CONSTRUCTING PUBLIC AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON ALCOHOL ISSUES: TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

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Abstract — Aims: To examine the possibilities for research into news reporting and its role in reflecting and informing public and political beliefs and action in relation to alcohol and drinking practices. Method: Studies on media and alcohol, focusing on the role of media in relation to alcohol consumption and drinking-related practices, policies and beliefs. Results: Most research on alcohol and media has focused on either advertising or entertainment media content, rather than on news reporting and its wider social implications. Conclusion: The role of news reporting could usefully be widened. We offer a framework for analysing the role of news media in relation to public debate and practice with regard to alcohol and drinking.

ALCOHOL AND MEDIA RESEARCH

Concern about the role played by the mass media in relation to alcohol consumption, drinking practices and related public beliefs has traditionally focused on alcohol advertising. In the 1980s, however, it was recognized that media images of alcohol and drinking go well beyond commercial advertising. Born to some extent out of frustration with the ambiguity of much ‘effects’ research on alcohol advertising, the case was put (e.g. DHSS, 1981; Gerbner et al., 1982) for a broader consideration of the images of alcohol and drinking which pervade the symbolic environment. New concern about the wider range of non-advertising images of alcohol and drinking led mainly to a focus on popular television drama serials or soaps (Lowery, 1980; Wallack et al., 1985; Hansen, 1986) with little or no analysis of how public discourse on alcohol may be constructed significantly through factual media genres, news most particularly. Thus, with a few exceptions (notably Casswell, 1997; Dorfman and Wallack, 1998, and the studies examined in more detail below), there have been surprisingly few attempts at mobilizing the extensive communications research literature on the construction of social problems or on the political agenda-setting role of the mass media (McCombs, 2004) towards an understanding of how alcohol policies and problems are covered and defined by the news media.

Taking its point of departure principally in the traditions of behaviourism, social learning theory, and the ‘effects’ tradition in mass communications research, much recent research about mass media and alcohol has thus focused on the question of how individuals are ‘influenced’ by advertising and media entertainment images of alcohol and drinking. The concern with ‘media entertainment images’ has focused on television programming although it has also encompassed research on other forms and media such as film (Cook and Lewington, 1979; Herd and Room, 1982; Herd, 1986; Room, 1987; Denzin, 1991; Kulick and Rosenberg, 2001), popular music lyrics (Beckley and Chalfant, 1979; Cruz, 1988; Herd, 2005), popular fiction (Pfautz, 1962; Cellucci and Larsen, 1995; Greenman, 2000), and music videos (DuRant et al., 1997; Robinson et al., 1998; Austin et al., 2000; Van den Bulck and Beullens, 2005).

NEWS AND ALCOHOL

There has been relatively little research on news and factual media reporting on alcohol, drinking practices, alcohol policy, and alcohol-related problems. The communications and political science literatures offer significant and powerful theoretical frameworks for analysing and understanding the role played by the news media in the public policy process and in the construction of public values and ‘climates of opinion’ (Ryan, 1991; Zaller, 1992; Entman, 1993; Best, 1995; Reese et al., 2001; Loseke, 2003; McCombs, 2004). The achievement of these frameworks is their departure from the conventional focus on individual behavioural and attitudinal dimensions, characteristic of much research on the influence of alcohol advertising. Instead they have focused on how particular issues are elaborated, contested, re-defined, and eventually removed from the public agenda. Aiming ultimately to chart and understand the dynamics and public ‘careers’ of social issues/problems, these approaches focus on the competition between key claims-makers (agencies, politicians, organizations, corporations, experts, etc.) in their attempt at commanding public attention and gaining legitimacy for their particular definitions of what constitutes a social problem, what its causes are, and how it should be resolved.

While there have been only limited attempts—and none in the UK—at pressing these frameworks into service with regard to alcohol, several studies in the related fields of tobacco/smoking and drugs control have made considerable strides towards mapping the dynamic interplay between media reporting, policy, politics, public understanding, or opinion (Chapman, 1989; Menashe and Siegel, 1998; Kennedy and Bero, 1999; Lima and Siegel, 1999; Durrant et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2005).

To comprehensively identify published research on news coverage of alcohol and news media roles in relation to alcohol issues, we conducted searches using combinations of the keyword-stems ‘alcohol’ and ‘news’ in the ISI Web of Science/Web of Knowledge databases. These searches were complemented with Google searches, with examination of recent reviews/overviews of alcohol research (notably Babor...
et al., 2003 and Grube, 2004) and with searches on particular institutional archives [e.g. The Prevention Research Center, the Berkeley Media Studies Group (2003) and the Alcohol and Public Health Research Unit (2002)].

The key relevant studies identified through our searches are summarized in Table 1, indicating, for each study, the method, media, period, datasets, and variables analysed.

The studies singled out for more extensive examination have been chosen because they at once represent promising work towards understanding the role of news media in relation to alcohol issues and illustrate some of the shortfalls of work in this area. We highlight (i) the lack of cross-referencing between studies; (ii) the need to examine effects of media reporting within appropriate theoretical frames from the media and communications field; (iii) the potential power of longitudinal analyses; (iv) the mediating role of advocacy or perspective-taking; (v) the significance of message sources; and (vi) the significance of the medium in which coverage occurs.

Theoretical and empirical cross-referencing

There is a lack of cross-referencing between studies. In contrast to the considerable amount of research on agenda-setting, framing, and advocacy communication in the fields of tobacco/smoking and drugs control, far fewer studies—and none in the UK—have addressed these processes in relation to media news coverage of alcohol issues. Amongst those that have, there is also considerably less commonality—than amongst the smoking and drugs studies—of theoretical frameworks used and less cross-referencing.


Effects of media reporting

Any systematic analysis of media discourses is usually carried out not simply to articulate the way media represent issues but also to identify underlying agendas of media owners or producers or potential influences upon media consumers or societies. The study of news discourses and alcohol issues has begun to explore media discourses for meanings that inform such wider understanding, but there is plenty of scope for further development of research in the future in this context.

Underpinning Törönen’s (2003) research is a clear assumption that news media reporting plays an important role in the processes of public opinion and policy formation, but he stops short of attempting to determine the finer patterns of interaction (reflection and influence) between these key components.

Yanovitzky and Stryker (2001), working also from the assumption that news media play an important role in constructing the boundaries that define public notions of acceptable behaviour, examined the effects of news coverage on binge drinking over the period 1978–1996. Describing their theoretical approach as a ‘norm-reinforcement’, they argue that the news media—together with family, peers, and other referents—provide important cues to socially acceptable individual behaviour. In contrast to the more general formulation offered by Törönen, they conceptualize ‘media effects’ within a tightly controlled analytical design enabling the measurement of interactions between the news agenda and public/policy agendas.

Longitudinal analyses

The role played by the media, and more especially by news media, in shaping public discourses about alcohol consumption cannot be presumed to occur at one point in time. If media coverage of alcohol-related issues has an impact upon public thinking and policy-making, this influence is likely to occur over time. It is important therefore to understand long-term trends in news discourses about alcohol issues and how these are linked to relevant policy and social change over time.

Törönen’s (2003) analysis usefully mapped the changes in media discourse over a period of time characterized by significant changes in Finnish alcohol policy and legislation, and as such it provided evidence on one of the important components—the media—in the dynamics of social values, public opinion, government policy and legislation, and media reporting.

Yanovitzky and Stryker (2001), drawing on the traditions of agenda-setting, combined three important sets of data from the period 1978–1996: secondary analysis of survey data [on young people’s ‘binge-drinking-related beliefs and involvement in this behaviour’ (p.219)], data on federal legislation against youth binge drinking, and primary analysis of press coverage of binge-drinking. Yanovitzky and Stryker’s study is interesting, because—unlike both Törönen and Lemmens et al.—they combine, in a rigorous and tightly disciplined research design, of three sets of data enabled them to show that ‘media coverage of binge drinking behaviour had a significant positive contribution to the trend in binge-drinking-related congressional bills (…)’ (p.222) and ‘(…) that the impact of news stories on this [binge-drinking] behaviour was mediated by policy actions as well as by changes in the social acceptability of this behavior’ (p.230).

Lemmens et al. (1999) examined national newspaper coverage of alcohol issues in the United States during the 7-year period 1985–1991. Their study is contextualized within a general, but relatively brief, discussion about the mass media and the public, touching on questions about agenda-setting, climates of opinion, and advocacy communication. They stress that their study was not designed to answer the more fundamental questions about relationship between the mass media and public beliefs, attitudes, and opinions about alcohol consumption (p.1555). Their analysis is particularly useful for the way in which it demonstrates two key dimensions of news coverage: thematic focus and key sources of alcohol issues information.

Drunk driving was, throughout the period examined, the most prominent thematic issue in national coverage. They further found a decrease, in the second half of the period studied, of issues related to alcohol abuse and alcoholism and of the ill effects of alcohol on the individual and society (p.1558). They found government information sources to be the single most prominent source of media reporting on alcohol, and, in contrast, public health advocates were a relatively infrequent source.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors/Study</th>
<th>Year of publication</th>
<th>Main method</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Period of coverage studied</th>
<th>Key data-sets and analytical variable(s)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casswell, S.</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Review and programmatic article</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Proposed focus: voices, themes and policies in news coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorfman, L. and Wallack, L.</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Summary/review of alcohol-relevant findings from a selection of news studies, but mainly a programmatic article on the advocacy approach and the role for news researchers</td>
<td>Reference to studies of both US broadcast and print media</td>
<td>Studies from selected years between 1990 and 1995</td>
<td>Frequency, positioning and thematic content of references to alcohol; media advocacy and the role for news researchers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemmens, P. H., Vaeth, P. A. C. and Greenfield, T. K.</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>Five national US newspapers</td>
<td>1985–1991</td>
<td>Coverage of alcohol and alcoholism; the matic content; positive/negative reporting; sources of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yanovitzky, L. and Bennett, C.</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Content analysis and time-series regression analysis with data on US congress bills and statistics on drunk driving (DD)</td>
<td>Two national US newspapers (New York Times and Washington Post)</td>
<td>1978–1996</td>
<td>News coverage of drunk driving (DD); number of DD-related bills introduced in US congress; statistics on involvement in DD-behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atkin, C. K. and DeJong, W.</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>Student-run US college newspapers</td>
<td>1994–1995</td>
<td>Information on alcohol and other drug use; substance-related problems; control strategies; prevention/treatment efforts; positive/negative portrayal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Advocacy and orientation in news discourses

Determining the processes of media effects, whether over the short-term or long-term, requires an understanding of other mechanisms within media coverage of alcohol issues that may mediate the responses of media consumers. One issue in this context is the extent to which a media narrative advocates behavioural change and indicates ways in which such change might be achieved. The orientations taken by the media towards alcohol consumption as a social problem might also shape public reaction, support for policy changes or controls over undesired ‘alcohol-related’ behaviours.

Lemmens et al. (1999) examined the general ‘slant’ (positive, negative, and neutral) and overall evaluative stance in newspaper reporting on alcohol issues. While noting that the press evaluations of alcohol use were ‘largely neutral or ambivalent and often negative’ (p.1559), they found interesting indications of changing social evaluations of alcohol, and their findings generally confirmed the findings of the much earlier research by Linsky (1970), that ‘moralistic’ and psychological or ‘personality’-focused explanations for alcohol abuse and dependency had, by the latter part of the 20th century, all but disappeared completely to give way to ‘naturalistic/environmental’ explanations.

While Yanovitzky and Stryker did not succeed in demonstrating a direct impact of media reporting on binge-drinking behaviour, their findings showed that news coverage plays an important role in articulating and reinforcing a change in public norms regarding the social acceptability of binge-drinking. On the basis of this finding, they convincingly argue that media advocacy [as proposed by Wallack et al. (1993)] aimed at influencing news and entertainment media coverage may be considerably more effective than public health communication campaigns in changing social norms with regard to binge-drinking.

Importance of message sources

The impact of media on the public agenda can be mediated by the perceived authority and credibility of message sources cited in media reports. This factor has seldom been examined in the context of news reporting of alcohol issues.

The study by Lemmens et al. (1999) contains many of the correct dimensions for understanding media roles in the interplay with public and political agendas, but omits to analyse who are the key claims-makers. A more recent study by Myhre et al. (2002), while making considerable headway with a detailed analysis of key content dimensions, similarly omits to examine ‘who’ articulates/drives the newspaper agenda on alcohol issues. Myhre et al. (2002) do examine ‘sources’ but by this they mean the ‘author/writer’ of the individual articles rather than the (authoritative, expert, or political) sources who may be quoted or referred to, and who may be the originators of news items.

Significance of medium

With very few exceptions, as indicated in Table 1, studies of news coverage of alcohol issues have focused on newspapers, although within this medium some interesting non-mainstream subcategories have been examined [e.g. Myhre et al. (2002); Atkin and DeJong (2000) and Jones-Webb et al. (1997)]. The communication medium’s significance for the role and social impact of alcohol messages has, however, not received sufficient attention so far.

The significance of ‘medium’ stems from findings in the general news media literature that the credibility of any news discourse depends not just on the message sources identified, but also upon the medium itself. News suppliers have become ‘brands,’ but the strength of these ‘brands’ in terms of their reputation for accurate, balanced and credible news often derives from their close association with a specific medium. Thus, television has traditionally been identified in public opinion polls as the most important and most trusted news medium (Lee, 1975; Levy and Robinson, 1986; Gunter, 2005). Newspapers have been rated as more credible than the internet (Flanagin and Metzger, 2001). However, these distinctions can vary among different media audience communities (Rainie and Packel, 2001).

LESSONS FROM OTHER AREAS

As indicated earlier, studies of news and tobacco/drugs issues have made further strides than research on alcohol and news towards an understanding of the dynamic interplay between news media, public/political understanding and policy or action. Studies in the tobacco field have provided evidence on the relative prominence of tobacco/smoking themes in news coverage, of the different ‘frames’ used for discussing tobacco themes and legislation, and of the relative prominence of anti- and pro-tobacco control measures in news reporting. While many of these studies make reference to the notion of ‘advocacy communication’—the attempt by ‘stakeholder’ parties in public controversy about smoking and tobacco control legislation to influence news media coverage (see Wallack et al., 1993; Chapman and Wakefield, 2001; Chapman, 2004)—it is surprising that few have analysed the specific sources of information quoted in news media coverage of tobacco and smoking related issues.

Several agenda-setting studies (Gonzenbach, 1992 and 1996; Fan, 1996) of public understanding and debate about drugs issues have pointed to the complex web of interaction between public opinion, media coverage and political action. Gonzenbach (1992), employing a time-series analysis of media coverage, public opinion, and presidential decisions on drugs issues during the period 1984–1991, showed media coverage to be an important ‘driver’ in relation to both public opinion formation and presidential decision-making. Studying a similar period, 1985–1994, Fan (1996) found evidence that changes in public perception of drugs as a serious problem could be explained by the press increasingly framing the drugs issue as a ‘crisis’, while other types of framing of the drugs issue contributed only in a limited way to changes in public opinion.

Two key conclusions—with implications for studies of alcohol and news—can be drawn from these studies of news coverage of tobacco and drugs issues: media coverage plays an important role in the building of public and political agendas on such issues as tobacco and drugs control, and the ‘terms of discussion’ or framing of issues impacts on public understanding of and the formulation of political responses to such issues.
A FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE ANALYSIS

In this concluding section, we build on the lessons from previous research on news and alcohol-related issues to outline a framework for analysis of the nature and role of news media coverage of alcohol in society. There is a gap in the literature on media and alcohol consumption that specifically focuses upon the role that news coverage can play.

The key dimensions to be considered for a framework of analysis for the study of the role of news media coverage of alcohol consumption and related matters fall under the following three headings: (i) Sampling Media Content, (ii) Content Analysis Categories, and (iii) Linking Media to Public Opinion.

Sampling media content

The selection of media content for analysis is a vital component in any study that attempts to present an empirical demonstration of the actual or potential impact of news coverage of alcohol-related issues. This concerns the audience coverage likely to be achieved by a mass medium or specific outputs of that medium, i.e. we need to know about the kinds of viewers, listeners, or readers attracted by a medium and, more specifically, the extent to which those media consumers (i) represent social groups that may have been targeted by media messages, and (ii) are likely to be responsive to those messages in the ways intended. Researchers have so far focused on the ways these issues have been covered by newspapers.

Other important news media, such as television, radio, and more recently, the internet, have rarely been included. Even if the earlier work presents an accurate and comprehensive indication of the nature of print news coverage of alcohol issues, it represents just one part of the range of information sources to which people might turn on their media menus.

In the context of alcohol consumption, for example, an issue such as binge drinking is one that centres on the drinking habits of young people mostly from mid-teens to late 20s. This age group is also the one that is the main focus of attention in respect of alcohol consumption leading to violence or sexual promiscuity. It is not, however, the age-group known for its interest in news—or more especially serious forms of news—coverage (Hargreaves and Thomas, 2002). Indeed, there is growing evidence that news consumption in general, and certainly via the principal traditional news sources, is experiencing a downturn (Hargreaves and Thomas, 2002). Nonetheless, information-seeking associated with specific events or issues that are deemed to be socially important to citizens or which deal with matters that create social concern or uncertainty can generate considerable volumes of news consumption.

Some media advocacy research associated with policies designed to produce shifts in alcohol-related behaviour have recognized that multimedia campaigns are needed if the aim is to raise issue awareness across an entire community (Holder and Treno, 1997). If news coverage is part of a wider interventionist campaign, however, it needs to be supplemented by more direct activities on the part of individuals within the community (Treno and Holder, 1997). It could be of value therefore to differentiate between media in terms of a number of criteria relevant to the uptake of information messages. Distinctions between media can be made in terms of the particular groups they reach, the degree of trust placed in media as information sources, and the effectiveness with which people learn from and are persuaded by arguments presented through different media.

We have already noted that young people are not major news consumers. In addition, the news media have different audience profiles. In targeting young people, for example, television may reach significant numbers at certain times, but health campaigners would need to recognize even then that specific programmes are likely to prove more effective than others at attracting young audiences. Newspapers, in contrast, are consumed to a lesser degree by youth audiences. Radio remains a popular medium with young people, but more for its music content than news. The internet has emerged as a significant medium for young people and has eroded the youth audiences for the longer established news media (Pew Research Centre, 2004). Some media may be effective at reaching community or opinion leaders while others may reach the general population.

One further criterion that might influence media content sampling in any study of news coverage of alcohol-related issues is the degree of trust or authority that attaches to particular news suppliers. One of the principal factors according to which the quality of news coverage is assessed by news consumers is its objectivity. This factor is a central ingredient of the ‘brand’ of a new supplier. The degree of trust placed in a news source may be influenced in part by the medium in which it operates. Television, for example, tends to command greater public trust than newspapers (Gunter, 2005). Some news brands, however, remain strong regardless of the medium in which they operate (YouGov, 2005).

News media can also be distinguished in terms of their respective effectiveness at conveying information to audiences. This point goes beyond differentiating news sources in terms of their perceived importance or credibility for news consumers. In previous research on reporting of alcohol issues, it has been assumed that newspaper reporting can play an important role in public opinion formation (Törönen, 2003). The significance of newspapers in this context, however, will be determined by how effective print media are compared with broadcast and electronic media at conveying information and persuasive messages to receivers.

Conflicting evidence has emerged about the relative effectiveness of television, radio, and newspapers in relation to recall of news by audiences (Furnham and Gunter, 1985; DeFleur et al., 1992; Walma van der Molen and van der Voort, 1997 and 1998). Differences have also been found in the effectiveness of different media in conveying messages designed to elicit resistance to persuasion and attitude change (Pfau et al., 2000).

In monitoring the likely effectiveness of any news-based media advocacy campaign therefore it would be relevant to distinguish the nature of the messages conveyed by different media and how appropriate those messages might be in respect of influencing particular groups. Such considerations should take into account the relative efficacy of different media to reach, inform, and persuade young people.

Content analysis categories

Many analyses of news media content tend to be topic focused. Studies of the changing nature of the news over
time have catalogued agenda shifts such that certain topics have been observed to command more space and other less. Thus, in the context of the study of alcohol coverage in the news, researchers have reported on changing levels of representation of alcohol issues, and sub-issues over time (Lemmens et al., 1999; Törnroën, 2003). There have also been limited attempts at evaluating the nature of coverage in terms of whether it is positive, neutral, or negative in its treatment of specific alcohol-related problems (Lemmens et al., 1999). Recent research on the changing nature of news coverage, however, has revealed more subtle ways of profiling news coverage that take into account the probable significance of certain types of narrative and visual presentational styles for the emotional reactions news content can generate among audiences (e.g. Brants and Neijens, 1998; Grabe et al., 2001).

Changes in the quality of news that have been examined under the heading of ‘tabloidisation,’ for example, have identified a growth in coverage of what has been referred to by some writers as ‘sensational’ news coverage (Blumler, 1999; Franklin, 2003) and by others as ‘personalized’ coverage (van Zoonen and Holz-Bacha, 2000).

Changes in production styles, which are characterized by visual and linguistic changes, have collectively been identified as representing a shift towards the use of techniques that are designed to play on the emotions of news consumers (Brants, 1998). Theoretical models and accompanying empirical methodologies have been developed to investigate this phenomenon (Grabe et al., 2001; Uribe, 2004).

One reason why the emotionality of news is important is that it can shape not just the audience’s emotional state but also the processing of information content (Lang et al., 1997). Powerful emotional response can impede information processing (Heo and Sundar, 1998; Lang, 2000). Emotional responses can also have a directional impact in determining which content is best remembered (Brosius, 1993; Aust and Zillmann, 1996). Subtle use of emotional cues has been found to determine which information is perceived by the audience as the most compelling or important (Aust and Zillmann, 1996).

When cataloguing the nature of news coverage of alcohol-related issues insights into the possible impact of media content on audiences could be enhanced from inclusion of ‘emotionality’ measures in the analytical framework. While some studies have adopted framing models to guide content analysis, frames have been defined primarily in terms of themes of issue coverage (e.g. Myhre et al., 2002; Champion and Chapman, 2005). The inclusion of emotionality elements would further enhance the nature of any analysis of linguistic content of the news and incorporate a theoretically-grounded framework for analysis of other non-linguistic news production attributes.

**Linking media to public opinion**

Linking content to public opinion can be further enhanced through adoption of framing models. The significance of this consideration lies in its centrality to the design of media and community campaigns designed to produce micro-level and macro-level social behaviour change. Iyengar (1991) articulated a model in which distinctions were made between the way news reports argued the case for ‘causal responsibility’ and ‘treatment responsibility’ when reporting upon social problems. Causal responsibility identified the nature of a problem and its origins, while treatment responsibility examined sources of power to solve particular problems. In discussing the nature of reporting within television news, Iyengar identified two types of news ‘frame’—episodic and thematic. When adopting an episodic news frame, news reports would focus on specific cases or events and represent public issues and social problems in concrete terms. With thematic frames, a more generalized and abstract orientation was adopted in which general outcomes and social conditions would be examined.

In an alcohol reporting context, a thematic frame might examine general policies about alcohol availability, drinking hours or the nature of alcohol promotions, and advertising. In contrast, an episodic frame might focus on stories concerned with specific outbreaks of allegedly alcohol-fuelled violence that might then be used to argue for tighter general restrictions on drinking. According to Iyengar, television tends to prefer episodic frames because they can be readily visualized and this is important for that medium. They can also be more emotionally compelling which adds to their dramatic value. This is increasingly important in an ever more competitive news environment. We also know that video presentations can be superior to print presentations in the context of presenting persuasive arguments to receivers (Pfau et al., 2000). In the context of using the media to convey messages about alcohol consumption, therefore, it is not simply the nature of the framing of issues that is important, but also the matching of arguments with the medium in which they are likely to be most effective.

What is clear from framing research, however, is that subtle changes to the way an argument is represented can make a radical difference to whether it is accepted or rejected by an audience. Policies that place restrictions upon consumer behaviour are often rejected because they are framed by news stories as developments designed to remove freedom of choice.

Psychological reactance theory has been used to explain why such persuasive approaches tend to be unsuccessful. Individuals react strongly against any steps by an authority to take away their freedom to choose. Restrictions on commodities that consumers have been free to consume may convert them into ‘forbidden fruit’ rendering them even more attractive. This effect has been observed in relation to age-related restrictions on media content believed to be unsuitable for young media consumers (Bushman and Stack, 1996). Such restrictions can render movies and television programmes even more appealing (Kracmar and Cantor, 1997). Further evidence has emerged that tobacco advertising bans can also make smoking more rather than less attractive to young people. Rather than discouraging smoking, the opposite effect seems to occur, especially among 18–24 year olds (Buddelmeyer and Wilkins, 2005).

**CONCLUSION**

We believe there is a need to develop content coding models that are informed by relevant theories and empirical evidence concerning the way individuals respond to news coverage and to policy developments designed to change their behaviour,
especially when these developments take away freedom of choice. So far, studies of news coverage of alcohol issues have adopted more simplistic framing models. We argue that consideration of empirical evidence on the sensitivities of media audiences to narrative and production treatments in media coverage of social policy issues in the news can lead to the development of more robust and comprehensive coding frames that reveal the presence of coverage features capable of promoting specific types of audience response.

We propose an analytical approach that will not only show the extent and nature of news reporting on alcohol issues, but take into account a range of factors linked to media consumers to guide the sampling of media content and construction of a coding method that will represent frames that are likely to be accepted or rejected by the public. This framing approach will not only simply examine sources of policy statements within news reports, but also take into account news source brands and the ways in which arguments for policies are presented, especially as they relate to the freedoms of individuals to choose in relation to the way they behave in different situations. In effect, this approach is designed to facilitate the mapping of the career of a social issue, to identify the primary definers and claims-makers and therefore who or what drives the public and media discourses on alcohol as a social issue.

REFERENCES


