



UNHEALTHY FOOD HIJACK



OF FESTIVE PERIODS IN NIGERIA



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List of Abbreviations

CAPPA	Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
GBFoods	Gallina Blanca Foods
NBC	Nigerian Bottling Company
NCDs	Non-Communicable Diseases
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
SSB / SSBs	Sugar-Sweetened Beverage / Sugar-Sweetened Beverages
UPF / UPFs	Ultra-Processed Food / Ultra-Processed Foods
WHO	World Health Organization

Acknowledgements

Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPPA) expresses deep appreciation to the public health advocates of the Healthy Food Policy Youth Vanguard, whose commitment and discipline made this festive marketing monitoring report possible. We particularly acknowledge the Digital Media Volunteers and CAPPA staff who served as participant observers across physical and digital spaces, often under demanding conditions.

These volunteers dedicated long hours to fieldwork in markets, malls, parks, transport hubs, and online platforms, documenting how food and beverage corporations saturated the festive period with unhealthy product promotions. Their work reflects a clear political commitment to a food environment that protects health rather than exploits vulnerability.

We also acknowledge the Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHA) for its invaluable technical guidance, capacity-building support, and strategic direction, which strengthened the policy relevance of this report.

Special thanks go to Humphrey Ukeaja, who compiled this report and synthesised evidence from digital tracking, field observations, and media review. We also sincerely acknowledge Abayomi Sarumi for coordinating the monitoring process and providing critical review throughout the project, as well as Zikora Ibeh and Akinbode Oluwafemi for their editorial inputs and guidance, which helped sharpen the analysis and ensure clarity and accuracy across the report.

Executive Summary

The festive period in Nigeria, spanning from late November 2025 to early January 2026, provides a concentrated view into how the food and beverage industry operates under conditions of heightened sociality, emotional openness, and increased household spending. While this report focuses on that specific period, the practices documented are not new. Rather, they reflect a recurring and well-established pattern in which celebratory seasons are treated as opportunities to intensify marketing and deepen consumption norms.

During the 2025 season, major producers and distributors of sugar-sweetened beverages, sweetened dairy drinks, instant noodles, and seasoning products intensified their presence across digital platforms, public spaces, and community settings. These promotional activities manifested as coordinated interventions into everyday life, designed to bind commercial products and *unhealthy diets*¹ to the social meanings of celebration, care, generosity, and collective identity. Parks, shopping malls, markets, concert venues, transport hubs, religious gatherings, and online social environments were transformed into branded settings in which highly processed food and beverage products appeared familiar, expected, and socially appropriate.

Companies also relied heavily on AI-assisted imagery, filters, and generative visual content to produce festive-themed materials at scale. These tools accelerated a trend already visible in earlier festive campaigns, enabling rapid content reproduction, influencer collaborations, and prize-based participation that blurred the line between celebration and advertising. Children and adolescents were, as in previous festive cycles, indirectly but systematically drawn into these marketing ecosystems. Child-oriented imagery, animated characters, Santa-themed visuals, games, and free product sampling embedded branded products within spaces associated with trust and authority, including schools, community programmes, religious-adjacent events, and family-focused gatherings. Corporate donations and sponsorships targeting youth settings further normalised early exposure, framing consumption as a festive reward or sign of care.

Corporate social responsibility activities remained closely intertwined with marketing efforts. End-of-year product distribution, community events, and festive “giving” enabled companies to access low-income communities, public spaces, and faith-adjacent settings with limited scrutiny.

¹ https://world-heart-federation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Factsheet_Unhealthy_diet.pdf

These initiatives served both to expand market reach and to strengthen corporate reputation during a period of economic pressure, thereby dampening public and political resistance to stronger regulation.

The health implications of these practices are already visible in population outcomes. Nigeria is experiencing a steady rise in non-communicable diseases, particularly hypertension and type 2 diabetes,² within a food environment increasingly shaped by ultra-processed products high in sugar and sodium. Festive periods intensify this trajectory by exploiting the psychological climate of holidays to encourage bulk purchasing of ultra-processed foods, frequent consumption, and the temporary suspension of dietary restraint. Across campaigns observed, nutritional information and health trade-offs were almost entirely absent. Products were framed through affective narratives rather than their material composition, reinforcing consumption patterns that persist beyond the festive season.

The findings of this report indicate that existing regulatory approaches are poorly aligned with contemporary marketing practices. National health policies and regulations fail to capture brand-led occupation of public space, influencer-driven promotion, AI-assisted content production, and CSR-mediated access to children and communities, all of which promote the consumption of unhealthy foods.

Based on these findings, the report recommends regulatory reforms that reflect contemporary marketing realities. These include raising the sugar-sweetened beverage tax to at least 50 percent of the retail price,³ introducing interpretive front-of-pack warning labels using clear symbols and visual cues, strengthening restrictions on child-directed marketing across all channels, and limiting branded activities in public, educational, and religious spaces. These measures are framed as proportionate public health responses to marketing practices that currently externalise long-term health costs while embedding harmful products in the most socially meaningful moments of Nigerian life.

² Idris IO, Oguntade AS, Mensah EA, Kitamura N. Prevalence of non-communicable diseases and its risk factors among Ijegan-Isheri Osun residents in Lagos State, Nigeria: a community based cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*. 2020 Aug 18;20(1):1258. doi: 10.1186/s12889-020-09349-2. PMID: 32811462; PMCID: PMC7437062.

³ <https://cappafrica.org/2026/01/26/ssb-tax-should-corporate-profits-supersede-public-health/>

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Nigeria is navigating a precarious epidemiological transition. Non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular conditions are rising fast, even as infectious diseases continue to weigh heavily on households and the health system.⁴ This shift emerges from a food system in active transformation. Ultra-processed foods are displacing traditional diets because they are priced to appear affordable, designed for convenience, and marketed until they feel very normal. Rapid urbanisation, widening inequality, and the instability of fresh food prices spurred by rising insecurity across farmlands in the country have created a market opening that *Big Food* and beverage firms have eagerly occupied and saturated with energy-dense products high in sugar, transfat, and salt. In the background, weak labelling standards and uneven oversight of marketing and product formulation leave consumers to navigate a minefield with little usable information and even less protection.

Festive periods concentrate this political economy into a short and intense window. Seasons such as Christmas and New Year accelerate travel, social gatherings, gift-giving, religious activities, leisure, and household spending, multiplying points of commercial exposure. Companies recognise this and treat the season as a strategic opportunity to convert consumption into social meaning. Sugar-sweetened beverages are framed as symbols of love and togetherness. Seasoning cubes are recast as markers of good hosting and the foundation of a “proper” festive meal. Marketing during this period does more than persuade. It actively recodes culture. By tying unhealthy products to generosity, respectability, faith, and family duty, the industry renders excess sugar and salt as tradition, while casting restraint and caution as *stinginess and boring*.

For this reason, scrutinising festive marketing is a public health necessity. These campaigns operate at high volume and within compressed timeframes, giving them psychological force that routine health messaging struggles to counter. They also exploit regulatory blind spots. Many arrive disguised as entertainment or corporate benevolence, from Christmas villages and city light displays to concerts and community giveaways. Because these activities do not resemble conventional advertising, they often bypass rules written for billboards and television, while reaching the same audiences, including children and low-income families, with fewer warnings and weaker oversight. In this sense, the festive season functions as a *risk multiplier*. It intensifies exposure, normalises overconsumption, and embeds health-harming products within the very rituals people rely on to endure a difficult year.

⁴ Ajisegiri WS, Abimbola S, Tesema AG, Odusanya OO, Ojii DB, Peiris D, Joshi R. Aligning policymaking in decentralized health systems: Evaluation of strategies to prevent and control non-communicable diseases in Nigeria. *PLOS Glob Public Health*. 2021 Nov 10;1(11):e0000050. doi: 10.1371/journal.pgph.0000050. PMID: 36962096; PMCID: PMC10022121.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach that combined digital monitoring, on-the-ground observation, media review, and qualitative insights from key informants. The goal was not simply to list advertisements, but to understand how different marketing activities interacted across digital and physical spaces to shape what Nigerians see, experience, and consume during the festive period. The monitoring period ran from about 25 November 2025 to 5 January 2026. This timeframe covered the build-up to Christmas, Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Eve crossover services, New Year's Day, and the first week of January, when many brands continued festive campaigns into the new year. This made it possible to capture both early promotional messaging and post-holiday extensions that encouraged continued consumption, including identity-based sugar-sweetened beverage campaigns and food-pairing messages.

Geographically, the monitoring focused on major cities such as Lagos, Abuja, Onitsha, and Ibadan, as well as high-traffic locations where food and beverage marketing is most visible. These included shopping malls such as Ikeja City Mall and Jara Mall, public parks like Gbagada Park, transport hubs including Oshodi and Jibowu motor parks, and large event venues such as the Eko Convention Centre during music festivals, all located in Lagos. Markets and community spaces in the other identified cities were also observed, as they often host promotions, cooking demonstrations, and branded community events. Religious sites and their surrounding areas, particularly churches hosting crossover and New Year services, were included where product branding or displays were visible.

Digital monitoring covered major social media platforms where Nigerian brands are most active, including *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *TikTok*, *YouTube*, and *X*. The review included official brand pages, visible paid advertisements, influencer accounts, and user-generated content linked to branded hashtags, challenges, or contests. Although platform algorithms limit complete capture, daily or near-daily checks of selected accounts and hashtags, combined with manual searches for campaign names and slogans, helped identify dominant campaigns and recurring messages. The monitoring focused on product categories that are routinely promoted during festive periods and are associated with elevated diet-related health risks. These included carbonated sugar-sweetened beverages; malt-based drinks commonly positioned as family or celebratory beverages; sweetened flavoured milk and dairy drinks; instant noodles; seasoning cubes and similar flavour enhancers; and other ultra-processed foods such as biscuits and highly processed snacks when they featured prominently in festive campaigns.

By design, the monitoring prioritised campaigns that combined several risk factors. These included high sugar or high salt content, strong appeal to children and young people, heavy emotional or cultural messaging, and clear efforts to present products as essential to Christmas, Boxing Day, or New Year celebrations.

Digital data collection involved regular observation of brand and influencer activity throughout the monitoring period. Screenshots of relevant posts and advertisements were taken with timestamps and basic details such as platform, account name, caption text, engagement indicators such as *likes*, *comments*, *shares*, and *visible hashtags or contest mechanics*. Where identifiable, indicators of paid promotions, including “sponsored” tags, or hints of geographic targeting were noted, although detailed micro-targeting data remained inaccessible. Each captured item was accompanied by short notes summarising the main message, the likely target audience, and any direct references to festive or religious theme

Field observations followed a semi-structured protocol. Volunteers visited selected locations at least once during peak festive activity and recorded the presence of branded displays and installations, sampling booths, banners, digital screens, and experiential activations such as Santa grottos, Christmas trees, or themed “villages.” Notes captured which products were most visible; whether children were targeted through games, gifts, or mascots; how product marketers interacted with families; and whether health or nutritional information was provided. Photographs were taken where permitted to show how branding was arranged and how public or communal spaces were effectively transformed into branded environments.

Media monitoring focused on mainstream and online news outlets that regularly report on CSR activities, marketing campaigns, and festive events. Searches combined brand names with keywords such as *Christmas*, *yuletide*, *lights*, *village*, *campaign*, *donation*, and *New Year* to identify relevant news articles and press releases. These materials were reviewed to understand how corporate activities were presented to the public during the festive period.

CHAPTER 2

The Burden of NCDs and Food Environment in Nigeria

Nigeria health profile is increasingly defined by the coexistence of long-standing infectious diseases and a steadily expanding burden of non-communicable diseases. Conditions such as hypertension, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and diet-related cancers are no longer peripheral to clinical practice or confined to specific social groups. They are becoming common features of everyday morbidity, particularly in urban and peri-urban populations. This shift is not adequately explained by individual behaviour or lifestyle change alone. It reflects a deeper transformation in the country's food environment and the economic and commercial forces that shape it.

Urbanisation has played a central role in this transformation. In major cities including Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, and Ibadan, long working hours, extended commuting times, income insecurity, and rising food prices have altered how households access and prepare food. Fresh foods have become increasingly expensive, unstable in price, and demanding in terms of time and energy. In contrast, ultra-processed foods offer predictability. Products such as instant noodles, sugar-sweetened beverages, sweetened dairy drinks, biscuits, savoury snacks, tomato pastes, and seasoning cubes are inexpensive, widely available, shelf-stable, and heavily promoted. For many households, these products now form the backbone of daily consumption, not as occasional substitutes, but as routine dietary staples. Their prevalence is the result of deliberate investment in distribution, pricing, and marketing systems that prioritise volume, convenience, and constant visibility.

The expansion of ultra-processed food and sugar-sweetened beverage consumption is best understood through the concept of the commercial determinants of health.⁵ Corporate strategies, rather than individual preference, increasingly shape what food is available, affordable, and socially desirable. Multinational and domestic food and beverage companies have reorganised Nigeria's food environment by saturating both physical and digital spaces with brand imagery, promotions, and aspirational narratives. Streets, markets, transport hubs, schools, places of worship, entertainment venues, and social media platforms are routinely used to normalise these products as integral to everyday life. While companies often frame themselves as contributors to development, employment, and social wellbeing, their product portfolios are dominated by items that deliver high levels of sugar and salt into the population. Within this landscape, healthier foods occupy a weaker position. They are comparatively less accessible, less promoted, and often more costly, while foods associated with increased NCD risk remain cheap, highly visible, and emotionally appealing, making them difficult to avoid.

⁵ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/commercial-determinants-of-health>

Policy responses in Nigeria have recognised the rising burden of diet-related non-communicable diseases but have so far struggled to match the scale and sophistication of commercial marketing practices. The Federal Government adopted a national NCD policy and initiated discussions around salt reduction,⁶ and in 2021 it introduced an excise duty on sugar-sweetened beverages that came into effect in 2022 through the Finance Act, charging a fixed levy of N10 per litre on non-alcoholic sweetened drinks as a tool to discourage excessive sugar intake and raise revenue for health expenditures.⁷

Despite these steps, the design and scale of these measures remain limited. The SSB tax rate is low relative to global benchmarks and has not been adjusted in line with inflation or WHO recommendations to significantly reduce consumption.⁸ Efforts to strengthen food labelling have led to updated requirements for the disclosure of ingredients and nutrient information on pre-packaged foods. However, discussions around more prominent front-of-pack interpretive labelling systems, which could provide consumers with clear and rapid signals about products high in sugar, salt, or saturated fat, are still ongoing and have not yet translated into widespread implementation. As a result, labelling remains of limited practical value at the point of purchase.⁹ Regulation of food and beverage marketing also remains uneven. Oversight is divided across agencies such as the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), which holds authority over food safety, labelling, and advertising approval, and other ministries responsible for health and trade, creating fragmented enforcements that fails to cover emerging marketing channels, particularly digital and out-of-home environments. These gaps are routinely exploited by industry actors¹⁰ who simultaneously resist stronger controls through lobbying and public messaging, while expanding their presence in low-income neighbourhoods, around schools, and within religious and community spaces.¹¹

Festive periods such as Christmas, Boxing Day, and New Year sit at the intersection of these trends and amplify them in dangerous ways. These are seasons when social life is most intense: extended families travel and meet, churches and mosques are full, workplaces host end-of-year parties, and shopping malls and parks become key leisure destinations for children and young people. Food and drink function not just as nourishment but as symbols of love, hospitality, and generosity; refusing a drink or a plate of food can be perceived as rude or ungrateful, while providing “enough” and “the best” is tied to dignity and status. In such environments, Big Food’s festive marketing campaigns operate as powerful cultural scripts, telling Nigerians that real celebration requires branded soft drinks, malt beverages, instant noodles, sweetened milks, and *richly seasoned dishes*.¹²

⁶ <https://cappafrica.org/2025/03/28/nigeria-launches-national-guidelines-for-sodium-reduction/>

⁷ https://www.gavinpublishers.com/assets/articles_pdf/Implementation-Status-of-Health-Tax-Policies-in-Nigeria-and-their-Alignment-with-Global-Standards.pdf

⁸ <https://cappafrica.org/2025/07/03/who-urges-nigeria-raise-prices-on-sugary-drinks-alcohol-tobacco-by-50-to-save-lives/>

⁹ <https://businessday.ng/opinion/article/putting-food-at-the-centre-of-nigerias-health-reform/>

¹⁰ <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/nutrition/articles/10.3389/fnut.2025.1644344/full>

¹¹ <https://oxgital.com/arcon-rules-for-nigerian-marketers-2026/>

¹² These are meals that derive their taste primarily from added salt, sodium compounds, monosodium glutamate (MSG), and artificial or concentrated flavourings, not from fresh herbs, onions, peppers, or traditional slow-cooked stock

The issue is not celebration itself, which remains socially and psychologically protective, but the deliberate placement of unhealthy products at the centre of these celebrations while their health consequences are obscured or downplayed. This is particularly troubling in a context where access to preventive services, routine screening, and long-term care for hypertension and diabetes remains limited, and where catastrophic health expenditures can push households into deeper poverty. When festive periods become moments of intensified sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats consumption, short-term enjoyment gives way to long-term health costs that fall disproportionately on low-income families.

Children and adolescents are especially vulnerable within this environment. They respond strongly to bright colours, characters, music, and peer trends, and they are still forming taste preferences while present in school and faith environments where trust in adult authority is high. When Santa figures distribute instant noodles, mascots appear alongside seasoning promotions, or music festivals sponsored by soft drink brands become the most sought-after youth experiences, children internalise the idea that these products are normal, desirable, and linked to social belonging. Over time, this shapes dietary patterns, making sugar-sweetened beverages and salty ultra-processed foods default choices rather than occasional indulgences.

Festive periods also confer reputational advantages on corporations. Through corporate social responsibility activities such as park decorations, concert sponsorships, product donations to schools and NGOs, and end-of-year “support” to communities, food and beverage companies position themselves as benevolent actors offering relief during periods of economic hardship. This framing can soften public and policymaker perceptions and create resistance to stronger regulation. The same companies being asked to pay higher taxes or face stricter controls are also those lighting public spaces and distributing festive gifts. Under this CSR guise, brands gain access to schools, religious institutions, and low-income communities with limited scrutiny from formal advertising rules.¹³ Taken together, Nigeria’s NCD and food environment context are shaped by a rapid shift towards ultra-processed diets, regulatory frameworks that lag behind contemporary marketing, and strong corporate influence over both physical food access and the social meanings attached to eating. Festive periods intensify exposure to these commercial pressures at precisely the moment when families are primed to consume more and interpret marketing messages through lenses of joy, generosity, and faith, rather than risk and harm.¹⁴

¹³ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10261624/>

¹⁴ <https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2025/12/28/how-big-food-turns-holidays-into-a-public-health-trap/>

CHAPTER 3

Findings from Online and Offline Monitoring

During the 2025 festive period, Nigeria's streets, malls, parks, and digital platforms were saturated with food and beverage marketing that sought to monopolise the emotional language of Christmas, Boxing Day, and New Year. These campaigns absorbed the rituals of the season itself. Light displays, concerts, Santa-themed installations, community cook-offs, and AI-driven digital storytelling were deployed to fold unhealthy diets into the meaning of celebration and togetherness. Across Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, Ibadan, Onitsha, and other urban centres, festive participation increasingly meant moving through branded environments, whether online or offline.

One striking feature was the deliberate blurring of boundaries between physical and digital spaces. Campaigns rarely operated on one channel. Social media content funneled audiences into physical activations such as Christmas villages, concerts, mall experiences, and park lightings. These on-ground events, in turn, were engineered to generate photographs, short videos, and user-generated content that circulated back online as free amplification. A truck tour, a mall Santa appearance, or a community cooking event functioned less as a one-off activation than as a node in a wider marketing system. Adults and children were encouraged to film, post, tag brands, and join hashtag challenges that quietly converted celebration into promotion.

Within this ecosystem, the nutritional character of the products on display was nearly invisible. Marketing narratives focused instead on emotional cues: sharing, family love, Nigerian pride, music and creativity, spirituality, and the promise of a better year ahead. Large screens and billboards showed smiling families with tables full of branded drinks and meals, while voice-overs promised "holiday magic," "Christmas at its peak," "legendary moments," and "joy that overflows," subtly implying that such experiences would be incomplete without a specific logo on the table or soft drink in hand. Public spaces, which ideally should support health-enhancing activities and neutral communal identity, were repeatedly turned into immersive branded playgrounds, especially in the evenings when families went out together to "see the lights" or attend festive events.

Another clear pattern was the deliberate segmentation of audiences. Brands did not address “Nigerians” as a single group; instead, they identified and targeted distinct populations, including children in malls, Gen Z¹⁵ audiences at music festivals and online, parents at transit hubs and supermarkets, and low-income families in markets and community settings. Each group encountered marketing that was calibrated to its emotional and social drivers.

Children were enticed with Santa imagery, mascots, games, and free samples. Young people were offered access to headline artists, VIP lounges, and digital engagements that required product purchases or QR-code scanning, effectively turning consumption into a gateway to status, inclusion, and participation in desirable social events. Parents were addressed with narratives about “good parenting,” “sharing goodness,” and “bringing joy to the family,” often using imagery that suggested tidy homes, coordinated outfits also known locally as *anko*,¹⁶ and aspirational lifestyles. Communities in lower-income areas were courted through CSR-framed events: park decorations, free shows, or food distributions that carried heavy branding and photography opportunities for corporate communications.

The cumulative effect of these strategies was a dense, overlapping web of exposures in which branded messages followed consumers across spaces, platforms, and moments of the day. A teenager in Lagos, for instance, might see a Coca-Cola’s AI-enhanced “Holidays Are Coming” advert on YouTube in the morning, pass by a Maltina “Legendary Christmas” street lighting on the way home, attend a Bigi Christmas village event at a mall with their family or younger siblings, and later scroll through Maggi and Knorr festive content on TikTok while waiting for dinner. Each contact is framed as fun, aspirational, or caring, leaving almost no space in festive discourse for reflection on the health consequences of excessive sugar or salt intake, or for alternatives that centre fresh, minimally processed foods and water.

In this sense, festive marketing in both digital and public spaces does not merely respond to consumer demand; it actively produces the idea that heavily processed, branded products are central to Nigerian Christmas and New Year celebrations. The following illustrations show how this logic was operationalised across different brands, platforms, and social settings during the festive period.

¹⁵ Generation Z (Gen Z) refers to people born approximately between 1997 and 2012, who grew up in a digital-first environment shaped by social media, smartphones, and algorithm-driven platforms, and who are disproportionately targeted through online, influencer-led, and interactive marketing strategies.

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/gbagimarket/posts/the-word-anko-and-its-borrowing-into-hausa-languagethe-word-anko-originates-from/1019834620172872/>

Coca-Cola: “Holidays Are Coming”

Coca-Cola’s “Holidays Are Coming”¹⁷ has long been an iconic global Christmas asset, and in 2025, the brand doubled down on this heritage by layering new technologies and local activations onto the familiar imagery of red trucks, Santa, and snow. The updated version incorporated generative AI-enhanced visuals and animations to create hyper-real, emotionally charged scenes of trucks gliding through winter landscapes and arriving in communities bathed in red light and Christmas cheer. For many viewers, especially those who grew up seeing the advert, the campaign tapped deeply into nostalgia; for younger audiences, the updated visuals offered novelty and spectacle, making the content highly shareable on social platforms where comments celebrated the “official start of Christmas” when the advert appeared.



Screenshot from the AI generated video.

In Nigeria, the campaign moved beyond screens into physical spaces via a Christmas Truck Tour across major cities and select smaller towns. These tours created “festive hubs” in parks, malls, and public squares, where branded trucks served as stages and backdrops for music, games, photo booths, and choreographed experiences involving influencers and local celebrities. Families queued to take pictures with the trucks, often encouraged by staff to pose with chilled glass bottles or cans, creating perfect “Instagram moments” that kept the Coca-Cola logo at the centre of each frame.

¹⁷ <https://marketingedge.com.ng/for-the-second-year-running-coca-cola-turns-to-ai-for-iconic-holidays-are-coming-christmas-ad/>

The spaces were designed to be immersive and family-friendly, with lighting, sound, and activities carefully orchestrated to produce a sense of “holiday magic” that children, in particular, found irresistible.

From a public health perspective, this approach raised several concerns. The heavy use of Santa imagery, “magical” AI-generated scenes, and emotionally manipulative music and voice-overs created a fantasy world in which Coca-Cola consumption was portrayed as both harmless and inherently linked to joy, generosity, and togetherness. Children were exposed to intense, repeated cues associating sugary drinks with positive feelings and cherished memories, long before they could understand the links between frequent SSB consumption and NCD risks such as obesity and type 2 diabetes. Because the campaign was framed as seasonal entertainment rather than advertising—especially in its on-ground manifestation as a “Christmas event”, many parents and policymakers may not even perceive it as marketing that warrants regulation.

The integration of AI and digital interactivity also raises regulatory challenges. AI-generated content allows brands to rapidly produce numerous variations of an advert, tailored to different segments or platforms, making it harder for regulators to track or pre-clear material. If future iterations of such campaigns incorporate personalised or interactive elements, children and adolescents could be exposed to highly targeted, psychologically optimised messages that further cement sugary drinks at the centre of festive experiences. This trend underlines the need for regulatory frameworks that explicitly cover AI-driven advertising and emotional targeting, especially towards minors.

For advocacy, Coca-Cola’s 2025 “Holidays Are Coming” campaign demonstrates why restrictions on SSB marketing to children cannot be limited to conventional cartoon ads or in-school posters. A comprehensive approach must recognise that child exposure happens through family-oriented events, Santa appearances, social media “memories,” and AI-enhanced storylines that position sugary drinks as a family tradition rather than a consumer choice. This underscores the need to treat festive marketing as a core public health concern and to integrate it into debates on SSB taxation, nutrition standards, and front-of-pack labelling. Without this, fiscal and informational policies risk being neutralised by seasonal storytelling that makes high-sugar products feel emotionally indispensable rather than optional.

Nigerian Breweries: "A Legendary Christmas"

Nigerian Breweries' *A Legendary Christmas*¹⁸ campaign approached the festive season through urban spectacle and portfolio-wide visibility. The company rolled out an ambitious 13-kilometre street lighting project across several Nigerian cities, including Lagos and Abuja, transforming major roads and neighbourhoods into branded corridors of festive light. These installations were presented as public gifts, inserting corporate and product identities into the urban landscape at a time of heightened social movement and leisure.

Alongside the light displays, the company established themed "Beer Villages" which, despite their name, were promoted as family-friendly spaces. These sites combined music, food vendors, games, and entertainment zones designed for different age groups. Non-alcoholic malt beverages were positioned as the central drinks within family and children's areas, while alcoholic brands remained visible through adjacent stages, banners, stalls, and event signage. The result was a shared festive environment in which multiple product categories coexisted without clear separation.



Flyer on the *Legendary Christmas* programme timeline

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPldhj6drdk>

This “crossover” strategy, where non-alcoholic and alcoholic products share the same festive environment, generated a halo effect. Maltina and Amstel Malta, already embedded in many Nigerian households as every day or special-occasion drinks, functioned as the respectable, family-friendly face of the portfolio, softening the perception of the wider alcohol brand family and the company itself. At the same time, the ubiquity of malt beverages in these spaces reinforced the message that communal meals and celebrations “naturally” require sugar-dense malt drinks on every table. In family photos and social media posts from the events, green and brown bottles and cans were frequently visible, further normalising their presence in both adult and children’s festive rituals.

From a nutritional perspective, malt drinks, although non-alcoholic, are typically high in sugar and calories.¹⁹ Regular consumption contributes to excess sugar intake and weight gain, particularly when festive habits extend beyond special occasions into everyday routines. These realities were absent from campaign messaging. Instead, malt beverages were framed as symbols of warmth, hospitality, and national pride.

The lighting projects and Beer Villages were repeatedly described as acts of corporate generosity, with emphasis on “giving back” and making Christmas memorable for families. Many attendees came primarily for the ambience and spectacle, not consciously to participate in a branded activation, yet once inside these spaces they were immersed in visual cues that tied festive joy to the company’s products.

This configuration raises complex regulatory questions. Current advertising rules that focus narrowly on direct alcohol adverts or child-facing cartoon characters are poorly suited to deal with multi-brand environments where non-alcoholic products attract families but share the same stage as alcohol. It becomes easy for companies to argue that they are promoting “family” drinks, even as children become familiar with the logos and colours of alcoholic products through adjacency. For public health, a more integrated regulatory perspective is needed—one that sees such campaigns as portfolio strategies rather than isolated promotions and that can limit cross-branding in spaces where children congregate.

¹⁹ E.U. Okon & Akpanyung, Edet. (2005). Nutrients and Antinutrients in Selected Brands of Malt Drinks Produced in Nigeria. *Pakistan Journal of Nutrition*. 4. 10.3923/pjn.2005.352.355.

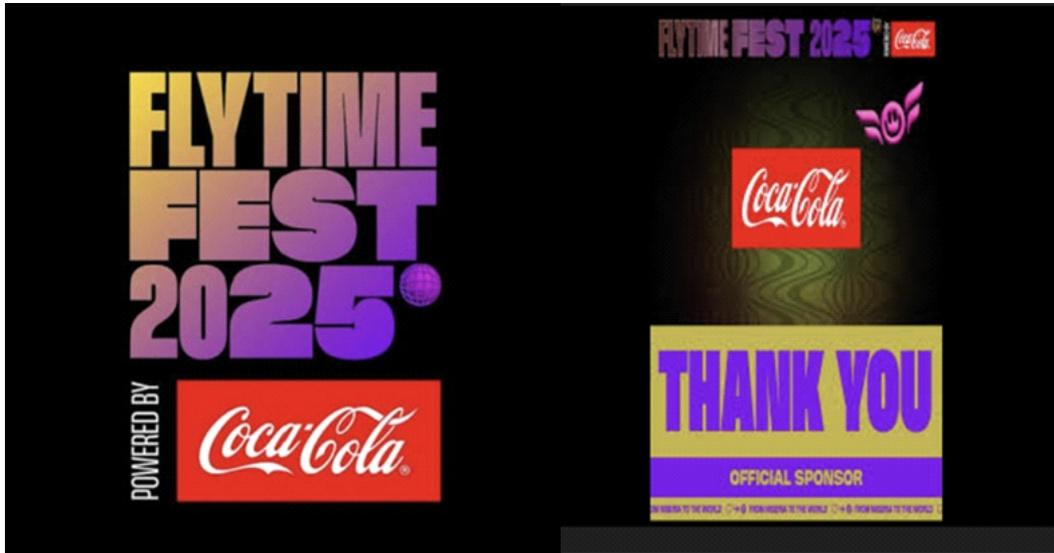
Musical Festivals and the Conversion of Youth Culture into Consumption

Coca-Cola's partnership with *Flytime Fest at Eko Convention Centre in Lagos*²⁰ turned one of the country's most high-profile music festivals into an immersive advertising ecosystem for sugar-sweetened beverages. The festival experience was redesigned so that the brand appeared at nearly every touchpoint, from entry zones and photo areas to lounges and digital interactions. Interactive installations, personalised experiences, and branded spaces ensured continuous exposure as audiences moved through the venue.

Through "Coke Studio" activations, interactive photo booths, personalised beverage stations, and exclusive "Coke Lounges," festival-goers were continually exposed to the brand's colours, sounds, and products as they moved through the venue. This created an environment in which it was nearly impossible to separate the excitement of live performances from the presence of chilled Coca-Cola bottles, making the drink feel like an integral part of the event rather than just one refreshment option among many.

In the lead-up to the event, the company's promotional mechanics such as "*Drink, Scan, Win*" encouraged product purchase as a condition of participation. Bottle scanning and prize draws offered access to tickets and exclusive experiences headlined by global artists such as Davido, Rema, and Asake. For young people whose identities and social-esteem are still forming and who regard *Flytime Fest* as a pinnacle of social life and cultural relevance, this framing positioned the purchase of Coca-Cola not merely as an action to quench thirst, but as a gateway to belonging, status, and once-in-a-lifetime experiences. The use of celebrity imagery, behind-the-scenes clips, and influencer endorsements in the promotional content strengthened the association between Coca-Cola and "*coolness*," creativity, and success, while health considerations were entirely absent from the narrative.

²⁰ <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DS7D09gAjlB/>



Digital products from the Flytime Fest 2025 in Lagos, Nigeria.

Also, the integration of sugar-sweetened beverage promotion into live music and influencer culture further complicates regulation. Traditional advertising rules tend to focus on discrete adverts such as TV spots, billboards, or clearly labelled digital campaigns. In the Flytime Fest model, however, branding is woven into the fabric of the event itself.

Stage designs, wristbands, photo backdrops, activation booths, and artist shout-outs all carried or referenced the brand, blurring the line between entertainment and advertising. This raises critical questions about how marketing should be defined and monitored in event spaces, and about the responsibility of event organisers, artists, and sponsors to protect young audiences from exposure to unhealthy product promotion. It also underscores the need for regulators to treat festivals and large concerts as specific marketing environments where clear rules for alcohol and sugar-sweetened beverage promotion should apply, much as they do for sports sponsorships in other contexts.

For advocacy, the Coca-Cola x Flytime Fest example highlights the urgency of pushing for rules that prohibit linking SSB purchases to youth-oriented ticket lotteries and that limit the extent of brand integration at events attended largely by minors and young adults. Such rules could require a clear separation between refreshment sales and access to tickets, ban product-linked lotteries that incentivise excessive consumption, and mandate prominent display of health warnings in spaces dominated by sugar-sweetened beverage branding. The case also underscores the importance of engaging artists and influencers as public health allies, encouraging them to question sponsorship arrangements that promote products known to drive NCD risks among their fan base, much as **Cristiano Ronaldo** publicly rejected the symbolic normalisation of Coca-Cola by removing branded bottles from view during a press appearance, signaling that cultural influence can be exercised in ways that challenge, rather than reinforce, harmful consumption norms.²¹

Peak Milk: “Enjoy Christmas at Its Peak”

Peak’s festive campaign, “*Enjoy Christmas at Its Peak*,”²² targeted a different but equally strategic set of emotional levers: family breakfasts, parental care, and the ideal of giving children the “best start” to magical holiday mornings. The campaign foregrounded sweetened flavoured milks and convenient on-the-go packs, with strong visibility at transit hubs like Oshodi and Jibowu, and through “*Peak Morning*” activations in popular malls on Boxing Day. Stands were set up where families could receive free samples, interact with branded hosts, and take photos in curated breakfast-themed installations that portrayed smiling parents and children sharing Peak-branded products amid Christmas decorations.

Their narratives were carefully crafted. Advertising copy and influencer posts emphasised ideas such as “*shared nourishment*,” “*Christmas at its peak*,” and “*starting magical mornings together*,” linking the act of serving sweetened Peak products with being a caring, modern, and attentive parent.

²¹ <https://www.upworthy.com/drink-water-not-soda-soccer-star-ronaldo-took-a-rebellious-stance-to-promote-health>

²² <https://www.brandessencenigeria.com/peak-milk-unveils-enjoy-christmas-at-its-peak-campaign-bringing-joy-to-families-across-nigeria/#:~:text=Peak%20Milk%2C%20Nigeria's%20leading%20dairy,chance%20to%20be%20featured%20nationwide>



Digital flyer from Peak Milk's Social Media Handle

Visuals frequently showed tidy, aspirational kitchens, happy nuclear families in coordinated outfits, and children who appeared energised and delighted by the presence of Peak on the breakfast table. In some digital content, the brand also leaned into themes of “rewarding” children for good behaviour or academic success, implicitly reinforcing the idea that sweetened dairy drinks are not just food items but tokens of parental love and recognition.

Nutritionally, many flavoured or sweetened milk drinks contain high levels of added sugar and can significantly increase a child's daily sugar intake, especially when consumed regularly rather than as occasional treats.²³ In contexts where children are already be exposed to SSBs, biscuits, and other sweetened foods, positioning such drinks as everyday breakfast staples risks accelerating early weight gain and metabolic disruption. Yet, the Peak campaign did not provide clear nutritional advice that could have enabled parents weigh these trade-offs; instead, it leaned heavily on the halo of milk as inherently wholesome and essential for child growth, blurring the distinction between plain milk and sugar-laden variants.

²³ Fayet-Moore, Flavia. (2015). Effect of flavored milk vs plain milk on total milk intake and nutrient provision in children. *Nutrition reviews*. 74. 10.1093/nutrit/nuv031.

The use of transit hubs and malls as activation points was also strategic. Transit hubs like Oshodi and Jibowu are frequented by working-class and lower-middle-income families travelling for the holidays; offering free samples there allowed Peak to reach large numbers of people in a liminal, emotionally charged context where parents may feel pressure to “spoil” their children despite tight budgets. In malls, the combination of festive decorations, special events, and discount shopping created a sense of exceptionality, making it easier for parents to justify purchases they might otherwise have seen as luxuries.

Sweetened dairy drinks often fall into a grey zone. They are not always classified or perceived as SSBs, and existing regulations on sugary drinks tend to focus narrowly on carbonated soft drinks. As a result, brands are able to market these products aggressively to families, using health-coded language and imagery that would raise red flags if applied to conventional sugary drinks. This underscores the need for a nutrient-profile-based approach to labelling and marketing control, in which products are assessed on their sugar, salt, and fat content rather than on broad categories like “milk” or “juice.” Mandatory front-of-pack warning labels indicating “*High in sugar*” for relevant sweetened dairy beverages would help parents make more informed choices, particularly when bombarded with emotionally charged festive advertisements and marketing.

Children as Central Targets in Festive Marketing

Across brands, children were consistently positioned as both audience and conduit. Donations to schools and children’s organisations framed sugary products as rewards for effort and resilience. Santa characters, mascots, and mall installations embedded ultra-processed foods within spaces of trust and authority.

Viju Industries Nigeria Limited provides a clear example of how corporate social responsibility was used to access children’s spaces. Through its “Celebrate Their Brilliance” campaign, the company positioned product donations such as Viju milk as a form of educational and welfare support. Sweetened milk and fruit drinks were distributed to schools and children’s NGOs under the banner of “end-of-year support” and public recognition of children’s achievements.

These distributions took place at school ceremonies, NGO programmes, and festive gatherings, and were accompanied by banners and branded materials that framed Viju as a caring partner invested in children’s futures. Because these activities were presented as charitable interventions rather than marketing, school authorities and NGO staff were more likely to accept them without scrutiny, despite the fact that they resulted in repeated exposure of children to high-sugar products and encouraged their routine consumption.



Viju Milk handing out their products to Kids

Indomie: “Season to Show Some Love”

Indomie’s “Season to Show Some Love” campaign extended the brand’s long-standing focus on children by deploying a carefully constructed festive persona, the “Indomie Santa,” across television, social media, and mall-based activations. In high-traffic locations such as Jara Mall in Ikeja and the Palms in Ibadan, the brand erected large Christmas installations that combined towering trees, play zones, face-painting stations, and interactive games.

At the centre of these spaces, Indomie Santa distributed gifts and free noodle samples, transforming ordinary shopping environments into immersive, child-oriented brand theatres.



Indomie presents gift packs of their products to kids as Christmas products



Pictures of consumers and Indomie Staff in branded Indomie products

Instant noodles are typically high in sodium and are classified as ultra-processed foods, and frequent consumption contributes to salt overload in a population already struggling with elevated hypertension rates.²⁴ Studies show that instant noodles often contain high levels of sodium and fat while lacking fibre and other nutrients, and that regular consumption of such nutrient-poor foods can lead to excessive sodium intake, contributing to elevated blood pressure and other health issues such as cardiovascular disease and obesity. Yet, in this campaign, health concerns were eclipsed by emotional storytelling about love, sharing, and caring for children during Christmas. The use of Santa and other child-coded imagery harnessed “pester power,”²⁵ as children who enjoyed Indomie Santa events were more likely to pressure parents to buy additional noodles, framing them as part of what makes Christmas special.

Seasoning, Salt, and the Commercial Capture of Festive Cooking

Seasoning brands emerged as some of the most culturally embedded actors during the 2025 festive period, using both physical and digital strategies to position high-sodium products as indispensable to celebration, hospitality, and Nigerian culinary identity. Brands such as *Knorr*, *Maggi*, and *Gino* did not market seasoning cubes and powders as optional enhancers, they presented them as the moral and sensory foundation of festive cooking itself.

Knorr anchored its festive strategy in markets and community spaces through its “*Share the Good*”²⁶ activation, which moved through dozens of communities and major markets in cities including Lagos, Onitsha, and Ibadan. The campaign revolved around *Jollof cook-offs, live cooking demonstrations, cultural dances, and large-scale food sharing*. Branded teams prepared communal meals in public view, repeatedly emphasising Knorr cubes as the “*secret ingredient*” required to achieve the right taste, aroma, and festive abundance. Free samples were distributed to traders, shoppers, and families, while banners, aprons, and tents transformed ordinary market spaces into branded environments. Children were frequently present, participating in games, dancing near cooking stations, and consuming heavily seasoned food, absorbing early associations between intense saltiness, celebration, and generosity. Framed as benevolence and cultural pride, the campaign obscured the role of seasoning cubes in driving excess sodium intake in a population already facing high rates of hypertension.

²⁴ <https://guardian.ng/life/wellness/how-instant-noodles-could-put-your-health-at-risk/>

²⁵ This situation refers to the ability of children to influence their parents to buy them products, especially items advertised in the media.

²⁶ <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/12/how-knorr-shared-the-good-this-festive-season-across-30-communities-in-nigeria/>



Knorr “Eat for Good” Packs presented to Persons with Disabilities and roadside traders

Maggi pursued a parallel objective through a digital-first strategy that targeted youth culture and everyday cooking narratives. Its “*Taste of Christmas*”²⁷ campaign centred on a viral music collaboration featuring popular Gen Z artists like Qing Madi and the Loud Urban Choir. The musical mash-up garnered millions of views across YouTube and TikTok, blending holiday themes with aspirational imagery and positioning Maggi cubes as the backbone of creative, modern cooking. This approach was reinforced through the “*Maggi Creator Conference*,” where influencers were trained to integrate seasoning products into recipes, lifestyle content, and festive meal videos. The result was a flood of native-looking content across social media platforms, in which high-sodium cubes appeared as natural, stylish components of family meals and holiday gatherings. Much of this content circulated without clear sponsorship labels, allowing peer-trusted voices to normalise excessive salt use while health considerations remained entirely absent.

²⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHagMDqc_5g



Digital flyers from Maggi's social media handles

Gino, under its “Truly Cares”²⁸ positioning, focused on the occupation of public leisure space. At Gbagada Park in Lagos, the brand transformed a communal park into a “Gino Christmas Village,” installing branded Christmas trees, lights, and photo installations designed to attract families seeking free festive entertainment. Tomato pastes, seasoning variants, and bulk packs were promoted as essential for large holiday meals, while children played, sampled products, and posed for photographs amid glowing brand visuals. The park, which should function as a health-promoting public space, became a site of immersive branding where ultra-processed products were presented as symbols of care, abundance, and resilience in a difficult economy.



Gino Christmas Tree at Gbagada Park, Lagos State, Nigeria

²⁸ <https://punchng.com/gino-lights-up-gbagada-park-for-a-joyful-yuletide-season/>

Extending Festivity into the New Year

New Year campaigns prolonged festive consumption by linking identity, renewal, and faith language to branded products. Personalised packaging, prize mechanics, and religious framing positioned sugary drinks as companions to crossover rituals and fresh starts. In religious spaces, branded chillers and promotional language blurred the line between celebration and endorsement. These extensions ensured that festive overconsumption did not end with December but flowed seamlessly into everyday routines.



New year crossover promotions by Coca-Cola and NBC on social media



Flyers from Bigi Drink's Social Media Handles

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

The 2025 festive season revealed a food marketing environment defined by saturation rather than persuasion. From late November through early January, major food and beverage corporations occupied Nigeria's digital platforms, public spaces, markets, religious settings, and leisure venues with a density that made avoidance nearly impossible. Ultra-processed foods and sugar-sweetened beverages were not simply advertised; they were woven into the emotional architecture of Christmas and New Year. Through Santa imagery, light displays, music festivals, communal cooking, and faith-coded messaging, products high in sugar and salt were reframed as expressions of love, generosity, national pride, and spiritual gratitude.

Children emerged as the most aggressively targeted constituency within this environment. Festive activations consistently bypassed parental mediation by meeting children directly in malls, schools, parks, churches, and online spaces. Free sampling, mascots, Santa grottos, branded "villages," school and NGO donations, and digital challenges habituated young palates to extreme sweetness and salt while embedding brand loyalty early in life. These strategies exploited children's limited cognitive defences and leveraged "pester power," turning celebration into a training ground for lifelong consumption in an already obesogenic food system.

Corporate social responsibility functioned as a critical delivery mechanism for this marketing. Product donations, community cook-offs, park decorations, concerts, and end-of-year "support" initiatives allowed companies to enter low-income neighbourhoods, schools, and faith-adjacent spaces with minimal scrutiny. Framed as care in a difficult economy, these interventions sanitised corporate image while expanding market reach, blurring the line between generosity and promotion, and insulating companies from public and regulatory challenge.

Digitally, the festive period marked an escalation in marketing sophistication. AI-generated visuals, influencer-led music collaborations, creator training programmes, scan-and-win lotteries, and viral short-form content were deployed to scale persuasion rapidly while evading traditional advertising oversight. Much of this content circulated as entertainment or peer-generated culture, rarely flagged as sponsored, and almost never accompanied by health information.

The result was exponential amplification of marketing messages with little regulatory friction.

Across product portfolios, brands relied heavily on halo effects and strategic co-location. Non-alcoholic malt drinks softened the presence of alcohol brands. Tomato pastes and seasoning cubes masked sodium content behind cultural legitimacy. Sweetened dairy drinks borrowed the health halo of milk to position sugar as nourishment. By placing multiple product lines side by side in festive spaces, companies normalised entire unhealthy portfolios rather than isolated products.

Taken together, these practices intensified Nigeria's already fragile nutrition environment at precisely the moment when consumption norms are most elastic. Festive marketing deepened structural drivers of diet-related non-communicable diseases while exploiting gaps in taxation, labelling, and marketing regulation. Without stronger countermeasures, including a substantial increase in sugar-sweetened beverage taxes, interpretive front-of-pack warnings, firm restrictions on child-directed marketing, and systematic monitoring of festive campaigns, holidays will continue to function as periods of concentrated public health harm rather than collective renewal.

CHAPTER 5

Recommendations

Public health outcomes are not only shaped only by personal choices, they are also produced by the rules that govern markets, marketing, and access. When commercial actors are allowed to dominate and determine food environments, especially during emotionally charged periods like Christmas and New Year, unhealthy consumption becomes the default rather than the exception. Effective regulation must therefore focus on changing the conditions that make excess sugar, salt, and ultra-processed foods cheap, visible, and socially normal, while healthier options remain marginal. Based on the evidence documented in this report, the following actions are necessary.

1. Nigeria's SSB tax should be substantially increased to at least 50 percent of the retail price, in line with World Health Organization guidance. The current flat-rate levy is too low to influence purchasing behaviour and loses value over time due to inflation. Revenue from an increased tax should be transparently earmarked for NCD prevention, nutrition education, primary healthcare strengthening, and access to safe drinking water, so that fiscal policy delivers visible public health returns.
2. Nigeria should adopt mandatory, interpretive front-of-pack warning labels for foods and drinks high in sugar, salt, and saturated fat. These labels should use clear symbols and plain language that allow consumers to identify health risks quickly at the point of purchase. Nutrient disclosure alone is not sufficient in a crowded and emotionally charged food environment, especially during festive periods when decisions are made quickly and under social pressure.
3. Comprehensive restrictions should be placed on the marketing of ultra-processed foods and sugar-sweetened beverages to children and adolescents. This should include banning the use of mascots, Santa characters, cartoons, and child-coded imagery, prohibiting free sampling and product giveaways to children, and ending school- and NGO-based corporate social responsibility activities that involve branded food and beverage products. Digital promotions, influencer content, and prize-based campaigns that directly or indirectly target young audiences should be explicitly covered.
4. Branding and promotional activities for unhealthy foods and beverages should be restricted in public, educational, and religious spaces.

Parks, community centres, places of worship, markets, and child-centred public events should not be used as marketing platforms for products linked to diet-related disease. Local governments and religious institutions should be supported to develop clear guidelines that protect communal spaces from commercial capture.

5. Digital advertising regulation must be updated to reflect current marketing practices. This includes explicit rules covering influencer marketing, AI-generated and algorithmically amplified content, user-generated promotional challenges, and purchase-linked lotteries or ticket promotions tied to unhealthy products. Platforms should be required to ensure clear labelling of sponsored content and to restrict targeting of minors.
6. Enforcement capacity must be strengthened. Regulatory agencies should be resourced and mandated to actively monitor festive and non-festive marketing across digital and physical spaces, issue penalties for violations, and publish enforcement actions.

Together, these measures would begin to realign Nigeria's food environment with public health goals, protect children and vulnerable communities, and ensure that festive periods no longer function as open seasons for unchecked commercial harm.

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Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPP) is a pan-African nongovernmental organisation that works to promote public health, advance human rights and public services, challenge corporate abuse of natural resources, and build community power for participatory governance. CAPP is dedicated to nurturing movements of African communities and a new generation of leaders working shoulder to shoulder to demand democratic governance of natural resources, accountability from power structures, inclusive participation in development processes, and an end to all forms of corporate and state abuse. CAPP envisions a continent whose development path is designed, modelled and executed by Africans - respecting and guaranteeing human rights, enabling social justice, and ensuring harmony with the environment.



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