Big Food and Corporate Social Responsibility: deception or public good?

Zoe Nicole Richards

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School of Health and Society  
University of Wollongong

‘Big Food and Corporate Social Responsibility: deception or public good?’

This dissertation is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Wollongong.

May 14, 2018

Zoe Nicole Richards  
Bachelor of Applied Science (Human Movement and Health Studies)  
Bachelor of Health Science (Honours)
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"Great things are done by a series of small things brought together."

- Vincent Van Gogh
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Publications constituting this dissertation

Published articles


Articles submitted for review


Other publications and contributions arising from this dissertation

Conference presentations


Richards, Z, Phillipson, L & Yeatman, H 2016, Community-focused Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies of the ‘Big Food’ Industry: public relations or public ‘good’? Paper accepted for presentation at the Governing Food: The role of law, regulation, and policy in meeting 21st century challenges to the food supply. Sydney, Australia. November 1st-3rd.


University and community seminars


Invited speaker: Corporate Social Responsibility of Big Food in Australia, Langone Medical Centre/Department of Population Health at New York University, New York, 17th May 2016.

Abstract

Introduction

Ultra-processed foods and SSB products are produced and sold by ‘Big Food’. Big Food is a term used by many public health experts to describe large multinational ultra-processed foods and beverage companies, specifically fast food restaurants, soft drink companies, and large packaged food manufactures that annual sales rank within the world’s top 100 food and beverage companies. Big Food companies assert that corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies (e.g. sponsoring junior sport, environmental programs) are a way for corporations to give back to the community and contribute to social good. However, public health experts question the motives of Big Food companies and fear CSR could be contributing to unhealthy diets by creating positive associations with unhealthy products and brands.

This research addressed the knowledge gap relating to the types of CSR strategies being implemented by Big Food in Australia and whom they targeted. It also explored how Big Food’s CSR programs shaped parents’ and children’s perceptions of companies. Finally, public health experts’ perspectives of the potential impacts of, and motivations for Big Food’s CSR activities, and their ideas for comprehensive public health action on CSR, were explored.

Methods

Three studies were conducted. Study 1, a mixed-method content analysis of industry documents, created a framework to map and monitor the types of CSR activities used, and whom they targeted. Study 2, qualitative dyadic interviews analysed using a value theory frame, provided an understanding of parents’ and children’s (N=30) awareness and interpretation of Big Food’s CSR strategies.

Study 3 included a series of in-depth, one to one qualitative semi-structured interviews with public health experts (N=30) from academic positions at universities (N=16) and civil society positions (N=14), from eight countries. It explored their beliefs regarding the motivations for, and impacts of, Big Food’s CSR strategies, guided by the ‘4P’s’ marketing framework, and what actions should be taken on Big Food’s CSR activities.
Results

Study 1 identified that Big Food’s CSR strategies primarily focused on environmental responsibility, consumer responsibility and community-based initiatives, and acted to create value in communities, especially with parents and children.

Study 2 established that parents and children had strong recognition of and attribution of moral values to companies who had undertaken CSR. For some parents CSR strategies were considered to conflict with the companies’ core business and a small group of parents viewed the activities as representing deceit of the public.

Public health experts considered CSR was a co-ordinated and sophisticated marketing strategy designed to build brand equity with the public and distract government, so as to prevent or minimise public regulation of food companies. Application of the 4P’s marketing framework highlighted experts’ perceptions that CSR worked in several ways, to: build credibility and trust with children; decrease the conflict that parents may feel about the presence of Big Food in children’s settings; and persuade government that companies operate responsibly and do not require public regulation. Most experts who participated in this study suggested that strategies to address CSR activities should be implemented in alignment with current public health actions that promote healthy diets. Their recommended actions included: counter-marketing campaigns targeted at parents and community organisations to denormalise CSR in the community; and direct lobbying of government, aimed at public policy makers.

Discussion

The first comprehensive framework for mapping Big Food’s CSR strategies was developed, which can be used as a guide for monitoring CSR activities as a specific form of marketing. The types of CSR strategies being used by Big Food identified in Study 1 can be used to educate communities about the use of CSR to build market share and consumer loyalty.

The novel use of value theory in Study 2 highlighted the dimensions of what parents and children valued pertaining to CSR. Actions that aim to denormalise CSR and to sever the strong ties between the community and Big Food, will likely be difficult. Efforts to gain public acceptance to limit CSR will need creative and powerful levels of persuasion if it is to gain public support. Public health experts identified that additional and consistent action to respond to Big Food’s CSR activities needs to be embedded within existing public health
responses that promote healthy food environments, such as the ‘INFORMAS’ framework or the ‘NOURISHING’ framework.

Conclusion

Overall, this dissertation asserts that Big Food’s CSR activities that provide companies with access to children’s settings and allows them to build brand value beyond the products they provide. It also highlights that Big Food uses CSR to prevent the creation of a climate of public and government support for regulation, rather than circumvent existing public health policies. The findings of this research support the review of regulation and possible restriction of CSR as part of an effective public health approach to promote healthy diets and improve the wider food environment. While CSR may provide some societal value, the public health community should acknowledge that Big Food’s primary objective of CSR activities is to increase their profits
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Definition of terms

| Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control | A cross cutting provision to the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control on the protection of public health policies with respect to tobacco control from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry. |
| Big Alcohol | A term applied to transnational alcohol companies with huge and concentrated market power. |
| Big Food | A term applied to large transnational ultra-processed food and sugary-sweetened beverage companies with huge and concentrated market power. |
| Big Tobacco | A term applied to transnational tobacco companies with huge and concentrated market power. |
| Conflict of Interest | A conflict of interest arises in circumstances where there is a potential for a secondary interest (e.g. vested interest in the outcome of a government’s work in a given area) to unduly influence, or where it may be reasonably perceived to unduly influence, either the independence or objectivity of professional judgment or actions regarding the primary interest (e.g. the government). The existence of a conflict of interest in all its forms does not as such mean that improper action has occurred, but rather the risk of such improper action occurring. Conflicts of interest are not only financial, but can take other forms as well. |
| Corporate Social Responsibility | A company’s economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities to society, in addition to the company’s fiduciary responsibility to shareholders. |
| Corporate Political Activity | A term derived from the tobacco control and the business literature, described as six strategies designed to influence policies and public opinion in favour of the industry. These strategies include: information and messaging; financial incentives; constituency building; policy substitution; legal strategies; policy substitution; opposition fragmentation and destabilization. |
### Definition of terms (continued)

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<td>Creating Shared Value</td>
<td>Policies and operating practices that enhances the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Marketing</td>
<td>The action or business of promoting and selling ultra-processed foods and sugary-sweetened beverages, including market research and advertising.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Regulation</td>
<td>State-mandated regulation and government intervention in the private market in an attempt to implement policy to produce outcomes which might not otherwise occur, ranging from consumer protection to technological advancement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry Self-Regulation</td>
<td>The process whereby an organisation monitors its own adherence to legal, ethical, or safety standards, rather than have an independent agency such as a third-party entity monitor and enforce those standards.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Non-Communicable Diseases</td>
<td>A disease that is non-infectious or non-transmissible. Non-Communicable Diseases can refer to chronic diseases that last for long periods of time and progress slowly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sponsorship</td>
<td>The act of supporting an event, activity, person, or organisation financially or through the provision of products or services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ultra-processed Food</td>
<td>Products that are mass produced packaged goods and fast foods, such as sodas, packaged sweet and savory snacks, instant noodles, chicken nuggets, and frozen meals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhealthy Commodity Corporations</td>
<td>Companies that produce and sell tobacco, alcohol, and sugary-sweetened beverages and ultra-processed foods that are high in salt, fat and sugar.</td>
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## Abbreviations

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<td>CPA</td>
<td>Corporate Political Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSV</td>
<td>Creating Shared Value</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISRC</td>
<td>Inclusive Social Rating Criteria</td>
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<tr>
<td>LMIC</td>
<td>Low and Middle-Income Countries</td>
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<td>MMAT</td>
<td>Mixed Method Appraisal Tool</td>
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<td>NCD</td>
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<td>SSB</td>
<td>Sugary-Sweetened Beverages</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
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Chapter 1 - Introduction to the Dissertation

1.1 Introduction to chapter

This dissertation explored how ‘Big Food’ utilises corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies to position the industry as socially responsible within Australia.

This dissertation explored how Big Food’s CSR programs shape parents’ and children’s perceptions of companies in Australia. It also examined the perceptions of public health experts regarding the potential impacts of, and motivations for, Big Food’s CSR activities and their recommendations for public health action on CSR.

Chapter 1 provides a review of the current public health and Big Food literature. This includes the strategies used by Big Food to gain global influence such as marketing, sponsorship and corporate political activity (CPA). The chapter highlights the current gaps in knowledge and establishes a case for exploration of the influences of CSR on public perceptions of Big Food companies that are likely to influence food environments and hence people’s food choices. Finally, the chapter identifies the broad research aims and presents the dissertation structure.

1.2 Non-communicable diseases (NCDs)

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) represent a leading threat to human health and socioeconomic development (World Health Organization 2005, 2018a). Cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and type-2 diabetes cause an estimated 40 million deaths each year, 80% of which occur in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) (World Health Organization 2018a). It is projected that by 2030 such diseases will claim the lives of 55 million people globally, and are predicted to cause nearly five times as many deaths as communicable diseases worldwide, including in LMIC (World Health Organization 2013). The epidemic is fuelled by a combination of risk factors, including tobacco use, harmful alcohol consumption, an unhealthy diet and lack of physical activity. Additional intermediate risk factors that contribute to NCDs include: obesity, increased blood pressure,
and increased concentrations of blood glucose and cholesterol (GBD 2015 Risk Factors Collaborators 2016; Lim et al. 2012).

There is a common misconception that NCDs stem from a moral failure, or a weakness of will, which leads to individuals becoming sedentary, obese, and more susceptible to developing a chronic disease (Stuckler et al. 2011). However, in most parts of the world, populations face major barriers to making healthy choices, and experience powerful and pervasive pressures to adopt unhealthy ones. The social ecological model of chronic disease acknowledges that there are multiple levels of influence on the propensity for individuals to engage in healthy behaviours, including socio-cultural (e.g. family and peers), and environmental (e.g. school, fast food outlets, advertising, and marketing) factors (Beaglehole et al. 2011a; Beaglehole et al. 2011b; United Nations 2010). These interwoven relationships between an individual and their socio-cultural environment will determine their health related behaviours (Beaglehole, Bonita, Alleyne, et al. 2011).

These behaviours are also influenced by the social determinants of health (Marmont 2005), that are the “conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age” (World Health Organization 2018c). The distribution of money, resources and power at international, national and local levels shape these circumstances, leading to health inequities. Health inequities refer to the avoidable and unfair differences in health status within and between populations (Marmont 2005).

1.2.1 Unhealthy diets

An unhealthy diet is a significant contributor to NCDs (World Health Organization 2004, 2016). Poor nutrition plays a role in one in five deaths globally, and is the highest risk factor for premature mortality before smoking (World Health Organization 2004, 2016). Unhealthy diets lead to reduced immunity, increased susceptibility to disease, impaired physical and mental development, and reduced productivity. While deaths from NCDs primarily occur in adulthood, the risks associated with unhealthy diet begin in childhood and accumulate throughout life (World Health Organization 2004, 2016).

Despite many Australians having access to high quality fresh foods, many do not consume these in the recommended amounts. Alternatively, over one-third of food intake comes from ultra-processed foods and beverages classified as ‘discretionary’ (Australian Bureau of
Statistics 2016; National Health and Medical Research Council 2013). Eating habits and attitudes are established from a young age, therefore, it is important to establish healthy eating habits from an early age as it is much more likely that these habits will continue throughout adolescence, and into adulthood (Anzman-Frasca et al. 2018).

The Australian Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents recommend the consumption of a variety of foods from the five food groups and to avoid the consumption of foods high in fat, salt and sugar (National Health and Medical Research Council 2013). There is, however, low adherence to these recommendations (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016), with children over consuming energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods. These guidelines recommend that children consume one to three serves of fruit and two to four serves of vegetables per day. According to the most recent National Health Survey, 68.1 percent of two to 18 year olds met the requirements for fruit consumption, 5.4 percent met the recommendation for vegetable consumption, and only one in twenty, 5.1 percent, of children met both guidelines (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). Children exceeded recommended guidelines for both saturated fat and sugar (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). It was also found that as children aged, the contribution of sugar to total energy intake increased and that children adhered less to the guidelines (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016).

The combined burden to health of overweight and obesity is now greater than that posed by tobacco consumption (World Health Organization 2018b). Combined with the associated physical, psychological and social consequences, obesity can diminish an individual’s quality of life (World Health Organization 2018b). In Australia, obesity not only has significant health and social impacts, but also considerable economic impacts (Colagiuri et al. 2010). The financial cost to society from overweight and obesity is increasing with direct health and non-health care costs estimated at $8.6 billion (AUD) in 2011-2012 (Colagiuri et al. 2010).

Globally, in 2016, 340 million children aged five-19 years of age were estimated to be overweight and obese, with another 41 million children under the age of five years reported to be overweight or obese (World Health Organization 2018b). Within the Australian context, over 60 percent of adults are classified as overweight or obese (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013), in addition to over a quarter of Australian children are also reported to be overweight or obese (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013). Whilst there is an
indication that the prevalence of overweight and obesity in Australian children may have plateaued, it remains unacceptably high, and without continued efforts to prevent obesity, it may yet further rise (Australian Government 2014).

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses of the available epidemiological evidence indicate that the increased consumption of ultra-processed foods and sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) is associated with increased energy intake, and in turn weight gain and obesity, in both children and adults (Malik et al. 2013; Rosenheck 2012). It is also well established that obesity is the leading risk factor globally for the development of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers (GBD 2015 Risk Factors Collaborators 2016; World Health Organization 2013). Additional evidence suggests that children begin to consume ultra-processed foods and SSB from the age of two years and that overall consumption of these products rises steeply with age (Australian National Preventive Health Agency 2014). To curtail this, health agencies and governments across the globe have made specific recommendations for limiting the intake of ultra-processed foods and SSB (World Health Organization 2004).

1.3 Big Food

Ultra-processed foods and SSB products are produced and sold by ‘Big Food’ (Stuckler & Nestle 2012; The PLoS Medicine Editors 2012). Big Food is a is employed in this dissertation and by many public health experts to describe “large multinational ultra-processed foods and beverage companies” (Stuckler & Nestle 2012; The PLoS Medicine Editors 2012, p.1), specifically fast food restaurants, soft drink companies, and large packaged food manufactures that annual sales rank within the world’s top 100 food and beverage companies (Food Engineering 2018; The PLoS Medicine Editors 2012).

In accordance with the NOVA (which is not an acronym) classification (Monteiro et al. 2016; Monteiro et al. 2013), examples of typical ultra-processed products include:

“Carbonated drinks; sweet or savoury packaged snacks; ice-cream, chocolate, candies (confectionery); mass-produced packaged breads and buns; margarines and spreads; cookies (biscuits), pastries, cakes and cake mixes; breakfast ‘cereal’ and ‘energy’ bars; ‘energy’ drinks; milk drinks, ‘fruit’ yoghurts and fruit drinks; cocoa drinks; meat and chicken extracts and ‘instant’ sauces; infant formulas, follow-on milks, other baby products; ‘health’ and ‘slimming’ products such as powdered or
‘fortified’ meal and dish substitutes; and many read to heat products including pre-prepared pies and pasta and pizza dishes; poultry and fish ‘nuggets’ and ‘sticks’, sausages, burgers, hot dogs and other reconstituted meat products, and powdered and packaged ‘instant soups, noodles and dessert’" (Monteiro et al. 2016, p.33).

The key purpose for industrial ultra-processing is to create products that are ready to eat, to drink or to heat (Monteiro et al. 2010; Monteiro et al. 2013). However, these products have come to replace unprocessed or minimally processed foods that are ready to consume, such as, fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, milk, water, and freshly prepared meals and drinks (Monteiro et al. 2016).

Globally, an extensive variety of ultra-processed food and SSB products are now available in most markets, offering convenience, novelty, extended shelf life and consistency of quality (Kelly & Jacoby 2018; Monteiro et al. 2016). Common attributes of ultra-processed products are hyper-palatability, sophisticated and attractive packaging, marketing claims about healthfulness, high profitability, and branding and ownership by transnational corporations (Kelly & Jacoby 2018; Monteiro et al. 2016). However, the wide availability and heavy marketing of many of these products, and especially those high in fat, sugar and/or salt contents, are reported to work to undermine individual efforts to consume a healthy diet and maintain a healthy weight, particularly among children (Cairns et al. 2013; Cairns et al. 2009).

Big Food focuses their production and distribution on ultra-processed foods and SSB, as these are typically more profitable than nutrient rich food products. According to corporate law, people who manage corporations are required to comply with legally binding fiduciary duties that require them to act in the best interest of the company and to enhance shareholder (or stock holder) wealth (Rutkow & Pomeranz 2011). Fiduciary responsibilities (also referred to as a ‘duty of good faith’) require managers to prioritise maximising shareholder profits (Rutkow & Pomeranz 2011).

High profit margins have also made Big Food undeniably influential, whereby they have become successful in translating their market power into political power (Mialon, Swinburn, Allender, et al. 2016; Sacks 2014; Sacks et al. 2013). This translation of power has enabled
Big Food access and dialogue with public policy makers (Moodie et al. 2013). It is anticipated that like other unhealthy commodity industries (e.g. tobacco, alcohol), Big Food companies aim to legitimise themselves in the public policy making process to sway policy makers away from the possibility of public regulation of their products and practices (Mialon et al. 2015; Moodie et al. 2013; Wiist 2010).

Big Food corporations also seek to influence the political process to create markets that are favourable for product promotion, production and distribution of ultra-processed foods and SSB. The acquisition of political power has also increased through the assistance of lobbyists, lawyers and trade organisations. For example, in Australia Big Food is represented by a comprehensive collection of organisations and peak bodies that represent a specific product (e.g. Australian Beverage Council (2018)); a segment of the industry (e.g. Restaurant & Catering Industry Association (2017)); a constituent of food (e.g. Sugar Australia (2004)); and the key larger food companies and retailers (e.g. Australian Grocery and Food Council) (2015)).

1.4 The influence of Big Food

1.4.1 Food products and their distribution

What people eat is increasingly driven by companies categorised as Big Food, as the “food system is no longer a competitive marketplace of small producers, but an oligopoly” (Stuckler & Nestle 2012, p1). Internationally, multinationals hold over one third of food sales in the global market, with more than half of global SSB produced by Coca Cola and PepsiCo (Alexander et al. 2011). In Australia, the ultra-processed foods and SSB manufacturing industry is the largest manufacturing sector, accounting for $111 billion (AUD) in market share, and almost one in six jobs (Department of Industry 2016).

The marketing and increased availability of ultra-processed foods and SSB are implicated in the displacement of traditional diets of minimally processed foods and freshly prepared meals (Martínez Steele et al. 2016; Singh et al. 2015). Many epidemiologists have argued that economic development has contributed to a ‘nutrition transition’, whereby population groups have shifted from under nutrition to over nutrition (Popkin et al. 2012; Popkin & Gordon-Larsen 2004). In some countries, this process has often resulted in a shift in population food preferences away from traditional diets characterised by low salt, low saturated fat and higher
fibre to less healthy and Westernised diets (Popkin et al. 2012; Popkin & Gorden-Larsen 2004), which are characterised by ultra-processed foods and lower intakes of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. However, it should be noted that in certain LMIC, traditional diets are characterised as high in fat and salt (World Health Organization 2017). Nowadays, in many countries, populations face a double burden of malnutrition that includes both under nutrition and over nutrition (World Health Organization 2018b). This is prominent in LMIC where the nutrition workforce is geared around ‘any calories are good calories’ and LMIC health systems are not equipped to prevent and treat diet-related diseases (Ford et al. 2017).

Much of the growth in sales of ultra-processed foods and SSB has occurred due to the expansion of companies into LMIC (Popkin et al. 2012). This expansion was facilitated by the liberalisation of global trade and foreign investments since the 1980s, which opened up the trading of unhealthy commodities, including ultra-processed foods and SSB, as well as tobacco and alcohol (Stuckler et al. 2012). The pace of increase in consumption of unhealthy commodities in several LMIC is projected to occur at a faster rate than historically in high income countries (Popkin et al. 2012). The wider distribution of these unhealthy commodities in combination with concurrent reduced physical activity (Salis et al. 2016), are reported to contribute to the increase of NCDs, particularly increases in the prevalence of obesity and type-2 diabetes (Beaglehole et al. 2011a).

### 1.4.2 Food marketing

Big Food also maintain influence and market share through mass media food marketing to promote and normalise the consumption of an extensive range of ultra-processed food and SSB, particularly to children and adolescents (Stuckler & Nestle 2012). Systematic reviews and reports indicate that television advertising influence children’s food preferences, purchase requests and consumption patterns (Cairns et al. 2013; Cairns et al. 2009; Hastings et al. 2006; Hastings et al. 2003). Additionally, a wide range of methods is used to market these products, including: children’s magazines, in-school promotions, outdoor advertising where children gather (e.g. billboards), social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat), online internet-based advertisements, apps, or in video games (Cairns et al. 2013; Signal et al. 2017). Companies also utilise a range promotional techniques to engage children with ultra-processed foods and SSB brands including: bright packaging, intensely flavoured ingredients, free toys, flash animation, music, games, competitions, collectables, and tie-ins with cartoon characters (Cairns et al. 2009). These
marketing tactics have been reported to reach children in schools, child-care centres, and supermarkets; through television and the Internet; and in many other settings (World Health Organization 2010; Signal et al. 2017).

The majority of research studies undertaken pertaining to Big Food has focused on the industry marketing activities used to influence and maintain market share (e.g. product promotion). These studies have explored the nature and content of marketing messages and the impact of these on consumer behaviours (Brownell & Warner 2009; Cairns et al. 2013; Cairns et al. 2009; Federal Trade Commision 2008, 2012; Harris et al. 2015; Hastings et al. 2006; Hastings et al. 2003; Moodie et al. 2013; Roy & Chttopadhyay 2010).

1.4.2.1 Marketing activities used to influence and maintain market share

Whilst television remains the key medium for companies to market themselves, systematic reviews show that corporations are gradually moving towards a multifaceted mix of marketing communication techniques that focus on building relationships with consumers from an early age (Cairns et al. 2013; Cairns et al. 2009; Hastings et al. 2006; Hastings et al. 2003). In Australia, food products marketed to youth are inconsistent with the dietary guidelines for healthy eating as they contain high amounts of saturated fat, sugar and/or salt (King et al. 2010). Pervasive and powerful product marketing is considered to be a significant contributor to the rising prevalence rates of NCDs amongst youth (Moodie et al. 2013), although it should be noted that youth overweight and obesity has plateaued in Australia in recent years (Australian Government 2014). Despite the established evidence supporting this, Big Food continue to target young people directly by spending $1.8 billion (USD) annually on youth-orientated marketing, with the promotion of SSB, fast food, and breakfast cereals and packaged products high in sugar accounting for 90% of these expenditures (Federal Trade Commision 2008).

Food marketing research indicates that there is an association between television food advertising and child and adolescent food behaviours, influencing their food preferences, purchase requests and knowledge (Cairns et al. 2013; Cairns et al. 2009; Hastings et al. 2006; Hastings et al. 2003). Based on expenditure data, this form of marketing is the dominant means of marketing unhealthy products to youth; however marketers have increased their use of other media and places where children gather to reach their target consumer group over time (Federal Trade Commision 2008, 2012; Harris et al. 2015). To date, most research into
the marketing strategies of Big Food has focused on how companies overtly promote their products to youth (Grow & Schwartz 2014), and utilise ‘stealth’ tactics known to appeal to this target group (Roy & Chttopadhyay 2010). Such strategies include product placement in movies and television programs, and the use of celebrity endorsements and event sponsorships that associate their products with music celebrities to maximise preference and sales (e.g. PepsiCo and Beyoncé Knowles) (Anderson et al. 2009; Bragg et al. 2016; Brownell & Warner 2009; Wills et al. 2009). By embedding their brands within established popular culture icons and everyday contexts, companies attempt to establish credibility and acceptance of their products with their target audience and society more broadly. For example, Coca Cola subtly position their products on American Idol, where the judges sip from branded drinking cups that are always placed prominently on their judging table (Brownell & Warner 2009). Brands are also placed strategically within storylines of children’s movies, including Spy Kids 2 and Diary of a Wimpy Kid, with both having well known branded products prominently throughout the film (Brownell & Warner 2009).

Public health research suggests that Big Food have also worked collaboratively with Big Tobacco in sharing youth marketing tactics (Brownell & Horgen 2004). An example of this is placing emphasis on sport and physical activity to reach youth (Blum 2005). Big Food aggressively target youth through sport sponsorship (Bragg et al. 2017; Kelly et al. 2011c; Kelly et al. 2012; Kelly et al. 2013), professional athlete and sport organisation endorsements (Brownell & Warner 2009), sports references and images on product packaging (Brownell & Horgen 2004), and sports equipment, or sports equipment-shaped products (Bragg et al. 2012). Big Tobacco were once criticised for using this tactic to promote their products, including product placement in youth-oriented sports video games, as well as sports sponsorship and athlete endorsements (Bragg et al. 2012; Nestle 2006). Placing emphasis on physical activity and promoting healthy lifestyles has the potential to negatively impact this target group, as they may begin to associate unhealthy products with healthy practices. Evidence from Australia also indicated that the endorsement from elite athletes led parents to perceive food products as healthier than the same products without athlete endorsement, thus influencing parental purchase decisions (Kelly et al. 2012).

Other forms of stealth marketing tactics include cross-promotion agreements. This includes third party licensed characters being tied in with television shows and movies, events, theme
parks, and toys and games (McGale et al. 2016; Mehta et al. 2012). This tactic can take many forms, but usually includes: characters featured on packaging, special flavours, competitions and giveaways (Harris et al. 2009; McGale et al. 2016). Similar to the behavioural outcomes associated with television advertising, such strategies are reported to positively influence product recall and requests for the tied-in unhealthy products (Harris et al. 2009; Vilaro et al. 2017).

1.4.2.2 Marketing activities used to build relationships, influence public policy and prevent regulatory reform

Previous research has also investigated marketing strategies used by Big Food to build relationships, influence public policy, and protect themselves against regulatory reform (Brownell 2012). These include a similar repertoire of ubiquitous marketing tactics used by Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol (Bond et al. 2010). These can be grouped into five categories: public relations, tactical campaigns, lobbying, co-opting policy makers and health professionals, and funding research (Brownell and Warner 2009; Moodie et al. 2013).

First are public relations campaigns and public statements, which are used to state care and concern about the health of their customers and populations. Big Tobacco devoted substantial resources to such campaigns to influence public opinion, and to minimise calls for government intervention (Friedman 2009). For example, tobacco companies invested substantial amounts of money into public relations efforts to deflect consumer criticism by arguing that cigarette companies do not promote abuse of the product, they simply provide choice and recommend moderate consumption (Daube 2012). Big Food has followed in the footsteps of tobacco companies when attempting to reframe health issues placing emphasis on ‘balance’ and ‘moderation’. Several companies have attempted to address the issue of obesity and the ‘role’ they wished to play in curbing the epidemic in the media (Herrick 2009). Companies have issued several public statements, which all echo similar sentiments: that obesity has many causes; that they are committed to providing product choice and; that they will undertake marketing practices that will encourage healthy lifestyles to make it easier for consumers to make better choices (Herrick 2009).

Second are tactical campaigns that emphasise freedom of choice and personal responsibility to encourage consumers to oppose regulation of the industry (Brownell & Warner 2009; Moodie et al. 2013; Wiist 2010, 2011). These types of initiatives emphasise self-control and
hold individuals accountable for their own purchasing and consumption choices (Brownell et al. 2010). This libertarian call for ‘freedom’ was Big Tobacco’s first line of defence against regulation, referring to the government as a ‘nanny state’ for impinging on personal freedom. Big Food highlights individual responsibility through messages of moderation that appear on food packaging. For example, food products produced by Mondelez International (Mondelez International 2013) that are high in sugar contain the words ‘Be Treat Wise’ on the exterior packaging. Similarly, Coca Cola encourage consumers to ‘be more active and take greater responsibility for their diets’, in response to criticisms associated with the sugar content of the company’s products (Dorfman et al. 2012). Even if individuals were to try to exercise personal responsibility, they are trying to exert it in a food environment which is designed to undermine it (Swinburn et al. 2011). Public health experts suggest that focusing on the individual’s behaviour regarding consumption and activity behaviours does little but offer cover to an industry seeking to downplay its own responsibility (Nestle 2002).

Third are the lobbying tactics employed by large corporations. Companies fight viciously against meaningful change proposed by public health experts and invest heavily in lobbying to influence politicians and public officials and to block or stall regulatory efforts (Brownell & Warner 2009; Moodie et al. 2013; Sharma et al. 2010). Again, examples can be drawn from Big Tobacco. Phillip Morris made large campaign contributions to politicians’ ‘pet causes’ in effort to exert political influence at federal and state levels (Tesler & Malone 2008). Lobbying activities may also occur via industry-funded ‘front groups’. For instance, Big Food funds groups that work to oppose policies in relation to regulation on marketing to children, front-of-pack nutrition labelling and taxes on unhealthy foods (Brownell 2012).

Regulations that have emerged have been in the form of self-regulatory measures that allow companies to regulate and monitor their own compliance to self-imposed codes of practice. In spite of this effort, independent evaluations of industry self-regulatory commitments indicate that they are ineffective and unlikely to curb the amount of unhealthy food marketing that children are exposed to or reduce the impact of this exposure (King et al. 2010).

Fourth is co-opting policy makers and health professionals. The legitimisation of Big Food as contributing to health is further fuelled by the growing number of private-public partnerships with public health organisations, ostensibly designed to foster collaborative action to improve
the population’s health. To undermine public health intervention and policies, Big Food promotes such partnerships with health experts and professional organisations (Moodie et al. 2013; Wiist 2011). For instance, corporations affiliate themselves with certain organisations to lend credibility to their brand and position themselves as a ‘part of the solution’ to addressing obesity in policy discussions (Herrick 2009). Similarly, both alcohol and tobacco industries have worked with public policy and health groups to establish organisations designed to position them as responsible, and to develop future health messages (Bond et al. 2010; Daube 2012). Public health experts recommend that government, not for profit and health organisations should be working towards regulation, and not collaboration (Moodie et al. 2013). This sentiment is supported by the director general of the World Health Organization (WHO), Margaret Chan, that the formulation of nutrition policies must be protected from the commercial or vested interests of the Big Food industry (Chan 2011).

Fifth is the funding of research, which some believe is used to generate data that supports the industry’s position and results in the reporting of biased research findings (Lesser et al. 2007; Levine et al. 2003; Nestle 2001). For example, Levine et al. (2003) assessed the relationship between authors’ published views on the safety and efficiency of the fat substitute Olestra as a mechanism for weight loss and their financial relationships with Procter and Gamble (P&G). The review demonstrated a strong association between the two, with authors who reported supportive conclusions were more likely to have a reported a financial relationship with P&G, and were also more likely to have maintained financial relationships with other companies or trade groups (Levine et al. 2003). Of the 67 articles included in the review, 52% of these included an acknowledgement of P&G support or identified one author as affiliated with P&G. Of these, 83% were classified as supportive, and the remaining 17% were neutral.

Systematic reviews show that research supported by industry funding is four to eight times more likely to support conclusions favourable relative to their own financial interests, compared to studies that are not sponsored by the food and drink industry (Lesser et al. 2007). Based on this, researchers encourage journal readers to exert ‘exceptional caution’ when interpreting the results of research studies that focus on a specific food topic and are funded by an industry group (Lesser et al. 2007). Additionally, due to some authors’ published opinions being associated with their financial relationships with industry groups,
public health experts have expressed that obtaining non-commercial judgements may be more essential to maintain objectivity in research findings (Nestle 2001).

1.4.3 Corporate Political Activity (CPA)
The five marketing strategies outlined above (i.e. public relations, tactical campaigns, lobbying, co-opting policy makers and health professionals, and funding research), have also been positioned in the literature as components of Big Food’s corporate political activity (CPA) (Mialon et al. 2016a; Mialon et al. 2017; Mialon et al. 2015; Mialon et al. 2016b; Sacks et al. 2013). However, not all authors who have assessed these activities have ascribed them to be CPA, presenting some definitional confusion in the critical public health literature. The authors of studies, who do ascribe these activities as CPA (Mialon et al. 2016a; Mialon et al. 2017; Mialon et al. 2015; Mialon et al. 2016b; Sacks et al. 2013) and those who do not (Brownell & Warner 2009; Moodie et al. 2013), appear to agree upon the fact that these strategies are used to build relationships, influence public policy and protect the industry from regulatory reform.

CPA is defined as “corporate attempts to shape government policy and public opinion in ways favourable to the firm” (Mialon et al. 2016a, p.1). Companies’ use CPA for three main reasons: to gain an advantage in its sector; to defend its products or actions; and to influence public policies, directly or indirectly. Companies utilise six strategies to wield political influence and they include: information and messaging; financial incentives; constituency building; policy substitution; legal strategies; policy substitution; opposition fragmentation and destabilisation (Mialon, Swinburn, Allender, et al. 2016; Mialon et al. 2015).

From a business perspective, CPA is common and acceptable as it seeks to maximise shareholder value (Mialon et al. 2017). However, it is believed to have unintended, or in some cases intended, effects of undermining efforts to prevent and control the development of public policies to prevent and control diet related NCDs (Mialon et al. 2016a; Mialon et al. 2017; Mialon et al. 2015; Mialon et al. 2016b).

1.4.4 Sponsorship
The term ‘sponsorship’ is employed in different ways in the critical public health and food marketing literature. Sponsorship is defined in this dissertation as: “the act of supporting an event, activity, person, or organisation financially or through the provision of products or
services” (NSW Government Office of Sport 2018). It may include a cash and/or in-kind payment to an event or organisation in return for promotional opportunities associated with said event or organisation (NSW Government Office of Sport 2018).

‘Sponsorship’ is associated with many different activities in the food marketing literature. Two sponsorship-related activities are ‘community sport sponsorship’ and ‘corporate sport sponsorship’. These two activities are relevant to the target group focus of this research – children and youth. These activities are also useful to explore what is understood to be sponsorship, as compared to CSR or marketing, as different authors have used the terms interchangeably. Other activities have been more clearly differentiated as either marketing or clearly sponsorship.

In general, sport sponsorship refers to when a business provides funds, resources or services to a club, in return for some form of rights and/or associations with the club that may be used to help the business commercially, or to support a club to function effectively and meet the needs of its members (Bragg et al. 2017; Kelly et al. 2011a; Kelly et al. 2011b; Kelly et al. 2012; Macniven et al. 2015; NSW Government Office of Sport 2018; Pettigrew et al. 2013). For instance, this may be in the form of a logo on a ball or on a sports club’s website, naming rights, skill development programs, branded equipment, or signs at an oval. Sport sponsorship, both community and corporate, are reported to increase brand awareness, build brand value, and the propensity for consumers to purchase products, particularly children and youth (Bragg et al. 2017; Kelly et al. 2011b; Kelly et al. 2011c; Kelly et al. 2012a; Macniven et al. 2015; Pettigrew et al. 2013).

At present, there appears to be definitional issues in the food marketing literature regarding how authors define community sport sponsorship and corporate sport sponsorship, and what each of these activities include. In some instances authors do not distinguish the two and refer to these activities generically as ‘sport sponsorship’ (Carter et al. 2013; Kelly 2011c; Kelly et al. 2012b; Kelly et al. 2013; Pettigrew et al. 2012), while a few authors have ascribed sport sponsorship to be a CSR activity. Separate definitions of community sport sponsorship and corporate sport sponsorship are important because the two terms apply to different activities and appear to occur within different settings.
In this dissertation, community sport sponsorship will be discussed as a type of CSR activity undertaken by Big Food where the authors ascribe it to be CSR. Community sport sponsorship primarily involves companies’ providing financial incentives and branded merchandise and equipment to local sports clubs to assist a club to function to meet the needs of its members, but also be associated with clubs (Dixon et al. 2017; Kelly et al. 2011a; Watson et al. 2016). Children and youth are considered to be the primary target audiences of community sport sponsorship activities and researchers have called for the sponsorship of children’s sport to be included in food marketing regulations in recognition of the impact of such activities on children (Bragg et al. 2017; Carter et al. 2013; Dixon et al. 2017; Kelly et al. 2011a; Kelly et al. 2011b, 2011b; Kelly et al. 2012a; Kelly et al. 2013; Kelly et al. 2012b; Macniven et al. 2015; Pettigrew et al. 2012; Watson et al. 2016).

1.4.5 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

An additional strategy reported as used by Big Food to build relationships, influence public policy, and prevent regulatory reform is CSR (Dorfman et al. 2012; The PLoS Medicine Editors 2012). Whilst this is an emerging area, public health experts have called for increased levels of critical social marketing to address CSR, as less is known about the influence these strategies may have on consumers.

CSR is concerned with the integration of environmental, social, economic and ethical considerations into business strategies and practices. While numerous definitions have been offered across numerous disciplines, consistent definitions, labels and vocabulary have yet to be solidly established in the field of social sciences. In the context of the existing critical public health literature CSR has been described as an ‘evolving’ idea that has come to include “companies’ economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities to society in addition to the company’s fiduciary responsibility to shareholders” (Dorfman et al. 2012, p.2).

Companies have publicly reported on CSR strategies – addressing social issues ranging from the reformulation of their products; changes in their practices regarding marketing to children; improvement of the availability of nutritional information and labelling; and promoting balanced diets and physical activity – via public reports and company websites (Coca Cola Australia 2018; McDonald's 2018; Nestlé 2018). Advocates of CSR argue that it can help companies meet these responsibilities while addressing the company's ‘higher’
social obligations. Companies participate in CSR activities to address societal concerns and to meet the requirements of groups beyond their own shareholders. In doing so, they claim to accept an ethical obligation to the public at large (Garriga & Mele 2004).

CSR has also been described as a mechanism for creating shared value that allows companies to reconnect their own company success with social progress. For example, Porter and Kramer (2006) suggest that CSR can assist in generating economic value that also allows the company to produce value for society by addressing social challenges.

However, public health experts suspect CSR strategies may primarily function as a public relations tool, used to build a positive brand image and consumer preferences, with the underlying intention of protecting their profitability (Dorfman et al. 2012). As a result of this, companies are able to deflect and shift blame from themselves on to the individuals who consume their products (Doane 2005; Lee & Carroll 2011). It has also been argued that companies utilise CSR to position themselves as ‘good corporate citizens’ and through association increase the social acceptability of their products (Doane 2005; Lee & Carroll 2011).

Big Food’s CSR agenda is an emerging as an increasingly important issue for population health at global, national and local levels, with public health researchers calling for future studies to address the socio-environmental drivers of NCDs (Beaglehole et al. 2011a; Beaglehole et al. 2011b; Swinburn et al. 2011). Understanding the impact of CSR strategies is essential in responding to the United Nations high-level meeting NCD goal of a 25% reduction in premature death due to NCDs by 2025 (Moodie et al. 2013) and the United Nations decade of action on nutrition 2016-2025 (World Health Organization 2016). This will involve initiating a ‘massive scale up’ of concentrated action to decrease consumption of unhealthy commodities (e.g. ultra-processed food and SSB).

Presently, more is known about the direct marketing, CPA and sponsorship activities of Big Food companies than is known about their CSR activities. Other unhealthy commodity industries, notably Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol have had their CSR activities scrutinised, including the types, target audiences, motivations and harms of such activities. The CSR activities of all three unhealthy commodity industries are explored in Chapter 2. This analysis
provides the basis for the dissertation and begins to build the evidence base relating to the
types, target audiences, motivations for, and potential influences of Big Food’s CSR
activities.

1.5 Research aims

Prior to this research, very little research pertaining to Big Food and CSR was available. For
that reason, a narrative review of the literature regarding CSR and Big Tobacco and Big
Alcohol was reviewed first (Chapter 2). The review of this literature informed an exploration
of what was known about Big Food and CSR, which assisted in identifying the current gaps
and limitations in the literature that assisted in the formulation of the specific research
questions addressed in this dissertation (presented here and in Chapter 3).

The overall aim of this dissertation was to develop a comprehensive framework that
summarised the strategic focus of Big Food’s CSR activities and intended target audiences
(that would serve as a guide to map and monitor CSR as a specific type of marketing) and
develop recommendations for public health action to address Big Food’s CSR strategies.
This research sits within the context of the Social Ecological Model of Health
(Bronfenbrenner 1979), and seeks to understand the multifaceted and interactive effects of
corporate marketing strategies, specifically CSR strategies, that influence healthy diets.

To draw out the complexities of this issue, this research utilised multiple stakeholder
perspectives (industry (via corporate documents and webpages), parents and children, and
public health experts). The research was also guided by multiple frameworks and concepts,
including: the Inclusive Social Rating Criteria (KLD Research & Analytics Inc 2003); value
theory (Nelson 2004); and the ‘marketing mix’ (4P’s) (Borden 1984), as the use of a single
theoretical perspective that only focused on one particular aspect of the research was
considered not able to articulate ‘the whole story’ (Nilsen 2015).

Specific aims of this research were:

1. To identify and map Big Food companies’ CSR activities, including:
   a. The strategic foci of CSR activities;
   b. Intended target audiences of CSR activities;
2. To identify the impact of Big Food companies’ CSR strategies, including the degree to which CSR activities positively or negatively influenced public perceptions of a specific community segment (i.e. parents and children);

3. To explore public health experts’ perceptions of the motivations and impacts of Big Food’s CSR strategies;

4. To systematically explore expert views on recommended public health strategies likely to be effective in minimising the harms associated with CSR activities of Big Food companies.

1.6 Contributions to knowledge

The study findings provided evidence of current CSR strategies of Big Food companies, their influence on community attitudes and perceptions towards their products, and the potential impacts on consumers, government and public health. This dissertation provided several theoretical, practical and methodological contributions to advance the knowledge in this field.

- Theoretically, this study is the first to systematically review and map the CSR strategies currently used by Big Food companies in Australia.
- Practically, findings from the research can inform the advocacy for and development of policy guidelines to respond to the marketing activities of Big Food.
- Methodologically, this study developed a new classification schema for categorising CSR activities undertaken by Big Food, which may also be applied to map CSR strategies across a range of unhealthy commodity industries.

1.7 Dissertation structure

This dissertation is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of a Doctor of Philosophy (Thesis by Compilation). According to the guidelines outlined for higher degree research students of the University of Wollongong, these articles may be published, submitted for publication, prepared as a manuscript for submission, or any combination thereof (University of Wollongong 2017). In accordance with these guidelines, this dissertation includes the chapters outlined below.
1.7.1 Chapter 1 - Introductory chapter
The chapter highlights the current gaps in knowledge and establishes a case for exploration of the influences of CSR on public perceptions of Big Food companies that are likely to influence food environments and hence people’s food choices. Finally, the chapter identifies the broad research aims and presents the dissertation structure.

1.7.2 Chapter 2 – Narrative literature review
Chapter 2 presents a narrative literature review of the current public health and business literature, pertaining to Big Food’s use of CSR strategies.

The literature regarding CSR and Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol was reviewed first, to conceptualise the CSR practices of other transnational unhealthy commodity industries, which have historically had a negative impact on public health (Bond et al. 2010; Brownell & Warner 2009). This overview was used to frame the exploration of what has been reported on Big Food’s CSR and assisted to identify current gaps and limitations in the literature that assisted in formulating the research aims and questions.

1.7.3 Chapter 3 – Synopsis of the research
Chapter 3 identifies the research questions that were informed by Chapter 2. This chapter also provides an overview of the research design, considerations relating to qualitative research and ethical issues. The chapter concludes with an overview of the frameworks used to guide the research and the contributions to knowledge.

Chapters by Journal Article Style
According to the higher degree research thesis by compilation guidelines (University of Wollongong 2017), other chapters have been included in the format of journal articles, which describe research conducted by the candidate during the period of her candidature. Chapter 4 to 7 comprise four articles, 2 of which have been published, and 2 of which have been submitted for editorial and peer review. Please note, that while the articles are formatted according to the guidelines for each journal, the referencing has been changed to Author-Date (Harvard) style for consistency within the preparation of this dissertation. Please also note that spelling is consistent with an English (Australian) dictionary. References are presented at the end of each chapter. A complete reference list is also provided in Appendix L.
1.7.4 Chapter 4 - Corporate social responsibility programs of Big Food in Australia: a content analysis of industry documents

Chapter 4 presents a journal article written by the candidate with co-authors Associate Professor Samantha Thomas, Dr Melanie Randle and Professor Simone Pettigrew.


This initial study developed a categorical framework to map and monitor the CSR strategies currently being implemented in Australia by Big Food. It also identified the nature of current CSR strategies used in Australia and whom they targeted.

The findings were presented via poster presentation at the 43rd Annual Public Health Association Conference in Perth 2014 and won the conference poster award. The findings were also presented at the 13th Public Health Congress: One Vision, Many Voices, in Hobart in 2015, for which the candidate was awarded the congress student scholarship.

1.7.5 Chapter 5 - Are Big Food’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies valuable to communities? A qualitative study with parents and children

Chapter 5 presents a journal article written by the candidate with co-author and supervisor Dr Lyn Phillipson.


Study 1 identified parents and children as two key target groups whom Big Food aimed to positively influence through their CSR strategies. This study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of parents’ and children’s awareness and interpretation of Big Food’s CSR strategies to understand how CSR shaped their beliefs about companies. Using semi-structured qualitative dyadic interviews, parents and children interacted in response to a series of brand logos and CSR themed advertisements. McDonald’s, Nestlé, and Coca Cola were the included brands, based on the findings from Study 1 that identified these companies as implementing the most CSR strategies in Australia.
This study also identified that the companies’ CSR strategies primarily focused on environmental responsibility, consumer responsibility and community-based initiatives. Therefore, each CSR themed ad represented one of these strategies. The definitions provided in Study 1 were used to select an ad for each CSR category.

1.7.6 Chapter 6 – Marketing or social good? Public health perspectives on Big Food’s CSR strategies and their impacts

Chapter 6 presents a journal article written by the candidate with co-author and supervisor Dr Lyn Phillipson.


Study 3 utilised one to one qualitative semi-structured interviews to systematically explore public health experts’ perceptions of the motivations, and impacts, of Big Food’s CSR strategies. This information was used to triangulate the findings established in Studies 1 and 2 of the research. It was important to collate these views as previous research had been derived from industry documents and reports using content analysis and comparative analyses with the tobacco and alcohol industry documents. Whilst that type of evidence provides insights into the types of strategies implemented, and the intentions of these strategies, this research does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the potential impacts of Big Food’s CSR on public health.

The findings of this study were presented at the Food Governance Showcase at the University of Sydney in November 2017.

1.7.7 Chapter 7 – Responding to Big Food’s corporate social responsibility strategies: expert recommendations for public health action

Chapter 7 presents a journal article written by the candidate with co-authors and supervisors Dr Lyn Phillipson, Professor Heather Yeatman.

Whilst action to address tobacco companies’ CSR strategies has occurred at an international level, public health action in the context of Big Food’s CSR strategies has been lacking. Given the potential similarities and differences in the timing, target audiences and support for restriction of Big Food’s CSR, Study 3 sought to explore what actions experts believed should be taken on Big Food’s CSR, and how these actions would fit within the overall agenda for public health responses to promote healthy diets and improve the wider food environment.

The findings of this study were presented at the Governing Food Conference in Sydney 2016, and via a poster presentation at the 15th World Congress on Public Health in Melbourne, 2017.

1.7.8 Chapter 8 – Discussion and conclusion

Chapter 8 presents an integrated discussion of the main results of all studies in this dissertation and contributions to knowledge. The strengths and limitations of these studies are discussed, as well as the implications for public health policy, and recommendations for future research to further the understanding of Big Food’s CSR strategies.
1.8 References


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Chapter 2 - Narrative Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter presents a narrative literature review written by the candidate in the form of a traditional dissertation chapter.

First, the literature regarding CSR and Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol was reviewed, as there is little evidence pertaining to Big Food. Reviewing this evidence provided an overview of the types of CSR activities employed by such Big Industries and how they have been explored. This overview then informed an exploration of what is known of Big Food’s CSR and assisted to identify current gaps and limitations in the literature that assisted in formulating the research questions.

2.2 Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been defined as “a company’s economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities to society, in addition to meeting the company’s fiduciary responsibility to shareholders” (Dorfman et al. 2012, p.2). CSR strategies are employed by various types of industries including pharmaceutical (Jeon & Gleiberman 2017), and oil (Thorsteinsdóttir et al. 2017), as well as clothing and car manufacturers (van Rekom et al. 2014). From the ‘industry’ perspective, CSR can assist in generating economic value (i.e. profits) that allows corporations to produce value for society by addressing social challenges (e.g. funding public programs) (Porter & Kramer 2006).

While there are many examples of companies making genuine efforts to practice in ethical ways, the CSR practices of transnational unhealthy commodity industries have come under the scrutiny of public health experts as activities that may have a negative impact on public health (Moodie et al. 2013). Experts have focused on three specific industries whose products have contributed to the increased prevalence of Non Communicable Diseases (NCD) (Stuckler et al. 2012) including: Big Tobacco (i.e. transnational tobacco companies); Big Alcohol (i.e. transnational alcohol companies); and more recently Big Food (i.e. transnational ultra-processed food and beverage companies). These industries have been described as “the new vectors of diseases” (Moodie et al. 2013, p1), linked to a wider industrial epidemic, where the agents that spread disease are transnational corporations. Corporations partly
contribute to the modern spread of disease through the implementation of sophisticated marketing strategies, which seek to normalise and create desire for their products, thus embedding and increasing consumption of them (Moodie et al. 2013).

The literature was reviewed to understand CSR and these new vectors of disease, and their use of these strategies. The literature regarding CSR and Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol was reviewed first, as there was little published pertaining to Big Food. Reviewing this evidence provided an overview of the types of CSR activities employed by such Big Industries and how they had been explored. This overview then informed an exploration of what is known of Big Food’s CSR and assisted in the identification of gaps in the research literature.

CSR strategies were initially implemented by Big Tobacco companies in response to a range of public health measures aimed at reducing harms associated with tobacco consumption (McDaniel & Malone 2009). As evidence mounted linking smoking to cancer, the social acceptability for cigarettes declined, which led to companies implementing CSR strategies aimed at improving their corporate image and preventing further regulations (Dorfman et al. 2012). While there has been less evidence directly linking alcohol to specific illnesses, it has been established that Big Alcohol used CSR strategies to improve their corporate image and minimise regulation of their products.

Literature was explored in a systematic manner, with particular foci on articles and publications that reviewed CSR strategies, as per the above definition (Dorfman et al. 2012). The review of the literature commenced with a tradition approach, using search terms “tobacco industry” or “big tobacco” and “corporate social responsibility” or “sponsorship”, together with “alcohol industry” or “big alcohol” and “corporate social responsibility” or “sponsorship”, on the databases Scopus and Web of Science. Titles were read for relevance, then abstracts of papers, with the view to selecting key papers that specifically analysed documents from the tobacco document archives to explore why and how tobacco and alcohol companies implemented CSR strategies. Most articles retained for in-depth analysis had a focus on Big Tobacco CSR strategies, with fewer studies reporting on Big Alcohol CSR strategies.
2.2.1 Big Tobacco and CSR

Tobacco is one of the leading causes of death globally (Lim et al. 2012), and a main risk factor for numerous chronic diseases including cancer, lung diseases and cardiovascular diseases (World Health Organization 2017).

As the evidence mounted about the links between tobacco and various illnesses, governments introduced increasingly restrictive regulations on the promotion, sale and access to tobacco products. At each regulatory step, the tobacco industry responded with increasingly sophisticated initiatives, through to their current CSR activities. The following section outlines when the various pieces of evidence and types of regulations came into effect, and the CSR strategies employed by the industry in response to them.

In the 1950s, the first series of epidemiological studies demonstrating the association between cigarette smoking and lung cancer were published (Doll & Bradford Hill 1950; Levin et al. 1950; Mills & Porter 1950; Schrek et al. 1950; Wynder & Graham 1950). Subsequently, the advisory committee to the Surgeon General conducted a comprehensive review of the available scientific evidence and published the first Surgeon General’s report on ‘smoking and health’ in 1964 (United States Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health & United States Public Health Service Office of the Surgeon General 1964). The report highlighted the deleterious health consequences of tobacco use (United States Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health & United States Public Health Service Office of the Surgeon General 1964).

Following this evidence, various forms regulation of the tobacco industry was implemented throughout the late 1960s and 1970s (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 2018). These included mandatory public warnings about the dangers of smoking on cigarette packaging and bans on cigarette advertising on television and radio (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 2018). In response to new evidence, Big Tobacco issued what was referred to as the ‘frank statement’ (Brownell & Warner 2009), a script that placed emphasis on individual responsibility, used by industry representatives to deny the catastrophic effects of smoking and to avoid public policy that might damage sales (Brownell & Warner 2009). In the 1980s public policies that focused on settings based changes came into fruition including the phasing out of smoking in public places, workplaces and on domestic flights (Robert Wood
Johnson Foundation 2018). At this time, Big Tobacco continued pushing its ‘individual responsibility’ rhetoric, maintaining that ‘smoking is not an addiction’ (Brownell & Warner 2009).

As the prospect of regulatory action increased in the 1990’s, so did the proliferation of Big Tobacco’s CSR strategies, particularly philanthropy. For example, Philip Morris used demonstrations of caring and empathy to improve their corporate image by funding youth smoking cessation programs and aligning themselves with anti-domestic violence campaigns (McDaniel & Malone 2009). During this time, companies also began to acknowledge that smoking was addictive, provide health information on corporate websites, and develop ‘safer products’ as part of a ‘commitment to tobacco harm reduction’ strategy.

In 1998, 46 U.S. states and six other U.S. jurisdictions sued the major cigarette manufactures to recover the medical costs the states incurred in treating sick and dying cigarette smokers (National Association of Attorneys General 1999). This Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) has been identified as one of the largest civil litigation settlement in U.S history (National Association of Attorneys General 1999). This resulted in the tobacco industry paying $10 billion (USD) annually for the indefinite future. Additionally, the MSA set standards for, and imposed restrictions on, the marketing and sale of tobacco products (World Health Organization 2003). It also provided access to internal industry documents, exploration of which has enabled significant public health advances in tobacco control, including the restriction and public regulation of CSR activities (World Health Organization 2008).

The most comprehensive commitment to tobacco control is the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The WHO FCTC was the first treaty negotiated under the support of the WHO and encompassed a regulatory approach to address the harms associated with tobacco consumption. Governments around the world have adopted WHO FCTC policies to discourage smoking, including price and tax measures, and non-price measures to reduce the demand for and consumption of tobacco (World Health Organization 2003). During this time, Big Tobacco continued implementing CSR strategies, primarily philanthropic donations to seemingly unrelated, but socially desirable causes to create a platform from which they could re-enter policy discussions and re-establish political influence (Fooks et al. 2011). To prevent tobacco companies from re-establishing political
influence, Article 5.3 (an additional cross-cutting provision to the FCTC) required parties to protect their tobacco control policies from tactics (e.g. CSR strategies) that promoted the commercial interest of the tobacco industry (World Health Organization 2008). For instance, recommendation six of Article 5.3, outlined requirements for member states to denormalise and publicly regulate the tobacco industry’s CSR strategies (World Health Organization 2008).

As previously mentioned the MSA was achieved through litigation and enabled access to evidence regarding Big Tobacco’s CSR strategies. The MSA revealed a series of internal tobacco industry documents that highlighted the companies’ deceptive marketing practices to influence consumers’ attitudes, which included details of CSR strategies (National Association of Attorneys General 1999). Comprehensive databases with documents from multiple companies provided accurate depictions of strategies used by the tobacco industry. Although, it should be noted that indexing issues may have prevented access to some documents and some companies were likely to have destroyed documents that had incriminating information in them prior to litigation.

Evidence form the tobacco control literature indicates that despite Big Tobacco’s insistence that they provide social value to consumers, the industry’s CSR portfolio provided another avenue to promote products, and thus increased consumer awareness and familiarity of cigarette brands (Yang & Malone 2008). Evidence from reviews of internal documents revealed that associating tobacco brands with attractive images and socially desirable activities (e.g. charities) was reported by the industry itself to be an effort to positively influence consumers’ beliefs and improve brand image (Mandel et al. 2006; McDaniel et al. 2006). Additional studies that have evaluated industry documents suggested that CSR enabled corporations’ access to, and dialogue with, policy makers, in efforts to shift government policy towards targeting individual behaviour, rather than industry practice (Fooks et al. 2011).

Due to the strength of evidence linking tobacco to the development of lung cancer, arguments against the regulation of the tobacco industry’s corporate marketing tactics, including CSR activities, are no longer as contested in many developed countries (World Health Organization 2008). However, additional industry documents have indicated that Big
Tobacco is still using CSR to hinder progress on public health policies in low and middle income countries (Kalra et al. 2017).

2.2.2 Big Alcohol and CSR

Big Alcohol has also been perceived to be a problematic unhealthy commodity industry (Bond et al. 2010). Increased alcohol consumption has been linked to a range of diseases (e.g. chronic liver disease and cancers), risky behaviours (e.g. drink driving), and domestic violence (World Health Organization 2014).

Tobacco industry co-ownership of alcohol companies has facilitated third-party access to, and analysis of, internal alcohol industry documents (Bond et al. 2009; Bond et al. 2010). However, in comparison to the tobacco industry, much less comprehensive and reliable evidence regarding the alcohol industry’s practices, including CSR, has been available. Most of the available public health literature assessing Big Alcohol’s CSR strategies was based on industry CSR reports, made publicly available by industry, which means the reports, was restricted to what industry choose to disclose, or are commentary and opinion pieces (Babor & Robaina 2013; Bond et al. 2009; Bond et al. 2010; Jones et al. 2016; Lyness & McCambridge 2014; Yoon & Lam 2013). A lack of thorough evidence has made it difficult to map when companies began to implement CSR strategies, and if these were disseminated in response to public health measures, as were the tobacco industry’s CSR activities.

However, the available documents and the case-study based published literature has suggested that Big Alcohol have emulated Big Tobacco’s CSR practices to increase the social acceptability of alcohol products and to normalise brands in communities (Jones et al. 2016; Yoon & Lam 2013). Like Big Tobacco, alcohol companies invested heavily in philanthropic donations to high profile charities, disaster relief, environmental protection and social outreach programs and also made significant financial contributions globally to the sponsorship of sport, the arts and cultural events (Jones et al. 2016; Yoon & Lam 2013). This strategic alignment with charities and sporting codes was considered to be a credibility building tool that promotes access to and dialogue with policy makers (Stuckler et al. 2012). Companies’ have also reported that self-regulation of marketing practices, including CSR, was sufficient to reduce alcohol related harms in society (Yoon & Lam 2013).
In regard to the product itself, it has been argued that unlike tobacco, alcohol has a place in society, as it could be used in moderation to enhance sociability or the enjoyment of food (Daube 2012). As such, Big Alcohol have utilised CSR activities to build additional credibility via media campaigns that aimed to educate consumers about the harms of alcohol and place emphasis on personal responsibility (Jones et al. 2016). Manufacturers achieved this by asserting they provided choice and did not promote the abuse of products, which has enabled the industry to frame alcohol related harms as an individual behavioural issue. This information was commonly disseminated by ‘social aspects and public relations organisations’ (SAPROs). Such organisations have been portrayed as part of the industry’s CSR agenda, but public health researchers have argued that these organisations' activities were in fact aimed at maintaining profits by promoting ineffective interventions, misrepresenting the evidence, and attempting to influence public perceptions in ways that favoured industry interests (Yoon & Lam 2013).

Despite the extensive evidence of similarities between the alcohol and tobacco industry in market structure, marketing strategies, and harms associated with consumption (Daube 2012), a coherent legal framework for global control of alcohol related harm has yet to be developed and implemented. In 2008, the World Health Organization began drafting a global strategy to reduce the harmful use of alcohol, which included policy guidelines and recommendations to be enacted by countries to reduce and prevent alcohol related harms (World Health Organization 2014). Key strategies included: tax measures, national maximum legal blood alcohol concentration limits, mandatory health warning labels on alcohol advertisements and containers and regulations on alcohol advertisements and sponsorships (World Health Organization 2014). All 193 member states signed up the strategy, however, the adoption, scope, implementation, and effectiveness of these have varied significantly by country (World Health Organization 2014). Whilst public health experts have similar concerns regarding the harms associated with Big Alcohol’s CSR, governments’ ability to regulate or restrict these activities have been significantly less compared to those of tobacco control.

2.2.3 Overview of Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol CSR strategies
The above review of tobacco and alcohol control literature describing CSR programs identified three key groups of strategies. Firstly, companies provided health information on corporate websites to assist consumers in making informed decisions regarding the consumption of tobacco or alcohol. Secondly, media campaigns were developed that aimed to
educate consumers about the harms of tobacco or alcohol and placed emphasis on personal responsibility (Bond et al. 2010; Friedman 2009; Jones et al. 2016; McDaniel & Malone 2009; McDaniel & Malone 2012; Yoon & Lam 2013). The third group of strategies comprised philanthropic donations to high profile charities and social causes including: disaster relief, environmental protection, social outreach programs (e.g. youth smoking cessation, domestic violence) and the sponsorship of sport, the arts and cultural events (Babor & Robaina 2013; Blum 2005; Jones et al. 2016; Lyness & McCambridge 2014; Mandel et al. 2006; McDaniel & Malone 2009; McDaniel et al. 2006; Yang & Malone 2008; Yoon & Lam 2013). Findings from the reviewed studies indicated that both tobacco and alcohol companies used CSR to increase the social acceptability of their products to build brand credibility and image. The target audiences of Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol CSR activities were described as youth on the cusp of turning the legal age to purchase tobacco and/or alcohol (i.e. 16-17 years) (Jones et al. 2016; Mandel et al. 2006; McDaniel & Malone 2009; Sebrié & Glantz 2007; Yang & Malone 2008), and policy makers and politicians (Fooks et al. 2011; McDaniel & Malone 2009; McDaniel et al. 2006).

Exploration of the CSR activities of Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol inform the next phase of the literature review, that pertaining to Big Food and CSR. Identification of the types and breadth of CSR strategies used by Big Industries, and the triggers for these activities, assisted in identifying in the types of, and motivations for, the activities likely to be employed by Big Food. This informed the development of an extensive list of search terms used to capture all relevant studies. For instance, other were terms interchangeably with CSR, such as, ‘social responsibility initiatives’ or ‘corporate responsibility campaigns’. Additionally, words used to describe the types of CSR activities such as ‘philanthropy’ or ‘sport sponsorship’, were included to broaden the search. The full list of search terms is detailed in the methods section of this review.
2.3 Methods

The aim of the literature review was to determine the extent of research reported in relation to CSR and Big Food and thus to inform this study’s subsequent exploration of the use of CSR strategies by Big Food in the Australian context. The review was informed by the overview of CSR and unhealthy commodities, developed in the previous section.

Literature review objectives were to:

1. Identify the research that has been ascribed by researchers as addressing CSR and Big Food,
2. Clarify the range and type of activities (including potential target audiences) that researchers have identified as CSR strategies used by Big Food,
3. Draw parallels between the range and type of CSR activities used by Big Food, compared with those reported to be used by Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol,
4. Identify gaps in the research literature to inform the research questions of this study.

2.3.1 Search strategy

The initial search strategy involved a review of the social sciences, business and marketing literature, including original and review scholarly articles. Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct and Academic Search Complete were selected to identify relevant studies, using the search terms (“fast food” or “big food” or “processed food” or “soda” or “soft drinks” or “sugary sweetened beverages”) and (“corporat*” or “big business” or “big food” or “multinationals” or “transnational”) and (“corporate social responsibility” or “social*” or “responsibil*” or “sponsorship” or “community” or “sport” or “philanthropy” or “donations” or “environment” or “media campaigns” or “arts” or “cultural”). These search terms were identified from the overview developed through the initial review of the tobacco and alcohol literature pertaining to CSR activities.

The full set of results from each search from each database was downloaded into an Endnote library. Endnote was used to remove duplicate articles and separate articles into three folders, ‘excluded articles’, ‘included for full review’, and ‘included for final review’.

2.3.2 Study selection

To meet inclusion for this review studies were required to be written in English, be a peer reviewed original research or review article, and be accessible as a full text copy. Studies
were required to be published within the last 13 years. This time period was selected after a preliminary scan of the literature indicated that there was no literature prior to 2005.

Articles needed to specifically assess an aspect of CSR strategies, in the context of Big Food. This meant that to be included in this review, authors had to self-ascribe activities as CSR, as the aim of this review was to identify the research that has been ascribed by researchers as addressing CSR and Big Food to clarify the range and type of activities that researchers have identified as CSR employed by companies. Chapter 1 identified that community sport sponsorship has been ascribed as a CSR activity in some instances, and in others it has not. Therefore, only studies where authors had ascribed community sport sponsorship as CSR were included for review.

Additionally, studies also had to explicitly define CSR in accordance with the working definition for this research, as stated above (Dorfman et al. 2012). The types of CSR strategies identified in the initial review of the tobacco and alcohol literature were also used as inclusion criteria. Therefore, studies were included if they appraised the three types of CSR activities described in 2.2.3 above, namely: health information provided via corporate websites; media campaigns or philanthropic activities.

For the purpose of this review, Big Food was defined to include “large multinational ultra-processed foods and beverage companies with huge and concerted market power” (The PLoS Medicine Editors 2012, p.1), specifically fast food restaurants, soft drink companies, and large packaged food manufacturers. To be included in this review the authors had to explicitly state that they were examining the activities of ultra-processed food and SSB companies.

Articles were excluded if they pertained to the primary industry (e.g. meat industry) or focused on food retailers’ use of CSR (e.g. supermarkets), as these were not the focus of this review. Studies that focused on Big Food’s use of other industry tactics (e.g. stealth marketing, lobbying) were not included in this review as these tactics have been established to be separate from CSR (Moodie et al. 2013). Studies were also excluded if they focused upon a different unhealthy commodity industry (e.g. tobacco and alcohol), as these were not the focus of this phase of the review.
The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Pace et al. 2012) was used to assess the research quality of each study. The MMAT was selected as it has been designed to be suitable for use in reviews that include qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods studies. It includes separate criteria for rating each methodological design (i.e. qualitative (4 criteria), quantitative randomized controlled trials (4 criteria), quantitative non-randomised (4 criteria), quantitative descriptive (4 criteria), and mixed methods (3 criteria)). Mixed methods studies are rated on qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods criteria. The number of criteria met by each study were then divided by the number of applicable criteria (e.g. 3/4 or 7/11) and converted into a percentage. The percentages are also presented using the following descriptors *(25%), ** (50%), *** (75%), and **** (100%). These represent the study quality ranging from low to high.
Table 2.1 - Inclusion and exclusion criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INCLUDE</th>
<th>EXCLUDE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPANY TYPE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Activities of “large multinational companies with huge and concerted market power” e.g. fast food restaurants, soft drink companies, and large packaged food manufactures.</td>
<td>Primary industry (e.g. meat industry) or food retailers’ use of CSR (e.g. supermarkets).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRODUCT TYPE</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ultra-processed food and SSB.</td>
<td>Tobacco, alcohol, gambling.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SELF-ASCRIBED CSR ACTIVITY TYPE</strong></td>
<td><strong>NOT CONSIDERD CSR</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Health information (emphasizing personal responsibility and informed decision making).</td>
<td>General marketing and advertising.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health education or social outreach programs (e.g. healthy diets, domestic violence).</td>
<td>Lobbying.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philanthropy (e.g. donations to charities and social causes, sport sponsorship, environmental protection, arts and cultural events).</td>
<td>Industry research.</td>
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<td>Product reformulation (e.g. developing healthier products that contain less sugar, salt, and fat).</td>
<td>Stealth marketing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cause marketing campaigns that promote CSR activities and media campaigns that aim to educate consumers about the harms of over consumption and place emphasis on personal responsibility.</td>
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2.4 Results

The initial search returned a total of 296 potentially relevant articles. After duplicates were removed (N=83), 213 article abstracts, and titles were screened for relevance, using the inclusion and exclusion criteria above. Of these, 16 peer-reviewed articles were included for full review whereby the author read the articles in their entirety. Upon reviewing these articles, 6 were deemed to be ‘included’ for the final review.

Regarding the 10 articles excluded upon being read in full, six studies were excluded because the authors did ascribe the activity under investigation to be CSR. Two articles did not assess a CSR activity specified in the selection criteria. One article could not be accessed, as the university library did not have a subscription to the journal that it was published in. Finally, one article did not fit with the definition of Big Food used in the selection criteria.

In total, 6 articles met all criteria for inclusion in the review (see Table 2.2 for details and ratings of quality). This review included articles published in four countries, including: the United States of America (N=2); Australia (N=2); New Zealand (N=1); and the United Kingdom (N=1). One cross-sectional mixed methods study (Schröder & McEachern 2005) explored university students’ awareness and perceptions of companies’ CSR activities in the UK. One cross-sectional qualitative case study (Batty et al. 2016) explored community event organisers’ perceptions of Big Food’s sponsoring community sporting events. Another cross-sectional study conducted a qualitative frame analysis of CSR material on corporate websites of a range of fast-food restaurants (Ban 2016). Three commentary articles (Bobba 2013; Dorfman et al. 2012; Scrinis 2016) critiqued empirical examples of Big Food CSR strategies.

The use of the MMAT highlighted some limitations in the literature in regards the predominant use of commentary articles (Bobba 2013; Dorfman et al. 2012; Scrinis 2016). Two of these studies did not specify a research question or objective. These commentary articles did not provide a methods section, which meant it was not clear how the authors came to their conclusions, as there was no information regarding where the information presented in the article was collected from, and how it was analysed. Therefore, these three articles were not assessed for study quality, as these did not pass the screening questions prior to commencing the appraisal (Bobba 2013; Dorfman et al. 2012; Scrinis 2016). There was
also a reliance on cross-sectional study designs that utilised small, convenience samples (Ban 2016; Batty et al. 2016; Schröder & McEachern 2005).

Figure 2.1 - Narrative literature review search results
2.4.1 Type of CSR strategies and target audiences reported to be used by Big Food

A diverse range of activities were described within the studies; however, they clustered into five categories. These included: philanthropy; health information via corporate websites; product reformulation; media campaigns; and environmental protection. Of the six articles, four papers discussed more than CSR activity and two articles focused on one activity.

2.4.1.1 Philanthropy

Three studies described CSR activities relating to the philanthropy (Batty et al. 2016; Dorfman et al. 2012; Schröder & McEachern 2005). These activities could be grouped into 3 sub-themes associated with philanthropy. The first sub-theme involved community sport sponsorship (Batty et al. 2016; Bobba 2013; Dorfman et al. 2012; Schröder & McEachern 2005). Authors described sport sponsorship to include: community sports events, physical activity programs and the provision of branded equipment. For instance, Batty et al. (2016) reported on a series of community triathlon, decathlon and running events that received funding from fast food companies. The second sub-category involved community grants (Dorfman et al. 2012). Community grant activities were described to include grant proposals whereby organisations could apply for an amount of money to refurbish community parklands. To illustrate, Dorfman et al. (2012) described two community grant programs (i.e. ‘Spark Your Park’, Coca Cola, ‘Project Refresh’, PepsiCo) both of which involved approximately $2 million (USD) being dedicated to refurbish parks, basketball courts, athletics fields in underserved communities. To note, these two grant programs are part of larger CSR programs (‘Live Positively, Coca Cola, ‘Change4Life’, PepsiCo). The third sub-theme entailed companies’ making donations to charitable and educational organisations. For example, Bobba (2013), briefly discussed the role of McDonald’s making financial contributions to the Ronald McDonald House Charity, and to a ‘Maths Online’ program as part of their CSR program.

Philanthropy activities were ascribed to explicitly target young children, youth and parents. For instance, Dorfman et al. (2012) indicated that CSR strategies are being used to seek sales and to cultivate brand loyalty, brand value, and brand preferences, specifically with youth and young children.
2.4.1.2 Health information via corporate websites

One study reported on health information distributed by companies’ via their corporate websites (Ban 2016). This specific study focused on health information on the corporate websites of a range of fast-food companies in the United States of America. Ban et al. (2016) reported this information to be framed in one of three ways. The author ascribed the first frame to be ‘individual choice’. This frame was described to attribute poor health outcomes to consumers’ inability to make health choices from the available menu items. For example, websites reported on the availability of menu items with low fat, low sugar or sodium content or ‘healthier options’ (e.g. apple slices included in Happy Meals instead of fries), and therefore it was up to individuals to make the healthy choice.

The second frame reported was ‘balanced lifestyles’. This included health information that placed emphasis on consumers’ being responsible for their health, specifically engaging with physical activity and eating a ‘balanced’ diet, which could include unhealthy products. To illustrate, fast food companies cited the American Dietary Guidelines and Physical Activity Guidelines and reiterated that if individuals engaged in adequate of physical activity and consumed healthy diets, this could justify one meal from a fast food restaurant. The third frame was described as ‘incremental improvement’. This was described as companies stating that they are making continuous and small changes to their products over a period of time. For instance, to highlight that the industry was committed to continuous improvement some fast food companies provided a breakdown of short, medium and long term goals to improve their product offerings.

Ban et al. (2016) did not explicitly state a target audience of health information via corporate websites, but it could be assumed that this may target consumers in general.

2.4.1.3 Media campaigns to promote CSR activities

One study reported on media campaigns used by companies’ to promote CSR activities (Dorfman et al. 2012). The two large CSR programs implemented by Coca Cola (Live Positively) and PepsiCo (Change4Life) mentioned in the philanthropy section above also included media campaigns to promote CSR activities included in these programs (Dorfman et al. 2012). ‘Live positively’ included educational media campaigns - ‘Balanced Living’ and ‘Exercise is Medicine’ - both of which urged to individuals to maintain healthy lifestyles. ‘Change4life’ also used media campaigns to promote physical activity and healthy eating,
using professional soccer players to encourage parents to help their children “have an active lifestyle”. These were promoted via social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), television and in print.

Media campaigns that promote CSR strategies were described to explicitly target parents and youth to build brand preferences and create a climate where consumption of unhealthy products becomes normalised (Dorfman et al. 2012).

2.4.1.4 Product reformulation
One study reported on product reformulation (Scrinis 2016). This was described as modifying a product by reducing levels of fat, sugar, salt and energy to make a processed product healthier. The marketing of these products was described to explicitly highlight the reductions in particular nutrients, with terms such as ‘light’, ‘reduced’, ‘low’ and ‘no’ on the label. This study also reported on ‘product fortification’ and ‘product functionalization’.

Product fortification was described as a nutritional strategy designed to address the absolute or perceived micronutrient deficiencies in populations or individuals. The author noted that mandatory fortification occurs in some countries, companies’ have also embraced fortification of products as a marketing strategy to appeal to consumers’ perceived scarcity of micronutrients in their diets. For example, Maggi (Nestlé) instant noodles state “fortified with iron” on the packaging to appeal to consumers who perceive themselves to be iron deficient.

Product functionalization was defined as products produced with nutrients or ingredients that are able to be marketed with implicit or explicit health claims that promise to enhance or optimise bodily health. Examples provided by the authors included ‘Vitamin Water’ (Coca Cola), and Uncle Toby’s Plus Antioxidants’ (Nestlé).

Product fortification and functionalization were described to target high income and/or nutrition savvy or conscious customers who may perceive these products to be healthier, or potentially low-income consumers who perceive they can attain a nutritious through low cost processed foods.

2.4.1.5 Environmental protection
Environmental protection activities were briefly discussed in one study (Schröder & McEachern 2005). However, these activities were not a core feature of the data analysis, but were rather introduced as examples of CSR activities in the introduction of the article. Given
that little published literature is available reading Big Food’s CSR activities, the authors still deemed it important to describe these activities. The activities relating to environmental protection were described to include: recycling programs, resource conservation (e.g. water), waste reduction strategies, and packaging initiatives.

The authors did not explicitly state a target audience of environmental activities; therefore, one could not be established at this point in time.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, Country</th>
<th>Study aim, objective</th>
<th>Study methodology</th>
<th>Data analysis</th>
<th>Study informants</th>
<th>Recruitment or selection</th>
<th>CSR activities</th>
<th>Study quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batty et al., 2016 New Zealand</td>
<td>To expand the discourse on CSR sponsorship and public health agenda associated with criticism of community sport events, and locating it within the sport management domain.</td>
<td>Cross-sectional case study, qualitative semi-structured interviews.</td>
<td>Qualitative thematic analysis.</td>
<td>Community event organisers (N=13) Representatives from community event organisations (N=4).</td>
<td>Convenience sample. Criteria used to select community events: sponsor alignment, geographical location, and minimum 10-year event history.</td>
<td>Philanthropy</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.2 - Studies included for review (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, Country</th>
<th>Study aim, objective</th>
<th>Study methodology</th>
<th>Data analysis</th>
<th>Study informants</th>
<th>Recruitment or selection</th>
<th>CSR activities</th>
<th>Study quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dorfman et al., 2012 United States of America</td>
<td>After reviewing an emblematic CSR campaign, we examine prominent cases from recent CSR efforts by soda industry leaders Pepsi-Co and Coca-Cola, to compare how these two industries have implemented CSR strategies.</td>
<td>Not stated.</td>
<td>Not stated.</td>
<td>Company corporate websites.</td>
<td>Purposive sample.</td>
<td>Philanthropy Media campaigns</td>
<td>Did not pass screening criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author, Country</td>
<td>Study aim, objective</td>
<td>Study methodology</td>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Study informants</td>
<td>Recruitment or selection</td>
<td>CSR activities</td>
<td>Study quality</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrinis, 2016</td>
<td>To situate reformulation strategies within companies’ CSR agenda as their role in shaping demand for products.</td>
<td>Commentary.</td>
<td>Not stated.</td>
<td>Not stated.</td>
<td>Not stated.</td>
<td>Product reformulation</td>
<td>Did not pass screening criteria.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.5 Discussion

The purpose of this review was to clarify the range and types of the range and type of activities that researchers have identified as CSR strategies used by Big Food. The studies described five types of CSR strategies, including: philanthropy, health information via corporate websites, media campaigns to promote CSR, product formulation and environmental protection. Across the studies, authors suggested that the primary target audiences of Big Food’s CSR activities were young children, youth, parents, and public policy makers. Although the available research is not extensive, it is still possible to draw some parallels between the range and type of CSR activities (and target audiences) used by Big Food, compared with those reported to be used by Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol.

2.5.1 Similarities to Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol CSR

This review highlighted similarities in the types of CSR activities implemented by Big Tobacco, Big Alcohol and Big Food. These included: philanthropy, health information via corporate health websites, and media campaigns to promote CSR (Ban 2016; Batty et al. 2016; Bobba 2013; Dorfman et al. 2012; Schröder & McEachern 2005; Scrinis 2016). Big Food was described to employ philanthropic activities, however, these varied to those implemented by Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol and are discussed in the next section.

Similar to tobacco and alcohol companies, Big Food are reported to provide health information via corporate websites to assist consumers in making informed decisions regarding the consumption ultra-processed foods and SSB (Ban 2016). For example, alcohol corporations are reported to provide information pertaining to the harmful effects of increased alcohol consumption and linked this information to the guidelines for alcohol consumption (Jones et al 2016). Similarly, Big Food was reported to link health information the dietary and physical activity guidelines (Ban 2016). One study also reported Big Food to employ media campaigns to educate consumers about the importance of physical activity and healthy eating (Dorfman et al. 2012), in a similar way to how Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol used media campaigns to educate consumers about the harms of tobacco and alcohol (Dorfman et al. 2012). This may mean that Big Food hope to shift onus for responsibility, regarding consumption of unhealthy products, away from corporations and onto individuals.
Like Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol, the reviewed studies suggested that Big Food is targeting public policy makers and politicians via CSR strategies to prevent public regulation of their products (Batty et al. 2016; Bobba 2013; Dorfman et al. 2012; Scrinis 2016). However, due to these articles being commentary pieces, it makes it difficult to comment on the impacts of and the potential motivations for Big Food targeting these groups. Additionally, the three unhealthy commodity industries all appear to target youth via CSR. However, Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol CSR activities were described to target to youth on the cusp of turning the legal age to purchase tobacco and/or alcohol (i.e. 16-17 years) (Jones et al. 2016; Mandel et al. 2006; McDaniel & Malone 2009; Sebrié & Glantz 2007; Yang & Malone 2008), whereas, Big Food were reported to target youth in general (Batty et al. 2016; Dorfman et al. 2012; Schröder & McEachern 2005). Findings from the reviewed studies suggested that like both tobacco and alcohol companies, Big Food may be using CSR to increase the social acceptability of their products in response to public criticism associated with the promotion of unhealthy products to children (Batty et al. 2016; Dorfman et al. 2012; Schröder & McEachern 2005).

2.5.2 Differences to Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol CSR

Compared to Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol, Big Food is reported to implement two different types of CSR activities including: product reformulation, and environmental protection (Schröder & McEachern 2005; Scrinis 2016). However, environmental protection activities were only discussed briefly in one study (Schröder & McEachern 2005), meaning that our understanding of these types of activities is currently limited, and require further exploration to determine who they are targeting and why companies’ are implementing such strategies.

While the three unhealthy commodity industries are all reported to invest in philanthropy, the literature indicates that Big Food’s philanthropy activities differ from those of the tobacco and alcohol industry. For instance, Big Food were described to supply community grants to organisations that serve low income communities, and community sport sponsorship that specifically targets young children (Dorfman et al. 2012). Whereas, Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol were reported to support a wider range of activities, including: disaster relief, social outreach programs and corporate sponsorship of sport, the arts and cultural events (Babor & Robaina 2013; Blum 2005; Jones et al. 2016; Lyness & McCambridge 2014; Mandel et al. 2006; McDaniel & Malone 2009; McDaniel et al. 2006; Yang & Malone 2008; Yoon & Lam 2013). It is likely that we have a greater understanding of tobacco and alcohol companies’
CSR activities, due to having access to and the ability to analyse internal industry documents that allowed for a comprehensive analysis of both industry’s strategies (National Association of Attorneys General 1999).

Whilst limited, studies included in this review suggest that Big Food’s CSR activities target young children and adolescents in attempt to build brand loyalty and lifelong customers through activities, such as providing branded equipment and building sports ovals in underserved communities (Dorfman et al. 2012). This however was something that both Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol have been unable to achieve as tobacco and alcohol products can only be purchased by consumers who are of legal age (Jones et al. 2016; Mandel et al. 2006; McDaniel & Malone 2009; Sebrié & Glantz 2007; Yang & Malone 2008).

2.5.3 What insights does this review provide about Big Food?

The reviewed studies provided some insights into the types of Big Food’s CSR activities and target audiences. Firstly, this review indicated that like tobacco and alcohol, Big Food companies are reporting health information on corporate websites. Therefore, this may be a good place start collecting information regarding CSR activities to determine what companies are implementing and whom they are potentially targeting. Particularly, because we do not have access to internal industry documents to elicit this kind of information, and by reviewing corporate websites, we may be able to identify CSR strategies that have not yet been identified and/or discussed in the literature. Secondly, some studies suggested that Big Food are also utilising CSR activities to influence public policy makers and politicians. At this stage, we do not have sufficient evidence-based research to substantiate this claim. However, this does highlight an area that requires further research to determine the strategies companies are using to establish this influence, and the potential impacts of, and motivation for this.

Finally, given the similarities in the types of CSR activities across the three unhealthy commodity industries, this may provide some indication to what actions the public health community need to undertake to address Big Food’s CSR activities. For instance, tobacco companies’ CSR activities became denormalised and publicly regulated, this may also be applicable in the context of Big Food. However, further research is required to determine whether this approach would be suitable to undertake.
2.5.4 Limitations of the reviewed studies

This review was comprised of a small number of articles (N=6), three of which did not report any methods, meaning that a large portion of the available evidence is commentary, rather than original research (Bobba 2013; Dorfman et al. 2012; Scrinis 2016). This makes it difficult to determine whether the arguments put forward in these articles have come from an objective point of view. Additionally, these articles did not present data that has been systematically collected and analysed. In absence of a methods section, the quality of these articles was unable to be assessed. The remaining articles were generally rated from fair to good. However, they were all comprised of cross-sectional, small study samples, offering preliminary results from three developed countries (Ban 2016; Batty et al. 2016; Schröder & McEachern 2005).

2.5.5. Current gaps in knowledge and how this dissertation addressed these gaps

This review has also highlighted current gaps in knowledge from which the study research questions were developed.

Whilst there is some evidence that highlights the intentions of and types of CSR activities being implemented abroad (Ban 2016; Batty et al. 2016; Dorfman et al. 2012; Schröder & McEachern 2005; Scrinis 2016), there is no evidence base research pertaining to this in the Australian context. Specifically, there is a gap in knowledge relating to the types of CSR strategies currently being disseminated and whom they target. Assessing these domains provided a solid knowledge base in order to identify the appropriate community groups that Big Food’s CSR activities are targeting. In addition to this, it allowed for the best-suited qualitative methods to be selected in order to assess the impacts that the identified CSR strategies may have on the identified community groups.

Evidence is also lacking in terms of how Big Food’s CSR activities impact consumers perspectives of companies. However, there are previous studies in the field of consumer psychology have attempted to measure the impact of corporations CSR strategies on consumers relating to purchase intent (Becker-Olsen et al. 2006); company evaluation (Mohr & Webb 2005; Sen & Bhattacharya 2001; Yoon et al. 2006); and buying behaviour of a range of products (Nelson 2004). The results of these studies show that consumers who are sensitive to ethical, social and environmental issues are more likely to support and/or purchase products from companies that support causes related to these aspects. Given that
these studies used quantitative methods to measure the impact of CSR they were unable to provide a thorough explanation as to why consumers respond favourably to socially oriented businesses. This review indicated that Big Food’s CSR strategies target parents and young children. However, to date, no study has specifically explored how Big Food’s CSR activities shape parents’ and children’s perceptions of companies. To address this gap in knowledge, the present study utilised qualitative methods to gain an in-depth understanding of how parents and children interpret the messages promoted in a range of CSR-themed advertisements.

Similarly, no studies had been undertaken to outline the potential impacts of, and motivations for Big Food’s CSR activities, using the perspectives of public health experts, nor had any outlined a comprehensive strategy for public health action on CSR. In the absence of access to internal industry documents (which provided insight into the deceptive nature of Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol CSR activities) this dissertation engaged the critical perspectives of public health experts regarding the potential impacts of Big Food corporations’ CSR on healthy diets and influence on public policy. The final study of this dissertation also explored when, where, what actions the public health community take to address Big Food’s CSR strategies and how these actions fit within the public health agenda to promote healthy diets and improve the wider food environment.

2.6 Conclusion

The review of the published academic literature highlights the range and type of activities implemented by Big Food. Although, limited research is available, the review identified that companies are employing similar CSR strategies to Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol, including: philanthropy, health information on corporate websites and media campaigns to promote CSR activities. To our knowledge, this is the first review to assess the research ascribed by researches as addressing Big Food’s CSR activities. The review contributed to the small, but growing body of evidence on this emerging type of marketing to children and identified the need for further exploration of the use of CSR strategies by Big Food.
2.7 References


Batty, R, Cuskelley, G & Toohey, K 2016, ‘Community sport events and csr sponsorship: examining the impacts of a public health agenda’, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol. 40, no. 6, pp. 545-64.


Bobba, S 2013, ‘The role of the food industry in tackling Australia's obesity epidemic’, *Australian Medical Student Journal*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 76-8.


Chapter 3 - Synopsis of the Research

3.1 Introduction to chapter

Chapter 3 presents the research questions that were informed by the narrative literature review. This chapter also provides an overview of the research design, considerations relating to qualitative research and ethical issues. The chapter then concludes with an overview of the frameworks used to guide the research.

3.2 Research questions

To achieve the specific research aims identified in Chapter 1, the following research questions were addressed:

**Meeting Aim 1:**
RQ#1 What is the range of CSR initiatives that are currently being implemented by major Big Food companies in Australia?
RQ#2 Who are the intended target audiences of these CSR activities?

**Meeting Aim 2:**
RQ#3 Do parents and children recognise Big Food’s CSR strategies?
RQ#4 How do parents and children perceive Big Food’s CSR strategies?

**Meeting Aim: 3**
RQ#5 What do experts perceive to be the motivations of Big Food’s CSR strategies?
RQ#6 What are the potential impacts of Big Food’s CSR strategies on government, consumers and public health?

**Meeting Aim: 4**
RQ#7 When, where, what actions should the public health community take to address Big Food’s CSR strategies?
RQ#8 How do these actions fit within the overall agenda for public health responses to promote healthy diets and improve the wider food environment?
3.3 Overview of research design

To address the aims and research questions outlined, this dissertation utilised mixed methods across three sequential research studies. The multi-study approach allowed for multiple perspectives to be brought together, to develop an in-depth understanding of CSR strategies.

Each study builds upon one another, starting with a mixed method content analysis of a selected group of Big Food companies’ CSR reports and industry documents to gain insight into the types of strategies employed, and whom they targeted. Building on this, the following study utilised qualitative dyadic semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of how CSR strategies influenced the beliefs and attitudes of parents and children (the key target audiences identified in Study 1). Finally, qualitative one to one semi-structured interviews were used to triangulate with the findings of the two previous studies (Studies 1 & 2) with public health experts’ perceptions of the motivations and impacts of Big Food’s CSR strategies on children, parents and the government (Study 3). Study 3 also systematically explored the views of public health experts regarding whether, when, what and how action on CSR should be incorporated into an overall public health framework to promote healthy diets and improve the wider food environment.

The research design for each study is explained in more detail in the methods sections of each journal article (Chapters 4, 5, 6 & 7).
• Global Obesity Epidemic.
• Big Food marketing techniques have been established.
• This study will explore Big Food’s CSR activities.

CASE STUDY: CSR OR a marketing strategy?

BIG FOOD

What are companies doing and why?

How are people interpreting this?

Who are companies targeting?

What are the motivations for & impacts of this?

What is the optimal Public Health response?

Research questions developed to address the research aims

Study 1

Mixed-method content analysis of industry documents

ISRC

Study 2

Dyadic semi-structured interviews with parents & children

Value Theory

Study 3

One-to-one interviews with public health experts

4P’s

Figure 3.1 - Research design overview
3.3.1 Qualitative research paradigm
A critical approach was taken in the conduct of the research. In social science, this type of approach enables a researcher ‘to go against the grain’ and to question the conceptual and theoretical bases of knowledge and to ask questions that go beyond prevailing assumptions and understanding. A critical approach also acknowledges the role of power and social position in health-related phenomena (Sim 2001). Therefore, a critical stance enabled the candidate to challenge the ‘status quo’ of powerful Big Food companies implementing CSR strategies.

3.3.2 Qualitative rigour
A number of validity techniques were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative data presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. First, the semi-structured interviews undertaken in Study 2 and Study 3 were collected until data saturation was reached (Miles & Huberman 1994). This was defined as the point where no new codes emerged from the subsequent analysis of interviews. Second, peer debriefing was utilised to enhance the credibility of the results (Patton 1990), where the candidate presented the themes to the principle supervisor as they were developed to confirm they reflected the data appropriately. This provided the supervisor with the opportunity to challenge the interpretation of the data. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion. Third, given that the researcher was the instrument in qualitative research, it was additionally important for the researcher to have competence in conducting interviews prior to data collection. Therefore, the candidate enhanced her competence and ability to conduct in-depth interviews through reading appropriate literature, and with mentoring from the principle supervisor.

3.3.3 Ethical issues pertaining to human subjects
Studies 2 and 3 of the research were conducted according to the guidelines laid down in the Declaration of Helsinki and all procedures involving human subjects were approved by the University of Wollongong and the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District (ISLHD) Human Research Ethics Committee (Study 2 - HE15-152, Study 3 - HE16-141).

In both studies, informed written consent was obtained from all parent/adult participants and all public health experts. In Study 2, informed verbal assent was also obtained from all children participants, which was witnessed and formally recorded. The risks associated with
participating in Study 2 and 3, were considered to be low. Participant information sheets and consent forms are included in Appendix A & B (Study 2) and Appendix G & H (Study 3).

3.3.4 Guiding frameworks
The overall aim of this dissertation was to develop a comprehensive framework that summarised the strategic focus of Big Food’s CSR activities and intended target audiences (that served as a guide to map and monitor CSR as a specific type of marketing) and develop recommendations for public health action to address Big Food’s CSR strategies. This research sits within the context of the Social Ecological Model of Health (Bronfenbrenner 1979), and seeks to understand the multifaceted and interactive effects of corporate marketing strategies, specifically CSR strategies, that influence healthy diets.

To draw out the complexities of this issue, this research utilised multiple stakeholder perspectives (industry (via corporate documents and webpages), parents and children, and public health experts). The research was also guided by multiple frameworks and concepts, including: the Inclusive Social Rating Criteria (ISRC) (KLD Research & Analytics Inc 2003); value theory (Hirose & Olson 2015); and the ‘marketing mix’ (4P’s) (Borden 1984). In some instances, the use of a single theoretical perspective that only focuses on one particular aspect of the research may not be able to articulate ‘the whole story’ (Nilsen 2015). Therefore, multiple guiding frameworks were selected to address the range of research questions, data collection and analysis techniques, and take into the account the perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups to develop a comprehensive understanding of Big Food’s CSR on healthy diets (Nilsen 2015).

The frameworks and how they informed the way the candidate analysed the data in each study is outlined below.

3.3.4.1 Inclusive Social Rating Criteria (ISRC)
Utilised in Study 1
The ISRC is a business tool developed to analyse and evaluate the overall corporate social performance of a range of commercial organisations. It includes seven categories (Community, Corporate Governance, Diversity, Employee Relations, Environment, Human Rights and Product) (KLD Research & Analytics Inc 2003).
The ISRC was used to inform the initial coding framework in Study 1, and then modified to develop a new coding tool that more accurately summarised the CSR activities of the Australian sub-branches of Big Food multinationals. This process involved: 1) retaining some of the original categories within the ISRC that captured CSR activities relevant to the study; 2) removing the categories of Corporate Governance, Human Rights and Product due to their low relevance to the information contained in the sources utilised; and 3) creating three new categories (Consumer Responsibility, Partnerships, Indigenous) to capture specific types of CSR activities employed by Big Food that were not represented within the original framework.

3.3.4.2 Value theory

Utilised in Study 2
From Study 1, analysis of companies’ CSR activities and aims attributed the goal of ‘creating shared value with community’ as central to Big Food CSR. ‘Value theory’ seeks to understand how, why and to what degree an individual values something; whether the object or subject of valuing is a person, idea or object (Hirose & Olson 2015). The concept of value has been variously defined as something of merit or worth (noun), or as a principle or standard of behaviour (verb) (Hirose & Olson 2015). In this sense the concept has both instrumental dimensions (‘acts’ or ‘property’ of worth) and a philosophical dimension (that underpins the ascribing of worth to something because of a belief in some type of moral or other good). Building on Study 1, the concept of value, as described above, was used to explore whether parents and children interviewed during Study 2 actually perceived Big Food’s CSR as of ‘value’. The range of values linked with CSR activities included being: acts of merit or worth; ascribed positive moral attributes to companies and their CSR activities; perceived as in conflict with companies’ CSR strategies; viewed or as ‘harmful’ or ‘unethical’.

3.3.4.3 The marketing mix (4P’s)

Utilised in Study 3
A central claim of public health experts in Study 3 was that CSR was less about building value for community, and more about marketing and selling products. As such, the marketing mix (4P’s) was utilised to analyse the data collected in Study 3.
Described as a ‘a systematic plan of action designed to promote and sell a product or service’ (Borden 1984), the marketing mix is a planning process which consists of decisions regarding the conception of the product, price, place and promotion (the 4P’s) which are central to an effective ‘marketing mix’ of strategies to achieve sales and profit goals (Borden 1984).

‘Product’ can either be a tangible good, or an intangible service that fulfils a need or want of the consumers. Price refers to what consumers must do in order to obtain the product. The cost may be monetary (e.g. price of the physical product), or nonmonetary, requiring consumers to give up intangible costs (e.g. time, effort or some type of psychological cost). Place describes the way that the product reaches the consumer, including the way that it’s distributed to the consumer and the channels through which consumers are reached with information. Promotion consists of the integrated use of advertising and public relations to sustain demand for the product.

While limited, the available critical public health literature suggested that Big Food were utilising CSR as a type of marketing to consumers. In the context of this research, the 4P’s were used as a guiding framework to identify the types of CSR strategies, persuasive messages and potential impacts of the strategies on key target groups.
3.4 References


Chapter 4 - Corporate Social Responsibility programs of Big Food in Australia: a content analysis of industry documents

4.1 Introduction to Chapter

Study 1 addressed aim 1 and answered research questions 1 and 2. It identified the nature of current CSR strategies and whom they targeted.

RQ#1 What is the range of CSR initiatives that is currently being implemented by Big Food companies in Australia?
RQ#2 Who are the intended target audiences of these CSR activities?

This information was used to inform Study 2 and 3 of this dissertation.

This study was completed under the supervision of Associate Professor Samantha Thomas and Associate Professor Melanie Randle.

This chapter presents a journal article that was written by the candidate with co-authors Samantha Thomas, Melanie Randle and Simone Pettigrew and was published in 2015:

The published version of this journal article is provided in Appendix J.

4.1.1 Author contributions

Zoe Richards had primary responsibility for the research design, data collection, data analysis, writing and editing of the paper.

Samantha Thomas, Melanie Randle and Simone Pettigrew provided advice with regards to the methods, approach undertaken, provided feedback on drafts of the manuscript, and also approved the final version.
4.1.2 Purpose of study
This study aimed to identify the nature of current CSR strategies undertaken by Big Food companies in Australia, and to identify the target audiences of these activities.

The study developed a mapping framework that allowed for CSR strategies to be systematically categorised by company, and for the intended target audience to be recorded. The framework created provides future researchers with a coding tool to identify the types of CSR strategies implemented by Big Food companies and the target segments they aim to reach. The mapping framework could be applied to other unhealthy commodity industries (e.g. tobacco, alcohol) in future research studies.

4.1.3 Guiding framework:
Inclusive Social Rating Criteria (ISRC)
The ISRC is a business tool developed to analyse and evaluate the overall corporate social performance of a range of commercial organisations. It includes seven categories (Community, Corporate Governance, Diversity, Employee Relations, Environment, Human Rights and Product) (KLD Research & Analytics Inc., 2003). The ISRC was used to inform the initial coding framework in Study 1, and then modified to develop a new coding tool that more accurately summarised the CSR activities of the Australian sub-branches of Big Food multinationals.

4.1.4 What does this study add to current knowledge?
Findings from this study provide evidence for public health advocates and researchers of the pervasiveness of CSR and a baseline for monitoring. Big Food emulated many of the same strategies as Big Tobacco, which suggested that public health experts should question the motivations for, and legitimacy of, such strategies. Findings provide evidence for public health researchers to continue to focus their research efforts beyond the health harms associated within unhealthy commodity products and expand their efforts to address Big Food’s corporate behaviour.

This study also complements the work conducted by Mialon et al. (2015; 2016) that proposed an approach to systematically identify and monitor the corporate political activity of the Australian food industry.
4.1.4.1 References


Mialon, M, Swinburn, B & Sacks, G 2015, ‘A proposed approach to systematically identify and monitor the corporate political activity of the food industry with respect to public health using publicly available information’, *Obesity Reviews*, vol. 16, no.7, pp. 519-30.
4.2 Abstract

Objective: To examine Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) tactics by identifying the key characteristics of CSR strategies as described in the corporate documents of selected ‘Big Food’ companies.

Methods: A mixed methods content analysis was used to analyse the information contained on Australian Big Food company websites. Data sources included company CSR reports and web-based content that related to CSR initiatives employed in Australia.

Results: A total of 256 CSR activities were identified across six organisations. Of these, the majority related to the categories of environment (30.5%), responsibility to consumers (25.0%) or community (19.5%).

Conclusions: Big Food companies appear to be using CSR activities to: 1) build brand image through initiatives associated with the environment and responsibility to consumers; 2) target parents and children through community activities; and 3) align themselves with respected organisations and events in an effort to transfer their positive image attributes to their own brands.

Implications: Results highlight the type of CSR strategies Big Food companies are employing. These findings serve as a guide to mapping and monitoring CSR as a specific form of marketing.

Key words: Industry, Corporate Social Responsibility, Marketing.
4.3 Introduction

Global ‘unhealthy commodity’ corporations profit from increased consumption of unhealthy products (e.g. alcohol, tobacco and ultra-processed food and beverages), thereby contributing to the development of non-communicable disease epidemics (Brownell & Warner 2009; Moodie et al. 2013; Stuckler D et al. 2012). Public health advocates have called for increased focus on the tactics used by these companies to promote their products and resist reforms that aim to prevent or minimise the harms caused (Chan 2011; Moodie et al. 2013; Stuckler D et al. 2012; Webster 2011). Such tactics are used by companies to build their powerbase within societies, including the creation of both ‘soft power’ (by influencing culture, ideas and cognitions of the public, public health advocates and health scientists) and ‘hard power’ (by building financial and institutional relations) (Moodie et al. 2013). By creating an environment in which continued consumption is encouraged, profits can increase, and regulation and government intervention can be avoided. While there is extensive knowledge about the tactics used by some types of global corporations (e.g. tobacco) (Bond et al. 2010; Daube 2012; Friedman 2009; McDaniel & Malone 2009; Tesler & Malone 2008), there is less understanding of the range of tactics used by other industries (e.g. ultra-processed food and beverage companies – ‘Big Food’). Initial studies suggest Big Food is now employing similar tactics to those of Big Tobacco in response to growing societal health concerns (Brownell & Warner 2009; Chopra & Darnton-Hill 2004).

Previously, most research into the marketing strategies of Big Food has focused on product promotion (Brownell & Horgen 2004; Hastings et al. 2003; Nestle 2002; Story & French 2004). These studies have explored the nature and content of marketing messages and the impact of these on consumer behaviour. Less is known about other marketing and public relations strategies of Big Food. To illustrate the types of activities this may include, the following section highlights current evidence regarding key strategies used by Big Tobacco and Big Food to protect their products from regulatory reforms (Bond et al. 2010; Brownell & Horgen 2004; Chopra & Darnton-Hill 2004; Daube 2012; Wiist 2010, 2011).

The first strategy is the use of public relations campaigns and public statements to state company concerns about the health of their customers and populations. For example, Big Tobacco invested substantial money into public relations efforts to deflect consumer criticism by arguing that cigarette companies do not encourage abuse of the product, they simply
provide choice and recommend moderate consumption (Dorfman et al. 2014). The second strategy involves tactical campaigns that emphasise freedom of choice and personal responsibility to encourage consumers to oppose regulation of the industry (Brownell & Warner 2009; Moodie et al. 2013; Wiist 2010, 2011). These types of initiatives emphasise self-control and hold individuals accountable for their own purchasing and consumption choices (Brownell et al. 2010). Big Food highlights individual responsibility through messages of moderation that appear on packaging. For example, food products produced by Mondeléz International that are high in sugar contain the words ‘Be Treat Wise’ on their exterior (Mondeléz International 2013).

The third strategy is the use of lobbying tactics. Large corporations invest heavily in lobbying to influence politicians and block or stall regulatory efforts (Brownell & Warner 2009; Moodie et al. 2013; Sharma et al. 2010). For example, Phillip Morris made large campaign contributions to politicians ‘pet causes’ in an effort to exert political influence at federal and state levels (Tesler & Malone 2008). Lobbying activities may also occur via industry-funded ‘front groups’. For instance, Big Food funds groups that work to oppose regulation of marketing to children, front-of-pack nutrition labelling and taxes on unhealthy foods (Brownell 2012). The fourth strategy involves co-opting policy makers and health professionals. To undermine public health intervention and policies, Big Food promotes partnerships with health experts and professional organisations (Moodie et al. 2013; Wiist 2010). Finally, the fifth strategy is funding research, which some argue is used to generate data supporting the industry’s position and produces biased research findings (Moodie et al. 2013).

Recently, researchers have questioned the role of a specific industry tactic – corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, which are often used to positively promote products, brands and industries to communities (Dorfman et al. 2012). CSR has been described as an evolving practice that has come to include “companies’ economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities to society, in addition to the company’s fiduciary responsibility to shareholders” (Dorfman et al. 2012, p.2). When companies acknowledge and act on these responsibilities, they are considered a ‘good corporate citizen’ (Brownell & Warner 2009). Advocates of CSR argue that it can help companies meet these responsibilities while addressing ‘higher’ social obligations (Dorfman et al. 2012). To meet the requirements of
groups beyond their shareholders, companies may implement CSR activities to address societal concerns. In doing so, they claim to accept an ethical obligation to the public at large (Garriga & Mele 2004; Lee & Carroll 2011). However, critics of CSR claim that such strategies are simply public relations initiatives designed to achieve ‘innocence by association’ as companies protect their profitability by aligning themselves with social causes to improve their public image and avoid regulation (Doane 2005; Dorfman et al. 2012; Tesler & Malone 2008). Using this approach, companies are able to deflect blame from their organisation on to individual consumers (Herrick 2009).

CSR initiatives were initially implemented by Big Tobacco companies in the 1950s after scientific evidence established a causal link between smoking and lung cancer (Friedman 2009). With this evidence came a decline in social acceptance of tobacco products that led to companies implementing CSR programs aimed at improving their corporate image and preventing legal and regulatory action (Dorfman et al. 2012; Friedman 2009; Tesler & Malone 2008). For example, Philip Morris sought to improve its image by funding youth smoking cessation programs and aligning itself with anti-domestic violence campaigns (Tesler & Malone 2008).

Less is known about how Big Food employs CSR tactics and the effects these strategies may have on consumption intentions.

Gomez et al. (2011) provided several examples of CSR programs in Latin and South America by beverage company Coca Cola. These included nutrition education and physical activity programs that promoted the adoption of a healthy lifestyle. Gomez et al. (2011) suggested that Coca Cola implemented such programs to divert public attention away from the negative health effects of its products, with scientific evidence linking sugar-sweetened beverages to increasing rates of childhood overweight and obesity. Dorfman et al. (2012) examined CSR campaigns implemented by Coca Cola and PepsiCo and outlined their specific intentions of increasing sales among youth, shifting blame from companies to individual consumers and preventing public regulation. Dorfman et al. (2012) suggested that CSR campaigns implemented by Big Food differed from Big Tobacco in relation to increasing product sales, as companies such as Coca Cola and PepsiCo have the potential to entice youth to become loyal, lifetime consumers by creating an emotional bond with their brands. This may
To contribute to the already alarmingly high rates of non-communicable diseases among individuals in these age groups (World Health Organization 2005). Public health experts assert that companies that invest in CSR initiatives are creating a conflict of interest when their products contribute to the burden of ill health (e.g. obesity) in the first place (Brownell & Warner 2009). This study aimed to address the gap in knowledge relating to the CSR tactics of Big Food in Australia and provide a template for monitoring these tactics over time.

To achieve this aim, the following research questions were addressed:

1. Which types of CSR initiatives are being implemented by major Big Food companies in Australia?
2. Who are the intended target audiences for these CSR activities?

4.4 Methods

4.4.1 Approach
A mixed method content analysis was conducted on a sample of Australian Big Food websites. Primary data sources included company CSR reports and web-based content that related to CSR initiatives in Australia. Company websites and CSR reports were considered suitable information sources for the purposes of this study because organisations typically use these documents to promote their major CSR initiatives to consumers (Maguire 2011).

4.4.2 Sample
To increase the generalisability of results, a range of Big Food categories were included to represent: a) fast food; b) sugar sweetened beverages; and c) packaged foods high in sugar, fat and/or salt. Using the academic literature and corporate documents available to the authors, companies were selected for inclusion based on the following subjective considerations. Companies were considered for inclusion if they displayed evidence of a formal CSR strategy and provided detailed information about these initiatives on their websites. Following this, a literature search was conducted using two databases, Scopus and Web of Science, to find evidence of previous CSR activities used by the companies initially identified.

Companies found in the literature base were considered for inclusion (Brownell & Horgen 2004; Brownell & Warner 2009; Dorfman et al. 2012; Gardberg & Fombrun 2006; Herrick
Initially, 11 companies were identified in the search. These companies produced either fast food (N=3); sugar sweetened beverages (N=2), or packaged foods (N=6) as their primary product category. Of these, six were extensively reviewed in the literature, and also provided detailed information about their CSR strategies specific to Australia via their corporate websites. Based on these considerations, the final sample included the Australian branches of: 1) Coca Cola; 2) McDonald’s; 3) PepsiCo; 4) Nestlé; 5) Mars; and 6) Mondelēz International (owner of Kraft and Cadbury).

4.4.3 Development of the coding framework
An adapted version of the Inclusive Social Rating Criteria (ISRC) (KLD Research & Analytics Inc 2003) was used to collect relevant data from the collated documents. This tool was originally developed to analyse and evaluate the overall corporate social performance of a range of commercial organisations. It includes seven categories (Community, Corporate Governance, Diversity, Employee Relations, Environment, Human Rights and Product). The ISRC was used as the starting coding framework, and then modified to develop a new coding tool that more accurately summarised the CSR activities of the industry under investigation. This process involved: 1) retaining some of the original categories within the ISRC that captured CSR activities relevant to the study; 2) removing the categories of Corporate Governance, Human Rights and Product due to their low relevance to the information contained in the sources utilised; and 3) creating three new categories (Consumer Responsibility, Partnerships, Indigenous) to capture specific types of CSR activities employed by Big Food that were not represented within the original framework.

The ISRC framework classified CSR strategies targeting specific populations within the broader Community category. The CSR strategies identified through the course of the present review identified numerous strategies that specifically targeted one particular group – the Indigenous population. These strategies were considerably different in their focus from the other CSR strategies within the Community category, which instead focused primarily on families and children across the broader population. To reflect this focus on Indigenous peoples, and the potential for this to be a common theme in other countries that also include Indigenous populations, a separate category was created to capture Indigenous-specific CSR strategies. The inclusion of this additional category will enable similar strategies to be mapped in future, both in Australia and abroad. The new categories were developed using qualitative thematic analysis techniques to group identified strategies that weren’t aligned
with existing categories of the ISRC framework. Definitions of the relevant individual CSR activities are provided in Table 4.1.

Based on the resulting framework, a coding spreadsheet was prepared allowing CSR activities to be categorised and the intended target audience to be recorded.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Activities that aim to reduce or prevent environmental impact, for example by sponsoring national environmental campaigns, endorsing government initiatives, adopting responsible sourcing practices, packaging initiatives, and various programs that focused on saving or recycling resources (e.g., litter, water, energy).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Responsibility</td>
<td>Activities relating to the responsible marketing initiatives and policies of the company in relation to health, for example health initiatives, provision of nutrition and health information, and resources that promote healthy behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Activities relating to the support of community programs and events, for example supporting sporting events, non-profit organisations and volunteer programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>Activities relating to partnerships formed between companies and professional and not-for-profit organisations to advance and promote research and foster community development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Relations</td>
<td>Activities that provide professional development and education opportunities for staff members, implementation of equal employment policies, and programs that promotes employee health and wellbeing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>Activities that support not-for-profit organisations that implement programs for the Indigenous population, for example developing leadership and mentoring skills, promoting sport, and improving public space, and infrastructure in Indigenous communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Programs aimed at populations identified as experiencing disadvantage, for example migrant populations, disadvantaged youth, and individuals with disabilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4.4 Data collection and analysis
Data were collected and analysed in a series of steps in April 2014. First, websites were scanned for relevant information. Dropdown tabs with links to information on responsibility to communities, wellbeing of communities and community development were searched to identify relevant information according to the CSR categories identified. The information from each website was saved into a Word document, along with a screen shot of each website address to allow website information to be revisited if clarification was required. The most recent annual CSR reports were downloaded to capture any information not available on the company’s website. The same data collection process was repeated one week later to check that all relevant material had been captured. A coding spread sheet was prepared to facilitate categorisation of the CSR activities and recording of the intended target audience. A target audience was determined based on the CSR activity descriptions and related images in the coded content. In particular, discernible demographic factors (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, education, employment status) and the benefits promoted were used to identify the likely target audience. Where an activity could potentially be placed in more than one category, the category deemed to be most dominant was selected. All data collection and coding was performed by the first author. Peer debriefing was employed to ensure that the data collected were valid and were coded and categorised correctly. Once the coding was finalised, SPSS was used to generate basic descriptive statistics by category and industry group in the form of frequency counts. Differences and similarities in CSR activities were then analysed across companies.

4.5 Results
Two hundred and fifty-six CSR activities were identified (Table 4.2). Of these, the majority fell into the categories of: Environment (30.5%), Consumer Responsibility (25.0%) and Community (19.5%). McDonald’s reported the most CSR activities (n=85, 33.2% of the sample) and PepsiCo the least (n=14, 5.4%).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Consumer Responsibility</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Employee Relations</th>
<th>Partnerships</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Diversity</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McDonald’s</td>
<td>32 (41.0%)</td>
<td>10 (15.6%)</td>
<td>20 (40.0%)</td>
<td>16 (59.3%)</td>
<td>6 (24.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (20.0%)</td>
<td>85 (33.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(27.6%)</td>
<td>(11.8%)</td>
<td>(23.5%)</td>
<td>(18.8%)</td>
<td>(7.1%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>(1.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nestlé</td>
<td>27 (34.6%)</td>
<td>24 (37.5%)</td>
<td>8 (16.0%)</td>
<td>5 (18.5%)</td>
<td>15 (60.0%)</td>
<td>3 (42.9%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>82 (32.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(32.9%)</td>
<td>(29.3%)</td>
<td>(9.8%)</td>
<td>(6.1%)</td>
<td>(18.3%)</td>
<td>(3.7%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coca-Cola</td>
<td>2 (2.6%)</td>
<td>16 (25.0%)</td>
<td>9 (18.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (8.0%)</td>
<td>4 (57.1%)</td>
<td>4 (80.0%)</td>
<td>37 (14.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.4%)</td>
<td>(43.2%)</td>
<td>(24.3%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>(5.4%)</td>
<td>(10.8%)</td>
<td>(10.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mars</td>
<td>6 (7.7%)</td>
<td>5 (7.8%)</td>
<td>7 (14.0%)</td>
<td>1 (3.7%)</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>20 (7.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(30.0%)</td>
<td>(25.0%)</td>
<td>(35.0%)</td>
<td>(5.0%)</td>
<td>(5.0%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mondeléz</td>
<td>8 (10.3%)</td>
<td>5 (7.8%)</td>
<td>4 (8.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (4.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>18 (7.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>(44.4%)</td>
<td>(27.8%)</td>
<td>(22.2%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>(5.6%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PepsiCo</td>
<td>3 (3.8%)</td>
<td>4 (6.3%)</td>
<td>2 (4.0%)</td>
<td>5 (18.5%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>14 (5.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(21.4%)</td>
<td>(28.6%)</td>
<td>(14.3%)</td>
<td>(35.7%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78 (100.0)</td>
<td>64 (100.0)</td>
<td>50 (100.0)</td>
<td>27 (100.0)</td>
<td>25 (100.0)</td>
<td>7 (100.0)</td>
<td>5 (100.0)</td>
<td>256 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(30.5)</td>
<td>(25.0)</td>
<td>(19.5)</td>
<td>(10.5)</td>
<td>(9.8)</td>
<td>(2.7)</td>
<td>(2.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures in parentheses refer to column percentages and italicised figures in parentheses refer to row percentages.
4.5.1 Environment

Diverse ranges of activities were included in the Environment category; however, they clustered into four key themes. The first Environment theme involved sustainability and responsible sourcing programs (N=31). These programs included sustainable practice committees, implementation of sustainable practices (e.g. McDonald’s Sustainable Footprint Assessment, which monitors energy usage and carbon emissions) and responsible resourcing practices (e.g. Mars sources Rainforest Alliance Certified cocoa). The second theme was packaging initiatives (N=19). For example, Nestlé disclosed six packaging initiatives as part of their ‘Sustainability Hero Projects’ program, which aimed to reduce the environmental impact of packaging material by 15%. The third theme concerned programs that focused on saving or recycling resources (N=25) and involved recycling litter, water or energy. For instance, companies described the implementation of a range of recycling, water, and energy saving programs (e.g. Mondeléz International’s REDCycle Program, which recovers and recycles units of plastic bags and packaging material from supermarkets). The last theme was the endorsement of government initiatives (N=3) and included the sponsorship of government-led campaigns such as ‘Earth Hour’ (e.g. Mars) and ‘Clean up Australia Day’ (e.g. McDonald’s). The documented environmental initiatives appeared to target the Australian population as a whole, rather than one specific group. The descriptions provided indicated that the environmental practices undertaken were to benefit the wider community, bring community members together to address environmental issues, or preserve the environment in general. To illustrate, PepsiCo stated that the company was “committed to minimising their environmental impact”, and focused their environmental sustainability efforts on “water, energy and waste minimisation as areas where they can make the biggest impact”.

4.5.2 Consumer Responsibility

Numerous activities that clustered around five key themes within the category of Consumer Responsibility were identified. The first Consumer Responsibility theme was the provision of nutrition and physical activity information (N=42). For instance, Coca Cola provided access to a range of health information resources (e.g. Clear on Kilojoules, which outlined the kilojoule content on each product). The second theme concerned the implementation of health initiatives (N=10). Nestlé promoted a number of nutrition focused initiatives, including a program that aimed to help consumers understand the importance of portion control (e.g.
Portion Plate Education). The third theme involved responsible marketing initiatives (N=6). McDonald’s reported that they adhered to the ‘Quick Service Restaurant Initiative’ that requires signatories to avoid advertising their products to children younger than 12 years of age during children’s peak television viewing times. The fourth theme concerned the reformulation of products (N=4). Nestlé, for example, reported that its product range has lower saturated fat, sodium and sugar compared to previously. The removal of food products from school canteens (N=2) was the fifth theme. To illustrate, PepsiCo reported that they had elected to cease supplying vending machines to primary schools. Instead, they provide a ‘smart option’ range of snacks in vending machines in high schools and health facilities.

Children and parents appeared to be the primary target audience for activities within the Consumer Responsibility category. This was evidenced by the companies’ focus on providing resources and information, often accessed and interpreted by parents, and restricting access to and promotion of products to children in certain settings and at certain times of the day. For instance, Modeléz International emphasised the importance of “marketing to children” in a “sensible and responsible manner” when describing the company’s adherence to the Australian Food and Grocery Council’s Responsible Marketing Initiative.

4.5.3 Community

Activities in the Community category clustered around three key themes. The first Community theme involved the provision of funding or in-kind support for local charities or national not-for-profit organisations (N=25). These included: fundraising events (e.g. Paws in the Park, Mars); provision of services for specific community groups (e.g. Ronald McDonald House Charity, McDonald’s); and opportunities for organisations to receive funding for programs (e.g. Community Grant Scheme, Coca Cola). The second theme concerned the sponsorship and implementation of community sport programs and events (N=21). For instance, McDonald’s reported that it sponsors Little Athletics Australia and has also implemented physical activity programs and events, including the Sydney Eisteddfod. The final key theme was the implementation of volunteer programs (N=4). For example, Mondeléz International and PepsiCo reported that they have established employee volunteer programs that provide their staff with one day of paid leave per year to volunteer at local community charities. The primary target audience for these activities appeared to be parents and their children. This was evidenced by the companies’ primary focus on providing sponsorship for sporting and health programs, offering physical activity opportunities and nutrition education to children. Promotional images of this target group were also used to
advertise the activities identified. For example, Coca Cola used an image of children and their parents riding bicycles to promote the ‘Bicycle Network’ program.

4.5.4 Employee Relations
Activities in the Employee Relations category clustered around three key themes. The first theme included training and leadership development opportunities (n=10). To illustrate, McDonald’s reported that it provides employees with education opportunities (e.g. McDonald’s Virtual Business School). Similarly, PepsiCo stated that it offers staff an opportunity to increase their job-related skills through the ‘PepsiCo University’, which offers learning opportunities focused on building managerial, networking and social skills. The second theme focused on equal opportunities in the workplace and methods to attain employment (N=13). To illustrate, McDonald’s reported that it sanctions the Equal Opportunity in the Workplace Agency Employer of Choice for Women citation, which acknowledges the company’s commitment to providing pay equity for women. The final theme identified was the implementation of employee health and wellness programs (N=4). For example, Mars reported that it has an ‘Associate Wellness Program’, which provides corporate staff with services such as discounted gym memberships, smoking-cessation plans and health checks. The intended target audience of activities in the employee relations category appeared to be current employees (to encourage retention) and aspiring potential employees (to build a positive image as an employer of choice). For instance, McDonald’s depicted these activities using images of happy employees, and provided detailed descriptions of how the company works “to provide an employment experience” that their “employees will always value”.

4.5.5 Partnerships
Activities relating to Partnerships centred around two key themes. The first theme involved partnerships with professional organisations and associations (N=14). McDonald’s, for instance, reported that it is affiliated with the Dieticians Association of Australia, whereby it aims to develop healthier menu options. The second theme concerned partnerships with non-profit organisations (N=11). To illustrate, Mondeléz International partnered with the ‘Humour Foundation’ to establish ‘Clown Doctors’ in all major children’s hospitals in Australia.
Companies partnered with numerous professional and non-profit organisations with varying objectives, which made it difficult to isolate one audience. Therefore, an exact target group was unable to be established for this category.

4.5.6 Indigenous
Activities in the Indigenous category primarily focused on Indigenous youth development and clustered around two key themes. The first Indigenous theme involved programs that aimed to develop skills and knowledge to increase higher education and employment opportunities among Indigenous youth (N=5). For example, Coca Cola reported that it provides funding for the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience program, a structured education-mentoring program that provides support to Indigenous students through high school and into university. The second theme concerned programs that offered opportunities to be physically active and develop skills related to health and nutrition (N=2). Nestlé, for instance, reported that it funds the ‘Mother and Daughter Program’ that teaches Indigenous girls and their mothers the value of healthy eating. The primary target audience of these activities appeared to be Indigenous youth. Descriptions of these activities specified that they were designed to support Indigenous youth in Australia. Images that depicted this target audience participating in activities were also used to promote initiatives. To illustrate, Nestlé used an image of Indigenous girls participating in a cooking activity in the ‘Mother and Daughter Program’.

4.5.7 Diversity
The activities relating to Diversity formed one key theme, namely initiatives that develop skills and increase employment opportunities for disadvantaged youth and disabled members of the community. For example, Coca Cola reported that it funds programs for disadvantaged community groups, such as the ‘Zone In’ program that offers high school students’ opportunities to seek help with education-related issues (e.g. assistance with assignments).

The target groups for these activities appeared to be migrants or disadvantaged youth. This was illustrated in the descriptions of these activities that specified the companies’ intentions of supporting these subgroups of the Australian population. For example, Coca Cola described their ‘On the Same Wave’ program as “helping migrants learn surf life-saving skills”.

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4.6 Discussion

The wide range of CSR strategies implemented by selected members of Big Food in Australia are presented in Table 4.2. While some of these strategies clearly target specific groups within the population, such as families with young children, it should be recognised that all CSR activities either directly or indirectly target the population as a whole (Brownell & Warner 2009). CSR strategies, by definition, work to develop a public image of a responsible and ‘good’ corporate citizen that is associated with positive attributes, and thus work to build brand awareness and preference within the population (Dorfman et al. 2012). These findings raise three considerations that warrant reflection and discussion.

The two most common types of CSR activities focused on building brand image by depicting the company as a responsible corporate entity, both in terms of the natural environment and its attitude towards its customers. It is likely that this type of strategy is an attempt to address public commentary within the media and public policy forums that criticise Big Food for contributing to the burden of poor health and deliberately targeting vulnerable populations such as children or lower socio-demographic communities (Brownell 2012; The PLoS Medicine Editors 2012; Yanamadala et al. 2012). This finding is consistent with previous literature suggesting that Big Food companies are irresponsible in their marketing and targeting strategies (Brownell & Warner 2009). At the same time, organisations use CSR to counteract criticisms and promote themselves as responsible entities. In doing so, companies may obtain a degree of immunity to the effects of negative public commentary when it occurs (Yoon et al. 2006).

Prior research indicates that the strategy of aligning with seemingly unrelated, but socially desirable, causes has been used by Big Tobacco in an attempt to build an overall image of corporate responsibility (Tesler & Malone 2008). Big Tobacco used this strategy in an attempt to maintain a positive industry image and create a platform from which they could enter tobacco policy discussions and re-establish political influence. The findings of this study suggest Big Food may be following a similar pathway as Big Tobacco by addressing societal concerns to influence policy-making decisions and thwart regulation (Brownell & Warner 2009; Herrick 2009; Moodie et al. 2013).
The findings highlight a prevalence of CSR strategies in the area of community-based initiatives that seemingly target families with young children. Previous research has shown that Big Food companies’ CSR initiatives aim to build brand and product preference from a young age (Brownell & Warner 2009; Dorfman et al. 2012), which may entice young children and adolescents to become lifetime consumers (Dorfman et al. 2012). Sponsoring children’s sporting events such as Little Athletics has a twofold impact: (1) it associates the brand with healthy physical activity, which may be perceived to offset the unhealthy nature of its products (Corti et al. 1995; McDaniel & Heald 2000); and (2) the company may be viewed as helping to sustain children’s community sporting programs (Maher et al. 2006). Numerous examples were found of Big Food companies supporting children’s and family events and organisations (e.g. Coca Cola’s Bicycle Network, Nestlé’s Milo In2 Cricket program). As well as building a positive brand image with children, this strategy may work to alleviate the guilt parents feel when allowing their children to consume the unhealthy products produced by Big Food companies, as they can justify patronage of these organisations because of the good work they may create a halo effect where companies are perceived as ‘healthy’, which may lead to incorrect inferences about a product in terms of its nutritional content (Chandon & Wansink 2007; Peloza et al. 2015). These practices may undermine public health efforts to address the negative health implications of unhealthy commodity products such as those produced by Big Food.

Big Food corporations also appear to be using CSR strategies in effort to align themselves with respected, credible organisations and events in an attempt to transfer these qualities to their own brand. For example, Nestlé has affiliated itself with numerous professional and not-for-profit organisations. In the past, the tobacco company Philip Morris viewed associating its brand with respected not-for-profit organisations as “crucial”, (Tesler & Malone 2008) and employed specialised marketing teams to identify suitable organisations to partner with for “credibility, visibility and to reach target audiences” (Tesler & Malone 2008). Furthermore, in an attempt to silence any opposition to their products, tobacco companies co-opted interest groups that may potentially oppose tobacco industry-funded CSR programs to avoid possible criticism in future (Fooks et al. 2011; Wiist 2011). Through the same mechanisms, Big Food companies could potentially position themselves as credible corporations to consumers and use this position to oppose future regulatory reform.
4.6.1 Limitations

Four limitations should be considered when interpreting these results. First, this was contained to a sample of six companies. A larger sample may have provided a more comprehensive overview of CSR strategies being implemented in Australia. However, each company has a substantial presence in Australia, as indicated by sales revenues (Food and Drink Business 2013; Roy Morgan Research 2014). It is also possible that other valuable information exists beyond the sources utilised here. Our data collection was deliberately restricted to Australian corporate websites and CSR reports. A wider range of industry documents (e.g. annual reports) may provide additional insight as to the range of marketing strategies used by Big Food. Further, we cannot report on the financial value of the different CSR strategies considered here. Different types of CSR activities were considered in equal value, which may mask their relative role in an individual company’s CSR portfolio or the CSR strategies of the industry as a whole. Finally, future research should identify the influence different types of CSR strategies have on the brand perceptions held by different market segments, including potentially vulnerable groups and also policy makers.

4.6.2 Implications for public health

This study identified a wide range of CSR strategies implemented by the Big Food industry, many of which appear to offer community benefits such as the administration of grant funding schemes. However, it can also be argued that Big Food uses CSR strategies to build positive brand images and consumer preferences, which leads to decreased perceptions of harm and increased consumption of unhealthy products (Dorfman et al. 2012). Still to be clarified is where the balance lies between Big Food companies’ providing genuine community benefits through these strategies, and any longer-term negative public health consequences of increased consumption of unhealthy products. Specifically, is there a point at which Big Food companies tip from being responsible corporate citizens acting in the community’s best interest to deceptive organisations that use CSR strategies primarily to achieve profit goals at the expense of public health? Further research is required to examine the real costs and benefits of Big Food CSR strategies to determine their net value to the community, and indeed whether such a tipping point can be identified.

Findings from this study provide evidence for public health advocates and researchers to map and monitor the marketing tactics used by Big Food companies to sell their products to communities. Through the use of CSR (e.g. sponsorship of children’s sporting activities)
companies can influence consumer opinions regarding certain brands or products without explicitly promoting an unhealthy commodity product, which is the case with direct advertising. Results also highlight the types of CSR strategies being used by Big Food. This knowledge could be used to educate communities about how businesses use CSR to build market share and consumer loyalty. Future research should extend this line of enquiry by examining the value of corporate investments in the various CSR activities and community reactions to them, in order to provide insight regarding the relative costs and benefits associated with different types of CSR initiatives.

4.7 Conclusion

Using a customised CSR strategy classification framework, this study examined the range of CSR tactics that are used by Big Food in Australia. Results suggest that Big Food is using CSR activities to: 1) build brand image through responsibility initiatives associated with the environment and customers; 2) target parents and children through community activities; and 3) align themselves with respected organisations and events in an effort to transfer their image attributes to their own brands. Big Food appears to be emulating many of the same strategies as Big Tobacco, which suggests that public health experts should question the motivations for, and legitimacy of, such strategies. To make a stronger case for government intervention, public health advocates need to go beyond the focus on the health harms associated with specific Big Food product categories and expand research efforts to include Big Food’s corporate behaviour.
4.8 References


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Chapter 5 - Are Big Food’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies valuable to communities? A qualitative study with parents and children

5.1 Introduction to Chapter

The content analysis conducted in Study 1 (Chapter 4) identified that parents and children were two key target groups whom Big Food aimed to positively influence through their CSR strategies. Therefore, Study 2 sought to interview parents and children about how they perceived Big Food’s CSR strategies. This chapter addressed aim 2, and answered research questions 3 and 4.

RQ#3 Do parents and children recognise Big Food’s CSR strategies?
RQ#4 How do parents and children perceive Big Food’s CSR strategies?

This chapter presents a journal article that was written by the candidate with co-author and supervisor Lyn Phillipson and was published in 2017:


The published version of this journal article is provided in Appendix K.

5.1.1 Author contributions

Zoe Richards had primary responsibility for the manuscript. She formalised the research questions, designed the study, collected and analysed the data, and was responsible for writing the manuscript.

Lyn Phillipson assisted in formalising the research questions, data analysis and reviews of the manuscript.
5.1.2 Purpose of the study

Whilst we have some understanding of CSR from both the Industry and ‘Public Health’ perspectives, what appears less well understood is how consumers perceive the CSR strategies of Big Food. Previous research has identified parents and children as two target audiences Big Food seek to influence positively through their CSR activities. This study examined parents and children’s awareness and interpretation of Big Food’s CSR strategies to understand how CSR shapes their beliefs about companies.

5.1.3 Guiding framework

*Value Theory*

The concept of value has been variously defined as something of merit or worth (noun), or as a principle or standard of behaviour (verb) (Hirose & Olson 2015). In this sense the concept has both instrumental dimensions (‘acts’ or ‘property’ of worth) and a philosophical dimension (that underpins the ascribing of worth to something because of a belief in some type of moral or other good). Building on Study 1, the concept of value, as described above, was used to explore whether parents and children interviewed during Study 2 actually perceived Big Food’s CSR as of ‘value’.

5.1.4 What does this study add to current knowledge?

This study was the first to systematically explore parents’ and children’s recognition and perceptions of Big Food’s CSR strategies. To our knowledge, it was the first to document unsolicited CSR strategy recognition of parents and their children.

It also highlighted the targeting and exposure of children to CSR in their everyday settings, including where children are physically active and receive health care. This study was the first to utilise value theory to generate a deeper understanding of the pervasive impact of CSR in children’s settings on their beliefs regarding the moral attributes of Big Food companies.

This study also suggested that given the impact, CSR restriction and regulation should also be considered as part of an effective public health approach to reduce the consumption of processed food and SSB. This is necessary to ensure the settings where children are physically active and receive health care are free from the influences of Big Food.
5.2 Abstract

Objective: Recent studies have identified parents and children as two target groups whom Big Food hopes to positively influence through their CSR strategies. This preliminary study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of parents and children’s awareness and interpretation of Big Food’s CSR strategies to understand how CSR shapes their beliefs about companies.

Methods: Qualitative semi-structured interviews with parents (N=15) and children aged eight-12 years (N=15) from New South Wales, Australia.

Results: Parents and children showed unprompted recognition of CSR activities when showed McDonald’s and Coca Cola brand logos, indicating a strong level of association between the brands and activities that target the settings of children. When discussing CSR strategies some parents and most children saw value in the activities, viewing them as acts of merit or worth. For some parents and children, the companies CSR activities were seen as a reflection of the company’s moral attributes, which resonated with their own values of charity and health. For others, CSR strategies were in conflict with companies’ core business. Finally, some also viewed the activities as harmful, representing a deceit of the public and smokescreen for the companies’ ultimately unethical behaviour.

Conclusions: A large proportion of participants valued the CSR activities, signalling that denormalising CSR to sever the strong ties between the community and Big Food will be a difficult process for the public health community. Efforts to gain public acceptance for action on CSR may need greater levels of persuasion to gain public support of a comprehensive and restrictive approach.

Key words: Big Food, Corporate Social Responsibility, Marketing, Industry, Community.
5.3 Introduction

The increased consumption of ultra-processed food and sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) is linked to the increased burden of obesity and type 2 diabetes globally (Chan 2011). These products are produced and sold by Big Food (i.e. large multinational ultra-processed food and beverage companies) (The PLoS Medicine Editors 2012). Although processed food and SSBs are more energy dense and nutrient poor, Big Food focus their production and distribution on these products as they are typically more profitable for manufacturers. Profitable products also enable companies to increase shareholder revenue, something that corporations are legally required to do (Rutkow & Pomeranz 2011). High profit margins have also made Big Food undeniably influential. They have been successful in translating their market power into political power, which has enabled them access to, and dialogue with, public policy makers (The PLoS Medicine Editors 2012).

Internationally, public health efforts to minimise the harms associated with over-consumption of processed food and SSBs have attempted to reduce consumption levels through policy interventions such as a ‘sugar’ or ‘soda’ tax (Pomeranz 2012; Powell & Chaloupka 2009; Powell et al. 2013; Ribaudo & Shortle 2011; Smith et al. 2010). The food industry has also undertaken self-regulatory actions, such as highly visible pledges to reducing children’s food marketing on television, reducing the number of products available in schools, and improving product labelling (Sharma et al. 2010). These commitments are governed by industry bodies and participation by individual companies is typically voluntary. Independent evaluations of industry self-regulatory commitments indicate that they are ineffective and unlikely to curb the amount of unhealthy food marketing that children are exposed to or reduce the impact of this exposure (Lumley et al. 2012).

In response to public health measures, Big Food have employed a range of tactics to continue to promote their products, prevent their products from becoming regulated, and to gain public and political favour (Wiist 2011). Key examples of these tactics include stealth marketing, lobbying federal and state governments, co-opting scientists and funding research, and more recently corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies (Brownell & Warner 2009). Whilst this is an emerging area, public health experts have called for increased levels of critical social marketing to address these tactics, particularly CSR, as less is known about the
influence these strategies may have on consumers (Pomeranz 2012; Powell & Chaloupka 2009; Powell et al. 2013).

CSR is an evolving concept, defined as “a company’s ethical, legal and philanthropic responsibilities to society in addition to meeting the company’s fiduciary responsibility to its shareholders” (Dorfman et al. 2012, p.2). Companies have publicly reported on CSR strategies – addressing social issues ranging from environmental sustainability to initiatives aimed at supporting the health and welfare of Indigenous and migrant communities – via public reports and company websites (Richards et al. 2015). CSR has also been described as a mechanism for creating shared value that allows companies to reconnect their own company success with social progress. For example, Porter and Kramer (2006) suggest that CSR can assist in generating economic value that also allows the company to produce value for society by addressing social challenges. However, public health experts suspect CSR strategies may primarily function as a public relations tool, used to build a positive brand image and consumer preferences, with the underlying intention of protecting their profitability (Dorfman et al. 2012; Richards et al. 2015).

Given the diverse range of activities that may be used as part of Big Food’s CSR strategies, the authors believe that categorisation into two groups is useful to consider the potential range of impacts and where public health advocates should focus their attention.

The first group we have termed ‘genuine’ CSR strategies. Examples include adhering to labelling agreements, reformulating products to make them healthier, sourcing local and sustainable products, employee wellbeing programs or implementing sustainability programs to minimise environmental impacts (e.g. packaging initiatives) (Hartmann 2011; Richards et al. 2015). These strategies are considered to be genuine because they aim to improve existing corporate practices, enhance the nutritional quality of products to benefit consumer health, increase the transparency of nutrition information and improve supply chain practices (Herrick 2009; Richards et al. 2015).

The second group are those we consider to be more ‘questionable’ CSR strategies. These strategies attempt to address issues related to the overconsumption of products through specific activities that target children and vulnerable populations. For example, sport
sponsorship, nutrition education programs, the provision of resources and equipment to schools, charitable donations, and education opportunities (Dorfman et al. 2012; Richards et al. 2015). Some of these strategies appear to be addressing public concerns related to the long-term negative health impacts of their products. However, they also serve as an opportunity to build brand value, given that brand logos are heavily featured throughout these activities and on resources (Dorfman et al. 2012; Richards et al. 2015). Others seem to be disconnected from companies’ products and the consumption of these, and also appear to target vulnerable population groups (Richards et al. 2015). However, they do not attempt to improve the nutritional quality of products, nor do they address any of the health issues associated with the consumption of such products (e.g. obesity).

Preliminary studies in the critical public health literature also show that Big Food is using CSR to divert public attention away from the negative health effects of their products; avoid government regulation; and shift blame from corporations to consumers (Brownell & Warner 2009; Dorfman et al. 2012; Herrick 2009). Studies from the critical public health literature have reported that companies use these CSR strategies to build brand image and preferences in an attempt to cultivate a climate in which the consumption of their products is viewed as a natural activity. Companies can achieve this by implementing strategies that either provide something of value to a particular group (e.g. charitable donations) or emulate the moral values of a group (Brownell & Warner 2009; Herrick 2009; Richards et al. 2015). Therefore, it could be argued that these strategies aim to serve the bottom line of corporations, despite their stated intentions to address the impacts of their products.

Whilst we have some understanding of CSR from both the Industry and ‘Public Health’ perspectives, what appears less well understood is how consumers perceive the CSR strategies of Big Food. Previous studies have explored adult views of CSR only within the contexts of organic food and genetically modified food (Pino et al. 2016; Pivato et al. 2008). These studies found that consumers who were more socially oriented tended to have a higher level of trust in a brand that engaged in socially responsible activities, which in turn influenced their purchase decisions (Pino et al. 2016; Pivato et al. 2008). A study exploring how young adults perceived two fast food companies’ CSR strategies found that majority of participants viewed the companies’ initiatives to be no more than marketing strategies aimed at increasing profits (Monika et al. 2005).
Recent studies have identified parents and children as two key target groups whom Big Food hopes to positively influence through their CSR strategies (Dorfman et al. 2012; Richards et al. 2015). Whilst CSR was not the specific focus, we identified two studies which had have investigated the role of Big Food’s sports sponsorship of community sports clubs (which is a form of CSR) (Kelly et al. 2012a, 2012b). One study aimed to establish whether parents and children would support policy interventions to restrict unhealthy food sponsorship at both elite and junior sporting clubs (Kelly et al. 2012b). Telephone surveys were conducted with parents and online surveys with children whom had participated in sport that received sponsorship in the past. Three quarters of the parents who participated in the survey supported the introduction of policies to restrict unhealthy food and beverage sponsorship of community and elite level sports, whereas 39% of children said they felt better about a company if it had previously sponsored a team or professional athlete. The second study identified that parents perceived their children to be influenced by elite sport sponsorship, but that this form of sponsorship was considered to be less influential within community sports club settings (Kelly et al. 2012a). This study also highlighted that the majority of parents who participated supported restrictions to children’s sport sponsorship, particularly the inclusion of Big Food logos on children’s uniforms (Kelly et al. 2012a).

However, to date, no study has specifically explored how Big Food’s CSR programs shape parents’ and children’s perceptions of companies. To address this gap in knowledge, the present study utilised qualitative methods to gain an in-depth understanding of how parents and children interpret the messages promoted in a range of CSR themed advertisements.

Specifically, the following research questions addressed were:

1. Do parents and children recognise Big Food’s CSR strategies?
2. How do parents and children perceive Big Food’s CSR strategies?

5.4 Methods

5.4.1 Participant information
Printed flyers were used to recruit primary school aged participants and their parents in the Illawarra region in New South Wales, Australia. Flyers were distributed to various local community organisations, and throughout professional networks. Snowball sampling was also utilised, where participants were asked at the end of each interview if they could
recommend potential participant families. Thirty participants took part in the semi-structured
dyadic interviews (i.e. one parent and one child per interview). The majority of the children
who participated were male (eight male, seven female), aged eight-12 years. Parents’ ages
ranged from 34 to 52 years, with the majority being female (12 female, three male).

5.4.2 Data collection methods and materials
Semi-structured dyadic interviews were used to explore the research questions. Interviews
were conducted in person in either the participants’ home, or in a private room located at the
university campus, with both the parent and child present at each interview. Basic
demographic information was collected from each participant prior to the interview
commencing. This included participant age, gender and family postcode. Postcodes were
collected to determine a family’s socio-economic indexes for areas index.

Following this, the three brand logos were shown on a laptop. Participants were then asked
what they knew about the company, and how they felt when they saw each logo. Participants
were then showed a CSR themed ad, one each from the same three brands. In response to
each CSR themed ad, participants were asked what they thought the company was trying to
communicate, and how they felt about the company communicating that particular message.
The order in which brand logos and ads were shown varied across the interviews. Parents and
children in each dyad viewed the brand logos and CSR themed ads simultaneously, but
children were asked the questions first. This was done to ensure that the parent’s opinion did
not influence the child’s response. The interviews were audio taped, and then transcribed
verbatim by the first author for analysis.

McDonald’s, Nestlé, and Coca Cola were the included brands, based on a previous study that
identified these companies as implementing the most CSR strategies in Australia (Richards et
al. 2015). This previous study also identified that the companies’ CSR strategies primarily
focused on environmental responsibility, consumer responsibility and community-based
initiatives. Therefore, each CSR themed ad represented one of these strategies. A search of
the three brands Australian specific YouTube channels was conducted by the first author to
identify appropriate ads. Definitions for a range of CSR strategies provided by Richards et al.
(2015) were used to select an ad for each CSR Category. Table 5.1 outlines the brand logos
and CSR themed ads (with web links) included in this study.
5.4.3 Data analysis

Upon completion, transcribed interviews were uploaded to QSR NVivo (Version 21), and then analysed using thematic analysis techniques (Miles & Huberman 1994). First, meaningful sections of text in the interview transcripts were given basic code names. Codes were then assessed for similarities and differences across the transcripts. Following this, codes were inductively grouped into themes by the first author. The first analysis of the data revealed a central theme of the participants describing CSR strategies as representing some form of value or being in conflict with the companies’ core business. ‘Value’ has been variously defined as something of merit or worth (noun) (Anonymous 2010), or as a principle or standard of behaviour (verb) (Anonymous 2010). In this sense the concept has both instrumental dimensions (‘acts’ or ‘property’ of worth) and a philosophical dimension (that underpins the ascribing of worth to something because of a belief in some type of moral or other good). Following a discussion about the initial analysis the authors made the decision to continue to analyse the data using the concept of value, as described above, considering whether participants perceived the values they ascribed to be in conflict with the companies’ CSR activities. CSR strategies were therefore coded as acts of worth, indicators of moral values, in conflict with business values: or as ‘harmful’ or ‘unethical’.

Peer debriefing was also utilised to enhance the credibility of the results, where the first author presented the themes to the second co-author as they were developed to ensure that they reflected the data accurately (Patton 1990). All participants were de-identified to ensure confidentiality. Each participant was assigned a sequential number based the order in which they were interviewed (e.g. Child 1 (C1), Parent 1 (P1)).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand logos</th>
<th>CSR advertisement (name, length in seconds)</th>
<th>CSR strategy previously identified</th>
<th>Web-links to ads</th>
<th>Description of ad provided on the website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="#">Nestle</a></td>
<td>“MILO, the official drink of play” – 30 seconds</td>
<td>Consumer Responsibility</td>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVOAruxenFE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVOAruxenFE</a></td>
<td>Active play is a fun way to ensure your kids are physically active, and get plenty of running, hopping and jumping -- all great for healthy bone development. When it comes to Calcium, milk is a great source. And because MILO contains calcium, by adding MILO to your glass of milk, you can boost its calcium content by 70%! In addition to this MILO and milk is a nutrient rich, low GI option - great for fueling active fun. No wonder MILO is the official drink of play!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="#">McDonald's</a></td>
<td>“Join us on Clean Up Australia Day” – 30 seconds</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECOYzNtPQw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECOYzNtPQw</a></td>
<td>Join us on Clean Up Australia Day and help us restore beauty in our local neighbourhoods. Together we can make a difference! Visit cleanup.org.au to register a site near you!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.5 Results

5.5.1 Brand Logo Recognition and Associations
All parents who participated in this study recognised all three brand logos. All children recognised the McDonald’s and Coca Cola logo; however, approximately one third did not recognise the Nestlé logo and said that they had never seen it before. As expected, participants associated the company logos with the products they produce, and children expressed strong attachments to how the products taste “Coke is yummy” [C10], and appear “I feel a bit thirsty” [C4]. Prior to viewing any of the CSR themed ads, several children and parents cited four activities implemented by McDonald’s but did not directly identify to these being a part of the company’s CSR program. These were the Ronald McDonald House Charity, the sponsorship of local sporting clubs, provision of healthier food options and the partnership with Little Athletics Australia.

“When they supported Little A’s um well I think they still do it if we have, if we get like a PB they give out these sheets and you can get this free thing from McDonald’s.” C1
“That have the McDonald’s logo, also there is Ronald McDonald house of course. So there is some sort of semi good things I guess that McDonald’s try to do.” P7

At this stage of the interview neither children nor parents mentioned any examples of CSR strategies from Nestlé.

5.5.2 Responses to CSR Themed Advertisements
Participant responses to the CSR themed ads clustered around one central theme: CSR as having value; and four sub themes: CSR strategies as acts of worth, CSR strategies as indicators of moral values, CSR and conflicted values and CSR as deceitful, harmful or unethical.

5.5.2.1 CSR as having value

*CSR strategies as acts of worth*
In this study, approximately two thirds of children and just over one third of parents described the CSR strategies performed as being of merit or worth. The strategies were described as worthwhile because the participant had either experienced the benefits of the activity in the past, or they appreciated that someone else in the community would benefit
from the strategy. For children, the merit they credited to the CSR strategies was the provision of fun and giveaways associated with the sponsorship of community events and sporting clubs.

“It sort of makes me feel excited because whenever we go to the Australia Day fair we always see the big thing, the big M, next to the stage. They [McDonald’s] always give you lunch boxes and stuff and they support soccer and rugby clubs, which I like about that.” C3

Parents also described the CSR strategies as worthwhile because they fulfilled a funding gap for services that meet the needs of others in the community. For example, without sponsorship from food companies, children’s sporting programs may not be able to continue. In a similar sense, parents also stated that without the financial resources provided, charities like the Ronald McDonald House Charity may not exist.

“So, if the government isn’t going to do it obviously they’re patching a hole there that is needed, they’re fulfilling a need that’s out there.” P7

CSR as indicators of moral values
A smaller proportion ascribed various CSR strategies as aligning with their own values of charity (giving time, effort and financial resources), and health (physical and environmental). With regards to charity, some children described Coca Cola’s support of Ronald McDonald House Charity as a good way of helping the community and expressed that they liked the fact that a company was giving up their time to help sick children. This aligned with the underlying acts of giving either time or money that are often associated with charity.

“They were helping lots of people and like a few times a year, and they were helping... they got free food, they were being very nice all around the community.”

C11

Children also explained that they liked that McDonald’s were participating in the Clean Up Australia Day initiative to work with the community to pick up rubbish and keep the environment clean. They discussed their appreciation of both McDonald’s again giving time and effort (perhaps again a form of charity), but also that they were contributing to the maintenance of a clean environment.
“McDonald’s helped a lot in cleaning up Australia day. There was heaps of rubbish, and then out of all of the people that do Clean Up Australia day, McDonald’s tries the hardest.” C12

For parents, associated fundraisers and provision of financial resources to the Ronald McDonald House Charity appeared to align with the value of charity. For example, some parents described that this initiative encouraged them to spend money at McDonald’s restaurants because they knew that some of it would end back up in the community.

“It’s a great initiative and I’m aware of the service they provide for families in hospital. As they say, they have the resources to do it and for me as a customer it encourages me to go and spend my money on their product because I know a bit of it ends up back in the community.” P9

Health was another thing that was valued by participants and was represented in terms of acts, which contributed to both physical and environmental wellbeing. With regards to physical health, in response to Nestlé’s Milo ad, children expressed that it was “pretty smart” [C4] for the company to be encouraging parents and children to “play together” [C4].

“So, if you’re kids are like a person who likes to play on the computer, it’s trying to tell the parents that to get milo, because it helps them go out and play”. C1

This appeared to align with the value of health and the importance of maintaining an active lifestyle when consuming unhealthy products. Overall, the value associated with these specific CSR strategies resulted in some children assigning moral attributes to the companies. For example, some participants described the companies as “nice” [C9], “caring” [C1], and “helpful” [C7].

Parents also demonstrated that they valued health. Some parents described the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and that the physical activity programs implemented as an important avenue for companies to pursue as it is a way that companies can offset the negative health impacts that their products have on children.

“It’s good for them to promote sport, because you know sport…any type of sport makes you know an active person, so more active person the more healthy you are, it’s good.” P10
A group of parents also ascribed the strategies as being indicative of the companies’ own corporate values. This was in reference to the healthy options menu provided at McDonald’s that reinforced the company’s value of the importance of choice and individual responsibility. Although this was not featured in the ads shown, some parents commented on the healthy options at McDonald’s that allowed for consumers to make a healthy choice. This gave the impression that not only did some parents value individual responsibility and choice, but the company did as well.

“Now they give you the choice of whether you can eat healthy, or whether you can eat unhealthy at McDonald’s. They have the salads that have been brought in, and wraps, and the apples and things for kids instead of the fries. So again, it’s the same as what I said about them [children] being aware of the brand. It’s trying to educate them [children] yes this is a brand, but you can choose from this, and you can choose from that”. P14

5.5.2.2 CSR and conflicted values

Another group of children and parents ascribed the CSR strategies as being in conflict with other activities of the corporations. This caused confusion for participants, as they were unsure of what to believe about the company. Participants expressed their confusion in relation to how the companies’ core business (producing and selling unhealthy products) conflicted with the moral values they also ascribed to the CSR strategies (e.g. charity and physical and environmental health). For example, children questioned why McDonald’s was promoting Clean Up Australia Day, when the packaging of their products impacted on the health of the environment.

“I think they were trying to tell us to clean up, but they were telling you in the wrong way. Like because they were trying to tell them [consumers] to clean up from their own company or the takeaway. I think that’s pretty dumb because that’s the company who causes all of the takeaway rubbish.” C2

Some parents also stated that whilst they appreciated McDonald’s involvement in the campaign, they also found it to be “quite ironic” [P2] for the company to partner with the Clean Up Australia Day organisation, given that their company’s packaging is one of the biggest contributors to pollution.
“It’s a bit mixed, as I said before it’s wonderful that they’re putting money into communities and into Clean Up Australia Day, that’s great and I really appreciate that, but on the other hand I can’t see how they are changing. They’re not using less packaging, and they’re not changing anything in store to have any less packaging. On one hand they’re one of the biggest polluters in communities, but then on the other hand they’re doing something. I find that a very two edge sword.” P12

With regards to physical health, some children were confused as to why junk food companies were promoting physical activity. For instance, some children questioned why a company such as Nestlé would try to promote physical activity to them. Some described the company had implied that their product Milo helps you to be active, or that you need Milo to have the energy to go outside and play. However, they expressed that this wasn’t the case.

“They were trying to get the message that Milo helps kids play (laughs). But, it really doesn’t.” C11

With regards to charity, some parents described the Ronald McDonald House Charity as being of merit. However, they also expressed that this charity was only made possible due to consumers purchasing high volumes of unhealthy products. Whilst they appreciated the financial resources provided to an initiative that supported families with sick children, they also stated that companies were profiting on obesity.

“It’s good that they do some fundraising, and that they are out there, and they do contribute with the Ronald McDonald House and all sorts of things for children. But, still I just see it as profiting on obesity and bad eating habits.” P4

5.5.2.4 CSR as deceitful, harmful or unethical

A small group of parents described the companies’ CSR strategies as being a smoke screen. These parents expressed that they did not see these activities to be a reflection of the moral values (charity, health), as described by other participants. Nor did they describe the CSR strategies to be of merit or worth, but regarded them as harmful. In fact, these parents articulated that CSR was another unethical marketing tactic used to increase and protect the sales of unhealthy products that have a negative impact on physical health. For example, one parent suggested that CSR strategies allow companies to “get away with” [P15] selling their products.
“Well they got onto the smoking tobacco companies and everyone knows that it’s bad for you. But, they fly under the radar because there is evidence everywhere to prove that sugar is killing everyone, and yet they seem to have enough lobby groups who have got their fingers in enough pies with politicians.” P15

Rather than being of merit or worth, some parents stated that the strategies were an effort to address public criticism that junk food companies receive in the media in regard to the childhood obesity epidemic. For example, some parents described the strategies as “feel good exercises” [P8] with the underlying intention of diverting attention away from the harmful health outcomes associated with the long-term consumption of processed products to encourage sales.

“It’s just more public relations, feel good rubbish, and they are just trying to offset all of the negativity by something in the grand scheme of things it doesn’t even cost them that much to run this place when they’re making millions of dollars every year. I see right through it.” P5

5.6 Discussion

The literature has previously reported on of both Big Foods’ publicised motivations for undertaking CSR activities (Brownell & Warner 2009; Dorfman et al. 2012; Herrick 2009) public health critiques of these strategies (Richards et al. 2015; Scrinis 2016) but to a much lesser extent, the public perception of these strategies (Kelly et al. 2012a, 2012b). Given that companies argue the social good of CSR activities, and their critics associate them with harm, it is important to gain a better understanding of how the public themselves perceive the strategies and impacts.

This study is the first to systematically explore parents’ and children’s recognition and perceptions of Big Food’s ‘genuine’ and ‘questionable’ CSR strategies. To our knowledge, it is the first to document unsolicited CSR strategy recognition of parents and their children. Both groups identified CSR strategies, activities and their settings for McDonald’s and Coca Cola prior to viewing any ads. All unprompted strategies included ‘questionable’ activities that targeted children and occurred in settings where children would be present (e.g. community events, sporting clubs, and children’s hospital). This may be indicative that both parents and children associate the brands with not just the products they produce (e.g.
hamburgers, soft drinks), but with activities for children that are considered to be ‘normal’ or ‘everyday’. It may also indicate that CSR strategies enable companies to create strong brand associations with consumers, and that both parents and children may not view CSR to be a separate entity of the brand, but embodied within the company. Previous public health studies suggest that one of the intentions behind Big Food’s CSR strategies is to cultivate an environment in which the consumption of processed foods and SSBs is a normal and frequent activity (Brownell & Warner 2009; Dorfman et al. 2012). Although this study was comprised of a small sample, this finding may indicate that ‘questionable’ CSR strategies might be working to achieve this by embedding brands within ‘every day’ children’s activities, which may also contribute to the process of consumption becoming normalised. It’s currently unclear how much money is being invested into activities, as information is limited to what is described in company CSR reports, with not all expenditures for all activities accounted for. However, given both parents and children’s ability to recognise CSR activities from their own community it could be assumed that for companies this is money well spent.

When discussing CSR activities some parents and most children saw value in the activities viewing them as acts of merit or worth. For children, value was associated with receiving free gifts, fun and with doing well for communities. The concept of CSR strategies as fun, aligns with the findings of a previous study where children described companies who provided sport sponsorship to be ‘fun’, ‘cool’ and ‘exciting’ (Kelly et al. 2012b).

For parents, CSR activities were seen as worthy because they filled a health service gap. For some parents and children, the companies CSR activities were viewed as a reflection of the company’s moral attributes and therefore they appreciated the activities because they resonated with their own values of charity and health. This may indicate that both parents and children have strong brand attachments with brand attributes that extend past the taste and convenience of products. These results align with those previously suggested by Richards et al. (Richards et al. 2015) who believe that companies use CSR to align themselves with respected organisations and events in an effort to transfer their positive image attributes to their own brands. It could be argued that companies seek to attain positive brand attributes to normalise their own brand within communities by role modelling behaviours that are desirable to parents and children (e.g. contributing to charities) (Dorfman et al. 2012).
For others the CSR activities were in conflict with other activities of the company. Participants expressed their confusion in relation to how the companies’ core business (producing and selling unhealthy products) conflicted with the moral values they also ascribed to the CSR strategies (e.g. charity and physical and environmental health). Although the activities were described to be in conflict with each other, participants still preferred that these activities were provided to communities, as they most likely wouldn’t exist. However, both groups of participants appeared to view these activities as the ‘social norm’, and that brands’ participating in community activities is an expected outcome.

Typically, public health experts advocate for the activities that the study participants appear to value not to be sponsored by the food industry (Brownell & Warner 2009). However, findings from this study signal that gaining public support for the restriction of activities that are valued at multiple levels’ will be a difficult process. The extent to which companies have invested in their own market research to predict and measure the reach and impact of their CSR strategies on consumers is currently unknown. However, this type of information could be used to help the public determine whether CSR activities are ‘genuine’ efforts to improve products and practices or are ‘questionable’ attempts to build market share. In regards to sport sponsorship (a form of ‘questionable’ CSR), previous studies have indicated that parents would support restrictions on unhealthy food and beverage sport sponsorship to reduce the potential impact of this type of marketing on children (Kelly et al. 2012a, 2012b), and were willing to bear the cost of a policy to be introduced through increased sports fees (Kelly et al. 2012a). However, it may still be difficult to gain community support for public health action on CSR, due to the harms associated with processed food and beverages being less clear than those associated with tobacco and alcohol. Therefore, to be successful in challenging this belief, public health must consider how address these elements of value with replacements that come from a place that holds no vested interest, but still ensure the community need is met. For instance, the Good Sports program framework (2016) may serve as an example where funding for a community need can be met, whilst also reducing the promotional opportunities for corporations. In the context of tobacco control, government legislated for specific amounts of revenue derived from tax measures placed on tobacco products to be used to buy out corporate sponsorship of sporting events (Richards 2016). Examining the feasibility of introducing hypothecated taxes on processed foods and SSBs to
be utilised in the same manner may be a potential course of action for public health researchers.

Finally, some parents viewed the activities as harmful, representing a deceit of the public and a smokescreen for the potential negative health impacts associated with companies’ products. These parents expressed that they did not see CSR to be a reflection of the moral values that others attributed to them, nor did they describe the activities to be of merit or worth. Parents were concerned about how companies that appear to be a genuine contributor in society may work to normalise brands in communities and influence children’s brand preferences. This finding is consistent with previous studies that identified parental concerns relating to food marketing influencing children’s preferences and consumption of unhealthy products, through social media platforms (Mehta et al. 2014), pester power (Campbell et al. 2014; Huang et al. 2016; Mehta et al. 2014) and community and corporate sport sponsorship (Kelly et al. 2012a, 2012b). However, this appears to be the first study that highlights parents’ concerns related to the influence that CSR ‘questionable’ strategies may have on children’s consumption.

Some parents could therefore be considered to champion efforts to address the potential impacts of ‘questionable’ CSR strategies, to carry this concern forward to other segments of the community, policy makers and governments. An existing advocacy platform that could highlight parental concerns regarding CSR is the Parents’ Voice network (Parents' Voice 2015). The community driven organisation aims to improve the food and activity environments of Australian children through a range of advocacy campaigns and programs, some of which already address elements of junk food marketing (e.g. sports sponsorship, pester power). Working with an organisation such as this would also allow for action on CSR strategies to be framed as a community issue, rather than nanny state intervention.

5.6.1 Limitations
Four limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study. First, our sample consisted of parents and children from middle to high-income neighbourhoods. It is possible that the perceptions of consumers from low-income areas may vary, and therefore the results may not be transferable across all socio-economic groups. Future research should also extend this line of enquiry by conducting further qualitative interviews with participants from low socio-economic neighbourhoods to gain insights into how this group perceive CSR
strategies. Secondly, this study was comprised of a small sample of parents and children, therefore these results should be considered preliminary. To confirm and build on these results, future research should be conducted with a larger sample size. Although children were posed the interview questions first there is a possibility that at times they were influenced by their parents’ responses. To limit this from happening, future studies could use ‘friendship dyads’ whereby children are interviewed with a friend. Finally, the Coca Cola ad used in this study may have caused confusion for the participants, as it included the Ronald McDonald House, which is usually promoted by McDonald’s. Therefore, participants’ responses about this ad may have been in reference to McDonald’s rather than Coca Cola.

5.7 Conclusion

So far, public health responses to Big Food include taxation on products (e.g. sugar tax), which has shown to be effective, and self-regulation of marketing strategies despite a lack of evidence to support self-regulatory approaches (Moodie et al. 2013). This preliminary study and previous public health literature (Dorfman et al. 2012; Richards et al. 2015) suggests that in order to be comprehensive, regulation and restriction of CSR should also be considered as part of an effective public health approach to reduce the consumption of processed food and SSB. However, given that a large proportion of participants in this study valued ‘questionable’ CSR activities; it may be quite difficult to gain public support for action on CSR, which has been essential in getting the government to regulate other big companies’ strategies in areas such as tobacco and alcohol. Efforts to gain public acceptance and support for the public health intervention on CSR may need greater levels of persuasion and compensation for the public to be supportive of a comprehensive and restrictive approach. Currently, an optimal public health response to Big Food’s ‘questionable’ CSR strategies is yet to be explored. Therefore, future studies may seek to speak to health experts about how we can advocate on behalf of consumers to minimise the potential impacts ‘questionable’ CSR strategies have on the perceptions of consumers.
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Chapter 6 - Marketing or social good? Public health expert perspectives on Big Food’s corporate social responsibility strategies and their impacts

6.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter presents a journal article that was written by the candidate with co-author and supervisor Lyn Phillipson and was submitted for publication in 2018:


This article is the first of two that presents findings from Study 3. This article addressed aim 3 of this dissertation and answered research questions 5 and 6.

RQ#5 What are the perceived motivations of Big Food’s CSR strategies?
RQ#6 What are the potential impacts of Big Food’s CSR strategies on government, consumers and public health?

Study 1 and Study 2 focused on the Australian context. In Study 3 both Australian and international public health experts who were leaders in the field were interviewed to gain broader perspectives on this issue. Study 3 provides an international perspective, offering insights from experts from seven developed countries, and one developing country.

6.1.1 Author contributions

Zoe Richards had primary responsibility for the manuscript. She formalised the research questions, designed the study, collected and analysed the data, and was responsible for writing the manuscript.

Lyn Phillipson assisted in formalising the research questions, data analysis and reviews of the manuscript.
6.1.2 Purpose of this study
In the absence of access to internal industry documents, researchers have called for studies to examine the critical perspectives of public health experts regarding the potential impacts of transnational Big Food corporations’ corporate social responsibility (CSR) on consumers’ health and on public policy. To address this gap, this study used qualitative methods to gain an in-depth understanding of public health experts’ perceptions of Big Food’s CSR motivations and knowledge of the strategies used and their views on the potential impacts on government, consumers and public health.

6.1.3 Guiding framework
The Marketing Mix (4P’s)
Described as a systematic plan of action designed to promote and sell a product or service (Borden 1984), the marketing mix is a planning process which consists of decisions regarding the conception of the product, price, place and promotion (the 4P’s) which are central to an effective ‘marketing mix’ of strategies to achieve sales and profit goals.

While limited, the available critical public health literature suggested that Big Food were utilising CSR as a form of marketing to consumers. In the context of this research, the 4P’s were used as a guiding framework to identify the types of CSR strategies, persuasive messages and potential impacts of the strategies on key target groups.

6.1.4 What does this study add to current knowledge?
This study highlighted the strong similarities that experts perceived between Big Food’s CSR and that of Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol. Use of a marketing mix (4P’s) to analyse activities also highlighted CSR as co-ordinated and sophisticated marketing. Experts perceived that the unique access that corporations had to children’s settings strengthened the argument for timely regulation of Big Food’s CSR activities within these settings.

Findings suggested the need to consider effective ways to regulate the CSR strategies of Big Food to protect vulnerable young children from exposure of companies’ CSR activities in settings where they play sport, receive health care and in school.
6.2 Abstract

**Objective:** This study comprehensively explored the perceptions of public health experts’ regarding the motivations behind Big Food’s corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies, their impact on children, parents and governments, and the implications for public health policy.

**Methods:** One to one qualitative, semi-structured interviews with international public health experts (N=30), from academic positions at universities (N=16) and civil society positions (N=14), from eight countries.

**Results:** Experts perceived Big Food’s CSR as a complex and integrated mix of marketing strategies used to positively influence three specific target audiences - children, parents and government. Key strategies targeting these groups included: product reformulation, charitable donations, sport sponsorship, and self-regulatory marketing codes. Experts described the outcomes of these strategies as: the building of credibility and trust with children; a decrease in the conflict that parents may feel about the presence of Big Food in children’s settings; and the persuasion of government that they are responsible and do not require public regulation.

**Conclusions:** Experts described strong similarities between Big Food’s CSR strategies and those of Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol. However, some experts perceived that the unique access that corporations have to children’s settings strengthens the argument for timely regulation of Big Food’s CSR activities within these settings.

**Implications:** Findings suggested that Big Food’s CSR strategies should be seen as critically different because of its blatant sophisticated marketing to children, parents and government and due to the timing in which companies have begun to employ CSR.

**Key words:** Big Food, Corporate Social Responsibility, Marketing, Industry, Experts.
6.3 Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been defined as “a company’s economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities to society, in addition to meeting the company’s fiduciary responsibility to shareholders” (Dorfman et al. 2012). CSR strategies are employed by various types of industries including pharmaceutical (Jeon & Gleiberman 2017), and oil (Thorsteinsdóttir et al. 2017), as well as clothing and car manufacturers (van Rekom et al. 2014). From the ‘industry’ perspective, CSR can assist in generating economic value (i.e. profits) that allows corporations to produce value for society by addressing social challenges (e.g. funding public programs) (Porter & Kramer 2006).

While there are many examples of companies making genuine efforts to practice in ethical ways, the CSR practices of transnational unhealthy commodity industries have come under the scrutiny of public health experts as activities that have a negative impact on public health (Moodie et al. 2013). Experts have focused on three specific industries whose products have contributed to the increased prevalence of Non Communicable Diseases (NCD) (Stuckler et al. 2012) including: Big Tobacco (i.e. transnational tobacco companies); Big Alcohol (i.e. transnational alcohol companies); and more recently Big Food (i.e. transnational ultra-processed food and beverage companies). These industries have been described as “the new vectors of diseases” (Moodie et al. 2013, p.1), linked to a wider industrial epidemic, where the agents that spread disease are transnational corporations. Corporations partly contribute to the modern spread of disease through the implementation of sophisticated marketing strategies, which seek to normalise and create desire for their products (Moodie et al. 2013).

Currently, we know more about the motivations and harms of the CSR activities of Big Tobacco than of Big Alcohol or Big Food. CSR activities of Big Tobacco are also relatively more regulated than these other industries.

6.3.1 Big Tobacco and CSR

The tobacco industry is the world’s least reputable industry (Daube 2012). Tobacco is one of the leading causes of death globally (Lim et al. 2012), and a main risk factor for numerous chronic diseases including cancer, lung diseases and cardiovascular diseases (World Health Organization 2017). The tobacco control literature describes tobacco CSR programs as comprised of four key strategies (Brownell & Warner 2009; Hirschchron 2004; McDaniel &
Malone 2009). These include: credibility projects (e.g. industry funded youth smoking cessation programs); financial sponsorship of small, community based organisations under the guise of philanthropy; heavy investment in sponsorship of sport (Blum 2005); and the formulation of self-regulatory codes with minimal consequences for non-compliance, as an alternative to public regulation (Fooks et al. 2011).

Despite Big Tobacco’s insistence that they provide social value to consumers, the industry’s CSR portfolio provides another avenue to promote products, and thus increased consumer awareness and familiarity of cigarette brands. Associating tobacco brands with attractive images and socially desirable activities (e.g. charities) was reported by the industry itself to be an effort to positively influence consumers’ beliefs and improve brand image (Friedman 2009). Public health evidence suggests that CSR enabled corporations access to, and dialogue with, policy makers, in efforts to shift government policy towards targeting individual behaviour, rather than industry practice (Fooks et al. 2011).

The evidence regarding Big Tobacco’s CSR strategies was obtained through litigation. The 1998 Master Settlement Agreement revealed a series of internal tobacco industry documents that highlighted the companies’ deceptive marketing practices to influence consumers’ attitudes, which included CSR (National Association of Attorneys General 1999). Access to these documents has enabled significant public health advances in tobacco control, including the restriction and public regulation of CSR activities (World Health Organization 2003). Prior to the implementation of the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, companies implemented various types of CSR strategies in response to the decline in social acceptability of cigarettes (Friedman 2009). However, due to the strength of evidence linking tobacco to the development of lung cancer, arguments against the regulation of the tobacco industry’s corporate marketing tactics, including CSR activities, are no longer as contested in many developed countries (World Health Organization 2008). Yet, additional industry documents have indicated that Big Tobacco are still using CSR to hinder progress on public health policies in low to middle income countries (Kalra et al. 2017).

6.3.2 Big Alcohol and CSR

Big Alcohol is also perceived to be a problematic unhealthy commodity industry (Bond et al. 2010). Increased alcohol consumption is linked to a range of diseases (e.g. chronic liver
disease and cancers), risky behaviours (e.g. drink driving), and domestic violence (World Health Organization 2014).

Tobacco industry co-ownership of alcohol companies facilitated third-party access to, and analysis of, internal alcohol industry documents (Bond et al. 2009). This evidence suggests that Big Alcohol have emulated Big Tobacco’s CSR practices to increase the social acceptability of alcohol products and to normalise brands in communities (Jones et al. 2015). Like Big Tobacco, alcohol companies invest heavily in philanthropic donations and make significant financial contributions globally to the sponsorship of sport, the arts and cultural events (Bond et al. 2010; Jones et al. 2015). This strategic alignment with charities and sporting codes is a credibility building tool that promotes access to and dialogue with policy makers. Companies also assert that self-regulation of marketing practices, including CSR, is sufficient to reduce alcohol related harms in society (Yoon & Lam 2013).

In regards to the product itself, it is argued that unlike tobacco, alcohol has a place in society, as it can be used in moderation to enhance sociability or the enjoyment of food (Daube 2012). As such, Big Alcohol have utilised CSR activities to build additional credibility via media campaigns that aim to educate consumers about the harms of alcohol and place emphasis on personal responsibility (DrinkWise 2014). Manufacturers achieved this by asserting they provide choice and do not promote the abuse of products, which has enabled the industry to frame alcohol related harms as an individual behavioural issue. Whilst public health experts have similar concerns regarding the harms associated with Big Alcohol’s CSR, ability to regulate or restrict these activities has been significantly less compared to those of tobacco control (World Health Organization 2014).

6.3.3 Big Food and CSR

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses of the available epidemiological evidence indicate that the increased consumption of ultra-processed foods and sugar sweetened beverages (SSB) is associated with increased energy intake, and in turn weight gain and obesity, in both children and adults (Malik et al. 2013; Monteiro et al. 2010; Rosenheck 2012). It is also well established that obesity is a leading risk factor globally for type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers. Additional evidence suggests that children begin to consume processed foods and SSB from the age of two years and that overall consumption of these products rises steeply with age (Australian National Preventive Health Agency 2014).
Globally, numerous health agencies and governments have made specific recommendations for limiting the intake of ultra-processed foods and SSB. However, this evidence is contested ferociously by industry, to the extent where they deny any association between consumption and illness (The PLoS Medicine Editors 2012).

Unlike Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol, very little information is available regarding Big Food’s CSR strategies and the effects they may have on consumer behaviour (Dorfman et al. 2012; Richards & Phillipson 2017; Richards et al. 2015). In the absence of access to internal industry documents, researchers have reviewed documents available via company websites and social media (Gaither & Austin 2016; Richards et al. 2015). This has provided some insight into the types of CSR strategies used and the apparent target audience, and allowed comparison with the activities of Big Tobacco (Richards et al. 2015).

Similar to Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol, Big Food’s CSR reports include detailed accounts of strategies that aim to benefit the public (e.g. community sport sponsorship, charitable donations) (Dorfman et al. 2012; Richards et al. 2015). Some of these have been acknowledged as potentially ‘genuine’ CSR (e.g. product reformulation, sustainability programs) by academics and of ‘value’ by parents and primary school aged children (Richards & Phillipson 2017). Others, however, especially those targeting children have been critiqued as ‘questionable’ by researchers, and as deceptive or in conflict with other company values by parents and children (Richards & Phillipson 2017).

Overall, while limited to only a handful of studies that focus on a single aspect of CSR, the critical public health literature suggests that one aim of Big Food’s CSR strategies is to create a ‘health halo’ to divert government and public attention away from the negative health effects of products (Herrick 2009; Richards et al. 2015). There is a growing body of literature highlighting the influence of food marketing on young people’s food preferences, purchase requests and knowledge (Cairns et al. 2013). However, there is still a greater need to understand the motivations and impact of CSR activities on these outcomes.

Studies from the public health literature imply that Big Food’s CSR activities emulate Big Tobacco’s CSR strategies, and therefore require urgent monitoring and regulation (Richards & Phillipson 2017). However, due to the patchiness in evidence, a comprehensive overview
of the multiple strategies, target groups, settings, and promotional messages of Big Food’s CSR strategies is yet to be developed. To address this gap, this study used qualitative methods to engage the critical perspective of public health experts to generate evidence to develop a comprehensive overview of Big Food’s CSR strategies. Specifically, this research aimed to generate an in-depth understanding of experts’ perceptions of the motivations for CSR strategies and the potential impacts on government, consumers and public health.

6.4 Methods

6.4.1 Recruitment and participant information
For the purpose of this study, an individual was considered to be an ‘expert’ if they were an academic researcher or professional working in a civil society organisation that monitors the corporate marketing strategies of Big Food (including CSR). To develop a convenience sample of relevant expert participants, the first author identified authors on Big Food and CSR by systematically searching the current academic and grey literature. Due to the limited nature of available literature, Twitter was also used to identify experts researching the issue, or a closely related topic. Expertise was confirmed via review of university or organisational public profiles which confirmed research interests and current funded projects in this area. Participant contact details were then retrieved from profile pages on organisations’ webpages. This resulted in an initial list of key public health experts from both academic and civil society (e.g. advocacy organisations, not for profit organisations) (N=10). Initial contact was made by email and follow up contact was made by both email and a phone call.

Using snowball sampling, after each interview, participants were asked if they could recommend other experts who could be approached. Overall, 36 people were contacted, with 30 agreeing to an interview. The final sample consisted of 20 female and 10 male participants, from academic positions at universities (N=16) and civil society positions (N=14), from eight countries including Australia (N=14); Brazil (N=3); France (N=1); Italy (N=1); Mongolia (N=1); New Zealand (N=1); the United Kingdom (N=5) and the United States (N=4). Experience working in the field ranged from five to 25 years. One participant [E14] declared a conflict of interest in relation to the organisation they work for previously receiving funding from an ultra-processed food and SSB company. However, that individual had not received any direct funding and therefore was still included in the study. In relation to the organisation they worked for previously receiving funding from an ultra-processed food
and SSB company. However, that individual was employed as an undergraduate student research assistant on that industry funded-project. Because the person had never funded by the industry at any point during their independent research career, the person was still included in the study.

6.4.2 Data collection methods and materials

One to one interviews with the experts were conducted from June to August 2016 by the first author either face to face (in person or Skype) (N=22) or via telephone (N=8). Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Initially, experts were asked about their understanding of the term CSR and how it had been used in the context of Big Food companies. This was followed by questions regarding the Big Food companies they were aware of that implemented CSR activities, the specific types of CSR programs they were aware of, and who they perceived the activities were targeting, and about any other consequences that may arise from Big Food’s CSR strategies.

The questions were developed by the researcher, in conjunction with two experienced public health researchers (candidate’s supervisors) and derived from gaps in the critical public health literature regarding the impacts and motivations for companies CSR activities. Please refer to appendix I for the complete interview guide.

6.4.3 Data analysis

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose software, and analysed using thematic analysis techniques (Miles & Huberman 1994). First, meaningful sections of text in the interview transcripts were given basic code names. Meaningful sections of text are defined as sections of the transcripts where participants provided responses that assisted in answering the research questions and were significant in the development phase of establishing the key themes. Following this, codes were inductively grouped into themes by the first author. The first analysis of the data revealed a central theme of the participants describing CSR strategies as part of Big Food’s marketing strategy. Issues discussed were consistent with the idea of CSR as part of ‘a systematic plan of action designed to promote and sell a product or service’ (Borden 1984). Experts variously described CSR in terms consistent with the 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion) of an effective ‘marketing mix’ of strategies (Borden 1984). Analysis revealed experts perceived three distinct target audiences for the CSR activities (children, parents and
government) with distinct but related persuasive messages for each group. As such, the authors made the decision to analyse the expert perceptions under the key theme of ‘marketing’, identifying the mix of strategies, persuasive messages and potential impacts of the strategies for each of the target groups. Peer debriefing was utilised to enhance the validity of the results, where the first author presented the themes to the co-author as they were developed, to ensure that they reflected the data accurately (Patton 1990). All participants were de-identified to ensure confidentiality. Each participant was assigned a sequential number based the order in which they were interviewed (e.g. Expert 1 (E1)).

6.5 Results

Overall, the results highlighted that experts perceived CSR as a complex and integrated marketing strategy, used to promote key messages to influence three specific target audiences; children, parents and government. The complexity of the integrated mix of strategies as described by public health experts is outlined in Table 6.1.

6.5.1 CSR as a comprehensive and integrated marketing strategy

In this study, all experts described CSR as a persuasive marketing strategy. The key motivations for employing CSR activities were described to be a mechanism to win public and political favour, and to distract government from publicly regulating Big Food’s products and marketing practices. Experts also stated that Big Food pursue CSR only to promote that they implement activities that provide public value to society, to position themselves as ‘good corporate citizens’ [E10], and to increase profits. Experts evidenced this viewpoint based on knowledge that CSR strategies are executed from the marketing department of a company.

“Having spent more time in food policy, I realise that majority of these activities are run out of the marketing limb of organisations, not the policy or scientific managerial limb. They are frankly a cynical range of activities seeking to promote the profile of the organisations to put it forward in the best possible light”. E18

Additionally, they described being aware that companies invest more money in the advertising of the activities, compared to what is invested into the actual CSR activity itself. Experts believed that companies’ CSR strategies were tokenistic activities that aim to build brand value and loyalty, or to address a loss in revenue.

“That’s a clear sketchy thing to do because they could have funnelled all of that money into that cause, but instead they reserve a huge portion of their money to
promote the fact that they did it, which shows how much they care about just saying that they did it.” E1
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<td><strong>Children</strong></td>
<td>Promote trust.</td>
<td>Sports equipment and resources.</td>
<td>Reduce the psychological costs of eating junk food by promoting exercise.</td>
<td>Schools.</td>
<td>‘You can trust us’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promote individual choice to exercise.</td>
<td>Free vouchers.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Community organisations.</td>
<td>‘You can consume our products, but remember to exercise’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase desire for products and pester power.</td>
<td>Opportunities to learn, be active, have fun (via funding of programs).</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hospitals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sports clubs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents</strong></td>
<td>Promote shared values of health and choice.</td>
<td>Reformulated products.</td>
<td>Decrease psychological costs of buying products.</td>
<td>Children’s settings: schools, community organisations, hospitals and sports clubs.</td>
<td>‘We’re being responsible’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduce perceived ‘costs’ of junk food.</td>
<td>Funding of Ronald McDonald House Charity (care when their children are sick).</td>
<td>Increase in the psychological costs of ‘speaking out’ against companies.</td>
<td>Not for profit organisations.</td>
<td>‘You need us; therefore you can tolerate us’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make parents ‘feel better’ about companies.</td>
<td>Little Athletics Australia. Sport sponsorship (opportunities for children to be active &amp; healthy).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.1 - Summary of Big Food’s CSR strategies as a marketing strategy (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Audience</th>
<th>Marketing Objective(s)</th>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Promotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Ensure favourable conditions for promotion, distribution, and sale of products.</td>
<td>Reformulated products.</td>
<td>Increase the price of public regulation.</td>
<td>Direct lobbying.</td>
<td>‘Don’t worry about us, we self-regulate’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promote shared value of individual choice and responsibility.</td>
<td>Self-regulatory codes.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Children’s settings: community centres, hospitals and sports clubs.</td>
<td>‘You need us, we’re charitable’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid public regulation of products.</td>
<td>Funding of charitable services.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not for profit organisations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table continues on the next page...*
Experts also explained that as a result of Big Food controlling the way that CSR messages are framed and the channels through which they are promoted, companies can ensure that activities resonate with key target groups. Experts specified the key target audiences of these strategies to be government (i.e. policy makers) and consumers (i.e. parents and children). Companies were described to use a similar set of CSR strategies to reach the target groups, but to convey different key messages, using varied channels of communication to reach them. To reach policy makers, companies were described to use “lobbying” [E11]. To reach government, parents and children, companies were described to be present in ‘places’ or settings where children are predominantly present. These included: “sports clubs” [E6], “community organisations” [E5], “not for profits” [E1], and “schools” [E15]. Activities also intentionally exposed children to promotional material at these locations, engaged them in participating in an activity within these settings, and in taking branded resources home after participating.

6.5.2 CSR as ‘marketing’ to children

Experts described two key messages that Big Food seeks to communicate to children through CSR. The first message is that ‘you can trust us’. Nutrition education and physical activity programs were described as strategies (CSR ‘products’) that are designed to make children think that companies care about them, and that they can therefore trust them. Experts stated that implementing CSR such activities in settings (places) that to children are “credible” [E29] or “trusted places” [E22] may make companies appear to be trustworthy as well. For instance, if children were to participate in a nutrition education program run by Big Food at school, they may perceive companies and products are “good” [E30] and “safe” [E6].

“They’re designed to have children think that the company is a better company, that the company cares about them, and one example that’s prevalent is that companies have marketing programs in schools. The companies want to associate themselves with the authority and the credibility of the school to have children think and feel more positive to trust the company in ways that can undermine their health.” E30

Sport sponsorship and charitable donations were also described as strategies that aim to create positive associations between brands and children, to position them as ‘good companies’. Experts stated that if children were to participate in or be exposed to a CSR activity at school or in the local community, there would be potential for children to link brands or companies with these activities in future. It provides companies with an opportunity
to ensure their promotions and at least vouchers for the products are in the ‘places’ that children use. Essentially, experts described CSR as a general strategy to provide children with the capacity to identify products (by promoting them in children’s settings) to establish brand preferences from an early age and to create brand loyalty throughout the lifespan.

“That sort of normalising the brand in children’s mind because it is part of the community, it is acceptable because parents have taken the money and it is a feel-good situation that the brand is giving to the community, and that would rub off on children.”

E13

The second message communicated to children is that ‘you can consume our products, but remember to exercise’. Experts stated that Big Food use the promotion of sport sponsorship and activities that involve physical activity as mechanisms to show children that products are a part of a healthy lifestyle, as long as they exercise.

These were described as activities intended to persuade children that exercise can cancel out the consumption of junk food. It is also a way of reducing the price of eating the food (the calories) by suggesting that exercising can act as compensation. Whilst experts did not deny that exercise plays a role in weight management and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, they did state that this form of CSR may cause confusion for children, regarding the nutritional value of Big Food’s products.

“We can link that to CSR because it is to do with physical activity. This is interesting because in an era when Big Food’s problem is childhood obesity, a clever tactic is to say well it’s about exercise, it’s not about this food”. E12

6.5.3 CSR as ‘marketing’ to parents

Experts described two key messages directed at parents through Big Food’s CSR strategies. The first was ‘we are being more responsible’. Companies were reported to convey this by promoting responsible practices that appear to support children’s health. For example, developing and advertising new children’s meal products that include fruit instead of fries, water instead of soft drink, or meat-based products that are now ‘hormone free’. Additionally, promoting new products that are reformulated and are healthier alternatives were described to be strategies that aim to make parents feel more positively about a company. Whilst experts stated that there is potential for some of these strategies to be genuine efforts to improve children’s health, they also stated that it is probable that companies use this message to build
brand loyalty with parents and essentially reduce the psychological price for parents of purchasing the products.

“Some of the efforts are designed to do the same thing to parents, and have the parents feel more positively about a company, and some of the efforts are legitimate and lead to positive changes and support children’s health, and others are meaningless and just make the parents feel better about the company”. E29

The second message directed at parents is ‘you need us; therefore, you can tolerate us’. Experts described that Big Food invest heavily in promotion of CSR activities that provide public value (e.g. public programs that are not funded by government). Such programs or products serve as evidence for companies to show parents how integral they are in local community culture. Experts stated that it was likely companies wanted parents to believe that without funding provided by Big Food, activities would not exist. Experts also stated that this strategy could work to make it difficult for parents to be angered with a company’s core business (e.g. selling unhealthy products to children), as activities such as funding local sport works to ameliorate the health impacts of unhealthy products. This strategy again lowers the psychological price for parents of the costs they may otherwise associate with the negative aspects of the food companies.

“It is like they’re holding on to only the positive side of their activities, not the negative, and that holding onto that positive enables them [parents], and the public to then go ‘oh well they’re not so bad, we’ll just let their activities go by the way side’”. E7

6.5.4 CSR as ‘marketing’ to government

Experts described Big Food as using CSR strategies to communicate two key messages to government. The first message is ‘don’t worry about us, we self-regulate’. Specifically, the message that CSR helped to portray was that government should not be concerned about the potential negative health impacts of unhealthy products on consumers. To achieve this, Big Food had developed new tangible products as part of a CSR marketing mix, which they use to demonstrate responsible practices through reformulation or reduced portion sizes.

“When the government goes to consider the regulation of corporate activity, for example, marketing controls or reformulations, these companies will say ‘look policy maker, we have these programs in place…and this is how we are self-regulating our business activities in the public interest’. ” E11
The second message conveyed to government through CSR strategies was ‘you need us, we are charitable’. Experts believed that sponsorship of community grants and charitable donations aimed to show government the valuable role Big Food played in the provision of public programs, which may not exist without financial contributions from industry. These donations again are ‘intangible products’ or services being provided to fulfil the needs of community and government and thus reinforce the message to government that Big Food are an essential part of the communities’ charitable services.

Experts asserted that by highlighting unique health care services (e.g. Ronald McDonald House Charity), learning opportunities (e.g. Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience), and physical activity programs (e.g. Little Athletics Australia) Big Food are able to place products and logos in the settings of essential services and therefore establish themselves as vital part of society that the community needs and wants.

“The other groups that they’re interested in influencing are political decision makers and policy makers. It is difficult if they have got a ground swell of community support, or community perception that they’re socially responsible, contributing to the community, sponsoring things that couldn’t otherwise be funded, if they withdraw their funding from athletics, my god who else is going to fund that?” E14

6.6 Discussion

Previous public health literature regarding Big Food’s CSR activities has analysed the types of strategies used and key targets (Richards et al. 2015), questioned the motivations behind the strategies (Dorfman et al. 2012; Herrick 2009), and revealed the mixed perceptions of parents and children, some of whom perceive CSR as valuable, whilst others perceive harms associated with unhealthy products accepted place in the community (Richards & Phillipson 2017). This, however, is the first study to document public health experts’ critical appraisal of Big Food’s CSR strategies.

Overall, public health experts described Big Food’s CSR activities to be a complex and coordinated mix of marketing strategies, being used to influence children, parents and government to increase profits, and to escape public scrutiny and regulation. Experts likened
these motivations to those of Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol (Moodie et al. 2013), raising concerns about Big Food corporations’ claims of genuine effort to build social value.

Of greatest concern to experts was the direct targeting of young children and the ubiquitous presence of CSR activities in children’s settings. Experts described CSR strategies as an intentional and direct attempt by companies to build brand value and create an allegiance with children as immediate potential consumers of Big Food’s products, rather than future customers (which was the case for tobacco and alcohol companies). Experts stated that the presence of Big Food’s CSR in everyday credible settings, such as sports clubs, hospitals and schools is used to send a message to children that they can trust Big Food as companies that do good for the community. This finding is consistent with previous studies that indicate CSR strategies seek to normalise brands by embedding themselves within children’s settings (Dorfman et al. 2012; Richards & Phillipson 2017).

Experts also described Big Food’s CSR strategies to be sending children the message that it is acceptable to consume ultra-processed foods and SSB if they exercise. However, previous public health studies indicate that by aligning consumption of products with exercise companies send mixed messages to children about diet and health, whereby children perceive high sugar foods as necessary to enhance performance (Bragg et al. 2013). Importantly, the direct targeting of, and access into, children’s settings through CSR activities was viewed as unethical due to the vulnerability of children who have less well-developed critical thinking capacities. Information from psychological research indicates that children under the age of 12 are susceptible to the pervasive effects of food marketing, as they are yet to reach cognitive maturity, and are therefore unable to understand the selling or persuasive intent behind marketing (Harris & Graff 2012).

Although, the links between harm to individual health and consumption are more tenuous with ultra-processed food and SSB (compared to tobacco and alcohol), the findings from this study and previous public health literature suggests that Big Food’s CSR strategies may have the potential to influence children’s brand awareness, preferences, and consumption patterns (Richards & Phillipson 2017; Richards et al. 2015). Evidence from longitudinal studies also suggest that unhealthy dietary behaviours formed in childhood appear to track into adulthood (Craigie et al. 2011), with children and adolescents who are overweight likely to remain
overweight as adults (Herman et al. 2009). It could be argued that because children are exposed to, and directly targeted by, Big Food’s CSR strategies from a much younger age (and therefore a longer period of time) than that of tobacco and alcohol companies’ CSR, these activities warrant monitoring and regulation to minimise the harms associated with lifelong over-consumption of ultra-processed food and SSB.

With regards to CSR as a marketing strategy to parents, this study corroborates with findings from previous studies, that in some cases, CSR may contribute to parents’ acceptance of children consuming processed foods and SSB due to the patronage companies provide to communities (Richards & Phillipson 2017; Richards et al. 2015). This was perceived as problematic because parents are, to a large extent, considered to be accountable for their children’s food consumption, and children tend to rely on their parents to reinforce values around food, due to their own cognitive abilities (Wansink 2006). In this study, experts also viewed the provision of essential services and sporting opportunities were being utilised to effectively ‘silence’ parents from speaking out against companies being present in children’s settings and sponsoring children’s events. The targeting of parents in this way further strengthens the case for the regulation of Big Food’s CSR activities in children’s settings.

Finally, experts described Big Food’s CSR strategies as similar to Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol (McDaniel & Malone 2009), with regard to companies’ intent to influence public policy, but different in relation to how companies place emphasis on how CSR activities provide social value communities, particularly to children. Experts argued that Big Food’s CSR has enabled companies to successfully position themselves as being essential to governments for the provision of important and unique health services to children that communities otherwise may not have access to, due to cuts in public funding (e.g. Ronald McDonald House Charity). Rather than agree with this message, experts described these strategies to be in conflict with governments’ responsibilities to provide communities with safe and healthy environments, not only through the provision of essential services, but also through the protection of children from exposure to pervasive marketing.

6.6.1 Limitations
This study was comprised of a small sample of public health experts; therefore, these results should be considered preliminary. To confirm and build on these results, future research should be conducted with a larger sample size. While this study invited experts from various
countries, participants who responded only represented a total of eight countries; seven
classified as ‘developed’ and one classified as ‘developing’. Therefore, the results
predominantly reflect experts from developed countries, and may not be transferable across
developing countries. Future research should also extend this line of enquiry by conducting
further qualitative interviews with participants from low-middle countries to gain insights
into how Big Food’s CSR strategies are perceived within this context.

6.6.2 Implications for Public Health

Whilst experts described similarities between the unhealthy commodity industries’
motivations and impacts of CSR strategies, this study suggested that Big Food’s CSR
strategies should be seen as critically different because of its blatant sophisticated marketing
to children and guardians (parents and government) as current and potential customers.
Findings from this study also signal that Big Food’s CSR activities should be viewed as
significantly different, due to the timing in which companies have begun to employ CSR. For
every example, Big Tobacco employed CSR as a means of subverting regulations and public health
policies enacted to minimise consumption related harm. However, Big Food appear to be
using CSR to prevent the creation of a climate in which there are both public and government
support of the regulation of their products.

At present, CSR strategies are not included in companies’ self-regulatory commitments for
responsible marketing to children. However, previous public health literature suggests that
regulation of CSR strategies is required as part of an effective public health approach to
reduce the consumption of ultra-processed foods and SSB (Richards & Phillipson 2017).
Future research should extend this line of enquiry by conducting further qualitative
interviews with public health experts to explore ways in which CSR strategies that target
children, parents and government can be publicly monitored, and seek recommendations for
regulation.

6.7 Conclusion

This is the first study to utilise the critical perspective of public health experts to highlight the
extent to which Big Food’s CSR strategies are a complex and co-ordinated mix of marketing
strategies, rather than a genuine effort to build social value. The findings raise the question as
to whether any of Big Food’s CSR activities can be considered as genuine. Rather, the study
indicates that experts perceived Big Food’s CSR activities as direct marketing to children as
consumers or potential consumers of their products, parents as ‘gatekeepers’ of children’s
diet and values, and governments as the providers of essential public services and safe and
healthy environments to communities. It highlights the similarities and differences between
Big Food’s CSR strategies to that of Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol and promotes an agenda
for the need to consider effective ways to regulate the CSR strategies of Big Food to protect
young children from exposure of companies’ CSR activities in settings where they play sport
and receive health care.
6.8 References


Chapter 7 - Responding to Big Food’s corporate
social responsibility strategies: expert
recommendations for public health action

7.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter presents a journal article that was written by the candidate with co-authors and
supervisors Lyn Phillipson and Heather Yeatman, and submitted for publication in 2018:
Richards, Z, Phillipson, L, & Yeatman, H 2018, ‘Responding to Big Food’s corporate
social responsibility strategies: expert recommendations for public health action’,
*Health Promotion International*, Submitted for review.

This article is the second of two articles that present findings from Study 3.
This article addressed aim 4 of this dissertation and answered research questions 7 and 8.
RQ#7 When, where and what actions should the public health community take to
address Big Food’s CSR strategies?
RQ#8 How do these actions fit within the overall agenda for public health responses
to promote healthy diets and improve the wider food environment?

7.1.1 Author contributions
Zoe Richards had primary responsibility for the manuscript. She formalised the research
questions, designed the study, collected and analysed the data, and was responsible for
writing the manuscript.

Lyn Phillipson assisted in formalising the research questions, data analysis and reviews of the
manuscript.

Heather Yeatman assisted in formalising the research questions, data analysis and reviews of
the manuscript.
7.1.2 Purpose of this study
The initial limited critical public health literature suggested that Big Food’s CSR was a complex and sophisticated marketing strategy that targets children, parents and government. Some action to address tobacco companies’ CSR strategies at an international level has been initiated, but public health action in the context of Big Food’s CSR strategies has not yet been reported. There are potential similarities and differences in the timing, target audiences and support for restriction of Big Food’s CSR as compared to Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol. This study used in-depth qualitative methods to explore what actions experts believed should be taken on Big Food’s CSR, and how these actions might fit within the overall public health agenda to promote healthy diets and improve the wider food environment.

7.1.3 What does this study add to current knowledge?
This article reported on the opinions and practical contributions to knowledge of public health experts, outlining their views on Big Food and CSR and how actions to address Big Food’s CSR strategies could fit within a broader public health framework to improve the wider food environment. The recommendations from experts inform the future development of policy guidelines to counteract the activities of Big Food companies, adding to the calls made by previous research to address this issue. This study also highlights the experts’ identification of the need to frame the comprehensive and strategic public health actions in specific ways so as to create a social movement within the community and to influence government.
7.2 Abstract

**Objective:** To systematically explore when, what and how experts perceived actions should be taken in response to Big Food’s CSR activities, and how these actions fit within the overall agenda for public health responses to promote healthy food environments.

**Methods:** One to one qualitative, semi-structured interviews with international public health experts (N=30), from academic positions at universities (N=16) and civil society positions (N=14), from eight countries.

**Results:** Some experts expressed that action on CSR should be taken, but it was not the most pressing priority. Within this group, experts stated that we need to see controls on direct marketing to children first, and that it may also be unlikely for controls to be placed on CSR due to a lack of political will. However, another group of experts suggested that action should be taken now, and within the context of a broader public health framework. These recommendations include: counter-marketing campaigns to denormalise CSR in the community, targeted at parents and community organisations; and direct lobbying of government, aimed at public policy makers.

**Conclusions:** Additional and consistent actions to respond to Big Food’s CSR activities need to be embedded within existing public health frameworks to limit marketing to children through CSR, and therefore reduce children’s propensity to purchase ultra-processed foods and SSB.

**Implications:** Further debate is also required in the academic community regarding the potential consequences of not calling CSR out as marketing, and what is required to shift community perceptions towards viewing CSR as a marketing activity that needs to be restricted.

**Key words:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Big Food, Industry, Community, Policy.
7.3 Introduction

Public health efforts to minimise the harms associated with over consumption of ultra-processed foods and sugar sweetened beverages (SSB) have attempted to reduce consumption through public health awareness, advocacy, and creating public and government support for policy interventions (e.g. soda tax) (World Health Organization 2004, 2012, 2013). In response to public health measures, Big Food (i.e. large multinational processed food and beverage companies) have employed a range of tactics to continue to maintain market share and to gain public and political favour to prevent public regulation (Moodie et al. 2013). Examples of these include stealth marketing, lobbying federal and state governments, co-opting scientists and funding research (Wiist 2011), and more recently corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies (Dorfman et al. 2012; Moodie et al. 2013; Richards et al. 2015).

CSR is an evolving concept, defined as “a company’s ethical, legal and philanthropic responsibilities to society in addition to meeting the company’s fiduciary responsibility to its shareholders” (Dorfman et al. 2012, p.2). Big Food companies communicate via their public reports and company websites on their activities that seek to address social issues, ranging from environmental sustainability to initiatives aimed at supporting the health and welfare of Indigenous and migrant communities (Dorfman et al. 2012; Gaither & Austin 2016; Richards et al. 2015). Some of these have been acknowledged as potentially ‘genuine’ CSR (e.g. product reformulation) and of ‘value’ by parents and primary school aged children 9. Other activities, however, especially those targeting children (e.g. community sport sponsorship) have been critiqued as ‘questionable’ by researchers, and as deceptive or in conflict with other company values by parents (Richards & Phillipson 2017).

Critical public health literature suggests that Big Food’s CSR is a complex and sophisticated marketing strategy that targets children, parents and government (Dorfman et al. 2012; Richards & Phillipson 2017, 2018; Richards et al. 2015). Studies have reported companies aim to create favourable conditions for the promotion, distribution and sale of processed foods and SSB, with the intention of minimising public regulation of the marketing of these products (Dorfman et al. 2012). These critical studies have also identified strong similarities between the types of CSR strategies employed by Big Food, to those of Big Tobacco. For example, companies appear to be using CSR strategies to align themselves with respected,
credible organisations and events in an attempt to transfer these qualities to their own brands (Brownell & Warner 2009; McDaniel & Malone 2009; Richards et al. 2015).

Researchers also have identified some critical differences in regard to how Big Food utilises CSR activities (Richards et al. 2015; Richards & Phillipson 2017). Unlike Big Tobacco, CSR activities have provided Big Food with direct access into children’s settings. Such regular access allowed Big Food to build brand value and brand loyalty with children from a significantly younger age. Studies have also suggested that their actions aim to normalise the presence and need for Big Food in communities by role modelling behaviours that are desirable to children and their parents (e.g. contributing to charities) (Dorfman et al. 2012; Richards et al. 2015). In one study, parents reported they felt silenced and less able to speak out against Big Food being present in children’s settings and sponsoring children’s events, due to such activities (Richards et al. 2015; Richards and Phillipson 2017).

Thus CSR activities have enabled companies to successfully position themselves as being essential to governments for the provision of important and unique health services to children in communities where such services otherwise may not be provided (Richards and Phillipson 2017). Big Food companies have also employed CSR strategies not just in response to regulation (as was the case for Big Tobacco), but seemingly to prevent it (Dorfman et al. 2012). Big Food may not face the same level of social stigmatization or regulatory pressure that confronted the tobacco industry but companies have quickly launched comprehensive CSR programs in response to increased levels of public criticism associated with the obesity epidemic (Brownell and Warner 2009; Moodie et al. 2013).

In the area of tobacco control, the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Article 5.3, requires member states to protect their tobacco control policies from corporate tactics (e.g. CSR strategies) that promote the commercial interests of the tobacco industry (World Health Organization 2003). Recommendation six of Article 5.3 of the FCTC outlined the needed to denormalise and publicly regulate the tobacco industry’s CSR strategies (World Health Organization 2008). Despite this recommendation Big Tobacco is still using CSR to hinder progress on public health policies in low-to-middle income countries (Kalra et al. 2017).

Similar public health action in the context of Big Food’s CSR strategies is yet to be developed or explicitly included within broader public health action frameworks (Richards
and Phillipson 2017). This study used in-depth qualitative interviews with experts to explore whether, when, what and how they perceived action on CSR should be incorporated into an overall agenda for public health responses to the harms associated with the over consumption of processed foods and SSB.

### 7.4 Methods

#### 7.4.1 Recruitment and participant information

An initial convenience sample of key academic and civil society (e.g. advocacy or not for profit organisations) experts with expertise in Big Food and CSR (N=10) was compiled using a systematic search of academic and grey literature and was then supplemented using Twitter. Participant contact details were retrieved from professional profile pages on organisational webpages. Initial contact was made by email and follow up contact was made by email and a phone call. Snowball sampling was then used asking participants to recommend other experts for participation. Overall, 36 people were contacted, with 30 agreeing to an interview. The final sample consisted of 20 female and 10 male participants, from academic positions at universities (N=16) and civil society positions (N=14), from eight countries including Australia (N =14); Brazil (N=3); France (N=1); Italy (N =1); Mongolia (N=1); New Zealand (N=1); the United Kingdom (N=5); and the United States (N =4). Experience working in the field ranged from five to 25 years. One participant (E14) declared a conflict of interest in relation to their organisation previously receiving funding from an ultra-processed food and beverage company. However, that individual had not received any direct funding and was still included in the study. In relation to the organisation they worked for previously receiving funding from an ultra-processed food and SSB company. However, that individual was employed as an undergraduate student research assistant on that industry funded-project. Because the person had never funded by the industry at any point during their independent research career, the person was still included in the study.

#### 7.4.2 Data collection methods and materials

One to one qualitative, semi-structured interviews were undertaken either in person, or via telephone or Skype. This was a cost-effective way to reach participants living interstate and overseas. Prior to conducting the interview, background information was collected from participants, including: their profession, time spent working in the field of public health, role
within their organisation, and whether they held any conflicts of interest. Participants were then asked a range of open ended questions regarding: what CSR was; their awareness of the CSR strategies of Big Food companies; and what they believed an appropriate public health response to Big Food’s CSR activities would entail. The first author also prompted participants around whether their suggested activities would need to occur at an organisational, community and/or policy level. The questions were developed by the researcher, in conjunction with two experienced public health researchers (candidate’s supervisors) and derived from gaps in the critical public health literature regarding how the public health community should respond to Big Food’s CSR activities.

Interviews were conducted over a three-month period, from June to August 2016. The interviews were conducted in a private room, audio taped, and then transcribed verbatim by the first author for analysis.

7.4.3 Data analysis

All participants were de-identified to ensure confidentiality. Each participant was assigned a sequential number based on the order in which they were interviewed (e.g. Expert 1 (E1)). Transcribed interviews were uploaded to Dedoose software, and then analysed using thematic analysis techniques (Miles and Huberman 1994). First, meaningful sections of text in the interview transcripts were given basic code names. Meaningful sections of text are defined as sections of the transcripts where participants provided responses that assisted in answering the research questions and were significant in the development phase of establishing the key themes. Following this, codes were inductively grouped into themes by the first author. The first analysis of the data revealed a central theme of the participants describing specific recommendations to address CSR to be prescribed within a broader public health framework that aims to promote healthy diets and improve the wider food environment. Therefore, the coding process involved identifying the key stakeholders to be engaged for action on CSR; the specific messages required to motivate key stakeholder groups to act; and the key strategies they should take as part of a coordinated response. Peer debriefing was utilised to enhance the validity of the results, where the first author presented the themes to the co-authors as they were developed, to ensure that they reflected the data accurately and comprehensively (Patton 1990).
7.5 Results

7.5.1 Yes, but not now
The majority of experts described Big Food’s CSR strategies as problematic. They sensed it was likely that companies used these activities as a stalling tactic to prevent regulation of their products, and to shift responsibility for consumption onto consumers. There was a perception that whilst CSR activities were a type of marketing to children, priority needed to be placed on addressing direct marketing strategies to children. This group of experts placed emphasis on the importance of establishing tighter regulations on direct forms of marketing (e.g. television advertising) before in-direct marketing tactics (e.g. CSR strategies) could be established.

“We’re still doing a very poor job of the much more explicit marketing to children for example. So, we’ve a long way to go before we start tackling indirect forms of marketing.” E15

Participants within this group also suggested that it would be unlikely for CSR to become regulated due to a lack of political will among policy makers to want to interact in this space. Some stated that it was likely public policy makers had been co-opted by Big Food and therefore would be reluctant to restrict companies’ marketing activities.

“That might be a bridge too far politically, and I don’t know about the ability of our current regulatory system to even manage to do something like that.” E9

7.5.2 Recommendations for embedded public health action on CSR
For another group of experts, they expressed the view that CSR should be addressed now on the basis of learning from past experience and taking up factors that were transferrable from public health action on the tobacco industry’s CSR. As within the response to tobacco companies, there was a sense that action on CSR should be undertaken as part of a broader public health response to promote healthy diets and improve the wider food environment. These strategies included advocacy efforts in the form of counter marketing directed at the community (parents and community organisations) and lobbying directed at the government (public policy makers). It was noted that such strategies needed to be monitored and evaluated to assess and generate evidence regarding the potential impacts and outcomes of the actions.
“Examples like that can make people really sceptical of industry behaviour and can really help shine the light on the fact that it’s about making themselves look good, more so than it is about donating to the cause.” E11

Experts situated the recommendations within a systems-based change paradigm, rather than the more dominant approach that focused on individual behaviour changes and ‘personal choice’. Their recommendations included counter marketing to de-normalise CSR, building relationships with community organisations and creating a political agenda.

7.5.2.1 Counter marketing to denormalise CSR in the community

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Experts situated the recommendations within a systems-based change paradigm, rather than the more dominant approach that focused on individual behaviour changes and ‘personal choice’. Their recommendations included counter marketing to de-normalise CSR, building relationships with community organisations and creating a political agenda.

Counter marketing to de-normalise CSR in the community

Experts discussed the need for public health networks to commit to dedicated ‘counter marketing’ as a key strategy to raise awareness among the community about how companies use CSR to normalise products, reduce the perceived harms associated with consumption, and to build brand loyalty. In the context of this study, counter marketing was described as the use of social marketing campaigns and advertisements to combat pro-industry influences and
increase pro-health messages. Participants described one clear message that should be communicated to parents and community organisations: ‘CSR is marketing to children’.

“The biggest leveraging tool .... is our own forms of advertising and counter campaigns against them with Twitter and social media, because now we have this social forum where people can get really vocal.” E1

Some experts anticipated that it might be difficult to gain community support for restrictive public health action on Big Food’s CSR strategies. They recommended campaigns should seek to convince consumers that CSR was problematic, while remaining as factual as possible, for example, “refrain from using messages such as ‘Big Food is bad’” [E22]. Participants asserted that an effective way to gain community support for restricting CSR activities was by highlighting that it was a marketing strategy used by companies to influence children’s brand preferences and choices, and children needed to be protected from being exposed to this type of marketing, particularly in children’s settings.

“For some reason people feel quite enraged about that because it’s a community area, our kids should be going there to have fun and play, and these big companies are infiltrating it.” E4

Participants recognised that existing public health coalitions need to build and establish relationships with community organisations involved in promoting health and wellbeing (e.g. not for profit organisations). These organisations were described as essential to lead and assist in the dissemination of counter-marketing campaigns, as they would aid in gathering support from parents.

Experts discussed the importance of encouraging community organisations and parents to undertake grassroots advocacy to influence government. For instance, community organisations and parents working together to develop petitions that sought government funding for community programs rather than funding from Big Food. Experts also noted that building community support and generating outrage needed to precede or at least be undertaken alongside direct lobbying of the government. They identified community support had been essential in getting the government to restrict tobacco companies’ CSR strategies.

“In the food marketing space, we have trouble bringing the community along, and yet we feel that’s quite a clear sort of protecting children type of message that we should be able to get across. Grassroots advocacy is at the most common level is working with the community to bring them on board to influence politicians.” E13
7.5.2.2 Build a political agenda with government

Experts also discussed the importance of directly lobbying government to highlight why Big Food’s CSR was problematic and that there was a need for government action in this area. Again, the key message to be communicated to policy makers was that CSR was a marketing strategy used to influence children’s perceptions of companies, and there was a need to restrict this form of marketing in children’s settings (e.g. sports clubs). Experts indicated that such lobbying efforts also needed to highlight the vulnerability of children and children’s limited critical thinking skills to discern marketing messages,

“You shouldn’t be targeting children who have no conditions to determine what is commercial and what pure information and how to discern between that. It’s a vulnerable population right? We should be protecting this vulnerable population.”

E28

Participants also indicated that it was necessary to lobby governments regarding the need for policy reform around corporate behaviour that would assist in the process of protecting children from exposure to marketing in children’s settings. Experts described three key areas where they believed government could take action to monitor and restrict Big Food’s CSR activities.

The first key action was for government to develop and enact a policy that required companies to publicly disclose information regarding their CSR activities, in accordance with a set of disclosure standards. Participants indicated that it was hard to capture this type of information, as it was not always included in companies’ annual reports. Having access to transparent records was considered useful to allow independent reviewers to identify whether vested interests may be present within companies’ CSR portfolios and to distinguish the monetary value invested by companies. This was considered to be currently unclear.

“At the moment we have voluntary disclosure and what is disclosed is what paints the company in a positive light. So, once again not leaving companies to voluntarily disclose information, but have them undertake more comprehensive reporting of their activities.”

E15

The second key action was for government to undertake meta-regulation of companies’ CSR strategies (in addition to direct marketing strategies), rather than companies undertaking voluntary self-regulation of these activities. Experts stated that self-regulation of marketing practices was typically ineffective and used to forestall policy change, but that there was
potential for this to be strengthened if “accountability mechanisms” [E20] were implemented. Such mechanisms were described as “permitting companies to develop their own standards and rules around their CSR activities that were then observed and monitored by government” [E22]. If companies did not comply with the standards they committed to, then government would be required to intervene to correct it or bring in public regulation.

The third key action described by a large group of experts was that governments should phase out Big Food’s sponsorship of sport using the same evidence-based public health strategies that were once used to phase out tobacco industry’s corporate sport sponsorship. This particular action would involve the government purchasing the sponsorship for a period of time, until sponsors without a vested interest could be obtained.

“The cricket was one example, where the one-day cricket was sponsored by ‘Benson and Hedges’, but the government bought out that sponsorship and picked up the cost until new sponsors could be brought on board.” E17

7.6 Discussion

This was the first study to systematically explore and document experts’ insights into Big Food’s CSR strategies. A majority of experts described CSR to be a stalling tactic to prevent meaningful control of marketing to children and therefore required action. Specific actions recommended by the participants in this study included: undertaking counter marketing to de-normalise CSR in the community; building relationships with community organisations and their parent constituents; and building a political agenda with government.

Internationally there exists a number of public health coalitions that aim to promote healthy food environments and which could implement strategies to respond to Big Food’s CSR activities. These include: the International Network for Food and Obesity/Non-communicable diseases Research, Monitoring and Action Support (INFORMAS) (Swinburn et al., 2013); the World Cancer Research Fund International (WCRFI) (2017); and the Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Alliance (2017). Within these networks there has been at least some focus on CSR activities. For example, the INFORMAS network monitors private-sector policies and practices (Sacks et al. 2013; The University of Auckland 2017), including monitoring corporate political activities (CPA) of companies that seek to influence public health policy (Mialon et al. 2015; 2016; 2017).
Big Food uses a number of key CSR strategies to engage with communities, including CPA strategies of constituency building and involvement in the community (Richards et al. 2015). The frameworks developed by these public health networks currently are not inclusive of a strategic response to such Big Food’s CSR activities. Most of the experts interviewed considered that such frameworks should be expanded to include key clear messaging, stakeholder engagement, monitoring, benchmarking and support to act on or respond to a broader range of Big Food’s CSR activities.

Both the participants in this study and the WHO specify the need to protect children from the influence of Big Food’s marketing strategies in children’s settings. These cover a wide range of settings where children gather, including, but not limited to, “schools, playgrounds, nurseries, pre-schools centres, family clinics, paediatric services, and during any sporting and cultural activities held on these premises” (World Health Organization 2010, p3). WHO endorses these evidence-based sanctions to member states, but they are not enforced.

Recommendations for dealing with CSR activities should include the wide range of settings where children are known to gather including cultural and sporting settings, and other activities that target children and are sponsored by industry, for example, education programs pertaining to health and nutrition, and the provision of resources and equipment (Richards et al. 2015). Alternatively, perhaps a separate recommendation that explicitly states that companies’ are unable to sponsor children’s activities or events, in children’s settings, including anything that is described or positioned as CSR, as this is not explicitly included within the 12 existing WHO recommendations (World Health Organization 2010).

Experts also recommended that existing public health networks’ need to work to build a political agenda with public policy makers address CSR. However, due to the political power currently wielded by Big Food that enables them access to, and dialogue with public policy makers this is likely to be a challenging undertaking (Stuckler & Nestle 2012; The PLoS Medicine Editors 2012). To curtail this, experts suggested that the public health community need begin to advocate around the negative impacts of CSR in our communities.

Internationally, coalitions of health experts are lobbying government to implement evidence-based public health policies and programs to provide healthier food environments and
promote healthy diets in effort to reduce the prevalence of NCDs (NCD Alliance 2017b; The University of Auckland 2017a; World Cancer Research Fund International 2017). Such policies have outlined clear actions for government to undertake and include a range of tax measures (e.g. soda or sugar tax) and non-tax measures (e.g. public education campaigns, product reformulation targets). Using the available global-level evidence-based public health research and policy recommendations related to CSR and CPA will be a strong advocacy tool for persuading communities and government to take a comprehensive and restrictive approach to Big Food’s CSR strategies (Mialon et al. 2015, 2016, 2017).

7.6.1 Limitations

This study was comprised of a small sample of public health experts; therefore, these results should be considered preliminary. To confirm and build on these results, future research should be conducted with a larger sample size. While this study invited experts from various countries, participants whom responded only represented a total of eight countries; seven classified as ‘developed’ and one classified as ‘developing’. Therefore, the results predominantly reflect experts from developed countries, and may not be transferable across developing countries. Future research should also extend this line of enquiry by conducting further qualitative interviews with participants from low-middle countries to gain insights into how Big Food’s CSR strategies should be addressed within this context.

7.6.2 Implications for public health

While the findings of this research and previous public health research indicates that CSR is another form of marketing (Dorfman et al. 2012; Richards & Phillipson 2017, 2018; Richards et al. 2015), there is still a need for greater awareness and debate about the role of CSR in the community. This issue needs to be raised at the community level as it’s important for the public to start being critical of companies’ CSR activities in the same way they are of more traditional marketing strategies (e.g. television advertising). Further debate is also required in the academic community regarding the potential consequences of not acting on CSR, and what is required to shift community perceptions towards viewing CSR as a strategic marketing strategy that needs to be restricted. To assist with this process, the public health community could build relationships with community organisations to develop grassroots advocacy strategies to act on CSR within local communities.
While experts highlighted the need to get Big Food’s CSR on the political agenda, this may not be possible until the community are supportive of restrictions on companies’ CSR strategies, as this was essential in the context of tobacco control (Brownell & Warner 2009). However, previous public health studies indicate denormalising CSR to sever the strong ties between the community and Big Food will be a difficult process for the public health community (Richards & Phillipson 2017, 2018). Further research is required to gauge how the wider community (beyond parents and children) view these activities and what is required to shift public perception to gain public acceptance for comprehensive and restrictive action on Big Food’s CSR strategies.

7.7 Conclusion

The leading international public health experts in this study considered Big Food’s CSR activities were part of comprehensive marketing and persuasive strategies of food companies and not primarily activities to provide social good to communities. They identified the need to embed actions to counter CSR activities within existing public health frameworks (e.g. INFORMAS (Swinburn et al. 2013)) that seek to improve the wider food environment to limit children’s exposure to such marketing of unhealthy products. Specific recommended actions included: undertaking counter marketing to de-normalise CSR in the community; building relationships with community organisations and their parent constituents; and building a political agenda with government. Implementing these actions within the context of a broader public health framework would allow for consistent coordination, implementation and monitoring.
7.8 References


Chapter 8 - Discussion and Conclusion

8.1 Introduction to the chapter

This final chapter presents a discussion of the main results from the three mixed-method studies undertaken. The implications for public health policy and research are discussed, as well as the strengths and limitations of this study.

The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research to further understanding of Big Food’s CSR strategies and the overall contributions to knowledge.

8.2 Gaps in knowledge that were addressed

Whilst there was some evidence that highlighted the intentions of and types of CSR activities being implemented by Big Food internationally (Ban 2016; Batty et al. 2016; Bobba 2013; Dorfman et al. 2012; Schröder & McEachern 2005; Scrinis 2016), there is no evidence-based research pertaining to this in the Australian context. Specifically, there was a gap in knowledge relating to the types of CSR strategies being disseminated, the key target groups and how these activities were promoted.

Prior to this study, no studies pertaining to how parents and children perceive Big Food’s CSR had been reported. Similarly, no studies had been reported that outlined the potential impacts of, and motivations for Big Food’s CSR activities, using the perspectives of public health experts, nor had anyone outlined a comprehensive strategy for public health action on CSR.

To address these gaps in knowledge, this research:

1. Identified and mapped Big Food companies’ CSR activities, including:
   a. The strategic focus of CSR activities;
   b. Intended target audience of CSR activities;
2. Identified the impact of Big Food companies’ CSR strategies, including the degree to which CSR activities positively or negatively influence public perceptions of a specific community segment (parents and children);
3. Explored public health experts’ perceptions of the motivations and impacts of Big Food’s CSR strategies.
4. Reported on the potential public health strategies likely to be effective in minimising the harms associated with CSR activities of Big Food companies.

Several research questions guided this research, to address the aims outlined above. The findings of this study are presented in response to each question and in relation to existing public health literature.

1. **What are the ranges of CSR initiatives that are currently being implemented by Big Food companies in Australia?**

   This study extended the current range of CSR activity categories previously identified in the existing public health literature. Study 1 (Chapter 4) identified a total of 256 CSR activities across six organisations (McDonald’s, Coca Cola, Nestlé, PepsiCo, Mars and Mondeléz International), and seven categories (community, environment, diversity, employee relations, Indigenous, consumer responsibility, partnerships). Of these, the majority related to the categories of environment (30.5%), responsibility to consumers (25.0%) or community (19.5%). McDonald’s reported the most CSR activities (N=85, 33.2% of the sample) and PepsiCo the least (N=14, 5.4%). Big Food companies appeared to be using this range of CSR strategies for three key reasons, to: 1) build brand image through initiatives associated with the environment and responsibility to consumers; 2) target parents and children through community activities; and 3) align themselves with respected organisations and events in an effort to transfer their positive image attributes to their own brands. This was first study of its kind in Australia to map these activities and now provides a clear framework for future monitoring of activities and their impacts.

   Some of the activities identified in this study were similar to those identified in the narrative literature review (Chapter 2). The CSR activities highlighted in the literature included: philanthropy, health information via corporate websites, media campaigns to promote CSR activities, product reformulation and environmental protection.

   Through Study 1 new CSR activities were identified. Philanthropy activities were categorised as ‘Community’ activities in this particular study. ‘Consumer responsibility’ included ‘product reformulation’ and ‘health information on corporate websites’, activities (identified in previous studies as separate activities) together with
partnerships’, ‘Indigenous’, and ‘diversity’ were also new CSR categories developed through Study 1.

2. **Who are the intended target audiences of these CSR activities?**

This study provided empirical data that identified the intended target audiences of a diverse range of CSR activities implemented by Big Food. Findings from Study 1 indicated that environmental initiatives targeted the Australian population as a whole, rather than one specific group. The target groups for ‘diversity’ activities were migrants or disadvantaged youth, and ‘Indigenous’ activities, specifically Indigenous youth. The intended audience for ‘employee relations’ activities were current employees (to encourage retention) and aspiring potential employees (to build a positive image as an employer of choice). A specific target group for CSR activities categorised under ‘partnerships’ was unable to be established, as companies partnered with numerous professional and non-profit organisations with varying objectives, making it difficult to isolate one audience.

The content analysis also identified that parents and children were two key target groups whom Big Food aimed to positively influence through their CSR strategies, specifically through community and consumer responsibility-based activities. From a public health perspective, it was particularly concerning that children under the age of 12 were targeted. Young children are susceptible to the pervasive effects of food marketing, as they have not reached cognitive maturity, and are unable to understand the selling intent behind marketing (Harris & Graff 2012). There has been a lack of public health evidence regarding how children view and interpret CSR activities, and thus Study 2 had a particular focus on this group. Parents being targeted by CSR were also perceived as problematic because parents are, to a large extent, considered to be accountable for their children’s food consumption, and children tend to rely on their parents to reinforce values around food (Wasink 2006). Therefore, the perceptions of parents with children aged eight-12 years were included in the sample in Study 2.

3. **Do parents and children recognise Big Food’s CSR strategies?**

This study is the first to document unsolicited CSR strategy recognition of parents and their children. Findings from Study 2 (Chapter 5) indicated that parents and children
showed unprompted recognition of CSR activities when showed McDonald’s and Coca Cola brand logos. All unprompted strategies included activities that targeted children and included: the Ronald McDonald House Charity, the sponsorship of local sporting clubs, provision of healthier food options and the partnership with Little Athletics Australia. These activities occurred in settings where children would be present, including: community events, local sports clubs, and children’s hospitals.

Unsolicited recognition of CSR activities may be indicative that both parents and children associate the brands with not just the products they produce (e.g. hamburgers, soft drinks), but with activities for children that were considered to be ‘normal’ or ‘everyday’. It may also indicate that CSR strategies enable companies to create strong brand associations with consumers, and that both parents and children may not view CSR to be a separate entity of the brand but embodied within the company. The findings of previous public health studies also suggested that one of the intentions behind Big Food’s CSR strategies was to cultivate an environment in which the consumption of processed foods and SSB was a normal and frequent activity (Dorfman et al. 2012; Gomez et al. 2011).

Overall, the findings indicate that CSR strategies worked by embedding unhealthy products and brands within ‘every day’ children’s activities and settings. Food marketing literature suggested that by aligning unhealthy brands within proximity of established popular culture icons and every day contexts, companies were able to build credibility and acceptance of their products with parents and children, and more broadly society (Bragg et al. 2012; Bragg et al. 2016; Bragg et al. 2013). The findings of this study supported that companies sought to attain positive brand attributes to normalise their own brand within communities by role modelling behaviours that were desirable to parents and children via CSR activities in the same way that other companies have used credible and popular celebrities to promote products (Bragg et al. 2012; Bragg et al. 2016; Bragg et al. 2013).

4. How do parents and children perceive Big Food’s CSR strategies?
Parents and children responded to Big Food’s CSR strategies in one of three ways: support for the companies’ activities because they aligned with their values; confusion, as
the companies’ activities were inconsistent with the nature of their products; or concerned about deceitful CSR strategies.

This study clearly identified that some CSR strategies aligned products with moral causes that resonated with parents and children’s values. When discussing CSR strategies some parents and most children saw value in the activities, viewing them as acts of merit or worth, which was consistent with value theory (Borden 1984). For example, some parents considered CSR activities as worthy because they filled a health service gap, such as, the Ronald McDonald House Charity. For some parents and children, the company’s CSR activities were considered to reflect the company’s moral attributes, which resonated with their own values of charity and health. This indicates that both parents and children had strong brand attachments with brand attributes that extended past the taste and convenience of products.

Previous public health research has shown that the use of celebrity endorsements (including musicians and elite athletes) in food marketing could enhance brand value and the desirability of a product, leading children and adolescents to more positively associate and form attachments with, unhealthy products (Bragg et al. 2012; Bragg et al. 2016; Bragg et al. 2013). The findings of this study indicated that by aligning products with moral causes that aligned with parents and children’s values, companies were able to create brand value and attachments, in the same way achieved through the use of celebrities (Bragg et al. 2012; Bragg et al. 2016; Bragg et al. 2013).

In some instances, the CSR strategies were contrary to companies’ core business and conflicted with the moral values ascribed to the CSR activities. Participants expressed their confusion in relation to how companies’ core business (producing and selling unhealthy products) conflicted with the moral values they also ascribed to the CSR strategies (e.g. charity and physical and environmental health). Although the activities were described to be in conflict with each other, participants still preferred that these activities were provided to communities, as they most likely would not otherwise exist. This finding supported previous public health research where parents identified similar conflicts with fast food and SSB companies sponsoring children’s sport (Kelly et al. 2012a, 2012b). While parents indicated that this form of sponsorship should be restricted,
they also were able to identify benefits to companies sponsoring such programs due to high costs of participation (e.g. registration, uniforms, equipment) (Kelly et al. 2012a, 2012b).

Finally, some parents viewed the activities as harmful, representing a deceit of the public and smokescreen for potential negative health impacts associated with companies’ products. These parents expressed that they did not see CSR to reflect the moral values that others attributed to them, nor did they describe the activities to be of merit or worth. Parents were concerned about how companies that appeared to be a genuine contributor in society may work to normalise brands in communities and influence children’s brand preferences. These findings supported earlier health policy research which reported that parents perceived fast food and SSB companies to be inappropriate sponsors of children’s sport clubs and events, due to the potential negative health effects that sport sponsorship has on children (Kelly et al. 2012a, 2012b).

5. What are the motivations of Big Food’s CSR strategies?
The motivations for CSR strategies were described to be the following: building of credibility and trust with children; decreasing the conflict that parents may feel about the presence of Big Food in children’s settings; and persuading government that companies are responsible and do not require public regulation.

Study 3 (Chapter 6), analysed public health experts perceptions of Big Food’s CSR using the 4P’s marketing framework (Borden 1984). This highlighted that Big Food’s CSR was a complex and integrated mix of marketing strategies used to positively influence three specific target audiences (i.e. children, parents and government). Experts identified the key strategies targeting these groups included: product reformulation, charitable donations, sport sponsorship and self-regulatory marketing codes. These specific strategies were similar to the CSR activities identified in Study 1 (Richards et al. 2015) and the existing public health literature pertaining to Big Food’s use of CSR. This indicated that although the current literature was limited, authors were in agreement regarding how CSR strategies should be categorised to understand whom they target and the motivations behind Big Food’s CSR (Ban 2016; Batty et al. 2016; Dorfman et al. 2012; Schröder & McEachern 2005; Scrinis 2016).
Experts described the outcomes of these strategies as: the building of credibility and trust with children; a decrease in the conflict parents felt about the presence of Big Food in children’s settings; and the persuasion of government that companies were responsible and did not need public regulation. These results supported the findings outlined in Study 1 (Chapter 4) that Big Food used CSR activities to build credibility in the community by aligning themselves with respected organisations and events in an effort to transfer their positive image attributes to their own brands (Richards et al. 2015). Similarly, Study 1 and previous studies indicated that companies’ use community-based CSR activities to target parents and children to build a positive brand image with children (Dorfman et al. 2012; Herrick 2009; Richards et al. 2015), and to alleviate the guilt that parents felt when allowing their children to consume unhealthy products, due to the community patronage of these organisations.

Previous public health studies have indicated that Big Food companies’ use CSR to shift blame from corporations and onto individuals (Dorfman et al. 2012; Herrick 2009) and to build brand value with children (Dorfman et al. 2012). Further to this, the findings from this study indicate that public health experts perceived Big Food’s CSR activities as direct marketing to children as consumers or potential consumers of their products, parents as ‘gatekeepers’ of their children’s diet and values, and governments as the providers of essential public services and safe and healthy environments to communities.

6. **What are the potential impacts of Big Food’s CSR strategies on government, consumers and public health?**

Some experts perceived that the unique access that corporations have to children’s settings strengthened the argument for timely regulation of Big Food’s CSR activities within these settings.

Experts described CSR strategies as an intentional and direct attempt by companies to build brand value and create an allegiance with children as immediate potential consumers of their products, and not just future customers (which was the case for tobacco and alcohol companies). This direct targeting of, and access into children’s settings through CSR was viewed as unethical. This view was based on the vulnerability
of children and their limited critical thinking capacities and are therefore unable to
understand the selling intent behind marketing (Harris & Graff 2012).

Experts also viewed the provision of essential services and sporting opportunities were
being utilised to effectively ‘silence’ parents from speaking out against companies being
present in children’s settings and sponsoring children’s events. This was perceived as
problematic because parents were, to a large extent, considered to be accountable for their
children’s food consumption, and children tend to rely on their parents to reinforce values
around food, due to their own under-developed cognitive abilities (Harris & Graff 2012;
Wansink 2006).

Finally, experts described Big Food’s CSR strategies as similar to Big Tobacco and Big
Alcohol, with regard to their intent to influence public policy (Bond et al. 2010; Brownell
& Warner 2009; Daube 2012), but different in relation to how companies place emphasis
on how CSR activities provided social value communities, particularly to children.
Experts argued that Big Food’s CSR enabled companies to successfully position
themselves as being essential to governments for the provision of important and unique
health services to children that communities otherwise may not have access to (e.g.
Ronald McDonald House Charity).

7. **When, where, and what actions should the public health community take to address
Big Food’s CSR strategies?**

This study was the first to systematically explore and document experts’ insights into how
the public health community could embed a response to Big Food’s CSR strategies. This
included recommendations to build community and government support for restrictions
on CSR activities within the broader public health agenda that promote healthy diets and
improve the wider food environment. However, not all experts believed that action on
CSR was a priority, as they believed that direct marketing strategies (e.g. television
advertising) needed to be addressed first. This group of experts also suggested that it
would be unlikely for Big Food’s CSR activities to become regulated due to a lack of
political will among policy makers to want to interact in this space.
In Chapter 7, experts’ views were presented regarding the need for the existing public health networks and coalitions to commit to dedicated counter marketing. They identified this as a key strategy to raise awareness among the community about how companies use CSR to normalise products, reduce the perceived harms associated with consumption and to build brand loyalty. However, some experts anticipated that it would be difficult to gain community support for restrictive public health action on Big Food’s CSR strategies. The views of experts were consistent with the findings in Chapter 5, which highlighted that a large proportion of parents and children valued CSR activities, signalling that denormalising CSR to sever the strong ties between the community and Big Food would be a difficult process for the public health community.

In the past, counter marketing to tobacco marketing was successful in reducing smoking among teenagers and young adults (Allen et al. 2010; Chauhan & Setia 2016; Pierce et al. 2012). A key example in the context of tobacco control includes the ‘The Truth ® Campaign’ (Allen et al. 2010). This initiative was an evidence-based, counter marketing campaign demonstrated to prevent smoking among at-risk youth. The success of the campaign was attributed largely to key three characteristics: its peer to peer message strategy; the use of branding; and its anti-tobacco industry theme (Allen et al. 2010). A similar initiative could be replicated with an anti-junk food and SSB industry theme that highlights the way that CSR seeks to directly target children in children’s settings. However, previous food marketing research has also highlighted that if misunderstood by children, counter marketing could be counterproductive, and if public health organisations pursue such strategies to reduce the negative influence of food marketing to children, the counter-ads may create boomerang effects (Bellew et al. 2017; Dixon et al. 2008; Dixon et al. 2014).

Experts also recommended for existing public health networks and coalitions to undertake direct lobbying of government to restrict Big Food’s CSR activities within children’s settings. Experts identified three key government actions as part of a co-ordinated response. First, experts recommended government to act by requiring companies to strengthen their existing self-regulation policies. However, this is in conflict with previous public health research which indicates that industry self-regulation of food marketing to children was ineffective and unlikely to curb the amount of unhealthy food
marketing that children were exposed to, or reduce the impact of this exposure (Lumley et al. 2012; Sharma et al. 2010). Some experts suggested that meta-regulation could be acceptable in this instance, whereby industry developed and administered its own arrangements, but government provides legislative backing to enable the arrangements to be enforced. However, this would require leadership, oversight and the threat of mandated regulation if self-regulation did not work (Sharma et al. 2010).

Second, experts urged companies be required to publicly disclose information regarding their CSR activities, in accordance with a set of disclosure standards. Currently, companies publicly report on CSR strategies via public reports and company websites (Richards & Phillipson 2017; Richards et al. 2015). However, this information is limited and does not include the expenditures for all activities or sometimes no information is provided at all. The third key action the alliance should lobby government for is to ban Big Food sponsorship of sporting and community organisations and events nationally. A large group of experts asserted that the government should phase out the sponsorship using the same public health strategies that were used to phase out tobacco sponsorship nationally (Richards 2016; World Health Organization 2003; 2008).

8. **How do these actions fit within the overall agenda for public health responses to promote healthy diets and improve the wider food environment?**

As reported in Chapter 7 (Study 3), most experts described Big Food’s CSR to be problematic as they sensed was likely that companies use these activities as a stalling tactic to prevent public regulation, and shift responsibility onto consumers. However, not everyone articulated that CSR needed to be addressed immediately, with some indicating that it may not be possible to regulate. Others reported a belief that CSR should be addressed using a comprehensive and strategic approach within a broader public health framework that sought to improve the wider food environment. Currently, actions to address Big Food’s CSR strategies are limited in existing public health frameworks. The findings of this preliminary study suggested that a more consistent embedding of strategies to respond to Big Food’s CSR activities within existing public health coalitions and networks was required to reduce marketing to children, and therefore limit opportunities for companies to build brand value and loyalty. Implementing these actions
within the context of a broader framework would allow for consistent coordination, implementation and monitoring (Richards et al. 2014).

Currently, public health frameworks developed by existing public health networks are not inclusive of a strategic response to Big Food’s CSR activities (NCD Alliance 2017; The University of Auckland 2017; World Cancer Research Fund International 2017) and should, according to most of the experts we interviewed, be expanded to include key clear messaging, stakeholder engagement, monitoring, bench marking and support to act on or respond to a broader range of Big Food’s CSR activities. Using the available global-level evidence-based public health research and policy recommendations related to CSR and CPA (Mialon et al. 2015; 2016; 2017) will be a strong advocacy tool for persuading community and government to take a comprehensive and restrictive approach to Big Food’s CSR strategies.

Internationally, coalitions of health experts are lobbying government to implement evidence-based public health policies and programs to provide healthier food environments and reduce the prevalence of obesity and NCDs (NCD Alliance 2017; The University of Auckland 2017; World Cancer Research Fund International 2017). Such policies have outlined clear actions for government to undertake and include a range of tax measures (e.g. soda or sugar tax) and non-tax measures (e.g. public education campaigns, product reformulation targets).

Currently proposed actions tend to prioritise and focus on restricting more traditional forms of marketing, such as, unhealthy food marketing to children on television (Hawkes et al. 2013; Swinburn et al. 2013). However, the findings from this research and other public health studies (Huang et al. 2016; Kelly et al. 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Mehta et al. 2014) suggest the need for companies to go beyond implementing self-regulation of traditional forms of marketing to children, to include social media platforms (Mehta et al. 2014), celebrity endorsements (Bragg et al. 2016; Bragg et al. 2013), and sport sponsorship (in studies where authors did not ascribe this as CSR) (Kelly et al. 2011, 2012a, 2012b), as well as to recognise CSR as marketing to children (Richards & Phillipson 2017; Richards et al. 2015). Given the preliminary evidence that suggests CSR is a comprehensive marketing strategy, and the strong presence of CSR in children’s
settings (Richards & Phillipson 2017; Richards et al. 2015), the absence of calls for restrictions seems to leave a gaping hole in protections for children from marketing.

8.3 Implications for public health policy and research

There were seven clear implications for public health policy and research arising from this research.

1. Findings from this research provided evidence for public health advocates and researchers to continue mapping and monitoring the CSR strategies used by Big Food companies to sell their products to communities. The results of Study 1 highlighted that companies use CSR to align themselves with respected organisations and events in an effort to transfer their positive image attributes to their own brands. This knowledge could be used to educate communities about how businesses use CSR to build market share and consumer loyalty (Richards et al. 2015). Results from Study 2 indicate that this is an important avenue for the public health community to pursue, as the majority of parents and children who participated in this study valued Big Food’s community-based CSR activities and therefore that it might be difficult to gain community support for public health action on CSR. However, previous public health studies have indicated that parents would support policy interventions to restrict unhealthy food sponsorship at both elite and junior sporting clubs (Kelly et al. 2012a, 2012b). For instance, Kelly et al. (2012a) reported that the majority of parents who participated in the study would support restrictions such as the removal of Big Food logos on children’s uniforms. This may indicate that gaining support for restrictions on sport sponsorship in children’s settings (a key CSR strategy) may be the most favourable place to start building community support for action on CSR.

2. Parents should be considered to champion efforts to address the potential impacts of ‘questionable’ CSR strategies, to carry this concern forward to other segments of the community, policy makers and governments. The results from Study 3 indicated that experts viewed the provision of essential services and sporting opportunities were being utilised to effectively ‘silence’ parents from speaking out against companies being present in children’s settings and sponsoring children’s events. However, findings from Study 2 identified that some viewed CSR to be in conflict with the company’s core business (i.e. products and sales of ultra-processed foods and SSB) or
as harmful, representing a deceit of the public and a smokescreen for the potential negative health impacts associated with companies’ products. An existing advocacy platform that could highlight parental concerns regarding CSR is the Parents’ Voice network (Parents' Voice 2015). The community driven organisation aims to improve the food and activity environments of Australian children through a range of advocacy campaigns and programs, some of which already address elements of junk food marketing (e.g. sports sponsorship, pester power) (Huang et al. 2016; Kelly et al. 2011, 2012b; Mehta et al. 2014). Working with an organisation such as this would also allow for action on CSR strategies to be framed as a community issue, rather than nanny state intervention.

3. Building on this, findings from Study 2 highlighted that to be successful in challenging communities’ beliefs, the public health community must consider how to address these elements of value with replacements that come from a place that holds no vested interest, but still ensure the community need is met. For instance, the Healthway framework (Healthway 2016) may serve as an example where funding for a community need can be met, whilst also reducing the promotional opportunities for corporations. However, it should be noted that evaluations of Healthway sponsorships indicate that this is already over prescribed (3:1) (Maitland et al. 2016) and most Australian states and territories do not have Health Promotion Foundations to implement this type of sponsorship.

4. In the context of tobacco control, government legislated for specific amounts of revenue derived from tax measures placed on tobacco products to be used to buy out corporate sponsorship of sporting events (Richards 2016). Examining the feasibility of introducing hypothecated taxes on processed foods and SSBs to be utilised in the same manner may be a potential course of action for public health researchers. However, it should be noted that state-based tobacco taxes in Australia are no longer permitted (Scollo & Bayly 2016). Therefore, it may only be possible if the hypothecated taxes were to be implemented at a national level, rather than state-based.

5. Future research should extend this line of enquiry by conducting further qualitative interviews with public health experts to explore ways in which CSR strategies that target children, parents and government can be publicly monitored, and seek their recommendations for regulation. Chapter 4 suggested that Big Food’s CSR strategies should be seen as critically different to Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol’s CSR activities
because of its blatant marketing to children and their guardians (parents and government) as current and potential customers. Additionally, findings from this study also signalled that Big Food’s CSR activities should be viewed as significantly different, due to the timing in which companies have begun to employ CSR, as it appeared that Big Food had implemented CSR activities much sooner than tobacco and alcohol companies (Dorfman et al. 2012). For example, Big Tobacco employed CSR as a means of subverting regulations and public health policies enacted to minimise consumption related harm (World Health Organization 2003; World Health Organization 2003). However, Big Food appears to be using CSR pre-emptively to prevent the regulation of their products and marketing practices (Dorfman et al. 2012; Herrick 2009).

6. Chapter 6 suggested that a more consistent embedding of actions to respond to Big Food’s CSR activities within existing public health networks was required to reduce marketing to children and to reduce the propensity for children to purchase unhealthy products. However, for this to be possible, influential advocates would be required to champion policy responses to Big Food’s CSR strategies on political agendas (Richards et al. 2014). Implementing these actions within the context of a broader public health framework would allow for consistent coordination, implementation and monitoring (Richards et al. 2014).

7. While the findings of this research and previous public health studies indicate that CSR was a marketing strategy (Batty et al. 2016; Dorfman et al. 2012; Richards & Phillipson 2017; Richards et al. 2015), there is still a need for greater awareness and debate about the role of CSR in the community. It’s important for the public to be critical of companies’ CSR activities in the same way they are of more traditional marketing strategies. Further debate is also required in the academic community regarding the potential consequences of not positioning CSR as a type of marketing, and what was required to shift community perceptions towards viewing CSR as a strategic marketing tactic that needed to be restricted.
8.4 Strengths of this dissertation

This research is supported by four key strengths.

1. This dissertation is the first series of qualitative studies to systematically explore Big Food’s CSR strategies, bringing together the perspectives of industry (via industry documents) (Richards et al. 2015), consumer perspective (parents and children) (Richards & Phillipson 2017) and public health experts. Multiple perspectives were taken into account to establish consistency across the data sources and to uncover deeper meaning in the data. Employing multiple viewpoints into this dissertation also strengthens the argument for public health action on Big Food’s CSR strategies, and allowed the candidate to draw implications for public health and future research across multiple areas.

2. This dissertation is also the first to develop a schematic coding framework that allows for the categorisation of Big Food companies’ CSR strategies. In developing this framework, the candidate was able to provide definitions for each category, which will assist future researchers in identifying and categorising CSR activities in future studies that seek to provide an overview the type and target audience of companies’ CSR programs. Developing these categories also allowed for CSR activities to be further categorised into ‘genuine’ and ‘questionable’ CSR activities, providing a more nuanced way to discuss CSR with the public and public health community.

3. Additionally, Study 1 and 2 of the research (Chapter 4 & 5) took into consideration companies that have substantial presence in both Australia and internationally, as indicated by sales revenues (Roy Morgan Research 2014) . To increase the generalisability of results of both studies, a range of Big Food categories were included to represent: a) fast food; b) sugar sweetened beverages; and c) packaged foods high in sugar, fat and/or salt.

4. Study 2 is the first to use value theory (Hirose & Olson 2015) to understand the depth of parents’ and children’s attachment to Big Food’s CSR strategies, highlighting the positive attributions that CSR generates for the two target groups. Study 3 (Chapter 6) was the first to utilise a marketing framework (4P’s) (Borden 1984) to map public health expert perceptions of CSR activities, which highlighted the coordinated and sophisticated nature of Big Food’s CSR.
8.5 Limitations of this dissertation and recommendations for future research

This dissertation has six limitations, which should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. These limitations have already been considered when formulating the recommendations and directions for future research.

1. Study 1 of the research (Chapter 4), contained to a sample of six companies. A larger sample may have provided a more comprehensive overview of CSR strategies being implemented in Australia. Future research should seek to include additional Big Food companies that promote their CSR programs either in a public report or on a public website not included in this research (e.g. Kentucky Fried Chicken). The data collected in Study 1 was deliberately restricted to Australian corporate websites and CSR reports; therefore, it is possible that other valuable information exists beyond the sources utilised. A wider range of industry documents (e.g. annual reports) may provide additional insight as to the range of marketing strategies used by Big Food. Further, this research did not report on the financial value of the different CSR strategies considered in this study. Different types of CSR activities were considered in equal value, which may mask their relative role in an individual company’s CSR portfolio or the CSR strategies of the industry as a whole.

2. It’s currently unclear how much money is being invested into activities as information is limited to what is described in company CSR reports or on their websites, with not all expenditures for all activities accounted for or sometimes no information is provided at all. However, given both parents and children’s ability to recognise CSR activities in Study 2 (Chapter 5), it could be assumed that for companies this is money well spent. Therefore, future research should extend this line of enquiry by examining the value of corporate investments in the various CSR activities and community reactions to them, in order to provide insight regarding the relative costs and benefits associated with different types of CSR activities. This type of information could be used to help the public determine whether CSR activities are ‘genuine’ efforts to improve products and practices or are ‘questionable’ attempts to build market share.

3. Study 2 was comprised of a small sample of parents and children; therefore these results should be considered preliminary. To confirm and build on these results, future research should be conducted with a larger sample size. Additionally, the sample only consisted of parents and children from middle to high-income neighbourhoods. It is
possible that the perceptions of consumers from low-income areas may vary, and therefore the results may not be transferable across all socio-economic groups. Therefore, future research should also extend this line of enquiry by conducting further qualitative interviews with participants from low socio-economic neighbourhoods to gain insights into how this group perceive CSR strategies.

4. Although the children included in Study 2 were posed the interview questions first there is a possibility that at times they were influenced by their parents’ responses. To limit this from happening, future studies could use ‘friendship dyads’ whereby children are interviewed with a friend. Furthermore, the Coca Cola ad used in this study may have caused confusion for the participants, as it included the Ronald McDonald House, which is usually promoted by McDonald’s. Therefore, participants’ responses about this ad may have been in reference to McDonald’s rather than Coca Cola. To prevent this from happening in future, studies should incorporate ads that promote CSR activities, but don’t cross over. Quantitative approaches could be utilised to explore parents and children responses to CSR activities by Big Food companies. For instance, experimental studies could be used to assess the impact on children and parents who engage in ultra-processed food and SSB branded CSR activities versus others who do not (e.g. perceptions of companies, whether CSR impacts their food intake).

5. Study 3 (Chapter 6 & 7) was comprised of a small sample of public health experts; therefore, these results should be considered preliminary. To confirm and build on these results, future research should be conducted with a larger sample size. While this study invited experts from various countries, participants whom responded only represented a total of eight countries; seven classified as ‘developed’ and one classified as ‘developing’. Therefore, the results predominantly reflected experts from developed countries, and may not be transferable across developing countries. Future research should also extend this line of enquiry by conducting further qualitative interviews with participants from low-middle countries to gain insights into how Big Food’s CSR strategies are perceived within this context and to explore how CSR should be addressed in low-middle income strategies.

6. Chapter 7 provided recommendations for action to guide public health researchers in developing a comprehensive and strategic response to Big Food’s CSR in regards to what the key messages and actions should be and who they should target. However,
this dissertation does not provide specific guidelines for how these actions should be coordinated and implemented. Future studies may seek to speak to employees of public health organisations and policy makers in regard to how we can translate these recommendations into practice. Additionally, future research should seek to test the recommended persuasive messages with community organisations and parents to see if they are successful in building the desired climate for change. It should also be acknowledged that the perspectives of government representatives have not been included in this dissertation. This should be pursued in future research to explore whether the recommendations outlined in Chapter 6 could be translated into policy. Additionally, there is a need to evaluate the impacts that Big Food’s CSR strategies may have on policy makers and the policy making process.

8.6 Final conclusions and contributions to knowledge

Overall, this study conducted an analysis of the CSR activities implemented by the Australian subsidiaries of Big Food companies over a series of sequential, mixed qualitative method studies.

Study 1 (Chapter 4) identified and mapped Big Food companies’ CSR activities including: the strategic focus of companies’ activities and intended target audiences of companies’ strategies. Informed by the Inclusive Social Rating Criteria (KLD Research & Analytics Inc 2003), this dissertation developed a new classification schema for categorising CSR activity undertaken by a sample of Big Food companies. This resulted in seven CSR categories and definitions (community, environment, diversity, employee relations, Indigenous, consumer responsibility, partnerships). Both serve as a theoretical guide to mapping and monitoring CSR as a specific type of marketing. This framework may also be applied to map CSR strategies across a range of unhealthy commodity industries (e.g. tobacco, alcohol), or to continue assessing updated CSR reports and company websites, as both reports and webpage content are updated regularly (Richards et al. 2015).

Given the diverse range of activities that may be used as part of Big Food’s CSR strategies (as identified in Chapter 4), categorisation of these into two groups was useful to consider the potential range of impacts and where public health advocates should focus their attention.
(presented in Chapter 5). The categorisation into two groups (genuine CSR, questionable CSR) also provided a nuanced way for the public health community to discuss CSR activities with the public. However, it should be noted that it might not be possible to identify whether any of Big Food’s CSR activities can be considered as genuine without access to internal industry documents (Dorfman et al. 2012; Richards & Phillipson 2017; Richards et al. 2015).

Study 2 (Chapter 5) employed qualitative semi-structured dyadic interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of parents and children’s awareness and interpretation of Big Food’s CSR strategies to understand how CSR shapes their beliefs about companies. It is the first to document unsolicited CSR strategy recognition of parents and their children. This study revealed the mixed perceptions of parents and children, regarding Big Food’s CSR activities, whereby some perceived these as valuable or in conflict with companies’ core business. Some parents also considered the potential health harms associated with Big Food’s accepted place in the community. Given that a large proportion of parents and children who participated in this study valued ‘questionable’ CSR activities; it may be quite difficult to gain public support for action on CSR, which has been essential in getting the government to regulate other big companies’ strategies in areas such as tobacco and alcohol. Therefore, efforts to gain public acceptance and support for the public health intervention on CSR may need greater levels of persuasion and compensation for the public to be supportive of a comprehensive and restrictive approach.

Study 3 utilised qualitative methods to gain an in-depth understanding of public health experts’ knowledge of Big Food’s CSR motivations and strategies and their views on the potential impacts on government, consumers and public health. Experts variously described CSR in terms consistent with the 4P’s (product, price, place and promotion) of an effective ‘marketing mix’ of strategies (Borden 1984). Big Food’s CSR activities were observed as direct marketing to children as consumers or potential consumers of their products, parents as ‘gatekeepers’ of their children’s diet and values, and governments as the providers of essential public services and safe and healthy environments to communities. Study 3 also provided evidence that public health experts perceive Big Food’s CSR activities to be attempting to build credibility and trust with children; decrease the conflict that parents may feel about the presence of companies in children’s settings; and to persuade government that companies are responsible and do not require public regulation.
Study 3 (Chapter 7) also explored what actions experts believed should be taken on Big Food’s CSR, and how these actions fit within the overall agenda for public health responses to improve the wider food environment. This chapter offers practical contributions to knowledge, outlining recommendations for public health action to address Big Food’s CSR strategies. The recommendations from experts may be used to inform the development of policy guidelines to counteract the activities of Big Food companies, adding to the calls made by previous research to address this issue (Brownell & Warner 2009; Moodie et al. 2013). The findings also highlight that the public health response to Big Food’s CSR needs to be embedded within already existing comprehensive public health frameworks that seek to create healthy food environments (e.g. the NOURISHING framework, INFORMAS) (Hawkes et al. 2013; Swinburn et al. 2013). Chapter 6 also highlighted that the public health community needs to take a lead in denormalising Big Food’s CSR as a marketing activity, rather than an attempt to provide social good to communities.

Overall, this dissertation asserts that Big Food’s CSR activities are indeed a deceptive marketing tactic that provides companies with access to children’s settings and allows them to build brand value beyond the products they provide. It also highlights that Big Food is using CSR to prevent the creation of a climate in which the public and government support for regulation, rather than circumvent existing public health policies (Brownell & Warner 2009; Moodie et al. 2013). Therefore, in order to be comprehensive, this dissertation recommends that the regulation and restriction of CSR should also be considered as part of an effective public health approach to promote healthy diets and improve the wider food environment. While CSR may provide some societal value, the public health community cannot lose sight of the fact that Big Food’s primary objective of CSR activities is to increase their profits (Brownell & Warner 2009; Rutkow & Pomeranz 2011; The PLoS Medicine Editors 2012), and is not to support the public’s health. The challenge for public health is getting our government and communities to see past the smoke screen companies’ CSR activities have created.

8.7 References


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Appendix A

Phase 2

Parent consent form
Research Title: Understanding parents and children’s perceptions of community-based activities implemented by the Food Industry

Researchers: Miss Zoe Richards, Dr Lyn Phillipson, and Professor Heather Yeatman.

I have been given information about the research project “Understanding parents and children’s perceptions of community-based activities implemented by the Food Industry”. I have had a chance to discuss the project with a member of the research team and to ask any questions.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time prior to the publication of the results of the study. My non-participation or withdrawal of consent will not affect my relationship with the University of Wollongong or the research team.

I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used in Zoe Richards’ PhD thesis and may be used in several academic journal publications and presentations.

I understand that if I have any enquiries about the research I can contact Zoe Richards via znr953@uowmail.edu.au.au. If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

I provide consent to:

- Participate in an interview for approximately 30 minutes  
  Yes ☐  No ☐
- The interview being audio recorded  
  Yes ☐  No ☐
- Direct quotes being used in published work  
  Yes ☐  No ☐
- I would like a copy/copies of the interview transcript  
  Yes ☐  No ☐

Signed
...........................................................................  ..../.../...

Name (please print)
..........................................................................................
Appendix B

Phase 2

Child consent form
Research Title: Understanding parents and children’s perceptions of community-based activities implemented by the Food Industry

Researchers: Miss Zoe Richards, Dr Lyn Phillipson, and Professor Heather Yeatman.

“Hello, my name is Zoe, and I’m from the University of Wollongong, and I’d like to ask you some questions about some food companies that you may know. I’d also like to show you some ads from these food companies, and ask you what you think about them. This information will be used in my PhD thesis, and may be used in several academic journal publications and presentation. This interview will also be audio taped.

Your participation is voluntary, and will only involve one interview for approximately 30 minutes today. You are free to stop the interview at any stage, or withdraw your information from the study after the interview is completed. This will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong or the research team.

To ensure that you feel comfortable with participating in this interview, can you please say yes or no to the following?”

Do you consent to:

- Participating in an interview for approximately 30 minutes
  - Yes [ ]  No [ ]
- The interview being audio recorded
  - Yes [ ]  No [ ]
- Direct quotes being used in published work
  - Yes [ ]  No [ ]
- Would like a copy/copies of the interview transcript
  - Yes [ ]  No [ ]
Appendix C

Phase 2

Participant information sheet
Project title: Understanding parent’s and children’s perceptions of community-based activities implemented by the Food Industry

Purpose of the research

This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong. The aim of this research is to understand how parents and children interpret messages included in a range of selected food companies’ promotional advertisements.

Researchers

The research team includes Miss Zoe Richards, Dr Lyn Phillipson, and Professor Heather Yeatman from the University of Wollongong. The contact details for the researchers are:

Miss Zoe Richards    Dr Lyn Phillipson
PhD Candidate     School of Health and Society
School of Health and Society   University of Wollongong
University of Wollongong   lphillip@uow.edu.au
znr953@uowmail.edu.au  02 42214773
Professor Heather Yeatman
Head of School – Health and Society
University of Wollongong
hyeatman@uow.edu.au
02 4221 3153

What we would like you to do

Participants will be asked to partake in a short 30-minute interview together. The interviews will be guided by questions developed by the research team. Participants will be shown some ads and asked what you think about those ads. The types of questions you will be asked are listed below:

1. Demographic questions (e.g. age, gender, height, weight, and socio-economic status).
2. How you feel about the food companies included in this study.
3. What you think about the advertisements that the food companies use to promote their products and community-based activities.

Participants will be reimbursed for their time with a $30 Coles-Myer gift voucher (one per family).

Possible risks, inconveniences and discomforts

Apart from the time it takes to participate in an interview, we foresee minimal risks for those who partake in this study.
Your involvement in the study is **voluntary**. You may withdraw your participation from the study at any point prior to our results being published, and withdraw any data that you have provided. Participants will have until December 2015 to withdraw. Declining to participate in the study will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong, nor will it affect your relationship with the organisation through which you have been recruited.

**Privacy and your information**

To ensure confidentiality, all participants will be allocated a participant identification number which will be used for data analysis and writing up of results. Please feel free to contact a member of the research team via phone, or email if you have any concerns about this at any point during the study. You are also able to request a copy of your interview transcript.

Any interview recordings, transcripts or other data will be stored securely by the research team in a locked filing cabinet or in password-protected files for electronic information. We will store the data from this project for a minimum of five years after the publication of our results. If you would like to access your information at any point during the project, including after publication, you may contact the researchers.

**Benefits of the research**

The information collected from your interview will be analysed and used in Zoe Richards’ PhD thesis. The research team also plan to publish several articles in academic journals.

**Ethics review and complaints**

This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Social Science, Humanities and Behavioural Science) of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research has been conducted, you can contact the UoW Ethics Officer on (02) 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

Thank you for your interest in this study.
Appendix D

Phase 2

Participant details form
Parent Details:  
Participant Name: ____________________  
Participant ID: ____________________  
Age: ________  
Gender: Male ☐  
          Female ☐  
Height: _____ (cm)  
Weight: _____ (kg)  
Postcode: ______

Child Details:  
Participant Name: _____________________  
Participant ID: ______________________  
Age: ________  
Gender: Male ☐  
          Female ☐  
Height: _____ (cm)  
Weight: _____ (kg)
Appendix E

Phase 2

Interview schedule
Interview preamble:

Good morning/afternoon (Name of Participant),

I am (Interviewer Name) from the University of Wollongong, and I’m going to ask you some questions about some food companies that you may know. I’m also going to show you some ads from these food companies, and ask you what you think about them.

Section 1: Reactions and attitudes towards selected food companies (10 minutes)

Participants will be shown three visual representations of selected companies one at a time (pictured below), and then asked the following questions and prompts. Prompts will vary, depending on the answers provided.
1. What can you tell me about this company?
2. When you see this image, how does it make you feel?

Prompts:
Could you explain this in more detail? Why?

Section 2: Reactions to CSR promotions (15 minutes)
Participants will be shown one CSR advertisement and then asked the following questions:

1. What do you think when you see this ad?
2. What do you think they are trying to tell you
3. Could you think of anything else that they could be doing for the community?

Prompts:
Could you explain this in more detail?
Why?

Advertisements:
Coca Cola - Ronald McDonald House (1 minute, 6 seconds)
McDonald’s – Join us on Clean up Australia Day (34 seconds)

Nestle – Milo, the official drink of play (31 seconds)
Concluding question:

1. Overall, do you think Food companies do mainly positive or negative things for communities?

Why?

Thank you for participating today, is there anything else you would like to say in regards to what we have discussed today before we finish up?
Appendix F

Phase 3

Recruitment email
Dear (Name),

This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong regarding Big Food’s use of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies. This study aims to use one to one qualitative interviews with public health experts working in both academic and non-academic roles in the community to triangulate the findings already established within a multi-study PhD thesis.

As part of this research, we would like you to take part in a one to one qualitative semi-structured interview. Interviews will be conducted over the telephone (or in person if you live in the Illawarra or Sydney region). The interview will include questions regarding the following:

1. Your understanding of CSR strategies;
2. Your perception of the impacts that CSR strategies may have on consumers;
3. Your perception of whether you believe CSR poses any ethical dilemmas; and
4. Whether you believe any action is required from within the public health community to counteract Big Food’s use of CSR strategies.

This interview will be audio taped in a private room, with your consent, and will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Alternatively, if you do not wish to participate in this research, we will have no further contact with you in the future.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Zoe Richards
PhD Candidate, School of Health and Society & Centre for Health Initiatives
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wollongong

Supervisors
Dr Lyn Phillipson and Prof Heather Yeatman
Appendix G

Phase 3

Consent form
Research Title: Challenging Big Food’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies: expert interviews with public health advocates

Researchers: Miss Zoe Richards, Dr Lyn Phillipson, & Professor Heather Yeatman.

I have been given information about the research project “Challenging Big Food’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies: expert interviews with public health advocates”. I have had a chance to discuss the project with a member of the research team and to ask any questions. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time prior to the publication of the results of the study. My non-participation or withdrawal of consent will not affect my relationship with the University of Wollongong or the research team.

I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used in Zoe Richards’ PhD thesis and may be used in academic journal publications and presentations.

I understand that given the specific nature of the research topic and that I may be identifiable from my responses used to report the study findings in academic journal articles and presentations. However, I will have the opportunity to request that the research team do not use any quotes that render me identifiable in the study.

I understand that if I have any enquiries about the research I can contact Miss Zoe Richards via zmr953@uowmail.edu.au. I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

I consent to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating in an interview for approximately 45 minutes</th>
<th>Yes ☐  No ☐</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My interview being audio recorded</td>
<td>Yes ☐  No ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My direct quotes being used in published work</td>
<td>Yes ☐  No ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the research team contacting me to seek approval to use quotes that may render me identifiable</td>
<td>Yes ☐  No ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like a copy of my interview transcript</td>
<td>Yes ☐  No ☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Signed .................................................. Date ....../....../......

Name (please print)
Appendix H

Phase 3

Participant information sheet
Participant Information Sheet

Challenging Big Food’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies: expert interviews with public health advocates

Purpose of the research
This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong. This study aims to use one to one qualitative interviews with public health experts working in both academic and non-academic roles in the community to triangulate the findings already established within a multi-study PhD thesis. So far the student has conducted and completed the following:

1. A narrative review of the broad public health and nutrition policy literature to situate CSR as an influential strategy within the other more commonly used marketing tactics.
2. A content analysis of industry documents to identify the key characteristics of CSR strategies as described in the corporate documents of selected Australian sub-branches of multinational Big Food companies.
3. Qualitative dyadic interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of how parents and children interpret the messages promoted in a range of CSR advertisements.

To corroborate these findings from these studies, the research team now wishes to speak with public health advocates with expertise in this area.

Researchers
The research team includes Miss Zoe Richards, Dr Lyn Phillipson, and Professor Heather Yeatman from the University of Wollongong. The contact details for the researchers are:

Miss Zoe Richards
PhD Candidate
School of Health and Society
Centre for Health Initiatives
University of Wollongong
znr953@uowmail.edu.au

Dr Lyn Phillipson
Australian Health Services Research Institute
Centre for Health Initiatives
University of Wollongong
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02 4221 4773

Professor Heather Yeatman
Head of School – Health and Society
University of Wollongong
hyeatman@uow.edu.au
02 4221 3153
What we would like you to do

As part of this research, we would like you to take part in a one to one qualitative semi-structured interview. Interviews will be conducted over the telephone (or in person if you live in the Illawarra or Sydney region); however, if you will be attending the 13th Congress on Obesity in Vancouver, Canada, the interview can be conducted in person whilst at the conference. Interviews will be audio taped in a private room, with your consent, and will last approximately 30-45 minutes. One to one qualitative semi-structured interviews have been chosen due the open-ended nature of the questions being asked, as we wish to obtain detailed responses from participants. This type of data cannot be feasibly obtained via a self-administered questionnaire.

If you agree to participate in this study, please provide the researchers with your preferred contact details. Alternatively, if you do not wish to participate in this research, we will have no further contact with you in the future. The interview will include questions regarding the following:

1. Your understanding of CSR strategies;
2. Your perception of the impacts that CSR strategies may have on consumers;
3. Your perception of whether you believe CSR poses any ethical dilemmas; and
4. Whether you believe the public health community should respond to or monitor Big Food’s CSR strategies.

Possible risks, inconveniences and discomforts

As this research is considered to be ‘low risk’ there are minimal ethical considerations. Due to the specific nature of this research, it is possible that the information you provide may be identifiable. Before using any quotes from this study that may be identifiable we will contact you with the quote, and the context in which we will use it in publications. You will have the opportunity to request that we do not use the quote in the study.

You are also able to request a copy of your interview transcript.

Your involvement in the study is voluntary. You may withdraw your participation from the study at any point prior to our results being published, and withdraw any data that you have provided. Declining to participate in the study will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong.

Privacy and your information

Your participation in this study will be confidential.

Any interview recordings, transcripts or other data will be stored securely by the research team in a locked filing cabinet or in password-protected files for electronic information.

We will store the data from this project for a minimum of five years after the publication of our results. If you would like to access your information at any point during the project, including after publication, you may contact the researchers.
Funding and benefits of the research
This research serves as an important case study to gain expert opinion on the potential influences of CSR as a marketing tactic. We hope that the data collected in this study will be used as a broad resource by the public health community.
The information we collect from your interview will incorporated into Zoe Richards’ PhD thesis. The research team also plan to publish several articles in academic journals based on the interviews.

Ethics review and complaints
This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Social Science, Humanities and Behavioural Science) of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research has been conducted, you can contact the UoW Ethics Officer on (02) 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.
Thank you for your interest in this study.
Appendix I

Phase 3

Interview framework
Interview Framework

First, I would like to ask you a few questions about your professional background.

Participant Background Information

1. Organisation/place of work
2. Role within organisation
3. Any associations with not for profit organisations, boards, or affiliations with food industry bodies.
4. Period of time spent working in this field.

Now we will move to the key areas of interest that I’d like to talk to you about today regarding Big Food’s use of CSR strategies.

Theme 1: Understanding of CSR Strategies

What is your understanding of the term ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’?

Prompts:
1. Are you aware of who implements CSR programs?
2. What types of CSR programs do they implement?
3. Who do you perceive them to be trying to reach?

Theme 2: Perceived impacts of CSR strategies on consumers

What do you believe to be the impact of Big Food CSR strategies on consumers?

Prompts:
1. Consumers in general?
2. Parents & Children?
3. Vulnerable population groups?

Theme 3: Perceptions of whether CSR poses any ethical dilemmas

What are your thoughts on food companies’ CSR strategies posing an ethical dilemma?

Prompts:
1. What are your views on food companies providing social or health programs?
2. How do you feel about companies promoting their community initiatives?
3. What are your thoughts on the regulation of CSR strategies?
Theme 4: Perceptions of whether public health community should respond to or monitor CSR

What are your views on the need for the public health community to respond to or monitor food companies’ CSR strategies?

Prompts:
1. At the community level?
2. At the policy level?
3. Advocacy initiatives?

Those are all of the questions I wanted to ask you today, before we finish is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this interview.
Appendix J

APPENDIX K

Appendix L

Complete reference list


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