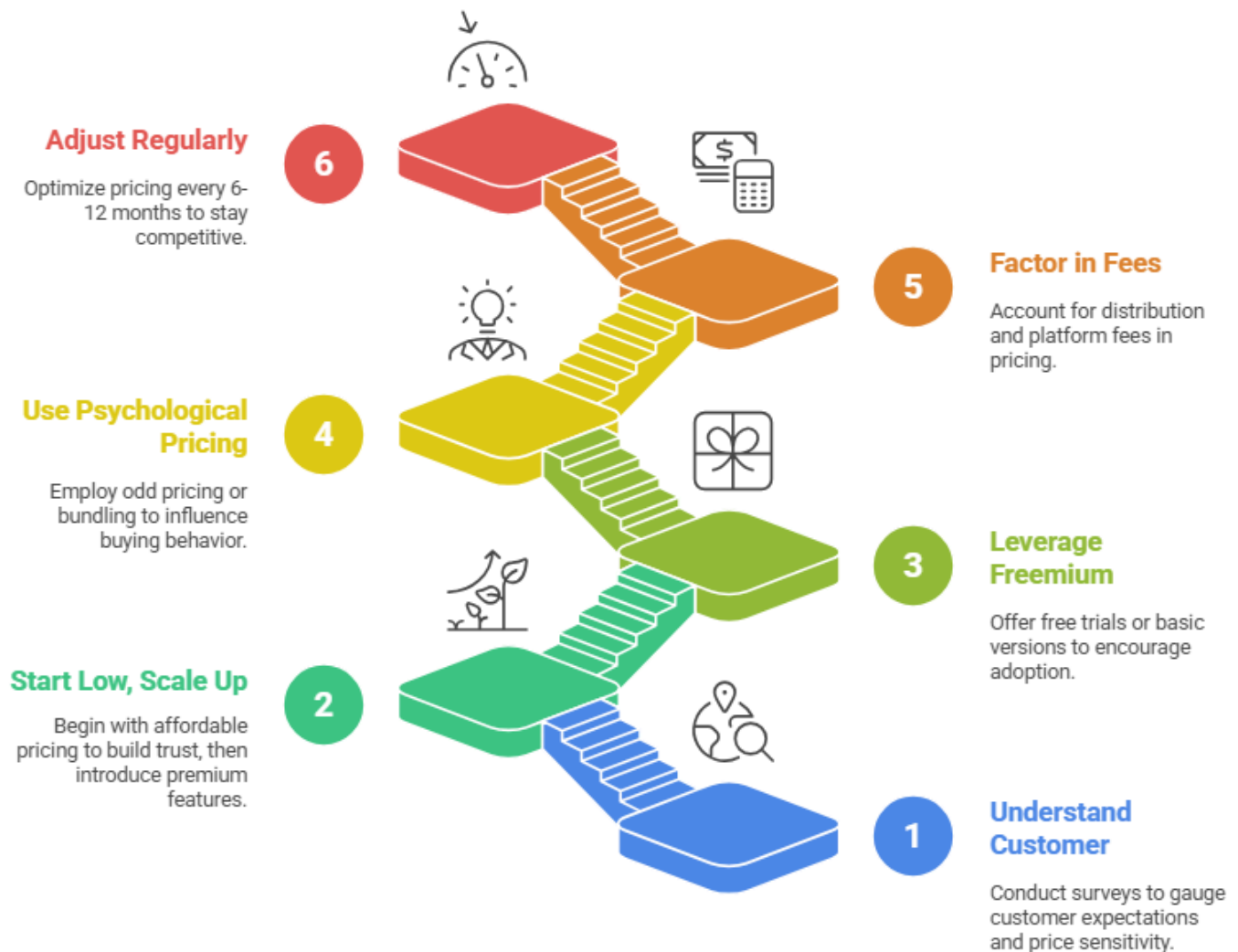
Why pricing for India needs its own Playbook

Unlike Western markets, Indian consumers are hyper-aware of price-value equations. Discounts, tiered pricing, and freemium models work here differently than they do globally.



Moreover, India isn't one market—it's many. What works in Bengaluru may not fly in Bhilai. Pricing strategies must be regionalized and flexible. Founders across sectors—from fintech and healthtech to ecommerce—agree that pricing is never a one-time decision. It's an ongoing experiment. Startups that crack the pricing code don't just look at spreadsheets. They listen to their users, study competitor strategies, and understand what their brand truly means to their audience.

Achieving Pricing Success in India



As digital payments and ecommerce spread deeper into smaller towns, new consumer segments will emerge—each with its own price sensitivity and spending habits.

What The Future Holds

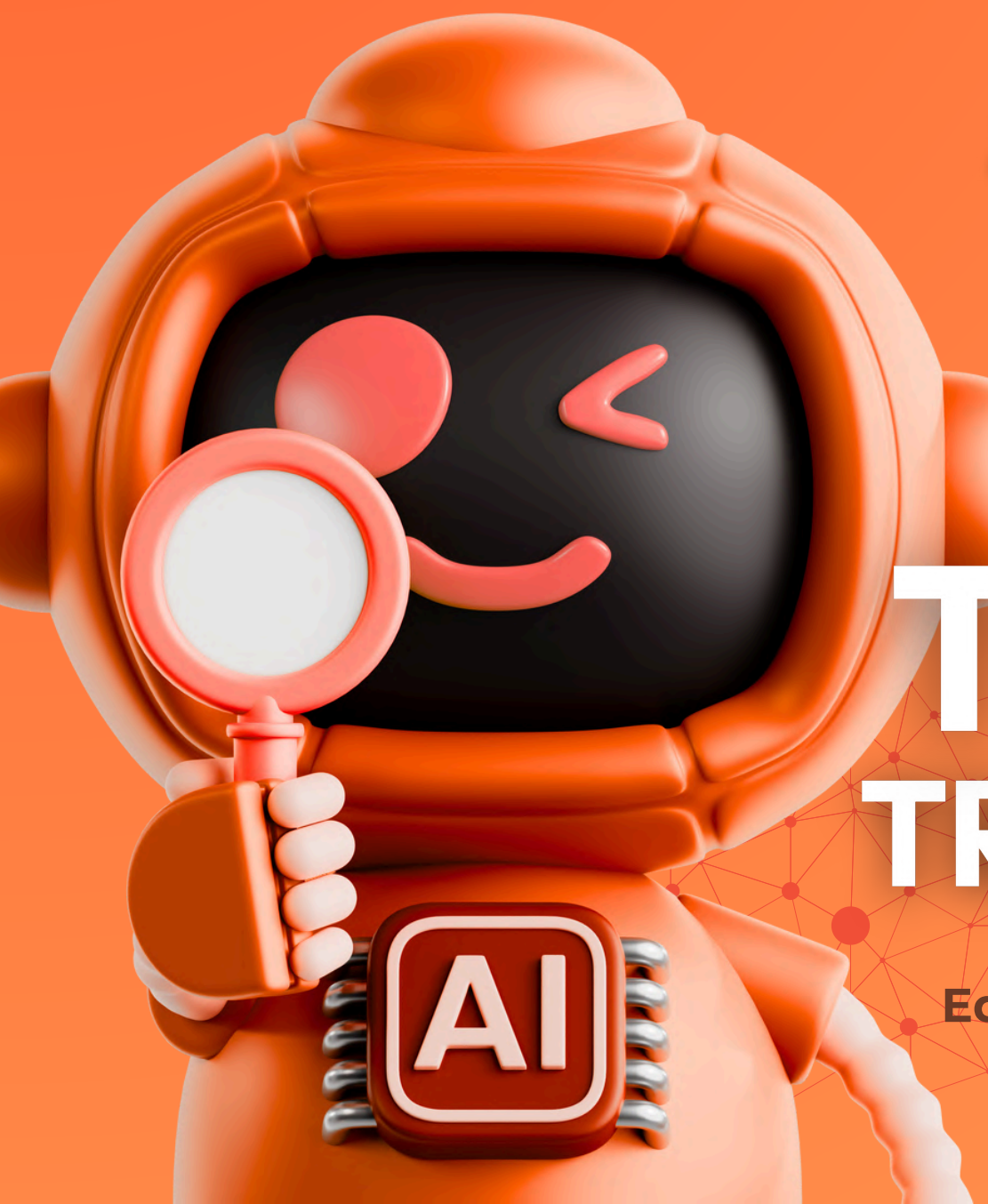
The startups of 2025 will need hyper-personalized pricing: maybe an ₹89 subscription for a small-town user and a ₹799 one for a metro user, each delivering value in different ways.

Smart pricing isn't about undercutting competitors. It's about creating perceived value, trust, and accessibility—and knowing when to charge less or more.

Because in India, the right price is not what the product costs to make. It's what your customer believes it's worth.

EDTech

The next phase of education will be learner-centric, powered by AI, and rooted in real-world application



TOP TRENDS

**in Indian
EdTech Startups**



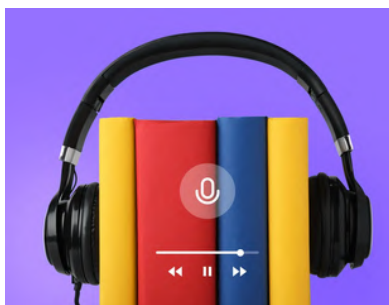
EdTech in India has evolved far beyond online test prep and pre-recorded lessons. In 2025, the sector is being shaped by cutting-edge technologies, evolving learner needs, and a deeper understanding of India's diverse education ecosystem.

From rural classrooms to urban upskilling hubs, startups are reimagining how Indian students learn, earn, and grow leveraging AI, gamification, and vernacular content to make learning more personalized, engaging, and accessible. With government support and rising internet penetration, EdTech is no longer a luxury—it's becoming a necessity across Bharat.

“

In India, EdTech must focus on employability. We're building products that connect learning directly to career growth.

– **Ashwin Damera, Co-Founder of Eruditus**





Top Trends in Ed-Tech

1 **Generative AI: Personalized learning at Scale**

Generative AI is no longer just a backend tool; it's powering real-time learning personalization. Startups are using AI to generate quizzes, translate content into local languages, and provide instant doubt-solving assistants—bringing adaptive learning to millions, even in remote areas.

2 **Phygital & Hybrid Models: Bridging Online and Offline**

Startups are tackling screen fatigue by going hybrid—delivering lessons online while offering hands-on practice in local centers. The future of EdTech blends digital scale with offline engagement.

3 **Regional Focus: Building for Bharat**

India's EdTech boom is shifting beyond metros. Startups are creating low-cost, local-language solutions tailored for learners in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities—from Coimbatore to Kanpur—making education more accessible and inclusive.

4 **Skilling Over Schooling**

Job-oriented learning is now the focus. From AI to fintech, Indian learners seek practical skills with real-world impact. Skilling platforms are teaming up with employers to offer placement-linked bootcamps, making education outcome-driven.

5 **Creator-Led Platforms**

The era of influencer educators is here. Students trust relatable teachers with strong digital followings. Individual educators now launch paid live batches, mentor groups, and curated study plans—building their own education brands.

6 **Early Learning Reimagined: Holistic Kids' Education**

Shaped by evolving parenting trends and NEP 2020, early learning EdTech is moving beyond academics. Platforms now focus on storytelling, coding, life skills, and emotional learning—making education engaging, playful, and values-based.



7 **Global Expansion: Indian Learning Models Going Abroad**

Affordable Indian EdTech products are finding demand globally. Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa are new frontiers for Indian platforms offering quality learning at scale, exporting India's education innovation worldwide.



8 **Trust and Regulation: Credibility Takes the Lead**

In the evolving EdTech landscape, trust and regulatory compliance have emerged as key differentiators, with users gravitating toward platforms that prioritize transparency and accountability. Credibility is now the cornerstone driving user retention and investor confidence.

9 **Learning + Employability: Education Meets Job Market**

More startups are combining learning with placement pathways. Apprenticeships, real-world projects, and AI-driven job matching are becoming standard, blurring the lines between education platforms and employment platforms.



India's EdTech story in 2025 is about deepening impact, not just scaling numbers. It's about affordable, hyper-personalized learning for Bharat's aspiring youth, preparing them for a fast-changing world. With hybrid models, localized content, and outcome-based education at the core, Indian startups are not just digitizing classrooms—they're reinventing learning for the next billion learners.



FOUNDERS SPEND

70%

OF EARLY TIME
on customer
discovery to get
their first 100 users
(Y Combinator).

STARTUPS WITH

1:1

OUTREACH
convert early users
3x faster than paid
ads (First Round
Capital).

ZERO

TO FIRST 100 CUSTOMERS

For every startup founder, the journey from idea to securing the first 100 customers is one of the most defining milestones. It's where theories meet reality, assumptions are tested, and resilience is built.

**How Indian Startups
Found Their First Tribe**



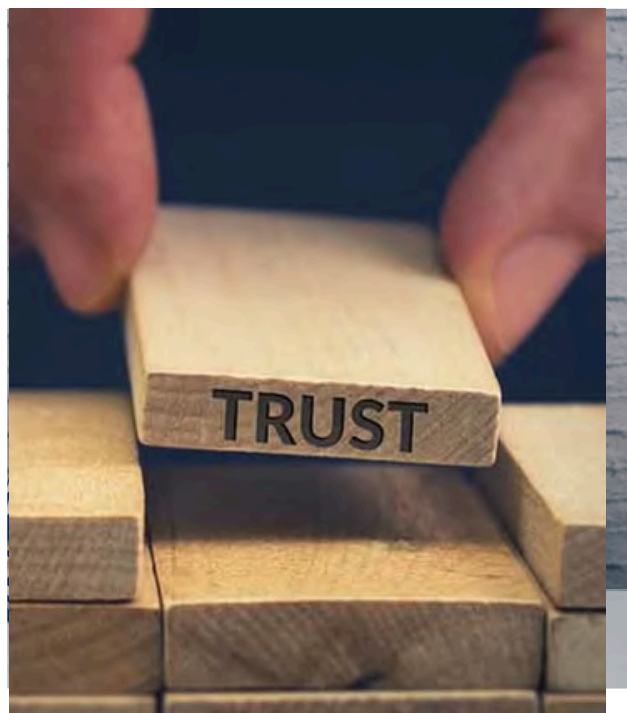


BUILDING *Trust, Not* TRACTION

Most founders begin by reaching out to friends, colleagues, and former clients. But what sets successful startups apart is how they shift the conversation from “support my venture” to “here’s how this solves your problem.” Instead of relying on goodwill, they lead with value. For instance, Ankit Shah, founder of a wellness-tech platform, didn’t pitch his product for sympathy—he showed how it could solve a specific issue people were already facing.

In these early stages, generosity matters more than revenue. Founders often offered free trials, hands-on demos, or personalized onboarding to build trust. Pooja Mehra, who runs an edtech startup, gave her first users a month of free access and personally walked them through the product. Their feedback helped her refine the platform, and many became long-term loyalists.

The first 100 customers often come directly from the founder’s hustle: cold DMs, feedback calls, late-night support chats. But what turns these early users into evangelists is how they’re treated. Startups that listened, iterated quickly, and genuinely solved problems created a sense of ownership among users.



SO HOW DID INDIAN FOUNDERS EARN THEIR TRUST?



We didn’t ask them to support us. We showed them how our product could solve a real problem they faced. That’s what got them to try it. Once we solved their problems, they referred us to their network. Word-of-mouth became our biggest driver,

Raghav Mittal, Founder of a retail-tech startup

Focus Narrow, Learn Deep

One of the biggest mistakes early-stage startups make is trying to appeal to everyone. But the smartest founders go niche. They zero in on one segment, one use case, and aim to solve that better than anyone else. Raghav Mittal, founder of a retail-tech startup, targeted D2C brands in Delhi exclusively.

By building trust within a tight-knit community, he sparked a word-of-mouth loop that brought in dozens more users without any marketing spend.

Personal outreach played a major role in this phase. Rather than blasting cold emails, most early wins came through 1:1 conversations—on WhatsApp, LinkedIn, or in person. Founders weren't delegating sales yet; they were doing it themselves, learning from every interaction, and fine-tuning the product in real-time.

“

Focus
Solve
Scale

Building in Public

Selling with Stories

In a noisy digital world, authenticity cuts through. Several Indian founders found early traction by simply sharing their startup journey—warts and all—on social platforms like LinkedIn. Shruti Kumar, founder of a fintech startup, never spent on ads. She just posted openly about the highs and lows of building her product, and her honesty brought in her first 40 paying customers.

This style of “building in public” does more than attract users—it builds trust. Potential customers feel like they're part of the journey, not just being sold to. And in a world increasingly skeptical of polished marketing, raw storytelling became a powerful tool for early-stage growth.

In the end, getting those first 100 users isn't about chasing growth hacks. It's about empathy, focus, and consistency. Indian startups that succeed in this phase are the ones who care less about scaling fast—and more about building something people genuinely need.

Because the first 100? They don't just use your product. They believe in it.

How to Build a REMOTE-FIRST Startup Team

A person with dark hair tied back, wearing a light blue sweater and white headphones, is seen from behind, sitting at a desk. The desk is lit by a warm yellow desk lamp. There are two computer monitors; the left one is large and shows a bright screen, while the right one is smaller and shows a webpage. A small hourglass with the number '30' is on the desk. In the background, a window shows a city skyline at night with lights from buildings and a bridge.

You begin to enjoy
your work and are less
likely to experience
burnout



Unlocking Talent Beyond Borders

In the post-pandemic world, the startup playbook is being rewritten—and nowhere is this more visible than in India. With skyrocketing internet penetration, affordable tech tools, and a rising generation of digital-native entrepreneurs, remote-first startups are no longer the exception. They are fast becoming the norm.

But how do you build a thriving, remote-first team that works seamlessly across India's diverse cities, towns, and villages? How do you go beyond Zoom fatigue and WhatsApp chaos to create a team that feels connected, empowered, and productive—even if they've never met in person?

Why Remote-First Makes Business Sense

A remote-first approach isn't just about cutting office costs. It's about unlocking access to the best talent, wherever they may be. Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities in India are brimming with skilled

Talent is everywhere —
startups can spread
opportunity beyond metros.

-- **Bhavish Aggarwal,**
Co-founder of Ola

professionals—from product managers to developers—who no longer need to relocate to Bengaluru or Mumbai to join an exciting startup journey. As Bhavish Aggarwal, Co-founder of Ola, once remarked: "Talent exists everywhere; opportunity should too. Startups have the power to decentralize growth beyond metros."

Remote-first teams also move faster, hiring without location constraints, reducing overheads, and providing team members with better work-life balance.

But building a great remote team is not as simple as sending laptops and scheduling video calls. It demands thoughtfulness, structure, and culture-building from day one.

How to Build a Remote-First Startup Team

Stay in Sync :

Hire within 2–3 hours to keep collaboration smooth and real-time.

Meet Quarterly :

In-person retreats every few months help build trust and team alignment.

Write Everything Down:

Build a documentation-first culture to enable clear, async communication.

Fix Compliance

Early: Tackle payroll, contracts, and tax



rules across states upfront to avoid legal hassles.

Empower, Don't Micromanage:

Create systems that prioritize autonomy and accountability over constant oversight.

Lessons from India's Startup Trailblazers

As Harshil Mathur, CEO of Razorpay, notes: "Remote work is no longer a perk; it's a core part of our strategy to access diverse talent and build a resilient organization." Several new-age startups in India have proven that remote-first is not just feasible but powerful. They've built high-performing teams spanning across states, towns, and even countries. Their playbook is clear:

- Be intentional about communication.
- Celebrate wins publicly, and solve conflicts privately.
- Focus on outcomes, not hours worked.

The Road Ahead

India's work culture is shifting. As digital infrastructure spreads deeper into Bharat, the next wave of startup innovation will be fueled by remote-first teams working from Ranchi, Kozhikode, Surat, and Guwahati —not just Koramangala or Powai.

The question is no longer whether remote First works. It's whether your startup is ready to

embrace this new way of building teams—where talent comes first, and geography comes last.





eCafe NCR Meetup 2025

*A Celebration of Startup Camaraderie,
Community, and Collective Growth*

Entrepreneurs Cafe, founded by Dr. Nikhil Agarwal, is a 14-year-old global movement that began with a simple coffee conversation with Dr. Sarah Oueld El Hachemi in Casablanca. Conceptualized as a platform for entrepreneurs to interact and brainstorm freely, the organization has evolved into a powerful network of changemakers. What started casually has now expanded to 26 countries and 110 cities, powered by passionate volunteers nurturing startup ecosystems worldwide.



A Purpose - Driven Welcome

The Power of Presence

At the NCR edition of eCafe's meetup held on 10th August at IIT Delhi Campus. Participants from across India and even internationally came together with a shared purpose: to support, collaborate, and grow.

The event kicked off with a personal and heartfelt story from one of the founding members, who recalled his unconventional decision to study business while at IIT, at a time when it was seen as impractical. He shared how he once traveled from Delhi to Mumbai without a phone, address, or contact-just a belief that someone would receive him.

That moment became the foundation of what eCafe represents today: a community where someone is always there to receive you, support you, and guide you.

Entrepreneurs Cafe operates on a unique "buy your own coffee" model, where the focus is on business, not leisure. Meetings are held monthly on second Thursdays globally, keeping the energy fresh and intentional. While virtual meetups are rising in popularity, eCafe continues to prioritize physical gatherings, believing deeply in the value of face-to-face interaction. The community continues to innovate, grow, and empower entrepreneurs worldwide.



Entrepreneurship isn't a solo sport, it's a team journey. And in this team, everyone plays to lift each other higher.

The Spiritual Side of Startups

The message was clear-eCafe isn't just a network; it's a temple of entrepreneurship. When people walk into these meetings, they come not for blessings, but



I'm not religious, but I'm spiritual. And I believe science and spirituality can co-exist. Just like belief in a higher power, belief in a supportive community can move mountains.

– Dr Nikhil Agarwal

for answers. Whether seeking advice, funding, looking for a co-founder, or simply reassurance, every entrepreneur arrives with questions, and the community responds with empathy and solutions.

eCafe is more than a meetup. It's a movement. If your city doesn't have one yet, you don't need permission—just passion. Gather a few founders. Pick a Thursday. Buy your own coffee. The magic will follow.

From One-Person Meetups to

500+

The growth of eCafe has been organic and inspiring. From early meetings where only one person showed up, to gatherings where 500+ founders packed a café, the journey has been defined by persistence and passion.

In some cities, local cafes even requested eCafe to pause meetups—because the crowd was too large. These moments show just how magnetic the concept of a genuine founder-led support system has become.

Among the attendees, **Noor Fatima**, co-founder of **Easiofy Solutions** shared her experience.

Having participated in previous events, she emphasized the emotional side of building a business. "At the top, it gets lonely," she said. "You need people you can laugh with, cry with, brainstorm with. That's what this community provides."

Another founder, **Fazal Ulfi**, spoke about leaving his corporate job to pursue his startup dream. "Sharing my idea with the group helped me gain clarity and confidence. The feedback was honest, and the support was sincere."

Stories of Struggle, Transition, And Support



In one of the most touching anecdotes of the evening, a speaker recalled a trip to Alleppey, Kerala, where fellow eCafe member Jaideep offered his entire 20-room houseboat for free as a gesture of thanks.

Uplifting Women Entrepreneurs Through Real Support

Anuradha Tyagi, founder of RTM Foods, shared her experience of launching a food startup while navigating misinformation from so-called startup consultants. "In Ghaziabad, many women entrepreneurs fall into traps-paying for guidance that never arrives," she said. "But eCafe has no commercial agenda. It gives what's missing in many ecosystems-genuine help, emotional validation, and peer support."

- ✓ Unbiased feedback on your ideas
- ✓ Emotional support when the journey feels overwhelming
- ✓ Collaborations that lead to real partnerships
- ✓ Access to mentors, investors, or service providers—without being sold to
- ✓ Unbiased feedback on your ideas



No confirmations. No payments. Just faith and gratitude. "This is my thank you for your service to the startup community," Jaideep had said.

It wasn't just about hospitality. It was a real-world example of how eCafe connections go far beyond business—they become family.

Learning Business Through Ludo

Dr. Vibhuti Agarwal, a bio-tech investor, added a creative perspective by comparing Snakes and Ladders and Ludo to the startup journey.

She explained, "Every POC is a ladder. Every failed pitch is a snake. But the game goes on. Just like life and business, it's a mix of chance, effort, and resilience." Her analogy resonated with the group, reminding everyone that setbacks are just setups for comebacks.



What You Really Get from eCafe

First-time attendees often ask, "What's in it for me?" The answers are simple and powerful:



कैसर मुक्त संगम

विगत आत्मसन्तान एवं ज्ञान अभियान



13 जनवरी - 26 फरवरी

एक दिन 1 करोड़ों की जानें बचाए जा सकें

सचिके सूर

राष्ट्रिय स्वास्थ्य सुरक्षा
संस्थान (RHS)

राष्ट्रिय स्वास्थ्य सुरक्षा
संस्थान (RHS)

संयुक्त आयोजन में



Dr. Deepika Singh
And **DG Rakshak**

Using
AI, Empathy, & Innovation

to Fight Breast Cancer



In a world where medical innovation often remains out of reach for those who need it most, **Dr. Deepika Singh** is rewriting the narrative—with science, heart, and unwavering determination.

An electronics and communication engineer turned healthtech entrepreneur, Dr. Singh is the founder and driving force behind **DGRakshak Pvt. Ltd.**, a groundbreaking startup on a mission to make **breast cancer detection accessible, accurate, and affordable** for women across the globe.

Her journey began in the labs of **MNNIT Prayagraj**, where she pursued her B.E. and M.Tech, and later, in the research corridors of **IIIT Allahabad**, where her Ph.D. work focused on something rarely discussed yet deeply urgent: “Early Detection and Screening of Breast Abnormalities through Thermal Image Analysis.” It was here that the seed for DGRakshak was sown.

Why should early detection be a luxury?

she often asks—a question that has guided her startup's bold vision.

DGRakshak's innovation lies in its fusion of **thermal imaging technology and advanced machine learning algorithms** to detect early signs of breast cancer—without radiation, without pain, and without the prohibitive costs of traditional diagnostic methods. The system combines multiple data points, including biomarkers and sensor-based inputs, offering a **radiation-free, non-invasive screening**

alternative that can be deployed in both urban hospitals and rural health camps.

But Dr. Singh isn't just building a product—she's building a **mission-driven ecosystem**. Backed by a team of engineers, researchers, and healthcare experts, DGRakshak is creating tools that **empower early intervention**, especially in regions where awareness and infrastructure are limited. The impact is already echoing beyond India's borders, with growing global interest in deploying the technology in underserved communities worldwide.

“

"We're not just innovating—we're intervening before it's too late," says Dr. Singh. **"We want to change how the world sees preventive care—making it smarter, faster, and more compassionate."**

”

In the fiercely competitive world of med-tech startups, DGRakshak stands out not just for its cutting-edge technology, but for its **soulful approach to science**. It's a startup born from empathy, built on evidence, and powered by the belief that **saving lives should never depend on your zip code**. With global scalability, a socially inclusive vision,



and a passionate founder at the helm, **DGRakshak is more than a startup—it's a beacon of hope in the fight against cancer.**

“ I started DGRakshak because every woman deserves a second chance—and that chance begins with early detection,” says Dr. Deepika Singh, Founder and CEO.





Defy



Drones, Disruption, *And a* Drive Toward Sustainability

What started as a simple observation of inefficiencies soon took flight as a mission to reimagine the future of agriculture and logistics. At the helm of this transformation are two changemakers who dared to dream beyond the horizon—with strong institutional backing behind them.

Defy's leap from concept to startup was powered not just by bold thinking but also by the right ecosystem.

JSS STEP (Science and Technology Entrepreneurs Park), based at JSS Academy of Technical Education, Noida, played a crucial role in incubating Defy during its early stages. As a premier technology

The gaps were clear: traditional farming strained natural resources; delivery systems crumbled under infrastructure challenges. What wasn't clear—until they discovered it—was the transformative potential of drone technology.

"It gave us a new lens to solve age-old problems," Samriddhi explains. "From precision farming to smart logistics, drones could bridge sustainability and efficiency like never before."

Built With Purpose

Backed *By* Visionaries

Defy's leap from concept to startup was powered not just by bold thinking but also by the right ecosystem.

JSS STEP (Science and Technology Entrepreneurs Park), based at JSS Academy of Technical Education, Noida, played a crucial role in incubating Defy during its early stages. As a premier technology

business incubator, JSS STEP provided Defy with access to resources, mentorship, funding networks, and a supportive entrepreneurial environment.

"JSS STEP believed in us when our idea was still taking shape," Samriddhi notes. "They offered us a launchpad—not just space or infrastructure—but real guidance, which helped us evolve with clarity and speed."

Over the years, JSS STEP has supported hundreds of startups in deep tech, healthcare, AI, and sustainability—Defy being one of the most promising among them.

Meet *The* Minds Behind Defy

At the heart of Defy's operations is a dynamic duo:

Samriddhi Pandey

Founder & CEO

Samriddhi leads Defy with a mission-driven approach. She shapes the company's long-term vision, builds strategic partnerships, and ensures the impact of drone tech reaches rural, underserved, and high-need sectors.

Nehaal Agarwal

Co-founder & Chief Strategy Officer

Nehaal transforms high-level goals into operational frameworks. He ensures services are sharp, scalable, and systemically impactful—steering everything from logistics planning to business strategy.

"My role is to constantly align ambition with reality," Nehaal says. "And to build processes that can grow sustainably without losing focus."

Defying Limits

Delivering **Impacts**

Defy's leap from concept to startup was powered not just by bold thinking but also by the right ecosystem.

From optimizing crop spraying and soil health monitoring to delivering critical medical supplies across inaccessible terrains, Defy is redefining what's possible when drones meet real-world challenges.

Their story is not just one of innovation—it's one of resilience, collaboration, and vision.

As Samriddhi aptly puts it:

“

Technology, when used with the right intent, doesn't just solve problems—it creates new possibilities. And thanks to support from platforms like JSS STEP, we've had the wings to make that future real.”

”



Our story is about more than innovation; It is about enabling communities to thrive.



From Insight to Impact

Advancing Social Innovation

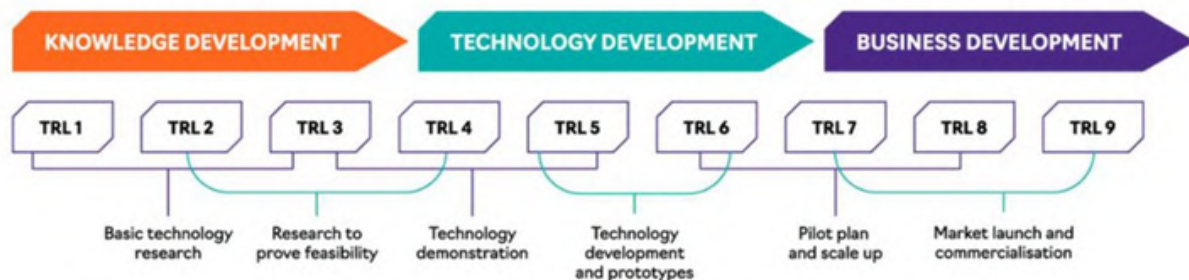
A TRL Framework



Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) are a standardized framework used to assess the maturity of a technology during its development and deployment. First introduced by NASA in the 1970s, the TRL scale ranges from 1 (basic concept) to 9 (fully operational system), providing a clear roadmap of a technology's

evolution from idea to implementation. By offering a common language to evaluate progress, TRLs help innovators, investors, and policymakers make informed decisions about funding, development, and commercialization. Today, TRLs are widely adopted across

industries and countries as an essential tool for managing the innovation lifecycle and ensuring that technologies are market-ready and fit for real-world application.



Understanding Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs)

Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) provide a structured framework for assessing the maturity of a technology, from early-stage research to full commercial deployment. Originally developed by NASA, this system is now widely used across sectors to guide innovation and investment decisions.

The nine TRLs are grouped into three key phases: Knowledge Development (TRLs 1–3)

focuses on exploring basic principles and early research. Technology Development (TRLs 4–6) involves building and testing prototypes in lab and controlled settings. Finally, Business Development (TRLs 7–9) transitions the technology into real-world applications, emphasizing operational testing, scalability, and market readiness.

This phased approach helps stakeholders track progress, identify risks, and make informed decisions about further development and commercialization.



About Dr. Shikha Dhawan

*Founder, Biozazen
Leadership Team, Entrepreneur
Cafe*

With over 22 years of extensive experience in health research and public health, Dr. Shikha is dedicated to delivering patient-centric healthcare solutions aimed at disease prevention, interception and treatment. She holds a post-doctorate in Biomedical Research from the USA, a PhD in Microbiology, and a PGDM in Biotechnology Business Management from India. She is founder of Biozazen that makes bioenzymes as environment friendly sustainable solutions for varied businesses. Inspired living with conscious pursuit and passion to change lives for the less privileged makes her laser focused on empowering women, enhancing public health, supporting rural livelihoods, promoting environmental sustainability,

TRLs 1–3: Knowledge Development



The journey begins at TRL 1, where scientific principles are observed and documented with no immediate application in mind. This is purely theoretical groundwork.

At TRL 2, the concept of the technology emerges. Innovators speculate potential applications, exploring use cases and forming early hypotheses. Though still theoretical, the groundwork for practical use is being laid.

By TRL 3, experimental proof of concept is sought. Researchers begin integrating basic components in laboratory settings, offering initial evidence that the idea could work.

TRLs 4–6: Technology Development



TRL 4 focuses on validating the compatibility of components in lab conditions, moving from feasibility toward functionality.

At TRL 5, prototypes are tested in environments that simulate real-world conditions. This stage assesses how systems behave when exposed to realistic constraints.

TRL 6 pushes further—demonstrating the technology in environments that mirror operational settings, confirming it can perform reliably outside the lab.

conducting health camps and advancing education at Centre for Social Integration and Borderless World.

Dr. Shikha is an investor, reviewer and subject matter expert for startups across various sectors, including health and wellness, Med-Tech, agriculture, sustainability, climate, and social impact at FITT-IIT Delhi, AIC-IIT Delhi, SIIC IIT-Kanpur, NIT Hamirpur, IIHS-Bangalore, KIIT TBI-Bhubaneswar, MIET Group in Ghaziabad and Meerut, HTIC IIT-Madras, India Accelerator-Gurugram, 15Wins Academy-Africa, iACCEL Gulf-Dubai and Because International-USA. At Entrepreneur Café, she ignites global startup success, driving bold business transformations and powerfully bridging entrepreneurs with the investors who bring their visions to life.

TRLs 1–3: Understanding and Ideation

At TRL 1, social innovators explore the core issue—reviewing research, consulting communities, and identifying root causes.

TRL 2 marks the formation of a theory of change and early solution ideas rooted in cultural and contextual understanding.

TRL 3 is for validating the concept through informal tests—like interviews or pilot workshops—to check relevance and traction.

TRLs 7–9: Business Development

TRL 7 involves deploying a full system prototype in real operational conditions—such as a pilot site—to evaluate performance and reliability.

TRL 8 confirms the technology is fully functional and qualified, tested end-to-end under expected conditions.

TRL 9 is full deployment: the system operates in its intended environment, delivering results at scale and ready for commercial rollout.

Adapting TRLs for Social Innovation

Though originally designed for space tech, TRLs can be adapted to guide social innovations—efforts to solve complex societal issues like inequality, education, or climate resilience. In such cases, success depends on community trust, stakeholder alignment, and systemic relevance—factors often lacking in tech-driven TRLs. The adapted framework brings clarity, accountability, and scalability to the path from ideation to sustained social impact.

TRLs 4–6: Prototyping and Early Testing

TRL 4 introduces a tangible prototype—such as a toolkit, campaign, or service model—tested in a limited setting.

TRL 5 involves real-world field testing at small scale, with feedback loops helping refine the solution.

At TRL 6, a refined, more scalable version is piloted more broadly. Metrics are defined, and operational systems are strengthened.

TRLs 7–9: Scaling and Sustained Impact

TRL 7 is all about preparing to scale—creating training materials, securing partnerships, and assessing systemic fit.



TRL 8 sees the solution implemented across multiple regions or communities, with ongoing data collection to measure effectiveness.

TRL 9 is achieved when the innovation is embedded into institutions or policy, delivering lasting systemic change and guiding broader ecosystem transformation.

Conclusion

The Technology Readiness Level (TRL) framework offers a clear, structured pathway for guiding innovations from conceptualization to real-world deployment. By breaking down the innovation journey into nine progressive stages, TRLs help innovators, funders, researchers, and policymakers align their expectations, investments, and interventions at the right time. Whether applied to high-tech engineering, digital

tools, or even adapted for social innovation, TRLs serve as a common language to evaluate risk, maturity, and scalability. Understanding and using this framework not only enhances the efficiency of the innovation process but also increases the likelihood of delivering solutions that are robust, reliable, and ready to create measurable impact in their intended environments.

► Highlights Of the Guftagu Events



7th August – Master Connector Meet | Jhandewalan, Delhi

An informal but powerful gathering. This relaxed meetup created space for deep, meaningful bonding—where conversations flowed beyond business and into trust.

28th June – Inter Circle Meet | South Delhi

A power-packed morning of real conversations, shared insights, and warm connections. From heartfelt intros to peer-led problem solving, the energy was all about growth with purpose. Thank you for showing up and making the circle thrive!





6th July – Guftagu Prime Meet | Gurugram

A focused, high-energy gathering where real conversations led to real breakthroughs. With purpose-driven professionals in the room, every moment—from exercises to reflections—sparked clarity, support, and trust-led growth. Thank you to all who showed up and made it powerful.



14th July – Prime Meet | Central Delhi

With changemakers from diverse industries, this Prime Meet delivered powerful shifts. Real conversations turned into real outcomes—reminding us that business flows where trust grows



Highlights Of the CMD Business Club Networking Event organised on 20th June, 2025



CMD Business Club – Coffee with CMD
organised networking event which was
distinguished attendees, including MDs,
CEOs, CXOs, and self-employed
professionals.

Your brand is only as strong as the story you tell — and how far it travels.

Content Writing —
Engaging copy that
tells your brand
story

Magazine Feature
— Print + digital
reach in startup
hubs

FROM STARTUP
STORY TO
INDUSTRY
AUTHORITY

YOUR JOURNEY
IS MORE THAN
MILESTONES. IT'S
A STORY
WAITING TO BE
TOLD

PR Articles —
Media coverage
that builds trust

Founder Spotlight
— Your story,
online & on print

Expert Column —
Be seen as a
thought leader

Podcast — Share
your journey in a
voice that connects

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WWW.ENGAGE2WIN.IN
INFO@ENGAGE2WIN.IN