

Street Racing: Content Analysis of Coverage and Framing by Canadian Newspapers

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Background

Prevalence and Legislation

Canadians find street racing serious concern.

Limited evidence on street racing prevalence/consequences.

Between 2002-2008, federal government and some provinces amended street racing legislation.

- Federal law: mandatory aggravating circumstance for dangerous operation, criminal negligence offences and increased penalties
- Provincial laws: definitions include stunt driving activities, and increased offences include vehicle impoundments, higher fines and licence suspensions

Newspapers Framing Street Racing

- Public opinions on street racing shaped by other sources
- Newspapers framing of MVCs highly skewed
- Editorial decisions based on novelty and drama (ie. If it bleeds, it leads)
- Articles on violent and dramatic stories with little resemblance to actual crime frequency and casualties
- Media select certain issues for social discourse thereby setting policy and public agenda

- How the press frame street racing informs public perceptions.
- Public perceptions about nature and prevalence of public health issues can be affected by **amount** and **type** of news coverage

Purpose: To examine the newspaper content on coverage of street racing to characterize the information that may have informed public opinion on this topic.

Methods

Identifying Newspaper Articles

Search term: “street racing”

Time: November 1, 2006 to October 31, 2008

Database: Proquest’s Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies.

Covers all major English newspapers across country

Result: 725 articles from **16** Newspapers

- *Represented mainly from Ontario and Western newspapers with one from eastern provinces*

Ethnographic Content Analysis

Qualitative research template analysis style used to develop coding template, code and analyze data.

- Evaluated by two independent reviewers
- Articles read for prominent descriptors, then coded.
 - Preliminary thematic coding scheme developed using 374 articles from Nov 1, 2006 to Oct 31, 2007
 - Final coding scheme used to analyze 351 articles from Nov 1, 2007 to October 31, 2008
- NVivo 9 software used in analyses

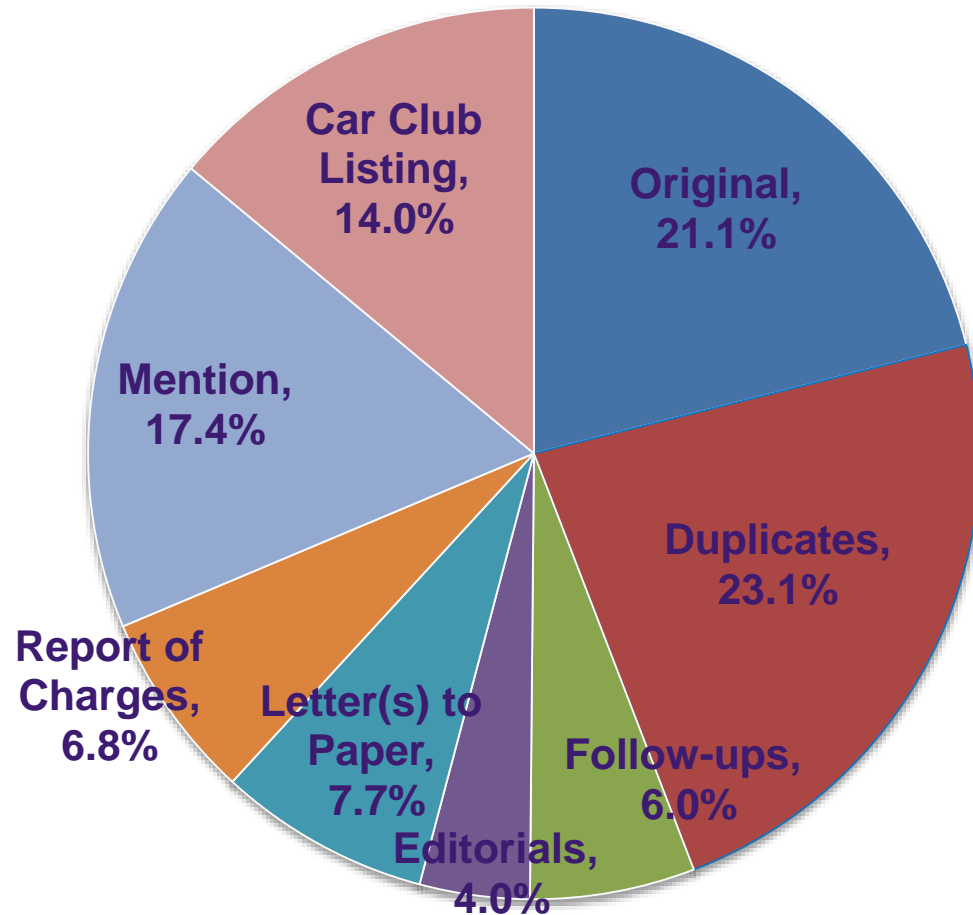
Results

Article Types

Every article assigned one article type :

- 1) *Episodic Articles (collisions and offences):*
 - a) *originals*
 - b) *duplicates and*
 - c) *follow-ups*
- 2) *Thematic Articles: Letter(s) to Editor and Editorials*
- 3) *Report of Charges:* articles on number of charges laid over a period of time
- 4) *Mention:* articles with words “street racing” without considerable elaboration on topic
- 5) *Car Club Directory listings:* (in BC only)

Percentage of Published Articles by Article Type



Episodic:

Original: 21.1%

Duplicates: 23.1%

Follow-ups: 6.0%

Total: 50.2%

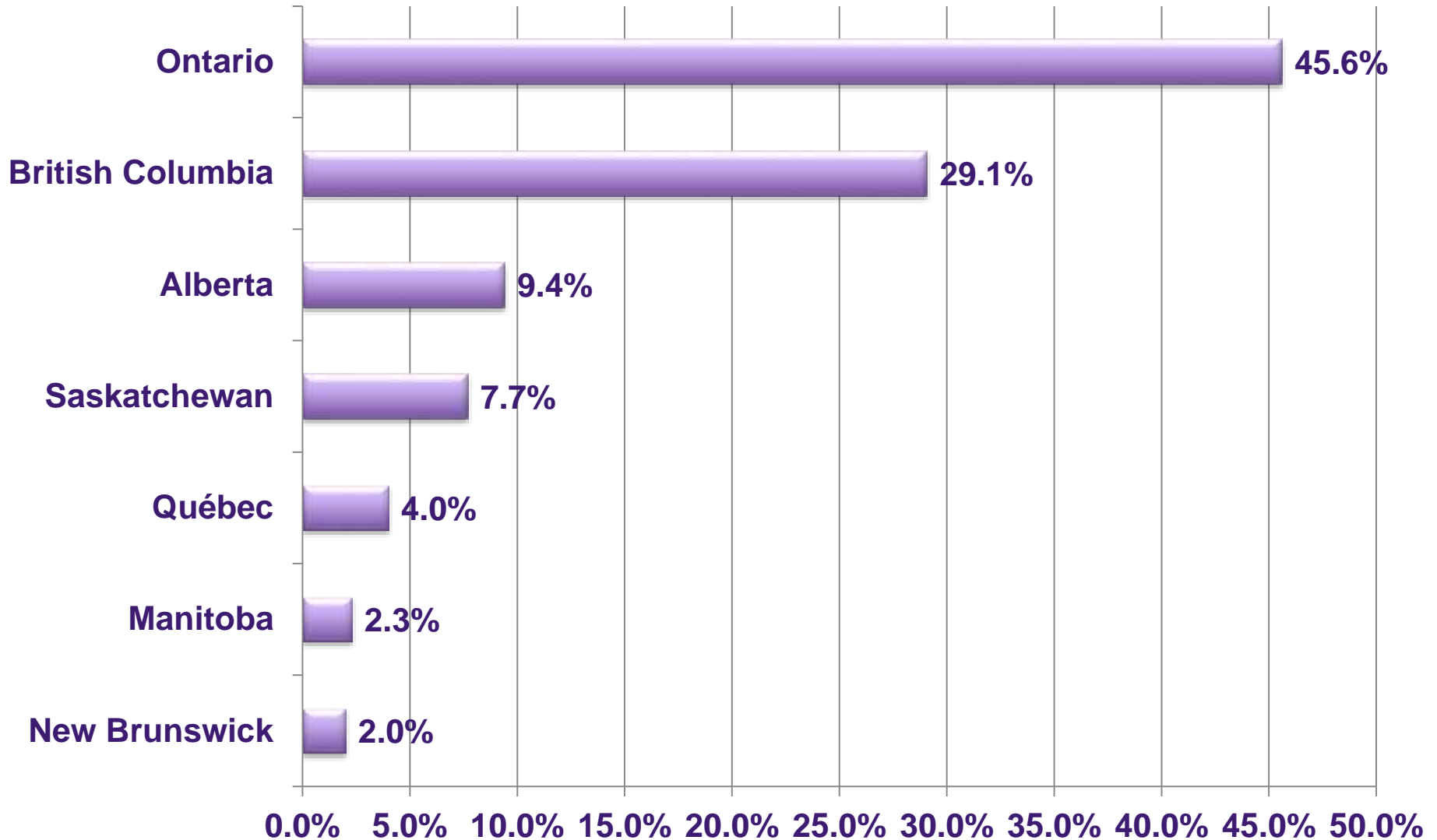
Thematic:

Letter(s) to Paper: 7.7%

Editorials: 4.0%

Total: 19.4%

% of Articles by Province (N=351)



Number of Street Racing Articles by Article Type and Slant (N=262)*

	Episodic (N = 171)			Thematic (N = 39)		Other (N=52)	
	Orig	Dupl.	F/U	Editorial	Letters	Reports	Mention
<u>Slant</u>							
+ SR law	21	31	7	2	7	14	6
- SR law	2	1	0	8	8	0	3
Neutral	48	48	13	4	10	9	20
Total	71	80	20	14	25	23	29

*Not all articles could be coded with a slant. These articles are excluded from this table.

Episodic Articles

Episodic Articles Published:

- Ontario (47.73%), British Columbia (19.32%), Saskatchewan (11.93%), Québec (3.41%)

Incidents occurred mostly on

- highways (34.87%), municipal roads (32.90%), rural roads (5.26%)

During daytime hours (21.05%)

Episodic Articles

Sensational and highly duplicated stories highlighted.

Emotional aspects of victim/villain frame:

- A 3 year old Québec girl struck and killed by a street racer while playing in her babysitter's backyard on Hallowe'en
- A retired school teacher who was killed on his bicycle "in a suspected hit-and-run case involving street racing"

Or because of the unusual content:

- "Octogenarian Speeds"
- "Volvo-driving mom" driving 101 km/hr through a school area on the way to daycare

Episodic Articles

Of the 176 episodic articles only 152 articles coded for content descriptors

- 53.29% involved a collision
- 49.34% involved an offence
- 2.63% of articles coded with both themes

Victims : Age

		Incidents (N=152)			
		Collisions		Offences	
Article Content Descriptors		N	%	N	%
Total		81	53.3	75	49.3
Victims		71	46.7	0	0.0
Age		49	32.2	0	0.0
	Child (0 to 16)	7			
	Young (16 to mid 20s)	5			
	Adult (25 to late 30s)	7			
	Middle Age (40 to 65)	30			
	Senior (65+)	5			

Victims : Sex

Article Content Descriptors		Incidents (N=152)			
		Collisions		Offences	
		N	%	N	%
Victims		71	46.7	0	0.0
	Sex	57	37.5	0	0.0
	Male	40			
	Female	24			

Victims : Result

		Incidents (N=152)			
		Collisions		Offences	
Article Content Descriptors		N	%	N	%
Victims		71	46.7	0	0.0
	Result	69	45.4	0	0.0
	Fatalities	60			
	Injuries	14			
	Property Damage	7			
	Psychological Trauma/Shock	2			

Perpetrator(s)/Driver : Age

		Incidents (N=152)			
		Collisions		Offences	
Article Content Descriptors		N	%	N	%
Perpetrator		77	50.7	75	49.3
	Age	58	38.2	58	38.2
	Young (16 to mid 20s)	51		24	
	Adult (25 to late 30s)	7		20	
	Middle Age (40 to 65)	1		9	
	Senior (65+)	0		12	

Perpetrator(s)/Driver: Sex

		Incidents (N=152)			
		Collisions		Offences	
Article Content Descriptors		N	%	N	%
Total		81	53.3	75	49.3
Perpetrator		77	50.7	75	49.3
Sex		59	38.8	63	41.4
	Male	58		56	
	Female	6		15	

Perpetrator(s)/Driver: Result

		Incidents (N=152)			
		Collisions		Offences	
Article Content Descriptors		N	%	N	%
Total		81	53.3	75	49.3
Perpetrator		77	50.7	75	49.3
Result		18	11.8	0	0.0
	Fatalities	7			
	Injuries	11			
	Property Damage	9			

Perpetrator(s)/Driver: Action

		Incidents (N=152)			
		Collisions		Offences	
Article Content Descriptors		N	%	N	%
Total		81	53.3	75	49.3
Perpetrator		77	50.7	75	49.3
Action		73	48.0	69	45.4
	Racing	61		10	
	Weaving among traffic	11		14	
	Speeding	12		60	
	Disobey traffic control	3		1	
	Lost control of vehicle	19		0	
	Impaired	5		0	

Perpetrator(s)/Driver: Charges

		Incidents (N=152)			
		Collisions		Offences	
Article Content Descriptors		N	%	N	%
Perpetrator		77	50.7	75	49.3
	Charges	57	37.5	77	50.7
	Causing bodily harm/death	41		0	
	Street racing	31		61	
	Speeding/Careless driving	2		4	
	Documentation/Licence issues	4		7	
	Failure to stop	20		4	
	Operating while impaired	6		3	
	Possession/Intent to distribute	0		6	

Perpetrator(s)/Driver: Penalties

		Incidents (N=152)			
		Collisions		Offences	
Article Content Descriptors		N	%	N	%
Perpetrator		77	50.7	75	49.3
	Penalties	18	11.8	61	40.1
	Jail time/Prison sentence	6		0	
	House arrest	11		0	
	Driving ban	8		1	
	Probation	4		0	
	Vehicle impoundment	2		56	
	Licence Suspension	0		42	
	Fines	0		9	

Thematic Articles

Arguments about street racing legislation

- Article in favour often cited police and government officials
- Articles against often written by members of general public.

Speculation of causes of street racing mainly described in Letters to Editor.

Thematic Articles

11.68% of articles coded as thematic

Street racing legislation a prominent topic in 51.22% of thematic articles.

- 65.85% published in Ontario
- provinces without legislation discussed need for stronger deterrents and stricter laws.

New Legislation Mentioned

Content Descriptors	Editorial	Letters to Paper	Total (N=41)	Overall %
New Legislation Mention	8	13	21	51.22%
Vehicle seizure under new leg.	4	7	11	
Fines under new leg.	2	5	7	
Licence suspension under new leg.	0	5	5	

Causes of Street Racing

Content Descriptors	Editorial	Letters to Paper	Total (N=41)	Overall %
Causes of Street Racing	6	14	20	48.78%
Lack of sanctioned racing areas (i.e. speedways)	1	4	5	
Those who flaunt rules of road (driving over 50 on 401 OK)	0	4	4	
Media glorification	1	3	4	
Poor drivers (not paying attention, poor judgment)	0	3	3	
Poor speed limits set	1	2	3	

Street Racing Law Arguments

Content Descriptors	Editorial	Letters to Paper	Total (N=41)	Overall %
Arguments FOR street racing law	3	9	12	29.27%
Tough laws and enforcement act as deterrent	0	4	4	
Speed kills	0	3	3	
Reduces injuries and fatalities	1	2	3	
General response – outrage	1	1	2	
Low persecution rate in courts	1	1	2	
50 over is still a general disregard for others	0	2	2	
Need stronger penalties/legislation	0	2	2	

Content Descriptors	Editorial	Letters to Paper	Total (N=41)	Overall %
Arguments AGAINST street racing law	5	15	20	48.78%
Violation of civil liberties	3	8	11	
Speed limits unrealistic	2	6	8	
Better drivers needed not new laws	3	2	5	
Law at police discretion – too much power	2	3	5	
Too harsh/Draconian	1	3	4	
Cash grab	1	3	4	
Token penalties are not a deterrent	1	3	4	
Political grandstanding	2	1	3	
50 over is not street racing	2	1	3	
Speeding on hwy vs. residential area	1	2	3	
Negative profiling of car enthusiasts	0	3	3	

Discussion

Articles focussed on collisions, fatalities and street racing offences with particular emphasis on sensational cases.

- Majority of collision articles described drivers as ***racing*** another vehicle, while majority of offence articles reported a single vehicle ***speeding***
- ***“if it bleeds, it leads”*** - highly duplicated articles involving collisions published more often than offence articles
- ***“speed-hungry young male”*** - male perpetrators, especially young males, most common characteristic

Thematic articles on legislative debate in respective provinces.

- Common themes included roadside vehicle seizure/impoundment, heavy fines and police powers.
- Most discussed causes of street racing: need for sanctioned racing areas and drivers' disregard for rules of road

In the absence of official statistics, media's presentation of street racing may be shaping public perceptions and the political agenda.

Limitations

- Daily newspapers only, thereby omitting opinions from other types and levels of media coverage.
- No French language newspapers included in database.
- The articles included in analyses are outdated.

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