
**Funded as part of NCI 'State
and Community Research
Initiative'**

Youth Smoking and the Media
Funded by the National Cancer Institute



U.S. Press Coverage of Smoking as a Youth Issue

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Aims of the Youth Analysis

- Examine the tobacco control messages being promulgated when press coverage is focused on youth
- Identify the issues that are most commonly associated with youth in press coverage and the tone & frame that are put forth
 - Consider the extent to which a 'youth' focus in press coverage implicates the tobacco industry in the continued problem of youth smoking
- Apply the lessons learned from these analyses to the ongoing debate within tobacco control over a youth focus

The ongoing debate over a focus on youth for tobacco control

On the one hand...

- Tackling youth smoking cuts off the tobacco industry's supply of smokers (Myers, 1999)
- Youth focused debates are more likely to elicit political support

But, on the other hand...

- Research suggests that changing the normative environment offers the greatest potential for reducing smoking levels (USDHHS, 2000)
- The tobacco industry has emerged as a proponent of the construction of smoking as solely a youth issue

Methods I

- Newspaper articles pertaining to tobacco were collected from a sample of 336 U.S. daily newspapers over 6 months (10/00-3/01).

- Yielded 8677 articles

- Staged sampling strategy. Initially took every other day of coverage. 4000 articles remained for screening.

- Subset of 'Youth' articles identified by key words in headline or first paragraph
e.g. minor, kid, teen, girl, student

- 644 articles included in final analysis

Methods II

Textual Analysis

Each of the youth articles was coded for -

- 2 Prominence variables: Front Page & Article Type
- 1 Overarching Tobacco Theme
- 2 Slant variables: Event & Opinion
- 1 Frame

Results

- 644 'Youth' articles identified
- 207 newspapers (62%) published at least 1 youth article over this period
- Only 31 youth articles (4.8%) appeared on the front page
- Coverage dominated by straightforward, 'Hard News' reporting – 543 articles (84.8%)

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Results II Themes

Theme	N= 644 Percentage of Total (%)
Education, Prevention & Cessation	32
Health Effects	20
Advertising and Promotion	15
Youth Access and PPU	15
Prevalence and Consumption	7
ETS and Related Bans	5
Addiction and Quitting	2
Other	1
Product Issues	1
Tobacco Industry	1
Farming	<0.5
Economic Issues	<0.5
Unintended Damage	<0.5

Results III

Prominence of Youth Articles

Secondhand Smoke and Related Bans were on front page in the greatest proportion: 17.6% (6 articles) were on the front page

The most common theme (Education, Prevention & Cessation) was underrepresented: only 2% (5 articles) appeared on the front page

Results IV

Slant

Event Slant N=644

65% coded positive

20% coded negative

9% coded mixed

2% coded neutral

Opinion Slant N=87

Only 87 articles were coded as being opinionated

80% positive

7% negative

14% mixed

Results V Frame

'Youth Vulnerability' was the most prevalent theme: 391 articles (61%)

'Evil Industry' frame applied to 14% of coverage

88% of Evil Industry frame co-occur with Advertising & Marketing theme

Discussion I

Approximately 1/3 overall coverage was of on-going youth focused education – feel good coverage

Any 'structural' attention tended to be in relation to youth policies rather than normative change ie. youth access not tax

Discussion II

The lack of coverage of negative events is surprising in relation to ongoing industry activities targeting youth

Little openly opinionated coverage suggests a lack of critical engagement with the youth issue

Coverage of youth & smoking unlikely to challenge existing structures & norms

Discussion III

The domination of the 'Youth Vulnerability' frame in this coverage serves to reinforce individual rather than structural causal factors

The news coverage of youth is not being used to further implicate the tobacco industry

The tobacco industry is essentially able to avoid responsibility for the problem of smoking in relation to these youth news data

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Funded as part of NCI 'State and Community Research Initiative'

Grant # CA86273-01
