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.

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.

A systematic approach was used to determine article inclusion based on PRISMA guidelines (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

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

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


