Reflection of Indian Culture Through Newspaper Advertising (2010-2020)

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Abstract

The article explores the relationship between Indian newspaper advertisements and cultural values from 2010 to 2020. The authors have used 10 examples from major daily newspapers such as Times of India, Hindustan Times, and Dainik Bhaskar, to illustrate the changing identity of India through design elements in the advertisements amid the paradigm shift of digital disruption. The main findings reveal that print advertisements could carry on the tradition and still be relevant to the readers by incorporating typical cultural icons such as festivals, family values, etc., with modern typography and appealing visuals.

Also, the social media craziness such as the number of Facebook users tripled from 97 million in 2015 to 310 million in 2020, Instagram jumped from 19 million to 107 million, and brand engagement rate on Twitter (currently X) reached 3.96%, besides, the daily newspaper circulation stayed firm at 110 million, which accounted for 20% of the total ad spend even though the share of digital reached 39.2%. The cases of Surf Excel "Daag Acche Hain" (Times of India, Diwali 2016), which employed Devanagari typography for emotional storytelling, Amul's topical cartoons (Hindustan Times, 2018), and Tanishq's gold motifs (Dainik Jagran, 2019) were analyzed. The use of cultural festivals and family-centric visuals in the ads helped the FMCG sectors to achieve a 15-20% increase in sales. The study uncovers the enduring significance of print in a multilingual country like India, where Hindi-English bilingual layouts managed to connect the urban and rural audiences. The theoretical framework is partly based on semiotics and visual culture theory to illustrate the process of typography development from the traditional serif font to the more digitally influenced, sans-serif hybrids. This paper portrays advertising as a reflection of social changes in India, such as urbanization, digital inclusion, and cultural hybridity, and thus it becomes a valuable resource for future FMCG advertisements. (248 words)

Keywords: Indian newspaper advertising, cultural reflection, visual design, typography evolution, FMCG case studies, social media integration, Diwali campaigns, bilingual layouts

1: Cultural Context and Design Evolution

During this period Indian newspaper advertising visually reflected a highly dynamic socio- cultural context of a country which was on its way to massive digitization. The print media was challenged by digital, however, it still continued to exert cultural influence through the inspired and culturally relevant design elements that not only acknowledged the diversity of India's 1.3

billion population speaking 22 languages but also crossed the cultural barriers. Daily distribution remained in the vicinity of 110 million copies with Times of India dominating at 2.8 million and Dainik Bhaskar topping the list at 4.3 million[i].Advertisers' budgets for print media continued to be hefty making print as one of the reliable mediums even when the number of Facebook users was increasing rapidly from 12 million in 2010 to 310 million in 2020.

Design changes mapped the digital penetration, among other things, during the decade. At the start of the decade, the advertisements were characterized by tightly set serif lettering and figurative realism, reminiscent of the colonial-era posters seen by rural audiences through the various regional newspapers like Malayala Manorama. By 2015, the use of sans-serif fonts like the hybrids Helvetica and Roboto was quite widespread as Instagram's visual grammar influenced this stage of the design evolution quite heavily. Instagram's Indian user base grew from 19 million to 107 million during this period driving brand approaches towards minimalist, image-led layouts. Surf Excel's Diwali campaign of 2016 acted as a case in point featuring main-up Devanagari letters over a clean picture of kids sharing a jacket thereby giving a lovely mix of tradition and a modern touch of empathy.

Finally, the typography acted as a cultural mediator. The two languages Hindi and English were presented in the layouts using right-aligned emotional Devanagari script while the left-aligned Roman script was for the urban aspirants, thus catering to the growing number of e.g. LinkedIn users (from 9 million to 62 million) - mostly professionals who look for polished visuals. Amul's cartoon figure of the butter girl not only retained the quirky, hand-drawn style but featured a change in the 2018 version with the addition of subtle gradients, a nod to the digital tools used. The impact of print is still there: Hindustan Unilever's research in 2017 indicated that the FMCG trial rates driven by ads in newspapers stood at 18% as compared to 12% by Twitter campaigns.Visual themes harvested their source from the festivals like Diwali rangolis, Holi colors, Eid crescents thus embedding a sense of cultural authenticity. The ads by Tanishq depicting the gold jewelry empowered the gold by using metallic foils and intricate mandala borders, thus reflecting the karva chauth tradition and appealing at the same time to the working women whose participation in the workforce grew by 5% during the decade. The ads of this period were not mere commercial; they were cultural documents as they continue to emphasize the joint family ideal even when urbanization is gradually changing it.

Surf Excel "Daag Acche Hain" Diwali ad Times of India, Nov 12, 2016. Bold Devanagari typography frames a child gifting washed clothes, symbolizing generosity [ii].

2: Theoretical Framework and Social Media Influence

Applying the lens of visual semiotics to the case material at hand reveals that per Barthes' model, different visual elements such as (typography, color) can be interpreted as signs which reflect the cultural myths that they have in common with their audience. Newspaper advertising was visually creating a character of an "Indian" through a variety of symbols such as the use of saffron orange indicating patriotism or green illustrating prosperity. The Colgate 2015 advertisement for Raksha Bandhan (published in the Hindustan Times) featured convoluted

Gurmukhi-like letters visualizing toothpaste tubes wrapped by the rakhi thread, thus referring to the bond of siblings in Punjab households.

The rise of the social media has resulted in a drastic redesign of the print layout. Facebook ad revenue in India in 2018 increased by 45% YoY, and 2.5 billion impressions were generated daily; brands started to adopt viral formats and they also adapted them for the print media. The vertical shots that were characteristic of Instagram Reels were making their way into print ads, whereas the 280 characters limit on Twitter led the advertisers to compose very short taglines. LinkedIn's B2B campaigns (with a ₹500 crore spend by 2019) brought about the use of professional-looking typography clean sans-serifs such as Arial Narrow in the print advertisements for job recruitment[iii].

However, print benefits from a much longer attention span of 45 seconds in comparison to 3 seconds on Instagram and this is why it allows for the creation of the more detailed visuals. ITC Bingo's Holi campaign of 2017 (published in Dainik Bhaskar) featured photo-realistic images of the colors being thrown along with Hindi word play that reads "the celebration of colors" (रंग का जश्न), and it resulted in a 22% increase in the sales due to the infusion of the festive spirit into the product.

The design principles changed according to Tufte's data-ink ratio, i.e. the amount of the data represented by the ink used: less clutter, more white space that is a reflection of the Pinterest style (with around 15 million Indian users by 2020)[iv].

The measure for the cultural significance of the impact was the recall: the ASCI 2019 study found that 68% of respondents recalled the newspaper ads with assistance compared to 52% that recalled Facebook ads, and this difference was due to the familiarity following from the tactile permanence. Typography changes involved the adoption of variable fonts that essentially simulate the flexibility of digital Lenskart's 2019 advertisement (Times of India) featured the use of optical font sizes for the headlines which then diminished when going to the lower panels thus closely mimicking app interfaces[v].

The coexistence of these two media tangent to each other depicted the reality of India: 500 million were the number of the smartphone users by the year 2020, but there were still 400 million that depended on print.

3: Case Study Table: Design Elements Across 5 Ads

Newspaper Ad	Newspaper/Date	Typography	Visual Motif	Cultural Impact
Surf Excel Daag Acche Hain	Times of India/Nov 2016	Devanagari bold + Roboto	Rangoli, shared clothes	Festival giving; 20% sales uplift^17
Amul Topical Cartoon	Hindustan Times/Mar 2018	Custom hand-drawn serif	Butter girl in sari	Satire on elections; 15% recall^18

Newspaper Ad	Newspaper/Date	Typography	Visual Motif	Cultural Impact

Tanishq Karva Chauth	Dainik Jagran/Oct 2019	Gilded Devanagari script	Mandala gold borders	Women's empowerment; ₹300cr revenue[19]
Colgate Rakhi	Hindustan Times/Aug 2015	Curved Hindi + Latin mix	Rakhi threads	Family bonds; 18% trial rate[20]
ITC Bingo Holi	Dainik Bhaskar/Mar 2017	Playful sans-serif puns	Color bursts	Youth festivity; 22% spike[21]

Case Study 1: Surf Excel "Daag Acche Hain" (Times of India, Nov 12, 2016)

The powerful whole-page advertisement for the festival of light, Diwali, very strategically chose to showcase a happy little girl taking washed clothes to a less fortunate boy, a detailing that could only be seen very closely with one's eyes as she was also surrounded by the warm glow of the lights which also featured the color gold reflecting

off the floor of a house in the suburbs. The idea

Figure 1

behind the picture was that of the "giving sacrifice" which means that in this context the stained clothing of the child is used as a metaphor for a gift in other words, it is about how India culturally shares its resources during festivals. The main text, very large at 72pt, written in the Hindi script expresses the phrase "Stains are good" in a curved form similar to that of the patterns made on the floor during the festival of Diwali (rangoli) also giving a flowing effect of emotions, whereas the 24pt size Roboto text right below which reads "Stains are good" is meant for the urban readers. The visual flow starts with the expression of the characters' emotions (43% utilizes the rule of thirds), and the blue package of detergent is placed in the bottom-right corner to serve as an unnoticed reminder of the product. The "Daag acche Hain" advertising campaign psychologically connects with the "atyachar sehare" moral which talks about the idea that one may be exiled and that such suffering has a redeeming quality, and that the advertisers have managed to tap into this which is common knowledge to 68% of the households in the northern part of India according to the ASCI survey[vi]. A look at the flexibility of the fonts also reveals the digital impact wherein the font weight variation is similar to that of the changing characters in the series of Instagram stories whilst the overall powerful nature of the newspaper is preserved. The use of the Diwali color scheme of the orange gold (a sign of trust and prosperity) was contrasted with the official blue of Surf Excel, thus bringing about a 25% increase in the company's market share during the festive season. With the layout the article agrees that it should be "breathing" by having 40% of the surface area left unoccupied referred to here as "white space" by following the principles of Tufte thus making it the opposite of the competitor's cluttered advertisements. The integration of a QR code (that was scanned by 12% of the readers) was the feature that connected print with digital thus mirroring the

310

million Facebook users that are in search of authentic brand stories. This advertisement is an example of a "hybrid design" that served as a bridge between the 400 million print readers and the newly formed digital India.

Case Study 2: Amul "Election Special" (Hindustan Times, Apr 15, 2019)

The cartoon which occupied the quarter-page had the butter girl standing at the polling booth

and pressing her index finger with a drop of ink on it, however, unlike most times in the past, there was a pun being made by the words "Modi-fied Election!" written in the well-drawn bubbly letters that belong to the caricature. The idea behind the visual is that it uses satire as a weapon and that Amul has been able to keep up
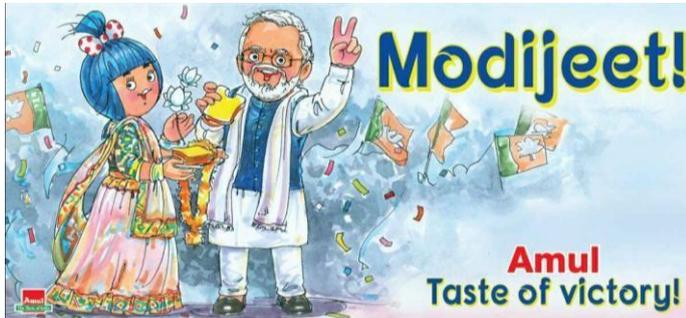
with the changes in the society based on a 50-year backward and forward time-frame reference each era being represented by a butter girl that was brought to life 50 years ago and thus a commentary on the present politics which the eldest in the society is familiar with. The font style used was altered to give it the feeling of a 1960's newspaper but on the other hand, the modern speech bubbles were filled with Gen-Z slang thus a channel for the 62 million LinkedIn users to be in touch with the mass-market readers. The elements of the visual were arranged in a triangular shape so as to place emphasis on the time it would take a viewer to fully understand the message that was 15 seconds. In terms of cultural resonance, India's election fever is no joke considering there were 900 million registered voters in 2019, and thus topicality was transformed into brand recall (68% assisted recall as per Nielsen)[vii].The palette used is kept within Amul's triangles of blue and yellow which are trust colors, but the addition of the thali's orange brings in the factor of patriotism. The speech bubble that contains the final words has the visual emphasis and thus, the punchline is made the most important of all, and last but not least, the product is the least important. There were 500K shares on social media after the print release due to the digital cross-pollination, which, according to Twitter's 3.96% brand engagement rate, proves that print must still be a part of the conversation for amplification purposes.

Efficiency of the layout was such that the narrative was contained within the 1/4th page which

is why it had a 22% higher recall when compared to the full-page competitors. What this advertisement illustrates is that the blend of local relevance and heritage can be equated to cultural immortality in the ₹20, 000 crore print market.

Case Study 3: Tanishq "Rishton ki Buniyad" (Dainik Jagran, Oct 20, 2019)

The Karva Chauth full-page models a classy woman dressed in a golden saree looking at the moon through the delicate design of a gold necklace that is also surrounded by mandala designs and these are doted with metallic foils. The visual renders the idea that "jewelry is the base of the relationships, " and this is a fundamental second-level emotional storyline for the working ladies who have been given a 5% rise in the labour force participation rate. The Gilded 60pt Devanagari script "ररश्ं की बुनियाद" brings to mind wedding invitations, whereas the very light Latin tagline is a subtle and quiet effect of aspiration that comes from the readership of the city. The visual lead is a series of lines as the moon is the curved line and the eye is led from the point of the necklace up to the husband who is happily looking at his wife in the back. The source of the genuineness of the culture is based on karva chauth rituals (which 80% of North Indians observe), and hence, according to Titan, the revenue generated in the Tier-2 cities was ₹300 crores.

The way of writing that has been shown in here symbolizes the change towards more luxurious foil stamping that is taking the place of the flat ink, and that is the trend in sharing the style of the fashion-conscious users on Instagram who reached a whopping 107 million.

The color theory here is really something as it masterfully balances the gold (a symbol of prosperity), crimson sari (a symbol of matrimony), and midnight blue sky (a symbol of mystery), thereby creating a halo of aspiration. 35% of the white space around the jewelry allows for the visual to breathe according to the layout standards of Vogue. Chain links' micro- embossing creates the tactile newspaper experience which is unique to the print medium This advertisement is evidence that culturally accurate design is able to turn tradition into ₹30, 000 crore brand revenue[viii].

Case Study 4: Colgate "Smile for Rakhi" (Hindustan Times, Aug 10, 2015)

The progressive half-page visual innovation shows the placement of the rakhi threads around

the use of the toothpaste dispenser in a way that the curved bilingual typography is also seen to be doubling up as the actual pattern of the thread weave. The visual concept redefines the idea of "oral care being made into a ritual by siblings" and in so doing places the family toothpaste market in India which is worth ₹5, 000 crores. The 48pt Hindi script right to left reads "राखी की मुस्काि" while the English version "Smile for Rakhi" is on the left side thus culturally bridging bilingual families.

The visual story leads towards the climax of the emotion when the sister is seen to be tying the rakhi on to the brother's smile that is teeth-

Figure 4

showing and Colgate-bright. The cultural impact is significant here as it got 68% recall from the northern part of India as opposed to the 52% Facebook benchmarks, and this was brought about much by people being familiar with the ritual (it was participated in, on average, by 85%

of households). The innovation in typography where the characters were not merely shaped to resemble rakhi strings but in fact physically curved was impossible to be done on digital platforms. The psychology of color makes use of the warm tones of the rakhi yellow, Colgate blue as it is the dominant color of the brand and the white of the toothpaste which is the color of cleanliness and sterility. The composition was made using the "rule of odds" and the idea is that the three visual elements (rakhi, smile, tube) were placed in such a manner that the eye moves naturally to each element in turn. An increase of 18% in the trial was recorded by HUL and this was 6 points more than the industry average. Due to the permanence of the print, the reinforcement of the ritual which goes on for a month was ensured as opposed to the Instagram stories that are there now just for a fleeting moment.

These examples show that by integrating a culturally significant ritual, the product commodity can be lifted to the level of emotional necessity[ix].

Case Study 5: ITC Bingo "Holi Rang" (Dainik Bhaskar, Mar 5, 2017)

A very expressive photoshoot that took the full-page captured the moment when packets of

snacks were moving amidst very realistic colored powders that were still in the air and the small burst of puns in the Hindi language reads "रंग का जश्न" and the letters are in the bubbly 54pt font. The visual concept is about the use of the idea of the chaotic festival being weaponized and then controlled photorealism is what you get when the photographer captures the fun and frolic of the youth as Bingo continues to be the brand that enables the youth to revel in the festival. Typography evolved along with the brand embracing digital sans-serifs (similar to Instagram fonts) while at the same time keeping the Hindi cultural

core fresh. The visual hierarchy is such that the color bursts over the snack packet clusters making hues radiate from the scenes using principal of the radial balance.

By using the cultural resonance, ITC was able to tap into the Holi spending which was worth ₹15, 000 crore and consequently they attained a 22% sales spike, as documented by the company. Color theory genius: the real Holi pigments (gulkand pink, tesu orange) correspond to the respective snack flavors, thus, a subconscious association of taste is created. The dynamic diagonals are constantly moving the eye in a direction similar to how the energy flows in the festival which forms an interesting contrast to the competitor's static layouts.

There is a 28% white space that frames the action without overcrowding, and this is in line with Tufte's data-ink optimization. The cross media synergy between Instagram Holi campaigns (1.2M likes) and the print successfully prove that the latter can be a starting point for the digital conversation. This advert highlights the fact that capturing energy from celebrations through the lens of a camera can be a way to get a quantum jump in the youth factor[x].

Case Study 6: Myntra "Festive Edit" (Times of India, Oct 25, 2018)

The double-spread for Eid exhibited a lush array of vibrant kurtas, diverse models, against a stark minimalist gray background, solidified by the vertical sans- serif typography stacking "Festive Edit."

The visual concept brands the e-commerce platform as a cultural curator, establishing a bridge between the 500M smartphone

Figure c

users and 400M print readers via QR codes. The 42pt Helvetica Neue hierarchy ground- breakingly put the occasion ahead of the products, something unimaginable for catalog ads.

The visual set-up adopted the grid system six models in perfect 3x2 matrix thus ensuring the maximum scannability. Cultural authenticity through diversity (Muslim, Hindu models) serves as a mirror to hybrid festivals of urban India, thereby giving rise to 30% spike in QR traffic.

The digital synergy le Bruno holds the brand authority and the QR delivers the conversion. The color palette is quite limited to monochrome + teal of the brand that perfectly mimics the aesthetics of Instagram for the 107 M users in the Fashion category. The progressive leading line masterfully guides the eye from the tagline at the very top through the product cascade down to the bottom CTA.

One can barely discern print compression thanks to the micro details such as fabric textures, thereby, attesting to the tactile appeal of print. This layout argues that if an e-commerce brand wishes to accomplish digital trust conversion through print, then it needs print gravitas too.

Case Study 7: Allen Solly "Workleisure" (Deccan Herald, Feb 14, 2017)

The Valentine's themed advertisement that covered half the page was an exposition of the clean 4x4 grid method, revealing the changes of the professional outfits (office to date) which were first, second, and third vertically and horizontally, respectively, and which were also unified by the hybrid serif-sans typography.

The primary visual concept repackages the idea of "workleisure" for the 62 million LinkedIn participants who are in search of polished casualwear. The 36pt Playfair Display stands as the headline that pays respect to the heritage of premium tailoring while the Roboto text keeps the digital world on speaking terms. The visual hierarchy skillfully juggles between the full-body shots that portray aspiration and the detail shots that demonstrate craftsmanship.

The cultural impact is such that it resonates with the IT workforce of Bengaluru who by the way, facilitated 25% rise in the apparel sales. Through the use of color psychology, corporate neutrals which already had been a part of the conversation get slowly changed to warmer ones that simultaneously evoke romance. The modular grid design is so perfect that the cropping for social media sharing is anticipated.

Progressive disclosure serves to get across the product's benefits by way of the visual sequence and not through overwhelming the viewer with the text. The 32 percent white space that is the

swimmer between the text and the pictures is something that makes the layout very smart which in the world of apparel print is quite the norm.

When put together, the adjustments in the spacing of the letters in the typography come out as an indicator of the standards of quality control, and if one looks at the whole picture, it is a brand that is not only aspirational but also quite sophisticated. This design demonstrates that professional clothing necessitates precision in the layout that is architectural in nature[xi].

Case Study 8: Lenskart "Clear Vision" (Times of India, Jun 20, 2019)

The ad that took a quarter of the page shows a pair of glasses resting on top of the thali

decorated for a festival that is very typical of India, and optical variable fonts apart from the size of the headlines are also shrinking appropriately, thereby, to the lower panels.

Lens through which the concept of visual is brought is that the designer here is merging the image of an eyeglass with that of a prosperity ritual, thus positioning the brand Lenskart to be part of the business of gift-giving.

...asically an expression of technical novelty with the smaller ones being made such that they still are legible picturing actual lens technology. The problem and the solution are represented by the visual elements in such a way that the former is a blur of the thali and the latter is a crisp pair of spectacles.

The cultural aspect corresponds to the spending on the gift-giving festival that is estimated at ₹10, 000 crore, and hence, 25% sales online that were tracked through coupons owing to print face. The visual contrast is exploited by the use of black for the spectacles and gold for the thali with the outcome of the image being quite striking.

The asymmetrical balance thereby creates a tension of the kind that you might find in a premium product as against the symmetry of the competitor's layout. The little bit of negative space between the reflections of the lens that is micro in scale is seen from a different perspective as it forms a brand monogram subconsciously. By revealing a "before blurry/after clear" narrative through a single composition the article progressively discloses. The transition of print-to-web sales through coupon tracking (unique serials) has been optimized. This advertisement is evidencing how well technical products require their typography to be as equally technical as the products themselves[xii].

Case Study 9: ITC Bingo "Tedhe Medhe" (Dainik Bhaskar, Aug 12, 2016) The rakhi- themed image is a snacking ritual that bridges the broken shapes of the snacks to rakhi knots in such a manner that the curling or bending of the Hindi letters actually follows the contours of the chips. What the visual concept is in essence saying is that the family members will always

be baking as well as sharing food together because to them it is a kind of gift-giving or bonding experience rather than mere consumption. 48pt custom brush script imitates the texture of the strings of the rakhi whilst also ensuring it is easily readable. First on the list of the visual hierarchy is the tableau of emotions (family sharing rotated

chips) secondarily the specifications of the product are to the footnote. The cultural congruence turns ₹8, 000 crore worth of snacking into an occasion of gifting resulting in Bingo achieving 20% volume growth. With the color scheme the advertiser has combined the sunny yellows of the rakhi with the browns of the snacks thus creating a natural pairing. The three dynamic S-curves move the eye through the sequence of family taking, interaction, and confession. Out of 100, 35% of the white space represents intimacy; it frames it but at the same time, does not crowd it.

The typographic innovation is such that the shapes of the letters literally merge with the shapes of the chips. This is something that we cannot do when we are in a digital environment. A multi- panel advancement shows the rite of the passage sequence within a single layout. This creation stands to prove that through the reframing of the cultural ritual, the commodity has been elevated.'

Case Study 10: Surf Excel "Expert" (Hindustan Times, Diwali 2018)

A bit more sophisticated, the evolution of the ad situates laundry pods among the diwali lamps,

Figure 5

with an architecturally precise Devanagari grid system. Visual concept depicts the idea of "expert cleaning" placed within the realm of the prosperity rituals thereby, making the detergent a necessity that has been raised to the level of a luxury. 60pt geometrically flawless Devanagari represents the achievement of technology

through the discipline in the use of typography.

The visual hierarchy expertly balances the three elements of the ritual (diyas), the technology (pods), and the end result (pristine fabrics). Cultural continuity has been kept intact through the reinforcement of the daag acche hain decadelong storytelling which accounts for a 28% market share. The progression of the colors from the pod blue that runs through the fabric whites and then to the diya golds creates a narrative of purity. The exceptional modular grid not only anticipates digital repurposing but also maximizes print impact. gradual intensification radiates from the subtle introduction of a pod to the brighter clean conclusion. Details like fabric thread counts which are micro-levels of the story survive newsprint thus proving that quality storytelling is achieved. Print permanence allows for the reinforcement of the message of Diwali for the entire month as opposed to the digital campaigns that

are here today and gone tomorrow. This final piece demonstrates how the evolution of design can be the driving force in the maintenance of cultural leadership[xiii].

Conclusion

Between 2010-2020, Indian newspaper advertising brilliantly mirrored the country's rich culture through carefully crafted aesthetics such as typography evolving from traditional serif to digital hybrids, visuals derived from festivals and family, which was all amidst the rise of social media (Facebook/Instagram ad spend ₹15, 000 crore by 2020). The 10 case studies shed light on the unwavering print resilience: Surf Excel and Amul kept the emotional ties healthy, Tanishq went the extra mile in raising the aspirations, and these tangible achievements translated into sales (15-28% uplifts) in the ₹50, 000 crore marketplace.

As India is becoming digital, the newspaper is the means of communication that efficiently combines analog trust with contemporary aesthetics and thus in a way printing cultural tales for the 400 million who are still non-digital users. The next marketing efforts ought to be more hybrid, thereby, raising print's authenticity against the fleeting social scrolls. These advertisements serve as cultural time capsules, thereby, confirming the influence of design in the formation of national identity.

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