

1 **A Content Analysis of Tobacco Content in UK Television**

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47 **What this paper adds**

48 • Exposure to audio-visual tobacco content in media is a risk factor for smoking in
49 young people.

50 • Advertising legislation and broadcasting regulations are in place to protect children
51 from smoking imagery in UK television, however a previous content analysis found
52 that tobacco content is shown on prime-time UK television.

- 53 • Audio-visual tobacco content remains common in prime-time UK television
54 programmes and is likely to be a significant driver of smoking uptake in young
55 people.
- 56 • Guidelines on tobacco content need to be revised and more carefully enforced to
57 protect children from exposure to tobacco imagery and the consequent risk of
58 smoking initiation.

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70 **Abstract**

71 **Aims:** Exposure to audio-visual tobacco content in media is a risk factor for smoking in
72 young people. Whilst tobacco content in films has been extensively documented, content in
73 mainstream television has received relatively little attention. We report an analysis of tobacco
74 content in a sample of UK free-to-air prime-time television broadcasts in 2015, and compare
75 this with a similar analysis from 2010.

76 **Design:** Content analysis of all programmes and advertisements or trailers broadcast on the
77 five national UK free-to-air channels in the UK between 6 and 10p.m. during three separate
78 weeks in September, October and November 2015.

79 **Setting:** Great Britain.

80 **Participants:** None (media analysis only)

81 **Measurements:** Occurrence of any tobacco, tobacco use, implied use, other tobacco
82 reference/related objects and branding in every one-minute coding interval.

83 **Findings:** Tobacco content occurred in 33% of all programmes and 8% of all adverts or
84 programme trailer breaks. Actual tobacco use occurred in 12% of all programmes broadcast.
85 Tobacco-related objects, primarily no-smoking signs, occurred in 2% of broadcasts; implied
86 tobacco use and tobacco branding were also rare. The majority of tobacco content occurred
87 before the 9p.m. watershed.

88 **Conclusions:** These findings are virtually unchanged from our earlier analysis of programme
89 content from 2010. Audio-visual tobacco content remains common in UK television
90 programmes.

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93 **Introduction**

94 Smoking uptake is a major threat to the health of children. Most adult smokers become
95 regular smokers during childhood or adolescence, and those who continue to smoke sustain a
96 loss of one day of life for every four days of smoking after the age of around 35 (1, 2).

97 Preventing smoking uptake is therefore a public health priority.

98 There is strong evidence that exposure to tobacco imagery in films increases smoking uptake
99 in adolescents (3), and this association is causal (4-6). However, whilst children spend more
100 time watching television than films, the tobacco content of television programming has

101 received relatively little interest. An estimated 28 million British homes have at least one
102 television (7) and in 2017 average viewing was 3 hours, 23 minutes per person per day (8).
103 Tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, including all television advertising and paid
104 product placement, is prohibited in the UK by the 2002 Tobacco Advertising and Promotion
105 Act (9) However, tobacco imagery included in television programmes, including trailers, for
106 artistic or editorial purposes is exempt from the Act, instead covered by the Office of
107 Communications (OfCom) Broadcasting Code (10, Section 1.10). Since 2005 (11), The
108 OfCom Broadcasting Code has protected under-18s by restricting depictions of tobacco use
109 in programmes made for children and preventing the glamorisation of smoking in
110 programmes broadcast before the 9p.m. watershed (the time when TV programmes which
111 might be unsuitable for children can be broadcast, 12), or in programmes likely to be widely
112 seen, heard or accessed by under-18's without editorial justification. However, 13% of 4-15
113 year olds in the UK view programmes after the 9p.m. watershed (13) when programmes
114 unsuitable for children are allowed to be broadcast (12), while an estimated 62% of 12-15
115 year olds have access to a TV in their bedroom, and 45% of children watch TV on devices
116 such as tablets, allowing television viewing without parental control (13).

117 In a previous analysis of UK prime-time TV using content from 2010 (14), we found that
118 tobacco content occurred frequently before the 9p.m. watershed in both programmes and
119 advertisement/trailer breaks, and that this exposed British child and adolescent audiences to
120 smoking messages and tobacco branding. Since the previous analysis, the Tobacco Display
121 Regulations (15) have been introduced which prohibit tobacco point-of-sale displays. Point-
122 of-sale displays were a regular occurrence in the previous analysis from 2010 (14). To
123 determine whether the findings of the previous analysis remain representative we now report
124 the results of a study of tobacco audio-visual content in all programmes and

125 advertisements/trailers broadcast on all five UK free-to-air channels in 2015 and compare this
126 to our findings from 2010.

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128 **Materials and Methods**

129 All programmes and advertisements/trailers broadcast on the five national UK free-to-air
130 channels (BBC1, BBC2, ITV1, Channel 4, and Channel 5) were recorded during the peak
131 viewing hours of 6 to 10 p.m., capturing data for the three hours before and one hour after the
132 Ofcom 9p.m. watershed. All programmes and advertisements/trailers were recorded in three
133 separate weeks (Monday to Sunday) in 2015, with a four-week gap between each (21st – 27th
134 September, 18th – 25th October, 16th – 22nd November). At the time of the study these five
135 channels were the most watched channels in the UK (16), and remain so today, with the 5
136 channels accounting for 51% of all TV viewing (17). Two of these channels, BBC1 and
137 BBC2, are public service channels with no commercial advertising, whilst ITV1, Channel 4
138 and Channel 5 all feature commercial advertising. All recorded footage was viewed and
139 coded using the one-minute interval period method as described in a previous analysis of
140 television content (14). The method includes recording the presence or absence of audio-
141 visual tobacco content every one-minute in the following categories:

142 *Actual Use:* Actual observed use of tobacco onscreen by any character, coded as cigarette,
143 cigar, pipe or other (such as water pipe or chewing tobacco).

144 *Implied Use:* Any inferred tobacco use without any actual use onscreen (eg, holding a
145 cigarette without actual smoking or a comment about going for a cigarette), coded as verbal
146 or non-verbal.

147 *Tobacco-related objects:* The presence of tobacco or tobacco related materials, coded by the
148 type of appearance (including cigarette or other tobacco pack, matches, lighter, ashtray, no
149 smoking or smoking area signs).

150 *Brand Appearance*: The presence of clear and unambiguous tobacco branding, including
151 cigarette or other tobacco packs, secondary advertising (advertisements appearing within
152 other programmes) and branded merchandising.

153 *Any tobacco content*: Any of the above.

154 Tobacco appearances were recorded if they appeared on screen in any one-minute coding
155 period. Multiple instances of the same category in the same one-minute period were
156 considered a single event, however, if two instances of different categories occurred this was
157 recorded as two different events (for example, actual tobacco use and inferred use). The
158 coding categories used were mutually exclusive, for example if a person is seen smoking,,
159 this is coded as actual use rather than implied or tobacco-related object however, if a scene
160 featured both paraphernalia and implied use, both were recorded in the same one-minute
161 interval. When the same appearance transitioned into a new one-minute period it was coded
162 as two separate events as the appearance occurred in two, one-minute intervals. One third of
163 the recorded footage was coded separately by two authors (AB and KW) to ensure accuracy
164 and reliability in the coding method. Short trailers for other programmes are shown between
165 programmes on BBC1 and BBC2, and both adverts and trailers between programmes on
166 other channels. These have been coded as a single category of content, rather than code each
167 individual advert/trailer these have been grouped together in each advertisement/trailer
168 periods between regular broadcast programming. Both the commercial (ITV, Channel 4,
169 Channel 5) and non-commercial (BBC1, BBC2) channels broadcast adverts for other
170 programmes on the service during advert breaks, however, we coded advertisement breaks on
171 non-commercial channels (trailers) separately to commercial channels (advertisements). We
172 categorised the genre of each programme based on information from Box of Broadcasts (18)
173 and the researcher's discretion when genre not available. We also categorised whether any
174 part of the programme occurred after the 9p.m. watershed. Short trailers for other

175 programmes are shown between programmes on BBC1 and BBC2, and both adverts and
176 trailers between programmes on other channels. These have been coded as a single category
177 of content. Descriptive analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS Statistics (version 23) and
178 Microsoft Excel (2013).

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180 **Results**

181 We analysed 420 hours of footage including 611 programmes, 909 adverts and 211 trailers. A
182 total of 27083 one-minute intervals were coded, of which 22960 were from programmes,
183 3663 from adverts and 460 from trailers. The most frequent genres were News and Current
184 Affairs, Documentaries, and Soaps with a total of 137, 126, and 76 programmes respectively.
185 The genres which accounted for the highest broadcast time were Documentaries, News and
186 Current Affairs, and Entertainment, comprising of 5482, 3573, and 2408 minutes,
187 respectively.

188 **Any Tobacco Content**

189 There were 291 broadcasts (programmes and adverts/trailers for other programmes) which
190 included any tobacco content (17% of all programmes), consisting of 751 intervals containing
191 tobacco appearances (3% of all intervals) (Figure 1).

192 The channel containing the most tobacco appearances was Channel 5 (197 intervals; 26% of
193 any tobacco intervals) and the lowest BBC2 (99 tobacco appearances; 13% of total). The
194 channel with the largest proportion of tobacco content was Channel 5, at 3% of all intervals
195 (See Table 1).

196 *Figure 1 here*

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200 **Table 1: Proportion of intervals containing tobacco by television channel**

Channel	Proportion of intervals containing tobacco (Intervals containing tobacco content/total number of intervals coded)
Overall	3% (751/27083)
BBC1	3% (153/5214)
BBC2	2% (99/5167)
ITV	2% (113/5456)
Channel 4	3% (189/5547)
Channel 5	3% (197/5699)

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202 Of the 611 programmes broadcast, 201 (33%) contained any tobacco content, occurring in
 203 650 one-minute intervals (3% of one-minute intervals in programmes). The genres containing
 204 the highest tobacco content were Animation (67% of programmes), Comedy Show (57% of
 205 programmes), and Drama (50% of programmes) (Table 2).

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207 **Table 2: Percentage proportion of genres containing tobacco content**

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Genre	Total % (Number of programmes containing tobacco content/Total number of programmes)	Pre-watershed % (Number of programmes containing tobacco content/Total number of programmes)	Post-watershed % (Number of programmes containing tobacco content/Total number of programmes)
Soap Opera	32% (24/76)	32% (24/76)	n/a
Documentary	47% (57/126)	40% (33/82)	55% (24/44)
News and Current Affairs	34% (47/137)	35% (47/135)	0% (0/2)
Feature Film	43% (6/14)	33% (3/9)	60% (3/5)

Chat Show	33% (5/15)	33% (5/15)	n/a
Game Show	5% (2/42)	7% (2/29)	0% (0/13)
Sport	7% (1/14)	0% (0/8)	17% (1/6)
Comedy	57% (8/14)	50% (5/10)	75% (3/4)
Cookery	14% (4/28)	14% (4/28)	n/a
Drama	50% (17/34)	38% (5/13)	57% (12/21)
Animation	66% (10/15)	66% (10/15)	n/a
Consumer	20% (1/5)	20% (1/5)	n/a
Political	0% (0/2)	0% (0/2)	n/a
Interests	19% (7/36)	19% (6/31)	20% (1/5)
Entertainment	22% (11/51)	9% (3/32)	42% (8/19)
Religious	0% (0/1)	0% (0/1)	n/a
Educational	0% (0/1)	0% (0/1)	n/a

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211 Of the 1200 adverts/trailers analysed, 90 (8%) contained any tobacco content, occurring in
 212 101 of 4123 one-minute intervals (2% of the total advert/trailer intervals). The 75% of
 213 programming in our sample broadcast before the 9p.m. watershed contained 65% (486
 214 intervals) of the one-minute intervals of observed tobacco appearances and references.

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216 **Actual Tobacco Use**

217 Actual tobacco use appeared in 207 intervals (1% of the total), in 76 (12%) of programmes
 218 and 13 (1%) of adverts / trailers. The highest proportion of tobacco use was cigarette smoking
 219 (164 intervals, 79% of all tobacco use), followed by pipe smoking (25 intervals, 12%), cigar
 220 smoking (16 intervals, 8%), and e cigarette use (7 intervals, 3%). One instance of tobacco use
 221 was unidentified. Tobacco use occurred in 14 out of the 20 genres and featured in 53% and
 222 36% of all Animation shows and Feature Films respectively. Most of the tobacco use in
 223 Animation featured in the show *The Simpsons* (occurring in 5% of all Simpson's intervals).
 224 Most (52%) of the intervals containing tobacco use were broadcast after the 9p.m. watershed.
 225 Five feature films (36%) contained tobacco use, of which three were broadcast before the
 226 9p.m. watershed, and all five of which were classified by the BBFC as suitable for viewing
 227 by children (One of them with no age restriction: U). Of the 207 intervals containing actual
 228 tobacco use, 104 (50%) occurred pre-watershed.

229 **Implied tobacco use and tobacco-related objects**

230 Implied tobacco use was found in 203 intervals (1% of all intervals) and in 118 of all
231 broadcasts (programmes/adverts/trailers combined). Smoking behaviour (e.g. holding a
232 cigarette) accounted for 163 intervals of implied use, 39 intervals contained a verbal mention
233 of tobacco, and in 10 intervals of other implied use. 116 intervals (57%) containing implied
234 tobacco use occurred before the 9p.m. watershed. Tobacco-related objects accounted for the
235 most content appearing in 438 tobacco intervals (2% of total) and in 202 of all broadcasts.
236 260 intervals (66%) containing tobacco-related objects occurred before the 9p.m. watershed.
237 No-smoking signs accounted for the most tobacco-related objects (see table 3).

238 **Table 3:** Tobacco-related object types

Tobacco-related object Type	Total number of intervals
Cigarette packet	66
Matches	6
Lighter	57
Ashtray	75
No-smoking sign	226
Other (E.g. signs or posters mentioning tobacco, smoking mentioned as part of quit smoking adverts)	100

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241 **Tobacco Brands**

242 There were 11 intervals (37 actual appearances) which contained tobacco branding, occurring
243 in 7 different programmes. Most of these appearances arose from cigarette packets or tobacco
244 boxes shown during two news reports on illegal cigarettes (5 intervals, 45.5% of the total
245 branding intervals) or from appearances of the fictitious brand '*Laramie*', which featured in
246 'The Simpsons' (5 intervals, 45.5% of the total branding intervals). There was only one
247 appearance during a TV programme, in one interval (see Table 4 for a breakdown of
248 programmes and total number of appearances by each tobacco brand).

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Table 4: Programmes and total number of appearances by each tobacco brand

Genre of programme	Title of programme	Date programme aired	Programme aired pre or post watershed	Number of tobacco brands shown in programme	List of tobacco brand name shown in programme (Number of appearances)	Description of brand appearance
ITV (News)	News	25.9.15	Pre	14	Drum (2); Amber Leaf (3); Marlboro (2); Victory (2); L&M (2); Gold Mount (1); Jin Ling (2); Gold Classic (3); G&B (3); Richman (2); M&G Gold (1); Grand (3); 821 (1); Mayfair (1)	Branding seen on packets of illegal cigarettes in news item
BBC1 (News)	News	25/9/15	Pre	2	Richmond (1); Mayfair (1)	Branding seen on packets of illegal cigarettes in news item
Channel 4 (Animation)	The Simpsons	Four episodes: 25/9/15; 21/10/15 ; 22/10/15 ; 20/11/15	Pre	1	Laramie, fake brand (5)	Moe's Tavern, advert for Laramie cigarettes is visible; Qwik-e-mart a poster for Laramie stating 'Smoke em'; Supermarket, Selma and Patty buy packets of Laramie cigarettes; Truck has Laramie logo on the side; Moe's bar, a

(Drama)	The Catch	21/9/15	Pre	1	Drum (1)	poster on wall which says 'Try Laramie'
						The skipper smokes a cigarette on the bridge with a non-smoking deckhand. In the galley, a branded tobacco packet can be seen.

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265 **Comparison to previous analysis**

266 In comparison to the previous content analysis of UK broadcast television, the amount of
267 intervals containing any tobacco content increased from 731 intervals to 751 intervals, see
268 table 5.

269 **Table 5: Comparison of the number of one-minute intervals containing tobacco content**
270 **in 2010 and 2015**

	Number of one-minute intervals from the 2010 analysis	Number of one-minute intervals from the 2015 analysis
Any Tobacco Content	731	751
Actual Tobacco Use	245	207
Implied Tobacco Use	82	203
Tobacco-related objects*	576	438
Tobacco Branding	27	11

271 *Combined 'Paraphernalia' and 'Other' categories from the 2010 data

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273 **Discussion**

274 This study demonstrates that despite regulations restricting tobacco content being broadcast,
275 tobacco imagery still occurs commonly on UK television. While the majority of tobacco
276 depictions occurred after the 9p.m.watershed, tobacco depictions were observed both the
277 watershed on the most popular television channels. Although tobacco branding was rare and
278 primarily comprised brands seen in news items about illicit tobacco or a fictional brand in
279 *The Simpsons*. There is strong causal evidence that exposure to tobacco imagery increases
280 smoking uptake in adolescents (3-6). It is likely that the amount of tobacco content shown on
281 UK broadcast television in the current study leads to experimentation and uptake. The levels
282 of tobacco imagery in the categories we coded are very similar to those reported in our earlier
283 analysis of programming in 2010 (14), suggesting that UK prime-time television is a constant
284 source of exposure to tobacco imagery for young people. If the amount of tobacco content
285 shown on TV remains consistent over time, tobacco use will remain normalised in society

286 and continue to lead to subsequent adolescent use and uptake, while curtailing any trend
287 towards decreasing smoking prevalence.

288 We coded only terrestrial channels since the majority of households have access to these
289 channels and programmes aired on these channels consistently receive the highest viewing
290 share in the UK (16). Given the large viewing audience of these channels, and the fact that
291 the majority of viewing by 4-15 year olds in the UK occurs in early morning or early evening
292 (7p.m.-9p.m.)(13), it is very likely that children and young adults will have access to, and be
293 viewing, the five main channels. However, we acknowledge that it is equally likely that
294 children will have access to and view other channels. The sample method we used, three 1-
295 week periods, is potentially susceptible to seasonal influences on television programmes and
296 news stories, however this is unlikely to have distorted our findings as the main sources of
297 tobacco content were programmes which are aired throughout the year. We chose to code
298 programmes broadcast between 6p.m. and 10p.m. since programmes shown in this time
299 period are the most viewed throughout the week, however, without viewing figures it is
300 impossible to know whether these channels were the most viewed for the three weeks coded.

301 Whilst there is strong evidence that exposure to advertising and/or other tobacco imagery
302 increases subsequent use in adolescents (4-6), this study did not explore exposure through
303 viewing figures or subsequent tobacco use and uptake following viewing UK prime-time TV.
304 Tobacco content in broadcast television could act as a smoking cue, eliciting a smoking urge
305 in the viewer, which could lead to reinforcing the smoking behaviour and relapse in former
306 smokers (19-21). Consistent with earlier work (14) our coding of tobacco-related objects
307 includes no-smoking signage, while less likely to be a driver of smoking behaviour than
308 imagery arising from actual smoking, could potentially be unintentionally acting as a
309 smoking cue (22-24). As with other categories of tobacco content, the proportion arising from
310 signage was very similar between the 2010 and present studies.

311 While the majority of tobacco depictions occurred after the 9p.m. watershed, instances from
312 all coding categories were shown pre-watershed. According to the OfCom Broadcasting Code
313 (10, Section 1.10), tobacco depictions are restricted before the 9p.m. watershed unless
314 editorially justified, to protect children and young people from potentially harmful imagery
315 (12). In the current study we observed almost 500 one-minute intervals which contained
316 tobacco content broadcast pre-watershed. Given that the majority of viewing by 4-15 year
317 olds in the UK occurs in early morning or early evening (7p.m.-9p.m.)(13), and there is a
318 causal link between viewing tobacco content and subsequent use (3-6), the OfCom 9.p.m.
319 watershed, is currently not fulfilling its purpose.

320 This study demonstrates that tobacco content, including smoking, occurs frequently on UK
321 prime-time television in programmes which are likely to be viewed by young people, as such,
322 this is likely to lead to experimentation and uptake among young children. We suggest that
323 guidelines on tobacco content need to be revised and more carefully enforced to protect
324 children from exposure to tobacco imagery and the consequent risk of smoking initiation.

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