



CHAPTER - 9

ROLE OF MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS IN GLOBAL FOOD CHAINS, CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY AND REGULATION OF ULTRA-PROCESSED FOOD INDUSTRIES

Dr Avipal Singh

Catering Supervisor, NVS, under Ministry of Education, Govt of India.

avipalsingh2@outlook.com

Abstract

Corporate power and food governance is framed by the global power of dominant multinational corporations that control global food production networks, brand management systems, retail and distribution systems, marketing systems, food technologies, and agrochemical and machinery systems. This section explores multinational corporations in the global food supply chain and the corporate accountability and regulation of ultra-processed food industries. Rather than understanding food governance as determined either by agricultural production or consumer choice, one must also consider the political and economic power of firms in shaping food that is produced, how it is marketed, how risks are communicated to consumers, and how governments respond to public health and sustainability challenges. Ultra-processed foods provide an interesting test case because they are industrially formulated, heavily branded, easily transportable and subject to advanced marketing. The growth of these industries raises public health, child protection, diet-related disease, regulatory capture, accountability in the food supply chain, trade policy and the right to adequate food.

Descriptive-analytical and documentary methods were used for the paper, by synthesising academic literature, international policy instruments, business and human rights principles, reports on food governance, and public health literature. Though there was no a priori survey, we organised evidence by corporate concentration, global value chains, accountability gaps, marketing tactics, legal accountability and regulatory instruments. The evidence suggests that voluntary business conduct is unlikely to substitute for state governance action to counter powerful commercial drivers incentivizing industry to create and promote unhealthy food environments. Stronger governance is required to support transparent disclosure, due diligence obligations through value chains, limitations on harmful marketing, independent monitoring, effective conflict of interest protections, public procurement standards, and redress. The paper concludes by recommending a balance between legitimate business activity, public health, environmental sustainability and social justice in food governance.

Keywords: corporate power, food governance, global food chains, multinational corporations, corporate accountability, ultra-processed foods, legal liability, public health regulation, food marketing, responsible business conduct

1. Introduction

Food governance is the institutions, policies and laws, market structures and public action through which societies organise food production, distribution, consumption and accountability. Traditional food policy descriptions highlight agricultural production, food security, farmers, food goods and services, nutrition and trade flows. Today, in contrast, most food governance is in the hands of multinational corporations that govern the food supply chain, advertising and selling, food processing, science, public-private partnerships of scientific or research institutions, and policies, in ways that are mostly obscured with industry euphemisms. Therefore, the governance problem is not just the presence of business actors but their power differences. A small number of companies are able to set rules, prices and the environment for consumers, with corporate concentration in food systems seen as a key problem, because market power enables firms to govern food conditions beyond what competition alone permits (Clapp, 2021).

Most attention is on the three interrelated aspects of the same problem. First, the roles of multinational corporations in global food chains: they are not just processors and retailers but are involved in food procurement, processing, packaging, logistics, digital delivery, retailer contracts and non-price promotion, such as establishing standards and developing brand demand. The second is corporate accountability and liability. Today, food companies generally have complex webs of subsidiaries, franchise or distribution systems, and supplier relationships complicated by private standards or contractual arrangements that obscure accountability. The third dimension is regulating ultra-processed food industries. Ultra-processed food and drink products are the key target of public health criticism of industries because of their industrial formulation and production, mass-marketing, ease of use, and high-profit margins.

1.1 Corporate power as a food governance issue

Corporate power in food governance is also understood as agenda-setting power, knowledge power, infrastructural power and political power. Corporations can steer food systems by deciding which seed technologies to offer farmers, which products to make, what to supply to supermarkets, and how prominently to display food or advertise on online delivery platforms. This matters most where public authorities depend on private sector partners to transform food systems while also regulating them. The challenge is to separate legitimate business influence from corporate capture, when public regulation is so diluted or postponed that it serves mainly to meet business interests.

Global food value chains are a good example: value chain governance depends on who sets quality standards, introduces and controls information, absorbs risk, and captures a large share of the value. Coordination of suppliers and distributors by a lead firm gives corporations leverage in determining product specifications, applying price pressure, and controlling access to markets, even when they do not own a step. This allows large firms to offload a large part of the social and environmental risk of production down the chain to farmers, workers, distributors and consumers. Global value chain analysis shows how firms amass control over the chain through contracts, standards and network management, rather than ownership (Gereffi et al., 2005).

1.2 Multinational corporations and the transformation of food chains

Multinational food companies have expanded via mergers and acquisitions, brand buyouts and franchising, and through globalisation in the forms of supermarketization, platformization, and product standardisation. This transforms food provisioning from a local set of exchanges to a coordinated network of ingredients, additives, packaging, marketing material, and retail data from multinationals. A snack, drink or ready meal can contain agricultural raw materials from one region, other ingredients from another region, be manufactured in several other factories, be marketed by multi-national corporations and finally be sold to consumers by local shops or internet retailers. It is difficult for corporations to accept moral responsibility for public harm that may be produced through the combined effect of a series of many decisions.

Meanwhile corporate chains can provide scale, reliable supply, employment, technology, and lower unit costs. The task, therefore, is to not generalise from the wrong type of corporate activity. The issue of food governance is how to regulate corporate power, given the imperatives to expand and grow markets, such as through aggressive marketing, increased volume, low price per calorie, reformulation to improve palatability, and opposition to regulation. It also includes questions such as who benefits from the current relationship and who bears the burdens, and how to hold corporations accountable for hard-to-define, delayed harm.

1.3 Ultra-processed food industries as a regulatory problem

Ultra-processed foods are commonly defined as industrial formulations that are comprised mostly or entirely of food-derived substances, or food-like substances, that are prepared by processing, typically with the purpose of creating highly palatable foods, extending shelf life, and improving the texture and appearance of food products, and are generally safe and useful. This is especially problematic when the industrial formulation, strong branding and broad distribution of low-cost processed foods combine to create food environments in which individuals' diets move away from fresh, minimally processed and culturally relevant foods. NOVA has changed thinking about nutrition by linking food processing to diet quality and public health issues, such as industrially formulated food products (Monteiro et al., 2019).

This is because ultra-processed foods are subject to regulation not just under food law but in employment, taxation, trade agreements, school canteens, retail margins and consumer behaviour. Firms usually prefer reformulation, education and responsible marketing. Public health researchers and civil society activists argue that voluntary action is ineffective and untenable where the same companies benefit from increased sales of foods precipitating poor dietary health. This makes understanding UPFs useful in studying the interactions between commercial power, food governance and the regulation of legal liability for harm.

1.4 Current research problem

Despite a clear need and appetite for food systems to transition to healthy and sustainable diets in the global food governance landscape, the accountability mechanisms to govern large food corporations do not take different contexts into account. In particular, self-regulation, progress reporting and voluntary alliances do not adequately address the collection of impacts of the food system. This scale mismatch is magnified when ultra-processed food industries harness their marketing, pricing, packaging and distribution networks to create a favourable social norm around processed foods, particularly among children and those on low incomes.

The paper therefore considers how corporate power has shaped food systems, and continues to define them through accountability gaps, as well as how regulation of ultra-processed food systems has emerged, without attempting to estimate the scale of harm from corporate involvement. Instead, the aim is to build a structured analytical paper which links business power, food system governance, public health concerns and policy tools in one framework.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the influence of multinational companies in shaping global food chains, food standards, retail systems and consumer food environments.
2. To assess the corporate accountability gap and its implications for legal liability in contemporary food governance
3. Assessing the need for stronger public regulation of ultra-processed food industries compared to voluntary corporate social responsibility.
4. Identify effective regulatory approaches for restricting unhealthy marketing, improving disclosure, and improving accountability within food value chains.
5. Advise governance measures that balance business with public health, child protection, environmental sustainability and social justice to the greatest extent possible.

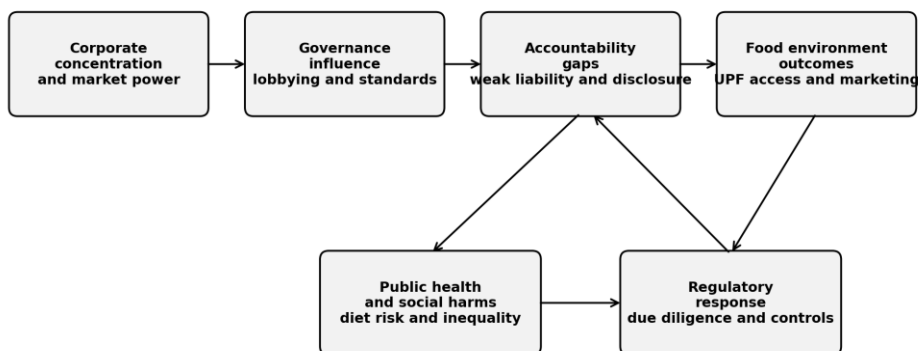


Figure 1. Analytical pathway linking corporate power, accountability gaps and food governance outcomes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Global food governance and corporate influence

The food governance literature has now moved from the state (planning for food security) to a composite of states, companies, international organizations, civil society or their networks, philanthropic organizations and international private food safety standards. The role of states in agenda setting has become less prominent. While corporate participation can add technical expertise and investment, this creates democratic imbalance if corporations are involved in setting the rules of the game, but are not subject to equivalent scrutiny. Such concerns are strongest where corporations are involved in policy discussions, but oppose stricter policy on marketing, labelling, taxation or formulation.

Another dimension is fragmentation in global food governance, with different institutions taking care of issues in agriculture, trade, health, environment, labor, consumer protection and competition policy. However, as regulation is a function of different subsystems, a product can be acceptable under food safety law but lead to unhealthy diets because of marketing to children, or a supplier can meet the requirements of their private standard but be involved in a value chain that creates unfair purchasing practices. This results in fragmentation, with no single institution possessing the entire chain of responsibilities, leaving gaps.

2.2 Corporate concentration and market control

Concentration in agricultural inputs, food processing, commodity trading, and retailing is well documented. Fewer firms controlling a greater share of the market have more power relative to suppliers, to demand contracts, set research priorities, and fund research. Concentration can reduce the space for smaller businesses, regional food systems and alternative models of production. It can affect farmers by increasing input dependency, affect consumers by reducing choice and affect governments by increasing the size and importance of larger businesses. Such concentrations create too-big-to-regulate firms when public institutions rely on firms for investment in capacity, stable supply, and technical capacity (IPES-Food, 2017).

The antitrust problem may not just be monopoly as legally defined. Even absent monopoly, a few firms may be so large that they dominate through branding, patents, logistics, data, digital platforms and relations with retailers. These forms of power are difficult to measure because they are distributed along the chain. The price competition perspective has to be broadened to include bargaining power, access to information, political lobbying, standardisation and consumer preferences.

2.3 Ultra-processed foods, nutrition transition and public health

Food systems are tied to the rising burden of diet-related non-communicable diseases in public health literature. Dietary risk is a major global public health issue contributing to global death and disability from cardiovascular disease, diabetes and other chronic diseases due to unhealthy diets. Also, high sodium consumption, low consumption of whole grains, and low fruit consumption were the most common diet-related risk factors for both mortality and disability-adjusted life years in many countries with data in the global burden of disease study of dietary risks (Afshin

et al., 2019).

Ultra-processed foods are often convenient, hyper-palatable, highly marketed, and packaged for long shelf life, and are part of this nutrition transition. Experimental studies show that energy and weight gain can be accelerated on ultra-processed diets in controlled conditions (provided that the ultra-processed products are matched in terms of proportion of major components and calories). However, it does not imply that all ultra-processed products should be considered equally risky. Processing, palatability, texture and pace of eating may also play a role (Hall et al., 2019).

These findings have been corroborated by more recent research. An umbrella review of epidemiological meta-analyses demonstrated positive associations between higher exposure to ultra-processed foods and a range of adverse health outcomes, including cardiometabolic and common mental disorder outcomes (Lane et al., 2024). This evidence adds support to structural food systems approaches which address price, promotion, placement and product formulation alongside limiting marketing exposure.

2.4 Commercial determinants of health

The commercial determinants of health framework is useful to public health for considering the role of corporations in disease distribution using corporate practices such as marketing, lobbying, product design, pricing, distribution, and public relations. In food systems, food choices are affected not only by personal choices/taste, but also by corporate advertising, retail/wholesale access and sales, school food environments, urban food environments, and food systems access via the World Wide Web. However, public health research into 'harmful' commodity industries has consistently warned about the need for regulation when industry profit conflicts with population health (Moodie et al., 2013).

The framework can also inform why corporate accountability is a legal and public health issue if firms have material influence over the conditions in which food choices are made. The challenge is to determine whether firms are easing or obstructing healthy food environments. These include product portfolios, marketing to children, lobbying transparency, political donations, conflicts of interest, funding of research, product packaging, and availability of products in schools and low-income communities.

2.5 Children, marketing and rights-based protection

Children are a conspicuous target for food marketing campaigns, being more susceptible to persuasion and having a limited understanding of the selling purpose of marketing. Marketing of food and drink products through cartoons, social and other influencers, games, sponsorship and branding in schools has been argued to normalise the frequent consumption of unhealthy food with high-added sugar, salt and unhealthy fats. International reports have also recommended the establishment of national standards and legislation that protect children from unhealthy processed and ultra-processed foods and harmful marketing practices (UNICEF, 2021).

A rights-based approach could shift the policy language to recognise children as rights holders rather than as consumers of health and development and enshrining the best interests of the child. Despite this, voluntary self-regulation cannot be justified because the power remains largely in the hands of companies selling the product. Such stricter self-regulatory provisions include mandatory restrictions, age-specific restrictions, government-led nutrient profiling, food monitoring of television and internet advertising, and sanctions for businesses that do not comply.

3. Corporate Power, Food Chains and Food Governance: Topic-Specific Analytical Section

Corporate governance is easier to understand when food companies and food supply chains are seen as control systems. Multinational food corporations control what farmers grow by procurement contracts, what processors produce by product specifications, what retailers sell by trade promotions, and what consumers eat by branding. Governance must not just be seen as ownership, advertising or market share but also includes invisible controls. Hidden control includes data, standards, shelf space, lobbying, scientific funding, private certification and digital targeting.

The main forms of corporate power in food governance are summarised in Table 3. This is an analytical summary. In this sense it seeks to show how corporate power operates at different levels of the food system and why a single regulatory measure is rarely enough.

Table 1. Analytical dimensions of corporate power in food governance.

Dimension of power	How it operates	Governance risk	Possible regulatory response
Market power	Control over large shares of processing, retailing, inputs or brands.	Supplier dependence, higher entry barriers and reduced consumer choice.	Competition policy, merger review and support for alternative food systems.
Political power	Lobbying, policy consultation, campaign influence and participation in public-private platforms.	Regulatory delay, weakened standards and conflicts of interest.	Lobbying registers, conflict-of-interest rules and transparent consultation.
Knowledge power	Funding research, shaping nutrition narratives and promoting reformulation claims.	Public confusion and industry-framed evidence debates.	Independent research funding and disclosure of industry links.
Infrastructural power	Control over distribution networks, shelf space, logistics and digital platforms.	Healthy alternatives may remain less available or less visible.	Retail standards, public procurement and digital marketing oversight.
Cultural power	Branding, celebrity endorsement, child-targeted campaigns and lifestyle messaging.	Normalization of high-frequency consumption of unhealthy products.	Marketing restrictions, warning labels and school food standards.

In terms of the table, a government which does only food safety analysis would not deal with marketing externalities. A government which focuses on advertising would miss supply chain concentration, and another government which only relies on voluntary reformulation would miss the proliferation of unhealthy product portfolios. Multiple tools and mechanisms are therefore required.

3.1 Corporate accountability and legal liability

Corporate accountability is explaining, justifying and putting right the social, health and environmental consequences of corporate activities, while legal liability is an enforceable duty in laws and regulations, but the challenges associated with assigning legal liability to foods and their consumption, including complex chains of cause and effect and effect modifiers such as household income, culture, convenience and behaviour, cannot be used as an excuse for poor governance in the food sector. They call for rules to discourage avoidable activities like deceptive advertising, marketing to children, non-disclosure, unsafe working conditions, environmentally damaging actions, and failures of due diligence.

The accountability ladder tracks how governance moves from weak voluntary commitments to enforceable responsibility. This does not reject voluntary accountability, but puts it at the lowest end of the ladder. Strong governance requires transparency, independent verification, and mandatory duties and remedy.

From weak accountability to enforceable responsibility

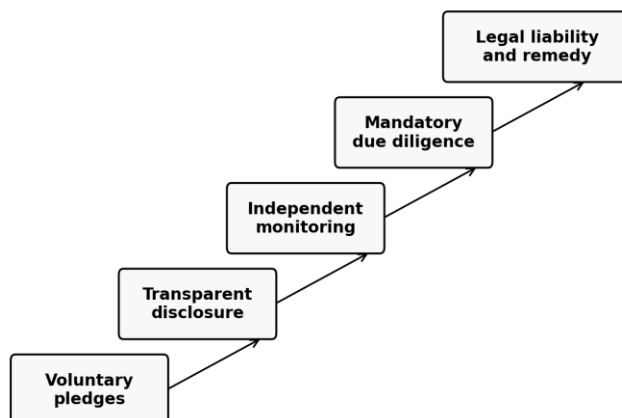


Figure 2. Accountability ladder for food corporations and ultra-processed food industries.

Table 2. Corporate accountability instruments for global food chains and ultra-processed food industries.

Instrument	Main purpose	Strength	Limitation	Best use in food governance
Voluntary pledge	Signals corporate intention.	Easy to adopt and flexible.	Weak enforcement and selective reporting.	Initial commitment, not final accountability.
Public disclosure	Reveals product, marketing and supply-chain information.	Improves transparency.	Disclosure may be selective or too technical.	Useful for monitoring product portfolios and lobbying.
Independent audit	Checks whether corporate claims are reliable.	Adds external scrutiny.	Can be weak if auditors depend on clients.	Needed for due diligence and sustainability claims.
Mandatory due diligence	Requires risk identification, prevention and mitigation.	Creates a legal duty to act.	Requires strong administrative capacity.	Useful for global supply-chain harms.
Marketing restriction	Limits exposure to harmful promotion.	Protects children and vulnerable groups.	Industry may shift to digital channels.	Needed for UPF and high sugar, salt and fat foods.
Civil liability and remedy	Compensates or corrects harms.	Creates deterrence.	Causation can be hard to prove.	Useful for misleading claims, unlawful conduct and rights violations.

3.2 Regulation of ultra-processed food industries

Regulatory measures to combat the ultra-processed food industries include nutrition policy, consumer protection, advertising regulation, fiscal policy, school food standards and corporate accountability legislation. Reliance on a single measure would be ineffective since corporate strategy is highly adaptive. If TV advertising is banned, online marketing may increase. If taxes on sugar-sweetened foods are introduced, marketers may reformulate products but still promote practices that encourage high consumption. Package designs may change due to label add-ons to stay attractive to customers for that brand; governance can foresee this.

WHO recommends that marketing policies that limit the promotion of foods high in saturated fatty acids, trans-fatty acids, free sugars or salt to which children are exposed should be mandatory, apply to children of all ages and they should use a government-led nutrient profile model (World Health Organization, 2023). A government model

is needed because industry-led models are narrow and may create loopholes . When the industry of interest, however, has a financial incentive to continue to sell, government standards are needed .

4. Methodology

The research method used in this paper is descriptive-analytical and the nature of it is conceptual and documentary . It is not a field study and statistical tests have not been used . Instead of original research, the paper synthesises material from the literature and policy documents, culminating in a systematic overview of corporate power and food governance. This is appropriate for a broad, multidisciplinary topic connected to law, public health, international business, political economy, and governance .

4.1 Study characteristics

Rather, it is qualitative and analytical, recognising patterns and relationships, with policy implications drawn from these, rather than measuring a population . The secondary data sources that we utilise include peer-reviewed academic literature, guidance from international bodies, policy documents, food system reports, and regulatory initiatives . This approach enables us to link corporate power, food-chain governance, ultra-processed foods, accountability, and regulatory design with a variety of stakeholders and contexts .

4.2 Sources of data

- Peer-reviewed literature on corporate concentration, global food chains, ultra-processed foods and commercial determinants of health .
- International policy frameworks on business and human rights, responsible agricultural supply chains, and child protection from harmful food marketing .
- Official reports of food governance bodies, benchmarking initiatives and United Nations agencies .
- Legal and policy developments related to corporate due diligence, food labelling, marketing restrictions and accountability mechanisms .
- Analytical interpretation of these sources as they apply to world food chains and the ultra-processed food industry .

4.3 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis is the multinational food corporation and food chains . The entities studied in this work include processors of ultra-processed food, packaged snack foods, beverages, food away from home, retailers and distributors of brands . In addition, there are other important actors such as regulatory institutions, consumers, children, farmers and communities . The relevant level of investigation is necessarily wider, because corporate responsibility does not stop at the factory gate, but is about production, distribution, marketing and consumption .

4.4 Analytical variables

Table 3. Core analytical variables for examining corporate power and food governance.

Analytical variable	Indicative indicators	Expected relevance
Corporate power profile	Market share, brand control, lobbying, data access, global reach and retail influence.	Shows the strength and forms of corporate influence.
Supply-chain control	Procurement contracts, private standards, supplier dependence and distribution networks.	Identifies where responsibility and risk are located.
Product and marketing practices	UPF product portfolios, claims, child-directed advertising, pricing and digital promotion.	Links corporate strategy with food environments.
Accountability mechanisms	Disclosure, due diligence, audits, grievance systems, civil liability and public monitoring.	Shows whether corporate responsibility is enforceable.
Regulatory outcomes	Marketing restrictions, labeling, taxation, school standards, competition policy and remedy.	Connects governance tools with public health protection.

5. Data Collection and Analytical Procedure

The use of secondary sources is appropriate for this subject as it deals with global corporate power and regulation: The steps undertaken for evidence collection were matching the themes to potential sources, locating credible sources, clustering the evidence by analytic themes, and identifying implications for governance. We do not mean to imply that all multinational food corporations behave in exactly the same way. The objective is rather to identify the structural problems of powerful actors in weak or fragmented regulatory systems and networks.

5.1 Secondary evidence used in the paper

Secondary evidence includes academic literature on corporate power, public health nutrition, global food supply chains, ultra-processed foods, business and human rights, responsible agricultural supply chains, and the protection of children from the harmful impact of marketing. System level accountability is informed by workstreams on food system cost accounting and corporate benchmarking. The FAO has acknowledged hidden environmental, social and health costs of agrifood systems, standing by the need for governance tools that internalise these externalities (FAO, 2023).

5.2 Suggested primary data collection for future field validation

1. Select leading ultra-processed food manufacturers, retailers and restaurants in the country or the selected geography, including beverage, snack, packaged meal and fast food companies.
2. Prepare company profile schedule: product portfolio, marketing channels, child-directed promotion, sustainability claims, pricing strategy, and distribution coverage.
3. Collect policy documents, annual reports, product labels, advertisements, school food policies, tax laws and marketing codes related to that country.
4. Interviews of public health experts, consumer groups, food retailers, teachers, parents, regulatory officials and businesses should be conducted ethically.
5. Trace the flow of products from suppliers to the retail level and online to identify control points in the value chain.

6. Analytical Discussion

6.1 Why multinational corporations matter in food governance

Multinational food corporations are important because they operate at such scale that they are able to shape the very rules of the game relative to what is acceptable supply and demand in food systems: what foods get grown or harvested, what foods become normalised, what foods are cheap, what foods are stocked in stores, and what foods mean through advertising. These food companies are not simply responding to demand; they are creating demand through branding and promotional systems, making private companies governance actors.

Influencing factors in low and middle income countries include urbanisation and changes in the structure of employment and schooling, retail structure, dietary habits, and lifestyle. Packaged snacks, sugar-sweetened drinks, instant noodles, ready to eat meals, and fast food are promoted as modern, convenient, and inexpensive. These products may solve time and access problems for working households, but may incur meaningful long-term public health costs that are not borne by the firms producing them.

6.2 How accountability gaps emerge

Accountability gaps may occur due to the separation of time, place and actor, for example, when an ingredient is grown in one country, processed in another, marketed in a third, and sold in shops in a fourth. Harms may include farmer exploitation, low pay and poor working conditions, environmental degradation, childhood obesity and diabetes, greenwashing or loss of dietary diversity. Such harms might not be enforced under a particular law if alternative laws apply. It is to tackle corporate accountability throughout the chain of production, and not solely at the point of product.

In addition, consumers are often seen as solely responsible for their food choices, yet food choices are made within the context of price, marketing, access, time to cook and eat, school policies and family income. A child who sees repeated snack advertising or a worker who is offered cheap ultra-processed foods is not making a choice in a neutral environment, and governance needs to consider the contexts in which choices are made.

6.3 Corporate strategies in ultra-processed food industries

Strategies of the ultra-processed food industries include creating convenient, branded and highly palatable products, and marketing them by packaging and claiming that they provide energy, happiness, family care, sport, nutrition, immunity or modern lifestyle. These strategies pose challenges for governance. Thirdly, sales and marketing are ubiquitous (supermarkets, small, non-chain stores, vending machines, internet, and shops near schools). Fourth, voluntary pledges and reformulation can improve nutritional profiles, but do not necessarily reduce ultra-processed food consumption. Factors behind the global rise in ultra-processed food sales range from broader food-system transformations to political economy drivers (Baker et al., 2020).

While such decisions may make sense from a business point of view, they may not make social sense once the health, environmental and social externalities are factored in. Here, the company is able to increase shareholder value but also increase external costs to public health. The government receives tax revenue and employment but pays for diet-related disease. This contradiction is at the heart of food governance.

6.4 Policy Recommendations

1. Develop standards governing marketing of unhealthy food and non-alcoholic beverages to children through television, packaging, schools, sports sponsorships and online media.
2. Mandate government-led nutrient profiling efforts for front-of-pack labelling systems, and prohibit industry-lead classification schemes.
3. Require major food companies to disclose the health profile of their product portfolio, lobbying and political contributions, marketing expenditure and due diligence/procurement policy.
4. Enhance competition policy and merger review of food businesses with high market concentration, which reduce farmer bargaining power, consumer choice or regulatory independence.
5. Ensure mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence for sourcing, labor, land rights, water rights, marketing and product-related risks in global food chains.
6. Develop school and public procurement standards that give preference to fresh and minimally-processed foods over the brands of ultra-processed products.
7. Establish independent monitoring bodies for food marketing and labelling that can investigate and impose sanctions.
8. Support small producers, cooperatives, local food markets and public nutrition programs so that healthy alternatives become available, accessible and affordable.

Summary

Reviewing the literature on corporate power and food governance, multinational corporations in global food chains and corporate accountability and regulation of ultra-processed food industries, the paper concluded that corporations are not passive actors who simply respond to demand; they also influence demand, standards, supply chains, marketing systems and policy debate. Thus, corporate power is a critical issue in food governance. When private actors control food brands, logistics, data and access to retail, they influence food's affordability, availability and desirability.

Literature highlights the need to go beyond informed consumer choice and voluntary corporate responsibility. Urgent action to reduce ultra-processed foods in the food system is required, because they are industrially formulated, aggressively marketed and associated with diet quality and chronic disease concerns. The governance challenge is not just processing, but the combination of product design, marketing expenditure, corporate concentration and weak accountability. Children and low-income consumers must be prioritised given their greater exposure to persuasive marketing and poorer food environments.

References

1. Afshin, A., Sur, P. J., Fay, K. A., Cornaby, L., Ferrara, G., Salama, J. S., Mullany, E. C., Abate, K. H., Abbafati, C., Abebe, Z., Afarideh, M., Aggarwal, A., Agrawal, S., Akinyemiju, T., Alahdab, F., & GBD 2017 Diet Collaborators. (2019). Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990-2017: A systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017. *The Lancet*, 393(10184), 1958-1972. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)30041-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30041-8)
2. Baker, P., Machado, P., Santos, T., Sievert, K., Backholer, K., Hadjikakou, M., Russell, C., Huse, O., Bell, C., Scrinis, G., Worsley, A., Friel, S., & Lawrence, M. (2020). Ultra-processed foods and the nutrition transition:

- Global, regional and national trends, food systems transformations and political economy drivers. *Obesity Reviews*, 21(12), e13126. <https://doi.org/10.1111/obr.13126>
3. Clapp, J. (2021). The problem with growing corporate concentration and power in the global food system. *Nature Food*, 2(6), 404-408. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00297-7>
 4. European Commission. (2024). Corporate sustainability due diligence. https://commission.europa.eu/topics/business-and-industry/doing-business-eu/sustainability-due-diligence-responsible-business/corporate-sustainability-due-diligence_en
 5. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2023). The state of food and agriculture 2023: Revealing the true cost of food to transform agrifood systems. FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc7724en>
 6. Gereffi, G., Humphrey, J., & Sturgeon, T. (2005). The governance of global value chains. *Review of International Political Economy*, 12(1), 78-104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290500049805>
 7. Hall, K. D., Ayuketah, A., Brychta, R., Cai, H., Cassimatis, T., Chen, K. Y., Chung, S. T., Costa, E., Courville, A., Darcey, V., Fletcher, L. A., Forde, C. G., Gharib, A. M., Guo, J., Howard, R., Joseph, P. V., McGehee, S., Ouwerkerk, R., Raising, K., ... Zhou, M. (2019). Ultra-processed diets cause excess calorie intake and weight gain: An inpatient randomized controlled trial of ad libitum food intake. *Cell Metabolism*, 30(1), 67-77.e3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cmet.2019.05.008>
 8. International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems. (2017). Too big to feed: Exploring the impacts of mega-mergers, consolidation and concentration of power in the agri-food sector. IPES-Food. https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/Concentration_FullReport.pdf
 9. International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems. (2023). Who is tipping the scales? The growing influence of corporations on the governance of food systems, and how to counter it. IPES-Food. https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/tippingthescales.pdf
 10. Lane, M. M., Gamage, E., Du, S., Ashtree, D. N., McGuinness, A. J., Gauci, S., Baker, P., Lawrence, M., Rebholz, C. M., Srour, B., Touvier, M., Jacka, F. N., O'Neil, A., Segasby, T., & Marx, W. (2024). Ultra-processed food exposure and adverse health outcomes: Umbrella review of epidemiological meta-analyses. *BMJ*, 384, e077310. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2023-077310>
 11. Monteiro, C. A., Cannon, G., Levy, R. B., Moubarac, J. C., Louzada, M. L. C., Rauber, F., Khandpur, N., Cediel, G., Neri, D., Martinez-Steele, E., Baraldi, L. G., & Jaime, P. C. (2019). Ultra-processed foods: What they are and how to identify them. *Public Health Nutrition*, 22(5), 936-941. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980018003762>
 12. Moodie, R., Stuckler, D., Monteiro, C., Sheron, N., Neal, B., Thamarangsi, T., Lincoln, P., & Casswell, S. (2013). Profits and pandemics: Prevention of harmful effects of tobacco, alcohol, and ultra-processed food and drink industries. *The Lancet*, 381(9867), 670-679. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(12\)62089-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(12)62089-3)
 13. OECD & Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2016). OECD-FAO guidance for responsible agricultural supply chains. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264251052-en>
 14. Stuckler, D., & Nestle, M. (2012). Big food, food systems, and global health. *PLOS Medicine*, 9(6), e1001242. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001242>
 15. Swinburn, B. A., Kraak, V. I., Allender, S., Atkins, V. J., Baker, P. I., Bogard, J. R., Brinsden, H., Calvillo, A., De Schutter, O., Devarajan, R., Ezzati, M., Friel, S., Goenka, S., Hammond, R. A., Hastings, G., Hawkes, C., Herrero, M., Hovmand, P. S., Howden, M., ... Dietz, W. H. (2019). The global syndemic of obesity, undernutrition, and climate change: The Lancet Commission report. *The Lancet*, 393(10173), 791-846. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)32822-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32822-8)
 16. UNICEF. (2021). Fed to fail? The crisis of children's diets in early life. UNICEF. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/fed-to-fail-2021-child-nutrition-report/>
 17. United Nations. (2011). Guiding principles on business and human rights: Implementing the United Nations Protect, Respect and Remedy Framework. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf
 18. World Benchmarking Alliance. (2024). 2023 food and agriculture benchmark insights report. World Benchmarking Alliance. <https://www.worldbenchmarkingalliance.org/publication/food-agriculture/>
 19. World Health Organization. (2023). Policies to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing: WHO guideline. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240075412>