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Researching the UK Science Media Centre

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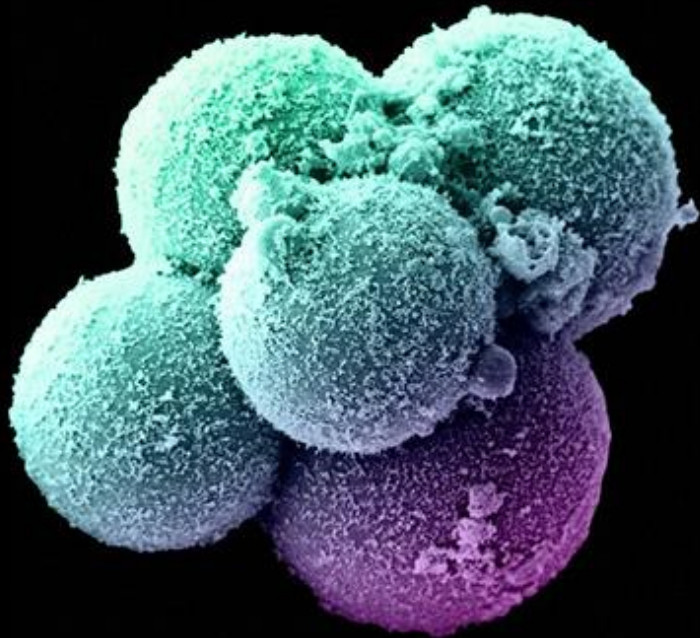
**CITY UNIVERSITY
LONDON**

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welcome to the

Science Media Centre

an independent press office helping to ensure that the public have access to the best scientific evidence and expertise through the news media when science hits the headlines

[find out more](#)

RESEARCH

Impact of the Science Media Centre on Science Reporting in UK Newspapers

Connie St Louis

ABSTRACT

- The influence of the SMC on science reporting in the UK needed to be quantified - to provide context for the general debate around their agenda, purpose and usefulness.
- This investigation looked into the influence of two services the SMC provide: "Roundups & Rapid Reactions" and "Briefings"
- Roundups & Rapid Reactions consist of lists of statements from experts in the relevant field, compiled for the benefit of science journalists
- Briefings are used to provide expert opinions for use by the media when an important scientific event occurs

METHODOLOGY

- All British national newspaper articles within two weeks of the expert reactions were considered
- The names of the experts were used as the search term
- Inter-coder reliability checked
- The group coded the same article initially and discrepancies used to amend the coding frame
- The results from the coding of each article were summated for analysis

Science Media Centre

**The media will do science better when
scientists do the media better**

Fiona Fox

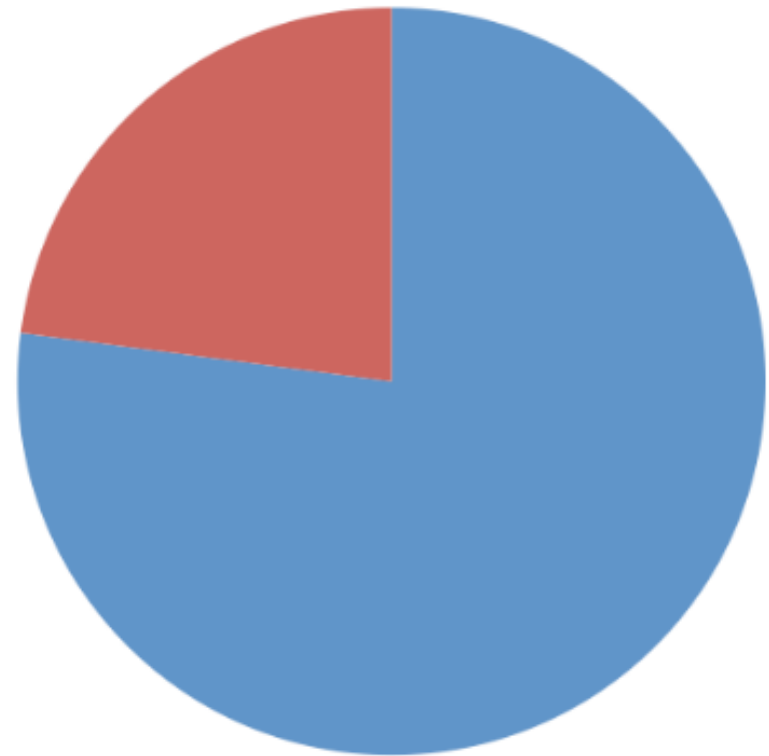
RESULTS

Expert reactions

54 per cent of the expert reactions during the time period were covered in the news

Of these, 23 per cent did not use an independent source

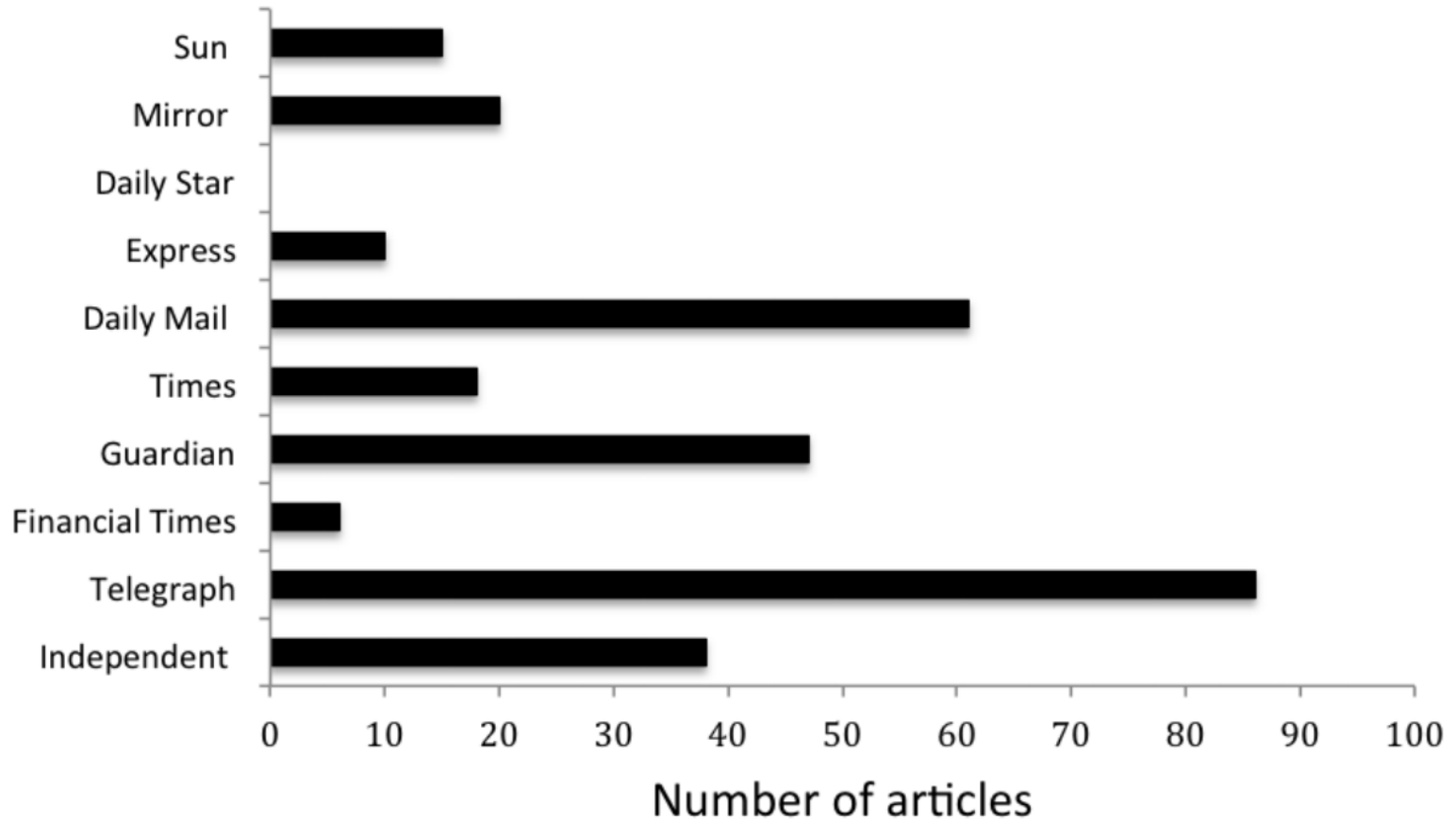
Of those that did, only 32 per cent of the external sources offered an opposing view to that offered by the expert in the SMC expert reaction



■ Used independent source

■ Did not use an independent source

Expert Reactions




Case study

- Paralysed rats learn to walk again

MAY 31, 2012



 Tweet 0

paralysed rats learn to walk again

Swiss research describes the stimulation of neurons connected to the injured spinal cords of paralysed rats to repair damage, to the extent that the rats can learn to walk again. The quote below was sent out in addition to those from the [Australian SMC](#).

Dr Elizabeth Bradbury, Medical Research Council Senior Fellow, King's College London, said:

Paralysed rats learn to walk again

Covered by:

The Sun

Sunday Times

Telegraph

Daily Mail

The Mirror

The Times

The Daily Mail article

New hope for the paralysed: Breakthrough sees rats with broken backs able to run in just two weeks

By TAMARA COHEN

PUBLISHED: 19:14, 31 May 2012 | UPDATED: 12:18, 1 June 2012



 **180** View comments

Paralysed patients have been given fresh hope after scientists enabled rats with severed spines to run again.

Using a cocktail of drugs and electrical impulses, researchers 'regrew' nerves linking the spinal cord to the brain.

After two weeks, the animals were not only able to walk, but climb stairs and run.

SMC expert

This is ground-breaking research and offers great hope for the future of restoring function to spinal-injured patients, however some questions remain before we know how useful this approach may be in humans.

Dr Elizabeth Bradbury, King's College London
Daily Mail

'Hopemongering'

Rats learning to walk again is impressive, but 'hopemongering' is dangerous in spinal injury research

By MICHAEL HANLON

PUBLISHED: 12:21, 1 June 2012 | **UPDATED:** 12:21, 1 June 2012



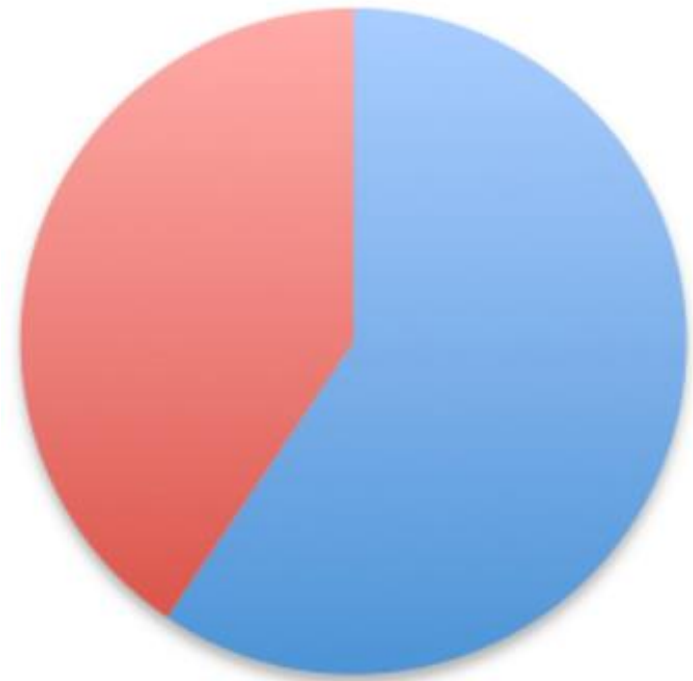
 **5** View comments

Journalists who write about health and science are often accused of scaremongering. Coffee will kill you, meat will give you cancer, watch out for those mobile phones!

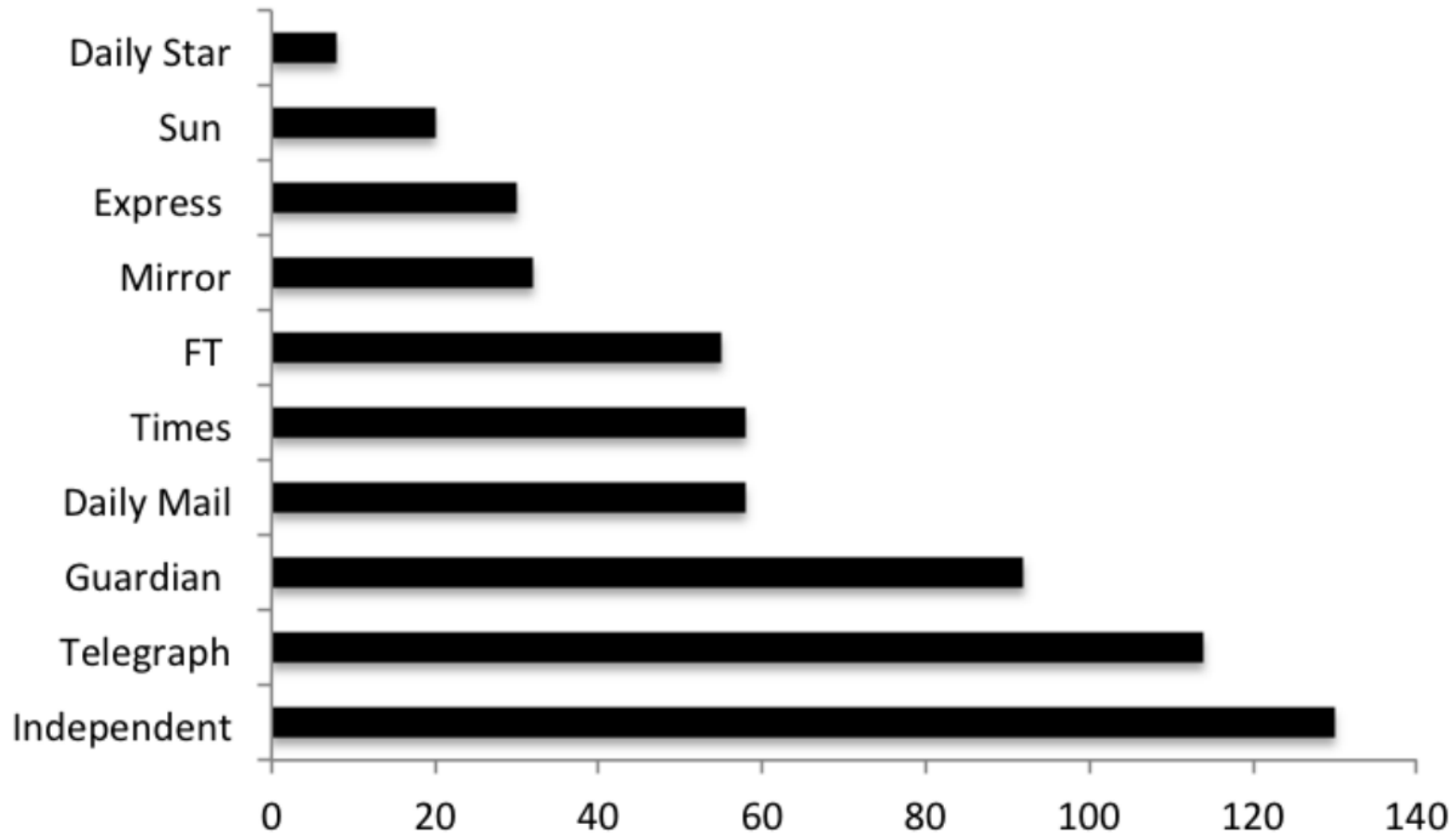
RESULTS

Briefings

60 per cent of the articles covering the briefings did not use an independent source



- Did not provide a non-SMC expert quote
- Provided a non-SMC expert quote



CONCLUSIONS

- There are more journalists than there should be that are only using experts from the SMC and not consulting independent sources
- Of the two services, journalists using the briefings service are less likely to consult an independent expert than those using the rapid reactions service