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PS 410

Globalization and Development

Professor Tan

How have Coca Cola products impacted Mexico and its society which includes government, religions and cultures in the 21st century?

The decision to write about Coca Cola products in Mexico came about from prior conversations with my family members who were born in Mexico. They stated that growing up Coca Cola products were essential to their lives, it needed to be at the dinner table at all times. These types of beliefs throughout the entire country of Mexico, have persisted which have now translated into the rise of diseases in Mexico. Through this research paper I am hoping to discover how Coca Cola became a staple and what the Mexican government has or has not attempted to do to address the many health issues that have arised due to Coca Cola. Additionally, I am hoping to see how Coca Cola has risen to make itself part of many religious practices.

When conducting my research it was very clear to see fairly quickly how Coca Cola is toxic for Mexico and its culture. Rosenberg in their article titled "How one of the most obese countries on earth took on the soda giants" writes "They don't worry about lost revenue or sales from a tax - it's the demonisation of their product. Soda is on the verge of becoming the liquid cigarette" (Rosenberg) And some of the things Coca Cola is attempting to do is denounce the negative effects that can arise if you keep consuming these products, they are doing this by sponsoring certain science conferences and or science officials. Sometimes their actions are even hidden under philanthropy attempts to local populations in Mexico.

How Coca Cola became prominent in Mexico

It is stated that Coca Cola got a lot of its popularity once Vicente Fox became president of Mexico, he served as president from 2000 to 2006. It is widely known that Fox began working for Coca Cola as a truck delivery worker during the 60's. But during the 70's he was actually able to become the chief executive of Coca Cola. During our course content, we have spoken about certain politicians acting in ways that benefit them and their social class. I believe that through a conscious or unconscious way Vicente Fox sought out to repay the company that gave support to him. In an article written by Business Insider, stated that during an interview he stated that during his presidential campaign, "My first donations that I got to start moving in politics came from people of Coca-Cola, from bottlers of Coca-Cola or the company itself" (Fox for Business Insider). These donations from Coca Cola then translated into favorable policies that would benefit them all from Vicente Fox. One clear example is during his presidency, Vicente Fox chose not to impose a "tax on sodas using sugar cane ingredients" (Gomez) When there was clear evidence stating that these sugary drinks were providing the Mexican population with various health conditions such as diabetes and obesity, Fox decided to ignore this.

Additionally, Coca Cola was one of the sponsors for the Mexico City Olympics which were hosted in 1968. Another sports event they sponsored was the World Cup around the 70's, through both of these examples we can see how the company emphasizes their brand throughout the world, making their company more prominent and known.

In their website under their Frequently Asked Questions section, the following question is asked "Why does Coca Cola sponsor the Olympic games?" to which they state "The Olympic Games are a truly global event, giving Coca-Cola a unique opportunity to refresh and celebrate with sports fans in the more than 200 countries where we do business" (Coca Cola Website)

They even go on to say that they have been the longest corporate supporter of the Olympics. I think it's clear to see through this that Coca Cola is strategically thinking, and knows that this is a way to get publicity worldwide, all while pushing their products. Demonstrating to us that Coca Cola has already globalized around the country which has now translated into various issues for various countries, however this goes ignored.

Coca Cola and Diseases in Mexico

Mexico's citizens have had a rise in various diseases throughout the country, such as diabetes, obesity, and heart disease, known as non communicable diseases. What is shocking however is the amount of deaths that have resulted because of these diseases. Below, I will insert a graph that Gomez included in their article, but the research was conducted by the World Health Organization and Global Health Observatory. It is clear to see through this graph that the amount of deaths due to these non communicable diseases has risen dramatically in the past 10 years.

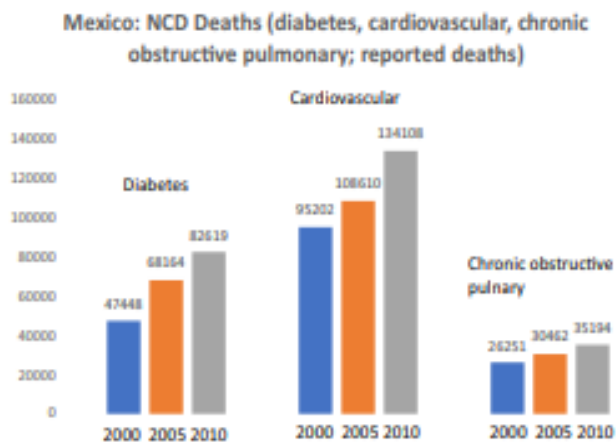


Figure 1 Mexico: NCD Deaths (diabetes, cardiovascular, chronic obstructive pulmonary; reported deaths). Source: WHO and Global Health Observatory (2019).

There is some health secretaries in Mexico that are striving to make a change by calling out these big corporations and the harm that they bring to the country of Mexico, throughout my research it was difficult to find these health professionals because as I will mention later in this

paper, a lot of researchers are biased due to sponsorships. However, Hugo Lopez Gatell, who serves as the Mexico Health Undersecretary states that Coca Cola among other sugary drinks have raised the number of deaths, specifically when it comes COVID. An article written by Agren wrote that Lopez-Gatell “claimed sugary drink consumption claimed 40,000 deaths annually in Mexico” (Agren) Consuming these sugary beverages leads to having non communicable diseases which then impacts the recovery process when you add COVID-19.

The current Secretary of Health for Mexico, Dr. Mercedes Juan Lopez, believes that imposing a tax would be unnecessary because they say that at the end of the day people will still continue drinking what might cause harm to them. This is something incredibly dangerous to say when you are the Secretary of Health representing Mexico. The article written by Rosenberg, mentioned earlier in this paper, speaks about how Juan Lopez was a part of La Fundación Mexicana para la Salud, also known as FUNSALUD, before she fulfilled this role in government. When looking at their website they have a “About Us” tab where they state the following “FUNSALUD, is made up of a hundred companies and businessmen committed to public health, has distinguished itself by identifying and characterizing health problems in Mexico, while generating solution models through public policy proposals, conducting analysis and evaluation of issues. relevant and priority health issues, as well as promoting scientific research and the training of high-level human resources.” (FUNSALUD Website) Why are we allowing big name businesses and companies to become part of scientific research and initiatives? Have we failed to realize that they are in part large contributors to the factor? Rosenberg goes on to write “has been a longtime critic of attempts to limit Mexican’s soda consumption and a longtime friend of soda and processed food industries” when writing about FUNSALUD. Not surprisingly, they also are against imposing a sugar tax.

Coca Cola influence on Political Environment

It is fair to assume that government leaders will do everything in their power to serve their constituents. However this is far from what has and is happening in Mexico. Like stated earlier in this paper, Vicente Fox served and it was clear to see that he had an intent to serve those who sponsored his campaign and paved the way for him to become the president, Coca Cola. He did this through favorable policies for the company.

Like mentioned in the previous page, he opposed imposing a tax on sugary drinks although the company he was once president for was causing various diseases for the citizens he was now serving under the Mexico presidency. Gomez states ``The president's ability to appoint and dismiss federal agency directors has also sustained the president's influence over policy agenda setting'' (Gomez 522) This shows us that the President always holds the upper hand as they have the veto authority and also oversee their political parties. This in simpler terms determines what sort of policy is being passed and who is appointed into their cabinet.

For example, Secretaria de Salud (Secretariat of Health) is a government office who has failed time and time again to pass various different proposals attempting to limit the rise of diseases. The reason it hasn't been successful is due to opposition and or simply the ignorance occurring. One of the attempts they have made is to impose "marketing regulations, a soda tax in 2008 and 2012, along with improved nutritional food diagrams" (Gomez 523) However, like other proposals it has failed to get passed.

This is also not simply to blame the Presidency, although it has a lot to do with it, it also has to do with Coca Cola itself. They have made themselves be included in various different science conferences and have even sponsored some. Oftentimes various companies who add onto the health concerns such as Coca Cola attend various congress meetings in Mexico having to do

with healthcare specifically. What is the need to show up to these meetings if not to influence them with their own corporate concerns.

Like stated earlier Coca Cola has managed to sponsor various conferences that they know might cause harm to their precious industry. Although, some of the following examples do not apply to Mexico strictly, it does however show the impact that Coca Cola has on influencing health findings by funding health research. For example, according to Barlow, Serodio, Ruskin, et al, Coca Cola helped fund the Global Energy Balance Network (GEBN) whose goal was to advance the interests of the company, these “findings” would then be promoted to society and made into a norm. What exactly was included in these findings? There were emails found through US Right to Know that stated the mission Coca Cola had when funding GEBN. Barlow, Serodio, Ruskin, et al. stated, “The emails show how Coca Cola intended to use GEBN to: (1) reframe obesity as a matter of addressing ‘energy balance’; (2) portray the GEBN as an ‘honest broker’ in the obesity debate; (3) promote obesity reduction strategies that are commensurate with Coca Cola’s interests via an extensive advocacy campaign” (Barlow, Serodio, Ruskin, McKee, Stuckler, et al)

Another great example is how Coca Cola uses its relationships with certain health researchers and leaders to promote their agenda. There was an article written by Wood, Ruskin, and Sacks that analyzes email exchanges done between the years of 2012 and 2014 between the Coca Cola Company and some health researchers and leaders. For example, the authors write “Coke also used ICPAPH as a platform to promote Exercise is Medicine (EIM). As its name suggests, EIM advocates the idea that physical inactivity is central to many types of illness, including obesity and type-2 diabetes - a message that aligns with Coke’s overall scientific agenda” (Wood, Ruskin and Sacks) This highlights the fact that Coca Cola spread its agenda at

the International Congresses of Physical Activity and Public Health (ICPAPH) by creating Exercise is Medicine, but it's even more important to highlight that this wouldn't have been possible without the relationships to these prominent leaders and researchers. Coca Cola had a strong relationship with Michael Pratt, who is a “public health leader in the area of physical activity and health” (Wood, Ruskin and Sacks) And it is him who was overall prepared to go into the ICPAPH to deliver the message that state that physical activity above everything is the most important in order to prevent medical issues, such as diabetes and obesity.

Coca Cola in Religious Practices

Coca Cola is so prominent in Mexico that it has even been introduced into religious practices. It is used as part of a cleansing rituals in order to make those are feeling sick be cured, it is stated that they believe that the burps that come after drinking Coca Cola is believed to eliminate sins in order to purify their souls (Future Challenges) Coca Cola was not always used as part of the religious traditions, they used to use a traditional alcohol.

Not surprising, Coca Cola can be found in almost every store in Mexico and some even state that it is easier to find these products than other necessities. I was watching a YouTube video of a CBS Reporter in a town in Chiapas, Mexico. We were able to see how Coca Cola is literally in every corner whether it be murals, stores, or even the plant.

The residents of Chiapas, which is the same place where Coca Cola has replaced traditional alcohol in religious practices, consume Coca Cola at the highest rate, averaging 2.2 liters of Coca Cola per day, according to Mexico News Daily. They have the highest consumption, however they also do not have access to clean drinking water. The Coca Cola plant in Chiapas is allowed to occupy “more than 300,000 gallons of water a day” according to Pierce writing for Esquire. It could be simply the fact that there is a lack of clean water, and that is why

the consumption of this sugary drink persists in Chiapas. Future Challenges, states that “12 million people in Mexico have no access to piped water and 32 million have no access to proper sewage” (Future Challenges) therefore it comes at no surprise that Mexico is the largest consumer of Coca Cola, there is simply no other alternative.

But how did it manage to become like this? I know all companies act out on their personal interest, could it be stated that this was done with a special intent from the company? Did they pay extra attention to what certain demographics value in particular countries? Mexico and various of their citizens value religion, it is stated that only 8.1% percent “report not practicing any religion” (US Department of State) Which means that more than half practice a religion therefore Coca Cola has had to adapt to appealing to all these members. Is it that Coca Cola targeted these religions and their practices in order to be used? Or is it that Coca Cola and their plant took over the town and their water which left the citizens of Chiapas to have no other route to take but to introduce it into their religion?

When doing my research I found an important article written by Bekimbetova, Erkinov and Rakhimov titled “Culture and Its Influence on Consumer Behavior in the Context of Marketing”. In this article they speak about how corporations must appeal to the culture of individuals residing where they are selling their products. They write “Culture as one of the strongest factors of external influence on consumer behavior affects the decision to buy and how the consumer will use this or that product. Manufactures need to manufacture and sell their products in accordance with the cultural characteristics of consumers of a particular country” (Bekimbetova, Equinov and Rakhimov) This quote in itself explains how culture is prevalent in the informed decision consumers make, the statistics above demonstrate to us that religion is a big aspect in various parts of Mexico. But, what I found more important to highlight was how

they say manufacturers need to ensure that they are catering to these specific needs and traits, it goes to show that every marketing technique taken is done with the wide purpose of selling their products.

I then came across an article for the New York Times written by Lopez and Jacobs, in which they speak about how the marketing from Coca Cola was targeted at impacting religious practices. The authors write, “Local health advocates say aggressive marketing campaigns by Coke and Pepsi that started in the 1960’s helped embed sugary soft drinks into local religious practices, which blend catholicism with maya rituals” (Lopez and Jacobs)

Moving Forward

So, what can be done in the near future? I believe that the main priority should be to ensure there is access to clean water in all parts of Mexico. The Borgen Project writes “Water is fundamental to human survival, yet half of the population of Mexico lacks drinkable water.” (The Borgen Project) This has then led to citizens in Mexico having to rely on products such as Coca Cola to stay “hydrated”, having these at every corner makes it incredibly accessible as well. I think it’s also important to reconsider how Coca Cola plants are impacting the lack of water access even further. How do we limit the power that Coca Cola has on occupying water for the production of their products?

Secondly, we need to prohibit companies from providing support by any means to scientific conferences or scientific leaders. Wood, Ruskin and Sacks state that an approach similar to the one taken by World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) would be best. The FCTC “calls for a comprehensive ban on tobacco sponsorship of any form to any event, activity or individual” (Wood, Ruskin and Sacks) Taking

this similar approach would limit any preconceived agenda held by companies which will then create less biased approaches.

Thirdly, it calls on the Mexican government to begin imposing higher taxes on Coca Cola and other sugary drinks. A tax has proven to be effective in Mexico, for example in 2014-2015 when then President Enrique Pena Nieto imposed a tax of 10%, known as the sugar tax. A quote by Aceves, Ingram and Nieto states “Evaluation demonstrates that the policy is effective when looking at the national consumption of sugar sweetened beverages, from 2014 to 2015 there was over a 15% decrease in consumption” (Aceves, Ingram, Nieto, et al.)

Lastly, it calls on the “developed” countries of the world to pay attention to issues that are occurring outside of their countries. In order for us to be truly globalized it requires us to lend a hand. The reason that Coca Cola is incredibly accessible in today's day in age is because of the North American Free Trade Agreement. An article written by Jacobs and Richtel for the New York Times states “The phenomenon is not limited to Mexico. Research shows free trade is among the key factors that have accelerated the spread of low nutrient, highly processed foods from the West, “driving the obesity epidemic in China, India, and other developing countries worldwide”, according to the T.H. Chan School of Public Health at Harvard” (Jacobs and Richtel) What is causing more harm is the fact that organizations in the United States are also investing into companies that are already profitable, this is leading to causing more harm to Mexico's overall health. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is a nonprofit that is “fighting poverty, disease, and inequity around the world” (Gates Foundation Website) However, it is this same foundation that has donated money to Coca Cola. Jacobs and Richtel write that the foundation is “the biggest outside investor in Coca Cola Femsa, which is the largest Coke bottler outside the United States.”(Jacobs and Richtel) It seems hypocritical for a nonprofit that strives

to make the lives of world citizens better while their actions are contrary to that. However, there are politicians in the United States that are actively attempting to combat the problems occurring in other countries. For example, Mike Bloomberg, former mayor of New York, has a charitable foundation named Bloomberg Philanthropies. The Guardian writes “In 2012, Bloomberg Philanthropies began a \$10m, three year programme in Mexico to reduce soda consumption. For the first time, the financial power of Mexico’s soda industry faced a serious challenge” (Rosenberg) This money was given to a foundation called El Poder who works to “fight industry pressure and win pro consumer policies” (Rosenberg) The foundation El Poder used the money to provide advertisements, campaigns and to conduct research.

In conclusion, the Mexican government must pay attention to what is going on in their own country and care about it enough to make changes. Coca Cola is not simply a drink folks drink to enjoy, for a lot it has become their only way to hydrate themselves because it's what is readily available. Coca Cola being readily available has also impacted religion, everyday life, well being and scientific research. It is time for not only the Mexican government to pay attention but also other countries.

Annotated Bibliography

2020 report on International Religious Freedom - United States ... U.S. Department of State.

(2021, May 12). Retrieved December 4, 2022, from

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/>

This helped me gather an understanding of the % of people that practice religion in Mexico. I then used to explain how marketing tactics from Coca Cola target this aspect in order to grow sales and or in order to make its way into religious practices.

Acerca de Nosotros. FUNSALUD. (2022, November 1). Retrieved December 4, 2022, from

<https://funsalud.org.mx/funsalud/>

The FUNSALUD website was helpful in my research because I was able to learn their mission statement which is to work on research regarding the health of Mexicans.

However, it was interesting to find out how they include businessmen in their board.

Aceves, B., Ingram, M., Nieto, C., de Zapien, J. G., & Rosales, C. (2020, April 1).

Non-communicable disease prevention in Mexico: Policies, programs and regulations. Health promotion international. Retrieved December 4, 2022, from

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7313413/>

This helped me see how a sugar tax was effective in limiting the sales of sugary drinks. I used it to justify why there must be a sugar tax to possibly fix the amount of deaths that come from consuming these objects.

Agren, D. (2020, August 24). *Soda or 'bottled poison'? Mexico finds a covid-19 villain in Sugary Drinks*. USA Today. Retrieved December 4, 2022, from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2020/08/23/coca-cola-bottled-poison-mexico-finds-covid-19-villain-soda/5607741002/>

I was able to learn about Lopez-Gatell who is the Mexico Health Undersecretary, they were incredibly outspoken on the problematic aspects of consuming these sugary beverages.

Alexander, L. (2020, July 8). *7 facts about access to clean water in Mexico*. The Borgen Project. Retrieved December 4, 2022, from <https://borgenproject.org/7-facts-clean-water-in-mexico/#:~:text=Water%20Scarcity%3A%20Over%2050%25%20of,are%20struggling%20with%20water%20scarcity>

This source was used to learn more about the lack of access to water throughout Mexico, about 50% lack the access.

Arzaba, A. (n.d.). *Coca-Cola: Globalization in the modern Mayan World*. FutureChallenges "Coca-Cola: Globalization in the Modern Mayan World. Retrieved December 4, 2022, from <https://blog.futurechallenges.org/local/coca-cola-globalization-inside-contemporary-mayan-world/>

This article touches on how small indigenous communities have been globalized as they are now using Coca Cola products in their mayan rituals taking place in churches.

Barlow, Pepita et al. “Science Organisations and Coca-Cola’s ‘war’ with the Public Health Community: Insights from an Internal Industry Document.” *Journal of epidemiology and community health* (1979) 72.9 (2018): 761–763. Web.

This article talks about corporations making their best efforts to support organizations that push their agenda on consumers having to focus on physical activity rather than their consumption of sugary drinks.

Bekimbetova, Erkinov, & Rakhimov. (n.d.). *Culture and Its Influence on Consumer Behavior in the Context of Marketing*. Retrieved December 4, 2022, from <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/culture-and-its-influence-on-consumer-behavior-in-the-context-of-marketing-in-case-of-coca-cola-company/viewer>

This article was important to learn about how corporations must use specific marketing techniques in order to appeal to certain cultures. It was an important article in order to justify how religion has been targeted in order to make more sales.

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (n.d.). Retrieved December 4, 2022, from <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/>

The Gates foundation was used to learn their mission statement which I use to discuss how it is a twisted one due to them making donations to corporations such as Coca Cola through their trust fund.

Coca-Cola and the Olympic Games - mb.cision.com. Coca Cola Company. (n.d.). Retrieved December 4, 2022, from <https://mb.cision.com/Public/MigratedWpy/86051/733602/b2f6eeb214290b6d.pdf>

Overall this website was used to demonstrate how Coca Cola has made themselves a well known name across the world due to them sponsoring different sporting events.

Gómez, Eduardo J. “Coca-Cola’s Political and Policy Influence in Mexico: Understanding the Role of Institutions, Interests and Divided Society.” *Health policy and planning* 34.7 (2019): 520–528. Web.

This paper goes over Non Communicable Disease (NCD) policies that Mexico is trying to pursue, but more specifically how Coca Cola has been able to block these policy goals to fulfill their individual goals.

Jacobs, A., & Richtel, M. (2017, December 11). *A nasty, nafta-related surprise: Mexico's soaring obesity*. The New York Times. Retrieved December 4, 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/11/health/obesity-mexico-nafta.html>

This article touches back on marketing strategies used in order to appeal to religious practices in Mexico.

Lopez, O., & Jacobs, A. (2018, July 14). *In town with Little Water, Coca-Cola is everywhere. so is diabetes*. The New York Times. Retrieved December 4, 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/14/world/americas/mexico-coca-cola-diabetes.html>

This article talks about how NAFTA made sugary drinks far more accessible which may have accelerated NCD.

Pierce, C. P. (2021, November 2). *Coca-Cola's shenanigans in Mexico are another sign of the Coming Water Wars*. Esquire. Retrieved December 4, 2022, from <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/politics/a22172862/coca-cola-mexico-town-water/>

This article touches both on the lack of access to water and how the Coca Cola plant in Chiapas occupies 300,000 gallons of water every day.

Rosenberg, T. (2015, November 3). *How one of the most obese countries on earth took on the Soda Giants*. The Guardian. Retrieved December 4, 2022, from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/03/obese-soda-sugar-tax-mexico>

I found this article to be useful because it speaks about various things regarding Coca Cola. This source however was specifically useful when speaking about the soda tax and how it is viewed by different leaders and what actions they have taken to influence policy.

Staff, M. N. D. (2020, August 19). *With average consumption of 2.2 liters of Coke a day, Chiapas leads world*. Mexico News Daily. Retrieved December 5, 2022, from <https://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/with-average-daily-consumption-of-2-2-liters-of-coca-cola-chiapas-leads-the-world/>

This article was used to learn more about the health impacts that have risen due to Coca Cola. More importantly, they do a great job in coming up with possible solutions.

Why does Coca-Cola sponsor the Olympic Games?: FAQ: Coca-Cola Canada. Coca Cola Canada. (n.d.). Retrieved December 4, 2022, from <https://www.coca-cola.ca/faqs/coca-cola-faqs-community/why-does-coca-cola-sponsor-the-olympic-games#:~:text=The%20Olympic%20Games%20are%20a,than%20any%20other%20corporate%20supporter>

It was interesting to read Coca Cola's FAQ's because we were able to see their reasoning for sponsoring sporting events.

Wood, Benjamin, Gary Ruskin, and Gary Sacks. "How Coca-Cola Shaped the International Congress on Physical Activity and Public Health: An Analysis of Email Exchanges Between 2012 and 2014." *International journal of environmental research and public health* 17.23 (2020): 8996-. Web.

The article states that there is a clear "conflict of interest" when it comes to corporations and public health, that is essentially why corporations go out of their way to fund science organizations.

YouTube. (2021). *Locals in rural Mexican town fault Coca-Cola for depleting water resources*. *YouTube*. Retrieved December 5, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPzie3gsdUA>.

This video from CBS was useful to see Chiapas and how prominent Coca Cola is throughout the state. More importantly it includes important citizens' stories.