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Panel

P04 Media and Health Policy

Session

T18 P04 Session 1 (T18 – Others)

Title of the paper

Using media content analysis to understand and influence health policy

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Abstract

Mass media play an important role in policy processes by setting the public agenda and framing narratives. Evidence-based theory illustrates how media content influences which topics audiences are attentive to, and how they understand the problems, societal groups and potential solutions associated with those topics. Understanding media content is useful to policy advocates as they seek to both understand public and elite perceptions of issues and to influence debates by engaging with media narratives.

Content analysis is an established set of methods that allow us to understand media content empirically. This paper comprises reflections on a series of media content analysis research projects covering a variety of health issues including obesity, tobacco control, alcohol, cancer, gender inequalities, HIV prophylaxis and health service delivery. These studies are used to illustrate the variety of ways in which media analysis can aid our understandings of policy processes, from large-scale quantitative studies of changing trends over time, to more focused, qualitative studies of the nuances of policy debates. In exploring these different application of content analysis, we consider how their findings can be applied practically by policy stakeholders.