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Decoding digital marketing secrets in India's food e-commerce landscape

India's food e-commerce is evolving, blending quick commerce, influencer marketing, and WhatsApp for hyper-local engagement. Brands thrive by combining data with empathy.

Chandan Bagwe
25 Jun 2025 05:00 IST

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India's food e-commerce sector is in the middle of an exciting shift. What began as a simple grocery delivery model has evolved into a fierce competition for consumer attention, innovative marketing strategies, and hyper-local tactics.

While large platforms such as Blinkit, Zepto, and Swiggy Instamart continue to dominate conversations, the digital marketing playbook is getting rewritten behind the scenes, often in ways that go unnoticed.

Here is a closer look at some of the most effective, and in some cases unexpected, strategies that are helping brands cut through the clutter in this fast-moving space.

Quick commerce listings: the new front shelf battle

Ask any shopper what they bought last evening, and chances are it came from the top row of their quick commerce app. Much like FMCG brands once fought for eye-level shelf space in supermarkets, they compete for prime visibility on apps like Blinkit and Zepto.

Brands are paying for top listings in product searches, home screens, and curated carousels. This is often based on time of day, location, and buying behaviour.

A chocolate brand might bid for top placement in residential neighbourhoods around 9 pm when cravings strike, while a breakfast cereal might aim for early morning visibility in working professionals' hubs.

It is a smart move, but not without nuance. Some apps display 'low stock' labels or use urgency tags to nudge purchases. While such tactics can spike conversion rates, overuse can backfire.

Consumers of today possess knowledge and are susceptible to manipulation. Brands that combine clever placement with honest messaging, like product benefits or reviews, tend to build longer-term loyalty.

In 2023 alone, Zepto saw a 400% increase in ad revenues, much of it driven by brands fighting for these prime digital real estate spots. For example, a start-up selling artisanal cookies in Delhi used this approach to target localities during chai time. Their visibility during that one-hour window boosted conversions by over 40% weekly.

Swiggy Instamart's in-app influencers: real people, real impact

Swiggy Instamart has added a new twist to influencer marketing by embedding content within the app, often featuring home chefs, recipe creators, and micro-influencers with niche followings. These are short, focused recipe clips placed where users are browsing for ingredients.

Let us say a shopper is adding paneer and spices to their cart. Just below, they might see a 30-second recipe for paneer tikka, featuring a particular brand of masala or ghee. This seamless integration does not feel like a promotion. It feels like a helpful nudge, exactly when the consumer decides.

A small ghee brand from South India did just this. Collaborating with a local chef known for her traditional sweet recipes, they ran a campaign featuring besan laddoos made using their ghee. Thanks to the visibility and relatability of the content, sales jumped by 30% in just 10 days.

This model works particularly well for regional or lesser-known brands that might get lost in the noise elsewhere. For example, a brand selling cold-pressed coconut oil in Kerala worked with a Malayali food blogger to showcase its use in cooking and haircare, doubling engagement within two weeks.

WhatsApp grocery: India's hyper-local engine



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While large e-commerce platforms expand their reach, India's local Kirana stores have quietly built their digital networks through WhatsApp. Yes, the same app used for family chats and school groups is now a full-fledged grocery delivery tool in many cities and small towns.

Here's how it works: Kirana shopkeepers broadcast messages with daily product lists, festival combo packs, and order reminders. Customers respond through chat or voice notes, and deliveries typically take place within a few hours. There are no apps, no friction, just familiarity.

What is interesting is how brands are now starting to integrate themselves into this ecosystem. Instead of trying to outmarket the Kiranas, they are supporting them.

Saffola, for example, has experimented with WhatsApp chatbots to share quick recipes and special offers that Kirana store owners can forward to their customer lists.

In another example, a regional masala brand in Maharashtra launched a festive campaign where store owners received customised WhatsApp creatives with product combos and local language messaging. Orders from those areas went up by 25% during Diwali week alone. This form of distribution might not make headlines, but it is remarkably effective, especially for repeat purchases and seasonal spikes.

What's driving all this? Understanding the Indian buyer

The Indian food shopper is digitally savvy but emotionally rooted. They want convenience, but they also want familiarity, trust, and context. This is why big-banner ads on social media alone don't work. Timing, format, and the relevance of the message are crucial factors.

A family ordering organic baby food may look for certification and ingredient details right on the app screen.

Someone ordering snacks for guests on short notice might go by visibility and reviews. A Kirana loyalist might wait for a personalised voice note recommending a new cooking oil.

Understanding the customer at a micro-level and catering to their current needs through quick commerce apps, recipe videos, or WhatsApp chats is the key to success.

Conclusion

India's food e-commerce space is anything but one-dimensional. It is a mixed economy of flashy platforms, quiet neighbourhood stores, large digital spending, and informal communication. And that is exactly why it works.

Brands that want to grow here need to stop choosing between scale and intimacy and embrace both.

Whether bidding for visibility during snack hours, working with local chefs for in-app videos, or empowering Kiranas through WhatsApp, the brands making the biggest impact are those that combine data with empathy. What is the key to successfully entering this market? Show up smartly, speak clearly, and don't forget the human touch.

(Our guest author, Chandan Bagwe, is the Founder and MD of C Com Digital, a digital-first marketing agency that specialises in delivering innovative solutions in the digital landscape.)

Zepto Blinkit Swiggy Instamart

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Lions 2025: The joy remains in watching the creative industry win as a whole

Cannes 2025 was proof: creativity thrives when it's brave, intentional, and human—whether from legacy labs or fearless indies rewriting the rules.

 **Shalini Avadhani and Gaurav Kumar**
24 Jun 2025 05:00 IST

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 **Shalini Avadhani and Gaurav Kumar**
Lead Creative Strategists, Creative Labs

Guest Column



This year's Cannes Lions held personal significance for me. Winning the first-ever Silver Lion for Godrej Creative Lab made the experience richer, more emotional, and unforgettable.

Achieving a place among the world's best felt like a defining moment—not only for our team but also for what it signifies in building something bold, purposeful, and creatively forward within a large legacy company like Godrej Consumer Products.



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Creativity in Plain Sight: Cannes Lions 2025 and the comeback of simplicity

Cannes Lions 2025 shifted focus from tech-heavy ideas to celebrating simplicity, highlighting campaigns that solved problems with straightforward, impactful creativity.

Gaurav Dudeja
21 Jun 2025 12:29 IST

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FCB INTERFACE

Last year, Cannes Lions 2024 was a masterclass in how ideas can be powered with innovative use of technology. *Spotify Speedbeats*, *Orange Women's football*, *HDFC Vigil Aunty*, *Xbox Everyday Tactician* and so many more pieces of work gave us a full buffet of how new age tools of data, algorithms or Deep fake AI can power big ideas. Further – we also saw work where complex coming together of multiple platforms – gaming, creator/social content along with traditional channels was pivotal to the storytelling.

And while the infusion of technology and creativity is here to stay, Cannes Lions 2025 felt like a return to the fundamentals. Reaffirming our belief that Creativity is a true economic multiplier and the biggest force in building businesses.

The winning work this year wasn't just smart—it was startlingly simple. Ideas so pure, so effortless in their expression, that you found yourself asking: how was this not done before? The best campaigns didn't try too hard. They just solved business and human problems in brutally honest ways.

4X4's 'Three Words', IKEA's 'Up?' Burger King's 'Burger to King' demonstrated that deep

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Is LinkedIn emerging as a real challenger to PR agencies? Think again

LinkedIn is reshaping PR, empowering leaders to communicate directly while enhancing their presence. PR agencies must adapt, blending traditional methods with real-time engagement.

Shalu Jha
19 Jun 2025 05:10 IST

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When Tinder's global chief executive posted his resignation on LinkedIn, the post reached the world quicker than any traditional press release could. In a matter of hours, the news was picked up by major media houses, not due to a carefully crafted media push but because it was posted directly by the source, in real time, on a platform where his audience was already present, not just to receive but also to respond to this news.

This transformation isn't a trend; it's a sign of changing times. What was once merely a professional networking site is now a real-time newsfeed, a leadership blog and a reputation engine all in one. And for PR folks such as myself, it poses an essential question: Is LinkedIn replacing us?

The short answer is no. But it is transforming us, and that's a positive change.

From gatekeepers to guides

For decades, public relations worked on a gatekeeper model. PR teams wrote and crafted press releases, pitched them to a select group of journalists, and controlled the message

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Generative AI & Dynamic Creative Optimisation, and the art of self-learning ad ecosystems

The guest author delves into the rise of campaigns which learn and adapt in real time.

Gandharv Sachdeva
13 Jun 2025 05:11 IST

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The advertising industry is rapidly moving towards a future where campaigns don't just get delivered; they learn, adapt, and improve in real time with human intelligence and guidance. The main drivers behind this change are Generative AI and Dynamic Creative Optimisation (DCO).

As a result, brands can now connect with consumers in new ways, forming what is now known as a self-learning ad ecosystem.

However, it hasn't been an easy journey to get here. Creating effective ads today is more complex than ever. Creating concepts and assets can be time-consuming and strain busy marketing teams. Personalizing campaigns for multiple audience segments and platforms is challenging because each one has its own set of technical and creative needs.

It is also becoming increasingly difficult to maintain a brand's look and feel consistency across various creative versions. With audiences exposed to hundreds of ads daily, avoiding fatigue and maintaining engagement demands constant innovation.

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How image search is transforming omnichannel shopping

Image searching is transforming how people shop—brands must now optimise visuals, pricing, and listings to stay visible in this new visual-first retail landscape.

Saurabh Agrawal
29 May 2025 05:10 IST

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Guest Column



Often, when I visit a store, I find a product I like—maybe a pair of sneakers, a stylish jacket, or a trendy bag.

But before making a purchase, I want to be sure I'm getting the best deal. So, I take out my phone, open Google Lens, and scan the item. Within seconds, the exact product appears online, along with its price across different websites.

Sometimes, it even shows me similar products from other brands, giving me more choices in terms of price, style, and availability.



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