Protocol: The Secret Media War over Sugar Sweetened Beverages -
Public Health Advocacy versus Food Industry Denialism

Introduction
Sugar sweetened beverages (SSB) contribute to a substantial proportion of the population’s sugar intake; SSB are thus becoming an increasing public health concern, contributing to obesity, increased rates of diabetes and cardiovascular disease (Malik et al 2010; Schulzae et al 2004; Ludwig et al 2001). With rising rates of consumption of such products (Ludwig et al 2001) there exists a pressing need for evaluation of what factors determine and promote their use.

Given the recognised health implications of SSB it is perhaps not surprising that Big Food have taken efforts to dispel research that threatens their business. Recent comparisons have been made likening lobbying tactics used by Big Food to that of Big Tobacco, illustrating similar strategies to protect their business models (Miller and Harkin 2010; Hawkins 2014; Stuckler and Nestle 2012). These strategies include lobbying focusing on personal responsibility, emphasising physical activity, criticising policies as ‘nanny state’ or undermining personal choice and creating doubt about scientific studies that criticise the industry (Brownell and Warner 2009).

The media and newspapers have the potential to play a significant role in policy change and policy agenda-setting and subsequently the health of the population (Baillie 1996; Stillman et al 2001). Thus it is important to analyse industry strategy and public health media advocacy in the media, in order to combat some of the health implications caused by SSB. This study aims to evaluate public health advocacy and industry strategies in the British national press with regards to SSB.

Aim
To examine Sugar-Sweetened Beverages articles in the British newspapers and assess the extent of public health media advocacy versus pro-industry messaging.

Objectives
1. To explore the employment of public health advocacy in the British Press.
2. To compare the coverage of public health and industry opposition within the context of print and online media focusing on three main issues:
   i) Sugar and sugary sweetened beverages (SSB)
   ii) SSB and the Food Industry
   iii) SSB and regulation

Methods
Articles were identified and analysis from main print newspapers and online news websites for January - December 2014. Articles were selected via Nexis Database that included a synonym of SSB and discussed one of the three main issues. All articles which met these criteria were then analysed in terms of article type, topic, prominence and perspective, using pre-piloted scales.

Newspaper articles in the British national press both online and print newspapers between 1/1/14 - 1/1/15 are included.

Articles will be sourced from 1/1/14 to 1/1/15 via the Nexis database using these search terms:
- Sugar* W/5 beverage*
- Sugar* W/p soft drink*
- Fizz* Drink*
- Sugar* drink*

These search terms are likely to include all relevant articles relating to SSB sugar and industry. Articles will then be screened for eligibility.

Inclusion criteria
1. Sugar sweetened beverages or a synonym.
2. The article must have at least one paragraph relating to sugar, the food industry or the regulation of sugar.

Exclusion criteria:
Articles that focus on:
- Artificial sweetener.
- Israel and SodaStream.
- Editions that have not been published
- Non-UK editions

Slant was reviewed in three main formats:
1. Opinion on Sugar and Industry.
2. Cause of problems relating to sugar.
3. Presented solutions relating to sugar

The purpose of analysing the slant of the article in this format is to attempt to understand some of the complex components and tactics that the food industry utilises. By separating the slant of the article into these three areas it provides a more detailed overview of the content and the message of the article.

All articles will be reviewed and verified by two independent researchers any discrepancies will be discussed and resolved by compromise and if necessary will be discussed with a third independent researcher.

Results
This section is an overview of the variables that will be measured during the analysis.

Result Analysis
1. In terms of Topic, prominence and slant of article
2. Article Topic and subcategories that are often grouped together discussing about sugar
3. Newspapers article type and their slant on sugar.

Topic and Slant
The predominant topic throughout this period is the health effects of SSB. 98.7% of these articles illustrated the negative health impacts of SSB. Proposed causes and solutions relating to the health impacts of SSB are neglected from the majority of these articles however the strongest is placed on individual responsibility where documented.

Although all articles independent of the topic are generally in consensus that sugar is bad, 80% of articles there is still a degree of heterogeneity in terms of solution to the problems posed by sugar in SSB. Although for example excluding articles that focus on regulation there is a divide between policy and product regulation and individual responsibility.

Topic and subtopics
In addition to analysing the theme of the article, its salience and its overall message it is also important to consider the subtopics within an article and what categories are associated together, for example if promotion and advisement are linked with sport and activity.

Newspaper Analysis

Contextual Analysis

Qualitative evaluation of articles in terms of media advocacy and food industry messaging.

Discussion
- The prominence and use of sugar within the media (New article regularly generated, use of different professionals, consistence message)
- The heterogeneity of proposed regulation - how that changes through out the year.
- Industry methods approaches towards SSB coverage in the media
Limitations

Not all major online newspapers were reviewed within this search. For example the Sun online, BBC.co.uk were not accessible via Nexis and therefore have not been included as of yet.

Nexis reports of all editions of the paper -some of which have not been published.

This study only examines media articles in mainstream national newspapers. As such, broadcast and advertisements, which contribute to a large proportion of the media, are neglected.

References:


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