

Sportswashing Through Media: Coca-Cola's Olympic Play

A Research Report



May 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For nearly a century, Coca-Cola, the world's largest soft drink producer, has used its sponsorship of the Olympics to reinforce its brand identity and increase global visibility. This long-standing partnership has become one of the company's most powerful vehicles for legitimacy, aligning its sugary drinks with athleticism, celebration, and global unity despite mounting public health concerns associated with its products. Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the Olympics is an example of corporate sportswashing, where a company uses the cultural prestige of sport to divert attention from health harms and enhance its reputational credibility. Sportswashing is a common tactic used by companies that produce unhealthy foods and beverages and can be seen across sports at the international, national, and local levels.

This report assesses how the partnership between Coca-Cola and the Olympics is represented in the media and to what extent public health narratives are reflected—or omitted—from the conversation. It does so by analyzing English-language online media coverage of Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the 2024 Paris Olympics. Drawing on a systematic content analysis of 85 media articles, the report finds that Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship is overwhelmingly framed in favorable or neutral terms. Despite growing evidence linking sweetened beverages to noncommunicable diseases, including diabetes and cardiovascular disease, there is little critical scrutiny of the public health consequences of promoting these beverages on a global stage. The observed media coverage frequently echoed Coca-Cola's narrative of linking its brand and products with the emotions and excitement of the Olympic games, even in outlets typically considered independent. This has the effect of limiting corporate accountability and public awareness of the health risks of Coca-Cola's products.

Key Highlights:

- **Most audience exposure and advertising value comes from a few high-impact articles:** The **85 articles** identified in this study reached an estimated **1.02 billion readers**, with a total estimated advertising value equivalency of **US\$9.41 million**. However, visibility was highly concentrated: just **7% of articles** accounted for **86%**

of both total reach (873.36 million people) and advertising value equivalency (US\$8.08 million). This demonstrates that brand narratives prevail in high-impact articles, which amplify Coca-Cola's messaging and reach the largest audience.

- **Short, general articles without critical analysis dominate coverage:** A majority of articles were brief in both format and length – 58% were general news stories (Figure 3), and 53% were under 500 words – offering limited space for deeper analysis or alternative viewpoints. Similarly, visual content largely reinforced positive or neutral portrayals of Coca-Cola, failing to challenge corporate narratives (Figure 12).
- **Media framing prioritizes brand legitimacy and corporate interest over public health:** About **78% of articles** framed Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship in a **favorable light** (Figure 5), often emphasizing brand promotion, shared values like togetherness, or the economic benefits of the sponsorship (Figure 6). **A limited number of articles (12 in total) critiqued the sponsorship**, and these mainly focused on Coca-Cola's environmental harms (Figure 7). Such skewed coverage undermines journalism's responsibility for fair and balanced reporting.
- **Public health narratives are largely absent in media reporting:** **Only 2% of articles** on Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship **scrutinized the partnership**— citing issues like exploitation, health risks, or unethical practices (Table 1). Public health experts and independent voices were rarely quoted (Figure 8).
- **Global media framing protects Coca-Cola from national scrutiny:** Media coverage overwhelmingly framed Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship in broad, positive, value-based terms—highlighting unity, celebration and global identity—while ignoring its real-world effects on health. **With 86% of articles adopting a global lens and only 14% referencing country-specific issues**, the sponsorship escaped meaningful scrutiny about Coca-Cola's contribution to national health burdens, including its questionable marketing practices (Figure 4). The absence of localized reporting obscured how Coca-Cola's marketing practices overwhelmingly

focus on specific groups, including youth and low-income communities. This framing limits the ability of national media, advocates, and policymakers to challenge these harmful sponsorships and pursue stronger regulation of unhealthy food and beverage marketing.

- **Brand-led messaging prevails over independent reporting: Coca-Cola spokespeople (19%) were the most frequently cited sources in news articles** (Figure 8). As a result, brand-centric talking points on the company's legitimacy and reputation shaped the core of the media narrative (Figure 9). There was little scrutiny of the company's motives for sponsoring the Olympics or the broader health implications of the sponsorship.

Implications

The findings of this study highlight how Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the Olympics provides the company with a high-visibility branding opportunity that is amplified and reinforced by the media rather than challenged. The absence of critical or balanced media coverage—along with limited representation of public interest voices—raises concerns that sports sponsorships such as this one are normalizing unhealthy products like ultra-processed foods and beverages.

These findings have implications for both policy and public discourse. As public health stakeholders increasingly seek to reduce the influence of unhealthy commodity industries in settings that engage youth and promote physical activity, popular international tournaments such as the Olympics remain largely untouched. When the media enables such companies and their brands to align with positive social values and shields them from reputational scrutiny on the global stage, it potentially undermines policy action at the national and local level.

Recommendations

To address the imbalance in media coverage of unhealthy food and beverage sponsorships in sports and mitigate the influence of sponsorships, particularly during high-profile events

like the Olympics, we recommend the following actions for governments, the media, and public health advocates:

Increase Visibility of Public Health Voices in the Media

Public health experts, youth voices, and independent researchers have a critical opportunity to shape media narratives on corporate sponsorship of sport. By contributing op-eds or commentaries and being represented in the media, these actors can present the health risks associated with unhealthy food and beverage company sponsorships and be a vital part of the public discourse.

Expose the Disconnect Between the Values of Sport and the Realities of Corporate Sponsorship

Strategic communication efforts can draw attention to the disconnect between sport's values—such as health, empowerment and physical well-being—and the values of companies whose products contribute to the growing global burden of diet-related diseases. Advocates' efforts to expose this contradiction need to resonate with the media, policymakers, and the public to help shift the narrative and call for meaningful institutional accountability.

Build and Support Locally Grounded, Inclusive Counternarratives

Civil society and community organizations are well-positioned to challenge sponsorships by unhealthy food and beverage companies because they are rooted in local contexts. Community-led advocacy that focuses on the harmful effects of these products can generate momentum for national-level reform. Testimonials and stories about those affected by diet-related noncommunicable diseases can strengthen advocacy efforts.

Promote Responsible and Balanced Media Practices

News outlets and journalists should critically examine the motives and consequences of company and brand sponsorships in reporting rather than provide a platform for promotion. This includes prioritizing source diversity and intentional inclusion of independent and public-interest perspectives. Media watchdog organizations and journalism associations

can support these efforts by providing guidance to journalists on how to report on unhealthy food and beverage company sponsorship critically and independently.

Ban Unhealthy Sport Sponsorship and Develop Health-Driven, Transparent Sponsorship Guidelines

Governments, along with international and national sporting bodies, such as the International Olympic Committee and FIFA, should take decisive action to end the widespread marketing and sponsorship of unhealthy food and beverage companies. These partnerships contradict and undermine the health-promoting ideals of physical activity and youth engagement and further normalize the consumption of products that are linked to increased risk for diet-related diseases. Drawing from lessons in tobacco control, policy measures could include outright sponsorship bans, mandatory disclosure requirements, and the development of health-focused sponsorship standards that align with public interest goals. Such policies are essential to protect the integrity of sport and ensure that global events like the Olympics are not used to legitimize harmful industries.



BACKGROUND

The ubiquitous marketing of unhealthy commodities—including sweetened beverages and other ultra-processed products and tobacco and alcohol—presents a significant challenge to public health efforts. Through marketing tactics that include advertising, promotion, and sponsorship, these industries systematically normalize and promote the consumption of products linked to chronic health conditions such as obesity, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers. These targeted marketing strategies shape consumer behavior, influence social norms, and undermine public health interventions by redirecting attention away from well-documented health risks (1–6).

Sports sponsorship has emerged as an effective marketing vehicle for producers of unhealthy commodities, allowing them to associate their brands with sport's greatest moments and stars. By sponsoring high-profile sporting events, producers of unhealthy commodities enhance their public image while minimizing the perceived dangers of their products (7). This form of sponsorship enables companies to “sportswash” their products’ harms and build brand awareness and loyalty, normalizing the presence of these unhealthy products in everyday life.

For nearly a century, since 1928, the Coca-Cola Company has maintained one of the most enduring sponsorships in history, embedding its logo, messaging, and products into the fabric of the Olympic Games(8). This partnership gives Coca-Cola unfettered access to global audiences—including children and young people. With the world’s attention trained on this marquis event that is saturated with national pride and shared values, Coca-Cola is perceived as both authentic and trustworthy and as an intrinsic part of the Olympic experience. This form of “sportswashing” provides a potent form of brand legitimization.

Media coverage of such sponsorships often reflects corporate talking points more than independent assessment. Favorable narratives dominate coverage of Olympic partnerships, while concerns about sponsors’ contributions to societal ills, such as the health harms of ultra-processed sweetened drinks, are largely marginalized or ignored. This creates a public discourse in which producers of unhealthy products like Coca-Cola

appear as champions of sport and unity—obscuring their role in harming global health and the environment.

Understanding how Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the Olympics is represented in global media coverage is important to unpack the mechanisms through which unhealthy industries maintain cultural legitimacy and evade accountability. This study systematically examines English-language online news articles covering Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the 2024 Paris Olympics to examine the dominant narrative and how it was constructed. This includes noting which voices were elevated or excluded, whether public health concerns were meaningfully addressed, the nature and tone of media coverage, and estimates of the global reach and financial value of earned media coverage.

By evaluating the interplay between corporate sports sponsorship, media portrayal, and public health, this study contributes to the global evidence base concerning the commercial determinants of health and the need for greater accountability in global sports sponsorship.

METHODS

News articles were identified using the Meltwater search engine and filtered based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Structured keyword searches targeted English-language online articles discussing Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship, brand partnerships, marketing campaigns or public perception. *The full methodology is detailed in Appendix A.*

We identified 85 articles published between May and October 2024 that discussed Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship. The articles were coded based on publication details, media type, framing, and sentiment toward the sponsorship. The coding process included a training phase to ensure consistency, followed by full-scale coding. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics to examine media trends. Cohen's kappa coefficient was used to calculate inter-rater reliability, yielding a reliability score of 0.9 that indicates strong agreement between coders.

KEY FINDINGS

Most audience exposure and advertising value comes from a few high-impact articles

Across the 85 articles analyzed, Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the 2024 Paris Olympics reached an estimated 1.02 billion readers, with a total advertising value equivalency of US\$9.41 million. However, this media exposure was highly concentrated: 7% of articles reached between 100 million and 200 million readers each, collectively accounting for 86% of the total reach (873.36 million) and US\$8.08 million of the advertising value equivalency. In contrast, 71% of articles had fewer than 10,000 readers each and collectively reached only 109,807 people, contributing to a combined advertising value equivalency of just US\$4,905. The remaining 22% of articles fell in the moderate reach category (10,001 to 100 million people each), collectively reaching 144.19 million people and accounting for US\$1.33 million in advertising value equivalency (Figure 2). These findings highlight how Coca-Cola secured a significant media footprint through a small number of high-impact stories - such as those published by outlets like CNBC and Forbes, while most coverage generated minimal audience engagement or advertising value equivalency.

Media coverage of Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship was heavily concentrated in North America and Europe, with limited representation from other regions (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Geographic Distribution of Articles by Continent

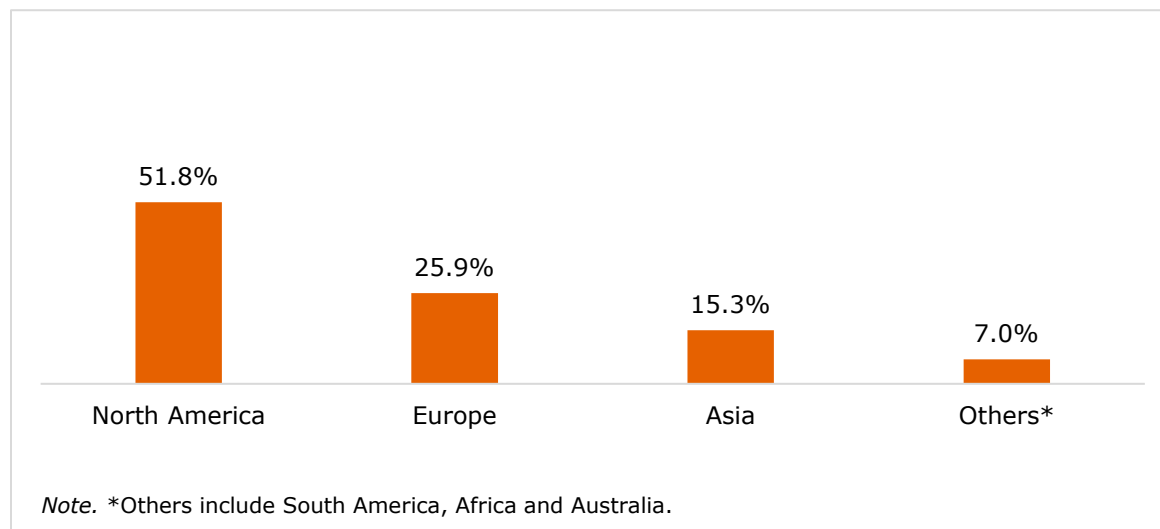
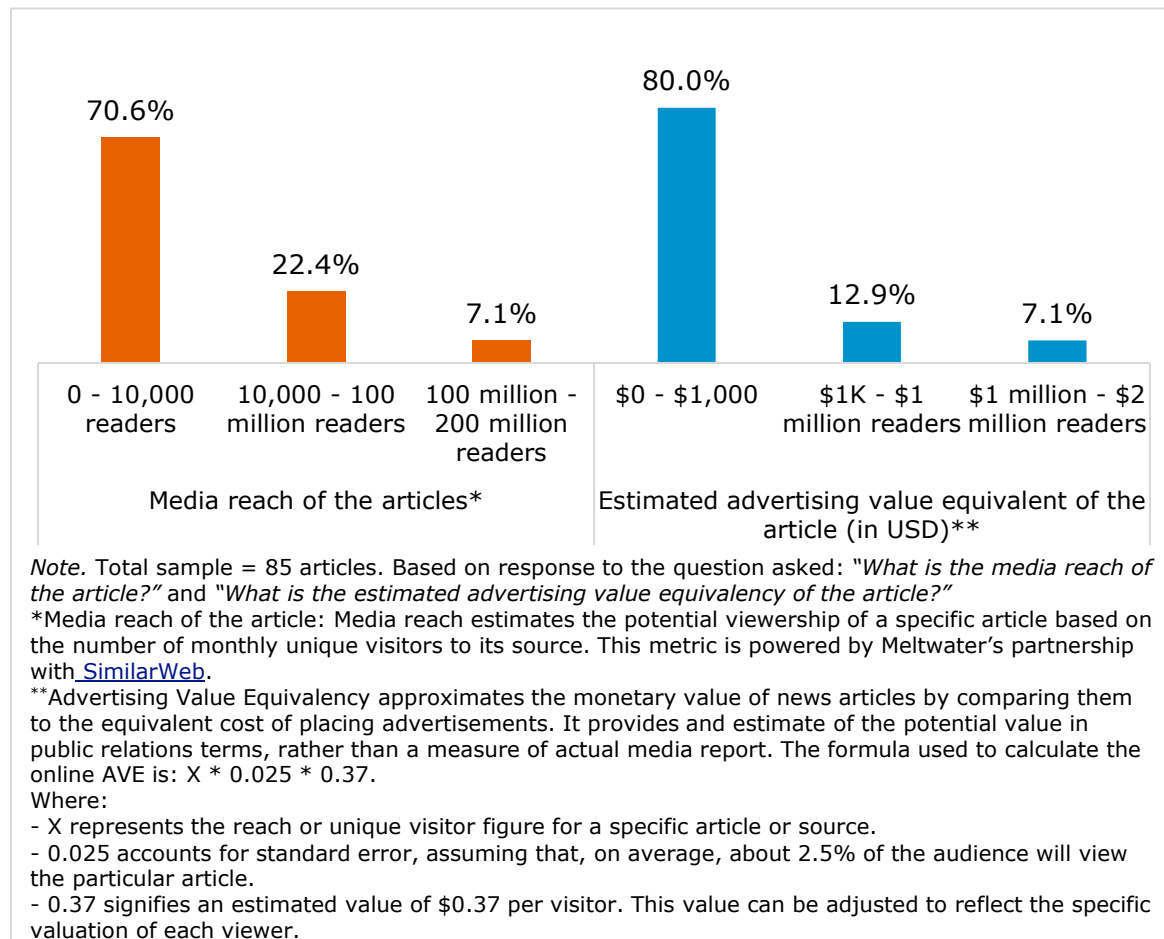


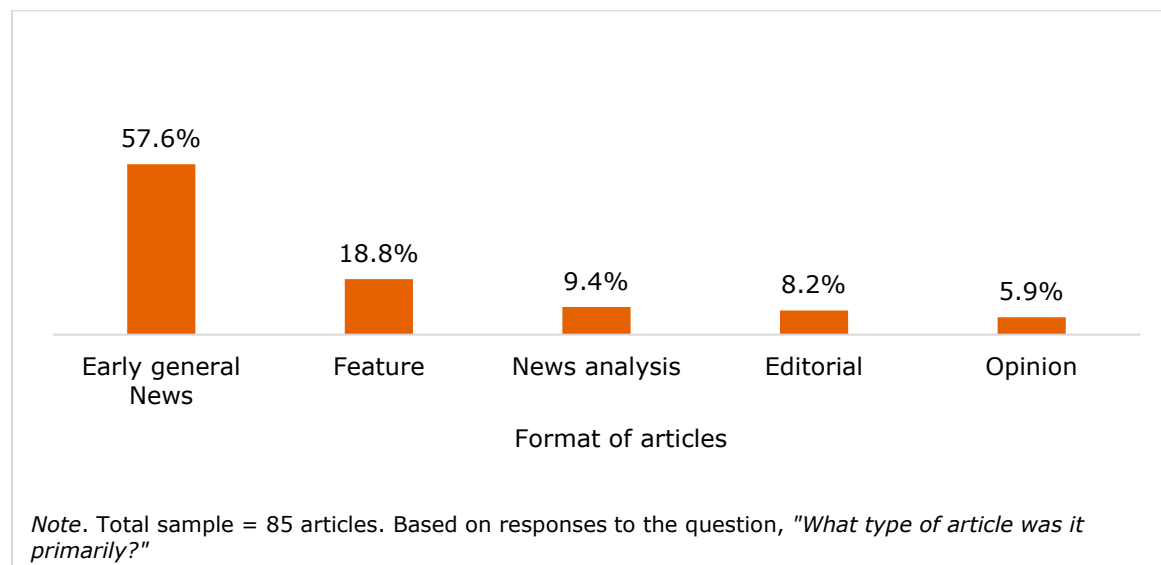
Figure 2. Estimated Digital Reach and Advertising Value Equivalency of Coca-Cola Olympic Sponsorship Media Coverage



Short, general articles without critical analysis dominate coverage

More than half of the articles (53%) were brief news pieces under 500 words, which primarily covered Coca-Cola's sponsorship activities during the Olympics without offering deeper analytical or investigative insights. General news formats (58%) dominated the sample, while editorials, opinion pieces and news analysis collectively made up less than 24% (Figure 3).

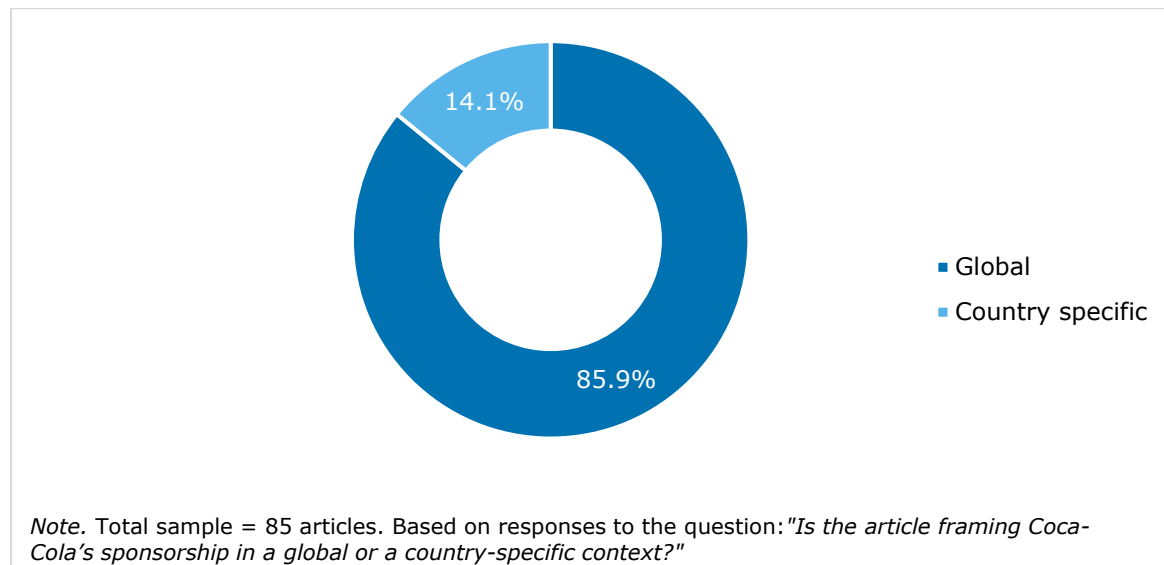
Figure 3. Format of Coca-Cola Olympic Sponsorship Media Coverage



Most articles (86%) were framed from a global rather than country-specific level (14%) (Figure 4).¹ The articles largely focused on Coca-Cola's association with Olympic values such as unity and celebration, while overlooking how the sponsorship plays out within national contexts. The articles that focused on country-specific narratives primarily looked at India, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Cayman Islands. The global-level framing allows Coca-Cola to align with Olympic ideals while avoiding country-level scrutiny of its health and environmental harms and questionable marketing practices. This deflection from local context may limit opportunities for national advocacy, media accountability and policy response.

¹ Framing in this analysis refers to the overall perspective or context in which Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship was presented—whether the article focused on global themes or specific national issues. Articles were coded as global if they emphasized universal Olympic values such as unity, celebration or international branding without reference to a specific country. In contrast, articles were coded as country-specific when they focused on how the sponsorship operated or was received within a particular national context—for example, coverage of Coca-Cola's Olympic marketing campaigns in India or local health debates in the United States.

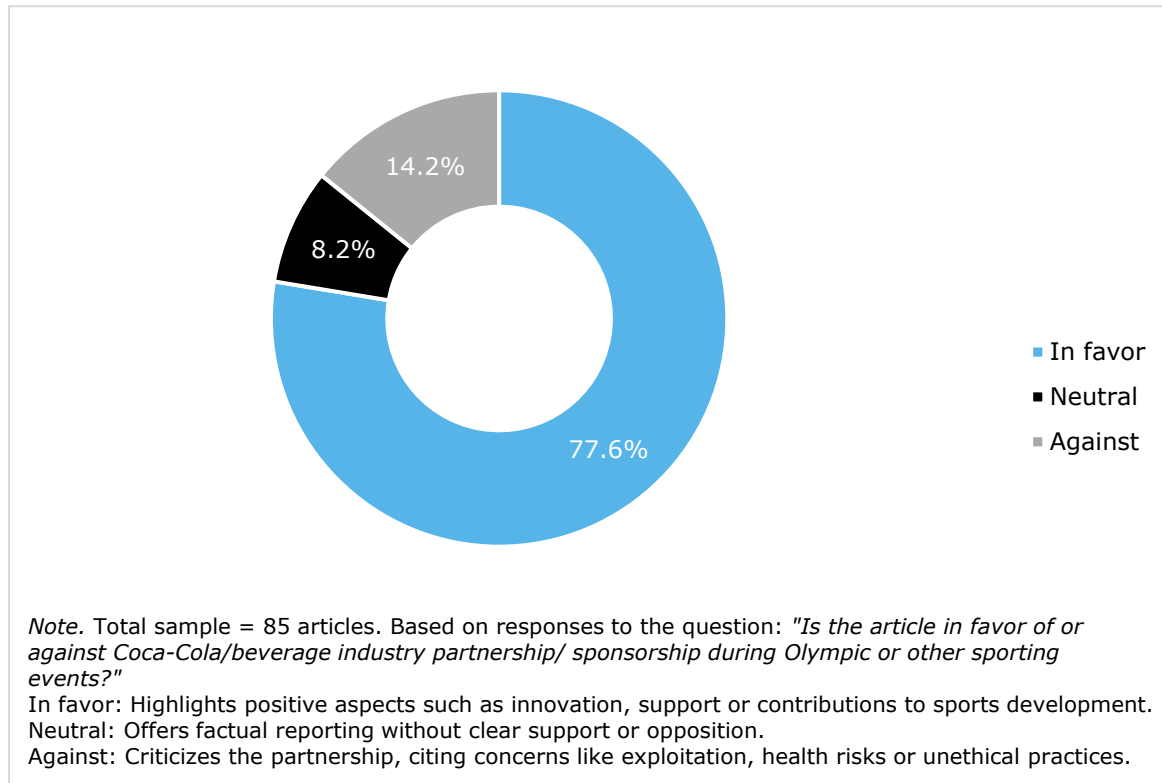
Figure 4. Framing of Coca-Cola Olympic Sponsorship Media Coverage (Global vs. Country-Specific Level)



Media framing prioritizes brand legitimacy and corporate interest over public health

The majority of articles (78%) treated Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship in a favorable light, emphasizing its brand promotion and shared values like togetherness or economic benefits (Figure 5). These articles reached 875.96 million people. Eight percent of articles maintained a neutral tone, presenting sponsorship-related details without overt endorsement or criticism. Only 14% of articles—accounting for a total reach of just 433,053 people—expressed opposition to the sponsorship, including concerns about environmental harms or perceived contradictions between Coca-Cola's products and the health-promoting ideals of sport. This suggests that media coverage of Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship is predominantly favorable or neutral, with minimal critical discourse.

Figure 5. Tone of Coca-Cola Olympic Sponsorship Media Coverage



Among the articles that positively portrayed Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship, most positioned the sponsorship as a form of brand promotion (85%) (Figure 6). This was followed by focusing on core values that Coca-Cola and the Olympics purportedly share, such as family, togetherness and community (37%), as well as economic benefits of the sponsorship (22%). These findings reinforce that the coverage of Coca-Cola positioned it as a favorable cultural brand.



Commenting on her association with the campaign, Nikhat Zareen,

“In the ring, every thumbs up fuels my determination to jab harder and go the distance. It is great to have Thums Up as a brand acknowledge the importance of support and belief in athletes like us.”

— Author Name not mentioned,
“Thums Up’s Olympics Campaign Demonstrates the Power of a ‘thumbs up’ Gesture.”

“Thums Up is a soft drink brand owned and marketed by The Coca-Cola Company in India.”



Commenting on her association with the campaign, Rubina Francis,

“Thums Up’s campaign sparks resilience and unity, showing how a simple gesture can inspire us to give a best shot.”

— Author Name not mentioned,
“Thums Up’s Olympics Campaign Demonstrates the Power of a ‘thumbs up’ Gesture.”

“Thums Up is a soft drink brand owned and marketed by The Coca-Cola Company in India.”



Elisabeth Allaman - Deputy Managing Director of IOC Television and Marketing Services

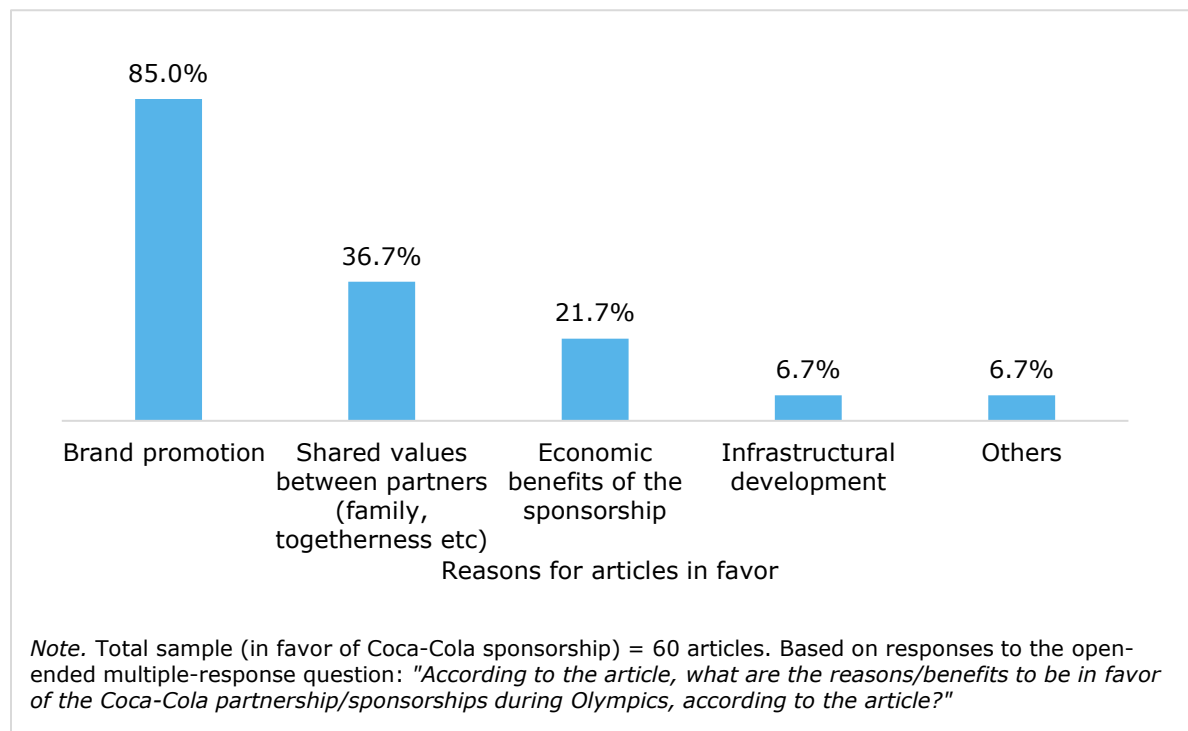
“In line with Olympic Agenda, we are looking for new ways to engage fans across different media, and so are pleased to bring together our Worldwide TOP Partner Coca-Cola and licensee, Panini, to create this new Paris 2024 collection. There have been a number of projects with Panini and some National Olympic Committees in the past, but for the first time, this collection offers fans unique digital content featuring athletes of different sports from all over the world.

— Author Name not mentioned,
“IOC and Panini launch Olympic Games sticker and card albums to inspire and engage fans”



Stefani-Singer- said in a statement to PEOPLE: **“We are thrilled to officially launched ‘Hello World’ for Paris 2024 in partnership with The Coca-Cola Company and the International Olympic Committee (IOC).**

— Kelly Fisher
“Gwen Stefani Teams Up With Anderson .Paak Ahead Of 2024 Olympics”

Figure 6. Reasons for Favorable Coca-Cola Olympic Sponsorship Media Coverage

There were only 12 articles that critiqued Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship—accounting for a total reach of just 433,053 people. The primary concern—raised in five of the articles—was how Coca-Cola harms the environment (Figure 7). Concerns that consumption of Coca-Cola beverages may lead to poor health (e.g., obesity, Type 2 diabetes, etc.) were highlighted in just two articles. Two additional articles questioned the contradiction of Coca-Cola's sponsorship with the fundamental values of sport. The remaining three articles raised other concerns, including the company's influence on youth health behaviors, ethical concerns related to marketing to children or misleading messages, and broader health implications of the sponsorship. Despite being under-documented, these concerns indicate that health and sustainability remain underlying areas of reputational risk for Coca-Cola. However, such criticisms were largely sidelined in coverage of its Olympic sponsorship—receiving minimal emphasis and rarely prompting deeper media investigation. Articles covering such topics offer an opportunity to increase public knowledge of health harms during high-profile advertising periods.



“The numbers in the company’s recent “Environmental Update” make it clear- Coca-Cola is not on track to meet its reuse goal, which is terrible news for the oceans,” said Oceana’s Senior Vice President Matt Littlejohn. “The company has failed to make progress and none of its largest bottlers have made the commitments needed to reach this goal. It is time for the company to disclose to its investors and customers exactly how it will meet its 25% goal by 2030. More reusable packaging means less single use plastic. The oceans can’t afford have the world/s largest plastic polluter according to recent report break the promise.”

— Gillian Spolarich and Anna Baxter, “FRENCH CONNECTIONS: Olympic bosses delight in Snoop Dogg impact, athletes face a torrent of abusive messages, while pressure grows for Games to axe Coca-Cola.”



“Two health experts have called for ties to be cut, claiming the deal allows the giants to sportwash health-damaging, sugar-filled drinks. Trish Cotter and Sandra Mullin, of global health group at Vital Strategies, said in the journal BMJ Global Health that such products are a 'key driver' for obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.”

— Mike Reegan, “FRENCH CONNECTIONS: Olympic bosses delight in Snoop Dogg impact, athletes face a torrent of abusive messages, while pressure grows for Games to axe Coca-Cola.”



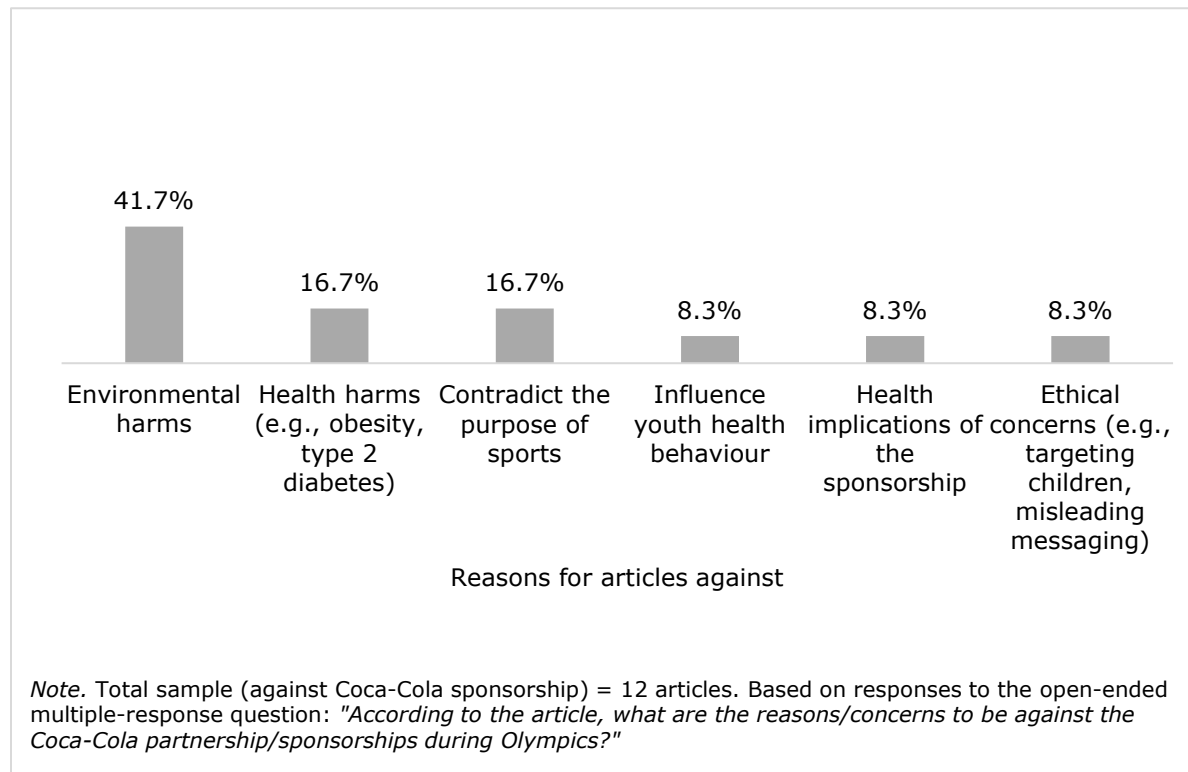
“The product-placement push has been controversial among some sports officials and triggered debate over whether the Games should preserve its ad-free traditions or follow other global sporting events, where everything from stadiums to jerseys to the field of play are seen as fair game to carry branding.”

— Christopher Harper, “Paris Olympics step up product placement.”



“Doctors add there is no connection to Coca-Cola helping to cure gastroenterological infections and diseases.”

— Sam, “Swimmers turn to Coca-Cola to stave off E. coli at 2024 Olympic Games.”

Figure 7. Reasons for Unfavorable Coca-Cola Olympic Sponsorship Media Coverage

Public health narratives are largely absent in media reporting

The primary themes covered in media articles on Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship largely reinforced the company's alignment with sports, shared values, and environmental responsibility while minimizing public health and ethical scrutiny. The thematic breakdown of 85 articles reveals that viewing and participating in sports was the most frequently highlighted primary theme (19%), which reinforced Coca-Cola's association with the Olympic games (Table 1). Sustainability-related discussions were also highlighted in the coverage. Coca-Cola's ongoing positively framed environmental initiatives accounted for 14% of coverage. In comparison, an additional 12% focused on the company's initiatives, specifically during the Olympic tournament, such as waste reduction and "eco-friendly" packaging. These narratives serve as a form of greenwashing, deflecting attention away from critical concerns such as the company's role in diet-related diseases and environmental degradation (e.g., plastic pollution). Commercial sponsorship topics were also prominent, with 11% of articles focusing on new sponsorship deals and another 7% covering the maintenance of partnerships. Coca-Cola's marketing and promotional efforts

during the Olympic games were highlighted in 8% of articles. The portrayal of Coca-Cola as embodying Olympic values was also emphasized, with 11% of articles highlighting a shared culture of excellence or inclusivity and diversity. Articles also covered Coca-Cola's role in enhancing the Olympic experience for athletes and fans (5%) and its support of athletes, national teams and sports development (5%). These narratives embedded the brand within broader Olympic values of unity, embracing cultural identity and diversity – clear examples of “sportswashing”— thereby creating emotional resonance with a global audience while shielding the brand from critique.

Secondary themes in media coverage of Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship were dominated by community engagement (42% of articles) (Table 1), reflecting Coca-Cola's efforts to use its sponsorship activities to position itself as a socially responsible company. This was followed by corporate branding (39%) and non-sponsorship-related marketing and promotions (35%). Notably, criticisms of Coca-Cola's sponsorship, including concerns about exploitation, health risks, and unethical practices, appeared in only 5% of articles.

This asymmetry of positive coverage highlights how Coca-Cola was able to dominate Olympic-related media narratives through favorable themes and emotional storytelling, with limited exposure to dissenting views.

Table 1. Primary and Secondary Theme of Coca-Cola's Olympic Sponsorship Media Coverage

Themes supporting Coca-Cola sponsorship	Primary theme	Secondary theme
Viewing and participation in sports	18.8%	17.6%
New sponsorship	10.6%	11.8%
Maintenance of sponsorship	7.1%	21.2%
Marketing, promotion (not sponsorship)	8.2%	35.3%
Coca-Cola's sustainability initiatives during the Olympics (e.g., waste reduction, eco-friendly packaging)	11.8%	18.8%
Coca-Cola celebrates shared value with Olympics: culture of excellence	9.4%	22.4%
Coca-Cola shared values with Olympics: inclusivity and diversity	1.2%	18.8%
Coca-Cola is committed to supporting physical well-being of athletes	1.2%	14.1%
Coca-Cola sponsorship/partnership provides a better experience for athletes and fans.	4.7%	24.7%
Coca-Cola's partnership results in revenue and jobs.	-	2.4%
Sponsorship to sports persons/supporting athletes/national teams	4.7%	2.4%
Community engagement	3.5%	42.4%
Environmental initiatives of Coca-Cola	14.1%	10.6%
Gift hampers for sportsperson	1.2%	-
Corporate branding	-	38.8%
Compare Coca-Cola's sponsorship with other Olympic sponsors (e.g., global brands)	-	14.1%
Themes Critiquing Coca-Cola's Sponsorship		
End of sponsorship	-	2.4%
Research suggesting the health harms of Coca-Cola products or in general soda/sugary beverages.	1.2%	2.4%
Regulation of sport sponsorship	-	1.2%
Criticizes the partnership, citing concerns like exploitation, health risks, or unethical practices	2.4%	4.7%

Brand-led messaging prevails over independent reporting

Media coverage of Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the Olympics primarily elevated brand-led narratives. Most articles did not cite sources (53%), but when sources were included, Coca-Cola representatives (19%) were most frequently quoted. This was followed by marketing and advertising industry representatives (7%). The perspectives of public health advocates (1%) and government spokespeople (1%) were largely absent from articles (Figure 8). "Other" quoted sources included singers or representatives from other Olympic sponsors such as Toyota or Air Liquide. The absence of public health or independent voices (e.g., researchers, nonprofits) indicates that the media largely echoed Coca-Cola's corporate messaging rather than challenging or contextualizing it through a public interest lens. The dominant talking points made by sources emphasized brand reputation (67%) and the appropriateness of sponsorship (28%), with minimal attention to sponsorship motives (9%) or health concerns (2%) (Figure 9). These patterns suggest limited critical scrutiny of Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship and a lack of voices that may offer this perspective in coverage. Overall, the findings indicate that media coverage was largely shaped by Coca-Cola's branding efforts and sponsorship legitimacy, with limited comment from public health or other independent voices and minimal scrutiny of potential ethical concerns.

Figure 8. Quoted Sources in Coca-Cola Olympic Sponsorship Media Coverage

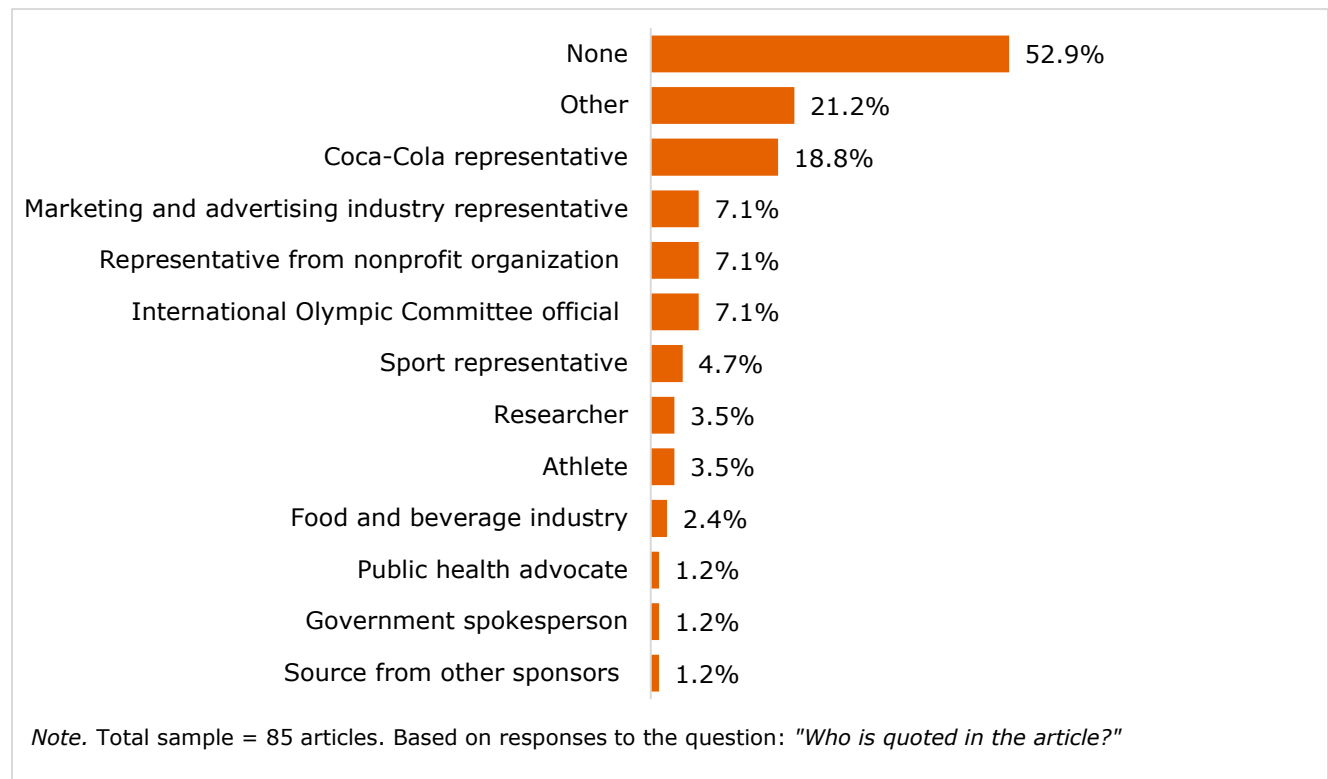
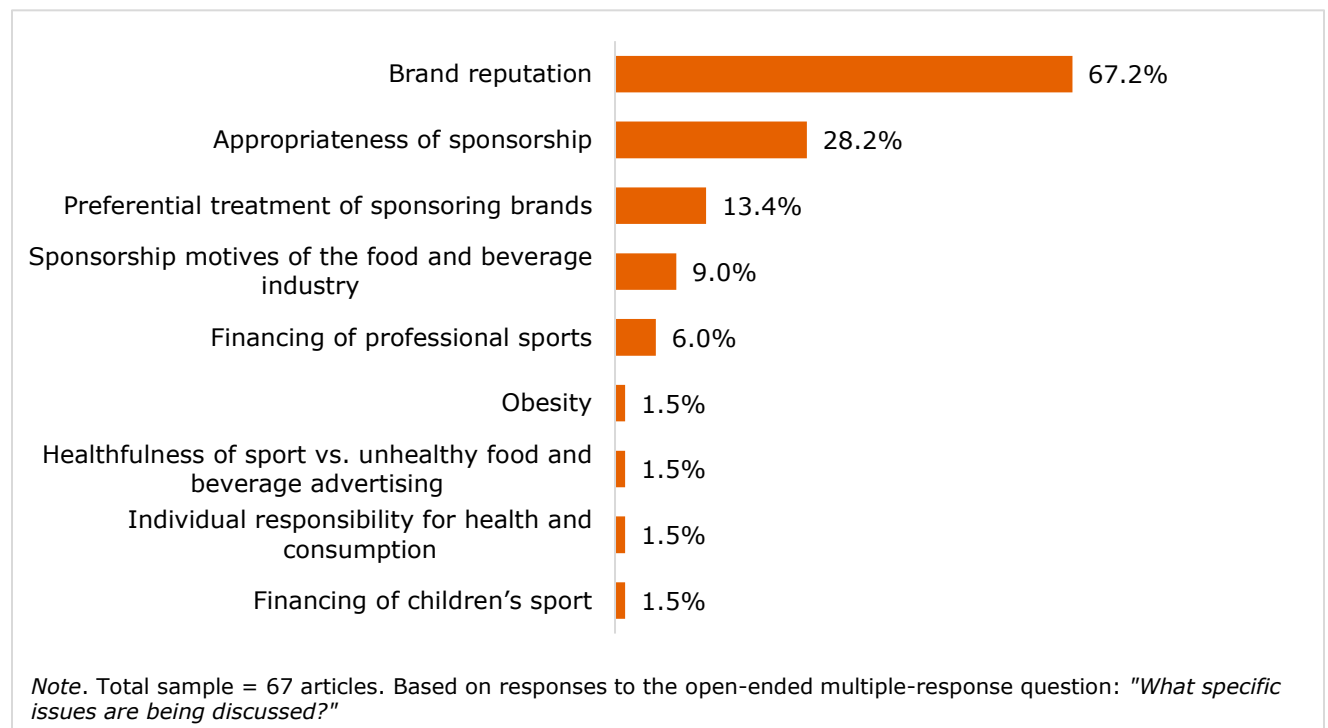


Figure 9. Key Talking Points by Sources in Coca-Cola Olympic Sponsorship Media Coverage



Most articles (66%) included photographs, while only 6% featured videos, and 31% used no visuals at all (Figure 10). Most imagery focused on events (38%), product and product packaging (34%), brand logos (30%), and celebrity endorsements (36%), reinforcing how articles served as brand promotion. All five analyzed videos prominently featured celebrities or influencers alongside Coca-Cola branding, reinforcing how the company uses high-profile celebrity endorsements to enhance brand visibility and appeal (Figure 11). Through this visual framing, Coca-Cola maximized brand exposure in media coverage without additional advertising spend—capitalizing on its Olympic sponsorship to secure repeated, high-visibility placements.

Figure 10. Format of Visuals in Coca-Cola Olympic Sponsorship Media Coverage

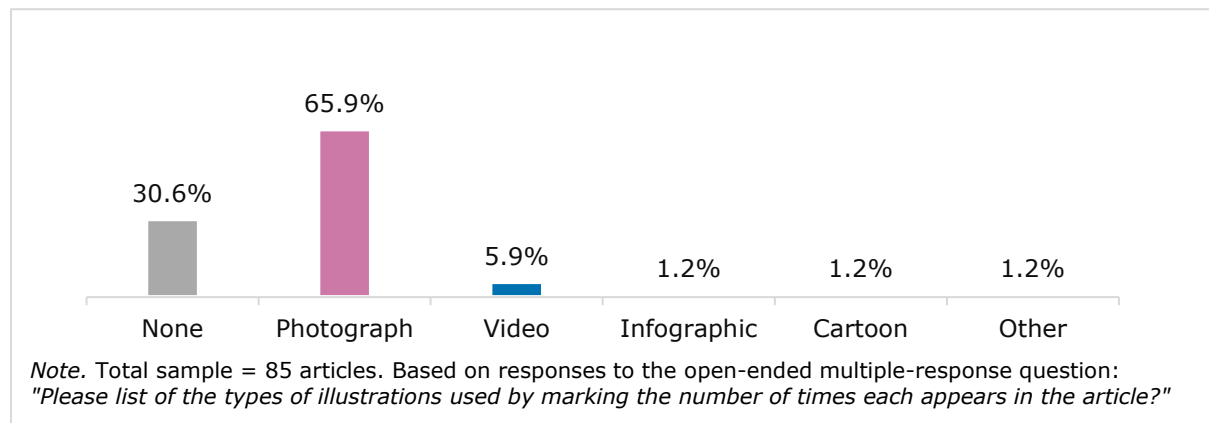
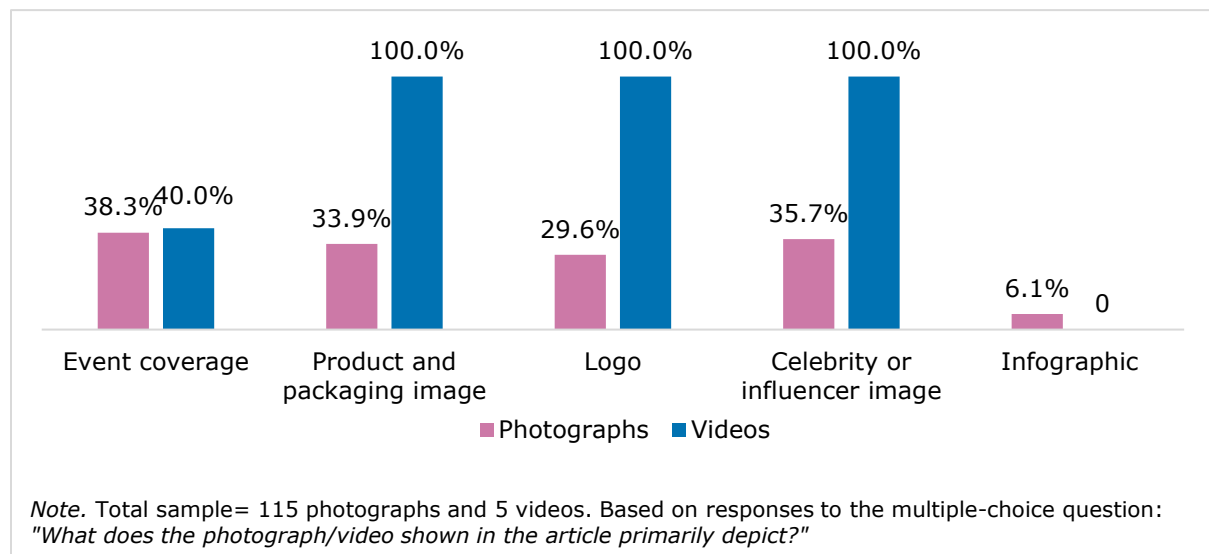


Figure 11. Content of Visuals in Coca-Cola Olympic Sponsorship Media Coverage





Examples of Visual Content



Product and Package Image



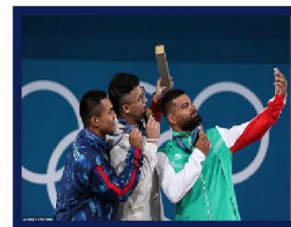
Event Coverage



Infographics



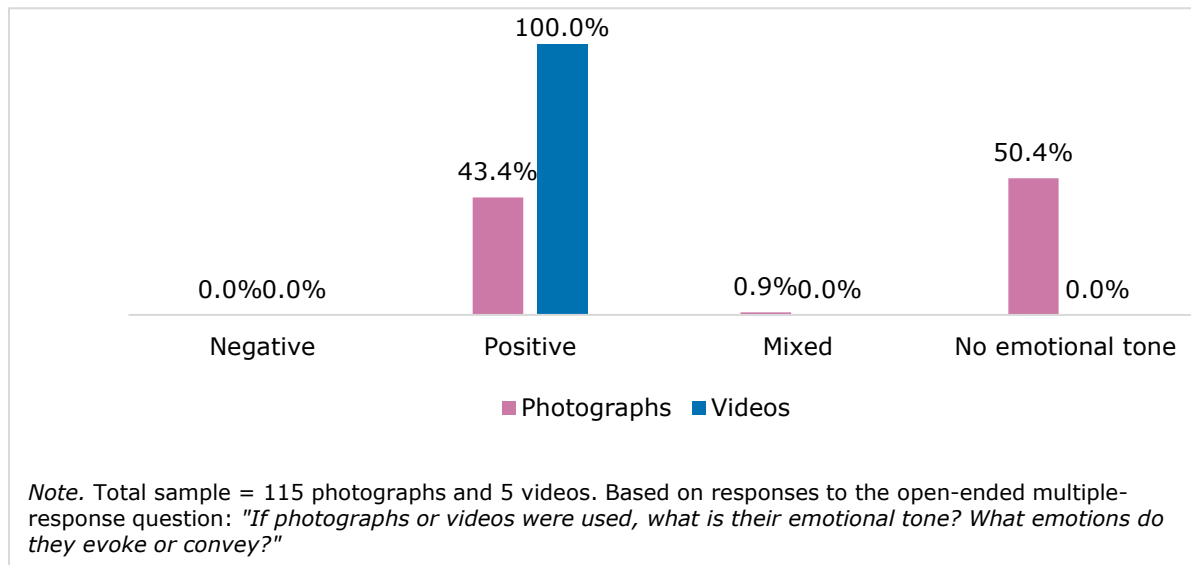
Logos



Celebrity Image

Most of the imagery in articles had either a neutral (50%) or positive (43%) emotional tone (Figure 12). A positive tone refers to images that convey emotions such as joy, pride, happiness, or empathy. Just 1% of images showed mixed emotions, and notably, no images conveyed negative sentiment. All five videos in the sample conveyed positive emotions. This visual profile underscores the consistently favorable portrayal of Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship in media coverage. The dominance of uplifting or noncontroversial imagery helps position the brand as celebratory and value-aligned while sidestepping critique. The absence of negative visuals (e.g., portraying health or environmental harms) reflects a missed opportunity for the media to interrogate the public health and ethical dimensions of the sponsorship, ultimately reinforcing Coca-Cola's legitimacy in the Olympic space without challenge.

Figure 12. Emotional Tone of Visuals in Coca-Cola Olympic Sponsorship Media Coverage



Examples of Visuals with Positive Tones



Note: Costa Coffee is a wholly owned subsidiary of The Coca-Cola Company, having been acquired in 2019.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of online media coverage of Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the 2024 Paris Olympics reveals that the media amplified Coca-Cola's Olympic sportswashing efforts. Media coverage helped Coca-Cola legitimize and enhance its image while distracting from the harm its product causes. Coca-Cola achieved expansive global visibility—reaching over 1 billion readers through just 85 articles—with an estimated advertising value equivalency of US\$9.41 million. This visibility was not the result of paid ad placements but earned media coverage, effectively functioning as free advertising that reinforced the brand's association with sport, celebration and global unity.

The media narrative about Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship was overwhelmingly favorable or neutral. Only 2% of media coverage critiqued the partnership as its primary theme; these articles cited concerns such as health and exploitation and unethical practices. The voices of public health experts and other independent voices (e.g., nonprofits and researchers) were largely absent. Most visuals used in articles reinforced positive emotional tones, and no imagery conveyed negative sentiment. Together, these findings suggest that Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship functioned as both a brand marketing tool and a means to influence public discourse in its favor. This analysis reveals how media coverage of Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the 2024 Paris Olympics overwhelmingly favored the brand and its sponsorship activities, amplifying its messaging while marginalizing critical voices.

The analysis also found that just a few high-impact articles led to most of the audience reach and that most articles were framed at a global rather than national level. This undermines opportunities for Coca-Cola to be held accountable at national levels, thereby limiting opportunities for localized advocacy. Coca-Cola's presence at the Olympics was presented as a global norm, essentially detached from the real-world health consequences associated with sweetened beverage consumption that many countries are facing.

For policymakers, civil society, and media institutions, these findings highlight the urgent need to scrutinize how corporate sponsorship extends beyond brand visibility to shape public perception—often at odds with public health goals. Without meaningful intervention,

sponsorships that embed unhealthy commodity producers like Coca-Cola within globally trusted institutions like the Olympics will continue to serve as a reputational shield, allowing companies to evade meaningful accountability. This not only undermines public health messaging but also deepens the challenges of holding corporations accountable, especially among young people and in communities that are most affected by noncommunicable diseases.

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About Vital Strategies

Vital Strategies believes every person should be protected by an equitable and effective public health system. We partner with governments, communities and organizations around the world to reimagine public health so that health is supported in all the places we live, work and play. The result is millions of people living longer, healthier lives.

To find out more, visit <http://www.vitalstrategies.org/> or X @VitalStrat.

Appendix A

Methods

Sampling and Data Collection

This study employed a systematic content analysis of news articles to evaluate Coca-Cola's sponsorship during the 2024 Paris Olympics. The sample was drawn from online news sources, utilizing structured keyword-based searches to identify relevant articles published in English. Relevant articles published between May 1 and October 31, 2024 were collected.

News articles were identified through Meltwater search engine. Duplicate articles, including those published on multiple platforms, were removed. The final sample was established using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Definition of relevance

Articles were considered relevant if they contained substantive discussions on Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship, brand partnerships, marketing campaigns or public perception. Specifically, relevance was determined by the presence of at least one of the following elements:

1. Mentions of Coca-Cola's role as an official Olympic sponsor or its Olympics-related marketing campaigns or other brand visibility initiatives.
2. Coverage of Coca-Cola's involvement in Olympic-related events, sponsorships, or promotional activities.
3. Discussions on brand perception, sponsorship impact or media representation of Coca-Cola during the Olympic Games.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

1. Articles published within the specified timeframe (May–October 2024).

2. Articles from national and international news media, including print, online and broadcast outlets.
3. Content explicitly discussing Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship, marketing or brand visibility during the tournament.
4. Articles written in English.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Articles published outside the defined timeframe.
2. Content that did not mention Coca-Cola's Olympic-related marketing activities.
3. Articles focused on Coca-Cola's financial performance, stock market trends or non-Olympic sponsorships.
4. News behind paywalls or unavailable due to inactive links.
5. Earned media related to Vital Strategies campaign "Kick Big Soda Out of Sport."

Keyword Selection for News Content Analysis

To systematically analyze media coverage related to Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the Olympics, a structured keyword search strategy was employed. The selection of keywords aimed to capture relevant news articles discussing Coca-Cola's involvement in the Summer Olympics of 2024. The search queries included variations of the brand name, such as "*Coca-Cola*," "*Coca Cola*," and "*Coke*," in combination with terms associated with the Olympic Games, including "*Olympics*," "*Paris 2024*," "*sponsor*" and "*official partner*." In addition, campaign slogans linked to Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship, such as "*Celebrate Everyday Greatness*" (Paris 2024), were incorporated to identify articles referencing the company's promotional efforts. Keywords related to beverages, including "*soda*," "*pop*," "*drink*," "*bottle*" and "*fountain*," were also utilized to ensure comprehensive coverage of Coca-Cola's branding and marketing within the Olympic context.

Content Analysis

A structured content analysis methodology was employed to examine the nature and extent of Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship media representation. A standardized coding framework was developed to categorize articles based on:

- Publication details (date, source, country of origin)
- News type (feature article, opinion piece, press release, editorial)
- Media reach and article value
- Article types
- Theme of the article
- Sentiment toward Coca-Cola sponsorship (positive, negative, neutral)
- Article framing (global vs. country specific)
- Visual content analysis examining the types of illustrations used, their primary subject matter (e.g., product images, logos, event photos) and the emotional tone they conveyed

The coding process followed a two-stage approach:

1. Training and pilot testing: Four coders were trained on the coding framework, and inter-rater reliability test was conducted on a sample of 30 articles to ensure coding consistency.
2. Full-Scale coding: After achieving inter-coder reliability, the complete dataset was coded using a standardized reporting format.

Data analysis

The data was analyzed using standard descriptive statistics, including frequencies and means, along with significance testing methods such as t-tests and chi-square tests to compare key groups across Olympic time periods.

Limitations

This study has a few limitations that should be considered for future research. These include that a significant portion of online articles from 2024 (35%) were no longer

accessible due to broken or expired links, likely resulting from website updates or content removal over the past year. Additionally, the news article search was restricted to English-language content, which may have influenced the findings—particularly the framing of the issue at the global versus national level. Syndicated news articles tended to echo each other, while more in-depth or critical articles may have been behind paywalls, further restricting access. The reliance on digital archives also meant that print-only or paywalled content not accessible through Meltwater was not included in the study. In addition, while Meltwater provided advertising value equivalence estimates to approximate the monetary value of media coverage, this metric offers only a generalized view of potential public relations value. It does not account for critical factors such as article placement, publication prominence or actual audience engagement, limiting its reliability as a measure of real-world media impact. Despite these constraints, the findings offer valuable insights into the media's portrayal of Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship that can be replicated for other industries, companies or event sponsorships, potentially using alternative archival sources, highlighting the need for alternative archival sources in future research. This approach could be replicated for analyzing other industries, companies, or event sponsorships—such as the alcohol industry's involvement in sports or cultural events—enabling broader assessment of media narratives, corporate influence, and public health implications across different contexts and timeframes.

Appendix B

Coding details	
Unique article number (5 Digits) — — — — —	Date of coding (DD/MM/YY)
Coder initials (3 digits) — — —	Time of coding (24 hours clock)

Q. N	Section 1: Basic Information About the Article
	Instructions to coders: The analysis will be done on the text of the news article. Embedded videos that discuss the article and hyperlinks that direct to other websites will not be coded.
	Base: All articles (from Meltwater database) Link of the article
	Base: All articles (from Meltwater database) Country
	Base: All articles (from Meltwater database) Article title/headline
	Base: All articles (from Meltwater database) Full name of the newspaper/magazine/ website where article was published
	Base: All articles (from Meltwater database) What is the media reach of the article? (Digits- 0-100000 – decimal allowed)
	Base: All articles (from Meltwater database) What is the estimated advertising value equivalency of the article? (Digits- 0-100000 – decimal allowed)
	Base: All articles (from Meltwater database) On which date was the article published? (DD/MM/YY)

Q. N	Section 2: Features of News Article
	Base: All Articles

	<p>Instruction: Include videos that are directly part of the article's content, such as those embedded within the article or that provide relevant explanations or context. Do not code for unrelated advertisements, pop-ups or external links, even if they appear alongside the article. Focus only on media that adds value to the article's narrative.</p> <p>Is there any video or a link to a video included in the article? (single coding)</p> <p>No -----1</p> <p>Yes -----2</p>
	<p>Base: 'Yes' in Q9</p> <p>Paste the link to the video's mentioned in the article. [Multiple response open-ended question]</p>
	<p>Base: All articles</p> <p>Are there any website links mentioned in the article? (single coding)</p> <p>No -----1</p> <p>Yes -----2</p> <p>Coke website -----3</p> <p>International Olympics Committee -----4</p> <p>Others – specify -----5</p>
	<p>Base: All articles</p> <p>What type of article was it primarily?</p> <p>Early general news -----1</p> <p>Opinion -----2</p> <p>Editorial -----3</p> <p>Feature -----4</p> <p>Letter to editor -----5</p> <p>News analysis -----6</p> <p>Other – specify -----99</p>
	<p>Base: All articles</p> <p>In which section or category of the newspaper/ magazine did the story appear? [Single response]</p> <p>Early general news -----1</p>

Business -----	2
Editorial -----	3
Opinion -----	4
Education -----	5
Environment -----	6
Main story -----	7
Front page -----	8
Health -----	9
Lifestyle -----	10
City news/ region -----	11
Sunday Magazine -----	12
Technology -----	13
Travel -----	14
Sports -----	15
Others – specify -----	99
Not Applicable -----	96
Base: All articles What is the article's word count? – 10 digits allowed Words count Other please specify – alphanumeric	

Q. N	Section 3: Description of Photographs, Images, Infographics, Cartoons or Videos Used in the News Articles
	Base: All articles Please list the types of illustrations used by marking the number of times each appears in the article. [Multiple response possible] Photograph -----1 Infographic -----2 Cartoon -----3 Video -----4 Other – specify -----99 None -----97

Base: Articles which used photographs/infographics/cartoons and other types of visuals

Select the option(s) that best describes the subject or theme.

Repeat question if there are multiple photographs, infographics or cartoons.

What does the photograph/infographic/cartoon shown in the article primarily depict?

	Photograph	Infographic	Cartoon	Video	Other
Product image (e.g., product images)	1	1	1	1	1
Infographic (e.g., charts, graphs or data visualizations related to sales or impact)	2	2	2	2	2
Logo (e.g., Coca-Cola logo prominently displayed in the article)	3	3	3	3	3
Drawing/illustration (e.g., hand-drawn images or artistically created depictions of Coca-Cola themes)	4	4	4	4	4
Screenshot (e.g., social media posts or campaign materials featuring Coca-Cola)	5	5	5	5	5
Product packaging (e.g., images focusing on Coca-Cola cans, bottles or special-edition packaging)	6	6	6	6	6
Event photo (e.g., pictures from Coca-Cola-sponsored events or press conferences)	7	7	7	7	7

	Celebrity or influencer image (e.g., public figures endorsing Coca-Cola featured in the article)	8	8	8	8	8
	Historical image (e.g., archival photos or historical advertisements related to Coca-Cola)	9	9	9	9	9
	Base: Articles which used photographs/infographics/cartoons and other types of visuals					
	Instruction: This question requires you to interpret the emotions you experience as a result of the image. What emotions does the image seem to convey?					
	If photographs/infographics/cartoons were used, what is their emotional tone? What emotions do they evoke or convey? [Single response]					
		Photograph	Infographic	Cartoon	Video	Other
	Generates negative emotion, like fear, sorrow, anger or disgust (specify)_____	1	1	1	1	1
	Generates positive emotions, like hope, humor, joy, happiness, pride or empathy (specify)_____	2	2	2	2	2
	Mixed emotions (specify)_____	3	3	3	3	3
	No emotional tone	4	4	4	4	4
	Not applicable	96	96	96	96	96

Section 4: Description of the Kind of Article Topic Regarding Coca-Cola Sponsorships During the Olympics		
<i>Instructions: The primary theme represents the main issue discussed in the article (at least 80% of the content)</i>		
Options	Primary theme [Single response]	Secondary theme [Multiple response]
Viewing and participating in sports	1	1
New sponsorship	2	2
Maintenance of sponsorship	3	3
End of sponsorship	4	4
Marketing, promotion (not sponsorship)	5	5
Coca-Cola's sustainability initiatives during the Olympics (e.g., waste reduction, eco-friendly packaging)	6	6
Coca-Cola celebrates shared values with Olympics: culture of excellence	7	7
Coca-Cola shared values with Olympics: inclusivity and diversity	8	8
Coca-Cola is committed to supporting physical well-being of athletes	9	9
Coca-Cola sponsorship/partnership provides a better experience for athletes and fans	10	10
Coca-Cola maintains that the company can adhere to voluntary health and sponsorship guidelines	11	11
Coca-Cola's partnership results in revenue and jobs	12	12
Sponsorship to sports persons/supporting athletes/national teams	13	13
Community engagement	14	14

Environmental initiatives of Coca-Cola	15	15
Policies limiting Coca-Cola's sponsorships could reduce tax revenues from advertising	16	16
Lack of evidence that Cola-Cola's products lead to poor health outcomes; more research in country needed	17	17
Research suggesting the health harms of Coca-Cola products or in general soda/sugary beverages	18	18
Maintenance of sponsorship/ Sponsorship restrictions might breach existing contracts or partnerships	19	19
End/criticism of sponsorship	20	20
Regulation of sport sponsorship	21	21
Gift hampers for sportsperson	22	22
Sponsorship to sports persons/supporting athletes	23	23
Community engagement	24	24
Corporate branding	25	25
Compare Coca-Cola's sponsorship with other Olympic sponsors (e.g., global brands)	26	26
Criticizes the partnership, citing concerns like exploitation, health risks or unethical practices	27	27
Other (Specify): _____	99	99
None		97
Base: All articles		
Is the article in favor of or against Coca-Cola/beverage industry partnership/sponsorship during the Olympics or other sporting events?		
Options	Single coding	Narratives

	In Favor	1		
	<i>[Highlights positive aspects such as innovation, support or contributions to sports development]</i>			
	Against	2		
	<i>[Criticizes the partnership, citing concerns like exploitation, health risks or unethical practices]</i>			
	Neutral	3		
	<i>[Offers factual reporting without clear support or opposition]</i>			
	Article did not talk about sponsorship/partnership	98		
	<i>Base: All articles that were reported against or neutral in 19 (above question).</i>			
	According to the article, what are the reasons/concerns to be against the Coca-Cola partnership/sponsorships during the Olympics?			
	Options	Multiple coding	Narratives	
	Health harms (e.g., obesity, type 2 diabetes)	1		
	Influence youth health behavior	2		
	Contradict the purpose of sports	3		
	Health implications of the sponsorship	4		
	Ethical concerns (e.g., targeting children, misleading messaging)	5		
	Environmental harms	6		
	Others (specify)_____	99		
	<i>Base: All articles that were reported favor or neutral in 19.</i>			
	According to the article, what are the reasons/benefits to be in favour of the Coca-Cola partnership/sponsorships during Olympics, according to the article?			
	Options	Multiple coding	Narratives	
	Brand promotion	1		
	Economic benefits of the sponsorship	2		
	Infrastructural development	3		
	Shared values between partners (family, togetherness etc)	4		
	Others (specify)_____	99		

	<p>Is the article framing Coca-Cola's sponsorship in a global or a country-specific context?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="297 317 954 369"><i>Options</i></th> <th data-bbox="954 317 1182 369"><i>Single coding</i></th> <th data-bbox="1182 317 1416 369"><i>Narratives</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="297 369 954 422"><i>Global</i></td> <td data-bbox="954 369 1182 422">1</td> <td data-bbox="1182 369 1416 422"></td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="297 422 954 474"><i>Specific</i></td> <td data-bbox="954 422 1182 474">2</td> <td data-bbox="1182 422 1416 474"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>Options</i>	<i>Single coding</i>	<i>Narratives</i>	<i>Global</i>	1		<i>Specific</i>	2	
<i>Options</i>	<i>Single coding</i>	<i>Narratives</i>								
<i>Global</i>	1									
<i>Specific</i>	2									
	<p><i>Base: All articles</i></p> <p>Is any campaign linked to the Olympics mentioned in the article? If yes, please provide the campaign name. [Multiple coding]</p> <p>Not mentioned -----1</p> <p>Yes (specify campaign name) -----2</p> <p>Yes (specify campaign name) -----3</p> <p>Yes (specify campaign narrative) -----4</p> <p>Yes (specify campaign narrative) -----5</p>									
	<p><i>Base: All articles</i></p> <p>Does the article mention the name of the organization running the campaign? If yes, please specify the name [Multiple coding]</p> <p>Not mentioned -----1</p> <p>Yes (specify organization name) -----2</p> <p>Yes (specify organization name) -----3</p> <p>Yes (specify narrative) -----4</p> <p>Yes (specify narrative) -----5</p>									
	<p><i>Base: All articles</i></p> <p>Does the article mention any "call to action" statements? If yes, please specify the statements [Multiple coding]</p> <p>Not mentioned -----1</p> <p>Yes (specify) -----2</p> <p>Yes (specify) -----3</p>									
	<p><i>Base: All articles</i></p>									

				<p>29. What are they talking about? (Multiple answers)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Obesity 2. Childhood obesity 3. Children's health 4. Healthfulness of sport vs. unhealthy food and beverage advertising 5. Overconsumption of food and beverage 6. Individual responsibility for health and consumption 7. Financing of professional sports 8. Financing of children's sport 9. Corruption 10. Morality issues 11. Appropriateness of sponsorship 12. Brand reputation 13. Preferential treatment of sponsoring brands 14. Sponsorship motives of the food and beverage industry 					
Actors		Who is speaking?	Which organization?						
Who is quoted in the article, and how do they describe the practice of sport sponsorship by food and beverage (F&B)				Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4	Response 5	Response 6

	companies?
	What specific
	issues are being
	discussed?
	Food and
	beverage
	industry
	Advertising
	industry
	Public health
	advocate
	Researcher
	Policymaker
	Government
	spokesperson
	Civil servant
	Government
	health
	organization
	Journalists/comm
	entary
	Sport
	representative
	Athlete
	Nonprofit
	organization
	Source from
	other sponsors
	General public
	Marketing
	experts

	Coca-Cola representative
	International Olympic Committee official
	Others (specify):
	Not applicable (Mutually exclusive)