

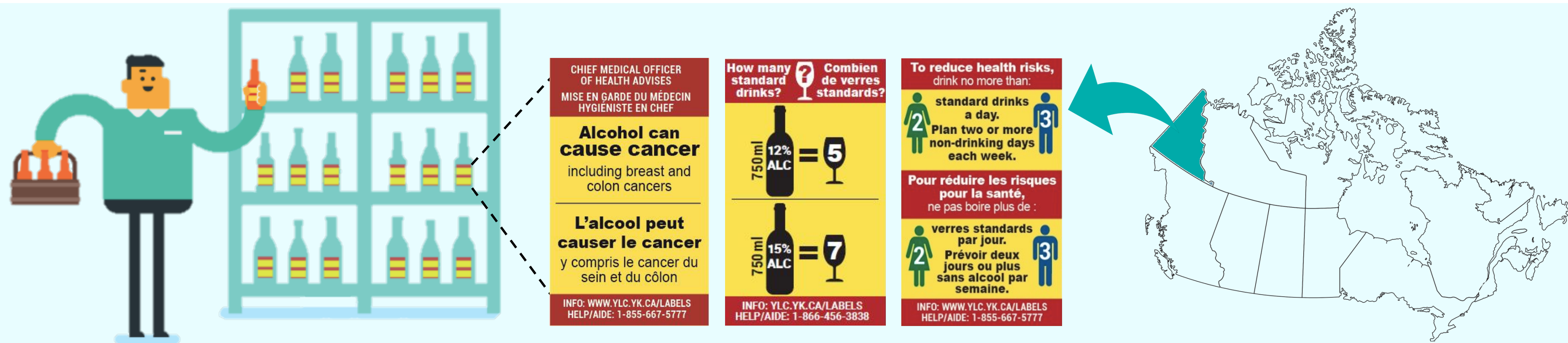
Extra! Extra! Read All About—Labels: A media content analysis of a real-world alcohol labelling study in Yukon, Canada

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Background

A quasi-experimental study was conducted in Yukon exploring the impact of alcohol labels with a cancer warning, alcohol drinking guidelines, and standard drink information. Only one month into the eight-month intervention period, the intervention was halted due to concerns from Canada's alcohol industry. The intervention later resumed with the cancer label omitted. The study drew significant international media attention. Media can play a role in shaping what the public perceives as important and can also act as an advocacy tool for increasing public awareness and support for various causes. A media content analysis was therefore conducted to assess mass media coverage of the Yukon alcohol labelling study.



Objective & Methods

This qualitative research explored the mass media coverage of the alcohol labelling study to better understand how it was framed in various media channels and the alcohol industry's response to the study.

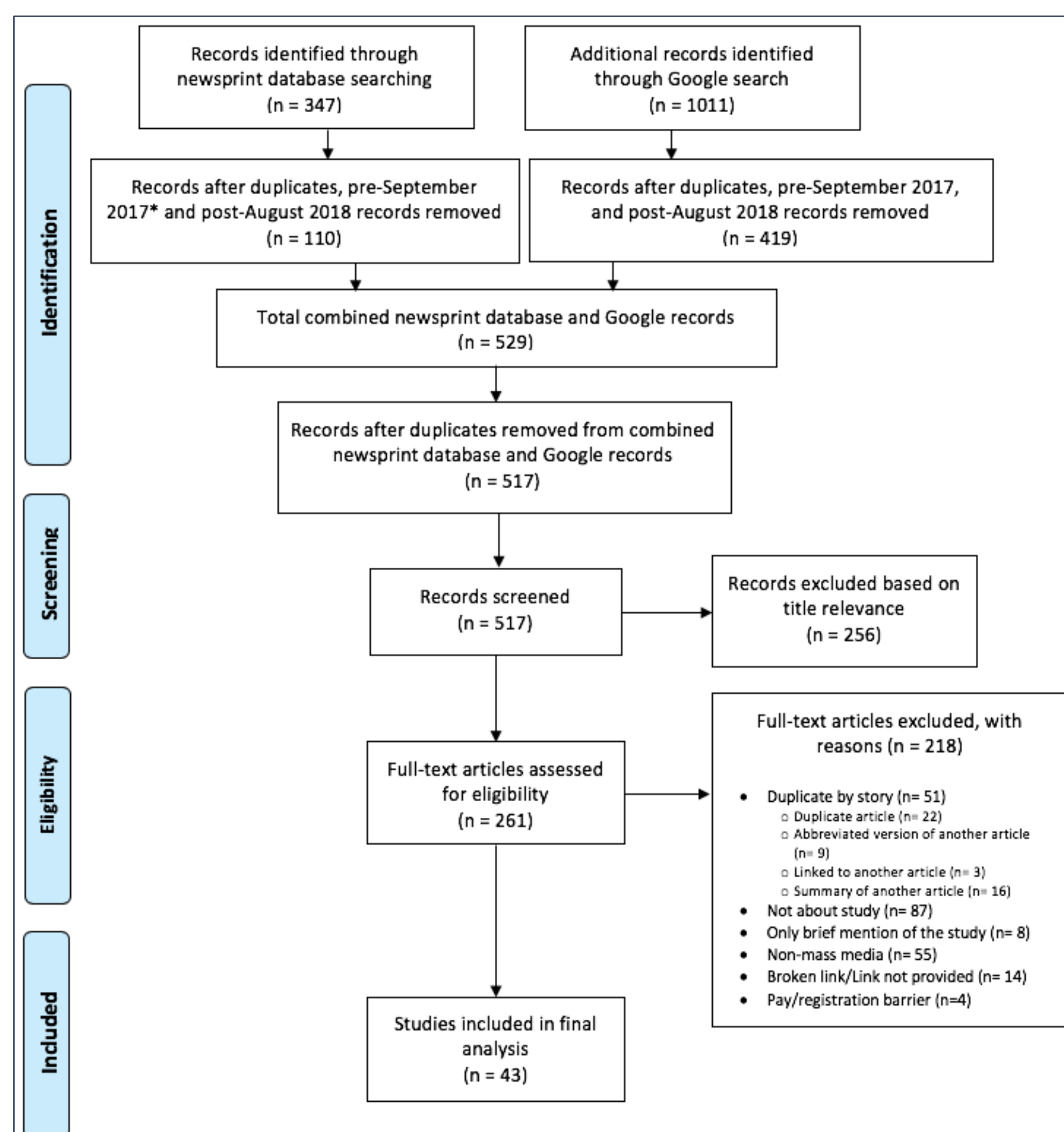


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram outlining article eligibility.

Four electronic media databases, Google, and Google News were searched for articles related to the alcohol labelling study published between September 2017 and August 2018. This spans before and after the study's launch, pause, and resumption.

A systematic strategy was used to determine article inclusion based on PRISMA guidelines¹ (see Figure 1).

Articles were coded independently by two researchers for slant—**supportive, opposed, mixed, and neutral**—toward alcohol labelling and the study.

Slant code definitions were refined and applied until an acceptable level of inter-coder reliability was reached and substantial agreement achieved.

Frequency of article slant over time was analyzed. Quotations were also extracted to elucidate the media's portrayal of the alcohol industry's response to the study and its labels.

Results

There were 43 eligible articles identified through the screening process published between November 22, 2017 and June 28, 2018.

Article types included:

- 22 hard news
- 8 commentary
- 7 blog
- 6 web story

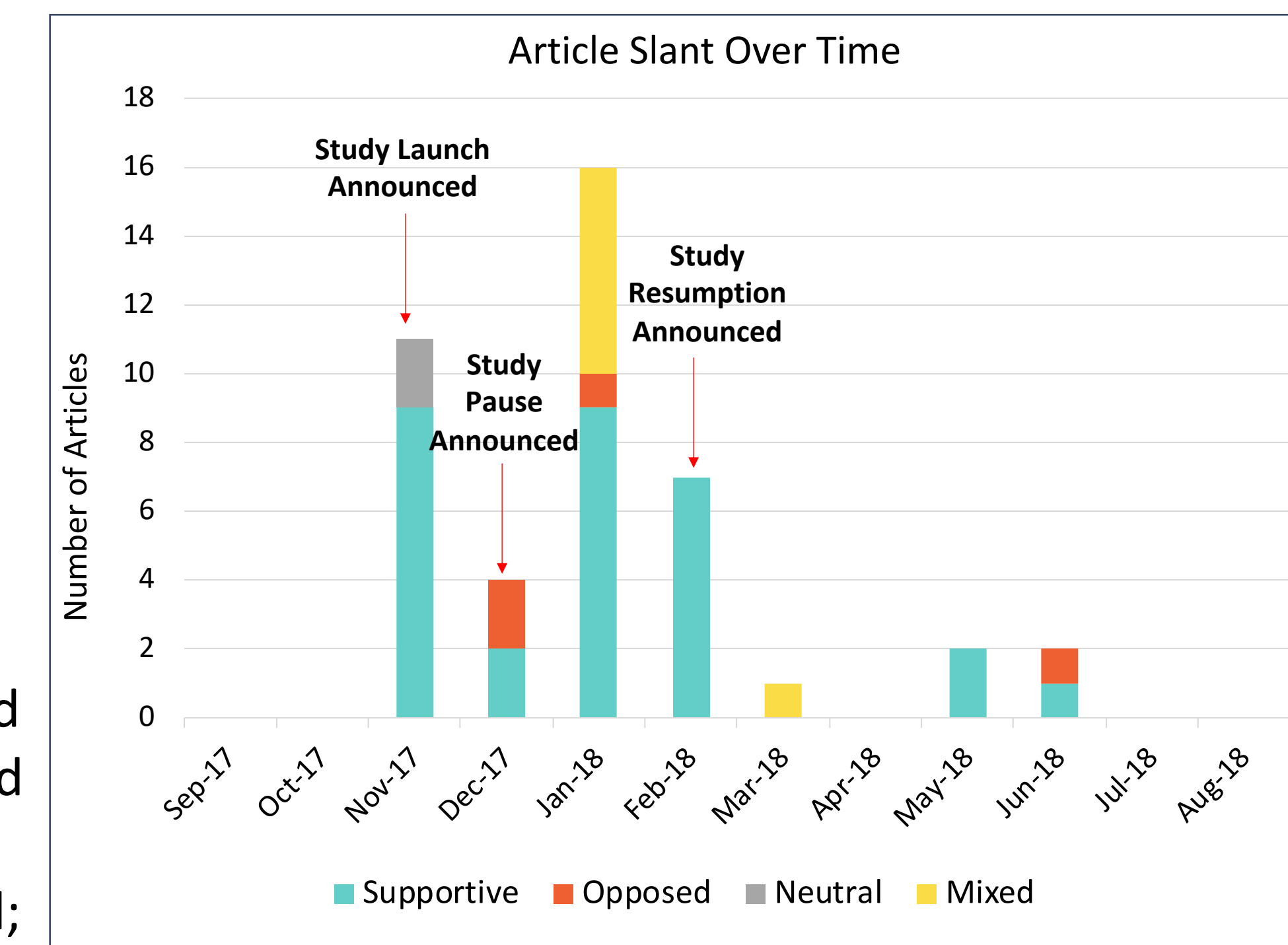


Figure 2. Media coverage and article slant over time.

Following the launch of the label intervention in November 2017, coverage was largely supportive. Mixed and opposed media slants did not appear until after the label intervention was halted; however, the supportive slant remained dominant over the full study period.

Slant analysis of articles revealed:

- 70% supportive slant
- 9% opposed slant
- 16% mixed slant
- 5% neutral slant

"What the alcohol industry really fears is that other provinces and territories will follow suit on the labelling initiative, and start taking the harms of alcohol more seriously...Bring on the bright-yellow stickers – and with them, recognition that, while alcohol can be used responsibly, it is a serious public-health issue." (André Picard, columnist) *The Globe and Mail*²

"In Canada, the latest junkscience attempt to promote alcohol as a cancer-causing scourge took place under the auspices of Health Canada...an experiment that they hoped could be spun into a national and international model of alcohol scaremongering." (Terence Corcoran, columnist) *National Post*³

"Westcott also said the content of the label that reads "alcohol can cause cancer, including breast and colon cancers" is scientifically debatable." (Jan Westcott, president of Spirits Canada) "As it's a new study, let's wait and see what the results are, and then let's discuss them. I think it's self-defeating, really, to stifle knowledge being developed." (Dr. Brendan Hanley, Yukon's Chief Medical Officer of Health) *The Whitehorse Star*⁴

Conclusion

- Alcohol industry interests and pressure represent a challenge to public health
- Industry concerns were brought to the forefront in the media after the intervention was halted and led to articles with an opposed or mixed slant toward alcohol labels
- Media coverage was largely supportive by highlighting alcohol-related harms, giving a voice to public health researchers, and challenging industry criticisms of the study
- Engaging with media may help public health practitioners and researchers better communicate their messages to the public

References

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