

# The Digital Transformation of India's Advertising Industry: Trends, Challenges, and Strategic Implications

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## Abstract:

The Indian advertising industry has experienced a significant upheaval in the last decade, propelled by technology innovations, evolving consumer preferences, and the rising prominence of digital media. This study examines advertising expenditure (AdEx) trends from 2011 to 2023, emphasising the progressive decrease of traditional media and the swift growth of digital platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic expedited this transition, strengthening the resilience and agility of digital advertising. The research analyses significant growth patterns, changes in medium composition, and upcoming trends including video advertising, programmatic marketing, and influencer-driven campaigns. Study indicates that digital advertising, comprising 40% of total AdEx, has emerged as the principal catalyst for development, whereas conventional media experiences stagnation. Despite its growth, digital advertising encounters obstacles such as data privacy issues, advertising fraud, and market saturation. The study highlights the necessity for cohesive advertising strategies that harmonise traditional and digital methods, while prioritising innovation, regulatory frameworks, and the advancement of digital infrastructure. Policymakers must tackle digital literacy, consumer privacy, and standardisation to establish a sustainable and inclusive advertising environment. This report offers strategic insights for marketers and policymakers, emphasising the future direction of India's developing advertising sector.

**Keywords:** *Advertising expenditure, traditional media, digital media, AdEx growth, digital transformation, advertising trends.*

## 1. Introduction

The Indian advertising industry has undergone significant changes in the past decade, influenced by technological advancements, changing consumer preferences, and unexpected disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Advertising expenditure (AdEx) patterns have shifted markedly from a focus on traditional media to digital-first strategies, illustrating wider trends of digitalisation and market adaptation. Traditional advertising mediums, including television, print, and radio, previously occupied a significant market share; however, the rise of digital platforms has transformed brand-consumer engagement. From 2011 to 2015, traditional AdEx experienced significant growth, reaching a peak of 16% in 2015, driven by the popularity of conventional media. From 2016 to 2023, growth rates experienced a deceleration, averaging 5.7% annually, with a significant contraction observed during the pandemic in 2020 (KPMG, 2023). Conversely, digital AdEx exhibited steady growth, averaging 30.5% per year during the same timeframe, influenced by rising internet penetration, smartphone adoption, and a shift towards targeted, performance-oriented marketing (Deloitte, 2023). In 2023, digital advertising represented 40% of total AdEx, a significant increase from 6% in 2011, indicating a fundamental transformation in the advertising landscape (PwC, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic expedited the shift to digital platforms. Traditional media experienced significant declines attributed to restrictions and evolving consumer behaviours,

whereas digital advertising demonstrated resilience by providing flexible, measurable, and adaptive solutions during periods of uncertainty (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Advertisers have increasingly adopted video-centric, social media, and programmatic advertising formats, reflecting consumers' rising preference for interactive and personalised content.

This study examines the growth patterns, medium composition, and digital media transformation within India's advertising landscape, emphasising the effects of the pandemic. The study analyses trends in advertising expenditures and shifts in advertiser preferences, offering insights into the evolving dynamics of the industry and the essential role of digital platforms in facilitating future growth. This study enhances the current body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive analysis of the strategic consequences of these trends for advertisers in the digital age.

## 2. Review of Literature

The advertising industry is undergoing a significant transformation globally, with a marked shift from traditional media to data-driven digital platforms. This trend is reflected in the Indian advertising landscape, which has embraced innovative approaches and rapid digitalization to remain competitive and effective in a dynamic environment. The following review explores key themes and trends in the evolution of advertising in India.

Globally, the rise of personalization, influencer marketing, and programmatic advertising has redefined how brands engage with consumers. These strategies, supported by real-time analytics, enable precise targeting and enhanced campaign effectiveness (Rungta, 2024). India has mirrored this trend, with the advertising industry growing at a robust rate of 18.6% annually, reaching a valuation of over ₹70,000 crores. Digital advertising occupies a substantial share, underscoring the profound impact of internet penetration on consumer engagement and marketing strategies (Anand & Prakash, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed a dramatic shift in advertising strategies. Globally, brands adopted innovative messaging emphasizing hope and social responsibility while leveraging e-commerce and digital platforms (Chitra, 2021; Yoo et al., 2021). Similarly, in India, advertisers displayed resilience by adapting campaigns to foster positivity and maintain consumer engagement via social media and other digital channels (Anand & Prakash, 2023). The pandemic also increased demand for health-related products and digital platforms, such as online gaming and e-commerce, further influencing advertising trends (Chitra, 2021).

Digital transformation has significantly redefined the advertising landscape in India, introducing advanced analytics, programmatic advertising, and sophisticated attribution models. Multi-touch attribution methods are replacing traditional last-touch models, providing deeper insights into consumer interactions across channels (Deshpande, 2024). Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube have become central to advertising strategies, enabling businesses to deliver interactive and emotionally resonant campaigns that drive consumer behavior (Juanim et al., 2024).

India's cultural and demographic diversity presents unique challenges and opportunities for advertisers. Gender stereotypes, though pervasive in traditional advertising, are increasingly being addressed through inclusive media representations (Gaur & Sarkar, 2024). Regional diversity has also influenced advertising strategies, with campaigns being tailored to align with

local cultural nuances and preferences (Chau, 2023). This adaptability underscores the industry's ability to cater to India's multifaceted consumer base.

While digital advertising is on the rise, traditional media such as print, radio, and out-of-home (OOH) advertising continue to coexist, offering diverse formats that cater to both urban and rural audiences (Dutta, 2014). The transition from traditional to digital platforms has been marked by increased internet and mobile penetration, compelling advertisers to engage consumers in real-time through interactive online platforms (Harishuthan & Simson, 2020). The industry's historical evolution highlights its adaptability to technological advancements and changing consumer behavior (Rabindranath & Singh, 2024).

Despite its growth, digital advertising faces challenges such as ad fatigue, privacy concerns, and the rising use of ad blockers (Manikandan & Krishnammal, 2024). Advertisers must focus on creating innovative and ethical campaigns to maintain consumer engagement and trust while addressing issues like digital overload.

The Indian advertising industry not only drives economic growth but also fosters cultural shifts and consumer awareness. By leveraging AI-driven insights and programmatic advertising, the industry is poised to enhance its global standing while addressing the complexities of consumer preferences and regional diversity (Ciochetto, 2009; Kesharwani, 2022).

The Indian advertising landscape reflects a dynamic interplay of cultural shifts, technological advancements, and evolving consumer preferences. From the incorporation of native advertising in traditional media to the transformative impact of digital platforms, the industry exemplifies adaptability and resilience. As digital adoption accelerates, marketers must navigate challenges like privacy concerns and ad fatigue while seizing opportunities to create culturally relevant and inclusive campaigns. The industry's continuous evolution underscores its critical role in shaping consumer behavior and contributing to economic and social progress.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To analyze the growth patterns of traditional and digital advertising expenditures in India from 2011 to 2023.
2. To explore the composition of advertising expenditure by medium, identifying shifts in advertiser preferences over the past decade.
3. To examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the advertising industry, with a specific focus on the transition from traditional to digital media.
4. To identify emerging trends and innovative formats in digital advertising and their implications for future advertising strategies.
5. To provide strategic insights for advertisers to effectively navigate the evolving advertising landscape in India.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This study employs a descriptive research design to explore the transformation of the Indian advertising market in the digital era, focusing on emerging trends, growth drivers, and policy implications. The research leverages secondary data sources the Pitch Madison Advertising Reports (2017–2024). The analytical framework includes a thorough analysis of trends,

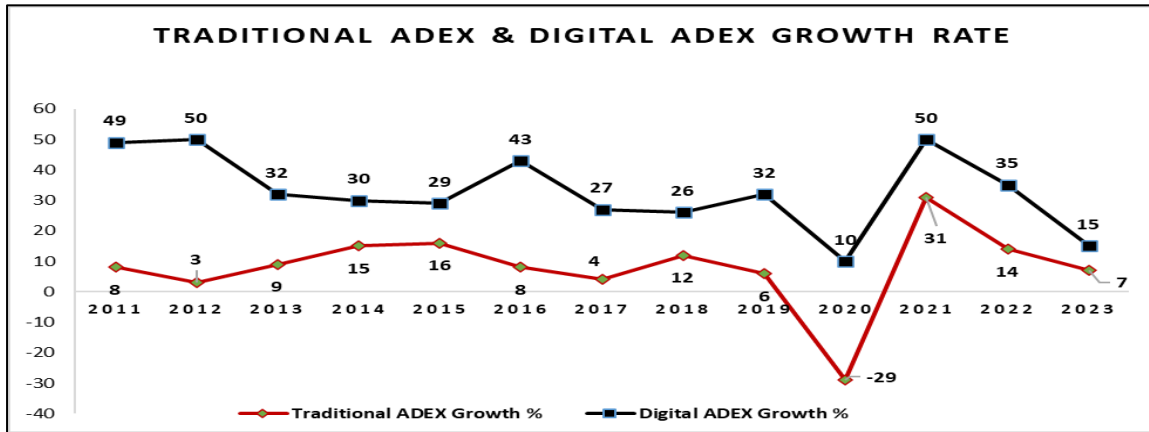
impacts, and changes in advertising expenditures (AdEx). The analysis of annual growth rates for traditional and digital AdEx aimed to identify long-term patterns and key inflection points. Additionally, a comparative analysis of market shares across various mediums—television, print, radio, cinema, outdoor, and digital—yielded insights into changing preferences over time. The study evaluated quarterly AdEx growth during the pre-pandemic period (2019) and the pandemic period (2020) to assess the impact of COVID-19, emphasising both short-term and long-term effects on advertising investments. The analysis of medium-wise composition indicated changes in advertiser preferences, highlighting a decline in print media, an increase in digital advertising, and the continued dominance of television. Furthermore, trends in digital transformation were analysed, emphasising the expansion of digital formats including video, programmatic advertising, and influencer marketing, which play a substantial role in the overall AdEx. This study mapped emerging trends in digital media, highlighting evolving advertiser strategies and changing patterns of consumer engagement.

## 4. Analysis and Results

### 4.1 Overview of AdEx Growth Patterns

Figure: 1 show, in the last ten years, the Indian advertising industry has experienced substantial changes, especially in the growth patterns of Traditional ADEX and Digital ADEX. Traditional ADEX had substantial growth, averaging 10.2% annually from 2011 to 2015, reaching a zenith of 16% in 2015. This expansion was driven by a significant dependence on traditional media, including television, print, and outdoor advertising. Nonetheless, the subsequent years experienced a slowdown, with growth averaging merely 5.7% per annum from 2016 to 2023. The 2020 pandemic precipitated a substantial contraction of 29%, as expenditures on conventional channels plummeted markedly. Notwithstanding a degree of recovery, growth in 2023 was limited to 7%, indicative of market saturation and a change in advertiser priorities. Conversely, Digital ADEX had remarkable and steady growth over the decade, averaging 30.5% each annum. Digital advertising sustained double-digit growth, even in hard years such as 2020, when it increased by 10% despite a market downturn. The post-pandemic recovery gained steam, with an extraordinary 50% growth in 2021, propelled by heightened technology penetration and a consumer transition to online platforms. By 2023, Digital ADEX increased its market share from 6% in 2011 to 40%, but Traditional ADEX's share decreased from 94% to 60%. This expansion corresponds with increasing internet penetration, extensive smartphone adoption, and a burgeoning inclination towards performance-oriented marketing (Figure:2).

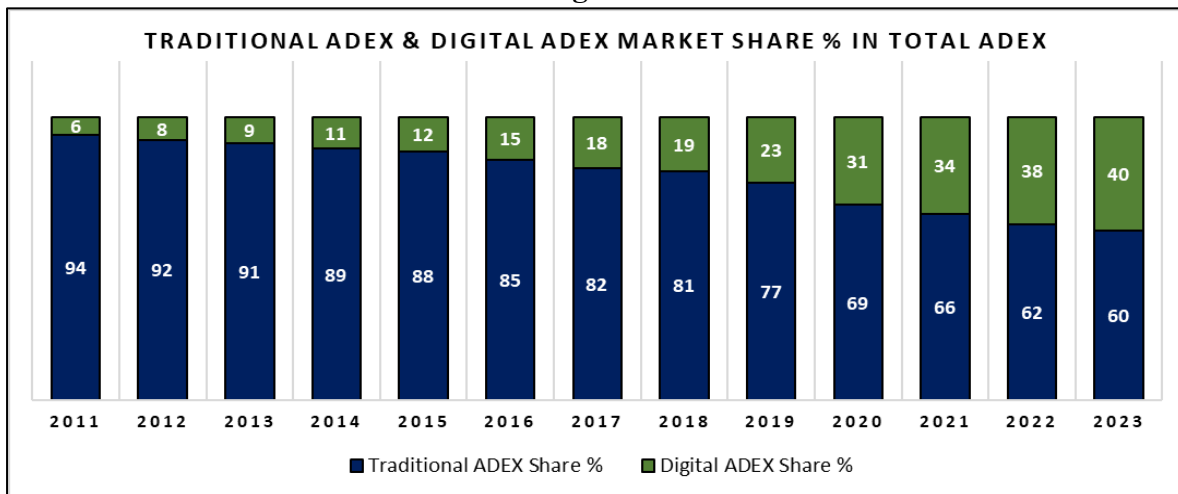
**Figure: 1**



Source : Pitch Madison Advertising Reports

The pandemic highlighted the robustness of digital advertising, which became an essential medium for consumer engagement during lockdowns, while traditional advertising expenditure had challenges in regaining pre-pandemic spending levels. Despite Traditional ADEX maintaining a bigger absolute value at ₹59,324 crore in 2023, the swift ascent of Digital ADEX to ₹39,714 crore indicates a distinct transformation in market dynamics. Digital advertising has emerged as the principal catalyst for industry expansion, transforming the environment through its emphasis on data analytics, targeted marketing, and quantifiable ROI

Figure: 2



Source : Pitch Madison Advertising Reports

The Indian advertising sector is seeing a digital shift, with advertisers progressively preferring digital media. Although Traditional ADEX remains influential, its growth is decelerating, requiring innovation and digital integration to sustain competitiveness. The future of advertising is anchored in the ongoing proliferation of digital channels, driven by consumer trends including mobile-first experiences, over-the-top (OTT) platforms, and the expansion of e-commerce.

#### 4.2 AdEx Composition by Medium

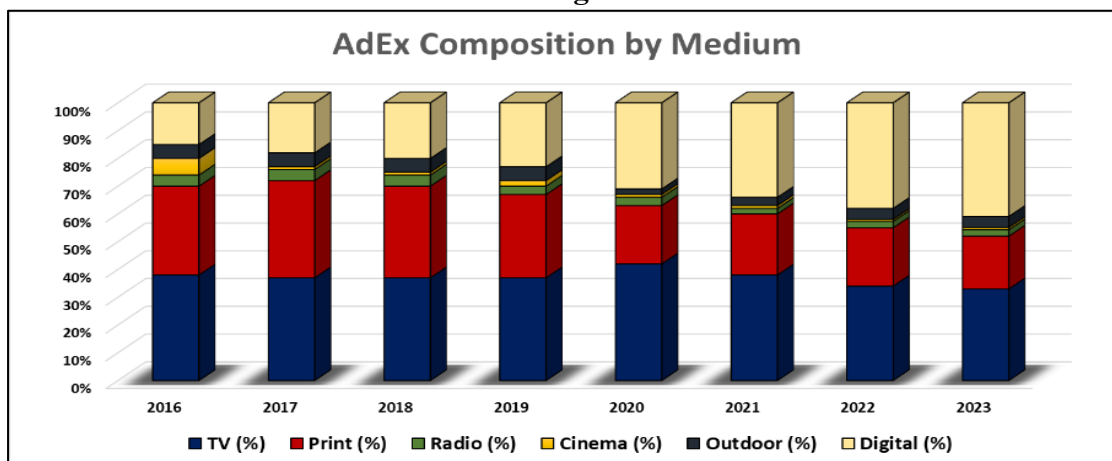
The data on Advertising Expenditure (AdEx) composition by medium in India from 2016 to 2023 in Figure: 3 indicates notable changes in advertiser preferences, mirroring wider trends

in consumer behaviour and technological progress. Television (TV) continues to be a significant advertising medium, yet its market share has experienced a gradual decrease from 38% in 2016 to 33% in 2023. The decline is attributable to increasing competition from digital platforms that have engaged younger, tech-savvy audiences. Television maintains its position due to its extensive reach and the appeal of regional and vernacular channels that address various demographic groups.

Print media has experienced a significant decline, decreasing from 32% in 2016 to 19% in 2023. The trend is influenced by the swift transition of urban audiences to digital platforms for news consumption. Print maintains a presence in rural and regional markets, where it remains a reliable source of information. Radio has experienced a decline from 4% to 2.3% during the same period, as streaming platforms and podcasts increasingly dominate audio consumption. Although radio is affordable and has a localised reach, its capacity to attract advertisers is limited by the expansion of digital audio platforms such as Spotify and JioSaavn.

Cinema advertising has experienced a significant decline from 6% in 2016 to under 1% in 2023. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted this medium, resulting in extended cinema closures and the emergence of Over-the-Top (OTT) streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, which attracted audience interest. Outdoor advertising has maintained relative stability at 4-6%, experiencing a minor decline to 4% by 2023. This is primarily attributable to diminished urban mobility during the pandemic and the emergence of geotargeted mobile advertising, which provides enhanced precision in reach and measurable results.

**Figure: 3**



Source : Pitch Madison Advertising Reports

Digital advertising has significantly increased, growing from 15% in 2016 to 40% in 2023, in contrast to traditional media. This expansion is driven by extensive smartphone adoption, accessible internet connectivity, and the growing prevalence of social media and e-commerce platforms. The capacity of digital advertising to deliver targeted and quantifiable outcomes has established it as a favoured option among advertisers. Innovations including influencer marketing, programmatic advertising, and performance-based campaigns have reinforced digital's dominance as the primary medium for advertising expenditure in India.

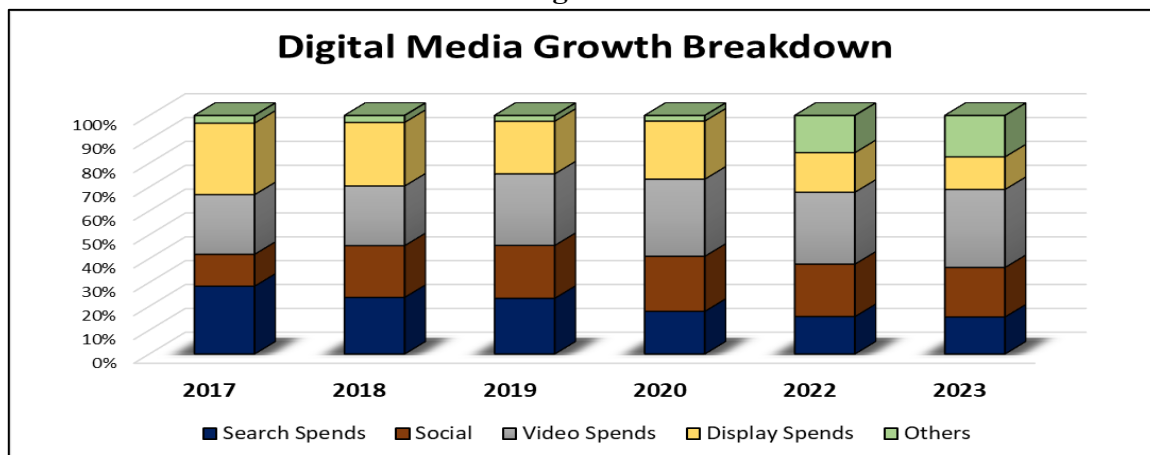
The trends indicate a significant transition in India's advertising landscape towards digital-first strategies. Traditional media, such as television and print, maintain significance in specific sectors; however, the growing digitalisation of Indian society and the demand for real-time, personalised engagement are transforming advertisers' budget allocation strategies. The changes underscore the dynamic characteristics of the advertising industry and the necessity for adaptability in effectively utilising emerging platforms.

### 4.3 Digital Media Growth Breakdown

The analysis of digital media growth in India from 2017 to 2023 in Figure:4 illustrates the transformation of advertising strategies in response to changing audience preferences and technological advancements in digital advertising. Search expenditures, representing 28% of digital advertising spending in 2017, have progressively decreased to 15% by 2023. The decline is attributable to the increasing prevalence of social, video, and programmatic advertising formats, which provide greater engagement and more visually appealing experiences than traditional search ads. The maturation and saturation of search advertising as a user acquisition medium have resulted in a budget reallocation towards more innovative formats.

Social media advertising increased from 13% in 2017 to 23% in 2020, subsequently stabilising between 21% and 22% in the following years. This growth corresponds with the rising use of social platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, which have become essential to advertising strategies because of their capacity to target specific demographics. Recent stabilisation in share suggests market saturation and the rise of competing formats such as video advertisements.

Figure: 4



Source : Pitch Madison Advertising Reports

Video advertising has experienced significant growth, increasing from 25% in 2017 to 33% in 2023. This trend indicates an increasing consumer preference for video content, influenced by the expansion of high-speed internet, the prevalence of smartphones, and the widespread use of video-centric platforms such as YouTube and OTT services like Netflix and Hotstar. Video advertisements provide immersive storytelling opportunities and have emerged as the preferred medium for brand campaigns seeking to establish emotional connections with audiences.

Display expenditures, which constituted 30% in 2017, have significantly decreased to 14% in 2023. The decline indicates a transition from conventional display banners to more interactive and engaging advertising formats, such as native advertising and dynamic video. The proliferation of ad blockers and growing consumer aversion to static display advertisements further exacerbate this trend.

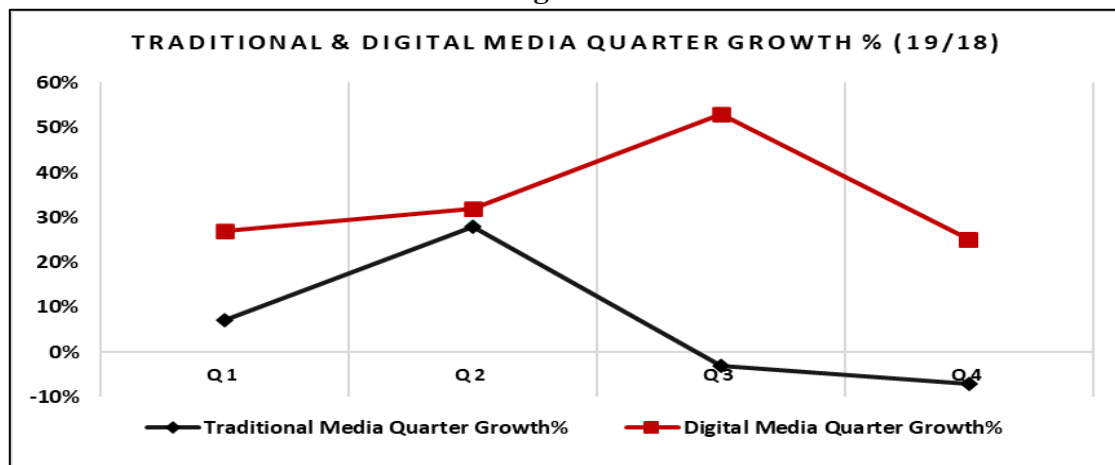
The "Others" category has significantly increased, rising from 3% in 2017 to 17% in 2023. This category likely includes emerging advertising formats such as programmatic ads, influencer marketing, and audio advertising, indicating the industry's adaptation to innovative channels and platforms. The notable expansion in this segment reflects advertisers' readiness to explore innovative and varied strategies to engage increasingly fragmented digital audiences.

The trends in digital media breakdown highlight the dynamic and rapidly evolving characteristics of the digital advertising ecosystem. Advertisers are increasingly focussing on formats that enhance engagement, personalisation, and return on investment, in response to consumers' evolving preferences for interactive, video-centric, and targeted content. This transition underscores the significance of agility and innovation in capitalising on emerging opportunities in the digital landscape.

#### 4.4 COVID-19's Impact on AdEx

The statistics present the quarterly growth rates for traditional and digital media advertising expenditures (AdEx) across two timeframes: 2019/2018 and 2020/2019. This comparison illustrates the changing trends in advertising expenditures prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure: 5



Source : Pitch Madison Advertising Reports

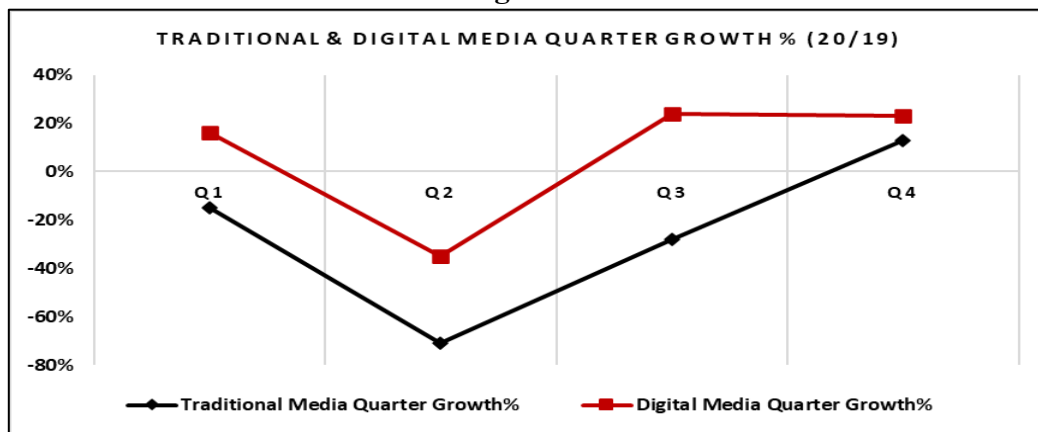
During the 2018/2019 period, traditional media exhibited consistent growth in the first quarter (+7%) and second quarter (+28%), followed by a decline in the third quarter (-3%) and fourth quarter (-7%). This suggests seasonal reductions while maintaining a generally stable performance for conventional advertising mediums such as print and television. During the 2019-2020 period, the effects of the pandemic became apparent. Traditional media experienced significant declines, particularly in Q2 (-71%) and Q3 (-28%), as businesses reduced



advertising budgets and moved away from traditional channels in response to restrictions and evolving consumer behaviour. In Q4, a recovery of 13% is evident, likely attributed to market reopenings and festive season campaigns; however, this growth remains subdued relative to pre-pandemic levels (Figure: 5)

Digital media demonstrated significant growth during the 2019/2018 period (Figure: 6), with positive increases observed in each quarter (Q1: +27%, Q2: +32%, Q3: +53%, Q4: +25%). This indicates an increasing preference for online platforms, attributed to their targeted reach and quantifiable results. During the 2019-2020 period, digital media exhibited resilience in the face of challenges, with only the second quarter reflecting a decline of 35%, presumably attributable to initial market uncertainty. The following quarters (Q3: +24%, Q4: +23%) indicate a rapid recovery, as businesses increasingly adopted digital platforms to respond to consumer shifts towards online shopping, entertainment, and communication during the pandemic.

Figure: 6



Source : Pitch Madison Advertising Reports

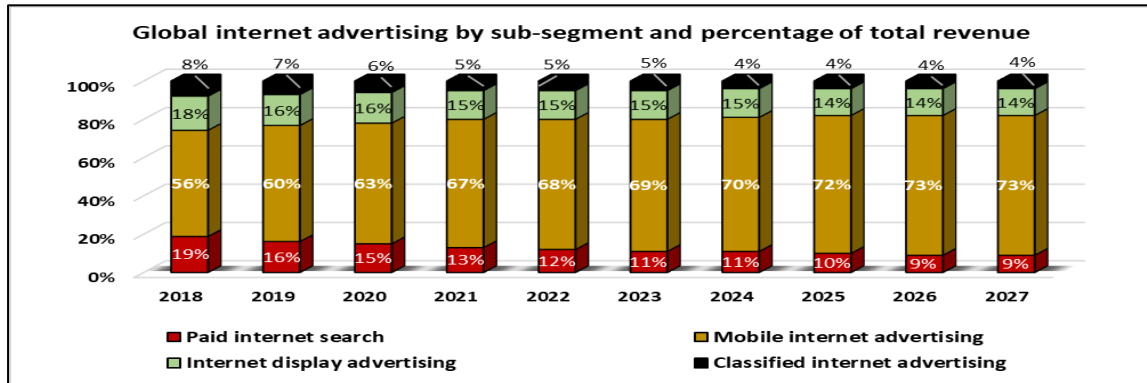
The data indicates a significant transition from traditional to digital media advertising during the pandemic. Traditional media encountered considerable difficulties, whereas digital media developed into a more dependable and flexible avenue for advertisers. This trend indicates the rapid digital transformation and evolving consumer behaviours shaped by the global crisis. Advertisers will likely maintain a focus on digital platforms, despite traditional media's efforts to rebound in the post-pandemic context.

#### 4.5 Internet Advertising Revenue

The analysis of internet advertising trends from 2018 to 2027 shows big changes in a number of areas. Between 2018 and 2023, worldwide online advertising trends indicate a decrease in paid internet search from 19% to 11%, alongside substantial increase in mobile internet advertising from 56% to 69%. Internet display advertising had relative stability, oscillating between 15% and 18%, whilst classified advertising underwent a modest decrease from 8% to 5% (Figure:7). In India, a comparable trend was observed, with mobile internet advertising experiencing a more pronounced rise from 50% to 70%. Paid internet search declined from

19% to 9%, whilst internet display advertising fell from 24% to 16%. Classified advertising had relative stability, decreasing little from 6% to 4% (Figure:8). The swift expansion of mobile advertising in India, relative to worldwide trends, is due to extensive mobile device penetration, economical data plans, and the rising digitisation of rural and semi-urban regions.

**Figure: 7**

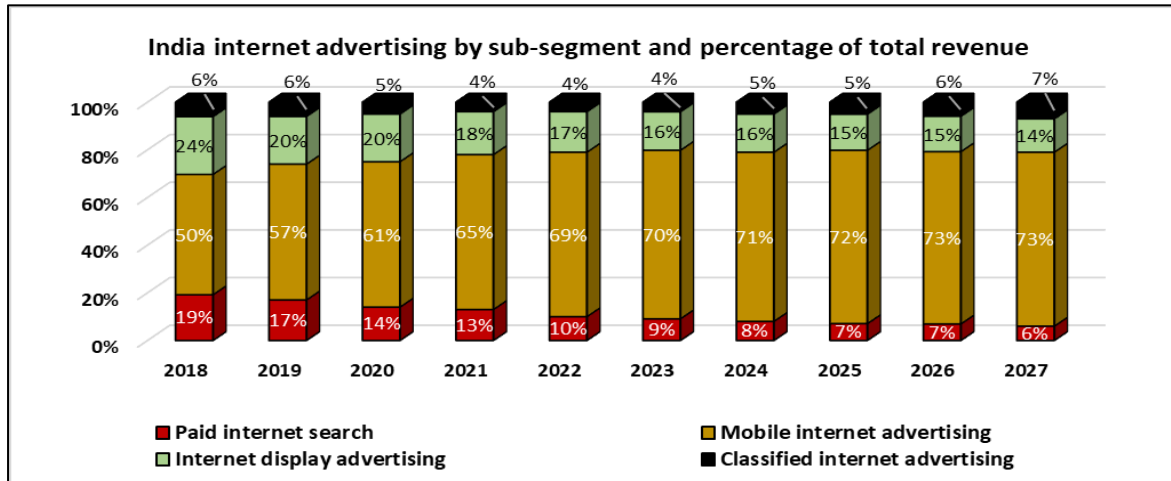


Source: Global Entertainment & Media Outlook 2023–2027: India perspective

From 2024 to 2027, mobile internet advertising is projected to sustain its global pre-eminence, rising from 70% to 73%, whereas paid internet search is anticipated to fall to 9%. Internet display advertising and classified advertising are anticipated to stabilise at 14% and 4%, respectively (Figure:7). In India, mobile internet advertising is projected to increase from 71% to 73%, whilst paid internet search is expected to decline further to 6%. Internet display advertising is anticipated to stabilise at 14%, while classified advertising is predicted to increase marginally to 7% (Figure:8). These statistics indicate a continuing transition to mobile-first advertising techniques, with India seeing a more significant decrease in sponsored internet search relative to worldwide markets.

The expansion of mobile internet advertising worldwide is propelled by the rising utilisation of mobile devices, enhanced targeting capabilities, and the widespread adoption of social media platforms. In India, this tendency is further propelled by economical data plans, inexpensive smartphones, and initiatives for digital inclusion, establishing mobile platforms as the predominant advertising medium. The pronounced decrease in paid internet search in India underscores the increasing dependence on mobile-first solutions customised for the local market. Moreover, classified advertising in India demonstrates superior resilience relative to worldwide trends, indicating its sustained significance in facilitating connections between consumers and vendors, especially in smaller marketplaces. The comparison highlights India's distinctive market dynamics and the impact of its swiftly advancing digital environment.

**Figure: 8**



Source: Global Entertainment & Media Outlook 2023–2027: India perspective

## Conclusion and Policy Implication

The Indian advertising industry has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past decade, characterized by a steady decline in traditional advertising expenditure (AdEx) growth and an explosive rise in digital AdEx. This shift has been driven by advancements in digital technology, changing consumer behaviors, and the increasing preference for targeted and measurable advertising formats. Traditional media, while still significant, faces challenges from digital platforms that offer superior engagement and return on investment (ROI). The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for this transformation, amplifying the reliance on digital platforms as businesses adapted to disrupted market conditions and evolving consumer needs.

Digital advertising's ability to innovate, personalize, and deliver measurable outcomes has solidified its position as the primary growth driver in the advertising industry. Formats such as video, programmatic, and influencer marketing have become critical components of advertising strategies, reflecting the dynamic nature of consumer engagement in the digital era. However, challenges such as data privacy concerns, ad fraud, and market saturation require strategic responses to sustain growth.

The findings underscore the need for advertisers to integrate traditional and digital strategies effectively, leveraging the strengths of both to optimize reach and impact. While traditional media retains importance in specific segments, the future of advertising lies in the continued expansion of digital channels, supported by advancements in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data analytics.

The findings of this study highlight the need for policy measures that support the evolving dynamics of the Indian advertising industry. Policymakers should prioritize initiatives to enhance digital infrastructure and literacy, particularly in rural and underserved areas, to bridge the digital divide and expand consumer engagement. At the same time, regulations must ensure data privacy, security, and ethical advertising practices to foster trust among consumers and advertisers. Traditional media, which remains significant in certain segments, requires support for its transition toward hybrid models that integrate digital innovations, thereby enhancing their competitiveness and relevance. To address challenges such as ad fraud and inconsistent

metrics in digital advertising, policymakers should collaborate with industry stakeholders to establish standardized guidelines and transparent practices. Furthermore, promoting the creation of regional and vernacular content across traditional and digital platforms can help advertisers connect with India's diverse audience more effectively. Finally, investing in skill development programs focused on emerging advertising technologies, such as artificial intelligence, programmatic advertising, and data analytics, is essential to equip the workforce to navigate the rapidly transforming landscape. These policy measures can foster a balanced, inclusive, and innovation-driven advertising ecosystem that benefits advertisers, consumers, and the broader economy.

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