

## PEER REVIEW HISTORY

BMJ Open publishes all reviews undertaken for accepted manuscripts. Reviewers are asked to complete a checklist review form (<http://bmjopen.bmj.com/site/about/resources/checklist.pdf>) and are provided with free text boxes to elaborate on their assessment. These free text comments are reproduced below.

### ARTICLE DETAILS

<b>TITLE (PROVISIONAL)</b>	PRESENTING A STRONG AND UNITED FRONT TO TOBACCO INDUSTRY INTERFERENCE: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF TOBACCO PLAIN PACKAGING 2008-2014
<b>AUTHORS</b>	Miller, Caroline Louise; Brownbill, Aimee Lee; Dono, Joanne; Ettridge, Kerry

### VERSION 1 – REVIEW

<b>REVIEWER</b>	Jenny Hatchard University of Bath, UK
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	10-May-2018

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>The paper is clearly written and well presented but could be improved by the authors elaborating on some key details, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The discussion and introduction would benefit from discussion/mention of additional relevant literature. There is a small but significant cohort of literature on newspaper coverage of tobacco control issues, including on plain packaging. The authors cite a small number of these, but not others (eg. Rowell et al. 2014).</li><li>- The methods are very brief. Could the authors elaborate on the method of newspaper selection linked to readership? The authors also mention 'minor amendments' to the coding structure but do not fully explain how their approach differs from previous work. Some additional information here would be useful.</li><li>- For the results, it would be interesting to know the relationship if any between prominence of editorials and opinion slant - for example, are negative articles prominent than positive ones or vice versa.</li><li>- The discussion is very short. perhaps the authors could consider some additional content - perhaps inclusion of ideas for how plain packaging can be framed by tobacco control advocates in the media, as based on the content of supportive media articles, although I realise this may be outwith the scope of the paper. Could the authors also consider the importance/non-importance of news as comment vs. straight news (given relative volumes) for expounding ideas about tobacco control policies?</li><li>- The paper would also benefit from proof reading as there are some very minor typos.</li></ul>
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Julien Mercille University College Dublin Ireland
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	09-Jun-2018

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	This is an interesting article, covering an important topic (the ways in which the media cover public health issues like tobacco public health
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measures). The work accomplished is comprehensive and systematic (700+ news articles reviewed, in many newspapers in Australia). I would like to see the article published, however, I would like to see the authors address a few issues in the interpretation of the results.

The overall nature of your results section implies that overall, the media have been positive toward plain packaging, even though the media have circulated many of the industry's arguments against it. In your Discussion section you conclude that public health advocates should thus not be deterred by media coverage of industry arguments and therefore should present public health arguments in the media to counteract those.

But I'm not sure the media coverage in the case you have studied can be interpreted as so positive. I'd like to see addressed the following points: You have surveyed comprehensively 6 years of media coverage, and you found many news pieces that were almost all neutral; and 6 editorial pieces that were positive (55% of 11 editorials). That's almost no positive coverage at all. (It's one positive piece per year, in only one newspaper per year, if I understand correctly). Moreover, all editorials would probably have been classified as "low prominence" because they usually appear in the back pages. I exclude the letters/comments section here because in my opinion they should not be included in a media study, even though they're selected by the editors. Unless someone like an authority on tobacco writes a long, well argued letter, they're usually short and frankly, not read by many people. I think it's ok to leave them in your results but I wouldn't use them to assess media coverage of an issue.

Therefore, it seems to me that the media's position is better characterised as "passive" or "reluctant supporter" of public health measures like tobacco packaging. In addition, as your results indicate, the media presented the range of industry views, even though most of those are discredited. Therefore, the fact that the tobacco industry was able to push its discredited claims into the media shows at least some support for these views in the media.

All this is related to the fact that the article does not seek to explain the results it presents: in other words, what factors explain the type of media coverage given to plain packaging? Why was the media not more actively pushing for this public health measure? (say, by using their front pages to present strong arguments in favor of plain packaging, etc.)

Here it would help to say something about how the authors conceive of the media (conceptually, theoretically), perhaps at the outset of the article. My own position is a political economic one, i.e., the media represent the view of the (Australian) establishment--owners of the mainstream media, for example, are usually large corporations. Therefore the viewpoints presented in the media cover the range of views held by the establishment (from its liberal wing to its conservative wing). You can see more details in an article I wrote that is very similar to yours about how the Irish media covered a public health law to reduce alcohol harms:

Julien Mercille (2017) 'Media Coverage of Alcohol Issues: A Critical Political Economy Framework--A Case Study from Ireland'. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health,

	<p>14 (6): <a href="https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5486336/">https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5486336/</a> (it's open access).</p> <p>Whatever is your conceptualisation of the media, it would be useful to state it in the article. this would, in turn, help to give an interpretation of the nature of the media coverage that you document, so that we understand better how the media cover public health issues. The Discussion section would thus be strengthened and clarified. Moreover, the article would move beyond a simply count of the views expressed in articles, which is somewhat descriptive (although it is important). It would add a more analytical aspect to the article.</p> <p>Minor points:</p> <p>Methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Search terms (pack*, cigarette, etc.): did you look for these anywhere in the newspaper articles? (or just in the headline, or at the beginning of articles, etc.)</li> <li>-What is the difference between a "mixed" and a "neutral" article in your coding?</li> </ul> <p>Overall, I think this article will be an important one when the above points are addressed.</p>
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### VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Reviewer: 1

Reviewer Name: Jenny Hatchard

Institution and Country: University of Bath, UK Please state any competing interests or state 'None declared': None declared

The paper is clearly written and well presented but could be improved by the authors elaborating on some key details, as follows:

- The discussion and introduction would benefit from discussion/mention of additional relevant literature. There is a small but significant cohort of literature on newspaper coverage of tobacco control issues, including on plain packaging. The authors cite a small number of these, but not others (eg. Rowell et al. 2014).

*The introduction and discussion have been expanded to incorporate additional literature.*

- The methods are very brief. Could the authors elaborate on the method of newspaper selection linked to readership?

*Additional information has been added to the methods section.*

The authors also mention 'minor amendments' to the coding structure but do not fully explain how their approach differs from previous work. Some additional information here would be useful.

*Additional information has been added to the methods section.*

- For the results, it would be interesting to know the relationship if any between prominence of editorials and opinion slant - for example, are negative articles prominent than positive ones or vice versa.

*Additional results have been provided.*

- The discussion is very short. perhaps the authors could consider some additional content - perhaps inclusion of ideas for how plain packaging can be framed by tobacco control advocates in the media, as based on the content of supportive media articles, although I realise this may be outwith the scope of the paper. Could the authors also consider the importance/non-importance of news as comment vs. straight news (given relative volumes) for expounding ideas about tobacco control policies?

*The discussion has been expanded to incorporate these points.*

- The paper would also benefit from proof reading as there are some very minor typos.

*The paper has been proofread*

Reviewer: 2

Reviewer Name: Julien Mercille

Institution and Country: University College Dublin, Ireland Please state any competing interests or state 'None declared': None declared

This is an interesting article, covering an important topic (the ways in which the media cover public health issues like tobacco public health measures). The work accomplished is comprehensive and systematic (700+ news articles reviewed, in many newspapers in Australia). I would like to see the article published, however, I would like to see the authors address a few issues in the interpretation of the results.

The overall nature of your results section implies that overall, the media have been positive toward plain packaging, even though the media have circulated many of the industry's arguments against it. In your Discussion section you conclude that public health advocates should thus not be deterred by media coverage of industry arguments and therefore should present public health arguments in the media to counteract those. But I'm not sure the media coverage in the case you have studied can be interpreted as so positive. I'd like to see addressed the following points: You have surveyed comprehensively 6 years of media coverage, and you found many news pieces that were almost all neutral; and 6 editorial pieces that were positive (55% of 11 editorials). That's almost no positive coverage at all. (It's one positive piece per year, in only one newspaper per year, if I understand correctly).

*Unfortunately a typo was missed in the submission of the paper. Although the percentages were correct, there were actually 100 editorials, not 11, meaning that there were 55 editorials which expressed a supportive opinion within the article over the 6 year period. In contrast, there were 28 opposing, 12 neutral and 5 mixed, therefore, the overall coverage of editorials was more supporting than opposing. Furthermore, we have stated that the overwhelming majority of articles published were 'neutral' in tone, with a slight inclination towards support rather than opposition where an opinion was present. This was not meant to imply that the overall coverage by the print media was positive towards plain packaging. We have clarified this point in the discussion and in the abstract.*

Moreover, all editorials would probably have been classified as "low prominence" because they usually appear in the back pages.

*We have done some additional analysis on the relationship between article type, prominence and opinion slant – see added paragraph in results section. While most editorials were indeed low prominence, there were a small number that were more prominent, and they discussed the events being reported in the news at the time, with the majority showing support for the policy.*

I exclude the letters/comments section here because in my opinion they should not be included in a media study, even though they're selected by the editors. Unless someone like an authority on tobacco writes a long, well argued letter, they're usually short and frankly, not read by many people. I think it's ok to leave them in your results but I wouldn't use them to assess media coverage of an issue.

*We agree; they were reported for sake of comprehensive coverage and did not feature in the analysis. We have made a note of this in the methods section.*

Therefore, it seems to me that the media's position is better characterised as "passive" or "reluctant supporter" of public health measures like tobacco packaging.

*We have stated that the majority of reporting was 'neutral'. We have expanded on the implications of this in the discussion.*

In addition, as your results indicate, the media presented the range of industry views, even though most of those are discredited. Therefore, the fact that the tobacco industry was able to push its discredited claims into the media shows at least some support for these views in the media.

*The majority of reporting was on events, and while the industry was able to get their anti-policy rhetoric published, it was not without criticism. It was beyond the scope of this study to conduct an economic framework analysis. However, we have incorporated some additional details in the discussion on this point.*

All this is related to the fact that the article does not seek to explain the results it presents: in other words, what factors explain the type of media coverage given to plain packaging? Why was the media not more actively pushing for this public health measure? (say, by using their front pages to present strong arguments in favor of plain packaging, etc.)

*We have added additional analyses relating to prominence of article coverage, clarified the role of the tobacco industry and reporting of events, and have expanded on the discussion to better explain the results and their implications.*

Here it would help to say something about how the authors conceive of the media (conceptually, theoretically), perhaps at the outset of the article.

*We have added the framework we have used to conceptualise the media in the introduction.*

My own position is a political economic one, i.e., the media represent the view of the (Australian) establishment--owners of the mainstream media, for example, are usually large corporations. Therefore the viewpoints presented in the media cover the range of views held by the establishment (from its liberal wing to its conservative wing). You can see more details in an article I wrote that is very similar to yours about how the Irish media covered a public health law to reduce alcohol harms:

Julien Mercille (2017) 'Media Coverage of Alcohol Issues: A Critical Political Economy Framework--A Case Study from Ireland'. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 14 (6): <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5486336/> (it's open access).

*We read your article with great interest and understand the value of analysing the media with respect to the political economic framework. We do appreciate your argument about the role of media outlets as more than "more or less disinterested conveyors of the range of views in society." We certainly observe the roles of outlets in Australia's tumultuous political leadership in recent years. However, it was largely beyond the original scope of this article to analyse the data using this framework. Our intent was to document the extensive media coverage of Australia's battle to become the first country to implement plain packaging, which was subjected to multi-pronged legal attacks against the legislation, both domestically (a constitutional challenge) and internationally (an Investor State dispute with Hong Kong raised by Philip Morris Asia, and finally in the World Trade Organisation). The aim was to inform other countries of the challenges that accompanied the drawn out policy process and legal defences, and to help policy makers in other countries not be 'spooked' by the volume and nature of industry arguments and attacks, which were all played out in the Australian media.*

*Preliminary analysis of the political and economic influences in the Australian media suggests that there are subtleties in the Australian media landscape regarding plain packaging coverage that would need to be explored in much greater detail to unpick. Australia's most conservative media outlets, e.g. Murdoch-owned NewsCorp and the Australian Financial Review, which articulates their position as promoting free-market economies, offered news content on plain packaging which was largely neutral. Numerous NewsCorp newspapers published more editorials in favour than against the policy. 'The Australian' newspaper (NewsCorp) published the most editorials in opposition to the policy (n=12), but the majority (n=7) were published in June 2014 – post implementation. Much of the neutrality or "a bet each way" coverage was likely due to the nature of the topics being*

*covered. Australian plain packaging laws were subjected to three protracted legal challenges (noted above.) Prior to legislation passing the media were covering a public health policy debate. Post legislation the media were covering the litigation as it unfolded, with all the uncertainty involved. We have added an extra quote into the results to better reflect the subtleties of positioning, and have incorporated all of these points into the discussion.*

*As shown in our study, the Australian media is willing to publish articles that are supportive of public health measures relating to tobacco. This reflects, we believe, Australia's long history and acceptance of tobacco control effort, and the delegitimization of the tobacco industry. For example, tobacco advertising was banned in newspapers in 1988. While the tobacco industry uses the media for public relations, they are viewed with scepticism, and these stories may help to reinforce the negative views of the tobacco industry that are held by the Australian audience. We acknowledge that the results are specific to plain packaging in the discussion. While we have not conducted any further analysis, we are aware that the results would most likely be different for alcohol-related public health policy. In Australian culture, alcohol consumption is ubiquitous and highly normalised. Alcohol production and export is also central to the Australian economy which contrasts with the now phased-out tobacco growing and manufacturing industry.*

Whatever is your conceptualisation of the media, it would be useful to state it in the article. This would, in turn, help to give an interpretation of the nature of the media coverage that you document, so that we understand better how the media cover public health issues. The Discussion section would thus be strengthened and clarified. Moreover, the article would move beyond a simple count of the views expressed in articles, which is somewhat descriptive (although it is important). It would add a more analytical aspect to the article.

*The discussion and introduction have been expanded to reflect these points, and we feel the article has been strengthened.*

Minor points:

Methods:

-Search terms (pack\*, cigarette, etc.): did you look for these anywhere in the newspaper articles? (or just in the headline, or at the beginning of articles, etc.)

*Both databases contained full-text articles and searches were conducted using the default settings. This information has been added to the methods section.*

-What is the difference between a "mixed" and a "neutral" article in your coding?

*A definition has been added.*

Overall, I think this article will be an important one when the above points are addressed.

## VERSION 2 – REVIEW

<b>REVIEWER</b>	Julien Mercille University College Dublin Ireland
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	30-Jul-2018
<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	The reviewer completed the checklist but made no further comments.