



EXAMINING THE PUBLIC HEALTH PERSPECTIVE IN LOCAL TOBACCO NEWSPAPER COVERAGE

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Learning Objectives

Examine utilization of the Public Health Model of Reporting (PHMR) in tobacco news coverage by local newspapers.

Discuss implications of the PHMR for translating research for mainstream media use.

Background

- Local media have been on the forefront of the tobacco control movement. High-volume news coverage and editorial support from the local newspaper have been associated with the success of citywide smoke-free ordinances.
- The media however face problems in interpreting medical findings and disclosing financial support behind them.
- The Public Health Model of Reporting (PHMR) emphasizes the use of public health (PH) facts about causes, consequences, and context in the translation of research to the lay audience.
- We focus on Missouri where no statewide systematic tobacco control efforts exist, thereby providing a fertile context in which to examine PHMR and its application.

Objective

Examine tobacco stories in local Missouri newspapers for presence of PH facts about context, cost and consequences and possible differences across story topic, type and locale.

Method

- Content analysis of all tobacco news stories and editorials in all local Missouri newspapers, October 2005 – December 2007. N = 1,255
- PH facts examined here: context, costs, consequences
- Context: helps readers view and interpret issues in a broader social setting. Refer to PH facts that provide comparisons.
- Costs: economic expenses incurred by PH problems at a familial, city, state, or national level. Refer to economic costs to society as a result of tobacco-related issues.
- Consequences: outcomes or impact of PH issues. Refer to effects of smoking prevention, cessation and treatment on local, state, national and international communities.
- Unit of analysis: the fact, ratio-level data.
- Intercoder reliabilities are .82 with Scott's pi index.

Results

- Smoking was covered primarily through news stories (n=798) with a local angle (n=704).
- Most popular topics were smoking restrictions/ordinances (n=630), cigarette taxes (n=218) and anti-smoking programs (n=127).
- Across all stories, 1201 context facts were given (M=.96), 896 consequences facts (M=.71) and 472 facts about costs (M=.38).
- A strong relationship existed between the stories' locale and the number of PH facts they contained. For context facts, $\chi^2 = 56.4$, $df=6$, $p<.001$; for costs, $\chi^2 = 96.6$, $df=6$, $p<.001$; and for consequences $\chi^2 = 136.2$, $df=6$, $p<.001$.
- A relationship was also found between the type of stories (editorials vs. news and features) and the number of PH facts provided. For context facts, $\chi^2 = 12.4$, $df=3$, $p=.006$; for costs, $\chi^2 = 19.3$, $df=3$, $p<.001$; and for consequences, $\chi^2 = 19.1$, $df=3$, $p<.001$.
- The number of PH facts also depended on story topic. For context facts, $\chi^2 = 69.8$, $df=15$, $p<.001$; for costs, $\chi^2 = 241.9$, $df=10$, $p<.001$; and for consequences, $\chi^2 = 200$, $df=15$, $p<.001$.

Conclusion

- The PHMR provides a framework for reporting on local tobacco issues. However, results show that tobacco news coverage contained few PH facts overall and fewer on average compared to earlier studies.
- This pinpoints a missed opportunity for public education that provides a social context to tobacco issues.
- Results suggest either a lack of awareness about the PH facts associated with smoking and tobacco among reporters, agenda-setting effects of special interest groups, or other factors such as newsroom culture.
- The PHMR helps to translate the vast research to the lay public who in many cases provide the final say on tobacco initiatives. Our findings provide new opportunities for health experts seeking rationales for their tobacco control actions.

<i>PH fact</i>	Context	Costs	Conseq.
<i>Story topic, type, locale</i>			
Health effects	1.75	.47	2.18
Restrictions/ordinances	.74	.04	.32
Anti-smoking programs	.94	.68	1.46
Cigarette taxes/prices	1.14	.91	1.06
Youth smoking	1.30	.34	.63
Other	.93	.86	.27
News	1.12	.43	.87
Feature	.63	.37	.63
Editorial	.69	.27	.42
Local angle	.66	.20	.29
State angle	1.30	.71	1.03
National/International	1.41	.33	1.78
Total	.96	.38	.71

Table 1: Mean number of PH facts by story topic, type and locale. N = 1,255

	Local	State	National/int'l
No PH facts	71.2% (Context) 88.9% (Costs) 84.9% (Conseq.)	52.6% (Context) 66.3% (Costs) 65.6% (Conseq.)	62.8% (Context) 87% (Costs) 48.1% (Conseq.)
1 PH fact	13.9% (Context) 6.1% (Costs) 7.8% (Conseq.)	18.6% (Context) 16.5% (Costs) 15.7% (Conseq.)	24.7% (Context) 4.3% (Costs) 17.3% (Conseq.)
2 PH facts	4.8% (Context) 2.8% (Costs) 4% (Conseq.)	12.6% (Context) 7.5% (Costs) 6.9% (Conseq.)	8.6% (Context) 6.2% (Costs) 9.3% (Conseq.)
>=3 PH facts	10.1% (Context) 2.1% (Costs) 3.3% (Conseq.)	16.2% (Context) 9.8 (Costs) 11.8% (Conseq.)	15.4% (Context) 2.5% (Costs) 25.3% (Conseq.)

Table 2: Distribution of PH facts across story locales. N = 1,254

	Smoking health effects	Ordinances/regulations	Anti-smoking programs	Cigarette taxes/prices	Youth smoking	Other
No PH facts	33% (Context) 77.3% (Costs) 40.9% (Conseq.)	69.4% (Context) 96.8% (Costs) 86.2% (Conseq.)	52.8% (Context) 57.5% (Costs) 51.2% (Conseq.)	58.8% (Context) 63.1% (Costs) 59.4% (Conseq.)	64.4% (Context) 81.1% (Costs) 75.6% (Conseq.)	68% (Context) 62.1% (Costs) 87.4% (Conseq.)
1 PH fact	29.5% (Context) 11.4% (Costs) 13.6% (Conseq.)	14.6% (Context) 2.5% (Costs) 6.3% (Conseq.)	26% (Context) 26% (Costs) 23.6% (Conseq.)	17.1% (Context) 15.7% (Costs) 18.9% (Conseq.)	11.1% (Context) 10% (Costs) 13.3% (Conseq.)	11.7% (Context) 11.7% (Costs) 8.7% (Conseq.)
2 PH facts	20.5% (Context) 5.7% (Costs) 14.8% (Conseq.)	5.7% (Context) .2% (Costs) 3.2% (Conseq.)	7.1% (Context) 11% (Costs) 7.9% (Conseq.)	8.8% (Context) 9.2% (Costs) 10.6% (Conseq.)	6.7% (Context) 5.6% (Costs) 3.3% (Conseq.)	8.7% (Context) 13.6% (Costs) 1% (Conseq.)
>=3 PH facts	17% (Context) 5.7% (Costs) 30.7% (Conseq.)	10.3% (Context) .5% (Costs) 4.3% (Conseq.)	14.2% (Context) 5.5% (Costs) 17.3% (Conseq.)	15.3% (Context) 12% (Costs) 11.1% (Conseq.)	17.8% (Context) 3.3% (Costs) 7.8% (Conseq.)	11.7% (Context) 12.6% (Costs) 2.8% (Conseq.)

Table 3: Distribution of PH facts across story topics. N = 1,255