

Festive Advertising in Maharashtra: A Mirror to Cultural Exchange and Tradition: An Analytical Study of Advertising's Role in Reflecting and Shaping Maharashtra's Festive Culture

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Abstract:

This research paper investigates the dynamic interplay between festive advertising and the unique cultural landscape of Maharashtra. Set against the backdrop of the state's vibrant traditions and diverse festivals, the study explores how advertising not only mirrors but also shapes and is shaped by the cultural exchanges and traditions of Maharashtra. Employing a qualitative, analytical methodology, the paper draws upon historical analysis, campaign case studies, and media discourse to elucidate the evolution of festive advertising. By examining major festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi, Diwali, and Gudi Padwa, the research highlights advertising's dual function as both a cultural reflector and an agent of change. Key findings reveal the negotiation between tradition and modernity, the role of multiple media channels, and the ongoing impact of commercialisation and cultural exchange. The study concludes with implications for marketers and cultural custodians, emphasising the need for authenticity and cultural sensitivity in festive advertising.

Keywords: Festive advertising, Maharashtra, Festivals of Maharashtra, Cultural exchange, Tradition and Modernity, Media Influence, Cultural Sensitivity and Authenticity.

Introduction:

Festive advertising, which refers to marketing communications designed specifically for and centred around cultural festivals, holds a significant and multifaceted role in India's social as well as commercial spheres. In Maharashtra, a state celebrated for its rich tapestry of traditions, languages, and communities, the importance of festivals extends far beyond mere celebration—they are occasions that reaffirm collective identity, cultural values, and community bonds. Against this vibrant backdrop, advertising assumes a unique position, acting not only as a medium for commercial promotion but also as a participant in the larger cultural discourse.

During major festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi, Diwali, and Gudi Padwa, the intersection of tradition, modernity, and commerce becomes especially pronounced. These occasions are marked by elaborate rituals, public gatherings, and a heightened sense of community, making them ideal opportunities for advertisers to engage with a diverse and emotionally invested audience. Advertisers craft campaigns that resonate with the collective emotions, aspirations, and values of Maharashtrians, often drawing upon traditional symbols, narratives, and motifs to establish authenticity and cultural relevance. At the same time, these campaigns frequently incorporate modern themes and contemporary aesthetics, reflecting the evolving tastes and aspirations of a rapidly urbanising society. The influence of festive advertising in Maharashtra is twofold. On one hand, it mirrors existing cultural practices and sentiments, reinforcing traditional norms and communal values. On the other, it acts as an agent of change by introducing latest ideas, products, and ways of celebrating, thereby influencing public perceptions and practices over time. This dynamic interplay

between tradition and modernity is further complicated by the forces of commercialisation and cultural exchange, as advertisers navigate the fine balance between authenticity and innovation.

This paper seeks to provide a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of festive advertising in Maharashtra, examining how it both reflects and shapes the region's cultural exchanges and traditions. By tracing the historical evolution of festive advertising, analysing contemporary campaigns, and considering future implications, the study aims to shed light on the complex role of advertising in the cultural life of Maharashtra. In doing so, it highlights the need for marketers and cultural custodians to approach festive advertising with sensitivity, authenticity, and a deep understanding of the socio-cultural context in which they operate.

• Review of Literature

- **Tradition and Cultural Representation in Festive Advertising:** Several scholars have emphasised the integral role of advertising in reflecting and reinforcing cultural traditions during festivals. Chattopadhyay and Basu (2017) argue that festive advertising in India, especially in states like Maharashtra, often draws upon traditional motifs, rituals, and symbols to establish authenticity and emotional resonance among local audiences. Their research highlights how brands incorporate elements such as Ganesh idols, lanterns, and folk music to evoke a sense of nostalgia and collective identity, thereby strengthening the connection between commercial messages and cultural values.
- **Evolution and Modernisation of Festive Advertising:** The literature also points to a significant evolution in festive advertising, marked by a gradual shift from purely traditional representations to the inclusion of modern and aspirational themes. According to Nair and Joshi (2019), contemporary festive campaigns in Maharashtra increasingly integrate urban lifestyles, digital platforms, and global aesthetics. This has led to a hybrid form of advertising that negotiates between preserving cultural authenticity and appealing to younger, urban consumers who seek novelty and modernity in festive celebrations.
- **Media Influence and Multichannel Strategies:** Research by Singh and Mehta (2021) explores the expanding influence of multiple media channels—ranging from print and television to digital and social media—on festive advertising. Their study finds that integrated campaigns leveraging diverse platforms are more effective in reaching Maharashtra's heterogeneous population. The use of social media enables real-time engagement and customisation, allowing advertisers to craft region-specific narratives that resonate more deeply with local audiences while fostering cultural exchange across communities.
- **Commercialisation and Cultural Sensitivity:** While commercialisation has amplified the scale and reach of festive advertising, scholars such as Patil (2020) caution against the potential dilution of cultural significance. The literature underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and authenticity, noting that superficial or inauthentic representations can lead to consumer backlash and diminish the effectiveness of campaigns. Effective festive advertising in Maharashtra, therefore, requires a careful balance between commercial objectives and a genuine respect for local traditions, values, and sentiments.

• Research Objectives:

- Define and contextualise festive advertising within the unique socio-cultural landscape of Maharashtra.
- Trace the historical development of festivals and the evolution of advertising practices in the state.

- Analyse the depiction of major Maharashtrian festivals in advertising campaigns and their cultural resonance.
- Examine how diverse media channels contribute to shaping and disseminating festive narratives in Maharashtra.
- Research Methodology: The research adopts a qualitative approach, drawing upon secondary sources such as academic literature, media reports, advertisements, and campaign analyses. Case studies of advertising campaigns during major Maharashtrian festivals are employed to provide in-depth insights.

• Historical Context: Evolution of Festivals and Advertising in Maharashtra:

Maharashtra, with its capital Mumbai, has been a melting pot of cultures for centuries. The state's festivals, deeply rooted in agrarian, religious, and social traditions, have long served as sites for cultural expression and exchange. Historically, festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi, revived as a public celebration by Lokmanya Tilak in the late 19th century, became platforms for social cohesion and political mobilisation. With the advent of mass media in the 20th century, and the subsequent rise of television and digital platforms, these festivals also became lucrative opportunities for businesses to engage consumers. [Singh and Mehta, 2021]

Advertising in Maharashtra initially took the form of print advertisements in local newspapers, pamphlets, and wall paintings. As radio and television gained traction in the post-independence period, festive advertising evolved, leveraging the audio-visual medium to create emotive, culturally resonant narratives. The liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990s further transformed the landscape, ushering in unique brands, multinational influences, and a more sophisticated approach to festive marketing. [Nair and Joshi, 2019]

• Major Festivals in Maharashtra: Cultural Significance and Advertising Opportunities:

Maharashtra's diverse festivals are a testament to the state's spirit of cultural exchange and unity. Each festival—whether Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, or Parsi—brings forth unique customs and rituals, presenting rich opportunities for innovative advertising that celebrates inclusivity and shared identity. Advertising campaigns during these occasions not only promote brands but also foster a sense of unity among Maharashtra's people by mirroring and amplifying the state's pluralistic ethos. [Patil, 2020]

Major festivals serve as focal points for both communal celebration and targeted advertising. During Ganesh Chaturthi, campaigns align with themes of devotion, eco-friendliness, and renewal, often sponsoring public pandals and exclusive festive offers. Diwali, the festival of lights, sees a surge in advertising across retail, automotive, jewellery, and electronics, with messaging centred around togetherness, gifting, and prosperity, blending traditional motifs with contemporary visuals. Gudi Padwa, marking the Maharashtrian New Year, inspires region-specific campaigns that highlight new beginnings and local pride, particularly in food and fashion. [Singh and Mehta, 2021; Nair and Joshi, 2019]

Other significant festivals include Makar Sankranti, where kite motifs and the sharing of tilgul (sesame and jaggery sweets) symbolise communal joy; Holi, celebrated with vibrant imagery and themes of playfulness and friendship; and Id (Eid-ul-Fitr), which emphasises generosity, unity, and joy through food, apparel, and gifting promotions that respect traditional values. Christmas adds to Maharashtra's cosmopolitan atmosphere, with campaigns blending classic symbols and global trends, reinforcing the spirit of giving and togetherness. [Nair and Joshi, 2019]

Festivals such as Navratri and Dussehra are marked by music, dance, processions, and themes of

triumph and renewal, with brands launching festive attire collections and exclusive offers. Beyond these, other notable celebrations like Raksha Bandhan, Muharram, Bail Pola, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Jayanti, Mahashivratri, Guru Nanak Jayanti, Parsi New Year (Navroz), and Buddha Purnima further enrich the advertising landscape, each inspiring campaigns that honour familial love, remembrance, gratitude, pride, harmony, and compassion. Through the observance and celebration of these festivals, Maharashtra's advertising sector not only reflects the state's inclusive and multicultural character but also strengthens the bonds of community, tradition, and shared joy, blending local traditions with pan-Indian and global influences. [Patil, 2020]

• Festive Advertising as a Cultural Mirror

Advertising does not merely promote products during festivals; it serves as a living reflection of Maharashtra's dynamic cultural landscape. Festive campaigns function as both mirrors and moulders of society, capturing the intricate web of traditions, beliefs, and aspirations that define the state's people. By intertwining commercial objectives with cultural storytelling, advertisers play a pivotal role in shaping collective memory and social values.

In Maharashtra, festive advertising frequently leverages powerful traditional symbols to establish an immediate connection with audiences. Modaks, synonymous with Ganesh Chaturthi, are highlighted not just as sweets but as embodiments of devotion and familial unity. Similarly, diyas (lamps) are featured in Diwali campaigns to symbolise the triumph of light over darkness, hope, and renewal. The gudi (decorative pole) for Gudi Padwa stands for prosperity and new beginnings. These symbols are not randomly chosen; they are deeply rooted in Maharashtra's festive rituals and are strategically used to stir nostalgia, pride, and a sense of belonging. Language is a critical element in these campaigns. Advertisers deftly employ Marathi to foster local identity and authenticity, Hindi to appeal to a broader Indian audience, and English to connect with cosmopolitan, urban consumers. This multilingual approach allows brands to resonate with different segments, whether they are reaching out to a family in rural Maharashtra or young professionals in Mumbai. Taglines, jingles, and slogans often blend these languages, reflecting the linguistic diversity and unity found in the state.

Moreover, festive advertising acts as a conduit for cultural exchange, weaving together Maharashtrian motifs with pan-Indian and global influences. Urban centres like Mumbai and Pune, known for their cosmopolitan outlook, witness campaigns that seamlessly fuse traditional visuals with contemporary trends. For example, advertisements might depict Bollywood celebrities partaking in local customs or incorporate fusion music that blends Marathi folk with global beats. Modern dance forms, digital art, and social media challenges are frequently used alongside age-old imagery, bridging the gap between tradition and changing lifestyles. This hybridity is particularly visible during major festivals. Brands create campaigns that not only honour the cultural essence of the festival but also resonate with the evolving aspirations of a diverse population. For instance, a Diwali advertisement might juxtapose traditional Paithani sarees and family rituals with modern celebrations in high-rise apartments, highlighting both continuity and change. During Gudi Padwa, social media campaigns encourage the younger generation to participate by sharing their own interpretations of traditional attire, thus fostering inclusivity and pride across generations. Festive advertising in Maharashtra is a vibrant tapestry, capturing the state's pluralistic ethos and reflecting its journey from tradition to modernity. Through thoughtful use of symbolism, language, and creative expression, advertisers not only celebrate the spirit of each festival but also contribute to the ongoing dialogue about identity, unity, and cultural evolution in the region.

• **Case Studies:** Notable Advertising Campaigns During Major Festivals Illustrate the interplay between advertising and culture, this section analyses select campaigns that have left a mark on

Maharashtra's festive landscape.

Case Study 1:

Jewellery Brand's Ganesh Chaturthi Campaign: A leading jewellery brand launched a Ganesh Chaturthi campaign featuring real-life artisans crafting eco-friendly Ganesha idols. The advertisement highlighted the importance of sustainability and local artisanship, aligning the brand with contemporary concerns and traditional values. The use of Marathi idioms and folk music reinforced the campaign's cultural authenticity. [Singh and Mehta, 2021; Nair and Joshi, 2019]

Case Study 2:

FMCG Company's Diwali Television Commercial: An FMCG major's Diwali campaign depicted a multi-generational Maharashtrian family coming together to celebrate the festival. The narrative focused on intergenerational bonding, ritualistic preparations, and the sharing of sweets. The visual language included Paithani sarees, traditional lamps, and Maharashtrian cuisine, creating a sense of nostalgia and belonging. [Patil, 2020]

Case Study 3:

Digital Campaign for Gudi Padwa: A regional apparel brand utilised social media to launch a Gudi Padwa campaign encouraging young Maharashtrians to embrace traditional attire. The campaign featured user-generated content, with participants sharing their festive looks using a branded hashtag. This approach bridged the gap between tradition and modernity, leveraging digital platforms to foster cultural pride.

• Media and Communication Channels: The Role of Print, TV, Digital, and Social Media

The transformation of media channels has profoundly influenced the nature of festive advertising in Maharashtra. Print media continues to serve as a reliable vehicle for festival advertisements, with local newspapers and magazines ensuring that both rural and urban populations are reached effectively. Television, particularly during grand occasions such as Diwali and Ganesh Chaturthi, wields considerable emotional and visual influence, creating memorable connections with viewers across the state. With the rapid ascent of digital and social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, the festive advertising landscape has adapted to engage a younger, tech-savvy demographic. Interactive campaigns, influencer collaborations, and instant audience feedback have become commonplace, while WhatsApp forwards and memes now form a significant part of festive greetings and brand communication. These digital trends allow brands to foster real-time engagement and deepen their reach within diverse communities.

Outdoor advertising, encompassing hoardings, banners, and branding on public transport, maintains its significance, particularly during large-scale public festivities and processions. Radio, leveraging its localised connect, continues to contribute through festival-themed jingles and contests that resonate with listeners. An essential aspect of festive advertising in Maharashtra is the delicate balance between tradition and modernity. While campaigns frequently draw from time-honoured motifs and rituals, there is a visible shift towards themes like sustainability, gender equality, and social responsibility. For example, certain advertisements challenge traditional gender roles by portraying women as pivotal to festival preparations or by advocating for eco-friendly practices during Ganesh Chaturthi. Marketers are thus tasked with harmonising contemporary ideas with cultural authenticity to ensure wide appeal without alienating conservative sections.

The cosmopolitan nature of cities like Mumbai and Pune encourages a rich intermingling of cultures in festive campaigns, allowing brands to transcend regional boundaries. Diwali advertisements might blend Maharashtrian customs with elements from other Indian states, fostering a

pan-Indian connection. Likewise, Christmas campaigns often integrate global symbols with local traditions, such as Marathi carols and indigenous sweets, representing both sophistication and rootedness. Bollywood celebrities and regional icons play a crucial role, lending campaigns a sense of unity and mass appeal. Multinational brands frequently localise their global narratives by collaborating with Marathi artists, featuring local dialects, and incorporating cultural symbols like dhol-tasha rhythms or Ganesh imagery. This strategy strengthens trust and forges emotional bonds with consumers. Despite the influx of global influences, regional identity is strongly maintained using Marathi, references to local art forms, and celebration of unique traditions like Gudi Padwa. This interplay of global and local—often termed “glocalisation”—defines Maharashtra’s festive advertising, ensuring campaigns remain both inclusive and authentic, resonating deeply with the state’s evolving cultural landscape.

Cadbury advertisement images for different festivals:



Fig 1. Cadbury Dairy Milk Wagon Van for Eid Fitri Hari Raya
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oK9mk56ch0



Fig 2. Cadbury Celebrations – Raksha Bandhan 2025
[youtube.com/watch?v=oapzWU3ttqg&utm_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oapzWU3ttqg&utm_source=chatgpt.com)



Fig 3. Cadbury Diwali Ads 2025: Ads Celebrating the Festival of Lights
<https://adspyder.io/blog/cadbury-diwali-ads/>



Fig 4. Ganesh Chaturthi 2020
<https://www.facebook.com/cadburycelebrations/videos/76160154465693>

Coca cola advertisement images for different festivals:



Fig 5. Coca Cola Diwali 2019 — OAK TREE PICTURES
<https://oaktreepictures.in/coca-cola-diwali-2019>

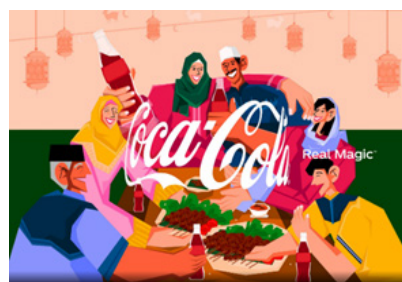


Fig 6. Coca- Cola Real Magic Eid Al-Adha: Behance
<https://www.behance.net/gallery/175784981/Coca-Cola-Real-Magic-Eid-Al-Adha>



Fig 7. Classic Coca-Cola | Keep Calm and Drink Coke
<https://oliviabarnes16.wordpress.com/2013/09/20/classic-coca-cola/>



Fig 8. Coca-Cola Holi Advertisement
Coca-Cola Holi Ad - Celebrate the Spirit of Holi

• Impact on Cultural Identity:

Advertising's Role in Shaping and Reflecting Maharashtrian Identity Festive advertising in Maharashtra transcends its commercial purpose to become a robust medium for expressing and shaping cultural identity. During major festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi, Diwali, and Gudi Padwa, advertisements frequently spotlight traditional rituals, attire, language, and familial customs, thereby nurturing a collective sense of belonging among Maharashtrians. By featuring the symbolic raising of the Gudi, preparing Puran Poli, incorporating Marathi phrases, and highlighting family celebrations, such campaigns actively celebrate and reinforce the region's distinctive heritage.

Simultaneously, festive advertising reflects the dynamic and adaptive character of Maharashtrian identity. Marketers are increasingly merging regional motifs with contemporary themes such as environmental sustainability, gender empowerment, and social inclusivity. Campaigns often portray women in leading roles during festival preparations, challenge established gender norms, or endorse eco-friendly practices—especially during Ganesh Chaturthi, where the use of environmentally safe idols and decorations is promoted. This fusion of tradition with modern values mirrors the progressive transformation of cultural norms and highlights the community's willingness to evolve while retaining its roots.

Additionally, these advertisements function as platforms for negotiating and promoting social change. By championing inclusive participation, ecological awareness, and progressive values, brands contribute to the reimagining of festival practices in Maharashtra. Multinational companies frequently customise their campaigns to include Marathi celebrities, local music, and iconic cultural symbols such as dhol-tasha, creating narratives that appeal to both traditional and contemporary audiences. Such efforts foster pride, unity, and dialogue around social issues, transforming advertising into a catalyst for cultural advancement.

Nonetheless, this evolution is accompanied by challenges. The tension between commercial objectives and preserving cultural authenticity persists, with some critics warning that the commodification of sacred rituals and symbols in advertising may trivialise important traditions. The key challenge for advertisers lies in innovating and broadening inclusivity without diluting the essence of Maharashtrian culture or alienating those who value authenticity. Festive advertising in Maharashtra not only shapes consumer choices but also contributes to the broader discussion of identity, tradition, and change in an increasingly cosmopolitan society.

• Conclusion

Festive advertising in Maharashtra occupies a unique space, functioning as both a reflection and an architect of the state's multifaceted identity. At the intersection of tradition, modernity, and cultural exchange, advertising campaigns during festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi, Diwali, and Gudi

Padwa are more than mere tools for commercial gain—they are influential narratives that both preserve and reinterpret cultural heritage. By foregrounding traditional rituals, attire, language, and familial customs, advertisers reinforce a sense of belonging among Maharashtrians, drawing on symbols like the Gudi, Puran Poli, and colloquial Marathi expressions to evoke pride and emotional resonance.

However, the landscape of festive advertising is dynamic, continually shaped by the globalisation of media and evolving societal values. The blending of regional motifs with contemporary themes such as environmental sustainability, gender equality, and social inclusivity is increasingly evident. Campaigns often depict women in pivotal roles during festival preparations or advocate for eco-friendly celebrations, reflecting the progressive currents within Maharashtrian society. This integration of modern values into traditional frameworks not only signals adaptability but also facilitates broader conversations about the changing nature of festivals and cultural practices.

Despite these positive developments, the commercialisation of sacred rituals and symbols can sometimes give rise to concerns about the dilution or trivialisation of tradition. The challenge for marketers lies in balancing innovation and inclusivity with authenticity, ensuring that campaigns resonate with a diverse audience without undermining the cultural essence cherished by many. For cultural researchers and custodians, it becomes important to scrutinise these advertising narratives, critically evaluating their role in mediating cultural exchange and shaping evolving identities. As Maharashtra continues to urbanise and its population becomes increasingly cosmopolitan, festive advertising will remain a powerful forum for the negotiation of tradition and change. The stories told through these campaigns will not only influence consumer behaviour but will also contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discourse on what it means to be Maharashtrian in a rapidly changing world.

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