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Introduction

Nuclear accidents have a strong impact on the public opinion and often lead to political discussions about the use of nuclear energy for power generation. In this context, media play an influential role in shaping public opinion about nuclear energy. Media do not only report about public issues, but they also have the power to influence people's opinion.

Objectives

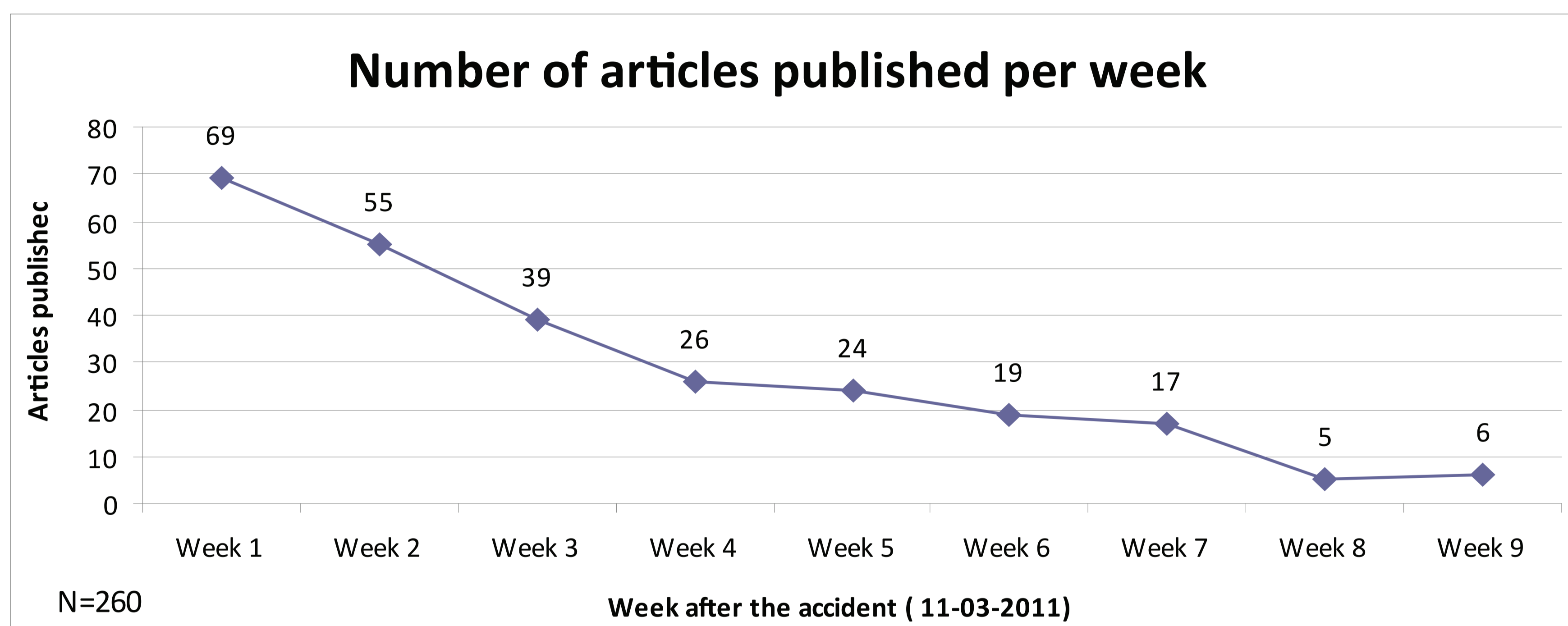
This paper reports on the role and principles of media and journalism with regards to the Fukushima nuclear accident and on the public opinion on issues related to the accident and to nuclear energy

Method

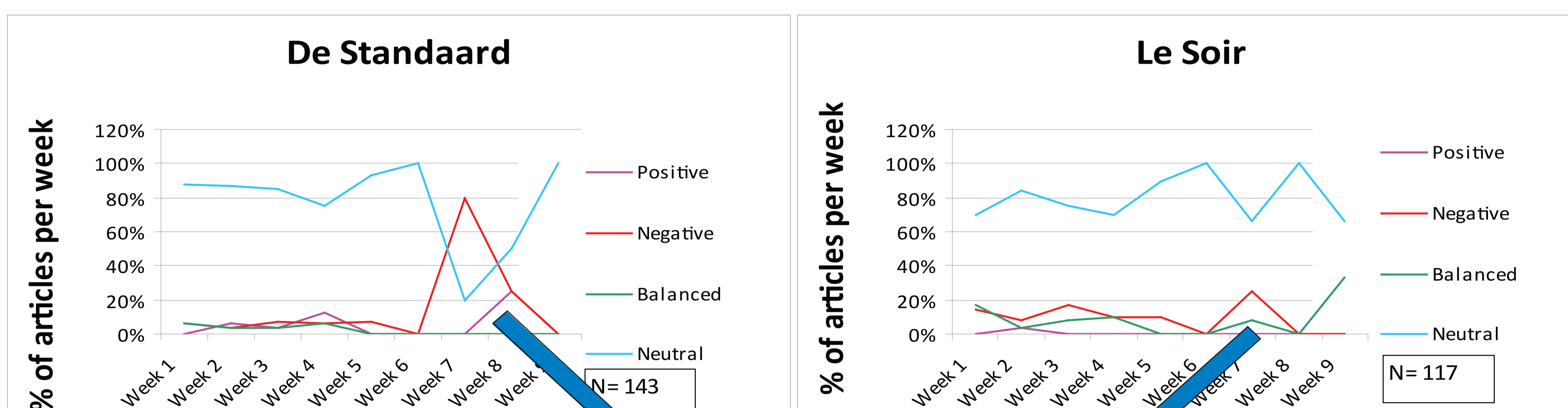
The research methodology consisted of: i) content analysis of two quality newspapers in Belgium, covering the first two months after the accident; and ii) public opinion research, based on more than 1000 personal interviews conducted in Belgium in the third month after the accident.



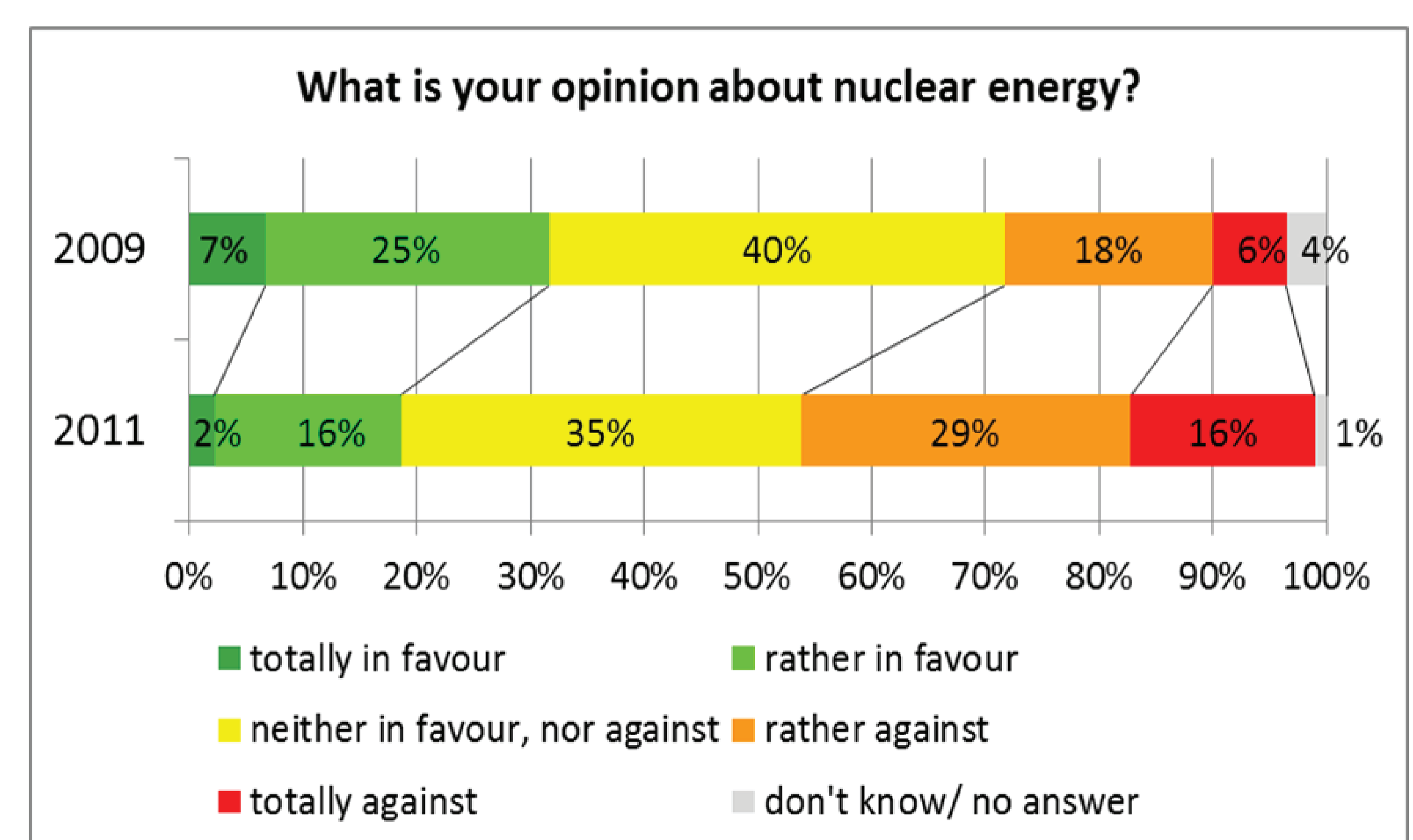
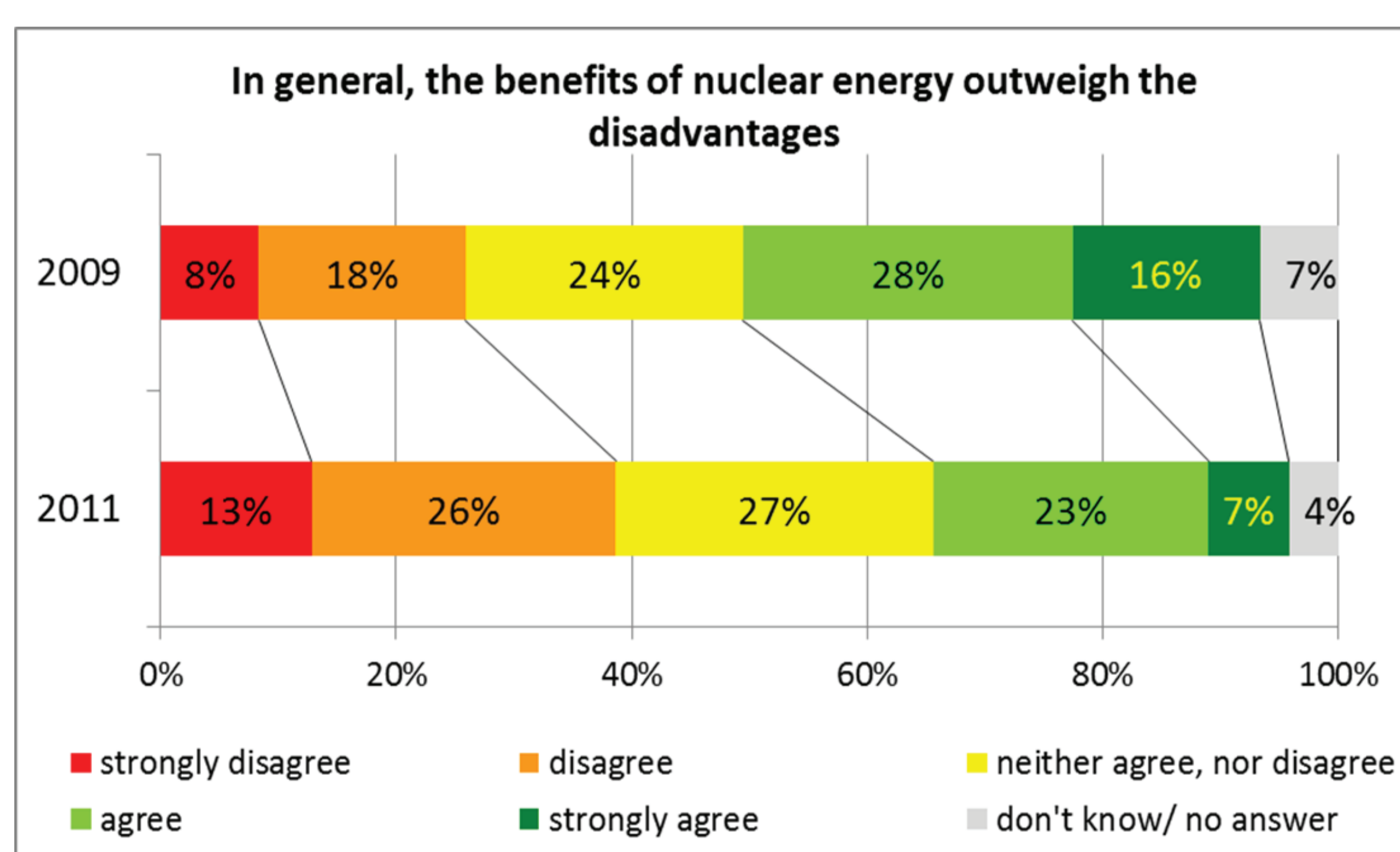
Results & discussion



Monotonous decrease in media attention with time



Orientation towards nuclear energy affected by anniversary of Chernobyl accident



Conclusions

Mass media closely monitored the nuclear emergency management during the event phase, but the interest decreased rapidly with time in the weeks after the accident. Conflicts and disagreements were highly presented in the media articles.

The overall orientation towards nuclear energy of the published articles was neutral, but a clear emphasis on the negative aspects was observed in April 2011, at the time of the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl accident.

Results also show that the public had more negative opinions and attitudes with regards to nuclear energy as compared to previous years.