The History of Coca-Cola in Mexico

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Introduction

Coca-Cola is the most widely recognized brand in the world. Red plastic chairs emblazoned with the logo can be found along dirt roads in small villages, and the famous bottle shape can be recognized in the dark. The fizzy drink is officially sold in every country except for two: North Korea and Cuba, due to trade embargoes with the United States. Trade sanctions against military-ruled Burma prevented the sale of Coca-Cola within the country for over fifty years. The drink has returned to be sold in Burma as of 2011, when the government moved towards democratic reforms. The re-entry of Coca-Cola into Burma is a symbol that there might be “real change” going on within the country, as Coca-Cola is said to be “the nearest thing to capitalism in a bottle.”¹ The Coca-Cola Company, which currently sells over 500 different brands of beverages worldwide, publicizes their daily serving of beverages as 1.9 billion.² Taking into account a global population of over 7 billion people, this figure implies that every fourth person consumes a Coca-Cola product each day. The Coca-Cola Company even claims that “Coca-Cola” is the second most recognized term in human language after the term “okay.”³

The ubiquity of Coca-Cola is perhaps no more apparent than in Mexico. In 2001, Mexico surpassed the United States for the title of the country with the highest per-capita consumption of Coca-Cola products. “The message that they can Open Happiness by drinking Coke has led many Mexicans…to spend their money—often a substantial part of their daily wages—on Company products, with the world’s leading annual per capita consumption.”⁴ From Coca-Cola’s first appearance in Mexico in 1897 to the present day, the ability of an American-born

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³ Ibid.
product to increasingly infiltrate the daily lives of Mexicans is truly outstanding. This notable rise in Coca-Cola consumption in Mexico over the last hundred years was fueled by clever marketing efforts, which aggressively pursued even the remote villages of Mexico and which promoted nationalistic pride, and by the economic and political changes in Mexico in the twentieth century that were further accelerated by the creation of NAFTA in 1994.

The Early History of Coca-Cola

The history of Coca-Cola began with a morphine-addicted pharmacist named John Pemberton. He invented the formula for Coca-Cola in Atlanta, Georgia in 1886. Coca-Cola was originally intended to be a patent medicine and a nerve tonic. The syrup, which contained African cola nut and cocaine extracted from the Andean leaf, as well as other flavorings and sugar, was sold by the gallon to soda fountains to be prepared with carbonated water. Despite the fact that the patent medicine and soda fountain beverage markets were already saturated in the United States, Coca-Cola was the only product on the market that fit both categories, and it quickly gained a following. As Pemberton lay dying of stomach cancer two years after inventing Coca-Cola, a shrewd businessman named Asa Candler purchased his formula for the syrup. It is Asa Candler who is largely responsible for Coca-Cola’s rapid rise to fame.

The incorporated and trademarked Coca-Cola Company found that their early success was almost entirely due to advertising. The firm spent over $22,000 on ingredients for Coca-Cola and over $11,000 on advertising in 1892. Frank Robinson, who had worked alongside Pemberton before working alongside Candler, gave Coca-Cola its name and designed the now-

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6 Ibid 13.
7 Ibid 7, 15.
8 Ibid 56.
ubiquitous script logo. By late 1895, less than ten years after Pemberton cooked up his first batch, Coca-Cola was sold in all states and territories of the United States.\(^9\)

The rapid success of Coca-Cola encouraged Asa Candler to continue to expand his business. Producing and bottling the beverage was an obvious choice for expansion, as bottling beverages was a prevalent business practice at that time. However, Candler was wary of bottling his soda fountain beverage. He felt he did not have the time nor the expertise to bottle the product himself, and feared that the Coca-Cola name would be tarnished if he assigned the bottling to someone else and they produced a low-quality product.\(^10\) Two lawyers named Benjamin Thomas and Joseph Whitehead recognized this ripe business opportunity and wrote up a bottling contract for Candler. As they were men he already knew and trusted, Candler was convinced they would bottle his product correctly and he gave away bottling rights to them. The agreement bound Thomas and Whitehead to purchase genuine Coca-Cola syrup from the Coca-Cola Company and to supply the demand throughout most of the United States.\(^11\) The bottlers subsequently sold bottling rights to local entrepreneurs, thereby establishing a network of bottling plants around the United States.\(^12\) The initial bottling contract set a precedent for the franchise system of Coca-Cola bottling that exists to this day. The company currently produces both Coca-Cola syrup and Coca-Cola concentrate, a powder without sugar, which it sells to both parent bottlers and retail outlets.

The network of local Coca-Cola bottling plants continued to grow such that nearly four hundred were in operation by 1909.\(^13\) Robert Woodruff, the Coca-Cola Company president from

\(^9\) Ibid 58.
\(^10\) Ibid 67.
\(^13\) Ibid.
1923 to 1954, sought to further expand bottling and heavily pushed for the establishment of bottling operations outside the United States in the early twentieth century. With international expansion in mind, Robert Woodruff created the Coca-Cola Export Corporation, a subsidiary of the Coca-Cola Company, in 1930. Bottling plants were opened in several foreign countries, including Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Peru in Latin America. Although plants had been established in several world regions, sales of Coca-Cola abroad were not very significant until after World War II. Sales abroad accelerated over the decades after World War II, and by 1976, the overseas market accounted for fifty-five percent of Coca-Cola’s profits.

World War II was an important point in the Coca-Cola Company’s history because the beverage was supplied to United States troops overseas throughout the war. In fact, Robert Woodruff insisted that “every man in uniform gets a bottle of Coca-Cola for five cents, wherever he is.” More than 60 military bottling facilities around the world kept troops supplied with Coca-Cola. By aligning the fizzy drink with patriotism, Coca-Cola improved its popularity in the United States during the war and also exposed locals abroad to their first taste of Coca-Cola. Locals began to develop an affinity for the drink. After the war, many of the war-time bottling plants were converted to civilian use, which created significant opportunities for Coca-Cola to expand its global reach in the coming decades.

Today, the caramel-colored carbonated drink that started it all is considered the Coca-Cola Company’s flagship product. The company’s portfolio now includes over 200 beverage

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15 The Coca-Cola Company, “History of Bottling”
17 Pendergrast, For God, Country, & Coca-Cola, 184.
19 The Coca-Cola Company, “History of Bottling”
brands. Dasani, Fanta, Sprite, Powerade, and Minute Maid are just a few of the company’s most recognizable brands besides Coca-Cola itself.

**The Early History of Coca-Cola in Mexico**

Mexico was one of the very first countries to sell Coca-Cola. In 1897, Asa Candler looked towards Mexico as a new market to extend Coca-Cola’s reach beyond the United States, Canada, and Hawaii. Coca-Cola was first introduced to Mexico during the Porfiriato, a thirty five year rule by Porfirio Diaz that began with a government coup in 1876. The Porfiriato is known for its economic stability and encouragement of enterprise, including foreign enterprise.

Later in the early twentieth century, the changing government regimes and political unrest in Mexico associated with the Mexican Revolution contributed to the trademark problems of Coca-Cola in Mexico. By 1925, there were four different pirated registrations for the name “Coca-Cola,” and several Coca-Cola imitators. Despite the difficulties, there were eight Coca-Cola bottlers spread around the country by 1934. In the forties, further complications ensued when the Mexican government demanded to know the ingredients of Coca-Cola before the concentrate could be imported into the country. The process of registering Coca-Cola through the Mexican government without revealing Coca-Cola’s secret formula took an entire year. Coca-Cola wasn’t regularly drunk in Mexico until the fifties, when Coke “began the ad blitz to wallpaper the country in red and white.” Along with extensive advertising, Coca-Cola provided Mexican storeowners with Coca-Cola branded refrigerators, tables and chairs if they sold above a certain threshold.

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22 Ibid 159.
The adoration of Coca-Cola in Mexico grew to be enormous. One anecdote comes from the introduction of Coca-Cola to indigenous villages in Chiapas in the sixties. The indigenous people there used *pox*, a homemade sugarcane rum, in their religious ceremonies, and alcoholism was rampant.\(^\text{26}\) In light of this, Coca-Cola began to be substituted for *pox*. Now, Coca-Cola is part of daily life there. One local man said that “indigenous people, the number-one thing they consume is Coca-Cola, and the number two thing is Pepsi.”\(^\text{27}\) A study from the seventies by Richard Barnet and Ronald Muller found that white bread and Coca-Cola were the food items Mexican *campesinos* bought “as soon as they could afford them—and sometimes even when they couldn’t.”\(^\text{28}\) Coca-Cola’s wide distribution of its beverages and branded furniture to even the smallest of remote villages helped ensure its wild success in Mexico.

**Effective Marketing of Coca-Cola**

Besides Coca-Cola’s insistence on distributing their beverages to the far corners of Mexico and their success in exposing as many Mexicans as possible to Coca-Cola on a daily basis, Coca-Cola’s aggressive marketing strategies in Mexico were highly effective at making customers loyal to the brand for life. The Coca-Cola scholar Michael Blanding wrote that it is at least in part “Coke’s role as a symbol of the American way of life that has made it so popular” in Mexico.\(^\text{29}\) That is probably true, as Coca-Cola’s Americanness was attractive to those Mexicans who were looking to emulate their northern neighbor. Coca-Cola’s marketing tactics did not utilize this as part of the strategy, as the Americanness of Coca-Cola was already inherent in the product. Instead, marketing employed a seemingly opposite strategy to ensure Coca-Cola’s success in Mexico. There was a focus on portraying Coca-Cola as belonging to Mexico, and of

\(^\text{27}\) Ibid 158.
\(^\text{28}\) Ibid 156.
\(^\text{29}\) Ibid 147.
being distinctly Mexican. Coca-Cola’s inherent Americanness and portrayal as a local, nationalistic product worked in concert to promote the beverage to new heights in Mexico. Additionally, the system of local Mexican-owned bottlers of Coca-Cola helped establish the “Mexican” identity of Coca-Cola, as the sugar, carbonated water, and production and distribution of the beverage were all supplied by Mexicans.

Coca-Cola often used marketing ploys during global events Mexico hosted, as this allowed them to reach a large audience while broadcasting their Mexican pride and depicting Coca-Cola as uniquely Mexican. Events in Mexico with a large Coca-Cola presence included the 1968 Summer Olympics, the 1975 Pan American Games, and the 1970 and 1986 FIFA World Cups. A marketing ploy called La Ola de Coca-Cola (the Coca-Cola wave) for the 1986 World Cup is just one of countless Coca-Cola advertisements that have a nationalistic, distinctly Mexican sentiment. The main component of the “Ola de Coca-Cola” strategy was a television commercial aired that year. In the commercial, a man repeatedly sings “Ola de Coca-Cola” in the background while the camera pans over a crowd of Mexicans in a World Cup stadium cheering for their national soccer team.\(^{30}\) The Mexican team then scores a goal and the crowd does the wave, the “ola de Coca-Cola.” The conclusion of the advertisement shows two fans clinking their bottles of Coca-Cola together and taking a luxurious sip, followed by the message “Disfrute Coca-Cola: La Ola del Mundial” (enjoy Coca-Cola: the wave of the World Cup).\(^ {31}\) The campaign was clever in that it connected the white wave under the lettering in Coca-Cola’s logo with a physical action related to the World Cup. However, the campaign was particularly ingenious in that it expressed Coca-Cola’s support for the Mexican national team, which was

\(^{31}\) Ibid.
sure to please the majority of Mexicans. Effective marketing strategies such as this encouraged brand loyalty and further consumption of Coca-Cola, as drinking Coca-Cola was equated with having Mexican pride.

**Free Trade and Growth in Coca-Cola Consumption**

Economic and political changes towards the end of the twentieth century helped encourage the large rise in consumption of Coca-Cola. The economic crisis in Mexico in the eighties helped bring to power a political faction that aimed to dispel Mexico of its traditional mistrust of the United States. This faction included Carlos Salinas, a member of the *Partido Revolucionario Institutional* (PRI), who was president of Mexico from 1988 to 1994. The new faction embraced neoliberal economic policies and ideologies, with the idea that they were the panacea for the woes of the economy, and in turn received economic assistance from the United States. President Salinas “portrayed nationalism and any concern for the loss of culture or sovereignty as anachronistic” and talked of integration and unity with the United States. Armed with this platform and his advanced public relations strategies, Salinas convinced the mainstream Mexican press to support the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

On January 1, 1994, NAFTA was implemented. The agreement sought to limit tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade and investment between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. NAFTA linked the Mexican and United States economies more than ever before. Neoliberal policies in Mexico, including the reduced trading barriers associated with NAFTA and government deregulation, permitted “higher prices and larger package sizes” of Coca-Cola.33

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The growth of Coca-Cola in Mexico during the last couple decades is striking, especially when compared with the trajectory in the United States. In 1991, the per-capita consumption of Coca-Cola Company beverages in Mexico was just below the per-capita consumption in the United States. Just ten years later, Mexico had usurped the United States as the highest per-capita consumer, but only by a small margin. From 2001 to 2011, per-capita consumption actually experienced a small decline in the United States. Those same years saw an acceleration in the increase of per-capita consumption in Mexico.\(^{34}\)

Per-capita consumption in Mexico in 1991 was calculated by the Coca-Cola Company as 290 eight ounce servings per year. In the twenty years between 1991 and 2011, this figure climbed to an astounding 728 eight ounce servings per year.\(^{35}\) That amounts to a 151% increase in per-capita consumption. It is helpful to compare this rise in consumption with the rise of Mexican incomes during the same time period. In 1991, gross domestic product per capita was $4,472 in current USD. By 2011, this number had climbed to $9,800.\(^{36}\) The 119% increase in GDP per capita from 1991 to 2011 was considerably less than the 151% increase in per-capita Coca-Cola consumption.

This disparity could be at least partially explained by income elasticity. As the income of the average Mexican grew during this twenty-year period, perhaps the demand for Coca-Cola grew at an even faster rate than income. If consumption of Coca-Cola is equated with demand for the product, the income elasticity of demand for Coca-Cola can be calculated as 1.269. The fact that this income elasticity is greater than 1 may imply that Coca-Cola is a luxury good; at the


\(^{35}\) Ibid.

very least, Coca-Cola is a status symbol that Mexicans buy proportionately more of as they get wealthier. It is likely that other forces besides income growth played a part in the remarkable increase of per-capita Coca-Cola beverage consumption between 1991 and 2011. Trade liberalization associated with neoliberal policies and NAFTA may have helped facilitate Coca-Cola’s growth during this period. As NAFTA was signed in early 1994, the consumption figures for 1991 and 2011 can be viewed as pre-NAFTA and post-NAFTA, respectively.

**Mexican Bottlers: Dominating Mexico and the World**

Coca-Cola does not have a significant amount of competition in the carbonated beverages market in Mexico. According to 2003 figures, it has about 70% of the market.\(^{37}\) Pepsi has about 15% of the market, leaving little room for smaller beverage companies to compete in Mexico.\(^ {38}\) Just as Coca-Cola is extremely powerful within Mexico, Mexican bottlers are powerful within the world.

In the seventies and eighties, many of the retailers who sold Coca-Cola, such as fast food franchises, became “international mega-chains.”\(^ {39}\) To supply this new type of customer, the Coca-Cola Company invested in several consolidations of small- and medium-sized bottlers of Coca-Cola. The consolidations ensured that Coca-Cola’s bottling partners had the necessary bandwidth to work with large global retailers.\(^ {40}\) Today, there are nine bottling groups of Coca-Cola in Mexico, which all operate as independent businesses, and fifty four bottling plants that function under the bottling groups.\(^ {41}\) Bottling in Mexico is substantially oligopolistic, as two of the bottlers are much larger than the other seven. Arca Continental, S.A.B de C.V., dominates the

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\(^ {38}\) Ibid.

\(^ {39}\) The Coca-Cola Company, “History of Bottling”

\(^ {40}\) Ibid.

northern and western part of Mexico and Coca-Cola FEMSA, S.A.B de C.V., distributes to all of Mexico City and most of central and southern Mexico. As both operate as S.A.B. de C.V., which stands for Sociedad Anónimo Bursátil de Capital Variable, this means they are publicly traded corporations with variable capital under the laws of Mexico.

The history of Coca-Cola in Mexico experienced a turning point when a local bottler reached the apex of global Coca-Cola power. The Mexican bottler Coca-Cola FEMSA now dominates global bottling as the “largest franchise bottler of Coca-Cola trademark beverages in the world.” This resulted from the merger of two of the largest bottlers of Coca-Cola in Latin America in 2003. Coca-Cola FEMSA, the Mexican company, acquired Panamerican Beverages (Panamco) of Panama for $2.7 billion. Coca-Cola has historically encouraged bottlers to merge so that maximum efficiency of the system can be attained. The chairman of Coca-Cola FEMSA, Jose Antonio Fernandez, reported that Coca-Cola FEMSA and Panamco sought out the Coca-Cola Company’s approval after their negotiations. Fernandez exclaimed that “the trust of the Coca-Cola Company shown to a Mexican company to let us grow to become the second-largest bottler is very important.” The merger was a significant event in the history of Coca-Cola in Mexico, as it can be associated with Mexico’s rise to power.

Coca-Cola FEMSA continued to acquire additional bottlers both in Mexico and abroad, most recently acquiring a large Brazilian bottler in 2013, and has moved up from the second-largest to the largest bottler in the world. Coca-Cola FEMSA now produces and distributes beverages of the Coca-Cola Company to its region in Mexico, all of Nicaragua, Costa Rica,
Panama, the Philippines, and Venezuela, most of Colombia, and large portions of Brazil, Argentina, and Guatemala. Similar to Coca-Cola FEMSA, the global reach of Arca Continental extends beyond Mexico to serve Ecuador and northern Argentina. A 2011 merger of Embotelladores Arca and Grupo Continental made Arca Continental “Latin America’s second largest bottler” after Coca-Cola FEMSA and “one of the largest in the world.” The power relations of Coca-Cola in Mexico have certainly evolved from the beginning stages. Two bottlers of Coca-Cola dominate Mexico, and the world.

Although it is easy to look at the success of the bottlers Coca-Cola FEMSA and Arca Continental and say that their success signals home-grown power derived from Mexico, it is not that simple. In Arca Continental’s case, the Coca-Cola Company has an 8.6 percent stake in the company. The Coca-Cola Company’s stake is almost thirty percent in Coca-Cola FEMSA. Not only does the Coca-Cola Company profit from its two largest bottlers’ successes, but also the company profits from the sale of Coca-Cola concentrate to the bottlers. The more success the Mexican bottlers achieve, the higher the monetary gains for the United States-based Coca-Cola Company. The Company’s stakes in the largest bottlers also signifies that power does not completely arise from Mexico. Rather, a large portion of the power the bottlers have attained has actually arisen from the United States. Nonetheless, the domination the two Mexican bottlers have been able to achieve is certainly impressive.

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46 Coca-Cola FEMSA, “About Coca-Cola FEMSA”
49 Coca-Cola FEMSA, “About Coca-Cola FEMSA”
Backlash against Coca-Cola’s Hegemony in Mexico

This new power structure of Coca-Cola in Mexico has been recognized by Coca-Cola’s competition: other soft drink companies competing for a share of the large Mexican market. In 2002, Kola Real, a young Peruvian company, started to sell its drink Big Cola in Mexico in an attempt to compete with Coca-Cola and, to a smaller extent, Pepsi. Big Cola was sold for about half the price of Coca-Cola, which affected Coca-Cola’s sales. Coca-Cola began an initiative to counter Big Cola, offering mom-and-pop retailers two bottles of Coca-Cola for one of Big Cola and threatening to remove Coca-Cola sponsored drink coolers from stores if Big Cola was being sold from them. A storeowner in the small village of Itzapalapa was adamant about giving her customers the choice of Big Cola alongside Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola retaliated by failing to fill her orders. She and a few other storeowners in a similar situation took their case to the Mexican Federal Competition Commission and the Coca-Cola Export Corporation was fined approximately $13 million for what were deemed unfair “monopolistic practices.” Not only has Coca-Cola attempted to monopolize the sugary drinks market in Mexico, but the limited number of powerful bottlers in Mexico have turned the production and distribution of Coca-Cola into an oligopoly. Coca-Cola’s power is extremely concentrated in Mexico.

Mexico’s Public Health Crisis and the Soda Tax

Mexicans have taken notice of more than just Coca-Cola’s concentration of power, as the negative health effects of drinking Coca-Cola and other sugary beverages have also come under fire. Mexico currently faces a public health crisis with high rates of obesity and diabetes in adults and children. Among adults 20 and over, 73.0% of women and 69.4% of men are overweight or

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50 The Economist, “Cola Down Mexico Way”
51 Pendergrast, For God, Country, & Coca-Cola, 429.
52 Ibid.
obese.\textsuperscript{53} The trends of increasing obesity prevalence from 1999 to 2006 (a period of large increases of Coca-Cola beverage consumption per capita) were some of the highest ever documented globally.\textsuperscript{54} Sadly, obesity can coexist with undernutrition or malnutrition, even within individuals, in Mexico.\textsuperscript{55} Diabetes is one of the top two causes of death in Mexico, along with, and sometimes overlapping with, heart disease.\textsuperscript{56} Almost a sixth of Mexican adults suffer from it.\textsuperscript{57} Mexico’s public health crisis is likely at least partly a consequence of the high prevalence of sugary carbonated drinks, which account for 70\% of all drinks sold in Mexico as reported by the newspaper \textit{Reforma}.\textsuperscript{58} Research linking the health problems of obesity and diabetes to the consumption of sugary beverages propelled the government to take action.

In 2013, Mexican Congress approved \textit{El Plan de Acción para la Prevención y Control de Enfermedades No Transmisibles} (the Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Transmissible Diseases), which stipulated that fiscal policies such as a tax were likely.\textsuperscript{59} In January 2014, the Mexican government instituted a tax on sugary drinks of one peso per liter.\textsuperscript{60} The soda tax has already reduced sales of Coca-Cola in Mexico, though not by much. After the first quarter of 2014, Coca-Cola FEMSA reported that they were experiencing reduced sales volumes of 5 to 7\%.\textsuperscript{61} Additionally, in a survey of 1,500 Mexicans in August 2014, just over half

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid 71.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
said they had reduced their consumption of sugary drinks after the imposition of the tax.\textsuperscript{62} The majority of survey respondents also said that they saw the link between sugary soda and health problems like obesity and diabetes.\textsuperscript{63} Although the survey results appear promising, the sales declines of Coca-Cola in Mexico have been decelerating since the first quarter of 2014.\textsuperscript{64} Coca-Cola FEMSA said that the company has “adjusted to the new environment in Mexico” and sales volumes were down just 0.3% compared to the third quarter last year.\textsuperscript{65} The growth of Coca-Cola in Mexico in the last several decades was outstanding, and it is possible that the new tax has not done much to reduce Coca-Cola consumption per capita. Sales volumes could be back to 2013 levels by next year. However, due to the relationship between health problems and soda consumption as Mexicans understand it, it is possible that the public image of Coca-Cola in Mexico has already reached its peak and is now degrading. Coca-Cola has experienced major changes in Mexico in the last hundred years.

**Mexican Coca-Cola Imported into the US**

In an interesting development, the United States consumes Coca-Cola imported from Mexico. Although it is officially referred to as “Coca-Cola Nostalgia,” the Coca-Cola sold in a glass bottle has come to be referred to as “Mexican Coke” and is produced by the Mexican bottler Arca Continental.\textsuperscript{66} Mexican Coke is so popular because it contains cane sugar instead of high fructose corn syrup, which is viewed as healthier and more natural. Coca-Cola produced in the United States has used high fructose corn syrup as its principal sweetener since the eighties.


\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.

when corn syrup became cheaper than sugar. In the fall of 2013, Arca Continental announced they were considering using more corn syrup in their products to cut costs in anticipation of the 2014 sugary drinks tax.

The announcement caused considerable uproar from American consumers of “Mexican Coke,” but Arca Continental assured them that the sweetener for Coca-Cola exported to the United States would not change. Although Mexico has taken measures to protect its important cane sugar economy over the years, the price of high fructose corn syrup, kept low by cheap imports of corn from the United States, is attractive to Mexican Coca-Cola bottlers. Both Arca and Coca-Cola FEMSA have admitted that they have started using corn syrup in combination with cane sugar to sweeten their beverages. Although American consumers get to enjoy their cane sugar-laden “taste of Mexico,” the outlook is not quite so rosy for Mexican consumers. Rather than allowing the price of Coca-Cola to rise, leading to the reduction of demand, and waistlines, in Mexico, Mexican bottlers will make their drink cheaper by substituting increasingly more corn syrup for cane sugar.

**Conclusion**

Although many view Coca-Cola as symbolic of a uniquely American strain of capitalism, there are few publicized critiques of how Coca-Cola’s Americanness has affected less developed countries such as Mexico. However, a play called “The True History of Coca-Cola in Mexico” tried to do just that. The play was performed at the GALA Hispanic Theatre in Washington D.C. in 2009. In the play, two young academic-types go to Mexico to uncover the ravages of

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67 Vanessa Wong, “The Mexican Coca-Cola Myth: It’s Almost American”
68 Ibid.
American economic imperialism there.\(^6^9\) Through a series of comedic interactions with local Mexicans, the protagonists, and the play itself, pose, but never quite answer, an important question: is Coca-Cola the face of American imperialism in Mexico? Coca-Cola could very well be defined as the face of American imperialism in Mexico, but the definition only fits for the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, power does not come exclusively from the United States, as power also comes from Mexico itself.

The history of Coca-Cola in Mexico has been largely shaped by shrewd marketing tactics of Coca-Cola, including the portrayal of Coca-Cola as a Mexican product of which consumers should be proud, and by the political and economic changes Mexico has undergone in the last hundred years. As Mexican consumption ballooned over the past twenty years, so too did the global power of the two large Mexican bottlers. Their rise in power is indicative of Mexico’s rise in power as a country, but the United States-based Coca-Cola Company, and United States policies, have certainly aided the acquisition of power into Mexican hands. Mexico’s soda tax has led bottlers to pursue cost-saving measures, such as increasing the percentage of corn syrup over sugar in Coca-Cola beverages. More than anything, the use of corn syrup by Mexican bottlers is emblematic of a cultural convergence of Mexico towards the United States. Despite the attempts by Coca-Cola marketing in Mexico to make you believe otherwise, Coca-Cola in Mexico is becoming less of Mexico’s own.

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