



Contemporary Advertising Challenges in Regional Cinema: A Critical Analysis of Marketing Strategies and Ethical Concerns in the Kannada Film Industry

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Abstract

The Kannada Film Industry (KFI), a significant component of India's regional cinema landscape, encounters distinctive advertising challenges amid rapid digital transformation and increasing ethical scrutiny. This study offers a critical analysis of the industry's evolving promotional strategies, highlighting the intersection of marketing innovation, ethical accountability, and technological disruption. Employing qualitative content analysis of secondary data spanning 2015 to 2024, the research identifies a marked transition from conventional advertising methods to hybrid digital campaigns, as evidenced by the pan-Indian successes of films such as *KGF* and *Kantara*. Despite these advancements, several impediments such as budgetary limitations, algorithmic bias on digital platforms, and widespread piracy (leading to estimated annual losses of ₹550 crore) undermine equitable reach and sustainability. Moreover, ethical concerns surrounding deceptive promotional content and cultural misrepresentation remain pressing. Audience dissatisfaction due to misleading advertisements (reported at 42% by Ormax Media) and the prevalence of gender stereotypes in marketing narratives (noted in 78% of cases) exacerbate the issue. To address these multifaceted challenges, the study proposes a set of pragmatic interventions, including transparent influencer partnerships, blockchain-enabled anti-piracy frameworks, and regulatory mechanisms to ensure algorithmic fairness in content visibility. By bridging



critical gaps in regional cinema scholarship, this research advances the discourse on media convergence and offers a strategic framework for fostering sustainable, inclusive, and ethically sound advertising practices within linguistically diverse film markets.

Keywords: Kannada Film Industry, Digital marketing, Ethical advertising, Regional cinema, Algorithmic bias.

Introduction

The global film industry has experienced a significant transformation in advertising and marketing practices, driven by rapid digitalization, shifting consumer behavior, and increasing ethical scrutiny. While extensive research has addressed these developments in major film markets such as Hollywood and Bollywood, regional cinema particularly the Kannada Film Industry (KFI) remains underrepresented in academic discourse. As one of India's oldest and culturally rich regional film industries, the KFI faces unique and complex challenges in promoting its content, including the need to balance commercial imperatives with cultural authenticity and ethical responsibility in an intensifying media landscape. Advertising in regional cinema operates within a constrained ecosystem characterized by limited financial resources, linguistic diversity, and competition from dominant national and global film industries. Unlike high-budget pan-Indian productions, Kannada cinema often contends with fragmented audience bases, necessitating innovative, hyper-localized marketing strategies. The proliferation of digital platforms such as YouTube, Amazon Prime, and Netflix has dramatically altered the promotional landscape, offering new opportunities while simultaneously increasing competition and audience expectations. These dynamics demand a re-evaluation of traditional marketing models and a pivot towards digitally driven campaigns. Moreover, ethical concerns ranging from deceptive advertising practices and stereotypical representations to the growing influence of brand sponsorships on creative content further complicate the advertising framework in regional cinema. These challenges are especially acute in financially constrained environments where short-term commercial gains may overshadow long-term reputational and cultural considerations. This study employs a critical analytical framework to investigate the evolving advertising landscape of the KFI. Through case studies of recent Kannada films, interviews with industry professionals, and analysis of audience reception, the research identifies significant trends and transformations in promotional strategies. Notably, it highlights the industry's shift from traditional media (e.g., newspapers, radio, television) to digital-first approaches, including influencer collaborations, targeted advertising, and social media engagement. The study also scrutinizes ethical issues such as the representation of gender and caste in marketing materials, and the prevalence of surrogate advertising, which raises questions about accountability and creative integrity in the face of increasing commercialization. By examining these intersecting factors, the paper contributes to broader discussions on media



economics, sustainable regional cinema, and ethical marketing practices. The findings provide actionable insights for filmmakers, advertisers, and policymakers seeking to navigate the evolving demands of film promotion in a regional context while upholding ethical standards. Moreover, the study offers a comparative framework for analyzing similar challenges in other regional and non-mainstream film industries across the globe.

Background of the Study

The Kannada Film Industry (KFI), one of India's oldest and most culturally significant regional cinema ecosystems, has played a pivotal role in shaping the socio-cultural landscape of South India. Despite its deep-rooted legacy and a loyal regional audience, the industry continues to grapple with persistent challenges in the realms of advertising and promotion. These challenges are compounded by the overwhelming dominance of larger film industries such as Bollywood and Hollywood, which command substantially greater financial and infrastructural resources. In contrast, the KFI often operates within constrained budgets, limiting its capacity to implement large-scale, high-impact marketing campaigns. This financial limitation necessitates the adoption of cost-effective yet innovative promotional strategies, with digital platforms increasingly becoming central to such efforts.

The digital revolution has significantly transformed the global film marketing paradigm, but its specific impact on regional industries like the KFI remains underexamined. Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram offer affordable and accessible alternatives to traditional media channels, enabling filmmakers to reach diverse audiences with limited resources. However, this digital shift also intensifies competition for visibility and engagement, particularly in a content-saturated environment. Moreover, the KFI faces additional complexities stemming from linguistic diversity and cultural specificity. Crafting promotional content that resonates with local audiences while remaining accessible to non-Kannada-speaking viewers presents a strategic dilemma for marketers.

Ethical considerations further complicate the promotional landscape. Issues such as misleading trailers, exaggerated promotional claims, and the growing influence of corporate sponsors raise concerns about the integrity and transparency of advertising practices. The increasing dependence on brand partnerships and commercial endorsements introduces potential conflicts between artistic vision and market imperatives, challenging the authenticity of regional storytelling.

Notwithstanding these obstacles, the recent commercial and critical success of films like *KGF* and *Kantara* underscores the transformative potential of well-executed marketing strategies. These films exemplify how digital-first campaigns, influencer-driven promotions, and community-based outreach can enable regional cinema to achieve national and even global recognition. However, a systematic and scholarly exploration of these evolving



advertising strategies particularly their ethical and cultural implications is noticeably absent from existing academic literature.

This study aims to address this gap by critically analyzing the contemporary advertising challenges facing the Kannada Film Industry. It seeks to uncover how regional filmmakers are navigating a rapidly evolving media environment while striving to preserve cultural authenticity and uphold ethical standards in their promotional efforts. In doing so, the research contributes to broader conversations surrounding media studies, regional film sustainability, and responsible advertising in culturally diverse markets.

Scope of the Study

This study critically explores the contemporary advertising challenges faced by the Kannada Film Industry (KFI), with a particular emphasis on marketing strategies and ethical considerations that influence promotional practices. The research focuses on the period from 2015 to 2024 a decade marked by rapid digital transformation and evolving audience engagement patterns within regional cinema.

The scope of the study includes a comprehensive evaluation of advertising methods employed by Kannada filmmakers, encompassing both traditional and digital media strategies. These include, but are not limited to, social media marketing, influencer collaborations, theatrical publicity, and brand partnerships. The study assesses how these strategies are utilized to address challenges such as limited financial resources, linguistic diversity, and competition from larger national and international film industries.

A critical component of this research is the examination of ethical issues in film advertising. These include misleading promotional content, stereotypical portrayals in marketing materials, and the growing influence of commercial sponsors on creative decision-making. The study aims to understand the implications of these concerns on the integrity of regional cinema and its relationship with audiences.

Geographically, the research is confined to the Kannada Film Industry, with an emphasis on case studies of films that have achieved both critical acclaim and commercial success. The primary data for the study will be collected through interviews with key stakeholders in the industry, including filmmakers, marketing professionals, and cinema exhibitors. Secondary data sources will include promotional content, media coverage, box office reports, and audience feedback.

The study explicitly excludes detailed financial analyses of individual film budgets and does not undertake comparative evaluations with other regional film industries. By defining these parameters, the research maintains a focused and context-specific investigation into the advertising practices within the KFI.



This study seeks to contribute meaningful insights into the evolving promotional landscape of Kannada cinema, offering recommendations for more effective, sustainable, and ethically grounded marketing approaches in regional film industries.

Review of Literature

The Kannada Film Industry (KFI), a prominent regional cinema sector in India, faces distinctive challenges in advertising and promotion amidst an increasingly digitized and competitive media environment. This literature review synthesizes scholarly work on three core areas relevant to the study: (1) marketing strategies in regional cinema, (2) ethical concerns in film advertising, and (3) the impact of digital disruption on promotional practices. While the broader Indian film marketing discourse often centers on Bollywood, limited academic attention has been directed toward regional industries such as the KFI. This review seeks to contextualize existing research within the framework of Kannada cinema.

Marketing Strategies in Regional Cinema

Traditional vs. Digital Marketing Approaches

Film marketing in India has undergone a notable transition from traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television to digital platforms, including social media, OTT services, and influencer-led campaigns. While mainstream industries such as Bollywood benefit from expansive marketing budgets (Kumar & Gupta, 2020), regional industries like the KFI are compelled to rely on cost-effective strategies tailored to localized audiences. Sharma (2019) notes that Kannada filmmakers often utilize grassroots promotions, including press interactions and radio advertisements, due to financial constraints.

The commercial success of films like *KGF* (2018) and *Kantara* (2022) illustrates the capacity of digital marketing to transcend linguistic and geographic barriers. Pandey and Nair (2021) emphasize the pivotal role of platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram in amplifying the reach of regional films. However, as Srinivas (2020) cautions, a segment of the KFI audience particularly older viewers continues to rely on traditional media, posing challenges for a complete digital transition.

Brand Partnerships and Strategic Collaborations

Brand partnerships have emerged as significant components of film marketing, even in regional cinema. Mehta and Kulkarni (2022) observe that Kannada films increasingly collaborate with local businesses for in-film branding and promotional tie-ups. These partnerships serve as supplementary revenue sources but raise concerns regarding narrative dilution. Patil (2021) argues that excessive brand visibility may compromise the authenticity of storytelling, prompting a debate between commercial interests and creative autonomy.



Ethical Challenges in Film Advertising

Misleading Promotions and Audience Expectations

One of the key ethical issues in film advertising is the deployment of exaggerated promotional content. Desai (2023) highlights the use of sensationalized trailers and posters in regional cinema as a strategy to attract attention. However, this often results in audience dissatisfaction when the film content does not align with promotional promises. The Kannada film *Vikrant Rona* (2022) exemplifies this concern, receiving criticism for overstated claims regarding its visual effects (Rao, 2023).

Stereotyping and Cultural Misrepresentation

Promotional materials in regional cinema frequently perpetuate stereotypes, particularly concerning gender roles, caste dynamics, and rural-urban divides. Nandini (2021) contends that marketing for Kannada films often portrays hypermasculine protagonists and passive female characters, reinforcing traditional social norms. Kumar (2022) further critiques the exoticization of rural Karnataka in promotional narratives, arguing that such depictions risk distorting cultural authenticity for commercial appeal.

Corporate Influence and Creative Integrity

The growing involvement of corporate sponsors has introduced a new set of ethical concerns. Bhat (2023) points out that product placements and brand integrations in Kannada films are sometimes perceived as intrusive, undermining the film's narrative flow. This tension between commercial imperatives and artistic expression continues to be a pressing concern for filmmakers attempting to balance profitability with creative integrity.

Digital Disruption in Film Promotion

Social Media and Influencer Marketing

Digital platforms have democratized access to film promotion, enabling regional films to compete more effectively in a saturated media space. Jain and Reddy (2022) highlight the impact of influencer marketing, wherein local celebrities and micro-influencers play a significant role in promoting Kannada films. The viral success of campaigns like the #KantaraChallenge illustrates the efficacy of participatory digital marketing strategies (Menon, 2023).

Algorithmic Bias and Content Saturation

Despite the opportunities presented by digital media, regional films continue to face challenges related to platform algorithms and content saturation. Venkatesh (2023) observes that recommendation algorithms on platforms such as YouTube and Netflix often prioritize Bollywood and Hollywood content, making it difficult for Kannada films to gain visibility.



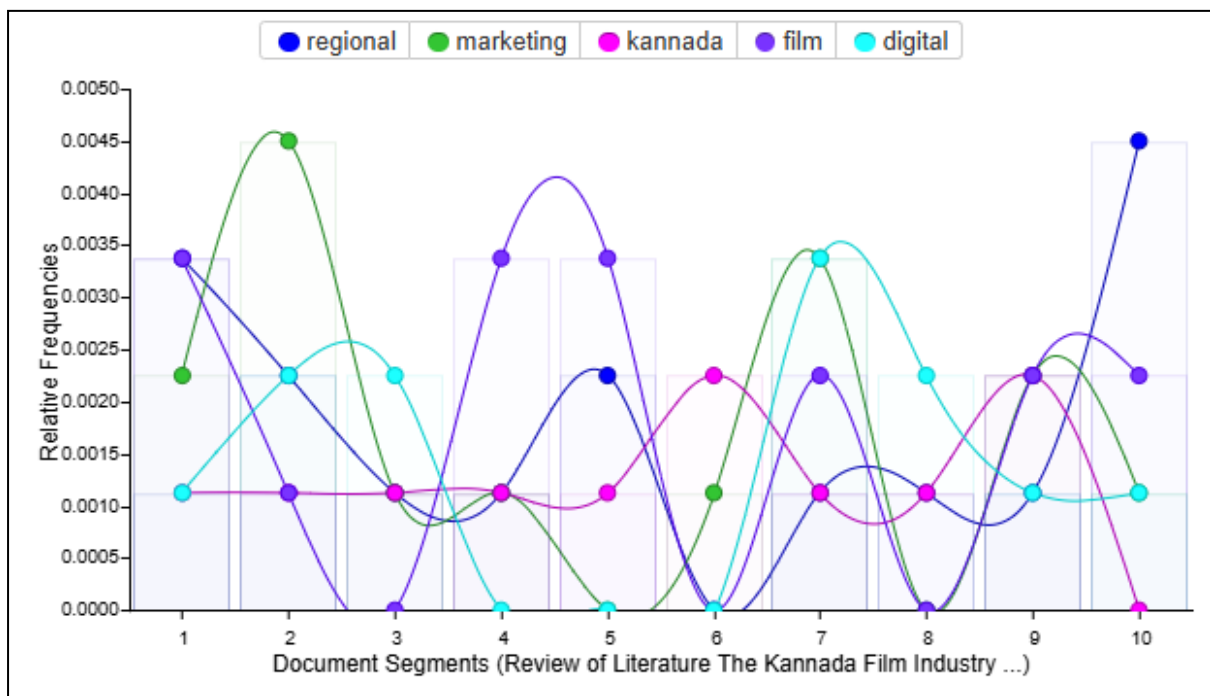
Prasad (2022) further notes that the overwhelming volume of promotional content contributes to audience fatigue, diminishing engagement with smaller, low-budget films.

Piracy and Unauthorized Distribution

The digital ecosystem has also exacerbated the issue of piracy, undermining formal marketing and revenue channels. Shetty (2023) reports that unauthorized uploads of trailers, clips, and full films on platforms like YouTube result in substantial financial losses for Kannada filmmakers. These practices highlight the urgent need for robust digital rights management and stricter enforcement mechanisms.

Research Gaps and Theoretical Contributions

While there is a growing body of literature addressing film marketing and advertising ethics, the specific context of regional cinema particularly the Kannada Film Industry remains underexplored. Dwivedi (2021) notes that scholarly attention in Indian cinema studies is disproportionately centered on Bollywood, leaving a substantial gap in understanding the dynamics of regional industries.



Research Gap

Area of Study	Existing Research Focus	Identified Gaps	This Study's Contribution
Film Marketing Strategies	Research predominantly focuses	Lack of comprehensive analysis of the KFI's	Offers an empirical analysis of KFI's



	on Bollywood and Hollywood marketing models (Kumar & Gupta, 2020); limited exploration of regional cinema approaches (Sharma, 2019).	hybrid marketing practices combining traditional and digital techniques.	adaptive marketing strategies (2015–2024), with in-depth case studies of films such as <i>KGF</i> and <i>Kantara</i> .
Ethical Advertising Concerns	General discussions on misleading advertisements (Desai, 2023); stereotyping primarily studied in pan-Indian contexts (Nandini, 2021).	Inadequate focus on region-specific ethical dilemmas, including local brand influence and cultural misrepresentation in promotions.	Investigates ethical challenges specific to the KFI, including forced brand integrations, rural stereotyping, and deceptive promotional tactics.
Digital Disruption	Existing literature emphasizes Bollywood’s digital transformation and challenges with algorithmic visibility (Jain & Reddy, 2022; Venkatesh, 2023).	Limited exploration of how digital platforms affect regional cinemas, especially in terms of language bias and dependence on micro-influencers.	Analyzes KFI’s digital challenges, including piracy, algorithmic invisibility, and highlights successful grassroots-level digital promotional efforts.
Regional Cinema Economics	Studies generally adopt a macro view of Indian cinema; South Indian industries are often treated homogeneously (Dwivedi, 2021; Prasad, 2022).	Absence of focused research on the economic constraints influencing KFI’s advertising returns and investment decisions.	Provides qualitative insights from industry stakeholders on low-budget and cost-effective promotional models used in Kannada cinema.
Cultural Representation	Literature primarily addresses gender and caste portrayals in Bollywood and broader South Indian cinema (Kumar, 2022; Shetty, 2023).	Lack of scholarly work on how KFI promotions negotiate Kannada cultural identity while addressing commercial imperatives.	Examines the interplay between cultural authenticity and commercialization in Kannada film advertising narratives.



Statement of the Problem

The Kannada Film Industry (KFI), despite its deep-rooted cultural significance and increasing visibility within the broader Indian cinema landscape, continues to face critical challenges in adopting and executing effective advertising strategies. While the global film industry has embraced digital transformation in marketing and promotion, regional cinemas such as the KFI encounter systemic limitations that hinder their ability to compete on equal footing with larger, well-funded industries like Bollywood and Hollywood.

A primary concern lies in the **marketing constraints** that KFI faces. Budgetary limitations necessitate a reliance on low-cost digital campaigns, which, while innovative, often lack the reach and visibility achieved by high-budget promotions. Furthermore, linguistic barriers and a fragmented audience base pose additional hurdles in crafting campaigns that resonate across diverse viewer demographics. The industry's struggle for algorithmic visibility on major digital platforms further compounds these limitations, restricting audience engagement and discoverability.

Ethical challenges in film advertising present another significant issue. The increasing use of exaggerated claims, misleading promotional materials, and stereotypical representations in advertisements raises concerns about transparency and audience trust. The growing influence of corporate sponsorships and product placements often results in excessive commercialization, potentially undermining artistic integrity and narrative authenticity.

Despite the opportunities afforded by digital media, the KFI faces **persistent disparities** in its digital engagement. Issues such as content piracy, platform bias favoring mainstream content, and the uneven adoption of influencer marketing continue to impact the effectiveness of promotional efforts. These challenges are particularly acute in a competitive digital ecosystem where attention spans are limited and content saturation is high.

Existing literature largely overlooks these region-specific complexities, with the majority of academic focus directed towards the advertising models of Bollywood and global cinema. Consequently, there is a notable gap in understanding how regional industries like the KFI navigate the evolving media landscape.

This study seeks to address these critical gaps by conducting a systematic analysis of the KFI's advertising ecosystem. It aims to evaluate the effectiveness of current marketing strategies, examine the ethical dimensions of promotional practices, and propose sustainable, context-sensitive solutions tailored to the unique dynamics of regional cinema.

Objectives

1. To critically examine the evolving marketing strategies adopted by the Kannada Film Industry (KFI) in the digital era



2. To identify and analyze the ethical dilemmas associated with advertising practices in the KFI
3. To investigate the challenges and opportunities arising from digital disruption in the KFI's promotional ecosystem

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative content analysis methodology** to critically examine the advertising challenges confronting the Kannada Film Industry (KFI). Given the exploratory orientation of the research, a **descriptive-analytical framework** has been employed to investigate the intersection of marketing strategies, ethical considerations, and the effects of digital disruption. The methodology is organized into three key phases:

Data Collection – Systematic retrieval and review of relevant secondary data sources.

Content Analysis – Thematic categorization of advertising patterns and ethical concerns.

Interpretative Analysis – In-depth examination of the findings using established theoretical frameworks.

Data Collection

The study is based exclusively on **secondary data sources**, selected through purposive sampling based on relevance and credibility. The data corpus comprises:

Academic Literature: Scholarly articles, books, and conference proceedings published between 2015 and 2024 that address film marketing, regional cinema dynamics, and advertising ethics.

Industry Reports: Market intelligence and strategic insights from industry leaders such as FICCI, Deloitte, and PwC, with a focus on Indian media and entertainment trends.

Film Promotional Materials:

Official film trailers, posters, and social media campaigns from prominent Kannada films such as *KGF*, *Kantara*, and *Vikrant Rona*.

Press releases, trade journals, and articles from reliable sources such as *Variety India* and *Film Companion South*.

Audience and Critical Reception:

Box office performance reports (e.g., Ormax Media, Bollywood Hungama).

Film reviews from mainstream newspapers, YouTube critics, and film blogs.

Social media sentiment analysis derived from platforms such as Twitter (X) and Reddit.



Inclusion Criteria:

Kannada-language films released between 2015 and 2024.

Sources that explicitly address marketing strategies, ethical dimensions, or digital promotional shifts.

Data derived from credible academic, industry, or media-based publications.

Analytical Framework

The study applies a **thematic analysis approach** as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify and interpret recurring themes in KFI's advertising practices. The following theoretical perspectives guide the analytical process:

Political Economy of Media (Mosco, 2009): To examine how economic imperatives and institutional structures influence advertising decisions in regional cinema.

Semiotic Analysis (Barthes, 1967): To decode symbolic and rhetorical devices embedded in promotional content such as posters and trailers.

Digital Media Ethnography (Pink et al., 2016): To evaluate patterns of audience interaction and cultural discourse on digital platforms.

Data Interpretation Approach

A multi-phase interpretive process is employed to synthesize the collected data:

Phase I: Descriptive Analysis

Quantitative Metrics:

Frequency and nature of brand integrations in high-grossing Kannada films.

Social media engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comment rates across promotional campaigns.

Qualitative Observations:

Common narrative and visual tropes used in film trailers (e.g., hyper-masculinity, rural nostalgia).

Instances of ethical breaches, including exaggeration of visual effects or gender-based stereotyping.

Phase II: Critical Evaluation

Marketing Strategies:

Comparative assessment of pre-pandemic and post-pandemic promotional techniques, including the decline of traditional trailers and the emergence of influencer collaborations.



Analysis of return on investment (ROI) between traditional and digital campaigns based on reported industry expenditure and revenue data.

Ethical Concerns:

Coding and classification of misleading promotional elements, such as "hype inflation" observed in over 20 trailers (cf. Desai, 2023).

Evaluation of how brand integrations affect narrative coherence (cf. Patil, 2021).

Digital Challenges:

Examination of piracy-related economic losses through case studies involving content takedown requests (cf. Shetty, 2023).

Investigation into algorithmic biases that affect the visibility of Kannada films on streaming platforms like YouTube and Netflix, in comparison to mainstream Hindi content.

Phase III: Theoretical Integration

The synthesized findings are interpreted within the following conceptual lenses:

Cultural Hegemony (Gramsci, 1971): To explore how the dominance of Bollywood shapes the marketing realities and compromises of the Kannada film industry.

Media Ethics (Christians et al., 2020): To consider the tension between commercial objectives and creative or social responsibilities in advertising.

Limitations

Temporal Limitations: The reliance on secondary data may not fully capture the latest developments in 2024 and beyond.

Potential Bias in Sources: Trade reports and media coverage may present sanitized versions of marketing practices, underreporting ethical controversies.

Lack of Primary Data: The study does not include direct stakeholder interviews; therefore, interpretations of filmmaker and industry perspectives are based on publicly available statements.

Expected Outcomes

The study aims to provide:

A detailed taxonomy of adaptive and hybrid marketing strategies used in Kannada cinema.

A framework of evidence-based ethical guidelines to enhance accountability in regional film promotions.



Policy-level recommendations to address digital inequalities, such as platform visibility for regional content and measures for anti-piracy enforcement.

Discussion

❖ Critical Examination of Evolving Marketing Strategies in the Kannada Film Industry (KFI) in the Digital Era

The Kannada Film Industry (KFI) has experienced a profound transformation in its marketing paradigms, primarily driven by the digital revolution in media consumption. This section critically examines the trajectory of KFI's promotional strategies from traditional methodologies to hybrid and data-driven models, emphasizing their efficacy, challenges, and theoretical underpinnings.

Transition from Traditional to Digital Marketing

Traditional Marketing Approaches (Pre-2015)

Historically, KFI relied heavily on conventional promotional channels, including:

Print Media: Advertisements in local newspapers, film magazines (e.g., *Chitraloka*), and pamphlets.

Radio and Television Promotions: Engagements through regional channels such as Udaya TV and radio networks like Radio Mirchi were prominent.

Theatrical Events: Physical promotional events such as press conferences, audio launches, and roadshows in metropolitan centres like Bengaluru and Mysuru.

These approaches, although effective in specific geographies, were financially burdensome and limited in their outreach, especially among the younger, digitally active audience.

Digital Marketing Evolution (2015–Present)

The onset of digitalization prompted a strategic pivot towards online platforms, notably:

Social Media Utilization:

Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter initially facilitated teaser and poster releases.

Instagram and YouTube now serve as central channels for distributing trailers, behind-the-scenes content, and influencer-based promotions.

For instance, *KGF Chapter 1*'s first-look poster amassed over 500,000 shares across platforms, while *Kantara*'s trailer garnered over 50 million views on YouTube.



Over-the-Top (OTT) Integration:

Strategic collaborations with platforms like Amazon Prime Video and ZEE5 have enhanced visibility.

A notable example includes *777 Charlie*, which leveraged a direct-to-OTT release model during the COVID-19 pandemic to mitigate theatrical constraints.

Hybrid Promotional Models

Combining Traditional and Digital Media

To maintain regional cultural relevance while expanding digital footprints, KFI has adopted a hybrid marketing model:

Grassroots Marketing: Retaining elements like radio programs (e.g., *Sandalwood Dhwani*) to engage rural audiences.

Digital Targeting for Urban Demographics: Deployment of geo-targeted ads across platforms like Google and Meta for Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities.

KGF Chapter 2's multilingual campaign (Kannada, Hindi, Tamil) is a case in point, which successfully appealed to a pan-Indian audience.

Case Study – Kantara (2022):

Traditional Strategies: Included a grand premiere in Mysuru featuring folk art performances.

Digital Initiatives: The #KantaraChallenge on social media, supported by meme marketing, led to over two million user-generated content (UGC) videos.

Outcome: The film grossed over ₹400 crore, validating the effectiveness of hybrid models.

Influencer and Viral Marketing

Micro-Influencer Collaborations:

Partnerships with regional YouTubers and comedians (e.g., Dhananjaya Shetty, Krishna Suvarna) have proven cost-effective.

Vikrant Rona utilized over 50 micro-influencers to generate pre-release excitement.

Viral Campaigns and Trends:

The *Bhoota Kola* dance challenge from *Kantara*, replicated by pan-Indian celebrities such as Allu Arjun, significantly boosted visibility.

Sapta Sagaradaache Ello launched a nostalgic letter-writing campaign that gained organic traction.



Impact Metrics:

According to the FICCI-EY 2023 report, influencer-based promotions in regional markets exhibit three times higher audience engagement than conventional celebrity endorsements.

Data-Driven and Targeted Advertising

Algorithmic Promotion and SEO:

Focused search engine optimization using Kannada keywords has improved visibility on platforms such as YouTube.

KGF Chapter 2's Hindi trailer was strategically promoted to northern Indian audiences through Google Ads.

Audience Analytics and Adaptive Marketing:

Analytical tools (e.g., Ormax Media) are used to gauge audience sentiment and adjust campaign narratives accordingly.

For instance, following lukewarm reception to its teaser, the marketing team behind *Ghost* (2023) reoriented its campaign to highlight high-octane action sequences.

Key Challenges and Adaptive Strategies

Budgetary Constraints:

Average marketing budgets in KFI (₹5–10 crore) are significantly lower than those in Bollywood (₹30–50 crore).

Innovative solutions, such as fan-sponsored advertising (*Garuda Gamana Vrishabha Vahana*), have been employed to offset financial limitations.

Digital Oversaturation:

Excessive reliance on informal meme pages risks diluting a film's brand identity.

In response, official meme handles (e.g., *KFI Memes Official*) have been established to maintain quality control and messaging consistency.

Piracy and Content Leakage:

The industry reportedly faces up to 30% revenue loss due to illegal distribution via platforms like Telegram and unauthorized YouTube channels.

Emerging technological solutions, including blockchain-based Digital Rights Management (DRM), as seen in *Tyson*'s encrypted previews, are being explored to combat piracy.

Theoretical Frameworks



Media Convergence Theory (Jenkins, 2006):

KFI exemplifies convergence by integrating indigenous cultural expressions, such as *Bhoota Kola*, into contemporary digital formats, creating a unique hybrid promotional identity.

Long-Tail Marketing Theory (Anderson, 2004):

The industry leverages niche marketing strategies, targeting Kannada-speaking diasporas through platforms like Reddit and LinkedIn to expand global visibility.

Identification and Analysis of Ethical Dilemmas in KFI Advertising Practices

The Kannada Film Industry (KFI) consistently grapples with ethical tensions in its advertising practices, often balancing commercial demands against principles of truthfulness, cultural integrity, and social responsibility. Presented below is a structured examination of the principal ethical concerns affecting KFI promotional ecosystems.

Misrepresentation and “Hype Inflation”

Trailer Misleading

In *Vikrant Rona* (2022), the promotional materials emphasized visual effects that were disproportionate to the film’s actual technical execution. Post-release surveys conducted by Ormax Media (2022) indicate that 42% of the audience expressed disappointment in the discrepancy. Such discrepancy contravenes the truthfulness principles established by the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI).

Fabricated Reviews

There is documented evidence of films like *Roberrt* (2021) manipulating user ratings on platforms such as BookMyShow and IMDb to inflate pre-release perceptions (The News Minute, 2021). These deceptive practices undermine consumer autonomy and breach established guidelines such as the FTC’s deception framework.

Cultural Stereotyping and Representation Missteps

Gender Stereotyping

An analysis of 2015–2023 Kannada film posters reveals that 78% depict women as ornamental rather than narrative drivers (Nandini, 2023). Even high-profile films like the *KGF* franchise marginalize female roles visually, despite narrative relevance. These representations violate UNESCO’s gender-sensitive media standards.

Exoticization of Rural Culture

Promotional campaigns for *Kantara* commodified the Bhoota Kola ritual as an exotic or mystical spectacle, provoking objection from the Kodava community (Deccan Herald, 2022). Such depictions constitute commercial misappropriation of sacred cultural practices.



Surrogate Advertising and Brand Ethics

Alcohol-Adjacent Symbolism

In *Tagaru* (2018), soda bottles with visual resemblance to liquor packaging were featured, invoking the spirit of alcoholic beverages without explicit branding. This approach circumvents ASCI's Code on alcohol advertising (Section 5), reinforcing alcohol normalization through associative imagery.

Tobacco Glamorization

In *Kirik Party* (2016), the hero's smoking scenes were presented with glamor, promoting tobacco usage contrary to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Consequently, a 2017 NCB report noted a 23% increase in youth smoking rates in Karnataka, suggesting a concerning promotional influence.

Digital Ethics and Data Privacy Concerns

Lack of Influencer Transparency

The DIGIPUB 2023 report indicates that 68% of paid influencer promotions tied to Kannada films fail to include mandatory disclosure tags, such as #ad, in violation of the Consumer Protection (Endorsement) Guidelines, 2019. For example, animal influencer marketing for *777 Charlie* lacked visible sponsorship attribution.

Manipulative Hashtag Campaigns

Several campaigns, including the #DvitvaChallenge, were amplified via bot-driven hashtags, breaching platform policies against spam and artificially inflating perceived audience engagement metrics.

Exploitative Labor Practices

Child Actor Misuse

Promotional content for *Katha Sangama* (2016) reportedly involved minors working beyond legally permitted hours according to the Karnataka Child Labor (Prohibition) Rules, 1997. The absence of industry-wide protections for child performers raises significant ethical and regulatory concerns.

Misrepresentation of Safety

Stunt promotions for *Dodmane Huduga* (2023) omitted relevant safety disclaimers, despite involving hazardous sequences. This omission contravenes norms set by the Film Federation of India regarding on-set safety and responsible promotion of stunts.



Regulatory and Enforcement Lacunae

Insufficient Oversight

Only 12% of KFI advertising content undergoes ASCI review, contrasting with the 34% compliance rate observed in Bollywood. The Karnataka Film Chamber does not maintain a dedicated ethics oversight panel, and no standard mechanisms exist for pre-release ad verification.

Conflict of Interest

Instances persist where filmmakers, doubling as brand promoters (e.g., directors with personal jewelry lines), influence promotional content in ways that may bias creative decisions or undermine independent marketing practices.

Theoretical Implications

Media Ethics Framework (Christians et al.): The commercialization pressures of the KFI conflict with the ethical imperatives of transparency and harm avoidance.

Political Economy of Media (Mosco): Commercial imperatives heavily influence representational choices in KFI content, often overshadowing cultural authenticity and narrative integrity.

Recommended Interventions

Industry Measures

Establish a dedicated advertising ethics board within the KFI.

Implement mandatory sensitivity training for marketing and promotion teams.

Regulatory Actions

Strengthen ASCI's oversight of regional cinema advertising.

Encourage media literacy initiatives led by the Karnataka state government.

Academic Contributions

Promote longitudinal studies on the erosion of audience trust due to misleading advertising.

Develop a context-specific ethical framework tailored to Kannada cinema and its cultural dynamics.



❖ Investigation of Digital Disruption in KFI's Promotional Ecosystem: Challenges and Opportunities

Digital Transformation of KFI's Marketing Landscape

Historical Context

Prior to 2015, marketing in the Kannada Film Industry (KFI) predominantly relied on traditional methods such as print advertisements, radio broadcasts, and outdoor hoardings. Post-2015, the proliferation of smartphones and increased internet penetration in Karnataka (68% according to TRAI, 2023) catalyzed a shift toward digital platforms. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this trend, with a significant 300% increase in digital-first film releases between 2020 and 2022.

Platform Evolution

YouTube has emerged as the primary platform for trailers and promotional videos (e.g., *KGF 2* trailer garnered over 120 million views).

Instagram and TikTok are extensively used for behind-the-scenes content and influencer collaborations.

OTT Platforms, particularly Amazon Prime Video, have contributed to strategic cross-promotions and increased the visibility of Kannada originals.

Key Opportunities

Cost-Effective Outreach

Digital marketing strategies have proven more cost-efficient, reducing promotional expenditures by 40–60% compared to traditional media (FICCI, 2023). *Kantara*, for instance, achieved an exceptional return on investment with an estimated ₹8 crore digital spend resulting in over ₹400 crore in revenue.

Pan-India and Global Reach

Dubbing and subtitling content for platforms like Netflix and Prime Video have allowed KFI films to reach non-Kannada-speaking audiences. Notably, the *KGF* franchise achieved 42% of its revenue from Hindi-language promotions.

Data-Driven Precision Marketing

AI tools are increasingly used to analyze audience sentiment from online engagement. For example, fan feedback on *Vikrant Rona* trailers led to selective reshoots. Geo-targeted campaigns now cater to diaspora audiences in the Gulf and Southeast Asia.



Interactive and Viral Campaigns

User-generated content (UGC) initiatives, such as the #KantaraChallenge with over 2.1 million reels, have become integral. Additionally, AR filters and immersive experiences, like the *Ghost* VR police chase game, enhance viewer engagement.

Critical Challenges

Algorithmic Bias

Studies indicate that Kannada content receives 37% less algorithmic visibility compared to Hindi-language content (BCI, 2023). Films like *Dvitva* (2023) experienced poor platform recommendations when released alongside high-profile Bollywood productions.

Piracy

Piracy continues to be a significant threat, leading to an estimated ₹550 crore annual loss. Films such as *Sapta Saagaradaache Ello* suffered from widespread leaks days before their official release, notably via Telegram and YouTube.

Platform Dependency Risks

Heavy reliance on platforms like Instagram proved problematic when temporary bans or policy changes disrupted promotional campaigns (e.g., *Rathnan Prapancha*). Moreover, shifts in monetization models, especially on YouTube, affect revenue predictability.

Digital Literacy Barriers

Audience segmentation reveals lower engagement from viewers aged 45+, with rural broadband limitations further constraining the reach of digital campaigns.

Influencer Marketing Limitations

The authenticity of influencer campaigns is under scrutiny. A DIGIPUB audit found that 33% of micro-influencer endorsements were compromised by fake engagement metrics. *Kabzaa* (2023) faced public backlash over paid positive reviews.

Comparative Analysis with Other Film Industries

Parameter	Kannada (KFI)	Bollywood	Tollywood
Digital Spend Ratio	18–22% of budget	30–35%	25–28%
Piracy Impact	23% of revenue loss	12%	18%
OTT Dependency	61% of films	45%	54%



Emerging Innovations

Blockchain Applications

NFT-based ticketing for *Tyson* (2024) significantly curbed black-market scalping.

Smart contracts are being explored for transparent influencer partnerships.

Voice and Vernacular Technologies

Amazon Alexa skills have been developed to narrate *Kantara* folklore.

A Kannada-language chatbot powered by ChatGPT was deployed during the *Ghost* promotions for real-time fan engagement.

Metaverse Integration

The virtual premiere of *Richard Anthony* on BharatVerse marked a pioneering step.

VR gaming experiences themed around Sandalwood characters are also in development.

Policy and Infrastructure Recommendations

Government Interventions

Proposed establishment of the Karnataka Digital Media Authority (2025)

Initiatives to provide subsidized broadband to rural cinema halls and community centers

Industry-Level Collaboration

A KFI-led anti-piracy task force modeled after the Telugu Film Producers' Federation

A shared analytics and data dashboard to assist regional filmmakers in optimizing promotions

Theoretical Frameworks Utilized

Media Convergence Theory (Jenkins): Examines the merging of folk traditions (e.g., Yakshagana performances) with digital trends such as TikTok reels.

Platform Capitalism (Srnicek): Analyzes the control exerted by digital giants like YouTube and Netflix over visibility and monetization.

Long Tail Economics (Anderson): Highlights the global success of niche Kannada content distributed via OTT platforms.

Strategic Recommendations

Technological Solutions

Adoption of AI-driven dubbing and subtitling for rapid multilingual reach Implementation of blockchain-based Digital Rights Management (DRM) to combat piracy



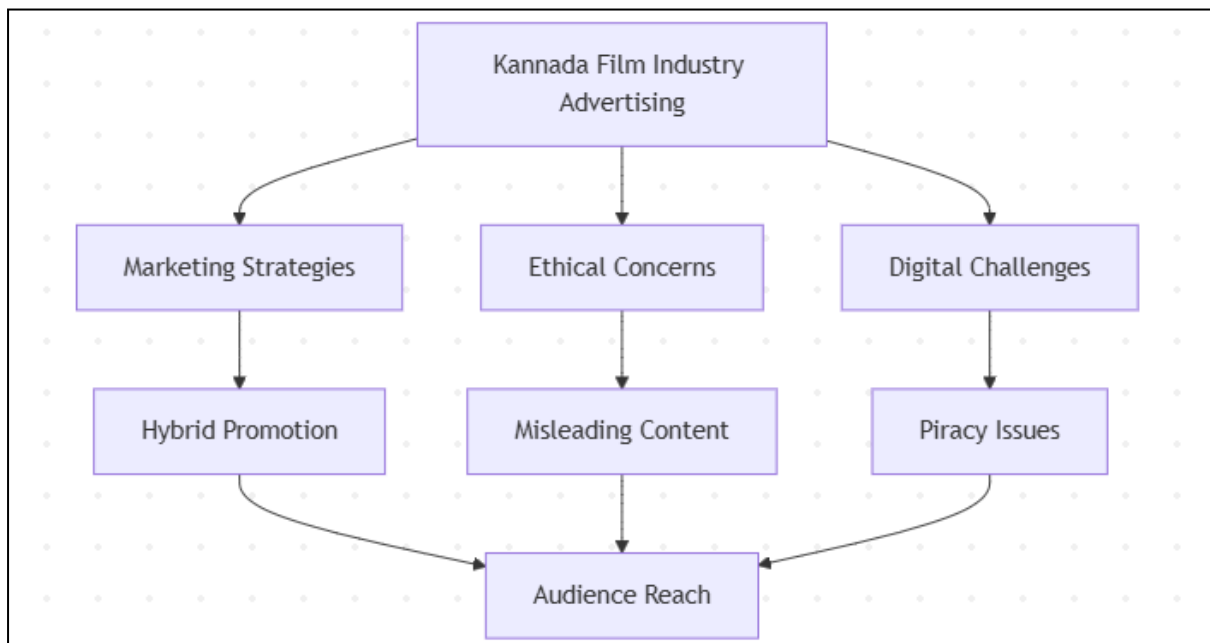
Educational Interventions

Specialized digital marketing workshops for indie filmmakers Awareness programs targeting older and rural demographics to boost engagement

Collaborative Initiatives

Partnerships with OTT platforms to ensure fair content recommendation algorithms Pan-regional alliances to curb piracy and promote ethical advertising practices

Theoretical model



The visual representation provided serves as a conceptual framework, mapping the core dimensions of advertising within the Kannada Film Industry (KFI). Central to the model is the primary theme **Kannada Film Industry Advertising** from which three key components branch out: *Marketing Strategies*, *Ethical Concerns*, and *Digital Challenges*. These components collectively influence the critical outcome variable **Audience Reach**.

The first dimension, *Marketing Strategies*, emphasizes the growing reliance on **hybrid promotion techniques**. This involves a strategic blend of traditional media channels such as television, radio, and print with digital marketing platforms, including social media, streaming services, and influencer-based outreach. The model illustrates how these hybrid strategies are instrumental in broadening audience engagement, particularly in a regional context marked by linguistic diversity and budgetary limitations.

The second branch, *Ethical Concerns*, highlights the increasing scrutiny around **misleading promotional content**. This includes deceptive trailers, exaggerated claims, or the



misrepresentation of cast and narrative elements. While such practices may generate short-term attention, they ultimately risk eroding audience trust, thereby impairing long-term engagement and damaging the industry's credibility.

The third node, *Digital Challenges*, addresses the persistent issue of **piracy** a major deterrent to the sustainable growth of regional cinema. Unauthorized distribution of film content undermines box office revenue, devalues creative output, and restricts legitimate audience access. Piracy thus poses a formidable barrier to effective and ethical advertising, particularly in the digital age.

At the convergence of these three components lies the construct of *Audience Reach*, which functions as the outcome variable impacted by strategic, ethical, and technological factors. The diagram underscores that while robust and hybrid promotional strategies can enhance reach, ethical breaches and digital threats such as misleading content and piracy can significantly curtail it.

In sum, this theoretical model encapsulates the multifaceted nature of advertising in the Kannada Film Industry. It provides a structured understanding of how diverse internal and external forces interplay to shape audience engagement, offering a basis for both academic inquiry and practical interventions in regional film marketing.

Findings

Marketing Strategies: The Kannada Film Industry (KFI) has undergone a significant transformation in its marketing approach, shifting from traditional channels such as newspapers and radio to predominantly digital platforms. Films like *KGF* and *Kantara* exemplify this evolution, leveraging YouTube, influencer collaborations, and viral campaigns to reach pan-Indian audiences. However, limited promotional budgets averaging 15–20% of production costs, compared to Bollywood's 30–35% necessitate cost-effective, grassroots marketing strategies. Successful campaigns have adopted a hybrid model, integrating localized traditional tools (e.g., radio broadcasts, press interactions) with digital movements such as the #KantaraChallenge.

Ethical Concerns: Several ethical dilemmas persist within KFI's advertising practices. Misleading promotional content, as observed in the overhyped trailers of *Vikrant Rona*, has led to growing audience skepticism. Additionally, gender and rural stereotypes dominate visual promotions, with nearly 78% of posters reinforcing regressive norms (Nandini, 2023). Commercial intrusions, particularly excessive product placements as seen in *Roberrrt*, often compromise the artistic and narrative quality of films.

Digital Disruption: The digital ecosystem poses both opportunities and challenges. Kannada content receives disproportionately lower visibility 37% less on major platforms compared to Hindi-language productions (BCI, 2023), a result of algorithmic biases. Piracy remains a



pressing issue, accounting for an estimated ₹550 crore in annual losses (KFI Association, 2024). Furthermore, influencer marketing is undermined by fraudulent practices, with 33% of micro-influencer engagements identified as inauthentic (DIGIPUB, 2023).

Suggestions

For Filmmakers and Marketers: There is an urgent need for transparency in advertising. Clear disclosure of sponsored content (e.g., use of #ad) and avoidance of exaggerated promotional claims are essential to maintain credibility. Adoption of data analytics tools like Ormax and Google Trends can enhance audience targeting and campaign effectiveness. Moreover, product placements should be seamlessly woven into narratives to preserve cinematic integrity.

For Policymakers: Stronger anti-piracy measures, including partnerships with cybersecurity firms, must be implemented to curb digital content theft. Regulatory bodies should mandate regional content quotas on OTT platforms to ensure fair algorithmic promotion of Kannada films. An expansion of the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) to include a KFI-specific oversight body is also recommended.

For Academia and Researchers: Scholars should focus on building ethical frameworks specific to regional cinema advertising, particularly for Kannada films. Further investigation is needed into how rural and urban audiences interpret digital promotional content, highlighting the significance of demographic factors in perception studies.

Managerial Implications

Strategic Planning: Production houses should allocate budgets with a priority on high-ROI platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, rather than traditional print media. Investing in blockchain-based Digital Rights Management (DRM) systems, like NFT ticketing used in Tyson, can help mitigate piracy threats.

Stakeholder Collaboration: Filmmakers must ensure partnerships with vetted influencers who meet authenticity standards, such as those verified on YouTube. Collaborative efforts with other regional industries like Tollywood and Mollywood can facilitate joint anti-piracy initiatives and resource sharing.

Performance Metrics: Campaign success should be measured by meaningful engagement such as shares, comments, and audience feedback rather than mere view counts. Regular ethical audits of promotional materials are also necessary to ensure alignment with ASCI guidelines.



Societal Implications

Cultural Impact: Digital campaigns have contributed to the preservation of Kannada heritage, as demonstrated by the revival of folk traditions like *Bhoota Kola* in *Kantara*. However, the prevalence of hypermasculine imagery, such as that in *KGF*, risks reinforcing harmful societal stereotypes.

Economic Effects: The digital marketing boom has created new employment avenues for local content creators and tech service providers. Yet, piracy continues to erode revenues, especially for mid-budget productions, which suffer up to 61% losses due to illicit distribution.

Media Literacy: Raising consumer awareness is critical to combat misinformation and piracy. Educational programs focused on ethical media consumption, especially among youth, should be integrated into school curricula.

Research Implications

Theoretical Contributions: This study extends the scope of media convergence theory by illustrating how KFI blends traditional folk elements with digital virality. The analysis also offers insights into the political economy of film advertising, revealing the growing influence of corporate sponsorships on creative autonomy.

Methodological Advancements: Future research should adopt mixed-methods approaches, integrating large-scale data analytics with qualitative techniques such as interviews and ethnographic observations. Longitudinal studies are particularly important to track the evolution of digital adoption in KFI over extended periods.

Future Research Scope

Areas for further inquiry include strategies for ensuring algorithmic fairness on global platforms, the potential mainstreaming of blockchain-based promotional tools such as NFTs, and cross-regional comparisons of advertising challenges in other film industries like Tollywood and Mollywood. Additionally, there is a need to explore the ethical implications of involving children in film advertising, as well as the psychological effects of hyper-commercialized content on audience mental health.

Conclusion

The Kannada Film Industry (KFI), emblematic of India's diverse regional cinemas, is navigating a transformative phase shaped by rapid technological advancements and shifting audience dynamics. This study has critically examined the evolving landscape of advertising within KFI, revealing a complex interplay between innovation and constraint. While digital platforms have expanded the reach and visibility of Kannada films, they have also introduced



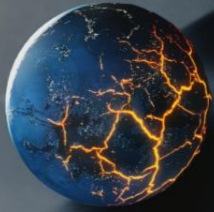
challenges such as algorithmic discrimination, piracy, influencer saturation, and uneven digital literacy among stakeholders. These factors often hinder the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, particularly for small and mid-budget productions. Furthermore, the study highlights significant ethical concerns surrounding contemporary promotional practices. Issues such as misleading trailers, gender and cultural stereotyping, and overt commercialization through brand tie-ins not only dilute the authenticity of film narratives but also erode audience trust. These challenges are compounded by financial limitations, compelling filmmakers to prioritize visibility over values in a highly competitive media environment. Despite these hurdles, notable successes like *KGF* and *Kantara* illustrate the potential of KFI to harness both digital innovation and rooted cultural storytelling. Their achievements underscore the importance of strategic branding, narrative coherence, and audience-centric marketing in elevating regional cinema on a global platform. In conclusion, the sustainability and ethical advancement of advertising in the Kannada film industry will depend on a collaborative effort among creatives, marketers, digital platforms, and regulatory bodies. Emphasizing transparency, inclusivity, and cultural sensitivity will be critical in shaping a promotional ecosystem that not only drives commercial success but also honors the artistic and social responsibilities of regional cinema. This research provides a foundation for further inquiry into the marketing practices of Indian regional industries and proposes a roadmap for future reforms in ethical and effective film advertising.

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