

PRE-LAUNCH PRODUCT VALIDATION THROUGH STRUCTURED BETA TESTING:
A CONSULTING CASE STUDY OF THE INDI GAMIFIED LOYALTY PLATFORM

by

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Chapter 1. Introduction

INDI is a startup that has built a gamified marketing platform for customer acquisition, working through discounts, promotional offers, and interactive loyalty mechanics. The platform creates a mutually beneficial model: local businesses gain new customers, and users get real benefits through a game-like experience.

Although the MVP was technically ready, the team faced an important problem before going to market: it had no structured process for validating the product in real conditions. Market entry requires capital investment, and committing those funds without prior confirmation that the product works carries a substantial risk of financial loss. Launching a product that fails to deliver its core value to users also makes any further testing irrelevant and prevents correct interpretation of the data collected.

There is also an organisational constraint to consider. The project team consists of six people, each with a full-time job elsewhere. This sharply limits the resources available for launch preparation and is one of the reasons the planned release date slipped by more than a year. At a certain point, it became clear that going to market without external support was not realistic.

The aim of this work is to design and run a structured product validation process with real users and to produce an evidence-based recommendation regarding INDI's further development strategy. After beta testing, the team will have an answer to the key question: whether the product is ready for a full market launch. A positive result will lead to a launch strategy backed by concrete data on user behaviour, mechanic effectiveness, and development priorities. A negative result will produce clear pivot recommendations that specify which parts of the product require revision and in what direction.

Chapter 2. Company Overview and Problem Statement

2.1 INDI OVERVIEW

INDI is a B2B2C mobile application that connects local businesses with users through a gamified system of discounts and offers. Its main function is to let users obtain benefits from local businesses in a gamified format, which raises engagement and stimulates interaction with business offers.

Within the platform, businesses post offers in the form of cards placed on a city map. Users can find these cards as they move around the city, collect them in the app, and redeem the offers at the relevant venues. For example, a coffee shop in a low-traffic period can post a card with the offer “Drop by within the next hour and get a free dessert with your coffee.” The user finds the card in the app and redeems it at the venue. The result is a win-win interaction: the user gets a benefit, the business gets an additional customer (see Fig. 2.1).

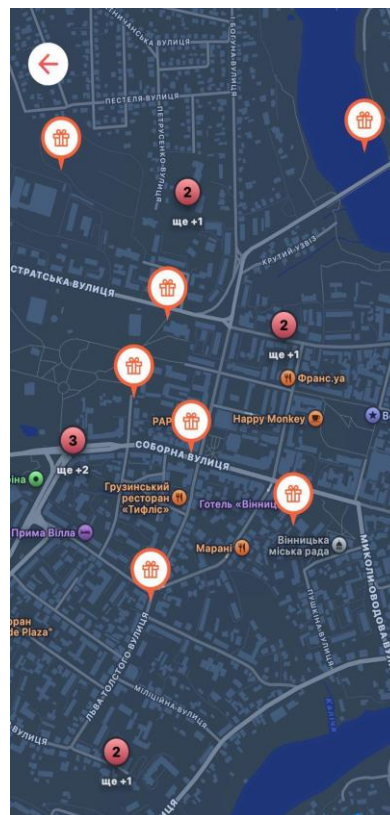


Fig. 2.1. INDI mobile application: discount cards displayed on the city map (mobile app screenshot; Ukrainian UI; INDI project, March 2026).

Apart from the map-based card mechanic, the platform also has an internal offer marketplace. On this marketplace, businesses place benefit cards that users can purchase with the app's internal currency, INDI coins. Users earn this currency by completing daily tasks, watching video ads, or interacting with the platform's game mechanics, such as competing with a bot in simple games. The internal currency will also be available for purchase through the app's donation system (see Fig. 2.2).

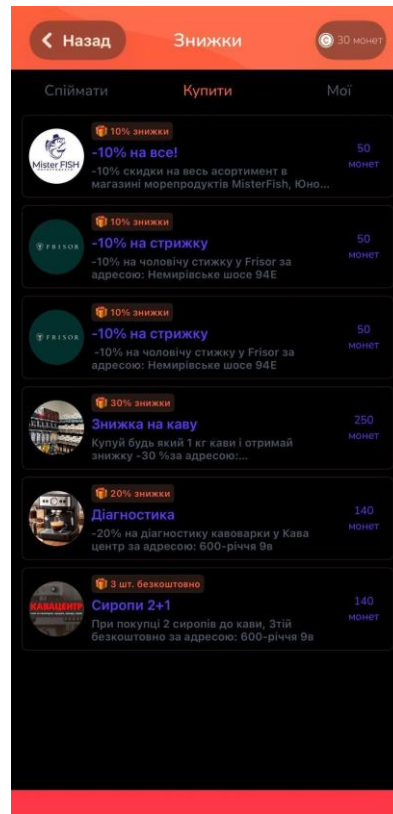


Fig. 2.2. INDI in-app marketplace: offers available for INDI coins (mobile app screenshot; Ukrainian UI; INDI project, March 2026).

To run the platform, the team built two software products: a mobile application for end users and a web-based admin panel for businesses.

The decision to develop native applications, rather than a single cross-platform product, was driven by several factors. The AR mechanic uses the smartphone's camera, and access to the device makes a full web implementation impossible. Native apps also offer a much simpler download path through the official stores (App Store and Google Play), which directly affects conversion in the acquisition funnel and lowers the entry barrier for new users.

The target audience consists of end users aged 18–35 (Generation Z and younger millennials) who regularly engage with local businesses and are open to using digital services for discounts and special offers. Based on prior audience research conducted by the INDI team during the product concept phase (Humeniuk 20), two typical user portraits were identified.

Win-oriented user. A young person aged 18–30, an active mobile-app user, who values emotional experience and the element of surprise. Willing to spend time on game mechanics in exchange for rewards, even small ones. The main motivation is the feeling of winning and the enjoyment of interacting with the product.

Saving-oriented user. A rational consumer aged 20–35 who regularly uses local businesses and consciously looks for ways to cut spending. Values simplicity, predictability, and tangible financial benefit. Willing to engage with game mechanics if the resulting discount is meaningful and easy to use.

2.2 POSITION OF A CONSULTANT

The author was brought into the INDI project because of a combination of practical experience in digital product development, project management, and consulting that directly matches the challenges the startup faces in preparing for market launch.

The author is the founder and project manager of a digital product development team that operates in the B2B segment. Past projects include web solutions for local businesses, an online ordering system for a restaurant complex in a business park, and an electronic document management system for the State Emergency Service of Ukraine, currently in its final stage of development. This experience provided a practical understanding of the full product development cycle, from identifying client needs through technical implementation and launch, and the skills to work with clients of different sizes and specifics.

The theoretical and analytical foundation came from training at the Kyiv School of Economics, one of Ukraine's leading universities for business and economics. The programme

covered product management, product analytics, business strategy, project management, and startup development. A defining feature of the programme was its project-based approach: in most courses, students worked on practical projects, which made it possible not only to absorb theoretical frameworks but also to apply them in conditions close to real business situations. The work with product analytics and startup validation methodologies in particular formed the direct basis for the approach to validating the INDI product.

Additional relevant experience comes from B2B consulting. The author has worked with business clients on business development tasks that included analysis of their current state, identification of growth points, and recommendations on customer acquisition and process optimisation. This experience built an understanding of how decisions are made at the level of small and medium-sized businesses, which is important in the context of INDI, where one of the main segments is local businesses.

The combination of product development experience, academic training, and consulting practice enabled the author to propose a structured approach to analysing the current state of the product, to move from intuitive decision-making to a methodology grounded in data and hypothesis testing, and to formulate well-grounded recommendations on the market entry strategy.

2.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Given that the team had no clear understanding of its next steps before launch, a series of working sessions was held with the project team to clarify the main challenges the product faces at this stage of development.

These sessions analysed the current state of the product and the level of its technical readiness, the existing usage scenarios, the team's assumptions about user and business behaviour, and the main risks of going to market without prior validation.

As a result, three areas of uncertainty were identified that determine the further approach to working with the product.

The first concerns technical and product readiness. Although the MVP exists, it remains an open question whether the current version of the product is stable enough for interaction with real users, and whether there are no critical issues that could prevent users from reaching the platform's core value.

The second area concerns the value of the product. The team has no confirmation that the platform's mechanics are intuitive and motivate repeat interaction, or that the product creates real value for both sides, users and local businesses.

The third concerns strategic uncertainty about further development. The team does not have a clear understanding of whether the product creates enough value to justify further investment in scaling and a full market launch.

Three research questions were formulated based on these areas of uncertainty. They define the structure of this work and follow the three stages of the recommendation – validation – implementation cycle.

RQ1: Is the current version of the product technically ready for interaction with real users, and which critical issues need to be resolved before a full launch?

RQ2: Does the product create enough value for users and local businesses, and do the platform's mechanics motivate repeat interaction?

RQ3: Do the data collected confirm that the product is ready for a full market launch, and what should the further development strategy be?

Chapter 3. Closed Beta Testing

3.1 RECOMMENDATION

To answer RQ1, the author recommended running a closed beta test before any larger-scale user acquisition. At the start of the work, the product existed only as an MVP that had not yet interacted with real external users. The team had no confirmation that the product was technically stable, that its logic was intuitive for new users, or that there were no critical issues that could prevent users from reaching the platform's core value.

Internal testing by the development team had limited effectiveness because of expert bias: developers know the product's logic well and may overlook problems that are obvious to new users. Going straight into open testing with such a product would have meant risking the product's reputation at the very start and getting irrelevant data on user behaviour because of technical bugs. For that reason, the recommended path was to start with a closed beta and a limited group of external participants.

3.2 CLOSED BETA TESTING B2C

3.2.1 HYPOTHESIS

Before user-side testing began, the following questions remained open: whether the application is technically stable for interaction with real users, whether the product's logic is intuitive without additional instructions, and whether there are no critical issues in the main usage scenarios.

3.2.2 VALIDATION

A group of 15 testers was assembled. Some were drawn from the team's acquaintances; additional participants were found through an open call to students.

The methodological feature of this stage was that testers were not given any instructions on how to use the application. Participants received a brief explanation of the product concept, but the

way they interacted with the application was up to them. This made it possible to model the behaviour of a real user encountering the product for the first time without prior training.

Since real businesses had not yet been connected to the platform at this stage, the team manually placed test cards on the map to simulate offers from local venues. This recreated the real interaction scenario between a user and the platform.

The main aspects covered during testing were registration and login, the map and the display of business cards, the card-collection mechanic, the basic game mechanics of the platform, technical errors and bugs, and the clarity of the interface for new users.

All identified issues were classified into critical bugs (issues that broke the main usage scenarios and required mandatory fixes before open beta testing) and non-critical bugs and improvements (issues that did not block core functionality and were logged in the backlog for further work) (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Issues identified during the B2C closed beta

	Critical	Non-critical	Features
B2C	3	7	8

Source: compiled by the author based on closed beta testing data.

Among the critical problems was a flaw in the registration process. In the event of an error, the application returned a technical system code such as “Error 409,” which is unintelligible to a regular user. Since registration is the first step of interaction with the product, any difficulty at this stage could cause user loss before they even start using the platform.

In addition to the technical problems, preparation for testing surfaced a legal risk. The function for receiving INDI coins for watching ad videos contradicted Google Play rules on showing ads in beta versions of applications, which could have led to the application being blocked on the platform.

3.2.3 IMPLEMENTATION

On the basis of the B2C testing results, two recommendations were made. The error-handling logic for registration was to be changed so that technical system messages were replaced by user-friendly hints. The ad-video viewing mechanic was to be temporarily disabled in the beta version of the application to remove the legal risk, while the function would be kept for full launch after testing was complete. Both recommendations were accepted and implemented by the development team.

3.3 CLOSED BETA TESTING B2B

3.3.1 HYPOTHESIS

Before testing of the admin panel began, similar questions remained open on the business side: whether the panel was technically stable, whether its logic was intuitive for business representatives without deep technical experience, and whether a business could create and manage offers on the platform on its own.

3.3.2 VALIDATION

Three local venues took part in the testing: a barbershop from a franchise network, a specialised coffee centre that combines a café, a coffee shop, and a coffee-equipment repair service, and a fast-food venue.

Since the platform was at the MVP stage, an important part of the process was explaining the product's value to the businesses. Training materials were prepared: communication scripts that explained the platform's idea, presentation materials describing how the admin panel works, and a video tutorial on using the system's main functions. A series of online meetings was held with each business to provide training and to model real usage scenarios.

The main aspects of testing covered business registration and login on the admin panel, creation and editing of offer cards, correct display of cards in the user mobile application, activation and deactivation of offers, the usability of the admin panel interface, the process of confirming a card's redemption by a user at the venue, and the identification of technical errors in panel operation (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Issues identified during the B2B closed beta

	Critical	Non-critical	Features
B2B	4	6	6

Source: compiled by the author based on closed beta testing data.

Critical problems included a character limit in the offer description field, which prevented businesses from formulating cards properly for users, and limited support for image formats during photo upload. Both problems blocked the creation of offers in the system, which made further platform testing impossible.

3.3.3 IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the B2B testing results, the recommendation was to expand the offer description field and to add support for the required image formats in the admin panel. In addition to technical fixes, work with businesses raised the question of the platform's internal economy: how to determine the price of offers in INDI coins and what the conversion rate should be. The recommended approach was the simplest possible model, 1 INDI coin = 1 hryvnia. This minimises cognitive load on businesses, simplifies the pricing of cards, makes the platform's economy transparent for users, and avoids the confusion that often arises in products with indirect internal-currency rates. The team adopted this model as the basis for further testing.

3.4 ANSWER TO RQ1

The closed beta tests of both parts of the platform produced an answer to the first research question. The current version of the product was not ready for interaction with real users in its initial form: 7 critical bugs were identified across the B2C and B2B parts of the platform, a legal risk linked to the ad mechanic was found, and the platform's internal economy remained undefined. After the identified problems were resolved, the product reached a level of technical readiness sufficient to move to the next stage, which was open beta testing in real market conditions.

Chapter 4. Open Beta Testing

4.1 RECOMMENDATION

After the critical issues from closed beta testing were resolved, the product reached the level of technical readiness needed to move to the next stage. The author recommended an open beta as the instrument for answering RQ2: does the product create enough value for users and local businesses, and do the platform's mechanics motivate repeat interaction?

Unlike closed beta, which targeted technical problems, open beta testing takes place in real market conditions with real users and businesses. Methodologically, this stage relies on Lean Startup principles: product development moves forward through testing of core product hypotheses in the real usage environment. Since INDI operates as a B2B2C platform, testing covers three separate dimensions: how end users interact with the platform, how businesses interact with it, and how effective the user acquisition channels are.

4.2 OPEN BETA TESTING B2C

4.2.1 HYPOTHESIS

Before open testing began, three assumptions were formulated. The platform's mechanics are intuitive for new users without additional instructions. The gamified format of obtaining discounts motivates users to return to the application. Users find offers from local businesses relevant enough to redeem them at venues.

To test these assumptions, a combined approach was chosen that mixes quantitative analysis of user behaviour through product analytics with qualitative research through Customer Development interviews and polls in the Telegram channel.

4.2.2 VALIDATION

Period and approach to data collection

Open beta testing ran for two weeks, from 12 to 26 March 2026. Methodologically, the stage was structured as a full research cycle. The first two weeks were spent collecting quantitative data through Amplitude and observing user behaviour, after which qualitative research was carried out through semi-structured interviews with users and polls in the Telegram channel. This made it possible first to accumulate a sufficient set of behavioural data and then to obtain qualitative explanations of the patterns observed.

User acquisition

Over two weeks of testing, 260 new users joined the platform. The distribution of new registrations across days shows a clear pattern. The highest activity was in the first two days after the advertising campaign launched, with 53 users on 12 March and 59 users on 13 March, after which the figure gradually fell to an organic level of 3–16 users a day (see Fig. 4.1).

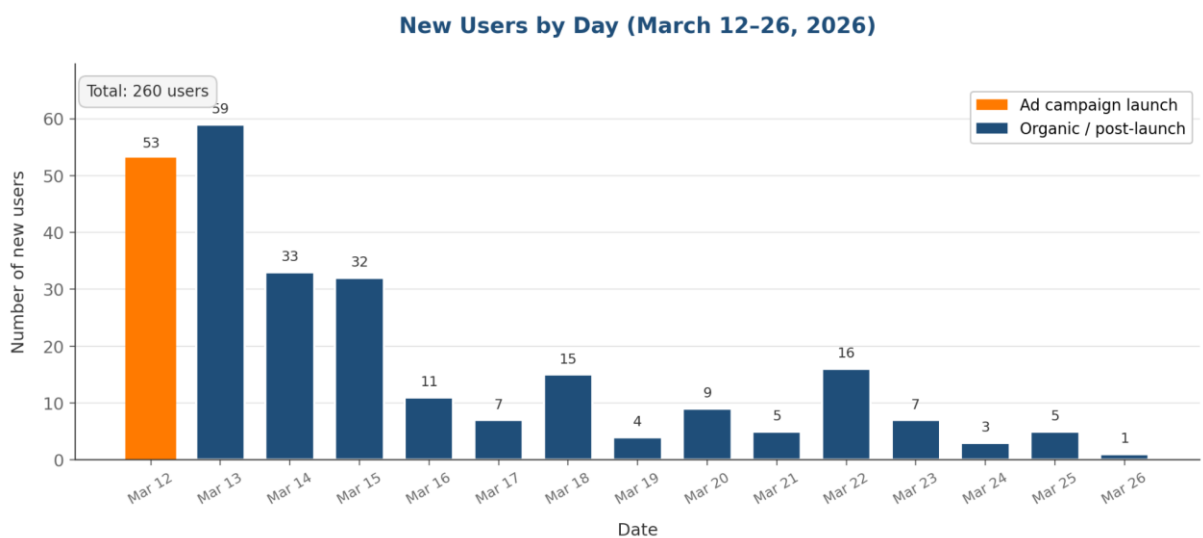


Fig. 4.1. New users by day during open beta testing, 12–26 March 2026 (Amplitude analytics; INDI project).

The breakdown of beta participants by platform showed a slight iOS lead: of 260 users, 147 used Apple devices and 113 used Android. This is telling, given the technical conditions of the beta. Android users had to take a more difficult path — fill in a Google form and wait for manual addition to the testers' team before they could download the app. iOS users had a simpler process: install

TestFlight and use it to install the app. The fact that the Android audience remained substantial despite a much higher entry barrier indicates strong motivation in this segment. After release on the official stores, where the download process will be equally simple for both platforms, a more even split is expected.

Retention

Day 1 rolling retention of 50.4% means that almost half of users came back to the application after their first session. Day 7 rolling retention of 38.5% confirms that the product holds a substantial part of the audience through the first week. Day 14 retention of 31.9% shows that one third of the audience is still active two weeks after registration. For a beta product with a limited amount of content and offers, these numbers are a strong signal (see Fig. 4.2).

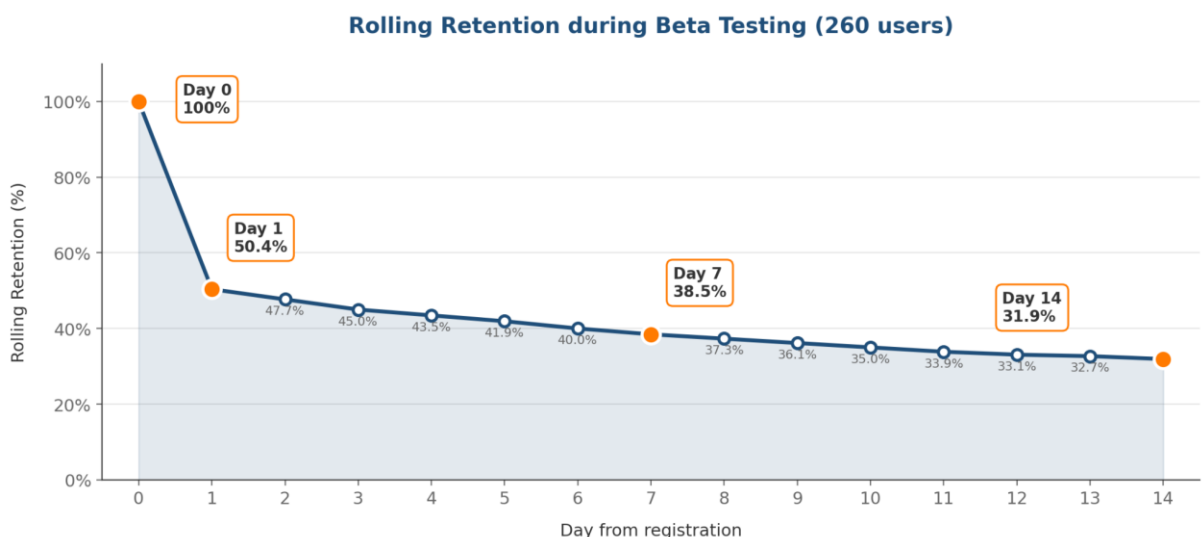


Fig. 4.2. Rolling retention curve during open beta testing, 260 users (Amplitude analytics; INDI project).

For context, industry benchmarks for consumer mobile apps put average Day 1 retention at around 25% and Day 7 retention at 11–13% (Business of Apps). It should be noted that these benchmarks refer to classic (standard) retention, which counts only users who return on exactly that day, whereas INDI measured rolling retention, which counts users who return on day N or any later day. Rolling retention figures are inherently higher than classic retention for the same cohort, so a

direct numerical comparison is not strictly valid. Nevertheless, even accounting for this methodological difference, INDI's results appear strong given the early stage of the product and the limited amount of content on the platform during beta.

Average DAU over the testing period was 50.87 unique users per day, with a peak of around 80 users on 14–15 March and a gradual decline to 21 users on 26 March. The drop in DAU toward the end of the period is the expected pattern after an advertising launch in the absence of new acquisition waves (see Fig. 4.3).

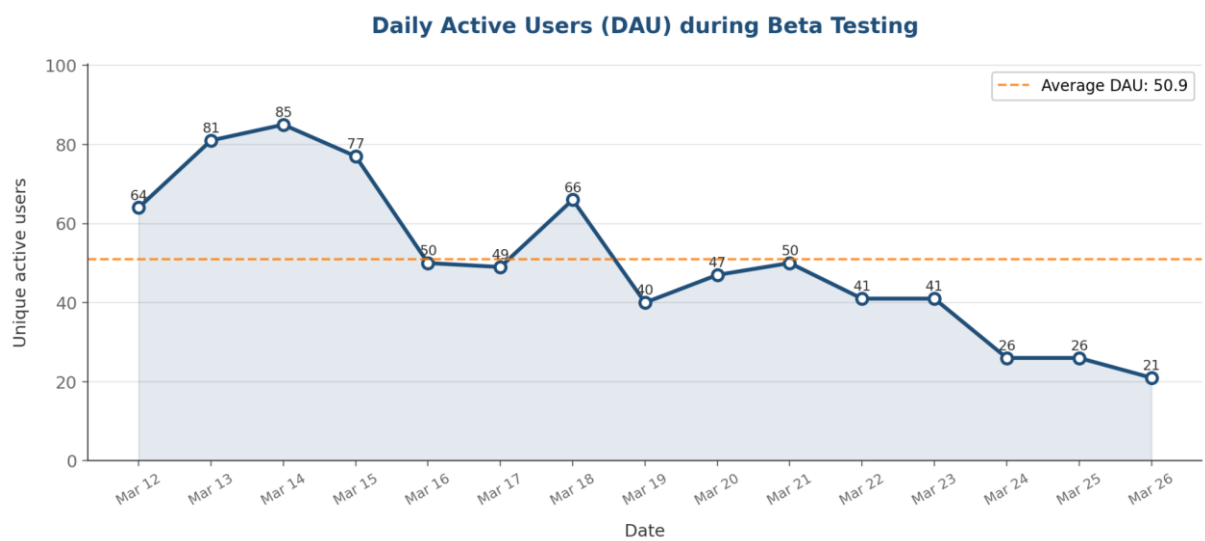


Fig. 4.3. Daily Active Users (DAU) during open beta testing (Amplitude analytics; INDI project).

Activation funnel

To assess the depth of user interaction with the product, an activation funnel was built that tracks events from the first opening of the application to actual redemption of a card at a venue (see Fig. 4.4).

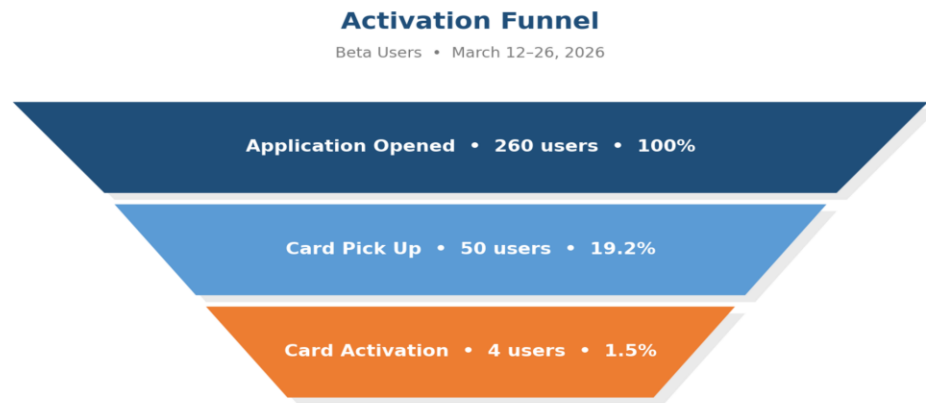


Fig. 4.4. Activation funnel for open beta users, 12–26 March 2026 (Amplitude analytics; INDI project).

Conversion from opening the application to picking up the first card was 19.2%; one in five users reached the platform's core mechanic. Conversion from picking up a card to redeeming it at a venue was only 8%: of the 50 users who picked up a card, only 4 redeemed it. The Card Activation figure is somewhat understated because not every redemption is registered through the panel.

Qualitative research

To understand the reasons behind the patterns observed, two polls were conducted in the Telegram channel and three semi-structured interviews were held with platform users.

The poll “Why didn't you use the card?” (44 votes, multiple answers allowed) showed the following distribution: the offer didn't interest me, 29%; haven't picked one up yet, 25%; didn't get to the venue, 22%; didn't understand how to redeem it, 18%; didn't have time or forgot, 13%; something didn't work, 6% (see Fig. 4.5).

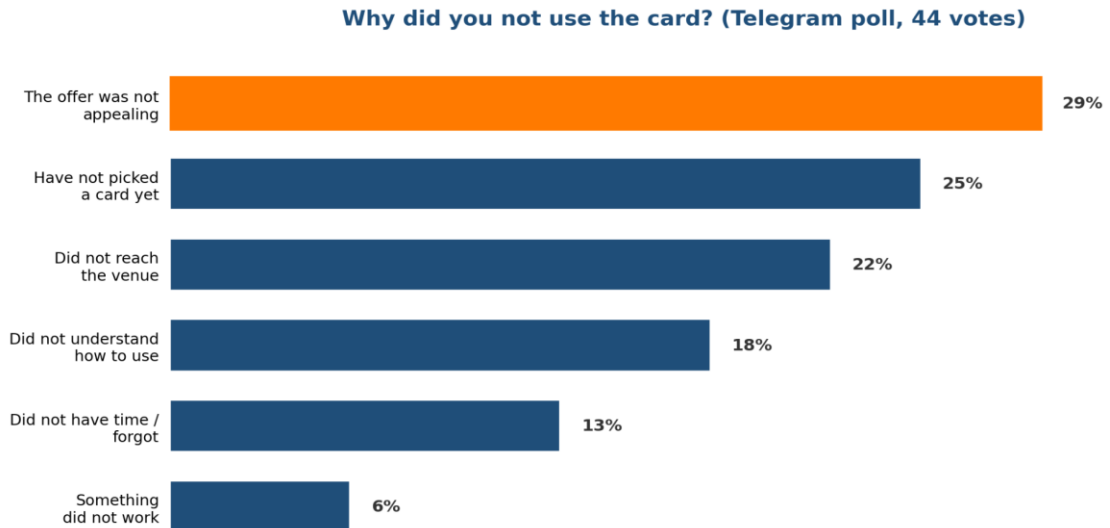


Fig. 4.5. Telegram poll “Why did you not use the card?”, 44 votes (INDI Telegram channel, March 2026).

The most common reason for not using cards is neither a technical issue nor the difficulty of the mechanic. It is the irrelevance of the offers themselves. Interview data confirm this.

The poll “Which businesses should be added?” (50 votes) showed a clear audience priority: food, 72%; beauty, 38%; sport, 26%; healthcare, 20%. The dominance of food confirms that users are most interested in offers that match their everyday needs (see Fig. 4.6).

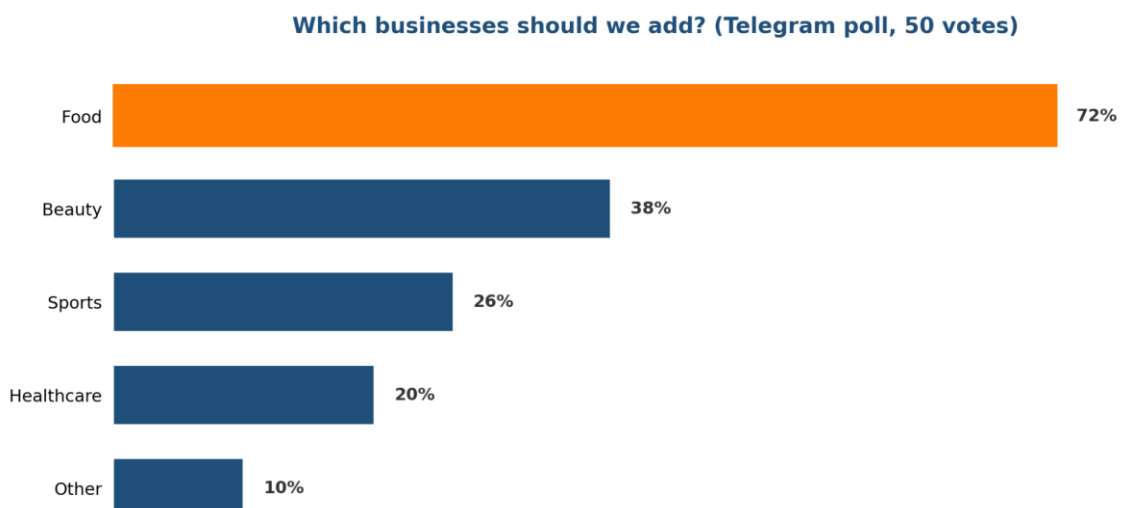


Fig. 4.6. Telegram poll “Which businesses should we add?”, 50 votes (INDI Telegram channel, March 2026).

The interviews confirmed and deepened the quantitative data. All three respondents figured out the product's mechanics on their own without additional instructions. The gamified format is received positively. Users draw parallels with Pokemon Go and note that the process of finding cards adds motivation to walks around the city. Daily activities and mini-games are a stable trigger for returning to the application.

At the same time, all three interviews independently pointed to the same problem: offers from businesses do not match users' actual needs. One respondent had 10 haircut discounts and a discount on coffee-machine diagnostics; none was relevant. Another could not find a relevant offer because they don't drink coffee and don't need a men's haircut. Notably, no user refused to redeem a card because of process complexity. The question was always whether there was a relevant offer for them.

4.2.3 IMPLEMENTATION

Observations from the first week of testing showed that push notifications are an effective activation tool. After a notification was sent, in-app activity rose noticeably. Building a full automatic notification infrastructure would have taken time, so a temporary solution was found within the existing functionality. The admin panel automatically sends all users a notification when a new card appears in the market. Cards were alternately removed and added back, which generated notifications and supported user engagement without further development.

In parallel, educational posts were published in the Telegram channel that explained how to redeem collected cards at venues. This was a response to data showing that some users did not understand the activation process.

Full analysis of the data collected, including the results of interviews and polls, made it possible to formulate strategic recommendations on improving Card_Activation and on the further development of the platform. These are set out in the final section of this work.

4.3 OPEN BETA TESTING B2B

4.3.1 HYPOTHESIS

After closed beta testing of the B2B side of the product and the resolution of the technical issues identified there, a further question arose: do businesses see the platform as an effective tool for attracting additional customers in real usage conditions? This is the second part of RQ2 and concerns the value of the product for both sides of the platform.

Three assumptions were formulated before open testing began. Businesses can create and manage offers on their own through the admin panel. The platform generates real additional traffic to partner venues. Businesses are willing to continue using the platform after the beta is over.

4.3.2 VALIDATION

Cooperation model with partner businesses

For the period of open beta testing, a special cooperation model was offered to the first three partner businesses, namely the barbershop, the coffee centre, and the fast-food venue. INDI guaranteed reimbursement of all discounts that businesses gave to users, which created a zero-losses model for the partners. This made it possible to involve businesses in testing without financial risk on their side and to obtain real data on platform effectiveness.

Beyond beta testing, the platform's business model assumes that businesses pay for the customers acquired. At the beta stage, however, the priority was not to test monetisation but to gather data on actual usage of the platform by both sides.

Adding certificates as a tactical adjustment

Observations from the first week and feedback from users showed that offers from the three initial partner businesses did not provide enough relevance for the different audience segments. To address this, certificates of well-known retail brands, namely Silpo, Rozetka, Epicentr, and Allo, were added during the testing period. They complemented the local-business offers with universal value options.

The certificates were redeemed much more actively than the offers from local partner businesses. This pattern provided further confirmation of the earlier conclusion from the B2C block:

the problem of low Card_Activation lies not in the product mechanic itself but in the relevance of offers to users.

Expansion of the business base

During open beta testing, one more partner, a seafood store, was added, which made it possible to verify the onboarding process for a new business in real platform-operating conditions.

At the same time, over the two weeks of testing, four businesses approached the INDI team organically with a request to join the platform: an IT school, a nutrition practice, a seafood store (which became a partner), and a local cyber club. Notably, all of them had been regular users of the application; interest in partnership emerged from personal experience with the product.

These businesses were ready to join even on a free cooperation model with no financial commitments to the platform, which indicates that INDI is perceived as a potentially valuable customer-acquisition channel even before its effectiveness has been confirmed in numbers.

Limited quantitative data

It was not possible to obtain statistically significant data on real additional traffic to partner venues during open beta. Because of the limited number of active users on the platform and the low Card_Activation rate, the figures for card redemption at venues were too low to support sound conclusions. This is a limitation on the answer to the business side of RQ2: the question of the platform's actual effectiveness as a customer acquisition tool requires testing at greater scale.

4.3.3 IMPLEMENTATION

During open beta testing, a tactical decision was implemented based on current observations: retail-brand certificates were added to raise the relevance of offers on the platform. This decision had two results. It confirmed the hypothesis that offer irrelevance was the main reason for low Card_Activation, and it gave users universal value options for the testing period.

In addition, the onboarding of a new business partner was carried out successfully, which confirmed the workability of the partner-onboarding process developed during the closed beta.

The organic approach of four new businesses over two weeks is one of the strongest signals received during open beta testing. This pattern shows that the platform can generate B2B interest without targeted marketing spend on partner acquisition. Users' perception of the product itself creates organic demand for partnership on the business side.

A separate insight from working with businesses concerned their real motivation for placing cards on the platform. For most businesses, questions of geography or the timing of card placement are secondary; what matters is the fact of attracting a customer within an acceptable budget. This observation became the basis for the recommendation on automating the creation and placement of cards, which is set out in the final section of this work.

Strategic recommendations on the further development of the B2B side of the platform, namely scaling the business base, revising the monetisation model, and adapting the onboarding process, are set out in the final section.

4.4 OPEN BETA TESTING MARKETING

4.4.1 HYPOTHESIS

The underlying assumption of the marketing block is that the platform can effectively acquire target users through accessible local communication channels at an acceptable cost. This assumption is critical for assessing the economic viability of scaling the product, since even if the product creates value for users, ineffective acquisition makes scaling unworkable. To test this assumption, two questions were posed: can target users be acquired through accessible local channels at an acceptable cost, and do the resulting CPI and CPA confirm that further scaling is justified?

4.4.2 VALIDATION

4.4.2.1 TELEGRAM AS AN INTERMEDIATE FUNNEL STAGE

Since the product was at the beta stage, a direct download link to the application was technically unavailable. iOS users had to install the app through TestFlight, while Android users had

to fill in a Google form with their email address for subsequent addition to the testing group. This made the standard acquisition funnel with a direct download link impossible.

The solution was to use the Telegram channel as an intermediate stage of the funnel. The channel became the single communication space where the potential audience gathered, which made it possible to maintain repeat contact with users for feedback collection and hypothesis testing. It also served as a quick feedback loop, since the beta product was updated regularly, and Telegram allowed the team to inform users about updates and fixes quickly, which reduced frustration and built trust in the product. The channel also contained step-by-step instructions for joining the beta on both platforms.

4.4.2.2 ACQUISITION CHANNELS AND FUNNEL

Three types of channels were chosen for user acquisition: Telegram channels, TikTok influencers, and Instagram. In total, advertising was placed on eight platforms with a combined reach of 116,200 views and a total budget of 16,700 hryvnias.

The marketing funnel is shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Open beta marketing funnel

Stage	Number	Conversion
Ad views	116,200	—
Telegram subscribers	230	0.2%
App downloads	260	113.0%
First card collected	50	19.2%

Source: compiled by the author based on open beta testing data.

Download conversion exceeded the number of Telegram subscribers for several reasons. Part of the audience subscribed to the channel and later unsubscribed while keeping the application installed. Some downloads also came through organic word of mouth, without going through the

Telegram channel. Around ten downloads came from the project team itself. The full marketing funnel is visualised in Fig. 4.7.

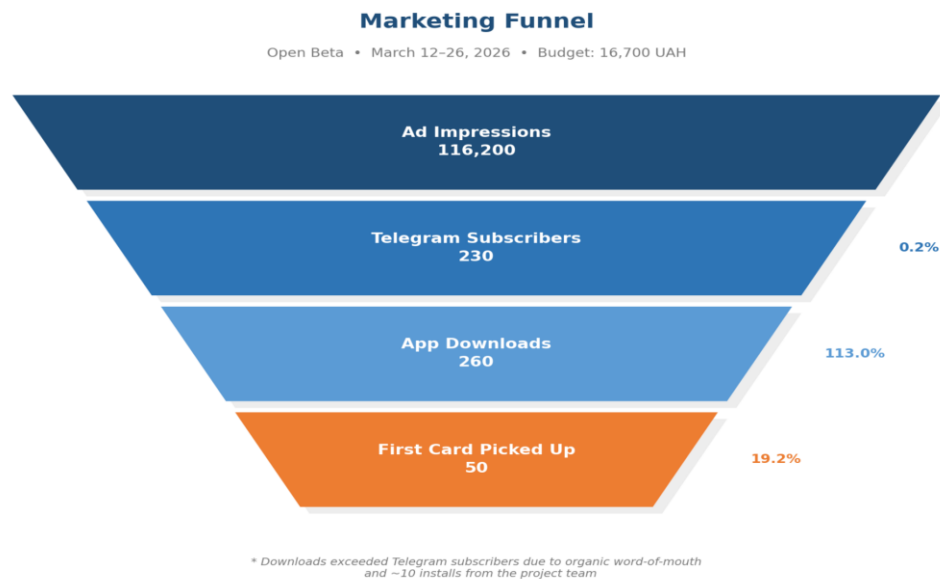


Fig. 4.7. Open beta marketing funnel: ad impressions, Telegram subscribers, app downloads, and first card collected (INDI internal marketing data, March 2026).

4.4.2.3 COMMUNITY BUILDING ON TELEGRAM

Alongside traffic acquisition, the Telegram channel functioned as a tool for community-building around the product. To support this, a tone of voice and a single visual style were developed for the channel.

Communication was led from the perspective of the mascot, INDI the raccoon, who addressed the audience informally in a young, playful tone. This matched the positioning of the product as a gamified platform and the target audience aged 18–35. The visual style relied on a single colour palette dominated by orange, 3D illustrations of the mascot, and game elements such as cards, gifts, and coins. Visual consistency throughout the beta built brand recognition before the full market launch. The channel was also used to gather user feedback through direct communication in comments and private messages.

4.4.3 IMPLEMENTATION

The marketing testing produced three recommendations.

First, the resulting CPI was 64.2 hryvnias per download, and CPA for the first card collected was 334.0 hryvnias. By comparison, the team's prior benchmark was around 158 hryvnias per download, so the result is 59% lower. This confirms that user acquisition through local channels is an economically effective approach for the beta stage.

Second, the appearance of organic word of mouth as early as the beta stage is an important early signal. Some users downloaded the application without going through the advertising funnel, which means the product attracts enough interest to spread organically. For an early-stage startup, this is one of the leading indicators of potential product-market fit.

Third, the absence of a per-channel conversion breakdown made it impossible to determine the effectiveness of each platform precisely. A technical limitation was that TikTok does not allow tracked links to be placed in the profile bio, and even where they are present they record only clicks rather than subscriptions or downloads.

Validation of the financial model

A separate result of the marketing testing was the chance to compare actual data with the assumptions the team had built into the financial model before beta. This comparison makes it possible to evaluate the accuracy of the planning assumptions and to identify the areas where adjustment is necessary.

The conversion rate from opening the application to picking up the first card was 19.2%, which is above the 15% built into the model. This means the mechanic that brings users to the platform's core mechanic works better than expected. User acquisition cost was also lower than the model assumed: actual CPI was 64.2 hryvnias (about \$1.6), which is much more efficient than the model's reference point of \$10 per acquired user.

At the same time, actual card redemption at venues was 8% of pickups, which is well below the model's assumption of 22%. The qualitative research clearly identified the cause of this gap: not a technical or product problem, but the irrelevance of offers from partner businesses for users' real

needs. Closing this gap by expanding the base of relevant businesses is therefore a precondition for reaching the economic indicators built into the model.

4.5 STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS AND ANSWER TO RQ3

4.5.1 OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

The open beta of the INDI platform produced a comprehensive set of data on how the product works in real market conditions. Analysis of these data revealed both the product's strengths and the critical areas requiring intervention before full market launch.

Among the positive results, the most important are the following. Rolling retention of 38.5% on Day 7 and 31.9% on Day 14 indicates a stable base for repeat interaction with the product. Organic word of mouth appeared as early as the beta stage, which is an early signal of potential product-market fit. The organic approach of four new businesses without targeted marketing effort confirms the platform's appeal to the B2B audience. A CPI of 64.2 hryvnias came in well below the team's earlier benchmarks, which confirms the economic effectiveness of local acquisition channels.

At the same time, the main issue surfaced during testing is the low Card_Activation rate of 1.5% of total users. Analysis of qualitative data from interviews and polls clearly indicated that the cause is not technical complexity and not the mechanic itself, but the irrelevance of offers from partner businesses for users' real needs. This hypothesis was confirmed during testing: the addition of retail-brand certificates led to noticeably higher redemption compared with offers from local partners, and was also supported by user interviews.

4.5.2 ANSWER TO RQ3

RQ3 concerned whether the accumulated understanding of the product and the market is sufficient to substantiate the further development strategy of the company, and what that strategy should be.

On the basis of the data collected, the formulated position is as follows. The product shows enough potential for further development and gradual scaling, but is not ready for an aggressive full

market launch in its current form. The main argument is that retention and the organic signals confirm the appeal of the idea and the mechanic of the product, while low Card_Activation points to a specific and resolvable problem (offer irrelevance) rather than a failure of the product concept.

The recommended strategy is therefore neither a full pivot nor an aggressive market launch, but consistent scaling through the resolution of the identified problems, with a parallel transition to a more sustainable operational model. The specific recommendations below are organised by three levels of priority.

4.5.3 CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Expansion of the partner business base

The main problem to resolve is the irrelevance of offers caused by the limited number of partner businesses. The recommended first step is active expansion of the partner base on free cooperation terms; beta testing confirmed that businesses are willing to join without financial commitments, especially those who have already used the platform as regular users. The priority categories for acquisition are those that showed the highest demand in the polls: food, beauty, sport, and healthcare.

Alongside building the base, the recommendation is a gradual transition to a sustainable commercial model. The starting point should be businesses that already show organic interest in the platform; this audience is the most ready for commercial relations because they come with an existing understanding of the product's value. The free model thus serves as a tool for rapid base expansion, while the commercial model is introduced in parallel for those partners where the platform's value has already been confirmed by experience.

Release on the official Play Market

After two weeks of successful beta testing, the platform meets Google Play's rules for moving from a test group to an official release. This step is important for several reasons. It removes the technical entry barrier for Android users, who currently have to fill in a Google form. It makes the

standard acquisition funnel with a direct download link possible. It also creates the conditions for restoring the function of watching ad videos for INDI coins, which was temporarily disabled because of Google Play rules.

4.5.4 TACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Introducing a referral system between users

All three interview respondents independently expressed interest in a referral programme. Given this confirmed audience readiness for recommendations, the introduction of a formalised referral system is a natural next step.

The recommended model is mutual reward: a user who shares a referral code receives INDI coins for each new friend who registers using that code, and the new user also receives a reward upon registration. This two-sided model maximises motivation both to share and to accept the invitation. Beyond strengthening organic spread, this system provides a built-in mechanism for traffic source attribution: during future advertising campaigns, it will be possible to track which source produced the most users through the referral codes given at registration.

Expanding gamification mechanics to support retention

Interview data showed that users perceive the platform's game mechanics positively, but the existing mini-games are too simple and do not create enough engagement. The recommendation is to add the game 2048 in the format of a weekly challenge that grants additional INDI coins on completion. This expands the engagement cycle from daily to weekly, which supports retention over a longer distance, and creates an additional return trigger for users who are more interested in gamification than in discounts.

Holding a strategic session with the team

Based on the data collected during beta testing, the recommendation is to hold a structured strategic session with the INDI team to formalise the priority goals of product development. The result of the session should be an agreed set of KPIs and OKRs for the next quarter, which will allow

a transition from reactive product management to systematic progress tracking. Among the key indicators, it is reasonable to set targets for Card Activation Rate, the number of active partner businesses in priority categories, and CPI for the next round of advertising campaigns. Recorded targets will also simplify communication with potential investors if external financing is sought.

Automating card creation and placement

Work with businesses during beta testing surfaced a systemic problem: manual creation and regular updating of cards requires time from businesses, and most small and medium-sized firms are not ready to allocate this time systematically. At the same time, the primary interest of a business is the customer acquired, not the management of cards as such. Two levels of automation are recommended. The first is a re-placement mechanic: a business creates a card once and can re-activate it with a single click after a defined interval, with all parameters preserved. The second is AI optimisation of placement: the platform itself determines the optimal time and conditions for activating a card on the basis of user behavioural data and patterns of usage of similar offers. This approach reduces the operational load on the business and increases the likelihood that partners will remain active on the platform in the long term.

Returning to active advertising and starting monetisation

After the move to the official Play Market and the expansion of the offer base, the recommendation is to gradually restart advertising activity through the channels that confirmed their economic effectiveness during beta. In parallel, it becomes possible to reconnect the function of rewarding users for watching ad videos, which had been disabled because of Google Play rules. This creates the platform's first source of internal revenue.

4.5.5 CONCLUSION

The open beta of the INDI platform confirmed that the product has real potential for scaling. Day 7 retention of 38.5%, organic word of mouth among both users and businesses, and the confirmed

economic effectiveness of local acquisition channels all indicate that the platform's concept works and resonates with the target audience.

The offer-relevance problem is a specific and resolvable obstacle that does not call the product concept itself into question. Resolving it through the expansion of the business base, together with the technical steps of moving to the official Play Market and the gradual restart of marketing activity, creates the conditions for the product to move from the beta phase to a phase of controlled scaling.

The recommended strategy assumes neither a product pivot nor an aggressive full market launch in the current form. It is built on the principle of consistent scaling through targeted resolution of identified problems, which matches both the data collected and the operational capacity of the INDI team.

CONCLUSION

This work was devoted to the consulting support of the INDI startup at the stage of preparing the product for market launch. At the start of the cooperation, the startup team had a technically ready MVP of the mobile platform but no confirmation of product value, no structured process for validating the product in real conditions, and no clear strategy for further development. With the limited resources of six people working full-time elsewhere, going to market without external support was not realistic.

The aim of this work was to develop and run a structured product validation process with real users and to formulate an evidence-based recommendation regarding the further development strategy of the company. To achieve this, a Hypothesis → Validation → Implementation framework was proposed, which made it possible to test the team's hypotheses sequentially across two stages, closed and open beta testing, with separate treatment of the user, business, and marketing components of the product.

The closed beta produced an answer to RQ1 on the technical readiness of the product. Seven critical bugs were identified across the user and admin parts of the platform, a legal risk linked to the ad mechanic in Google Play was found, and the platform's internal economy was undefined. After these problems were resolved and the model 1 INDI coin = 1 hryvnia was adopted, the product reached the level of technical readiness sufficient for interaction with real users.

The open beta testing answered RQ2 regarding the value created by the product. Quantitative data from Amplitude — rolling Day 7 retention of 38.5%, 260 new users in two weeks, average DAU of 50.87 — confirmed that the core game mechanic generates sustained user engagement. At the same time, the Card Activation rate of 1.5% revealed a critical gap: the relevance of available offers was insufficient for users to complete the full usage cycle. Qualitative research through interviews and polls unambiguously identified the cause — a limited pool of partner businesses that did not match user expectations in terms of geography and category. On the B2B side, organic inbound interest from

four new businesses during the testing period served as a signal of market demand, although no statistically significant data on traffic generation for partners was obtained.

The marketing block demonstrated the economic effectiveness of local acquisition channels: the resulting CPI of 64.2 hryvnias came in well below the team's prior benchmark of 158 hryvnias.

The answer to RQ3 on the further development strategy of the company was based on a comprehensive interpretation of the collected data. The recommendation formulated was neither an aggressive market launch in the current form nor a product pivot. The proposed strategy is consistent scaling through the resolution of specific identified problems: expansion of the partner base on free terms, release on the official Play Market, introduction of a referral system between users, and expansion of gamification mechanics. These steps create the conditions for a gradual transition of the product from the beta phase to a phase of controlled scaling, while a sustainable monetisation model is built in parallel.

The practical outcome of the work for the INDI team is not only the specific set of recommendations but also the methodological approach to data-based product decisions that was put in place. The transition from intuitive product management to a structured cycle of hypothesis testing is a fundamental change that will allow the team to make informed decisions on its own at the next stages of product development.

The consulting work on the INDI project described here spanned several months and covered a much broader scope of activity than is reflected in this document. The author's work included full planning and coordination of two beta-testing stages, development of the methodology for collecting qualitative and quantitative data, conducting user interviews directly, behavioural data analysis in Amplitude, content strategy and tone of voice for the Telegram channel, and regular working sessions with the INDI team for the implementation of recommendations. This document presents only the main methodological decisions, the most representative results, and the strategic conclusions that reflect the overall logic of the process.

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