

Distracted Driving in the Media

Student Researcher: Trichelle Reay

Supervisor: Dr. Lauren Mayes

Department of Criminology

Research Question

How is distracted driving portrayed in the media within British Columbia?

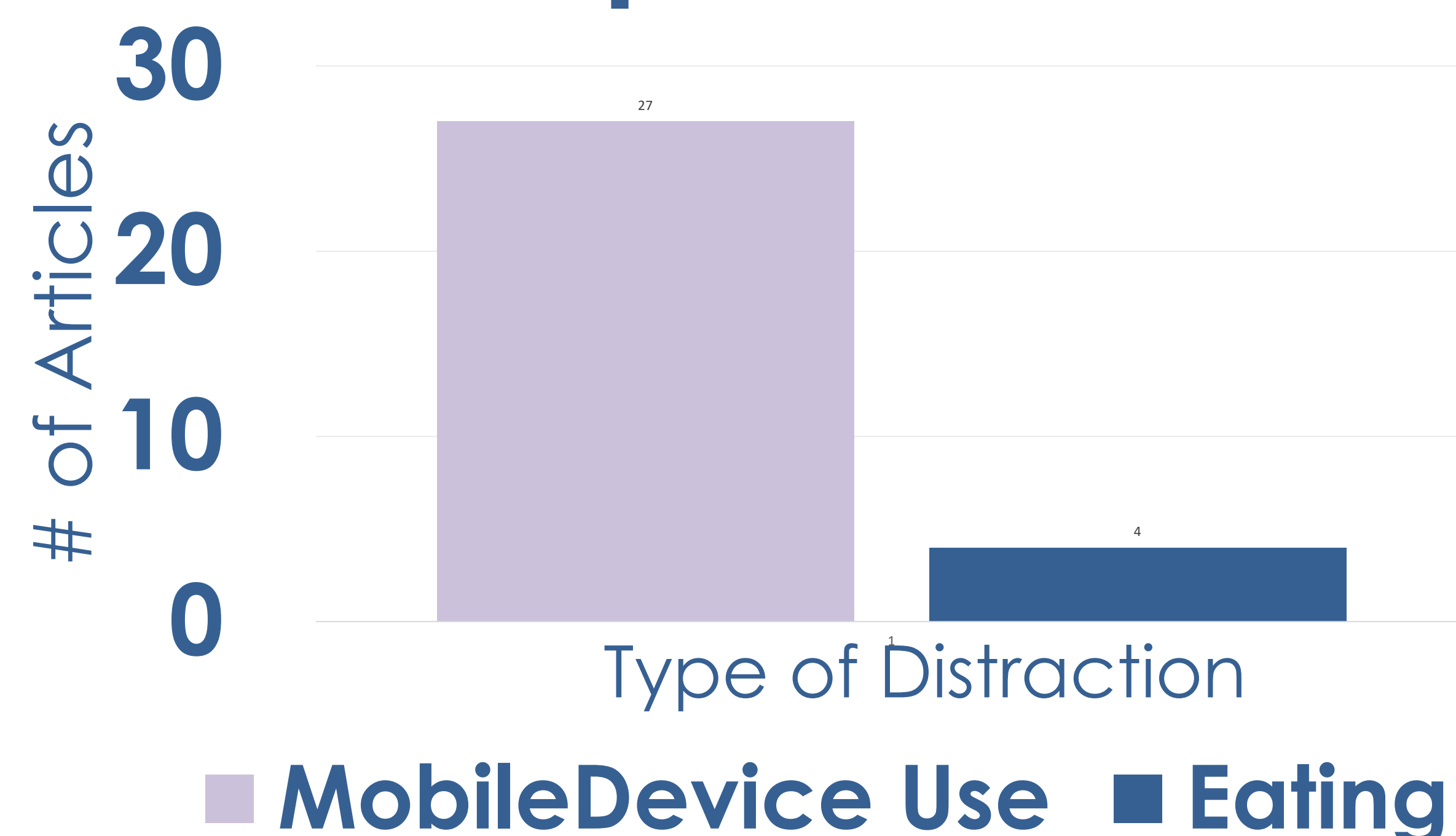
The Research Literature

- Distracted driving is a threat faced on all roads today.¹
- Distracted driving contributed to 21% of both fatal car crashes and serious injury collisions in 2016.⁴
- Many legislative efforts have been implemented.¹
- There is widespread noncompliance with distracted driving laws.¹
- Formal social control appears to be having little effect on driving behaviour; therefore, informal forms of social control need to be investigated.²
- How distracted driving is portrayed in the media has not been investigated within the current research literature.

Methodology

Using a qualitative research approach, a content analysis of 28 news articles was conducted using an inductive coding method.³ Articles were selected from the top 3 newspapers in British Columbia: *The Province*, *The Times Columnist*, and *The Vancouver Sun*.

Top 2 Distractions Reported



Research Findings

Several themes emerged in the research articles analyzed:

- The majority of articles were negatively framed and penal oriented – discussing punishments for distracted driving and the need for stiffer sanctions.
- In the portrayal of distracted driving, many articles used loaded, negative language.
- Consensus that there is a lack of clarity in distracted driving laws.
- To successfully combat distracted driving, there is acknowledgment of a need for restorative justice, education, and awareness initiatives rather than just punishment.
- Mobile device use was the type of distraction reported the most.



Conclusion

Distracted driving in the media has largely become synonymous with mobile device use and driving. The media's portrayal of distracted driving is largely negative, taking a very penal approach to discussing and addressing the problem. However, for years this approach has been largely ineffective – we need to try something else. The media is a great platform to use to generate constructive education and awareness concerning distracted driving with the possibility of instilling real change – if framed and delivered effectively.