

Strategies Used for Food and Beverage Advertisements in Bengaluru City – A Visual Interpretive Study

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Abstract

Objective: To assess the strategies and messages used to promote consumption of highly processed and commercialized food products.

Methods: Photographs of 110 advertisements of food and beverages on the hoardings, walls, bus stands, near shopping places, traffic signals were clicked from most commuted areas of Bengaluru city and analysed by visual interpretation. Advertisements were coded for - visual details, type of product, placement and context themes used. Qualitative methods were used to analyse data and identify the common themes used to appeal the consumers.

Results: Most of the advertisements were of sugary beverages, fast food restaurant chains. The themes used were Tempt your Buds - 33.8%, Discount/Large - 22.3%, Best Times - 15.1%, Celebrity Endorsement - 7.9%, Refreshing 6.4%, Nutrition-6.4%, Leave an Impression-5.7% and Download Apps -2.1%. The advertisements with themes like tempt your buds and discount/ large was more prominent.

Conclusions: Food and beverage advertisements (ads) are widespread over the city. These advertisements appeal to public's desires to be modern, successful and happy, and being careful while purchasing 'cheap' and 'convenient' foods and beverages, and it has a adverse consequence on health. Advertisements play a major role in selection of food and beverages and this directly or indirectly affect the oral health of the community.

Keywords: Snack food, beverages, advertisements

I. Introduction

Today's food environment is quite different to that experienced by previous generations. Globalization is associated with changing occupation, incomes and lifestyles. As Kennedy, Nantel and Shetty explain, "globalization is having a major impact on food systems around the world..[which] affect availability and access to food through changes to food production, procurement and distribution... in turn bringing about a gradual shift in food culture, with consequent changes in dietary consumption patterns and nutritional status that vary with the socio-economic strata" (Hawkes, 2006).

There is increasing consumption of foods high in fats and sweeteners throughout the developing world, while the share of cereals is declining; intake of fruits and vegetables remains inadequate. Unhealthy diet is a key modifiable risk factor for Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs). India is the third most obese country in the world (Balch, 2012). Overweight during childhood and adolescence is associated not only with an increased risk of adult obesity and Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs), but also with a number of immediate health-related problems, such as hypertension and insulin resistance (World Health Organization, 2010).

Food choices now-a-days are influenced by the advertising, focusing directly on consumers and marketing techniques have come under scrutiny for their probable contribution to promoting unhealthy eating and childhood obesity (Dixon et al., 2011). Advertisement (ads) is one of the effective tools of integrated marketing communication to emotionally motivate consumers to buy the products, (Vijayapushpam et al., 2013) adapting to the cultural and social contexts of the target audience. A wide range of techniques are used to market these products, reaching children in schools, nurseries, and supermarkets; through television and the Internet; and in many other settings (World Health Organization, 2010). Ads often target basic human emotions and desires to feel successful, loved and happy—with the message is that consuming a product can be a simple way to fulfil one's desires (Amanzadeh et al., 2015)

Higher disposable incomes, changing consumption patterns and the marketing of powerful western brands are bringing fast food to India (Balch, 2012). As a result [of product advertising], people have started preferring these so called "fast foods" over "balanced diets" (Balch, 2012). It has become a kind of status

symbol to eat in fast food chains, and to drink colas and soft drinks. However, there is no literature on the strategies used by these food advertisement companies in developing countries to promote their product. Outcomes of the shift to the modern diet include additional expenses for food and beverages, loss of cultural practices, and risk for chronic diseases such as tooth decay, obesity, hypertension, heart disease, Type II diabetes and cancer (Amanzadeh et al., 2015). Thus the aim of the study was to explore the methods and themes used by the advertisements to promote the consumption of highly processed and commercialized food products and beverages.

II. Methodology

Photographs of food, snack and beverages along with field notes were collected from the most commuted areas of Bengaluru city for duration of one month. Digital camera was used to click 2-3 photographs of the same advertisement on hoardings, outside the shops, bus stands, shopping places, roadside walls, traffic light signals, and on public and private vehicles, from the arterial roads of Bengaluru city. These photographs were transferred on the bigger screen and the photograph with maximum clarity was selected for the analysis. A total of 110 photographs were included, since data saturation was achieved. Similar advertisements from different locations were eliminated so that final database comprised single representation. Qualitative method was used to analyse the visual content of the images captured to identified patterns; explore different themes, and topics used in the advertisements. Each photograph was analyzed and coded for its visual details such as colour, design and content, for placement and context, for the meaning of words used for what attracted the most attention in single advertisement. Then the relating meaning and the main theme of each advertisement were identified. Then the ads were divided into different themes and were coded for their strongest, most prominent and repetitive themes. Next these codes were applied to the whole set of data. Advertising themes for snacks and beverages identified after the analyses were: *Tempt your Buds*, *Discount/Large*, *Best Times*, *Celebrity Endorsement*, *Refreshing*, *Nutrition*, *Leave an impression* and *Download App*.

III. Results

Most of the advertisements were of fast food restaurant chains, sugary beverages and alcohol. Each advertisement was categorised for location, type of product (snack and beverages), visual details such as colour, size, design, content, placement, and context and for the meaning of words used for what attracted the most attention in single advertisement.

3.1 Context of Ads

Advertisements were posted primarily on the *walls and on trees close* to the stores where local residents commute and purchase household necessities, chatted with neighbours, and children bought snacks. Catchy advertisements were spread all around the store wall and the main windows in an unorderly fashion to grab the public's attention.

3.2 Placement of Ads

Ads placement to attract attention—were more central, approximately at eye level, had a bigger display, more eye catching photographs or graphics. Ads were placed at the traffic light signals where people waited for a long time. Since many people drove or took buses within and between the main city of Bengaluru, the ads were generally placed along the route of the main roads on; roadside, public vehicle, bus stands and traffic lights. Table 1 describes the different themes identified and their frequency of distribution across the city.

3.3 Tempt your buds

This theme communicates the tasty flavour like *chocolate flavour biscuits*, *doughnuts*, and *ice-cream*. Hoardings with a picture of big burger, fries, coke, and flavoured milk were included under this theme. Many of the advertisements were of franchise chain restaurants outside the shop showing the delicious *cheesy pizza*. Advertisement of sugary beverages at the bus stand with the image of cow cartoon was a strategy for attracting children. The main attraction in this advertisement was different flavours such as chocolate flavour, strawberry flavour used to make milk tasty.

3.4 Discount/large

Communicating two things: money and quantity, or “cheap price” and “big”. This theme included quotes like value treat, happy hours, free etc. The most prominent quote used was “*HAPPY HOURS*” which was mostly seen on alcohol advertisements. In one of fast food advertisement for a burger, half of the hoarding was a picture of a burger; the other half was a picture of a bottle of soft drink and French fries, surrounded with a few words. These words were in large fonts and in red colour against a white background, emphasizing the price and

size. In addition, the association of the cheap price with the disproportionately large picture of a chocolate in one of the ads exaggerates the good value for the money.

3.5 Best times

The concept of good times, fun, happiness, festival, family and friends were used in this theme. These ads used the phrases like “*buds for you*”, “*king of good times*”, “*treat yourself*” and “*festivals*”. One of the ads promoted that the best times with friends is while having pizza. An ad for ice cream showed the variety of flavours available, in different shapes and colours.

3.6 Celebrity endorsement

This theme emphasises mostly on models advertising for various fast-food and beverages. This has a greater impact on children and young adults. The main strategy used here was visual perception, through which they could show the joy or taste of a chocolate biscuit or soda. Most of the ads in soda beverages were promoted by female gender, a strategy used to attract opposite gender.

3.7 Refreshing

The refreshing quality of beverages was highlighted in many ads. This message was visually transmitted through the colour or foaminess of the drink, a glass that was frosted, or bubbles in the background. It was also conveyed through words that highlighted “thirst” or “refresh”. The association between the aching of thirst and the joy of slaking one’s thirst reminds the viewer of the continual need for hydration in the warm Bengaluru weather.

3.8 Nutrition

Appeals to better health with best ingredients were used to attract the public. Goodness of haldi along with a cartoon image was shown in one the sugary beverage attracting both mother and child. Images showing vegetables in a wrap or taco was another way of grabbing the attention. Different kinds of oat meal, multigrain biscuits were mostly promoted through these ads. Some ads promoted a link between the traditional and modern diet by using english words, like American Breakfast. Fast food establishments also redefined their food offerings to appeal to the consumers’ appetites at any time of the day. For example, pizza chains sold breakfast items, encouraging dining-out for breakfast, which was not previously part of the local culture.

3.9 Leave an impression

Mostly used in alcohol beverages to attract young adults and teenagers. These ads communicate modern and rising in life is related with taking alcohol.

3.10 Download apps

Latest and the modern strategy to promote snacks and beverages. Cash back, free and easy home delivery were the highlights to these ads. These ads promote the availability of fast food and sugary beverages at the door step. One of the ads was made on dark purple and yellow colour with a quote “*downloads the app, downsize your bill*”.

3.11 Communicative strategies

Different communicative strategies were used to reinforce the messages used in the advertisement to attract the public.

Combining two or more strategies like, best times and cheap price in a single advertisement was a strategy to grab public’s attention. Combining appeals could provide an engaging story line with a single conclusion: the urge to buy and consume the product. For example, ads that combined the time spent with friends at cheap price.

Repetition of advertisements in different places conveyed a sense of omnipresence, demonstrating that the product was an integral part of daily life. For example, beverage advertisements for milk were seen on bus stand, public and private vehicles and hoarding suggesting that these were the beverages one should consume every day. “Resonance”, as defined by McQuarrie (Amanzadeh et al., 2015) , “occurs when there is a repetition of elements within an ad, and when this redundancy is such that an exchange, condensation or multiplication of meaning occurs”.

Placement of ads in prominent places throughout the community reinforced this integration and associated the product with specific community activities, for example placement of big hoardings at the traffic light signal where vehicle stands for a longer span of time. Placement of ads outside the franchise chain restaurants along the roadside where the vehicles are stuck in traffic.

Personification is the use of familiar people or cartoon characters to help make a product seem familiar and desirable (Amanzadeh et al., 2015). Cartoon characters were used for the personification in one of the beverage ads. These characters can particularly appeal to children, invoking a cute, funny or fun association with the product.

Table 1: Distribution of advertising themes for snacks and beverages across Bengaluru city from different locations (n=110)

SL. NO	ADVERTISING THEMES	FREQUENCY (%)
1.	Tempt your Buds	33.8%
2.	Discount/Large	22.3%
3.	Best Times	15.1%
4.	Celebrity Endorsement	7.9%
5.	Refreshing	6.4%
6.	Nutrition	6.4%
7.	Leave an Impression	5.7%
8.	Download Apps	2.1%.

IV. Discussion

In the present study 110 photographs of food, snacks and beverages were collected from the hoardings, outside the shops, bus stands, shopping places, road side walls, traffic light signals and public and private vehicles. The results of our study were similar to a study conducted by Baharak Amanzadeh et al.(2015) where the most prominent themes were Cheap Price, Fast, Large Size, and Modern. Other themes used frequently in combination with these were Refreshment Sports/Nationalism, Sex and Gender Roles, Fun/Happy Feelings, Family, Friendship and Community, and Health. Marketing explicitly involves designing strategies and implementing activities to influence consumption habits and create demand (Hawkes, 2006). Owing to its visibility, promotional food marketing has become one of the hallmarks of globalization.

In recent years, the food and beverage industry has viewed children and adolescents as a major market force. Premiums and sweepstakes prizes are often used to appeal to children's and adolescent's taste and desires. Fast food restaurants typically use premiums in children's meals, giving away simple toys. Premiums can increase short-term sales since children may desire the item over the food, but they also can help elevate the image of that brand in children's minds (Story et al., 2004). Adolescents are persuaded by the emotive messages of advertising, which play into their developmental concerns related to appearance, self-identity, belonging, and sexuality. Direct comparison was not possible because most of the studies were done for children and on television advertisement. Our study focuses on adolescents and young adults who come across these advertisements daily on the hoardings which are placed at the most commuted areas of the city, and are easily seen.

In India people have started working at younger age, they have less time to cook food and therefore depend on readily available food. The trend of nuclear families with both the parents working, have easy accessibility for these kinds of food and have a great impact from these advertisements in the selection of food and beverages. Borzekowski and Robinson conducted a study that showed exposure to the food advertisement for thirty seconds, altered food preferences in pre-school children (Sixsmith et al., 2009). In Bengaluru large hoardings and pictures are placed in and around the traffic signal where the vehicles stop for at-least two minutes. This strategy for the placement of advertisement has a great impact in selection of food and beverages for young adults. In a descriptive (Story et al., 2004) study that examined US food advertising during 52.5 hours of Saturday morning children's programming, 564 food advertisements were shown and on average, 11 of 19 commercials per hour were for food. Of these ads, 246 (44%) promoted food from the fats and sweets group, such as candy, soft drinks, chips, cakes, cookies and pastries. Fast food restaurant and sugar breakfast cereal advertising was also prevalent. There were no advertisements for fruits or vegetables.

The growth of supermarkets and large discount stores has even more important implications for the long-term expansion of the processed foods sector. Convenience stores typically sell hot and cold snacks, such as microwaveable products, donuts, ice cream and soft drinks. Usually located in neighbourhoods, they mainly target urbanites with limited time wanting a quick snack. Advertisements for nutritious foods promote selected positive attitudes and beliefs concerning these foods (Institute of Optimum Nutrition Archives, 2001). For food products advertised in mainstream TV channels, claims such as “Keeps you healthy”, “Makes you active”, “Low calories” were tagged, whereas food and drinks advertised in children channels they claimed them as “Makes taller & sharper”, “More nutrients”, “High protein”. In this study the frequency of advertisements with health claims were only 6.4%. Some of these advertisements comply with the health claim in that they mentioned the actual component (vitamin or mineral) that brings about the health benefit. Some of the health claims were somewhat exaggerated. Moreover, more than half of the advertisements that had health claims promised enhancement of well-being. This is misleading as well-being is a broad area that involves that balance of mental, social and physical well-being (Dixon et al., 2011).

Children and adolescents are eating more outside food, drinking more soft drinks, and snacking more frequently (Story et al., 2004). Childhood overweight and obesity is a major public health concern. Almost two-thirds (60%) of overweight children have at least one cardiovascular risk factor (e.g., hypertension, hyperlipidemia) and the prevalence of type 2 diabetes mellitus is increasing in youth (Story et al., 2004). The growing epidemic of childhood obesity has focused attention on the possible role that food and beverage advertising and marketing may play in influencing child and adolescent eating behaviours and body weight.

Eating patterns and food choices among children and teens are important factors that affect how quickly youngsters may develop tooth decay. Foods high in carbohydrates, sugars and starches greatly contribute to the production of plaque acids that attack the tooth enamel and eventually lead to cavity formation. Diet lacking certain nutrients, makes it more difficult for tissues in the mouth to resist infection and this may indirectly contribute to periodontal disease, a major cause of tooth loss in adults. The best documented is vitamin C, whose deficiency ultimately causes scurvy, a disease characterised by bleeding, suppurating gums and the loss of teeth. Deficiencies of vitamins A and E may also predispose to periodontal disease. Deficiencies of protein, vitamin D or calcium may lead to the resorption of bone around the teeth and destruction of the periodontal ligaments that anchor the teeth to the jawbones (Institute of Optimum Nutrition Archives, 2001).

The cultural context is another important context because it affects the degree of acceptability of new products and services introduced through the globalization process. This is particularly relevant for promotional activities. This is the true power of marketing and indicates the importance of "cultural transition" in dietary change (Hawkes, 2006). There are no regulations regarding these advertisements. Greater emphasis has been placed on promoting Energy Dense and Nutrient Poor child-oriented foods to parents. As parents are typically the main grocery buyers of the foods available and accessible to children in the home, it is critical that initiatives aimed at reducing the persuasive impact of food marketing include this target group (Amanzadeh et al., 2015).

V. Conclusion

This interpretive study makes a contribution to the literature through its identification of common themes, messages and strategies used in the promotion of advertisements. Quantitative studies should be conducted to know the impact of advertisement on the people in the selection of food and beverages. These studies need to include the various marketing channels used to reach youth, such as television, schools, and the Internet, as well as different age periods, such as early childhood, middle childhood and adolescence (Sixsmith et al., 2009). Marketing strategies should be imbibed in the promotion of nutritional food products.

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