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*Research Article*

# Food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing and sponsorship at secondary schools in the City of Cape Town, South Africa

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## Highlights/Key Messages

- Food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing is prevalent in Cape Town secondary schools.
- Coca-Cola Company dominates marketing activities in the research setting.
- Legislation is urgently needed to protect children from harmful marketing.

## Background
Multinational food and beverage corporations, collectively termed 'Big Food,' contribute substantially to the global obesity crisis through deliberate product formulation, distribution, sales and marketing. Although food marketing in schools is recognized as a contributor to unhealthy dietary behaviors, evidence on its extent in South African secondary schools is limited.

## Objective
To identify food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing and sponsorship at secondary schools in the City of Cape Town.

## Methods
An observational, cross-sectional study was conducted in 37 purposively selected public secondary schools from the two largest educational districts in Cape Town. Fieldworkers captured observations of food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing material (names/logos/brands) visible from outside the school premises and within public view. A web-based search was also done to identify marketing and sponsorship activities on schools' website pages and Twitter/X accounts. Prominently observed food and non-alcoholic beverage companies were invited to complete an online survey.

## Results
A total of 137 sightings of visible marketing and sponsorship materials from 35 food and non-alcoholic beverage companies were recorded in and around school premises, on school websites and Twitter/X accounts. One hundred sightings were recorded in and around school premises at 89.2% of the schools, with materials mostly displayed on signboards (40%), retail stores (33%), banners (7%), and flags (5%). The predominant company observed was The Coca-Cola Company, contributing 31.4% of the total sightings. Second was the Spar Group (12.4%). The most observed product was sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), contributing 29.2% of the total sightings. No online questionnaires were completed by the seven most prominent companies sighted and approached, regardless of repeated reminders.

## Conclusions
Food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing and sponsorship were widespread across secondary schools, with SSBs being the most prominent single category, followed by companies and supermarkets that manufacture or sell a combination of ultra-processed food and SSBs. These findings support the need for stronger regulatory measures to protect children and adolescents from unhealthy food marketing within school environments.

**Keywords:** food, non-alcoholic beverages, marketing, sponsorship, schools.

## Introduction

"*Millions of children and adolescents are growing up in environments where sugary drinks, salty and sweet snacks and fast foods, including ultra-processed foods and beverages, are highly accessible and aggressively marketed. These unhealthy food environments are driving nutrient-poor, unhealthy diets and a surge in overweight and obesity among children and adolescents, even in countries still grappling with child undernutrition.*" (UNICEF 2025a).

Globally, obesity in adolescents now surpasses undernutrition as the main form of malnutrition (UNICEF 2025a). This mirrors the profile of young children and adolescents in South Africa (SA), where the double burden of malnutrition is persistent and unhealthy food environments detrimentally impact children's health (Kruger et al. 2022). Efforts to address undernutrition (stunting, underweight and micronutrient deficiencies) are well formulated in policies and regulations focused on infant and young child health and nutrition in SA (May et al. 2020). In contrast, far less attention has been afforded to interventions for reducing overweight and obesity in children and adolescents. Underweight in boys was recorded at 20.7% and in girls at 6.7%, both 13–18 years old. In contrast, 6.1% and 2.5% of boys were overweight and obese, and 15.8% and 11% of girls were overweight and obese. A review of the nutritional status and dietary intake of South African adolescents aged 15 years and older (Kruger et al. 2022) portrays the crisis of overweight faced in the country: 35.4% of boys and girls suffered from overweight and obesity combined (Kruger et al. 2022).

This profile is fuelled by the regular consumption of unhealthy fast foods in supersized portions, often eaten frequently during the week (Kruger et al. 2022), along with sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs), and energy dense tuck shop items (Kruger et al. 2020). In contrast, low fruit and vegetable intakes are reported, particularly in poorer households, partly due to widespread nutrition insecurity, resulting in compromised micronutrient status (Kruger et al. 2020). While adolescents from wealthier households reported somewhat higher fruit and vegetable intakes, they also consumed more energy-dense snacks and had a higher obesity prevalence (Kruger et al. 2020), underscoring the double burden of malnutrition across socioeconomic strata.

In Cape Town, one investigation of nutrition and physical activity behaviors in nine randomly selected public secondary schools (41.7% boys, 59.3% girls, n = 911) found that the combined prevalence of overweight and obesity was 16.2% and 9%, with significantly more girls than boys being overweight or obese (p=0.036) (Muller et al. 2017). In a study of 338 students aged 10–16 years from disadvantaged urban communities, 15.7% were overweight and 6.2% obese, again with significantly greater prevalence of overweight in girls (21.1%) compared to boys (8.4%) (p = 0.002) (Somers et al. 2006).

Multinational corporations in the food and beverage sector have substantial, concentrated power that dominates the global food system. Collectively termed 'Big Food,' these industries contribute substantially to the global obesity crisis through deliberate tactics in unhealthy product formulation, distribution, sales and marketing of ultra-processed foods (UPF) and SSB (Slater et al. 2024). SA, along with other low- and middle-income countries (LMIC's), is increasingly subject to the strategic actions of Big Food that capitalize on the lack of regulations and legislation that could restrict or prohibit the marketing of UPF and SSB (WHO 2023, Lewis et al. 2020). Some effort has been made to address labelling and advertising in SA through Regulation 146 (R146), which aims to protect consumers from misinformation, misrepresentation, mislabelling, and incomplete information (Department of Health 2010). An update to R146 and its amendments (R429) is currently in the draft Labelling and Advertising of Foodstuff Regulation 3337 (R3337), published for public comment in 2023 (Department of Health 2023) but not yet promulgated. This delay leaves vulnerable groups exposed to the ongoing and aggressive marketing strategies of UPF and SSB companies.

As the fast-paced food and nutrition transition continues, and with limited policy impact and slow legislative progress, SA remains a profitable market for Big Food (Lewis et al. 2020). UPF and SSB companies are investing in effective marketing of their products to children, strategically implemented through various selected channels and settings, including in school settings (UNICEF 2025b).

Children spend a significant portion of their critical development years in school settings (Velazquez et al., 2017). School-learners, especially adolescents, are at an age of development where they are afforded greater freedom and autonomy in certain aspects of their lives, ultimately resulting in the formation of lifestyle habits, including eating habits and preferences (Kruger et al. 2020). These habits track into adulthood if not countered by environments that are conducive towards healthy lifestyles (Tao et al. 2024). The school environment plays an integral role in what school learners are exposed to, including influences such as the marketing of UPF and SSBs, either directly and/or indirectly within the school premises or from the surrounding environment (Nortje et al. 2017).

In the absence of fully implemented regulations restricting food and beverage marketing to children, there is a critical need to document the extent and nature of marketing and sponsorship practices within South African schools to generate evidence that can inform policy implementation, monitoring, and enforcement. While a previous South African study documented that mostly unhealthy food is sold in schools or around schools (Nortje et al. 2017), there is limited evidence specifically on SSB marketing and sponsorship in secondary schools in Cape Town, the extent of visible branding within and adjacent to school premises, digital marketing and sponsorship on school websites and in social media targeting SA, and other types of engagement of food companies regarding schools. This research aimed to assess the state of food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing and sponsorship at secondary schools in the City of Cape Town, Western Cape Province, South Africa.

## Methods

### Design

The study utilized an observational descriptive cross-sectional design. South Africa, with a population of 63 million, is located at the southern tip of Africa. It is classified as a higher middle-income country, but this ranking is rather

misleading because, with a Gini coefficient of about 0.65, it has the highest income inequality in the world (Sulla et al. 2022). The City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality is South Africa's second-largest hub of economic activity and ranks as the nation's second most populous urban center.

Within the City of Cape Town boundaries, the Western Cape Education Department has eight school districts. From these districts, the two largest metro districts, the South and North districts, were purposefully selected for this study. These two districts have the bulk of schools (80:20 public to private) with high learner populations due to dense residential areas and expanding urban settlements, and serve diverse socioeconomic communities. The study universe consisted of 49 public secondary schools, both gender-segregated and coeducational. Twelve schools were excluded due to safety concerns (according to the South African Police Service at the time of data collection), resulting in a sample of 37 schools.

In addition, the food and non-alcoholic beverage companies identified during the observation of the secondary schools were sampled. Data collection took place between 27 February and 17 March 2023.

### Data collection instruments

A school premises observational sheet was used to collect data on the specific marketing material types, the environment in which they appeared, the relevant brand on the marketing material type, the specific product and a short description of the marketing material. An observational sheet for the school website and Twitter page (rebranded as "X" in 2023) included the name of any visible sponsorships and marketing material.

Marketing and sponsorship materials were defined as a range of promotional artefacts, such as advertisements, branded signage, and sponsored resources.

Food was classified as fresh or UPF. Fresh food is food in its natural or minimally processed state, consumed soon after production, and characterized by limited preservation, high nutritional quality, and short shelf life, including fruit, vegetables, eggs, meat and milk. UPFs are industrial formulations made largely from chemically altered food substances, combined with additives and preservatives to enhance sensory qualities and shelf life. Examples include snack products, refined baked goods, confectionery, breakfast cereals, instant noodles, processed meats and ready made meals.

Non-alcoholic beverages and SSBs are commercially produced drinks containing added sugars, including sodas, fruit drinks, energy and sports drinks, sweetened teas, and flavored waters.

An online survey sent to the most observed companies aimed to assess the form (type) and rationale of food and non-alcoholic beverage sponsorship to schools and sports. The questions contained in the online survey included the main products the company sells, whether the company sponsors any schools in the study setting, an if so, the reason for the sponsorships, the visual branding acknowledgement expected from the schools for sponsorship, whether adolescents (aged 14-18) were included in the company's primary target market, the possible benefit of such sponsorship to the company, the awareness and knowledge of any current regulations regarding marketing of their product/s to minors. The survey consisted of three multiple-choice questions, four yes/no questions, one closed-ended question and four open-ended questions. Most multiple-choice or yes/no questions were followed by a closed-ended or open-ended question to prompt for more information.

The data collection instruments were available in English only since the researchers did not engage directly with schools and the research project documentation was completed in English only. The economic and marketing environment in SA also conducts business and official communication in English.

### Data collection procedure

Final-year BSc Dietetics students acted as fieldworkers for the study. The eight fieldworkers were divided into two teams of four. Each team collected data at four schools per day by annotating food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing material (names/logos/brands) in and around school premises, visible from outside the school premises, and within public view. Two separate observers completed these observations independently for each school and recorded them on pre-developed observational sheets. Duplicate or multiple observations of the same company were counted once for each type of material cited (e.g., one company could be cited once on one or more signboards on the same school grounds, a second sighting could be of one or more flags, and altogether this would be counted as two sightings for that company). After completion, the two sheets were compared. Any disagreements were resolved by discussing annotated differences on the same day.

Upon return from data collection every day, each team conducted a web-based search to identify all visible food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing (names/logos/brands), type and location of any SSB marketing material, on all school website pages and school Twitter/X accounts as per the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) Compliance Framework for Researchers and Research Institutions (ASSAf 2025). The search included all posted images and food and non-alcoholic beverage sponsorship declarations of all types of sport and other school activities.

By the end of the school-environment observation data collection, the researchers contacted the marketing managers of the most observed food and non-alcoholic beverage companies. This was done via email, requesting participation in the study via an online survey, developed on a web-based, pre-approved Stellenbosch University tool, SUN-Survey. A digital link to the SUN-Survey, together with the consent form, was sent to the seven dominant companies. The invited companies were granted two weeks to respond. When they did not respond to the survey, two additional contact attempts were made.

A pilot study was conducted that ensured all fieldworkers and observational sheets were fit for data collection. The

fieldworkers attended a two-day training session which covered all aspects of the research process, and they were standardized to complete all tools before data collection commenced. The logistical and practical process for data collection, as well as the content validity of the data collection tools, were tested and updated accordingly.

A pilot test at a secondary school in the Cape Winelands School District was conducted outside the study setting, and the results were not included in the final study results or conclusions. The authors also asked two experts in Community Nutrition to evaluate the content of the observational sheets.

### Data curation and statistical analysis

Fieldworkers, in groups of two, manually entered responses from the observational sheets into Microsoft Excel (Version 2021) using a computer, laptop, or tablet. Data were entered into the Excel spreadsheet on the day it was collected. Control measures to ensure data integrity included setting up an automated backup system, storing the data in a restricted-access room, and password-protecting all electronic data. Schools remained anonymous by using assigned codes for each school. Data were arranged as nominal categorical data, summarized using frequency distributions and percentages, and displayed on bar graphs.

The online surveys did not request company names and included confidentiality assurances. The relevant school names where the prominent companies were sighted also remained confidential.

The protocol and all data collection instruments were approved by the Undergraduate Health Research Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University (Reference number U22/09/202).

## Results

Results are presented according to the location where food and non-alcoholic beverage company sightings were identified, namely within and around the school premises, on school websites, and on school Twitter/X accounts, as well as companies sighted and brands observed. Although surveys were distributed to the seven most prominent food and beverage companies associated with these sightings, no online questionnaires were completed, regardless of repeated reminders.

### School Environment Marketing

Of the 37 schools included in the study, 33 schools (89.2%) had visible marketing and sponsorship materials from 35 food and non-alcoholic beverage companies displayed in and around school premises. At these schools, 100 overall sightings of marketing and sponsorship materials were made, averaging 2.7 (SD 1.97) sightings per school.

Of these types of marketing materials, signboards were predominant, followed by promotional material displayed on retail stores, banners, and flags (Figure 1).

The predominant company observed across all sightings was The Coca-Cola Company, followed by supermarket groups Spar Group Ltd Southern Africa, Shoprite Holdings Ltd, and Woolworths (Figure 2).

Of all sightings, the dominant brand observed was Coca-Cola, followed by Spar and Powerade (Figure 3).

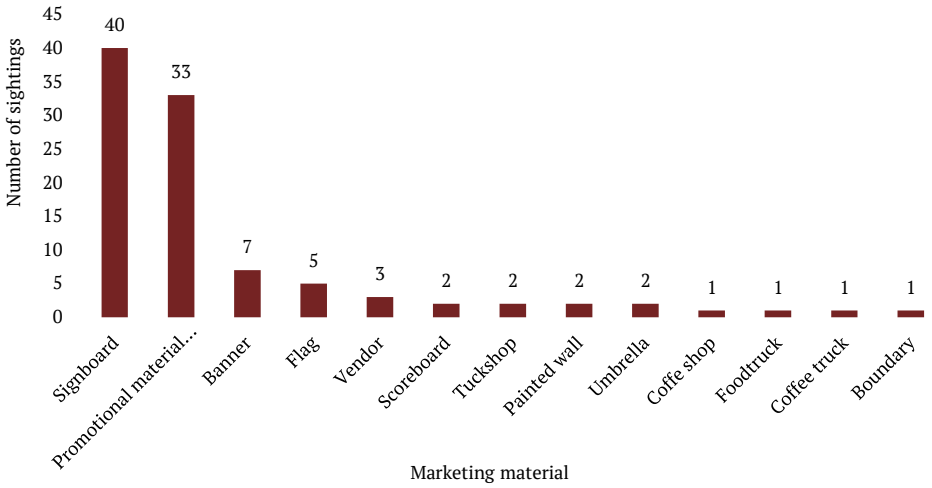



**Figure 1. Type of marketing materials of food and non-alcoholic beverage companies observed in and around school premises**

#Promotional material refers to advertisements displayed on retail stores; not attached to the school buildings, mostly directly opposite the school's main entrance or across the street from school premises.

*A tuck shop is a small cafe on school premises that sells snacks, sweets, and drinks. In South Africa, the term is widely used to describe a kiosk where learners can purchase food and refreshments during breaks.

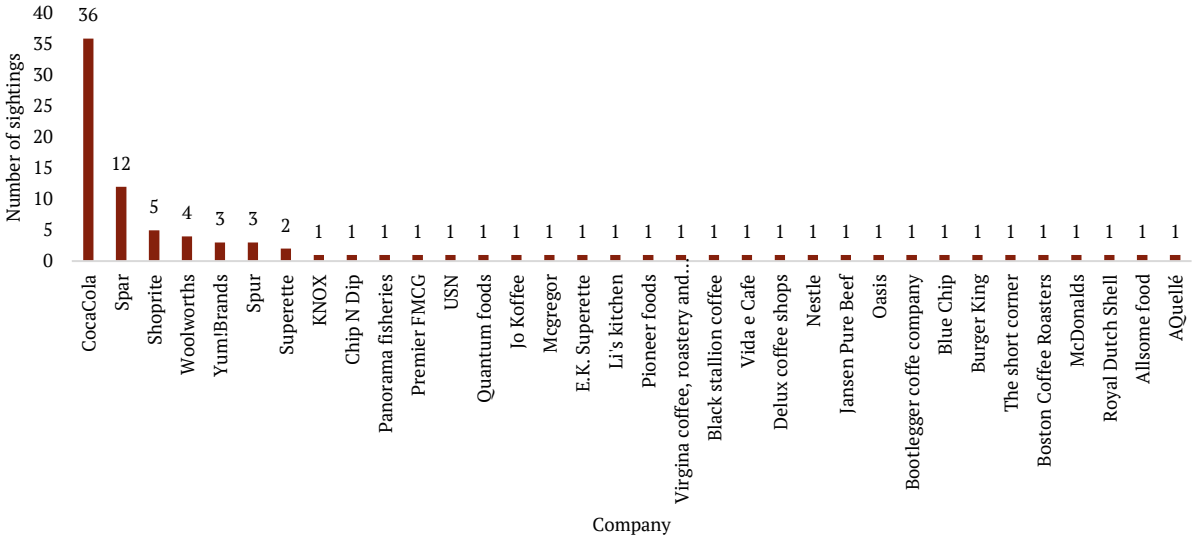



**Figure 2. Marketing and sponsorship from companies that manufacture or sell food and non-alcoholic beverages observed in and around school premises.**

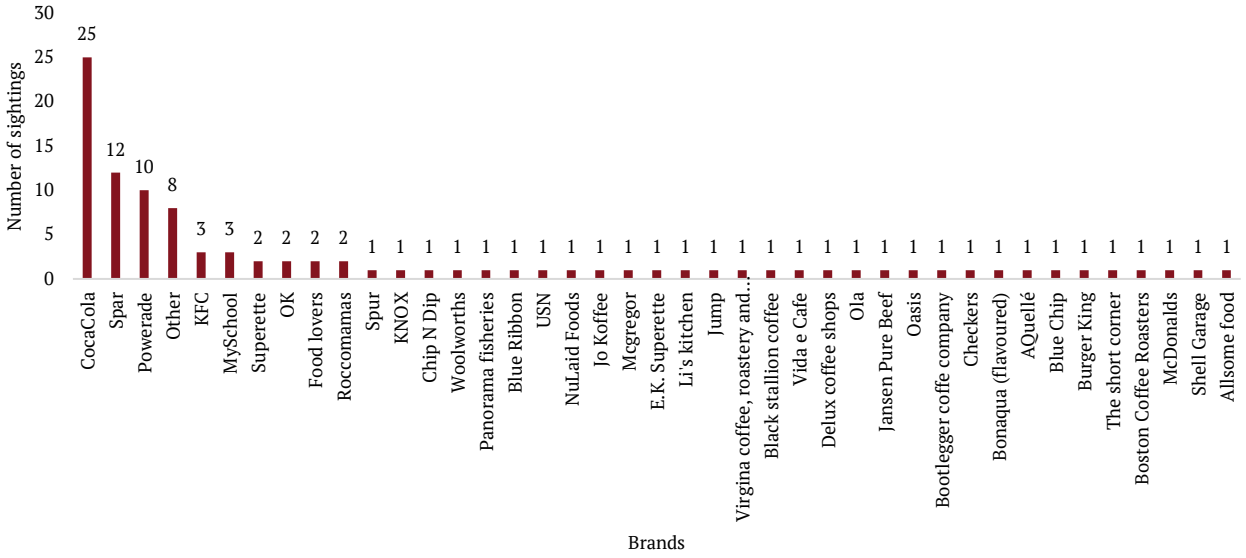



**Figure 3. Food and non-alcoholic beverage company brands sighted in and around school premises.**

Of all the products marketed/sponsored in and around school premises, the predominant product was SSBs followed by UPFs (Figure 4).

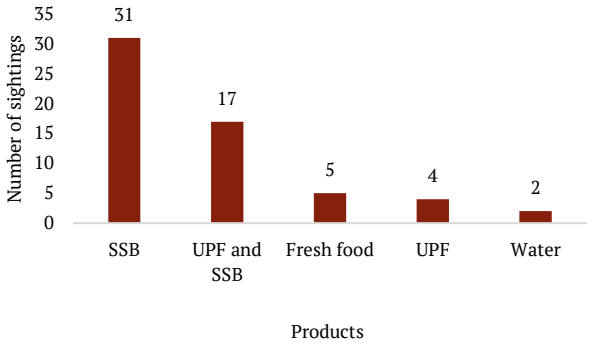



**Figure 4. Food and non-alcoholic beverages marketed/ sponsored in and around school premises.**

Retail stores that sold food and non-alcoholic beverages near school grounds included supermarkets, convenience stores, cafés, and spaza shops (informal retail stores typically operated from a home in South African townships) (Figure 5).

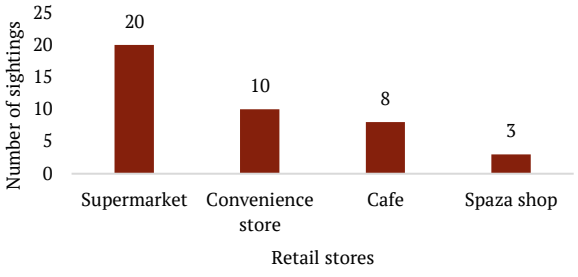



**Figure 5. Retail stores that sold food and non-alcoholic beverages near school premises.**

### School Website Marketing

Twenty-three schools had their own websites. Eleven of those had marketing material from various companies visible on their website. A total of 24 sightings of visible marketing were made on these websites, averaging 1.04 per school (SD 1.4). Sighting formats were classified as an image, video or a statement. The predominant form was statements followed by images. There were no promotional videos.

Following on, sightings were classified by where they appeared on the relevant school's website pages (Figure 6).

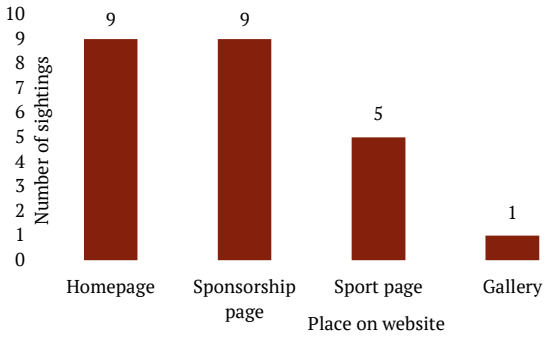



**Figure 6. Places where sightings of food and beverage brands and companies were found on the schools' websites.**

Of the 24 sightings, the predominant company observed was Coca-Cola followed by KFC and Spar (Figure 7).

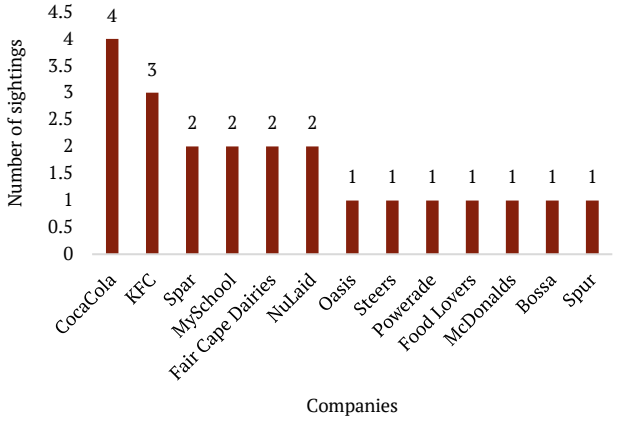



**Figure 7. Food and beverages companies visibly displayed on schools' websites**

### School Twitter/X Account Marketing

Thirteen schools had Twitter/X accounts. Only three of these schools had posted entries within the 365 days preceding data collection, yielding a total of 13 sightings of food and beverage companies. Posts were classified as direct (solely for the purpose of sponsorship) or indirect (sponsorship appeared in the post, but the sole reason for the post was not to promote the brand). There were 10 direct and three indirect posts (Figure 8).

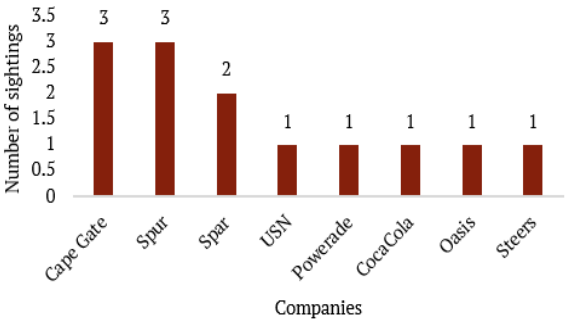



**Figure 8. Food and beverage companies visibly displayed on schools' Twitter/X accounts**

The predominant companies sighted mostly manufacture or sell UPF and SSBs.

### Company survey responses

The seven most prominent companies identified through the various observation sheets were The Coca-Cola Company, the Spar Group, Shoprite Holdings, Woolworths, Yum, Cape Gate, and the Spur Group. The marketing managers of all these companies were contacted via email and invited to participate by completing the online survey. All seven surveys were opened, but none were completed.

### Major findings and important trends

From the total observations of visible marketing and sponsorship (N=137), 100 on school grounds from outside or near school premises, 24 on school websites, and 13 in school Twitter/X accounts, key patterns emerged. SSB companies, particularly the Coca-Cola Company, dominated across multiple marketing platforms. Advertisements from supermarket groups also had a widespread presence across platforms, indirectly promoting unhealthy food environments.

## Discussion

Overall, the study found that food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing and sponsorship are prevalent in secondary schools in the City of Cape Town, South Africa. This corresponds with the conclusion of a scoping review by Farmer et al (2025) that food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing is ubiquitous in school environments. Furthermore, the predominant Big Food company observed in the present study was "The Coca-Cola Company," and the major brand in marketing and sponsorship activities was "Coca-Cola", with nearly 1/3 of the products being SSBs. Evidence shows that the capital investment made by such an economically influential company through targeted marketing of their products in schools, deliberately engaging highly impressionable children and adolescents with growing autonomy, builds brand loyalty (Masterson et al, 2020) and capitalize on their large and growing purchasing power (Lewis et al, 2020).

While assessing the impact of various food and beverage marketing strategies on the independent dietary choices of secondary school learners was beyond the scope of the

present study, the Farmer et al (2025) scoping review found that marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages increases adolescents' attention to these products and impacts dietary behaviours of school learners. When left unregulated, Big Food companies embed their presence within schools by sponsoring signage and banners in exchange for advertising visibility, strategically positioning promotional materials at tuck shop entrances, and aligning their brands with ostensibly health-oriented activities such as sports events (UNICEF 2025b; Kruger et al, 2020). Such practices, like observations in the present study, normalize the consumption of energy-dense, nutrient-poor products within educational settings, shaping dietary preferences and behaviors of children and adolescents during a critical developmental stage. By embedding marketing into spaces associated with learning and health, these corporations blur the boundaries between commercial interests and public well-being, thereby reinforcing unhealthy consumption patterns and exacerbating nutrition insecurity among young populations (Igumbor et al, 2012; Kruger et al. 2020).

The gravity of the situation is further emphasized by a 17-country study which found that South African children and adolescents consumed fast food more frequently than peers in high-income countries such as Japan and Belgium, situating SA among the highest global consumers of unhealthy convenience foods (Braithwaite et al. 2014). This occurs within the context of the persistent double burden of undernutrition and overweight in South African children and adolescents, including in the City of Cape Town, with obesity rates, particularly among girls, remaining high despite widespread food insecurity. Access to nutrient-dense foods should therefore be encouraged rather than merely energy-rich options (Draper et al 2019). The Integrated School Health Policy established a framework for promoting healthy food environments in South African schools (National Department of Health & Department of Basic Education, 2012), supported by guidelines that encourage tuck shops to provide more nutritious options. However, children's preference for unhealthy foods and the higher cost of healthier alternatives present significant barriers to implementing such initiatives (Nortje et al, 2017). This is further complicated by the expansion of the fast-food sector and rising SSB sales. Addressing these challenges requires attention to the broader food environment and the powerful influence of Big Food, including the aggressive market penetration of multinational corporations into LMICs and their targeted efforts to shape taste preferences early in life (Draper et al 2019). Specific actions stronger than guidelines are therefore required and could include, implementing and enforcing legislation banning unhealthy food marketing in schools; developing school policies that prohibit commercial sponsorship by companies marketing unhealthy products; banning vending machines that sell unhealthy food options, prohibiting unhealthy food sales in school tuck shops and areas around the school, and encouraging the selling of fruit and other healthy foods, establishing routine monitoring of school food environments; and evaluating the effectiveness of future regulatory interventions.

Although the WHO has adopted a Set of Recommendations on the Marketing of Foods and Non-alcoholic Beverages to children (WHO 2013), SA has not enacted any legislation in response to this Set of Recommendations (Lewis et al. 2020; Kruger et al, 2020). Recommendation 5 of the document specifically states, "*Settings where children gather should be free from all forms of marketing of foods high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt. Such settings include but are not limited to nurseries, schools, school grounds and preschool centers, playgrounds, family and child clinics, and pediatric services and during any sporting and cultural activities that are held on these premises*" (WHO 2013). Instead, SA has largely relied on industry self-regulation of food advertising to children, which has been criticized as insufficient and in need of stronger legislative intervention (Lewis et al. 2020). The findings of the present study add evidence supporting decisive action for strong regulatory measures in SA to protect children and adolescents from marketing and sponsorship materials for unhealthy food and non-alcoholic beverages, including in school settings.

In the present study, although all invited companies opened the survey, none completed it. This suggests a deliberate choice not to engage, rather than simple non-receipt or technical failure. However, the reasons for this non-response remain unclear. Possible explanations include competing organizational priorities, internal approval requirements, limited interest in participating, or reluctance to discuss school-based marketing practices. Consequently, these interpretations should be considered speculative. While the exact reasons remain speculative, the uniform non-response across all targeted companies indicates a shared hesitation or resistance. This finding highlights the opacity of corporate decision-making in school sponsorships and the methodological challenge of studying such practices when companies choose silence.

Overall, our observations underscore the structural role of corporate power in perpetuating obesogenic environments and highlight the urgent need for regulatory frameworks that safeguard children and adolescents from exploitative marketing practices by Big Food (UNICEF 2025a).

## Limitations

The observational study design limited the study's ability to access in-depth data on food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing and sponsorship in the secondary school environment. Not entering schools and observing school grounds from inside the school premises, nor interviewing the school personnel, further limited our study findings. Certain schools were in residential areas, which limited visibility along all parameters of the premises and could have limited the total number of sightings in and around schools. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design provides only a snapshot of marketing practices in selected schools during the study period, and findings may not be generalizable beyond the selected Cape Town districts or to private schools and other provinces in South Africa.

Twelve eligible schools were excluded because of safety concerns, which may have introduced selection bias by underrepresenting learners from high-risk, lower-income contexts.

Observations were limited to marketing visible from public spaces and therefore may have underestimated marketing occurring inside school buildings or classrooms.

According to the ASSAf POPIA Compliance Framework for Researchers and Research Institutions (ASSAf 2025), which aims to safeguard personal information when processed by a responsible party, certain social media platforms, namely Instagram and Facebook, are no longer viewed as public records and are therefore restricted for research access. This reduced the platforms for observation in the current study to Twitter/X accounts and schools' websites. Considering that the top social media platforms actively used in SA are Facebook and Instagram (https://data.stateglobe.com/blog/top-10-social-media-platforms-in-south-africa), our social media observations were thus limited.

The absence of survey responses from the invited companies prevented assessment of their motivations, sponsorship policies, and perspectives regarding school-based marketing. Personal contact with marketing managers of food and beverage companies may have yielded responses, but POPIA in SA prohibits sourcing personal information (e.g., mobile numbers) for individuals. The researchers therefore had to rely on information available in the public domain and could access only e-mail addresses supplied on company websites. Consequently, the study could not triangulate observational findings with industry-reported practices. Future research should aim to obtain some of this information from school-based sources rather than external sources.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This study provides empirical evidence that food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing is pervasive across both physical and digital environments in secondary schools in the City of Cape Town, reinforcing concerns about the commercial determinants of adolescent health.

The marketing strategies employed by Big Food companies raise concerns about the potential influence on dietary choices and health outcomes of adolescents, although the present study did not directly assess behavioral outcomes. Given the critical developmental stage of adolescence, when lifelong habits are formed, further research is essential to assess the impact of these marketing efforts on their eating behaviors and overall health. Such further research should include interviewing secondary school learners about dietary intake. It would also be important to assess the perspective of school principals, sports coaches, and tuck shop managers about food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing and sponsorship at secondary schools. These additional insights could inform policymakers and stakeholders of interventions aimed at protecting youth from potentially harmful marketing practices and elevating the school setting to promote healthier environments.

Big Food self-regulation, in light of this study's findings and the rise of the obesogenic environment, provides further evidence supporting stronger regulatory measures to protect children and adolescents in SA from the harmful effects of marketing and sponsorship of unhealthy food and non-alcoholic beverages. Specific actions could include implementing and enforcing legislation restricting unhealthy food marketing in and around schools; developing school policies that prohibit commercial sponsorship by companies marketing unhealthy products; establishing routine monitoring of school food environments; and evaluating the effectiveness of future regulatory interventions.

### Author Contributions

LdP and RB led the conceptualization of the research study and design. All authors contributed to study design and data collection tools. KL, MC, LC, TG, HG, HJ, BQ, and LV conducted the initial analysis and coding. KL wrote the first draft of the manuscript with routine critical reviews by LdP and RB. All authors then critically reviewed the following versions. All authors have read and approved the final version of the paper and its submission and have given consent for publication.

### Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in Scientific Writing

Nothing to disclose.

### Acknowledgements

None.

### Ethical Approval

The protocol and all data collection instruments were approved by the Undergraduate Research Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University (Reference number U22/09/202).

### Data Availability Statement

All datasets are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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