

Taste, branded characters, events, & health claims:

The food industry's favourite digital marketing techniques in Singapore

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Objective

To conduct an environmental scan, characterising key marketing techniques used by major food industry players.

Methods

- Internet traffic rank and number of followers were used to identify top food and beverage (F&B) websites, and social media pages.
- Published coding frameworks for coding marketing techniques were adapted¹⁻⁴
- 17 F&B websites (e.g. restaurants/delivery/retailers/caterers) and 12 top non-F&B websites (e.g. news providers) were coded.
- Facebook and Instagram posts (Jan–June 2018) of popular beverage (n = 5), retail food (n=4), and packaged food (n=3) brands in Singapore were coded.
- Food type was coded according to an adapted version of WHO food classification frameworks⁵⁻⁶

Results

The 12 non-F&B websites contained 117 F&B marketing messages:

Marketing techniques	% of sites	Food / beverages marketed	% of sites
Part of editorial content	74%	Beverages	26%
Links to other media marketing	74%	Western-style fast food	22%
Promotional characters / events	28%	Confectionery / desserts / savoury snacks	18%
Health claims	23%		

The 17 F&B websites:

Marketing techniques	% of sites
Membership / loyalty reward schemes	82%
Online stores	76%
Website communities	71%
Health claims	41%
Advercation (educating while advertising)	35%

During 6 months on social media:

Beverages

Brands	Total fans*
MILO	246,115
Coca-Cola	188,354
Nescafe	127,209
100Plus	84,777
LiHO	82,584

Beverage brand totals

Engagement	Total activity**
✂ Posts	345
👍 Likes	84,919
💬 Comments	7,093
👁 Views	3,674,726
➦ Shares	7,536

F&B marketed % of posts

Sugary beverages	68%
Didn't display beverage	12%
Sugar-free sweetened	10%
Tea / coffee	5%
Milk drinks	4%
Water / non-sweetened	1%

Techniques % of posts

Events, e.g. sports	50%
Sensory characteristics	49%
Branded characters	45%
Emotive claims	33%
Healthier Choice Symbol	20%
Brand responds to users	29%
Contests / giveaways	27%
Brand partnerships	21%

Retail

Brands	Total fans*
McDonald's	452,944
Starbucks	448,358
foodpanda	421,436
KFC	322,663

Retail brand totals

Engagement	Total activity**
✂ Posts	623
👍 Likes	449,053
💬 Comments	97,321
👁 Views	12,455,245
➦ Shares	111,609

F&B marketed % of posts

Western prepared food	47%
Asian prepared food	18%
Tea / coffee	17%
Sauces / dips / dressings	16%
Sugary beverages	15%
Fruit, veg, legumes	13%
Cakes / biscuits / pastries	8%

Techniques % of posts

Sensory characteristics	80%
Branded characters	48%
Brand responds to users	46%
Seasonal limited products	35%
Brand partnerships	30%
Convenience	26%
Price discounts, offers	23%

Packaged products

Brands	Total fans*
Sticky	131,423
Ben & Jerry's	128,492
Ferrero Rocher	126,533

Packaged product totals

Engagement	Total activity**
✂ Posts	150
👍 Likes	10,694
💬 Comments	643
👁 Views	296,472
➦ Shares	1,437

F&B marketed % of posts

Confectionery / desserts	54%
Edible ices	35%
Cakes / biscuits / pastries	11%

Techniques % of posts

Sensory characteristics	73%
Events, e.g. sports	47%
Branded characters	37%
Brand responds to users	27%
Corporate responsibility	17%

*Facebook **Facebook + Instagram
Percentages that add up to more than 100% are where multiple techniques / foods were present in a single post.

Conclusion

Food industry marketing techniques vary by brand type. As in other settings, in Singapore, sensory characteristics (taste, texture), branded characters, sports and community events, and health claims are common digital marketing techniques.



MILO health claims



LiHO branded character



KFC sensory characteristics



100Plus events

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¹ Vandeweyer S, et al. New Zeal Med Assoc. 2017;120(1450):32–43. ² Kelly B, et al. Public Health Nutr. 2008;11(11):1180–7. ³ Freeman B, et al. Am J Public Health. 2014;104(12):e36–64. ⁴ Vossallo AJ, et al. JMR Public Health Surveill. 2018;4(2):1–11. ⁵ WHO. WHO Nutrient Profile Model for the Western Pacific Region. 2016. ⁶ WHO. Nutrient Profile Model for South-East Asia Region. 2017.