A growing proportion of the global burden of disease can be attributed to commercialization of products that are backed by industry giants. These products include tobacco, alcohol, and sugar-sweetened beverages. These industries are politically and economically influential, and utilize an array of tactics to promote their products. Previous research has shown that evidence-based public health policies have been opposed or watered down in the battle between health and profit. Despite the recognition that industry interference has been hampering policy adoption and implementation efforts, few attempts have been made to conceptualize industry tactics, and to compare them across public health issues. This study proposes a conceptual framework that illustrates the domains of industry interference by drawing on literature pertaining to tobacco, alcohol, and sugar-sweetened beverages.

Methods

A scoping review was undertaken in March 2018 via PubMed, Scopus, EconLit, Business Source Complete, Global Health Observatory, Grey Literature Report, Communication Initiative Network, and watchdog websites. We identified studies pertaining to industry tactics published in English. A grounded theory approach was undertaken to analyze published papers and to construct the conceptual framework.

Results

Six domains of industry interference were identified across the three industries and illustrated in the framework: Challenging science; creating a positive public image; manipulating economics; influencing government policy making and implementation; mounting legal challenges; and anticipating future scenarios.

Conclusions

Advocates can use this framework to devise strategies to counter industry interference. Studies can also be undertaken to explore the applicability of this framework to other industrial epidemics. Such evidence will contribute to actionable knowledge as well as theory development.

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