

A Global Public Health Threat for Food Policy Executive Summary

The marketing of unhealthy food and beverages is a complex political, social, historical, cultural and economic process that also represents a key driver of unhealthy environments. When the food marketers abuse their tremendous power to promote unhealthy products to vulnerable audiences, these business practices can lead to unethical behavior.

Chief among the offenders are the ultra-processed food and beverage product (UPP) marketers. They saturate the marketplace with junk products through tactics that are aggressive, insidious and everywhere. Their strategies go beyond the advertisements that are viewed online or on television. Consumers are ambushed with food marketing through the sponsorship of their favorite sports teams, the hidden product placements in their children's educational shows and the free products that they receive at events. What is often viewed as innocent commercialism is actually corporate deception that promotes unhealthy diets and leads to negative consequences for human and planetary health.

The dangers are even more apparent when UPPs target children and adolescents who lack the developmental maturity to distinguish advertisements from entertaining or educational content. By focusing its marketing practices on the youth, the UPP industry is shaping social norms, displacing cultural diets, creating life-long eating preferences for its products, and damaging the health of children around the world.

The UPP industry is notorious for failing to take responsibility for its participation in creating an unhealthier planet. The industry instead places blame solely on the individual or the guardian of the child. UPP corporations exploit consumers through deception and undue influence, and also gain privileged spaces in policymaking tables. **This report shows how UPP marketing threatens public health by decreasing state action to regulate food environments:**

Reason #1 - It generates a harmful domino effect by creating unhealthy food environments, burdening countries with sicker populations, and other negative results.

Reason #2 - It extends beyond advertising, promotion and sponsorship to include corporate washing that allows the industry to establish itself at the policymaking table while influencing vulnerable populations.

Reason #3 - It's aggressive, insidious and everywhere: it enables the industry to influence what consumers eat, displacing traditional foods from different cultures.

Reason #4 - It puts children and adolescents at risk of becoming victims of commercial exploitation due to the corporate saturation of unhealthy products in the market.

This report aims to urgently expose the damage of the UPP industry's marketing strategies. This marketing promotes the consumption of UPPs. It also positions its brands to further an image of good corporate citizens to become a legitimate social actor. It also seeks to increase the public understanding of these strategies and the source of the problem. This report contains a summary qualitative analysis of more than 300 examples of corporate practices performed by the UPP industry obtained through public sources from more than 52 countries, highlighting the industry trends observed. Even though the analysis may not be exhaustive or comprehensive of all marketing strategies, it seeks to expose common industry trends through the samples selected worldwide, as these practices are mirrored in diverse countries and regions. All the information included in this report has been obtained through ongoing social listening, media monitoring, and direct observation from public sources.

The harmful and sophisticated marketing practices of the UPP industry require immediate and mandatory regulations. Governments around the world have failed to implement robust policies that provide reasonable protections to consumers. This report offers recommendations for governments and civil society organizations to help address this issue. Until adequate action is taken, the health and social effects of allowing the UPP industry to continue its risky marketing tactics can threaten global public health.