

What's News?

What's News? consists of three activities designed to help youth understand how the news and news-oriented media influence our perceptions about tobacco and alcohol.

Media Mapping—News continues the mapping activities of previous modules with a focus on news content.

Analyzing News Coverage explores how news content is determined, defined, and developed. Particular attention is devoted to how decisions are made about what does and doesn't get covered.

Operation Deadline lets youth experience the challenges and difficulties of news production by developing their own news broadcast.

Objectives

Youth will:

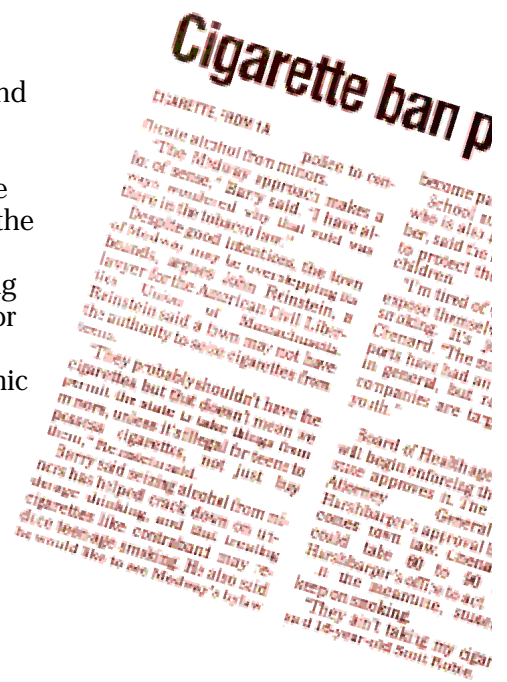
- understand how “news” is defined,
- identify different perspectives presented in news stories about tobacco and alcohol in each major medium—television, radio, newspapers, magazines—and
- identify direct and indirect tobacco and alcohol promotions in news media.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Deciding what's news. It is impossible to present everything that happens in life so news media focus only on the “most important” events and stories. This raises the question of who decides what is and isn't important. Generally, this is the work of producers and editors, guided by general standards of what counts as “news” (see page 77). The basic criteria include **proximity, relevance, immediacy, timeliness, interest, drama, entertainment,** and those things that are novel, rare, or new. The more a story meets these criteria, the more likely it is to be covered.

Media differences. Selection of news stories is also influenced by technical capabilities of the medium used. Print media such as newspapers and magazines must rely on the use of text, photographs, and artwork to convey their messages, while electronic media such as radio and television depend on sound and “live” images, respectively.

Stories in electronic media are typically shorter and emphasize the visual. Print media can devote more space and time to providing in-depth coverage and context for the story as well as providing background information. Electronic media can deliver news stories more quickly than print media, often broadcasting “live” as a story unfolds.



KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Commercial Concerns. News coverage is not simply a public-interest activity. Like entertainment media, news providers earn profits through advertising. Thus, news media need to deliver stories that will attract viewers, and, therefore, viewer preferences significantly influence the types of stories presented in the news.

In addition, alcohol and tobacco companies are important advertisers in various news media, although only alcohol companies spend a lot of money on advertising in print news outlets, particularly magazines. Though it rarely happens, negative news stories about specific companies or products may lead to retaliation in the form of canceling advertising contracts or initiating or threatening a costly lawsuit.

Subtle Messages. Because depiction of tobacco and alcohol in the news is more subtle and less frequently reaches young people than marketing or entertainment programming, you may need to scan news sources (such as television, newspapers, news magazines, nonfiction, articles in glamour and fitness magazines, **editorial cartoons**, and Internet sites) to secure appropriate materials for evaluation and discussion. The important issues to examine are:

the different perspectives presented in stories about tobacco and alcohol,

incidental presentation of individuals smoking, chewing tobacco, or drinking in news footage/photographs, and

tobacco and alcohol promotions (e.g., sign exposures in game footage/photographs that appear in news coverage).

Agenda Setting: Establishing the importance and priority of issues, based on the amount and placement of news stories. Issues that receive the most coverage and are given primary placement in news broadcasts, newspapers, and magazines are more likely to be seen as important by the general public.

Bias: Personal opinions or beliefs of reporters, which may be expressed and influence how a news story is presented.

Editorial Cartoons: Cartoons that make fun of people and events in the news.

Editorials: Opinions written by news staff which take a positive or negative stance on news events.

Features: A longer format story or article, which often provides more in-depth coverage of a particular issue, often human interest.

Footage: Film that has been shot to illustrate a news story. Typically, there is much more footage available than can be used; so news teams must select only those images that best illustrate the story they want to tell.

Immediacy: How recent or current a news story is. The more quickly the news media can relate a story to the public—ideally as it is unfolding—the more interesting it is for viewers or readers.

Multi-Source Rule: Comparing how the same story is presented in several different media (such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines).

Proximity: How close a news event is to people. Local events are closer to home than national and international events and are often of more interest because they may directly affect the lives of viewers and readers.

Relevance: How important a story is to people's lives and its impact on their lives. The more impact a news event is likely to have on the lives of viewers and readers, the more likely it is to be presented.

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Media Mapping—News

Talking Points

- The primary issues that affect how news media portray tobacco and alcohol.
- Why tobacco and alcohol use are often not seen as “newsworthy.”
- Information about tobacco and alcohol use that is often not presented.
- Effects of advertising and threats of lawsuits on news media coverage.
- Incidental portrayals of tobacco and alcohol use within news stories.

Action Steps

1 Discuss youth’s attitudes toward news using the following questions:

- ? **What news media, if any, do you read, watch, or listen to most often? Why? Where do you get information on health and fitness?**
- ? **Are there particular types of news media you don’t like? Why? Why not?**
- ? **What do you like and dislike most about news? Why do you feel this way?**
- ? **Do you trust the news? Why or why not? What strategies do you use to decide whether or not a news story is true?**
- ? **Can you think of any particular news stories you thought were deceptive or false? Describe these. How did they make you feel?**

2 Distribute *Handout 14: What’s News*. Discuss the criteria used to define what is “news” and how these may influence the amount and nature of tobacco and alcohol coverage. Explore what aspects of tobacco and alcohol use are most likely to be covered as a result of applying these criteria. Brainstorm a tobacco- or alcohol-related story for each criterion of “newsworthiness.”

3 Distribute *Handout 15: Media Mapping—News*. Discuss the ways in which news media directly and indirectly influence public opinion about tobacco and alcohol. If time allows, have youth map news coverage of tobacco and alcohol media for two days, focusing on just one or two media, such as television and newspapers. For a shorter exercise, have them analyze tobacco or alcohol coverage in two or three magazines of their choice (such as *Rolling Stone*, *SPIN*, *Seventeen*, *People*). This is necessary for the next activity.

Focus

1. Assess how “news” criteria influence coverage of tobacco and alcohol.
2. Identify the extent to which news coverage of tobacco and alcohol contributes to the normalization and glamorization of these products.

Time:

45 minutes

Materials:

Handout 14: What’s News

Handout 15: Media Mapping—News

Handout 5: The Seven Critical Media Questions

Teens call tobacco ad ban useless



Friends who smoke have more influence than advertisements, area teenagers say.
By LYNDI GLEDHILL
Missouri staff writer

New restrictions on teen smoking will not have an effect on those who have already started, according to Columbia-area teens.

Despite President Bill Clinton’s planned announcement outlining new restrictions on tobacco designed to curb teen smoking, most teenagers chose to smoke not because of advertising, but because they see others doing it.

“Kids are going to do what they want to,” said Brandon Woodard, 16, who does not smoke because he plays baseball. “No one feels anything to stop the kids who are smoking now, and they are the ones who other kids see smoking. They don’t pay attention to advertising.”

—Brandon Woodard, 16

Matt Crow, 19, who has been smoking since he was 15, said the new restrictions will not be effective because, “No one cares you if you look old enough, and you can always have friends buy them for you.”

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analyzing News Coverage

Focus:

Assess how news media shape opinion through decisions about the priority of news stories and the specific points of view used to present the story.

Time:

45 minutes

Materials:

Handout 16: What's the Angle?

Handout 5: The Seven Critical Media Questions

Examples of news stories on tobacco or alcohol; other nonfiction feature stories youth wish to contribute

Talking Points

- News media attempt to present multiple points of view in stories to ensure a complete and objective account. However, it is not uncommon for reporters to give stories a particular “slant” by selecting and ordering quotes and facts that promote one interpretation over others. Understanding how this “bias” can creep into news stories is important if we are to truly make up our own minds about issues and events.
- News media differ in how they tell a news story. To get a complete and accurate understanding of a news event, it is often necessary to compare different news sources, such as television and newspapers. This is referred to as the “multi-source” rule.

Have them analyze a specific news story. Engage in a more in-depth analysis by using the criteria provided in *Handout 16: What's the Angle* and *Handout 5: The Seven Critical Media Questions*.

2 Assign students to watch both the local and national television news for one evening. Purchase one or more local and national newspapers for the day of and the day following this viewing assignment. Explore the following questions:

? **How are the same stories covered by these different news media? Are the facts and perspectives similar or different? In what way? How does this influence your view of the story? Which version did you prefer? Why?**

? **Were stories covered on television different from those in the newspaper? Which ones? Why?**

? **What were the most important stories on the local television news broadcast? What was most important in the local newspaper(s)? How do story priorities compare with one another? With national coverage?**

Action Steps

1 Have youth bring examples of tobacco- and/or alcohol-related news stories from their media mapping activity. You may need to have some samples available just in case they have difficulty finding a timely article or program. Video recordings of television newscasts are particularly useful for group discussion and analysis.

In addition to newspaper clippings or magazine articles, youth should also look for editorials, editorial cartoons, photographs, and even comics. Have students discuss the extent to which they feel the news stories are truthful and accurate and why.



© 1996 New Jersey Sunday Herald, Newton, NJ

Operation Deadline

Focus

Understand the difficult choices which characterize television news and how these affect the way tobacco and alcohol stories are presented.

Time:

45 minutes

Materials:

Handout 17: Operation Deadline

Handout 14: What's News?

Tobacco & Alcohol Fact Sheets (pp.18-19)

Talking Points

- As we saw earlier, choosing news stories is not easy. There are a lot of differences in what is covered and how. These differences occur not only between different mediums, such as television and newspapers, but also between competing newspapers or television stations. Today you're going to decide what counts as "news worth covering."

Action Steps

- 1 Divide youth into teams and distribute *Handout 17: Operation Deadline*, which asks them to choose the line-up for a 30-minute evening newscast. This requires them to pick which stories will be covered and which won't, in what order the stories will be presented, and how much time will be devoted to each. Have them use the criteria provided in *Handout 14: What's News?* to help them make these decisions.

- 2 When teams have completed the exercise, discuss how and why they made their decisions. Explore the values that are represented in their ordering of news items, the amount of time devoted to each, and the particular story angles presented.

What interpretations would viewers be likely to make about the relevance and importance of tobacco and alcohol as a result of the teams' decisions?

- 3 If time allows, have youth actually script out one of the tobacco or alcohol stories. What information would they use to begin the story? What film footage would they provide? How would they "localize" the story for their community?

- 4 Be sure to analyze the results of the Activity 4-1: *Media Mapping—News*.

ACTIVITY EXTENSION: Invite representatives from your local news media to speak to youth. Have them discuss how they identify, select, and develop news stories. Have them discuss tobacco- and alcohol-related stories they typically cover. Leave time for youth to ask questions.

Notes