

THE GREAT INDIAN ADVERTISING: KAL, AAJ AUR KAL

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Abstract

The Indian advertising sector has evolved from a modest business activity into a significant industry that substantially impacts the nation's economy and culture. Over the last decade, it has expanded its creative scope, capital investment, technological integration, and job creation, establishing a notable presence globally. The industry's size grew from ₹15,600 crore in 2005 to ₹43,500 crore in 2014, continuing its upward trend in the following years. Between 2014 and 2017, it experienced consistent growth, with advertising expenditure exceeding ₹62,000 crore by 2017. This expansion was fuelled by the widespread adoption of digital media, e-commerce, and mobile technology. While television and print media were dominant in 2014, digital media's share grew from 10% to approximately 16% by 2017, altering the industry's landscape. Furthermore, the industry underwent a fundamental change in its creative and strategic methodologies. Emerging advertising formats such as causevertising, artvertising, sadvertising, bloatvertising, madvertising, celevertising, blandvertising, and grandvertising—emerged as innovative tools to connect with diverse audiences. These approaches not only enhanced brand visibility but also reflected evolving consumer expectations and socio-cultural sensitivities.

In addition to quantitative growth, the industry experienced a paradigm shift in its creative and strategic approaches. Newer forms of advertising—such as causevertising, artvertising, advertising, bloatvertising, madvertising, celevertising, blandvertising, and grandvertising—emerged as innovative tools to connect with diverse audiences. These approaches not only enhanced brand visibility but also reflected evolving consumer expectations and socio-cultural sensitivities.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the growth trajectory of the Indian advertising industry between 2014 and 2017, evaluate the relative performance of key media segments, and examine the emergence of innovative advertising typologies. The study highlights how structural changes, consumer behavior, and digital adoption collectively shaped the present and laid the foundation for the future of Indian advertising.

Keywords: *Indian advertising industry, exponential growth, digital media, e-commerce, causevertising, celevertising, innovation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The advertising industry in India has developed into a thriving and dynamic sector that reflects the nation's sociocultural fabric as well as its trajectory of economic growth. It has grown from a small participant in the early years of India's post-independence economy to a multibillion-dollar sector with international renown. Today's advertising is a cultural phenomenon that shapes consumer behavior, aspirations, and societal ideals in addition to being a tool for company growth. Through the prism of Kal, AajaurKal – yesterday, today, and tomorrow – this essay examines the development of Indian advertising, paying special attention to the years 2014–2017, when digital transformation started to change the course of the sector.

1.1. Evolution of Indian Advertising: Kal (Past)

Historically, Indian advertising was dominated by print media and radio until the liberalization era in the 1990s, which brought satellite television and global brands into the Indian market. During the early 2000s, television advertising established itself as the most dominant medium, capturing consumer attention across urban and rural households. Print media, with its linguistic diversity, continued to play a vital role. By 2014, the industry had grown significantly, with advertising expenditures reaching ₹ 43,490 crore (GroupM, 2015). This set the stage for the next phase—digital transformation. The period also witnessed the emergence of celebrity endorsements (“celevertising”) and socially-driven campaigns (“causevertising”), laying the foundation for creative diversity.

1.2. Present Scenario: Aaj (2014–2017)

Between 2014 and 2017, the Indian advertising industry registered strong growth, marked by rising expenditures and rapid shifts in media share. In 2015, total ad expenditure (AdEx) was ₹ 48,977 crore, a growth of 12.6% over 2014 (GroupM, 2015). In 2016, the figure reached ₹ 57,486 crore, and by 2017 it touched nearly ₹ 62,000 crore (IBTimes, 2016; Pitch Madison, 2017).

Digital advertising was the fastest-growing segment, expanding from around ₹ 5,200 crore in 2014 to ₹ 9,700 crore in 2017 (IAMAI, 2017). Its share of total ad expenditure rose from ~8% in 2014 to ~16% in 2017, demonstrating the rapid adoption of smartphones and affordable internet data following Reliance Jio’s entry in 2016 (Business Standard, 2017).

In terms of media share, television maintained dominance with about 44–46% across 2014–2016. Print, which held 34–36% in 2014–2015, declined to under 30% by 2016 (Livemint, 2016). Radio, outdoor, and cinema maintained steady but smaller shares, together contributing about 10%.

1.3. Advertising Expenditure Trends (2014–2017)

The following table summarizes India’s advertising expenditure trends between 2014 and 2017.

Year	Total Ad Spend (INR crore)	Digital Ad Spend (INR crore)	Digital % of Total	Television %	Print %
2014	43,490	~5,200	~8%	46%	36%
2015	48,977	7,315	~10%	45%	34%
2016	57,486	~7,300	12.7%	44%	29.7%
2017	~62,000	9,700	15-16%	42%	28%

The advertising sector in India grew steadily as shown in Figure 1, from 2014 to 2017; i.e. ₹43,490 crore in 2014 to about ₹62,000 crore in 2017, representing a compound annual growth rate of roughly 12%. With a steady 44–46 percent market share, television continued to dominate, but print media saw a dramatic drop, going from about 36 percent in 2014 to 28 percent in 2017(Figure 2). On the other hand, digital advertising doubled its share, rising from about 8% in 2014 to almost 16% in 2017(Figure 3). Mobile, video, and social media formats were the main drivers of this growth. The pattern demonstrates a clear structural change: television remained strong but digital platforms gained territory from conventional media, especially print.

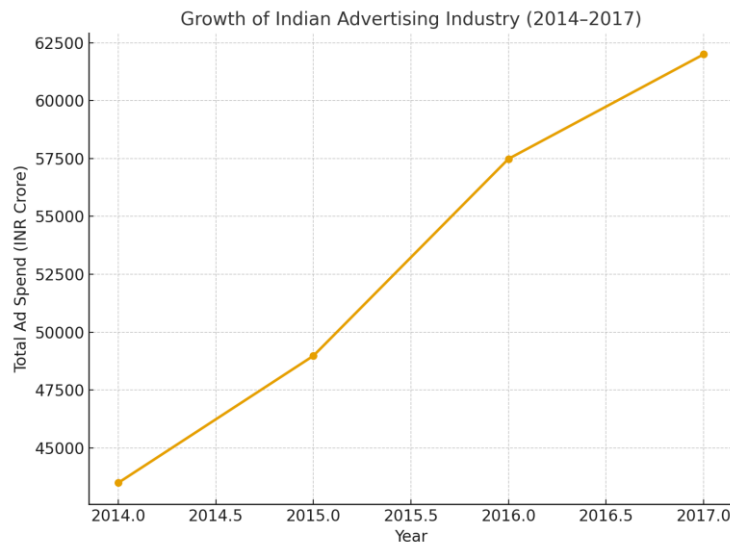


Figure 1: Growth of Indian Advertising Industry (2014–2017).

Source: GroupM (2015, 2016), Pitch Madison (2017), IAMA (2017), Forbes India (2017), Livemint (2016), Business Standard (2017).

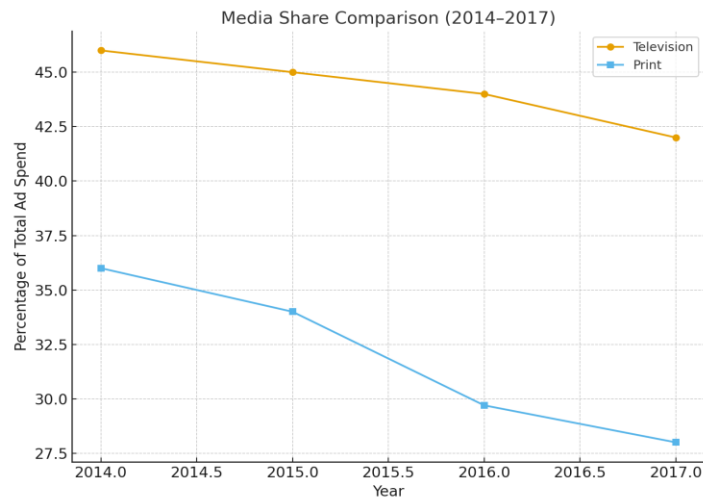


Figure 2: Media Share Comparison (2014-2017)

Source: GroupM This Year, Next Year (2015-2017); Pitch Madison Advertising Reports (2016-2017); FICCI-KPMG M&E Industry Reports (2015-2017).

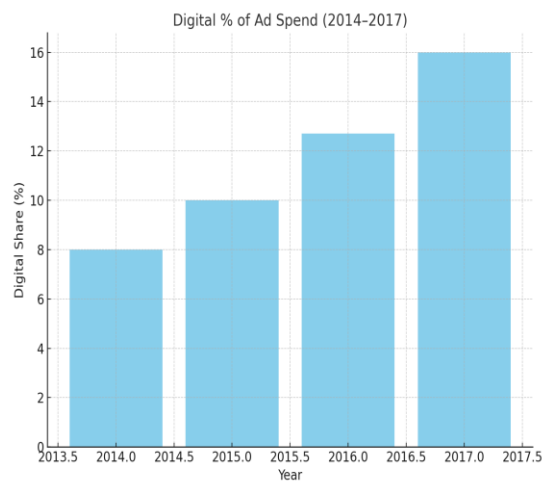


Figure 3: Digital percentage of Advertisement Spend (2014-2017)

Source: GroupM This Year, Next Year (2015-2017); Pitch Madison Advertising Report (2017); IMAI-IMRB Digital Advertising Reports (2016-2017).

1.4. Consumer Behavior and Advertising Impact

There were notable shifts in consumer behavior between 2014 and 2017. Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have influenced Indian customers to become more tech-savvy. In addition to increasing their advertising expenditures, e-commerce behemoths like Flipkart and Amazon changed how Indian consumers interacted with companies. Emotional storytelling, also known as sadvertising, causevertising, and celebrityvertising, became popular strategies for capturing viewers' attention. Diversity, gender sensitivity, and the ambitions of young people were more reflected in advertisements.

Additionally, regional language advertising increased dramatically as businesses realized they needed to reach people outside of metropolitan areas. Nearly 75% of new internet users in India preferred to consume information in their native tongues, according to IAMAI (2017), which prompted marketers to localize their marketing. Authenticity and emotional resonance emerged as important factors in influencing customer trust.

1.5 Creative Innovations in Indian Advertising (2014–2017)

1.5.1. Causevertising

Between 2014 and 2017, Indian advertising increasingly embraced social causes to connect with emerging urban audiences. This was the period when brands started to address issues of gender equality, civic responsibility, and sustainability more directly in campaigns. Ariel's Share the Load (2015) became iconic for challenging gender norms in household chores, while Tata Tea continued its Jaago Re initiative focusing on civic awareness. These campaigns reflected how advertising was evolving into a medium of social commentary, aligning with consumers' growing expectation for responsible brands.

1.5.2 Artvertising

The years 2014–2017 also saw the rise of "artvertising," as brands experimented with cultural motifs, murals, and design-heavy campaigns to stand out in increasingly cluttered urban landscapes. Asian Paints tapped into festivals and local art styles to deepen its association with homes and tradition, while Coca-Cola integrated vibrant wall art into city campaigns (Sarkar, 2018). This art-led approach connected strongly with younger, aspirational consumers and reinforced advertising as both a commercial and cultural expression.

1.5.3 Sadvertising

"Sadvertising" gained traction during this period, as brands used emotional storytelling to stand out in a market that was becoming more digitally connected. Google's Reunion ad (2014) struck a deep emotional chord by highlighting friendships lost during Partition, while insurance companies used poignant narratives around family and security to build trust (Missaglia et al., 2017). In an era when social media accelerated sharing, these emotion-driven campaigns went viral, showcasing the power of pathos in brand communication.

1.5.4. Bloatvertising

At the same time, “bloatvertising” remained prevalent in sectors like FMCG and telecom, where brands often relied on overproduced, flashy campaigns to compete for attention. Examples included repetitive detergent ads or high-decibel telecom promotions that promised “unlimited everything.” While such campaigns ensured high visibility, they often failed to build long-term trust, as Indian consumers during this period were beginning to demand authenticity over spectacle.

1.5.5. Madvertising

Humor-based “madvertising” thrived between 2014 and 2017, especially as digital platforms expanded reach. Fevicol’s quirky print and TV spots, Mentos’ witty one-liners, and Centre Fresh’s youth-centric humor ensured high recall value. According to KPMG (2016), humor-based campaigns performed well online, as younger consumers found them highly shareable. Madvertising proved essential in differentiating brands in the cluttered FMCG and lifestyle categories.

1.5.6 Celevertising

Celebrity endorsements dominated Indian advertising during this phase, with cricketers and Bollywood actors serving as the most trusted faces for mass campaigns. Virat Kohli’s association with brands like Puma and MRF, or Deepika Padukone’s endorsements for Tanishq, became defining examples of “celevertising.” GroupM (2016) noted that nearly two-thirds of FMCG and lifestyle advertising budgets leaned on celebrity endorsements, though critics argued that overreliance diluted originality and consumer engagement.

1.5.7 Blandvertising

“Blandvertising,” marked by uninspiring, formulaic campaigns, was most visible in highly regulated sectors such as financial services and insurance during 2014–2017. These campaigns relied heavily on compliance-driven scripts, with little creative differentiation. As a result, many were quickly forgotten, reducing their effectiveness in driving consumer engagement. Srivastava (2010) emphasized that audiences increasingly rejected predictable formats, further pressuring brands to innovate.

1.5.8 Grandvertising

Finally, “grandvertising” characterized high-budget campaigns that dominated both traditional and digital platforms. The Indian Premier League (IPL) became a flagship space for such campaigns, with FMCG giants, telecom firms, and e-commerce platforms investing heavily in sponsorships and large-scale commercials. Flipkart’s Big Billion Days (2016) exemplified this trend, as e-commerce firms deployed massive budgets for nationwide campaigns (EY, 2017). While effective in generating short-term visibility, these efforts highlighted the need to integrate large-scale campaigns with digital storytelling for sustained consumer engagement.

1.6. Future Outlook: Kal (Tomorrow)

The Indian advertising sector was at a turning point in 2017. According to industry projections, the advent of over-the-top (OTT) platforms, cheaper internet connectivity, and rising smartphone penetration will all contribute to digital advertising's continued strong growth trajectory. Reports like Pitch Madison (2017) and GroupM's This Year, Next Year (2016) predicted that video advertising and mobile-first campaigns would account for the majority of future investment. It was generally anticipated that digital will eventually overtake television; in fact, several forecasts indicated that digital may overtake television as India's primary medium by the early 2020s (GroupM, 2016; Pitch Madison, 2017).

At the same time, ethical advertising, sustainability, and consumer trust were starting to come up in strategic conversations (KPMG, 2016). For long-term engagement, advertisers realized that striking a balance between data-driven accuracy and genuine storytelling would be essential. As of 2017, technology and creativity were expected to become more intertwined in the future, changing the fundamentals of Indian advertising.

II. CONCLUSION

The Indian advertising industry, through its journey of Kal, Aaj, and Kal, reflects the dynamism of a country in transition. From print and television dominance to the rise of digital-first campaigns, the industry has continuously adapted to technological, economic, and cultural shifts. The period between 2014 and 2017 highlighted digital acceleration, consumer empowerment, and innovative storytelling. As it looks ahead, the industry is poised to become a global leader in creative, impactful, and ethical advertising.

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