

Representative, communicational and institutional changes in the Brazilian associations of food industries

Inflexões representativas, comunicacionais e institucionais em associações das indústrias de alimentos brasileiras

Inflexiones representativas, comunicacionales e institucionales en asociaciones de industrias de alimentos brasileñas

Caio Pompeia ¹

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Abstract

As the agenda for promoting adequate and healthy food is strengthened in Brazil, national food industries associations have changed their corporate political activity (CPA). Highlighting the Brazilian Food Industry Association (ABIA), the Brazilian Dairy Association and the Sugarcane Industry Union, and addressing the period between 2014 and 2020, this article analyzes this change in its representative, communicational and institutional dimensions. Methodologically based on the CPA identification model, the sources of the work comprise records of participant observation in the Pensar Agropecuária Institute (IPA) and in the Brazilian National Congress, notes of interviews with directors and technicians from business and political associations, in addition to various documents and websites of the associations, the State and civil society. The results show that, in the representative dimension, the food industries associations reformulated their lobbying in Congress, creating a commission in the IPA for that purpose; in the communicational dimension, there was increased prominence of a narrative of appropriation of the agenda for adequate and healthy food, a discursive strategy that was followed by two other narratives, one in opposition to the agenda, the other of shifting corporate responsibilities to individual decisions; finally, in the institutional dimension, there were notable changes in the ABIA, in addition to the creation of other associations and networks. The conclusion indicates that the CPA of the main food industries associations in the country is changing sharply to respond to criticisms of the commercial determinants of health.

Food Industry; Healthy Diet; Food Security; Lobbying; Legislative

Correspondence

C. Pompeia

Departamento de Antropologia, Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo.
Av. Professor Luciano Gualberto 315, sala 1061, Cidade Universitária, São Paulo, SP 05508-010, Brasil.
caporine@gmail.com

¹ Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brasil.



Introduction

Amid the increasing prevalence, in Brazil, of chronic noncommunicable diseases associated with overweight and obesity ^{1,2}, a coalition of players from civil society, academia, the State and international organizations has endeavored to promote an agenda in the country – that of adequate and healthy food ^{3,4}.

Based on global advances on the topic, on the NOVA ⁵ classification and on guidelines of the revised edition of the Brazilian National Food and Nutrition Policy ⁶, in addition to other instruments, this agenda presents, among its main objectives, the advocacy of regulatory measures for factors strongly associated with this epidemic and the promotion of food education for the population.

Despite their focus on promoting public health, goals such as these receive direct opposition from a portion of the food industries. The literature has directed increasing investigative attention to such resistance, which, incidentally, characterizes a worldwide phenomenon ^{7,8,9,10,11}. It is important to highlight, in this sense, the notion of commercial determinants of health, through which Kickbusch et al. ⁷ propose an interdisciplinary domain to addresses corporate strategies that promote unhealthy diets. Among such strategies, the authors emphasize those related to economic, advertising and political factors.

In the political sphere of these determinants, apropos, it is worth mentioning the concept of corporate political activity (CPA), as used by Mialon et al. ⁸ to address corporate attempts to influence public opinion and the State in ways that benefit the firms. Informational, legal, financial, public relations and deregulation actions, beside confrontation with political opponents, are part of the scope covered by the authors' approach ⁸.

Inspired by this concept, this article examines changes in three CPA dimensions related to the national associations of food industries: the representative, communicational and institutional dimensions.

Highlighting the Brazilian Food Industry Association (ABIA), the Brazilian Dairy Association (Viva Lácteos) and the Sugarcane Industry Union (UNICA), the analysis covers the period between 2014 and 2020, precisely the period in which the agenda of adequate and healthy food began to expand its influence in the Brazilian public sphere ^{3,4,12}.

As for the representative dimension, the focus, through ethnography, is on the change of the lobbying of the abovementioned private associations in Congress. Here, we adopted the definition of Santos et al. ^{13,14} that lobbying is characterized by the advocacy of interests in relation to state agents.

As for the communicational dimension, the article observes a mobilization of corporate justifications through different narratives. The conceptual foundation for this objective is found in French pragmatic sociology, especially in the works of Boltanski & Chiapello ¹⁵ and Boltanski & Thévenot ¹⁶, who understand criticism as a modification engine in corporate legitimation devices.

Finally, as for the institutional dimension, the work focuses on changes involving the food industries associations. The analysis of this dimension – which characterizes a conditioning factor to enhance or hinder CPA, and which has received less attention from the literature on commercial determinants of health – is guided by political science researches that address the impacts of crises on industrial associations, that is, that deal with the ways in which institutional innovations ¹⁷ – in other designations for the same phenomenon, institutional changes ¹⁸ or engineering ¹⁹ – are configured in the abovenamed associations in unstable and conflicting periods.

The sources consisted of documents and records made during fieldwork. Conducted between December 2018 and July 2019, the field research comprised, on the one hand, participant observation – particularly – in the *Pensar Agropecuária* Institute (IPA) and in the Brazilian National Congress: in the IPA headquarters, in Brasília, one prioritized the observation of meetings for interaction between technical agents and representatives of agrifood systems associations, as well as the participation of parliamentarians; in the Legislature, one observed meetings of commissions of the Chamber of Deputies and the Federal Senate, in addition to public hearings. On the other hand, the fieldwork also included 38 (mainly semi-structured) interviews with leaders and technicians from business associations linked to agricultural and industrial activities, parliamentarians and members of the Executive. These dialogues were conducted in two ways: in 18 cases, by telephone, with an approximate duration of between half and one hour; on 20 occasions, in person, mainly in Congress, most of them shorter.

In both situations – participant observation and interviews – field notes were made. As for the documents, which covered the period between 2007 and 2020, one used management reports, materials and websites of food industries associations, official archives and Internet pages of the Executive and Legislature Branches, in addition to texts and websites of the organized civil society.

Contacts for obtaining permission to access the IPA were initially made by telephone, then by e-mails with an invitation from the institute, and were then followed by face-to-face conversations at its headquarters. The telephone interviews were negotiated and scheduled by email, while the others were conducted by direct dialogue, especially in the corridors of the Congress. We are grateful both to the persons who organize the IPA – for the access granted for participant observation, and for sharing information and materials – and who agreed to be interviewed for the work.

Before initiating the analysis, it is also important to situate the author's changing focus during the research: the fundamental issue guiding the author's perspective during fieldwork concerned the ways in which the different corporate agents related to agrifood systems have built new intersectoral political spaces and acted in relation to the State, especially the Legislature. The dialogue with the literature on the commercial determinants of health, and, therefore, with the consequences of CPA for public health, occurred a posteriori, raised from the observations and interactions carried out in the field. In this process, the concept of CPA, as propounded by Mialon et al. ⁸, ended up becoming methodologically instrumental to trace, in all empirical material, corporate political activities and apprehend them according to the categorization of corporate strategies proposed by the authors.

Representative dimension: a new lobbying channel for the food industries

Characterized as one of the drivers of the commercial determinants of health ⁷ and understood as a practice to be traced according to the concept of CPA ^{8,9}, the lobbying of food industries associations started to have its disposal, in the late 2010s, an important political dispositif in the National Congress: the IPA. Before addressing the specific impact of these representations in the institute, it is important to analyze the institute briefly, as well as the political field of agribusiness.

After being formally established in 2011, the IPA would reach prominence in this field between 2015 and 2016 ²⁰. In the biennium, it had finally attracted a wide gamut of national commercial agriculture and industry associations, and had consolidated protocols to qualify conflict management and the prospection for consensus among them. With the success of this strategy, the institute contributed decisively to aggregate representativeness and financial resources from agents that are dominant in this field ²⁰.

The aggregation in turn enabled fostering the management of the collection of such resources and their use, among other purposes, to set up an appropriate physical space for lobbying – in a mansion in Lago Sul, in Brasília – and to consolidate an experienced and diversified technical team ²⁰.

This modification is consistent with the increase in the professionalization of lobbying in Brazil ^{13,14}. Among the characteristics that the literature attributes to such increase are a satisfactory own budget, previous experience and specialization of employees, in addition to exclusive dedication ¹³. They are present in the IPA, as reported, in interviews to the author, by members of the institute's technical team and of the associations that compose it.

Despite the remarkable advances, in the institute, with the improvement of the ways of dealing with the differences between the private actors and the constitution of a specialized team, the political dispositif would have less political relevance if it had not significantly altered the public-private relations in the field of agribusiness ²⁰. Indeed, the main characteristic of the IPA is its position backing the agribusiness caucus (FPA), a factor frequently emphasized in the interviews given to the author by leaders of the associations, and also mentioned by parliamentarians.

The three types of agents that constitute the tripod of this sophisticated political dispositif interact systematically ²⁰. In this interrelation, a strategic instance is the commissions, political technologies established within the scope of the IPA to promote the division and specialization of the different associations according to shared interests. Operating around macro themes, such as agricultural policy, the environment and land disputes ²¹, such commissions were emphatically praised in interviews given to the author by directors of national associations of industries that financially support the institute.

In them, private agents (1) deal with their differences and prospect agreements, (2) receive guidance from technicians to formulate proposals based on these consensuses – as well as justifications to defend them –, and (3) negotiate the decisions with an FPA parliamentarian²⁰. It is from the inter-relationships between these three functions of the commissions – led, respectively, by private agents, advisers and legislators – that come the proposals to be advocated, weekly, to the nucleus of the agribusiness caucus, and, after that stage, to the other members of the caucus²⁰.

Despite its increasing effectiveness, the IPA had consolidated itself without having space for the specialized treatment of topics such as food labeling, contents and advertising. Such situation would start to change especially in 2017²², when the agenda of adequate and healthy food gained momentum¹² and positions of valorization of regulatory measures regarding the commercial determinants of health stood out in the Executive and Legislative spheres – particularly, at the time, the multisectoral Working Group (WG) created at Brazilian Health Regulatory Agency (ANVISA) to deal with food labeling, which was approaching, after a series of meetings, the decision on the model to be adopted in the country²³.

It was in this context that national associations of food industries – such as UNICA and Viva Lácteos – organized, in coordination with ABIA, an area in the IPA: the Food and Health Commission^{21,22}. In 2019, among the actions to which the commission then paid more attention, three stood out: (1) to oppose the Brazilian National Council for Food and Nutrition Safety (CONSEA), (2) to strengthen the opposition, in Congress, to regulatory initiatives for commercial determinants of health, and (3) to disseminate corporate narratives about food issues²¹.

One begins with the analysis of its work in relation to the CONSEA, a fundamental relationship body on food and nutrition security, among civil society actors, state managers and scientists^{24,25}. It was through the interaction between these actors that a matrix of public policies was developed and strengthened to effectively fight hunger and undernutrition in Brazil²⁶.

However, the council's action that annoyed the food industries – it is important to consider that ABIA had been part of this body since the 2000s²⁷ – was not that of its main line, of fighting hunger and undernutrition, but the advocacy that, especially in more recent years, it had begun to carry out on another spectrum of the food issues: the regulation of the commercial determinants of health. In this sense, CONSEA acted under the strategic guidance of the National Conferences on Food and Nutrition Security. Throughout their operations, these instances of democratic treatment of matters related to food had – driven by the contradictions of the nutritional transition in the country – gradually started to pay more attention to the agenda of adequate and healthy food^{28,29,30}.

Among several of the council's initiatives in this regard, it is worth mentioning its guidance to ANVISA for the creation of the WG on labeling, followed by an important work in this forum, its recommendations on regulation to the Presidency of the Republic, and its work related to the II National Plan for Food and Nutrition Security – which, in turn, also expressed direct concern on the subject of regulation^{23,31,32}.

Following the extinction of the CONSEA by the Jair Bolsonaro government^{24,25}, the IPA Food and Health Commission planned an operation related to the Executive's decision. This planning included a survey in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate to learn about the positions of parliamentarians about the end of the body, the preparation of a document with criticisms of the council and its distribution to parliamentarians, and the construction of agreements with key actors in dealing with the issue in the Brazilian National Congress²¹.

While actors responsible for promoting adequate and healthy food sought to reverse the extinction of the body, the dominant position in the commission decided to strengthen, in relation to the Executive, the decision for its extinction²¹. If such plan did not appear possible, the subsidiary proposal prevailing in the commission was to recreate the council within the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply – an administrative sphere of hegemony of dominant agents in the field of agribusiness²¹.

At the IPA meetings, the adequate nutrition agenda was treated with concern, and on one occasion the director of an industries association insisted with the institute's management that, if CONSEA was recreated, its composition should be changed, with the strategic introduction, in the agency, of representatives of food industries (data recorded by the author in field notes on April 29 and May 13, 2019).

At the same time, the Food and Health Commission was structured to facilitate systematic monitoring and intervention on the bills related to the food and nutrition agenda, especially those related to labeling, reinforcing its position as a new – but already relevant – lobbying instrument of food industries²¹.

In relation to legislative proposals, one could highlight initiatives to add rules on food labeling, determine the display of warnings about the presence of carcinogenic or potentially carcinogenic substances in products for consumption, and prohibit the use of trans fats in the manufacture of food products, the IPA advised a contrary position to FPA parliamentarians³³. At the same time, it provided justifications to be used by members of the caucus³³.

As it can be observed, a relevant portion of the arguments presented, in addition to being fragile, were supported mainly by economic logics – which, moreover, are defined in the approach of Mialon et al.⁸ as liberalizing practices to promote environments with weak regulation. As proposed by pragmatic sociology^{15,16}, in the oppositions between criticisms and justifications situated in justice regimes, a fundamental part of the clashes is to determine which argumentative logics are more legitimate to be used in each public controversy³⁴. In line with this sociological model, there is, therefore, a corporate attempt to dispute the importance of nutritional considerations, with the shift of discussions to instances of legitimation favorable to corporate political activities.

As for the rules on labeling, it was argued³³ that it would be “(...) *undue state intervention in the economy, with open violation of the principle of free enterprise and the principles of proportionality and reasonableness*”; with regard to warnings about the risk of cancer in some food substances, it was insisted that “(...) *there is already more than adequate information about the harmfulness of certain products that should appear on labels and packaging*”; as for the ban on the use of trans fat in the manufacture of food, it was stated that “(...) *it introduces a negative precedent (...) since it is not up to the State to decide what will be consumed by the population*”.

At the IPA meetings, there were also frequent expressions of apprehension as to how public opinion reacted to the issues addressed at the institute (data recorded by the author in field notes on May 22 and April 13, 2019). In fact, the specialized literature has pointed out that one of the factors that condition the influence of industry lobbying is how each corporate political activity is perceived in the public sphere¹³. Not by chance, one of the central objectives for the commission was to promote corporate narratives about food issues.

Communicational dimension: the narratives of appropriation, contestation and shifting

Three main corporate food narratives would be mobilized through the IPA Food and Health Commission: appropriation, contestation and shifting narratives. Although none of them was a recent creation, they would receive, in the late 2010s, innovative materializations and specific emphases in the agency linked to the FPA, and also in other representations linked to the food industries.

To analyze this communicational dimension of the CPA, it is necessary to make a brief historical digression in the article, which situates the corporate narratives in the context of the strengthening of public health promotion initiatives in the country, which started mainly, in 2014.

Although the adequate and healthy food agenda was, in the mid-2010s, in development, it had already achieved some significant successes: (1) in relation to the public sphere, there was an initial decrease in the food industries capability to control the circulating discourses, as had been accused by ABIA itself¹⁰; and, (2) with regard to the State, there were advances, even if incipient, of the strategies to regulate commercial determinants of health and of the influence of the NOVA classification on public policies, as explained below.

One of the essential causes of the gradual decrease in the power to set the press agenda, in addition to changes in international public opinion, was the increasing difficulty felt by corporate agents to influence on research in the area of food and nutrition in Brazil. In this sense, it is important to emphasize the relevance of public universities and funding agencies in supporting independent and qualified groups of researchers concerned with the effects, on public health, of the ongoing changes

in nutritional standards in the country. As it is well known, it was through their work that the NOVA classification was introduced in 2009³⁵ and was consolidated in the 2010s^{5,36,37,38,39}.

At the state level, regulatory initiatives such as the creation, in 2014, of the WG at ANVISA to deliberate on food labeling³¹ and the approval by the Brazilian National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents of a resolution dealing with abusive advertising directed at the target public of that body could be highlighted⁴⁰. Conducted within the scope of the Brazilian Ministry of Health, the relaunch, in 2014, of the *Dietary Guideline for the Brazilian Population*⁴¹ – since then based on the classification by level of processing, as proposed by the NOVA classification – represented an essential step for food education in the country.

In 2016, actors involved in promoting the adequate nutrition agenda had, under the leadership of the Brazilian Institute for Consumer Protection and the ACT Promotion of Health organization, expanded their articulation, embodied in the Alliance for Adequate and Healthy Food¹². As a result, actions to clarify public opinion on labeling and ultra-processed foods would become more relevant¹².

A prominent association, ABIA had tried to justify itself^{15,16} in relation to this order of factors by emphasizing a narrative of confrontation against central assumptions of the aforementioned agenda. To this end, the association coordinated with the São Paulo State Institute of Food Technology (ITAL) and São Paulo State Secretary of Agriculture and Food Supply to launch the Processed Food Platform⁴².

Emphasizing CPA mechanisms aimed at criticizing scientific evidence and promoting doubts in public opinion about the validity of academic research – especially those based on the NOVA classification –, the corporate rhetoric advocated through Ital stated that: “*Several myths related to the ingestion of processed foods, without proper scientific evidence, influence the population’s food decisions, causing the consumer to miss the opportunity to eat safe, nutritious, practical and tasty foods*”⁴².

In a movement led by other corporate actors, a second narrative would gain momentum after the Ital campaign. Acting with greater autonomy in relation to ABIA, a dozen multinational companies would mobilize a rhetoric of appropriation of the adequate and healthy food agenda. In the so-called “Brazilian National Movement for Health and Well-Being”, launched in 2017, AMBEV, Coca-Cola, Ferrero, General Mills, Grupo Bimbo, Kellogg’s, Mars, McDonald’s, Mondelēz, Nestlé, PepsiCo and Unilever sought to re-establish their image as defenders of public health⁴³. The effort to appropriate this agenda operated with the support of a mechanism that the approach of Mialon et al.⁸ characterizes, based on the concept of CPA, as the promotion of good intentions and dissemination of what would be positive features of the food industries.

Turning, after the historical digression, to the IPA, it should be pointed out that, in its commission, both the appropriation and the contestation narratives would be important, simultaneously, to a third narrative – of shifting. The latter was related to the mechanism that Mialon et al.⁸ characterize as attempts to avoid the recognition of corporate responsibilities concerning unhealthy diets, emphasizing, for this end, individual decisions and attitudes.

See, for example, the name of the IPA commission itself: Food and Health²¹. The intention was to use this key idea to replace, in the public sphere, the expression “adequate and healthy food”, which named the agenda advocated by the abovementioned Alliance^{12,24}. In the corporate rhetoric, “healthy” ceased to be a quality of food, and started to function in relation of addition to it, as the noun “health”, coherently to a rhetorical line of shifting that was intended in corporate strategy. It is important to highlight, in this sense, that, through the IPA commission, other political-rhetorical initiatives were organized with the use of the key idea, such as the food industries caucus (FPAS) – launched in 2019 to influence legislative decisions in agreement with interests of food industries associations⁴⁴.

At times, the different narratives – appropriation, contestation and shifting – would be combined in Parliament to enhance corporate justifications. At the inauguration of FPAS, its coordinator, Deputy Evandro Roman (Social Democratic Party, Paraná), made the following statement: “*We must also understand that healthy sleep is restorative. The issue of healthy eating and the practice of physical activities are really part of this balance that provides a good quality of life. We have to promote health in order to develop a healthier future society*”⁴⁴.

It should be noted that, in addition to the rhetoric of appropriation – expressed in the disclosure of good corporate intentions –, the shifting narrative was jointly operated – the transfer of corporate responsibilities to individual decisions.

Another example helps to show the combinations of narratives. Justifying the creation, in 2019, of the Food and Health subcommission – again, the use of the key can be noticed – within the scope of the Chamber of Deputies' Commission on Agriculture, Livestock, Food Supply and Rural Development, Roman showed, amid statements of concern for public health, that the contestation narrative would continue to have relevance: *“today there is a very big discussion about food and health, but we have to understand that there are many truths, but we also have to destroy many ideological untruths that we will discuss in this subcommission”* ⁴⁵.

The reorientation of corporate strategies based on actions and arguments ⁴⁶ of the food industries associations – that is, the changes in their lobbying and in their narratives – were connected to a dimension of institutional changes.

Changes in ABIA and other institutional engineering

In this last section of the article, one investigates some remarkable institutional innovations ^{17,18,19} influenced by food controversies in (and among) food industries associations. As indicated in the introduction, the references for this objective are political science works that focus on examining the effects of crises and conflicts on business associations ^{17,18,19}. The period chosen for analysis – 2014 to 2020 – is not random, since it was precisely in this interregnum that the adequate and healthy food agenda was strengthened.

For the study of this institutional dimension, the work focused on one of the main functions of the operation of corporate associations as defined by Schneider ¹⁸: the rationalization of the treatment of connections between companies. The main changes in the political interrelationships between the food and beverage corporations occurred, during the referred period, in (or in relation to) ABIA.

Chaired since the 1980s by Edmund Klotz, the association had reacted to food controversies by heavily promoting its traditional CPAs. As previously indicated, the organization had insisted on the narrative of fighting the adequate and healthy food agenda. Concomitantly, it had continued to promote lobbying in Congress through its legal, and public and institutional relations departments, often supported by external consultants; complementarily in the representation of interests, the association sought to influence, with the participation in councils, the legislative priorities of the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo and of the Brazilian National Confederation of Industry (CNI) ^{22,47,48,49,50,51}.

Comprising 128 associates in 2014, the organization concentrated its command hierarchy on the presidency, which was supported by a small committee composed of a little more than a dozen transnational companies – with a predominance of corporations of sweets and dairy, soft drinks and beers, in addition to traders ⁴⁸. At the same time, ABIA sought to reinforce its position as the largest forum for organizing food companies, not prioritizing relevant and sustained institutional efforts to build new alliances with other associations in this domain ^{47,48,49,50,51}.

In these circumstances, agents from two significant food segments – on the one hand, dairy, and, on the other hand, wheat-based foods – had decided to establish new representations. In 2014, more than two dozen dairy companies – including Nestlé, Danone and Vigor – would advance their political approximation, creating Viva Lácteos ⁵². At the end of 2015, the Brazilian Manufacturers Association of Pasta and Industrialized Bread & Cake and the Brazilian Association Biscuit Manufacturers came together to found the Brazilian Manufacturers Association of Biscuit, Pasta and Industrialized Bread & Cakes (ABIMAPI) ⁵³.

Although these instances of institutional engineering also responded to a broader set of political and economic changes in the country, they certainly implied some decrease in the representativeness of ABIA: from then on, this association would gradually lose members – in 2020, it comprised 95 companies, a 25.8% reduction in relation to 2014 ^{48,54}. Although specialized in wheat-based industries, ABIMAPI would go from 82 companies in 2014 to 104 in 2020, an increase of 26.8% ^{53,55}.

However, more evident dissatisfaction on the part of the food industries corporations with the political conduct in ABIA would be revealed in an institutional innovation process that was initiated in 2017 and implemented in 2018 in the association. Klotz was not reelected, the association was given a new name – “Brazilian Food Industry Association” replaced “Brazilian Food Industries Asso-

ciation” – and its logo was redesigned. The intention, according to the new direction of the organization, would be to convey the idea of corporate unity, both due to the absence of the ending “ies” at the end of “industry” and to the blue and green colors chosen for the logo ⁵⁶.

However, the most important institutional change was the modification in the allocation of authority within the association – the basic marker for dealing with corporate interactions, according to Schneider ¹⁹. In place of the presidency concentrated attributions and continuously reappointed, an executive presidency was installed, directly responding to the strategic orientation of a board of directors – to be changed every biennium ^{47,51,56}.

At the same time, there was an initiative to integrate more corporations into ABIA’s new command arrangement. As a result, it went from 14 companies occupying vice-presidencies in 2016 to 27 constituting its board of directors in 2020 ^{50,54}. In this sense, there was another relevant qualitative change: transnational companies of ultra-processed foods and beverages that were distant from the hierarchical top of the association approached this position, such as Dr. Oetker, Ferrero, General Mills, Heineken, Heinz, Mars and Seara. From then on, they would establish themselves more firmly to influence ABIA’s strategic orientation, in conjunction with industries that had previously sought to do so, such as AMBEV, Bunge, Cargill, BRF, Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Mondelēz, Unilever and PepsiCo ^{47,49,51,56}.

This process of changes occurred simultaneously to the expansion of ABIA’s predisposition in relation to what Mialon et al. ⁸ classify as building political support, since the organization has striven more decisively, since the end of 2017, to work with other representations influential in agrifood functions. Jointly with CNI and the Brazilian Association of the Industries of Soft Drinks and Non-Alcoholic Beverages (ABIR), ABIA created the Labeling Network, which involved approximately two dozen national associations of food industries that had the objective of influencing ANVISA’s WG on the theme ⁴¹. Along associations such as Viva Lácteos and UNICA, ABIA would create a dispositif to increase the influence of the industries on food and nutrition issues in Congress, as pointed out in the first section of the article ⁴⁴.

Conclusions

This article analyzed relations between the strengthening of the adequate and healthy food agenda and changes in the corporate political activities of a portion of the national associations of food industries. Three changes were examined – representative, communicational and institutional – in the period between 2014 and 2020, precisely when the aforementioned agenda expanded its influence.

The first analytical dimension – representative – addressed the establishment of a lobbying channel in the Brazilian National Congress by food industries associations, such as Viva Lácteos and UNICA: the IPA Food and Health Commission, a technical-corporate forum linked to the FPA. The political alliance with the robust political dispositif led by agrobusiness elites implied an increase in the professionalization and efficiency of the representation of interests of these associations.

The second dimension of analysis – communicational – focused on narrative strategies employed by food industries associations to justify the commercial determinants of health. Three main narratives were examined, one opposing the adequate and healthy food agenda, another one that intends to appropriate this agenda, and a third one that seeks to shift corporate responsibilities to individual attitudes.

Finally, the third analytical dimension – institutional – investigated the main changes influenced by food controversies in food industries associations. The work addressed and institutional engineering in ABIA, in a process through which connections between corporations in the association were modified, especially the allocation of power between them. In addition to this aspect, attention was directed to political inventions such as the creation of ABIMAPI and the Labeling Network.

By addressing these three analytical dimensions, the research sought to contribute to initiatives examining the commercial determinants of health and corporate political activities.

Additional information

ORCID: Caio Pompeia (0000-0002-1692-1985).

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Resumo

Conforme se fortalece, no Brasil, a agenda de promoção da alimentação adequada e saudável, associações nacionais das indústrias de alimentos têm inflexionado sua atividade política corporativa (CPA). Destacando a Associação Brasileira da Indústria de Alimentos (ABIA), a Associação Brasileira de Laticínios e a União da Indústria de Cana-de-Açúcar, e tratando do período entre 2014 e 2020, este artigo analisa tal inflexão em suas dimensões representativas, comunicacionais e institucionais. Fundamentado metodologicamente no modelo de identificação da CPA, o trabalho tem como fontes registros da observação participante no Instituto Pensar Agropecuária (IPA) e no Legislativo, anotações de entrevistas com dirigentes e técnicos de associações empresariais e políticos, além de diversos documentos e websites das entidades, do Estado e da sociedade civil. Os resultados demonstram que, na dimensão representativa, as associações das indústrias de alimentos reformularam seu lobbying no Legislativo, para isso criando uma comissão no IPA; na dimensão comunicacional, houve aumento da proeminência de uma narrativa de apropriação da agenda da alimentação adequada e saudável, estratégia discursiva que passou a ladear outras duas narrativas, uma de contraposição à agenda, outra de deslocamento das responsabilidades corporativas para decisões individuais; finalmente, na dimensão institucional, ocorreram notáveis transformações na ABIA, além da criação de outras associações e redes. A conclusão indica que a CPA das principais associações de indústrias de alimentos no país está se alterando de modo acentuado para responder às críticas aos determinantes comerciais da saúde.

Indústria Alimentícia; Dieta Saudável; Segurança Alimentar; Manobras Políticas; Poder Legislativo

Resumen

En Brasil, conforme se fortalece la agenda de promoción de una alimentación adecuada y saludable, asociaciones nacionales de las industrias de alimentos han modificado su actividad política corporativa (CPA). Destacando la Asociación Brasileña de la Industria de Alimentos (ABIA), la Asociación Brasileña de Lácteos y la Unión de la Industria de Caña de Azúcar, y considerando el período entre 2014 y 2020, este artículo analiza esta inflexión en sus dimensiones representativas, comunicacionales e institucionales. Fundamentado metodológicamente en el modelo de identificación de la CPA, el trabajo tiene como fuentes: registros de la observación participante en el Instituto Pensar Agropecuária (IPA) y en el poder legislativo, anotaciones de entrevistas con dirigentes y técnicos de asociaciones empresariales y políticos, además de diversos documentos y sitios web de entidades, del Estado y de la sociedad civil. Los resultados demuestran que, en la dimensión representativa, las asociaciones de las industrias de alimentos reformularon su lobbying en el Legislativo, para conseguirlo crearon una comisión en el IPA; mientras que en la dimensión comunicacional hubo un aumento de la preeminencia de una narración de apropiación de la agenda de la alimentación adecuada y saludable, estrategia discursiva que pasó a flanquear otras dos narraciones: una de contraposición a la agenda, otra de desplazamiento de las responsabilidades corporativa hacia decisiones individuales; finalmente, en la dimensión institucional, se produjeron notables transformaciones en la ABIA, además de la creación de otras asociaciones y redes. La conclusión indica que la CPA de las principales asociaciones de industrias de alimentos en el país se está alterando de modo acentuado para responder a las críticas hacia los determinantes comerciales de la salud.

Industria de Alimentos; Dieta Saludable; Seguridad Alimentaria; Maniobras Políticas; Poder Legislativo

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