



Developing a Coding System to Track Newspaper Coverage of Tobacco Issues

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Presentation Aims

- Introduce the *Youth Smoking and the Media* project.
- Outline our development of a coding system for newspaper coverage of tobacco issues.
- Report findings from a pilot study of Australian newspaper coverage of a recent successful ETS lawsuit.

Project Aims



- Map newspaper coverage of tobacco issues.
- Develop methodology to assess news content and slant.
- Relate newspaper coverage within communities to Monitoring the Future survey data of teens' attitudes, beliefs and behaviors relating to smoking.
- Improve understanding of the relationship between media coverage of tobacco issues and youth smoking levels.

YSM Outcome Measures

- MTF survey data regarding youth attitudes, beliefs and behaviors relating to tobacco.
- YSM maps newspaper coverage of tobacco issues across MTF communities. Patterns of readership and coverage across communities estimate exposure.
- New 'newspaper' variable for explanatory model relating to MTF data

YSM Data & Coding

- Over 400 newspapers being monitored. Yield approximately 2000 articles per month.
- Prominence Variables: Front Page, Image, Article Type, Size.
- Content Variables: Overall Theme, Primary Topic.
- Position Variables: Slant & Frame.

YSM Coding System

- Building on strong existing research e.g. ASSIST tracking
- Seek to incorporate both content and frame analysis approaches. Both important in our model. What is being covered and how?

Themes, Topics, Slant & Frames

Themes: Health Effects, ETS, Advertising and Promotion, Economic Issues, Farming (13 in total).

Topics: Addiction & Quitting, Youth Access, Cigarette Content & Regulation, ETS Health & Comfort, Societal Costs of Smoking (34 in total).

Slant: Pro-Tobacco, Anti-Tobacco, Neutral or Mixed.

Frames: Support for Formal Intervention, Smoking as Socially Unacceptable, Government Keep Out, System Cynicism (14 in total).

**The Best of
Both Worlds
is Difficult
to Achieve**

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- Spent 12 months developing the coding system.
- Consensus approach to developing the code book. 2 initial developers and then 6 member coding team.
- Need a robust model able to handle volume that is fairly easy to learn.

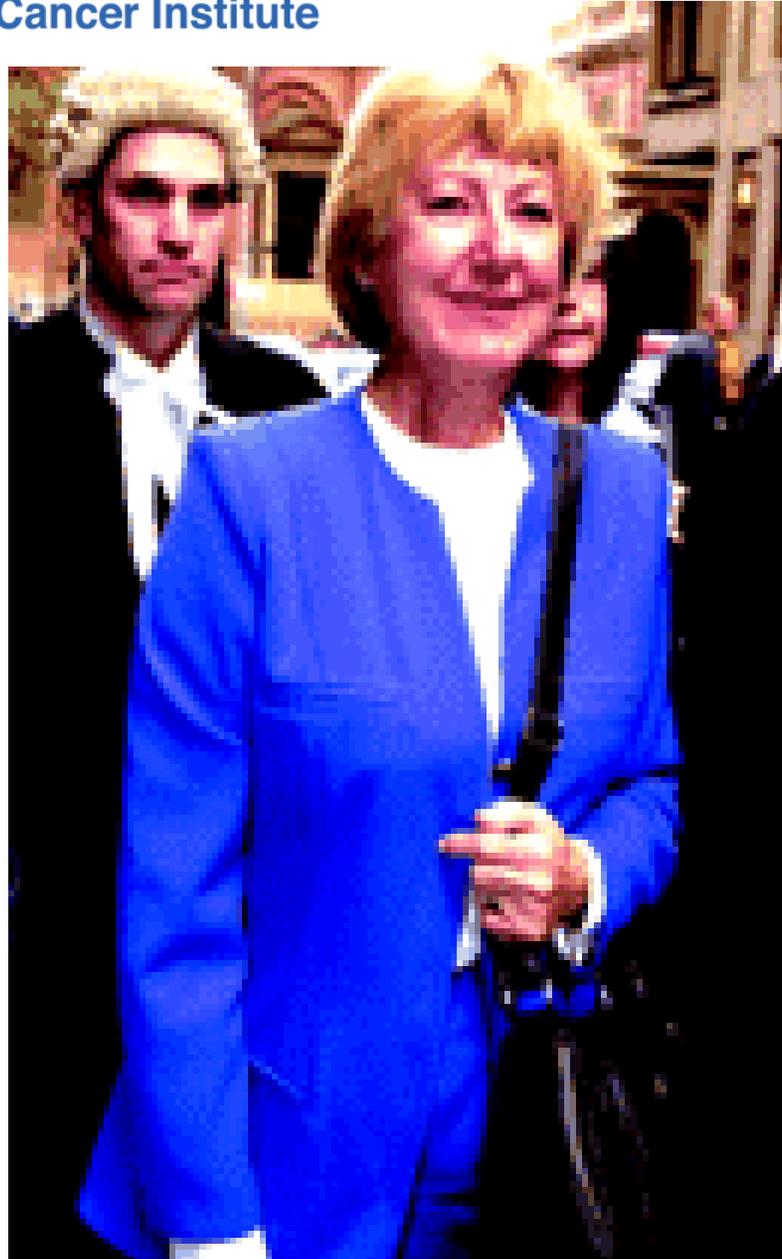
Our Pilot Study

The Marlene Sharp Analysis

- Topical and confined case study
- On May 1st 2001 a non-smoking barworker (Marlene Sharp) was awarded \$A466,000 for damages for throat cancer that she claimed resulted from years of bar work.
- The research team collected and coded all Australian newspaper articles dealing with this story in the month following the decision.
- Two members (MW & KS) both coded each of the articles in order to ensure concordance and develop consensus.

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Credit: Sydney Morning Herald

Marlene Sharp Results

- 100 newspaper articles relating to the Marlene Sharp case in May 2001.
- Only 7 received front page coverage (all in the days immediately following the trial).
- Mostly 'hard news' coverage (74/100). Only 3 editorials, 7 columns and 13 letters to the editor.
- All of the articles have the "ETS" Theme.

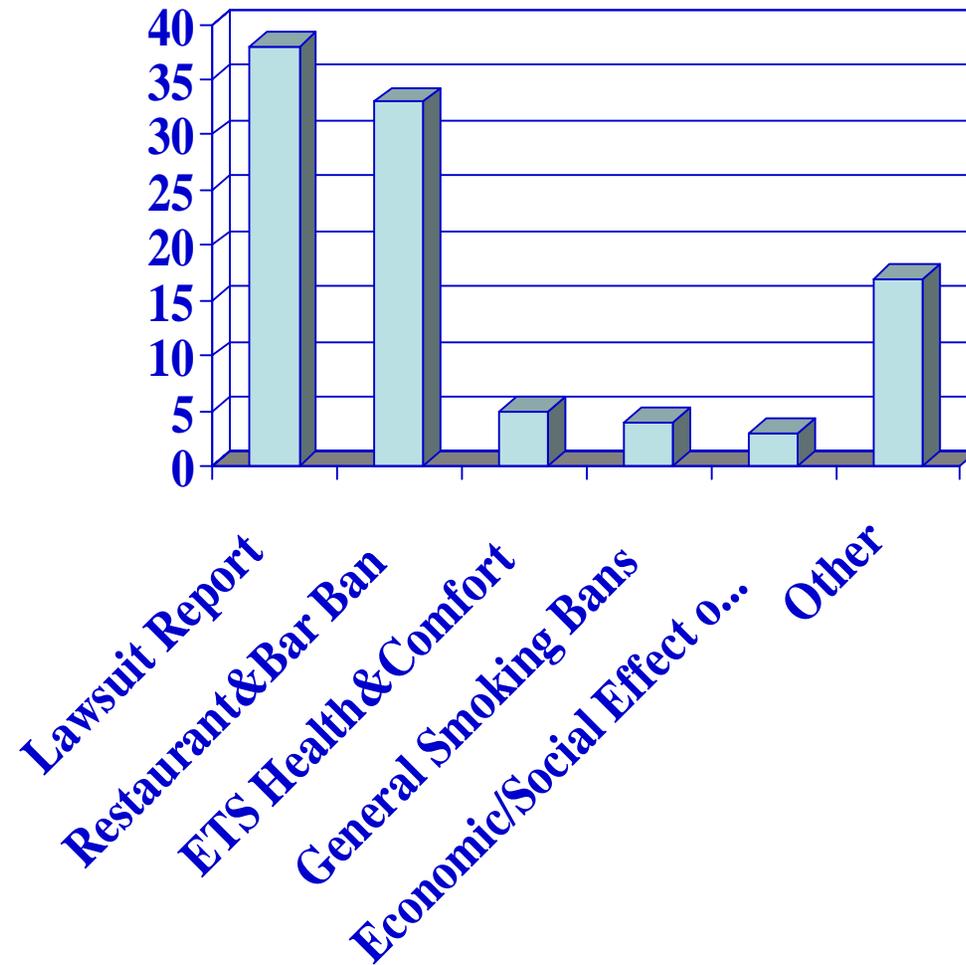
Results II

- Reports of the outcome of the case (success for the plaintiff) and the possible implications for future bans were the most common primary topic (38 & 33 articles).
- Only 22 of the articles had at least one paragraph dealing with the substantive issue of the case: ETS as a cause of cancer. Only 5 articles had this as their primary focus.

Primary Topic

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Results III

– Frames & Slant

- Predominantly positive coverage for tobacco control.
- 45 coded with one of the 'positive' tobacco control frames, 42 were neutral – only 13 were negative.
- 'Support for Formal Intervention' (29) and 'Smoking as Socially Unacceptable' (10) were the most common frames.
- 'Government Keep Out' (5) and 'System Cynicism' (5) were the most commonly occurring negative frames.

'Take Home' Messages

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- The central issue to the case (damaging health effects of ETS) was largely ignored.
- The policy implication of the trial was deemed very newsworthy. Bans in pubs and clubs seen as inevitable
- Overall, Marlene Sharpe received sympathetic coverage and regulation was supported.
- The 'tipping point' for ETS in Australia may have been reached.

Conclusions



- Developing a robust and meaningful coding system for news coverage of tobacco is challenging.
- Coding scheme successfully applied to a case study – provided valuable data about news coverage. Good news for embarking on our main study.
- News coverage can be both surprising and enlightening for tobacco control. Coverage can offer insight for Tobacco Control.