

## **Activity: Media Narratives and Funding**

### **Objective:**

Students will critically engage with an article to uncover and map the potential influence of funding on media narratives, with a focus on health-related content targeting youth.

### **Setup:**

1. Divide students into small groups.
2. Provide each group with the same article from Filter Magazine: "Is UK Government's 'Smoke-Free Generation' Bid Losing Its Way?"
3. Each group gets a large piece of paper or a whiteboard and markers.
4. Students have access to the internet for research.

### **Steps:**

1. Initial Reading & Annotation (15 minutes): Each group reads the article and marks up sections that push a particular agenda, uses persuasive language, or quote sources with potential biases.
2. Identify the Beneficiaries (10 minutes): Groups discuss and list who stands to benefit from the article's narrative. This includes industries, companies, or ideologies.
3. Research & Connect the Dots (20 minutes): Groups use laptops or tablets to research the publication and its funding sources. They also look for connections between the identified stakeholders and funding sources.
4. Groups draw lines or "maps" on their paper/whiteboard to visually connect elements of the article with potential funding sources and beneficiaries.
5. Create a Funding Influence Hypothesis (15 minutes):
6. Each group hypothesizes how the funding could have influenced the article. They prepare a brief presentation for the class, explaining their hypothesis and showing their "influence map."
7. Class Presentations (20 minutes): Groups present their maps and hypotheses. After each presentation, open a 5-minute floor discussion for questions and counterpoints.
8. Closing Discussion (10 minutes): Discuss what patterns emerged across the different group presentations as a whole class. Reflect on the importance of critically evaluating media, especially regarding health-related content for the youth.

## Individual Reflection (Homework):

As homework, students write a one-page reflection on what they learned about the influence of funding on media narratives and how it can affect public perception, particularly in health matters concerning youth.

This activity is designed to be hands-on and thought-provoking, requiring students to collaborate, research actively, and present their findings creatively. The "mapping" exercise will help visualize the potential connections between media narratives and funding, fostering a deeper understanding of the impacts such relationships can have.

## Background on Filter Magazine's Article:

Today's goal is to deepen our understanding of media literacy by exploring how funding sources can influence media narratives, which is essential when addressing high-stakes public health topics. We'll equip students to critically evaluate the content they encounter, understanding that financial backing can shape both reporting and public perception.

The article from Filter Magazine, titled "[Is UK Government's 'Smoke-Free Generation' Bid Losing Its Way?](#)" discusses the UK's approach to vaping and smoking regulation. It presents a stance that is critical of the government's handling of vaping products, suggesting that it may hinder progress toward a smoke-free generation.

## Funding and Potential Influences:

Filter Magazine is transparent about its funding sources. According to their website, they receive support from various organizations, including grants from non-profits and individual donations.

For the teacher's background, it is essential to note that one of [Filter's](#) financial backers has been identified as the **Foundation for a Smoke-Free World**, which has been reported to have received funding from Philip Morris International, a leading tobacco company. Please see [WHO's Statement](#) on the Philip Morris-Funded Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. This link can raise questions about the potential for a conflict of interest, given that the tobacco industry could benefit from narratives that promote vaping—a product that some tobacco companies have invested in—as a healthier alternative to traditional cigarettes. The Foundation for a Smoke-Free World's name might suggest a commitment to ending tobacco use, but its funding from a major tobacco company raises questions about its objectives. Such organizations often use names that sound positive and public-spirited, which can be misleading. The tobacco industry has a known history of harmful impacts on public health, and its funding of harm reduction initiatives could be seen as a strategy to pivot its market focus, particularly towards vaping. Understanding these connections is critical for educators and students alike. It's vital to scrutinize the funding and affiliations of organizations involved in health communication, as these can greatly influence the content and perspectives they present. Additionally, the author's affiliations could influence the article's stance; Knowledge-Action-Change is funded by Philip Morris. For more details, refer to [The Bureau of Investigative Journalism's report](#).

## **Why This Is Relevant:**

Understanding the funding behind this article is crucial because it can provide insights into why certain positions might be emphasized. If a media outlet receives funding from an organization with specific interests in the tobacco industry, it could lead to a bias in how information is framed, particularly concerning the health implications for youth.

## **What the Teacher Can Do:**

- Highlight the importance of determining who funds the media outlets and how that could affect their published content.
- Encourage students to think critically about the potential motivations behind the narratives found in health-related articles.
- Guide students to research the background of media outlets and authors to uncover possible biases or conflicts of interest.

## **TEACHER PRESENTATION**

### **Slide 1: Introduction to Media Narratives and Funding**

- Title: "Understanding Media Narratives and Funding Influence"
- Quick introduction: "Today, we'll learn how to critically assess media articles, focusing on understanding the potential influence of funding sources on media narratives, especially concerning public health and youth."

### **Slide 2: Why It Matters**

- Title: "The Impact of Funding on Media Objectivity"
- Bullets to discuss:
  - "Media outlets often depend on external funding."
  - "Funding sources can influence the framing of articles."
  - "Understanding these influences is crucial for critical media consumption, particularly health-related topics."

### **Slide 3: Case Study Example**

New Study Shows Energy Drinks Boost Concentration in Teens

According to a recent study highlighted in 'Daily Health Trends,' teenagers who start their day with 'Zap Energy drinks have shown a 20% increase in concentration and a significant improvement in their cognitive tests. Dr. Bright, the lead researcher, suggests that 'Zap Energy' drinks could be a beneficial addition to any teen's breakfast. The article also cites Dr. Greene, a known adolescent nutrition consultant, who claims these drinks are a 'game-changer' for teen learning.

***Please refer to the 'Notes for Teacher's Think-Aloud Steps' in the slide notes section.***

- Title: "Case Study: Energy Drinks and Youth Focus"
- Brief description of a hypothetical article that portrays energy drinks positively.
- A prompt question: "What might be missing from this narrative?"

#### **Slide 4: Investigative Steps**

Title: "Investigative Steps in Critical Analysis"

Step 1: Read the article carefully.

Step 2: Identify the stakeholders and potential beneficiaries.

Step 3: Research funding sources and author affiliations.

Step 4: Formulate and present a hypothesis on funding influence.

#### **Slide 5: Research and Analysis Demonstration**

- Title: "Teacher's Demonstration: Linking Funding to Narrative"
- Provide an example of how to search for the study mentioned in the article and its funding source.
- Show how to connect this information to the positive portrayal in the article.

#### **Slide 6: Transition to Activity - "Analyzing Media Influence"**

Title: "Now It's Your Turn: Analyzing Media Influence"

Subtitle: "A Simplified Real-Life Investigation"

##### **Instructions:**

- "In your groups, you will analyze an article to trace how funding may shape its narrative."
- "This is a condensed version of real investigative work, focusing on the key steps."

### **Steps for Students:**

- Read & Annotate: "Quickly read the article and highlight any biased language or persuasive tactics."
- Identify Interests: "Discuss who might benefit from the article's narrative and why."
- Research & Map: "Research the publication's funding sources. Then, on your paper/whiteboard, draw connections between the narrative and these funding sources."
- Present & Discuss: "Prepare a short presentation of your findings and hypothesis for the class discussion."

### **Slide 7: Reflection and Discussion**

- Title: "Reflecting on the Influence of Funding"
- Prompts for post-activity discussion:
  - "How did the funding source influence the article's narrative?"
  - "What are the ethical implications of such influence, especially concerning public health and the youth?"

### **Slide 8: Closing Thoughts**

- Title: "The Role of Critical Thinking in Media Literacy"
- Parting thoughts on the importance of skepticism and research when consuming media.
- Encourage students to apply media literacy skills learned in class to daily media consumption.

The teacher can elaborate verbally on each point, using the slides as a visual guide for the students.



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