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Agenda-Building Influences on the News Media's Coverage of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Push to Regulate Tobacco, 1993-2009

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**AGENDA-BUILDING INFLUENCES ON THE NEWS
MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF THE U.S. FOOD AND
DRUG ADMINISTRATION'S PUSH TO REGULATE
TOBACCO, 1993-2009**

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ABSTRACT

Citing agenda-building theory, this article examines the influence of three key factors on the news media's coverage of the process of placing tobacco and tobacco products under regulation of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration between 1993 and 2009. We analyzed data from a content analysis of 570 news articles from The New York Times and Washington Post and found that the media published significantly more FDA regulation articles during the Clinton administration than during the Bush administration. Our analysis links that imbalance of media coverage to the influence of the president of the United States (Clinton and Bush, during the duration of this study), journalistic routines and real world events. We compared the Clinton and Bush era news coverage on article prominence, article topics, and reasons to support/oppose FDA regulation and found significant differences, which we suggest led to the imbalance of news articles in the two administrations.

Tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of death and disease in the United States despite significant reductions in its use over the past 40 years. Tobacco-related medical care and lost productivity costs the US \$193 billion annually (Healthy People, 2011). These persistent tobacco-related harms to individuals and society have been given voice through mass media (Smith, Wakefield and Edsall, 2006), on which people depend for

information (Ball-Rokeach et al., 1984). An array of paid media campaigns have aimed to inform, educate, and/or frighten smokers and potential smokers into changing their attitudes and behaviors around smoking (Farrelly et al., 2002), and they have met with varying degrees of success. (Leshner and Cheng, 2009; Flay, 1987; Erickson, McKenna and Romano, 1990).

Mass media have also been examined as a means to advance arguments in favor of and against tobacco control policies (Menashe and Siegel, 1998)(Brownson et al. 1995; Lima and Siegel, 1999; Smith and Wakefield, 2006). Media advocacy involves promoting policy change through the media by generating media coverage that is favorable to the policy (Wallack and Dorfman, 1996). This approach is based on the contention that media agendas can influence the policy preferences of the American public (Jordan, 1993).

Effective influence of media coverage of an issue should involve understanding beyond that offered by research in the media effects paradigm. A clearer understanding of how to gain access and use media more effectively can enhance the likelihood of successful policy promotion (Jordan, 1993). This study contributes a case study of this process by analyzing media coverage about the United States Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) authority to regulate tobacco and tobacco products. News coverage of this battle between the FDA and the tobacco industry, a battle that played out in public places, in laboratories and lecture halls, and in all three branches of the US federal government, changed over time, both in quantity and in the nature of content. We aim to describe these changes in order to better understand the relationship between the media and changes in tobacco control policy.

Our approach is informed by agenda-building theory (McCombs, 1992), which details the internal and external factors of news organizations that affect the

processes of their news selections and production. As such we examined changes in the volume and content of coverage over time in order to determine how these changes are related to three key influences on media agenda: influential sources (such as the president of the United States), real events and journalistic norms. This approach aims to shed light on what roles these factors played in shaping how the media cover health-related policy issues. The results aim to enhance our understanding of how to approach the media to maximize the effectiveness of media advocacy effort.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Agenda-building

Public opinion researchers have documented the interaction between media coverage of issues and public knowledge and attitude toward those issues, particularly regarding tobacco use (Menashe and Siegel, 1998). Agenda-setting scholars have documented the role of the news media in setting the agenda for the public and for policy makers (McCombs and Shaw, 1972); therefore it is very important to understand who sets the news media agenda or how the news media agenda is selected. In 1985, Weaver and Eliot examined these questions, asking “who sets the media’s agenda?” This question led scholars throughout the 1980s to explore influences on the media’s agenda, making the news agenda the dependent variable in their research. This ongoing scholarly conversation explores the concept of agenda-building (Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch and Weaver, 1991; Gilbert, Eyal, McCombs and Nicholas 1980; Turk, 1986).

The news media form a complex and diverse set of outlets targeting diverse groups and seeking diverse agendas and outcomes. Untangling the myriad influences on their “agenda” has proved challenging for media

scholars. Lang and Lang (1981) addressed the complex set of influences on media's content, suggesting a series of feedback loops that produce and are produced by the media's content. A decade later, Shoemaker and Reese also emphasized the complexity of the process, even when the field is narrowed to focus only on the media involved in the production of news (1991). Despite the complexity of the issues, these researchers and others have defined a widely accepted set of key influences on the news media, including influential news sources (like the president of the United States), real world events (like high profile court cases) and routines of journalism (heavy reliance on available government officials and press releases; use of episodic framing) (Lang and Lang, 1981; Corbett and Mori, 1999). These key media influences guided our study of the media coverage of the FDA's regulation of tobacco.

INFLUENCES ON MEDIA'S AGENDA

Journalistic Routines and Politics

Though tobacco industry representatives and allies use multiple routes to avert government regulation of tobacco (strong lobbying and significant campaign donations, for example), investing in paid advertising and public relations has served the industry well (Arno et al., 1996). The successful public relations campaigns begun by the tobacco industry just as documents were leaked showing the industry knew nicotine was addictive had long-lasting impacts on the public's conception of smoking's safety (Brandt, 2007). These assertive public relations maneuvers also arrived as FDA Commissioner David Kessler was testifying before the Subcommittee on Health and the Environment, in the U.S. House of Representatives about the industry's manipulation of nicotine to enhance its addicting effects. Before the news media began covering the link comprehensively, the

industry launched a preemptive strike, disseminating research reports denying the connection between smoking and compromised health and providing experts to interpret research in the industry's favor (Kennedy and Bero, 1999).

Good public relations professionals know how the pressures of news media deadlines improve the chances that press releases will be picked up and published in whole or in part in the mainstream media.(Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). This is so now more than ever as the Internet demands more and more content and news organizations are spreading resources thin (Phillips, Couldry and Freedman, 2010). By providing easy access to information and sources to reporters on short deadlines, tobacco public relations professionals got their organizations' agendas in front of the public through the news media (Curtin, 1999).

At the same time, anti-smoking advocates pushed their messages in the media, increasing their likelihood of success by providing the media with engaging stories, frequently focused on youth smoking. These stories possessed the traditional news values (Impact, proximity, timeliness, conflict, oddity, prominence and currency) that news publishers knew would appeal to readers (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Kennedy and Bero, 1999). Tobacco stories also have substantial emotional impact by focusing on people adversely affected by smoking or on people who felt that regulating "safety" infringed on their freedom as Americans (Lima and Siegel, 1999). Both sides of the issue (pro and anti tobacco regulation) provided access to the "experts" who could interpret and place research in context for reporters, a practice that also capitalizes on the tight schedules of journalists working on deadline by making news gathering easier for them (Nelkin, 1987).

Because the tobacco industry possesses potential to provide substantial donations to campaigns, many political candidates have seized on the issues around the regulation of tobacco products. Politicians, especially during

campaigns, have access to media coverage, and have used the media to argue one side or the other in the tobacco wars (Thompson et al., 2007). Depending, presumably, on their philosophical leanings, conservatives tend to support the free choice, free market, and business side of the debate (which turns out to be the tobacco industry) and liberals tend to support the protection of the public by regulation side of the debate. Of all politicians, the president of the United States has the most access to news media, and thus power to impact media agendas (Lang and Lang, 1981; Jordan, 1993).

Real World Events

Tobacco in the news media has a long and compelling history, and the lens of social science research has focused on this tobacco-media relationship for several decades (Wallack, 1981; Smith, Wakefield and Edsall, 2006; Pierce and Gilpin, 2001, among many others). Along with journalistic routines and politics, real world events frequently serve to prompt media coverage of tobacco issues. The tobacco regulation timeline is widely available, and features a series of “events” that caught media attention in the history of tobacco policy. Highlights from the timeline as described by Wallack (1981) and others include the following, which the media made into “events”: The 1964 Report of the Surgeon General’s Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health, for example, grabbed media headlines around the world when it said cigarette smoking could cause lung cancer. In 1970 the Federal Communications Commission restricted broadcast advertising for cigarettes, again, prompting media coverage of the issues. In 1993, the EPA reported that secondhand smoke causes cancer. In 1994 FDA Commissioner Dr. David Kessler suggested nicotine was addictive and should be regulated as a drug, then in 1995 the FDA declared that nicotine is a drug. The following year, Kessler published

regulatory “rules” for tobacco and tobacco products, and the tobacco industry immediately contested them in court.

The decade of the 1990s, in fact, saw the tobacco industry embroiled in high-profile court cases with states and individuals suing to recoup medical costs and damages suffered from smoking-related illnesses. Despite its best efforts to avoid bad press, the industry was often vilified in the media, especially as damaging information emerged about manipulation of nicotine levels and marketing targeting youth (Nocera, 2006). In 1998, 46 states settled their class action suit against the tobacco industry in what was called the Master Settlement Agreement. This settlement with states and individuals who wanted restitution for tobacco-related medical costs required the industry to pay billions of dollars to states to cover the money the states had spent caring for sick and dying smokers. The settlement also provided the industry some protection from future lawsuits of that kind.

In 2000 the Supreme Court of the United States decided that the FDA had not been given the authority to regulate nicotine. Pushing the legislation forward again on the momentum of an energetic presidential campaign and an historic victory, Obama signed the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act on March 16, 2009, giving the FDA authority to regulate nicotine in a number of ways, including content and marketing, as one of his first actions in office. As usual, the political context surrounding the regulatory legislation affected the outcome. The regulations had passed through Congress and been signed by President Obama based on evidence, including the industry 1990s documents and other research supporting the efficacy of advertising limits in advancing public health and the protection of children (Baker and Kelly, 2010). Undeterred, the tobacco industry sued the FDA over alleged First Amendment violations in the Tobacco Act’s regulations of marketing. In January 2010 the U.S. District

Court in Kentucky held that limiting advertisement to a black-and-white tombstone format would in some cases represent a violation of commercial free-speech rights. Each of these “events” got media attention.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Agenda-building theory allows the researcher to look for relationships between sources and content, as well as see how the content emerged from the political and social contexts (Kosicki, 1993). We seek answers to the following research questions: What roles did presidential administrations and real world events play in setting the agenda for the news media and in shaping news coverage of tobacco regulation policy. In addition, we also ask how can we attempt to apply what we know from previous agenda-setting research about impacts of journalism norms on the media’s coverage of issues and events to gain better understanding of news coverage of FDA regulation of tobacco during the Clinton and Bush administrations.

METHODS

We report results from a quantitative content analysis of 460 articles from *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* which appeared between January 1993 and December 2008, which coincides with the Clinton and Bush administrations. We chose these publications because they are important agenda-setting papers in terms of national issues (Gilberg, Eyal, McCombs & Nicholas 1980

Content analysis is a research method that works well in applied contexts, such as studying health or political messages delivered via the media, and that allows inferences to be made from data to context (Neuendor, 2002; Krippendorf, 1980). In choosing two consecutive eight-year presidential administrations for this study, we

used this method to look not only at the nature of the coverage of FDA regulation of tobacco but also at changes in the amount of coverage over time.

We searched the online Lexis-Nexis Academic database using the search terms “FDA and tobacco,” “FDA and regulation,” and “tobacco and regulation.” For the two papers, the search located 1977 articles, which were entered into an inventory (serving as a sampling frame). From this population, we randomly selected 600 articles for coding using a random number generator (+/- 3.5 at 95% confidence). Approximately 460 were retained for analysis after eliminating articles that were coded as unrelated because FDA regulation of tobacco was discussed but was not the focus.

The research team developed the coding sheet (See Table 1) based on existing coding schemes for studying tobacco content in print media (Smith et al., 2002; Glantz, 2001; Champion and Chapman, 2009; Menashe and Siegel, 1998; Magzamen, Charlesworth, and Glantz, 2001). Variables coded for agenda-building included information about articles’ focus (the primary topic based on the first two paragraphs of the article) ,arguments around supporting and opposing FDA regulation, and prominence in the paper (measured with location (or example, front section versus others) and having an image or not).

Table I
Variables coded for agenda-building

(LOC) Prominence-location:

1 = front (National A-1) ___

2 = business/financial ___

3 = science/health ___

4 = magazine ___

5 = editorial ___

6 = metro/local ___

7 = national (not front) ___

8 = ___ other _____ (specify)

9 = unknown/unclear ___

(IMAGE) Prominence-Image 0 = no ___ 1 = yes ___

(RELEVANT) The article is primarily about:

1 = the FDA regulation ___ 0 = other ___

(FOCUS/TPC) More specifically, what is the article about? What is the KEY theme? We are talking about the MAJOR story topic of the article. After reading the “entire” article, what do you think is the article about? For news pieces, the headline or lead will often define this. In stories like features, columns and letters, you may have to look further, beyond the headline or lead, for the main theme of the story (they often don’t follow the news writing basics). You should be introduced to the main idea in the first few paragraphs in any case.

(TPC1)	Smoking bans (smokers’ and nonsmokers’ rights)
(TPC2)	Economic impact of tobacco (taxes, impact of regulations on sales, cost of smoking related medical care)
(TPC3)	Tobacco marketing (misleading descriptors, youth as targets, channels-outdoor and in-store displays ads, magazine/print ads, packaging-images colors)
(TPC4)	Youth tobacco use (access, possession, use of products)
(TPC5)	Package warning labels
(TPC6)	Tobacco content (added and natural constituents: chemicals, flavors, nicotine level, additives)
(TPC7)	Litigation against tobacco companies
(TPC8)	New tobacco-related products (electronic cigarettes, clean nicotine, cessation aids)
(TPC9)	Health effects of smoking (smoking related illness, nicotine and addiction)
(TPC10)	Tobacco industry/companies (rogue industry)
(TPC11)	FDA regulation
(TPC12)	Other _____ (specify)

RTS	Reasons to support (tobacco control argument)	0 or 1	RTO	Reasons FDA shouldn't regulate (tobacco industry argument)	0 or 1
RTS1	Tobacco use causes death and disease		RTO1	Flawed or trivial connection between tobacco and health. Health impact is no different from other things people consume.	
RTS2	Tobacco/ Nicotine is an addictive drug		RTO2	Tobacco/ Nicotine is not addictive, or is not different from other things that people commonly consume.	
RTS3	High cost of smoking related medical care is a national burden		RTO3	Tobacco is Legal. It's a choice individual adults should be allowed to make.	
RTS4	Tobacco companies lie and manipulate, both directly and through marketing.		RTO4	Tobacco companies are just trying to do business and have the right to free speech	
RTS5	Children are affected (marketing influences children)		RTO5	Tobacco companies market to adults; marketing just to get people to change brands, not encourage youth smoking	
RTS6	Tobacco lobbyists influence policy making		RTO6	Our political system works	
RTS7	FDA is capable of creating and enforcing tobacco regulations		RTO7	FDA can't adequately create or enforce tobacco regulations	
RTS8	Regulation can prevent or mitigate tobacco related		RTO8	FDA regulation legitimizes tobacco industry and its products	

	harms			
RTS9	Other (specify)		RTO9	Other (specify)

(RDR) Overall, does the article (news, letter, or editorial/column) support or oppose FDA regulations?

1 = oppose ___ 2 = neutral/balanced/mixed ___ 3 = support ___

Two independent coders used the coding sheet over a period of six months to gather data, which were entered and analyzed in SPSS and STATA. To establish intercoder reliability, coders double coded about 30% of articles (blind). Reliability was calculated using Krippendorff's Alpha for two coders, and scores ranged from a low of .65 to a high of 1.0, with an average of .80. We chose this indicator of reliability because it conservatively accounts for chance agreement (Hayes and Krippendorff, 2007).

FINDINGS

Our analysis looked at the FDA tobacco regulation coverage in general and then compared the coverage of the issue during the Clinton and during the Bush administrations. Our research focused on these two administrations because the discussions of FDA regulation were a prime topic in US politics beginning in the early 1990s and continues to make the news. We cut off the research with the Bush administration because our data collection timeframe did not allow us to collect the first term of the Obama administration. The two administrations considered for this study took very different stances on tobacco regulation issues, making for interesting comparisons. To look for agenda-building processes, we focused on variables of prominence (location and image), article focus, and reasons to oppose or support FDA regulation of tobacco. Three main findings emerged.

The first notable finding was the overall imbalance of articles between the two administrations, with 6.7 times

more appearing during the Clinton (n=400) years than during the Bush (n=60) years. In addition, the news media featured the FDA regulation of tobacco issue more prominently during the Clinton administration than during the Bush administration. For example, Clinton-era media featured a higher percentage of front page articles (21.3%) than Bush era stories (10%)($X^2= 1.10$, $p < .01$). The media also differed between the two administrations in the use of graphics to accompany FDA articles. Clinton era articles contained a graphic 36% of the time while Bush-era articles contained a graphic 19% of the time, giving Clinton-era articles significantly more prominence ($X^2= 2.11$, $p < .01$). Taken together, these findings indicate that the issue of FDA regulation was covered much more prominently during the Clinton administration than during the Bush administration not only in terms of the quantity but also in terms of the quality.

Along with the prominence, our analysis found differences in the “reasons to support” and “reasons to oppose” FDA regulation between the media coverage of the issue during the two administrations. Table 2 reports our analysis of the arguments for and against FDA regulation, with some significant differences in the prevalence of these arguments between the two administrations. The top three reasons cited for supporting FDA regulation during both the Clinton and Bush administrations were “children are harmed” (46% vs. 34%, respectively; $X^2=4.403$, $p < .05$), “tobacco is addictive” (35% vs. 17%, respectively; $X^2=10.78$, $p < .01$), and “tobacco causes death and disease” (27% vs. 36%, respectively). Other significant differences between the Clinton and Bush eras were found regarding the “cost of tobacco related health care” (Clinton 12% vs Bush 1.1%; $X^2=9.958$, $p < .01$) and “FDA capacity to create/enforce tobacco rules” (Clinton 13% vs. Bush 1.1%, $X^2=10.93$, $p < .01$).

During both eras, the percentage of articles that contained arguments against FDA regulation was much lower than for articles containing arguments supporting regulation. Typical of Clinton administration's focus on smoking and addiction, Clinton-era articles mostly included arguments about how "tobacco is not addictive" (10%) likely responding to any voice questioning nicotine's addiction. This argument was followed by the Clinton era-concern that FDA regulation would legitimize the tobacco industry (9%). Bush-era articles, even smaller in number, focused on two primary reasons: "tobacco companies are just doing business" (4.5%) and "FDA can't enforce this type of regulation" (4.5%). The only statistically significant difference between media coverage of the FDA regulation issue in the two administrations concerned the "tobacco is not addictive" argument, which was more prevalent during the Clinton administration ($X^2=6.911$, $p<.05$).

Table 2
Reasons to support/oppose FDA regulation by presidential administration

	Clinton	Bush
Reasons to support		
Tobacco causes death and disease	N=120, 27%	N=32, 36%
Tobacco is addictive*	N=154, 35%	N=15, 17%
Cost of smoking-related med care**	N=55, 12%	N=1, 1%
Children are harmed***	N=204, 46%	N=30, 34%
FDA capable of creating/enforcing regs ****	N=59, 13%	N=1, 1%
Reasons to oppose		
Flawed connection b/t smoking and death/disease	N=13, 3%	N=1, 1%
Tobacco is not addictive*****	N=42, 10%	N=1, 1%
Tobacco is legal	N=24, 5%	N=1, 1%
Tobacco companies are just trying to do business	N=36, 8%	N=4, 4.5%
Tobacco is marketed to adults	N=21, 5%	N=2, 2%
FDA can't enforce this type of regulation	N=28, 7%	N=4, 4.5%
Regulation legitimizes the tobacco industry	N=4, 9%	N=2, 2%
*X ² =10.78, p<.01 **X ² =9.958, p<.01 ***X ² =4.403, p<.05 ****X ² =10.934, p<.01 *****X ² =6.911, p<.05		

Overall, the top three primary foci for FDA related articles reflected the different priorities for each administration and on newsworthy events going on at the time. For the Clinton years, after regulation in general, articles focused on litigation (20%), youth tobacco use (15%) and tobacco marketing (14%), followed by tobacco as a rogue industry and tobacco's economic impact, which

occurred in less than 10% of the articles. (See Table 3.) Bush era articles focused more broadly instead of placing great emphasis on one argument: the highest number of articles focus on tobacco marketing (16%); the second highest category focused on tobacco content (10%), followed by tobacco's economic impact (10%) and youth, litigation, smoking bans and new products all occurred in less than 10% of articles. The Clinton and Bush eras saw significant differences in media focus on litigation (Clinton 20% and Bush less than 10%; $X^2 = 7.17$, $p < .01$) and on youth smoking (Clinton 15% and Bush less than 10%; $X^2 = 3.96$, $p < .05$). Clinton chose to focus on children and smoking, along with the issue of children as the victims of the tobacco industry's savvy marketing campaigns (a priority issue of his campaign and presidency), grabbing the attention of media, who believed those stories would sell. It is also important to report that all the lawsuits against tobacco companies—such newsworthy events—were filed during the Clinton administration.

Table 3

Article topics by presidential administration

Topic	Clinton	Bush
Smoking bans (and smokers' rights)	N=7, 2%	N=1, 1%
Tobacco industry's economic impact	N=25, 6 %	N=9, 10%
Tobacco marketing	N=62, 14%	N=14, 16%
Youth tobacco use*	N=65, 15%	N=6, 7%
Cigarette package warning labels	N=3, 8%	N=0, 0%
Tobacco content	N=42, 10%	N=9, 10%
Litigation against tobacco companies**	N=88, 20%	N=7, 8%
New tobacco related products	N=8, 2%	N=4, 5%
Health effects of smoking	N=18, 4%	N=6, 7%
Tobacco as a rogue industry	N=32, 7%	N=5, 5%
* $X^2=3.96$, $p<.05$ ** $X^2=7.17$, $p<.01$		

DISCUSSION

Consistent with previous agenda-building research, real world events, journalistic routines and politicians influenced the way, and the frequency with which, the media represented the tobacco regulation by the FDA. Overall, the differences between the Clinton and Bush administrations on the issue of FDA regulation play out in the media, as shown in these data on the variables of prominence, focus, reasons to support and reasons to oppose. Most notably, we found a much higher volume of media coverage on FDA regulation during the Clinton administration (87% of articles coded). Our analysis of these data suggests the reason for this imbalance could be Clinton's focus on the issue and his efforts to push a tobacco regulation agenda in the media, along with Bush's tendency to suppress important public health information for political reasons, which resulted in these issues' low profiles in the media during the Bush administration (Harris, 2007; Milio, 2004). For example, Milio wrote of the Bush Administration's lack of transparency: "Congress' General Accounting Office, which investigates policy implementation, cited 21 areas of executive authority that abused science information, including "political interference" and suppressing scientific reports; allowing misleading science statements by the president; providing inaccurate information to Congress; altering web sites and gagging scientists," (2004, 641-643). A *New York Times* article quoted Former Surgeon Gen. Richard H. Carmona: "Top Bush administration officials 'repeatedly tried to weaken or suppress important public health reports because of political considerations'...and would not allow him to speak or issue reports about stem cells, emergency contraception, sex education, or prison, mental and global health issues. Top officials delayed for years and tried to

“water down” a landmark report on secondhand smoke” (Harris, 2007)

These data show the reflection of the Clinton administration’s framing of the tobacco issue as “about children” and “about addiction,” two powerful and compelling frames that grab the attention of journalists looking for reader friendly approaches. Clinton-era articles included “children are harmed” as a reason to support regulation in 46% of articles and “tobacco is addictive” in 35%.

By the large number of articles and the prominence of those articles, the media reflect Clinton’s personal focus on the tobacco issue, and his active involvement in the issue is further revealed in the news headlines, where his name appeared frequently: “Clinton Urges Giving FDA Oversight of Tobacco (NYT, 2000); Clinton proposes Broad Plan to Curb Teen-age Smoking (NYT 1996). As a result of Clinton’s pro-regulation philosophy and his anti-smoking agenda, FDA regulation made progress in the political arena and gathered attention as the issues made their way through the courts.

Bush was clearly not pushing a tobacco-regulation agenda. Given his established pro-industry record on tobacco, from his years as governor of Texas until his presidency, this makes sense. He was quoted during his presidential campaign saying he was opposed to the ongoing lawsuits against the tobacco industry begun during the Clinton administration and planned to stop the suits if elected; and he objected to future cigarette taxes and restrictions on the tobacco industry (Christensen, 2000). During his presidency, in negotiations for the WHO Framework on Tobacco Control treaty—which aimed to impose taxes and restrictions on the tobacco industry in China—U.S. objections often reflected the tobacco industry’s wish list, and the Bush administration took the industry’s side on ten out of eleven issues. His presidential

campaign enjoyed support in money and manpower from sources intimately affiliated with the industry, including Geoffrey Bible, president and CEO of Philip Morris at the time (Christensen, 2000).

The low number of articles published on the subject during his presidency may have resulted from Bush's efforts to protect the industry from disastrous public relations during a time when tobacco companies were embroiled in battles on many fronts. Former Surgeon Gen. Richard H. Carmona was quoted in *The New York Times* saying he was forbidden to talk about important science and health issues (such as the dangers of secondhand smoke) during Bush's presidency (Wright and Katz, 2007).

The nature of the coverage was different, too. Because tobacco and tobacco policy had been consistently associated with health hazards and dangers to children in the previous administration, when Bush did talk about the tobacco industry he focused on other things, including an emphasis on the industry's right to do business, and freely market its legal products to adults. It's hard to find a way to support something that has been presented as harmful to society and to children. When he had to respond, Bush directed attention away from the youth frame, focusing on economic and free choice issues.

These analyses also demonstrated the influence of real world events in setting the media's agenda. In 1990 the U.S. Surgeon General concluded that smoking was the most extensively documented cause of disease ever investigated. On top of this damning conclusion, whistleblowers from the tobacco industry revealed several damaging industry secrets. Inside memos unveiled the companies' long-term experiments overseas that led to manipulation of nicotine levels in tobacco in an effort to keep smokers hooked (Nocera, 2006). Kessler's dramatic testimony against the tobacco industry also encouraged media attention to the issues. These events occurred during

the Clinton administration, resulting in more articles during his tenure because the events were newsworthy.

Additionally, research reports from within the industry detailed the companies' efforts to lure and hook youth into taking up smoking, to assure the future of the industry would be strong. These revelations resulted in a series of blows to the industry in which David Kessler declared nicotine a drug, claimed FDA's authority to regulate it as such, and proposed a set of rules governing the sales and production of cigarettes. These stories of a rogue industry lying to the public, targeting youth and intentionally manipulating tobacco to hook smokers, along with the passionate and outspoken FDA Commissioner David Kessler's high profile war on tobacco, were just the type of compelling plot elements journalists were looking for.

And finally, based on previous agenda-building studies demonstrating the influences of news values and other norms in news production (such as deadline pressure), we can speculate on the influence of journalistic routines on shaping news media coverage of FDA regulation of tobacco (Zoch). Again, comparing the Clinton and Bush administrations, we found significant differences in the focus of FDA articles between the two administrations, with the Clinton administration choosing affective frames, focusing attention on the elements of the stories that would grab journalists' attention and make their jobs of engaging readers/viewers easier. Clinton administration officials consistently framed the FDA stories as "about children," working within the traditional approaches valued by editors trying to gain and keep readers. Choosing this frame, the Clinton administration capitalized on the accepted routines of journalists looking for appealing, reader friendly stories. Stories about children, especially threats to children, sell papers. By making anti-smoking an administration priority, Clinton

made it news by talking about it and by making officials available to talk about it, easing the burden of journalists to find sources for stories on deadline.

CONCLUSION

The political arena provides avenues for public health practitioners to work toward macro-level changes in health and health policy. But the policy arena is not a gentle place. On many issues, like those related to tobacco, heavy-weight forces wield influence through political and financial means). Statistics showing the harm some policies might cause for public health meet with equally compelling “freedom of speech and choice” and “free market economy” issues, that can undermine health communicators’ efforts.

Skilled health communicators know that the media provide an important forum in which these processes play out. Understanding the mechanics of the American mass media system is key in making use of their influence on public opinion and politics. In the tobacco wars, in particular, pro-tobacco (or pro-freedom, as they might describe it) special interest groups (often born of and backed by the deep pockets of the industry itself), provide savvy and resourceful opposition to anti-smoking groups ostensibly fighting for better public health. While the political climate does matter, as this study has demonstrated, public health communicators can leverage their power through the media by making high-profile sources easily accessible and telling compelling human interest stories (sugar-coating the statistics), that grab media attention and get health messages out.

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