

FACTSHEET

Big Soda Is a Big Sports Sponsor

The largest global manufacturers of soda are The Coca-Cola Company, PepsiCo, Inc. and Keurig Dr Pepper, Inc.—collectively known as Big Soda. Big Soda uses sport sponsorship to promote their brands and products to billions of fans around the world.¹ This includes sponsoring the most elite sporting events, leagues and teams and counting on some of sport's leading stars as brand ambassadors.

Big Soda wants its unhealthy drinks to be connected to positive feelings about sport and its stars, including excitement or perceptions of sport as a healthy social good.¹⁻⁴ This enhanced messaging can generate brand awareness and preference. Sport sponsorship is also an indirect way to reach children and teens, who may be especially susceptible to sport marketing.² Here are some key facts to keep in mind:

How Does Big Soda Sponsor Sport?

- Food and beverage brands were the second largest category of brands endorsed by 100 different athletes (24%), according to a 2013 study. Soft drinks were the second most athlete-endorsed food and beverage product after sports drinks. Almost all (93%) of advertised beverages had 100% of calories from added sugar.⁵
- In 2023, Coca-Cola had the most sport sponsorships of any other brand, even surpassing sports brands like Nike.⁶ In 2022, Coca-Cola had 233 active sponsorship agreements worldwide across 21 sports.⁷ Its largest active deal was with the International Olympic Committee. Pepsi had 109 active sponsorship agreements across 16 sports.⁷
- Coca-Cola has sponsored the Olympics since 1928 and the FIFA World Cup—the world's most watched sporting tournament—since 1978.⁸⁻¹⁰ Coca-Cola is also one of the International Cricket Council's longest-ever single brand partners.¹¹ In 2024, Coca-Cola established a formal partnership with the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) for Copa América 2024, the world's oldest national team tournament.^{12,13}
- PepsiCo has sponsored the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Champions League since 2015 and sponsors UEFA Women's Football.⁵ PepsiCo

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also has a multiyear partnership with the EA Sports FC football video game franchise, which includes in-game integrations.⁶ PepsiCo took over sponsorship of the National Basketball Association in the U.S. from Coca-Cola and is a sponsor of Pakistan's cricket team.^{7,8} PepsiCo has featured Lionel Messi—widely regarded as one of the most famous and influential footballers in the world—in its global campaigns for over a decade. He has been the face of major marketing initiatives for Pepsi and Lay's, including the 2014 global campaign that featured his image on chip bags in over 60 countries and the 2024 “Oh-Lay's” campaign tied to football culture.¹⁴⁻¹⁷

- As the National Football League's (NFL) official soft drink, PepsiCo has partnered with the league for over 20 years and has secured deals with 15 NFL teams.^{18,19} Recent activations include promoting Pepsi Zero Sugar alongside D'Andre Swift being the first NFL player to wear the number 0, serving as the presenting sponsor for rookie NFL awards and airing a 2024 commercial casting major NFL players.^{18,19}
- Coca-Cola's partnership with FIFA spans youth, men's and women's tournaments, and since 1950, the company has employed stadium advertising at every FIFA World Cup.²⁰
- For nearly 20 years, Coca-Cola has been the only company to host a global activation tour of the FIFA World Cup Trophy, engaging with millions of fans worldwide.²⁰ Coca-Cola also works with The Panini Group to produce collectible stickers for FIFA tournaments—27 million fans signed up for the digital stickers for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.²⁰

Why Does Big Soda Sponsor Sports?

- U.S. viewers of the 2008 Olympic Games had higher brand awareness for companies that spent the most on sponsorship (e.g., Coca-Cola, McDonald's).²⁰ Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the Olympics was found to lead to greater preference for Coca-Cola over Pepsi during the tournament.²¹
- As a FIFA World Cup sponsor, Coca-Cola has purchased rights to use official FIFA World Cup branding, conduct brand exposure in and around stadiums, promote recognition for their sponsorship and use preferential advertising, among other branded activities. These benefits allow Coca-Cola and other

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sponsors unmatched access to millions of people in over 200 countries worldwide.²²

- During the 2014 World Cup, Coca-Cola's Facebook fan base grew by 2.5 million—more than any other sponsor.²³ The top three most-liked ads during the 2018 FIFA World Cup were from Big Soda companies/brands: Pepsi, Gatorade (a PepsiCo brand) and Coca-Cola.²⁴
- There is evidence demonstrating that after people were exposed to unhealthy food sponsor brands during sports events, they felt the image of the event and brand were more closely aligned.²⁵
- Parents have been found to perceive food products as healthier when they are endorsed by a professional athlete, making them more likely to purchase them.²⁶
- Children strongly recall sponsors of their youth and professional teams and report favorable attitudes toward food and beverage companies for the sponsorship of events.²⁷⁻³¹
- Children ages 10 to 11 were more likely than older children to say that they thought about sponsors when making food or beverage purchases and would return the favor of sponsorship with their purchase.²⁸

Why Should Coca-Cola and Other Big Soda Companies Be Kicked Out of Sports?

Big Soda's sugary drinks harm our health and planet. Partnerships between sports organizations and Big Soda, such as Coca-Cola's long-term partnership with the International Olympic Committee, enable Big Soda to "sportswash" their products' harms away.

1. Contributing to Negative Health Outcomes

Globally, rates of obesity and Type 2 diabetes are rising.^{32,33,34} Sweetened beverages like soda are one of the leading sources of free sugar in diets.^{32,35-39} Regular consumption of sweetened beverages is associated with increased risks for health problems throughout life, including overweight and obesity, Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.^{32,40-48} Here are some key facts:

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- Type 2 diabetes is one of the fastest-growing global health threats, with an estimated 537 million adults living with diabetes today and 246 million more adults projected to be living with diabetes by 2045.^{32,33} In 2020 alone, 2.2 million new cases of Type 2 diabetes worldwide were attributed to consumption of sugary beverages, with the highest proportion of attributable cases among young adults aged 20-30.⁴⁹ Since 1990, obesity has more than doubled among adults and has quadrupled among children and adolescents.³⁴
- For every 250 ml increase in daily sweetened beverage intake, risk of obesity increases 12%, risk of Type 2 diabetes increases 19%, risk of cardiovascular disease increases 13%, and risk of all-cause mortality increases 5%.^{32,40,50}
- For most children and adolescents, one 355 ml soda will put them over the daily recommended calories from free sugars.³² In countries without taxes on sweetened beverages, a typical 500 ml soda contains 53 grams (13 teaspoons) of free sugar. Drinking just one of these beverages puts most adults and children over the daily recommended limit.³²
- A global study of adults in 75 countries found that a 1% increase in soda consumption was associated with about 5% more adults with overweight, 2% more adults with obesity and 0.3% more adults with diabetes.⁵¹
- Increased consumption of sugary beverages is also associated with dental caries and tooth erosion.⁵²⁻⁵⁴ Those consuming sugary beverages daily or several times per week have nearly twice the risk of developing dental caries compared to those who never or rarely consume them.⁵⁴

2. Targeting Children and Teens

Despite Big Soda's voluntary pledges to not market to children, its actions tell a different story.^{55,56} Big Soda sponsors elite sports that children watch, as well as youth sport teams, leagues and tournaments.^{27,56,57} Big Soda companies run sports-related campaigns geared toward young people and use fitness and sports development programs to reach youth. These practices serve as a "corporate social responsibility" cover and redirect blame for rising obesity rates toward individual-level lack of physical activity rather than sweetened beverages.⁵⁸ Here are some key facts:

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- Coca-Cola's marketing has used equity brand characters like polar bears and other characters that are attractive to children—including in sports-related promotion—as well as athlete sports endorsements, a common tactic used by Big Soda companies.^{5,56}
- PepsiCo's Mountain Dew brand was #1 in sweetened beverage ads viewed by U.S. teens in 2018. Black teens saw nearly three times as many brand ads as white teens.⁵⁹ Mountain Dew used campaigns linked to sports like skateboarding and snowboarding and featuring professional athletes—especially NBA basketball players—endorsing Mountain Dew.⁵⁹
- During the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, Coca-Cola ran an [ad campaign](#) to convince teens and moms that its sweetened beverages were healthy. The company used influencers, including Olympic athletes, to reach teens. The campaign reportedly reached 21 million teenagers and accurately targeted 88% of them.⁶⁰⁻⁶²
- In 2015, children in the U.S. watched telecasts associated with 10 sports organizations more than 412 million times.²⁷ Four in 10 nonalcoholic beverages shown via sponsorship messages were full-calorie, regular sodas, while two in 10 were diet sodas.²⁷
- A study in Australia found that nine in 10 companies sponsoring junior sports development promoted unhealthy food, including Keurig Dr Pepper, Inc.'s soda brand Schweppes.^{57,63} In India, Coca-Cola runs an under-16 cricket program for cricket players ages 12-16 and sponsors a tournament called the Coca-Cola U-16 Cricket Cup.⁵⁵

3. Polluting the Environment with Plastic

Big Soda uses an enormous amount of plastic to bottle its beverages. The manufacturing, transportation and disposal of plastic bottles generates a large carbon footprint; billions of bottles that are not recycled end up in incinerators, landfills or polluting our environment and waterways.⁶⁴ Here are some key facts:

- According to an analysis of global plastic pollution, Coca-Cola is the leading plastic polluter followed by PepsiCo, Nestlé, Danone and Altria.^{65,66}

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- Approximately 21-34 billion plastic bottles from nonalcoholic drinks are polluting the ocean every year. The bottles are primarily from carbonated soft drinks and water.⁶⁷
- Despite commitments to increase the volume of beverages sold in reusable packaging, both Coca-Cola and PepsiCo increased their use of plastic packaging in 2022.^{68,69} Coca-Cola increased its plastic packaging by more than 6% or 206,000 metric tons to 3.43 million metric tons of annual plastic packaging and PepsiCo increased its plastic packaging by 4% or 100,000 metric tons to 2.6 million metric tons.^{68,69}
- If Coca-Cola meets its reusable commitment, by 2030 it could eliminate the cumulative equivalent of more than 100 billion 500 ml single-use plastic bottles and prevent up to 14.7 billion plastic bottles from entering our waterways and seas.⁷⁰ However, as of December 2024, Coca-Cola's revised 2030 environmental goals no longer include reaching the target of 25% reusable beverage packaging, highlighting the lack of accountability and enforcement for voluntary environmental goals.⁷¹⁻⁷³

4. Using Water in Water-Scarce Areas

The manufacturing of soda requires a large amount of water. There are several examples of places where Big Soda has exploited water resources from water-scarce communities to produce its beverages.^{32,74,75} The large amount of groundwater used by bottling plants competes with local household and agricultural use, and may lead to increased consumption of soda and poorer health in affected communities.^{76,77} Here are some key facts:

- A single 1-liter regular sweetened beverage requires an estimated 336-618 liters of water.^{* 78-80}
- In India, Coca-Cola and PepsiCo bottling plants have been temporarily disallowed from using water, been ordered to close plants, and have been accused of being liable for nearly US\$50 million in damages resulting from extractive water practices.^{76,81-83} A village in the desert state of Rajasthan saw local water levels drop by almost 10 meters over the five years after Coca-Cola's plant became operational.⁸⁴

* Varies depending on sugar source and inclusion of ingredients such as caffeine or vanilla extract.

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- Coca-Cola has a highly advantageous deal with the Mexican government to pay very little for large amounts of water—up to 300,000 gallons—that it uses daily from a water-scarce town in the Chiapas region.⁷⁵ Many residents report that it is now easier to purchase Coca-Cola than it is to purchase water, leading to skyrocketing rates of diabetes and heart disease. When a drought hit northern Mexico and people lacked water for basic needs, Coca-Cola continued to pull billions of liters of water from public reservoirs and sell its bottled water to residents.⁸⁵

5. Lobbying to Protect Profit over Health

Big Soda spends billions to undermine public health policy and protect profit. This includes lobbying, campaign contributions, charitable giving, and the funding of research that furthers its claims.⁸⁶ Here are some key facts:

- Big Soda spent at least US\$106 million to defeat public health initiatives at the local, state and national level in the United States between 2009 and 2015.⁸⁷ Coca-Cola led the American Beverage Association and other companies in federal lobbying expenditures.⁸⁷
- Coca-Cola spent more than US\$5.6 million on lobbying in the United States in 2021, including on bills like “Break Free From Plastic Pollution” and “The SWEET Act” (to tax sweetened beverages), among others.⁸⁸ Coca-Cola has also lobbied against plastic regulations in the European Union, including proposed deposit return schemes that have been shown to increase consumer recycling.^{89,90}
- Big Soda’s heavy lobbying against sweetened beverage taxes has also been recorded in Mexico, Chile and Colombia, among other countries and jurisdictions.⁹¹

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