The trust strategy?

An analysis of the relationship between social media strategies and trust

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ABSTRACT

Since the rise of social networking sites (SNS) much research has been carried out regarding their effects on journalism (Gulyas, 2013; Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013; Hermida, 2012; Newman, 2009; Arenberg & Lowrey, 2019; Lischka, 2018). At the same time, the public's trust in news organizations has been shown to be quite low in many western countries, with only half or less of the population of said countries claiming to trust the news (Newman et al., 2017). However, no study has examined whether the SNS themselves play a part in forming the readers' perception of trustworthiness. Because of this, this study investigated the following research question by focusing on a specific news organization: *What role does the social media presence of De Groene Amsterdammer play in its subscribers' perceptions of trustworthiness of the magazine itself?* Considering that the majority of trust research has been carried out in quantitative manner, this study instead approached the problem from a qualitative method. Through the use of semi-structure interviews and a thematic analysis, the factors which drive the respondents' perception of and trust in *De Groene Amsterdammer* were established. It was found that worries related to the commercialization of news subtract from the quality of and trust in the news. Moreover, a link between trust and perception was established. The specific characteristics of *De Groene Amsterdammer* as identified by the respondents were also shown to be part of the motivations for reading the magazine. The concept of trust was investigated in depth. The research first showed the applicability of Kohring and Matthes's (2007) quantitative scale for measuring generalized trust also in a qualitative research about trust in a single news organization. Moreover, it showed that other aspects in addition to the dimension identified by Kohring and Matthes (2007) contribute to influencing trust: a positive evaluation of journalistic sources, the presentation of coverage confirmative of the respondents' ideas, and the existence of a background of trust. The respondents' perception of the *Groene*'s strategy was also detailed, including its limitations. While the magazine's strategy was not found to have changed the respondents' trust in the magazine, it did positively color the perception of the magazine of a few respondents, bringing in questions of the necessity of future studies on this subject.

KEYWORDS: *social networking sites, trust, journalism, strategy, de groene amsterdammer*

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1. Introduction

The man who reads nothing at all is better educated than the man who reads nothing but newspapers. (Jefferson, n.d., as cited in Pew Research Center, 2008)

Thomas Jefferson's distrust of the news media, one not uncommon in politicians, has in recent years extended to large parts of the populations of many Western countries (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017). Even in countries where trust is higher, public perception remains quite negative. The Netherlands, for instance, is the country with the 5th highest level of trust in journalism out of the 36 considered in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017 (Newman et al., 2017). However, the 5th highest level translates to only 51% of Dutch respondents claiming they trust news media overall. On the other hand, 62% of people said they trust the news that they consume – the 2nd highest percentage out of the 36 countries considered. While the first figure, the one regarding general trust, is striking enough, the second figure is particularly surprising. Indeed, a 62% of people trusting the news they consult implies that 38% of the population do not trust even the news that they consume.

1.1 A Changing News Environment

During this struggle to regain, or at least retain, the public's trust, news organizations have also found themselves in a field profoundly changed by the rise of the Internet and social networking sites (Ju, Jeong, & Chyi, 2014). These changes have especially regarded the avenues of news consumption. Indeed, by 2016, in the Netherlands online news had supplanted all other channels as the main avenue for news access, with 79% of the population using them (Newman et al., 2017). Social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter now also have great importance in news access. In 2017, 32% of Dutch Facebook users, or about 4 million people out of 10.8 million total users, reported using social media to access news content (Statista, 2018). These changing audience behaviors made having an online presence and using social networking platforms a near necessity for most news organizations.

The use of SNS by news organizations poses both challenges and opportunities. One challenge is capturing the audience's attention, and attention is scarce (Goldhaber, 1997). This is a feature, not a "bug," of the present time. As Castells wrote, we are currently living in the

information age (Castells, 1996), and the main currency of such a society is, inevitably, attention (De Castell & Jenson, 2004) – the finite resource that accessing a near-infinite amount of information consumes (Simon, 1971). Moreover, SNS expose a large part of its users, over 30%, to news organizations they would not actively seek out (Newman et al., 2017), increasing the competition for a single brand to stand out. At the same time, accidental exposure can also work in favor of news organizations, allowing a chance at user conversion with no extra effort. As for the opportunities, SNS allow news organizations who so choose to present a more "personal" image to their audience and establish a closer rapport. This is significant for a number of reasons: user interaction with newspaper representatives has been linked to community building (Villi & Jung, 2015), which in turn results in higher audience engagement and loyalty to the brand (Malmelin & Villi, 2015) and to a higher likelihood of contribution and in the creation of a sense of responsibility towards the community (Culnan, McHugh, & Zubillaga, 2010).

1.2 SNS, Trust, and Journalism

The intersection of trust in journalism and changed user behaviors in an online and social environment have been analyzed in a 2017 study by Fletcher and Park with a very large sample (N = 21,524). The authors found that the increased number of avenues for news present on SNS led to more difficulties for the audience to assess the accuracy and credibility of single news organizations. Therefore, the authors claimed, trust in the media became a predictor of online user behavior. They found that individuals with lower levels of trust were more likely to engage in news-related online participation such as commenting or sharing articles, a cautionary tale against using online metrics as measures of success of any given article (Fletcher & Park, 2017). Moreover, people who distrust the news are more likely to seek out partisan sources (and more likely to then share them), increasing polarization in public opinion (Ladd, 2011), which in turn decreases trust in news media (Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, & Steindl, 2018).

In the years since the rise of social networking sites, many studies have investigated how SNS influence journalism (Hermida, 2012; Newman, 2009), journalists (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013; Gulyas, 2013), and audience behavior (Hermida, Fletcher, Korell, & Logan, 2012; Thurman, Moeller, Helberger, & Trilling, 2018). More studies, such as the Fletcher and Park (2017) one discussed above, have analyzed the relationship between trust and online behavior.

However, no study has instead analyzed whether the social networking sites strategy of news organizations plays a part in their readers' perception of trustworthiness. Moreover, the majority of research in regard to journalism has been conducted on daily news organizations, rather than periodicals – two formats which have somewhat different audiences, practices, and motivations. Considering the influence SNS have been documented having, it seems likely that, other than changing audience behavior, also the perception that the audience has of news organizations would be subject to change. Therefore, if SNS behavior by news organizations does influence the audience's trust in and perception of the brand itself (as expected), virtuous SNS practices will have positive effects on the audience's perception, while negative ones will be detrimental. Based on these considerations, the following research question will be investigated:

What role does the social media presence of De Groene Amsterdammer play in its subscribers' perceptions of trustworthiness of the magazine itself?

The research question is focused on *De Groene Amsterdammer,* one of the Netherland's oldest and most respected weekly magazines, for two reasons. First, the author will be collaborating with them in his research project. Thus, investigating a research question connected to the magazine will allow the author to fully utilize the collaboration, for instance by giving him access to their subscribers to interview. Second, *De Groene* has only recently decided to expand and solidify their social media presence. Therefore, this research will give the opportunity to analyze the part that a social media presence plays on issues of audience perception and trustworthiness for a publication that is not yet fully "social."

1.3 Scientific relevance

The scientific relevance of this thesis is found in both the approach and methodology used to investigate the research question. First, the approach. Trust research in media studies, especially in regard to the news media, has historically been concerned with the concept of *credibility*, rather than trust (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). This focus on credibility rather than trust has presented a number of issues. First of all, the concept itself is quite vaguely defined. Indeed, credibility has been sometimes considered to be a synonym of trust (Kiousis, 2011). Other times, credibility was considered to be a part of the larger concept of trust (Tsfati &

Cappella, 2003). As such, focusing on trust as a clearly defined and separate concept will allow to better establish what exactly contributes to forming audience perceptions of trustworthiness.

Second, the methodology. Trust research in media studies has so far been mostly investigated from a quantitative standpoint. While such a choice allowed for the creation of a large scientific background in regard to generalized levels of trust in the news, little research has been conducted on individual readers' perceptions. This thesis will instead use a qualitative approach, by conducting in depth interviews. In the course of the interviews, the Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale of generalized trust in the news will be adapted. Said adaptation, other than being solely from a quantitative to a qualitative standpoint, will also consist of applying the scale to trust in a single news organization, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, rather than to the media at large. The qualitative method of this research will, therefore, allow for a more nuanced and personal understanding of what trust means to individual readers, broadening the current general understanding of trust in the news. Moreover, using an adaptation of Kohring and Matthes's (2007) scale will clarify whether such a scale is suitable also to investigate readers' trust in a single news organization.

Finally, as previously mentioned, while many different studies analyzed the impact of social networking sites on many aspects of journalism and audience relations, no research has studied the potential impact that SNS have on trust in the news. Considering that an ever-increasing amount of people use social networking sites as a way to access the news (Newman et al., 2017), this research will analyze a previously under-investigated angle, thus contributing to the scientific understanding of both SNS and journalism, and SNS and trust.

1.4 Social relevance

The social relevance of this research is found in the influence that trust has on audience behavior. Indeed, trust in the media has been shown to drive the audience's choice of news outlets (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). If social networking sites do indeed play a part in forming the audience's perception of trustworthiness, then a negative SNS presentation would also drive the audience away from the news outlets they perceive as not trustworthy. This is significant for news organizations in that it directly counters the purpose of using SNS. Indeed, SNS are used by news organizations as an additional, cost-effective avenue for audience reach, especially in

regard to young readers, the most social and so far, elusive demographic for news organizations. Being able to determine whether and how SNS strategies do affect trust, then, is important for all news organizations, but especially for one like *De Groene Amsterdammer* that is starting to focus more on SNS.

Trust has also been found to influence the effectiveness of the media itself, for instance in agenda-setting and framing aspects (Ladd, 2011; Tsfati, 2003). Agenda-setting refers to the capability of the media to drive what is being talked about in society. Framing, on the other hand, is the shifting of public opinion by the way in which a story is presented (Ladd, 2011). Therefore, lower levels of trust will result in a lessened effectiveness of the media. This is especially significant for a quality news organization as the *Groene*, in that the presenting of both investigative pieces and wider social, cultural, and political commentary are among the central aspects of the magazine. Indeed, the crux of investigative journalism can be found in agenda-setting, in that previously unknown facts are brought to the public's attention. Similarly, in depth commentary deals with both agenda-setting and framing. Because of this, a magazine like *De Groene Amsterdammer* which makes of these aspects its strong suit, would be especially impacted by a lessened effectiveness of their journalism.

Finally, the answering of the research questions necessary involves establishing the respondents' perception and evaluation of the *Groene*'s SNS strategy. As such, and given the qualitative approach of this research, a nuanced understanding of how the respondents perceive the *Groene*'s strategy, what positives they see with it as well as what negatives, will be gathered. Because of this, this research will present the *Groene* with potential inputs to fix aspects of their strategy that the audience perceives as not working or stress the presentation of aspects which are already working.

1.5 Outline

This thesis is structured as follows: chapter two will present the theoretical framework for this research, starting by discussing what social media and social networking sites mean, before tackling the concept of trust: its definition, the different types of trust, its predictors and effects. Chapter three will present the methodology of this thesis. First the reliance on qualitative research and interviews will be justified. Next, the operationalization of the concepts investigated

will be presented, followed by a recounting of the data collection and thematic data analysis for this thesis, and a reflection on validity and reliability. Chapter four will present the results of this research across three topical areas: the relationship with the news, selective trust, and social networking sites. Each area will be analyzed in depth and further divided into themes and sub-themes. Chapter five will contain the conclusion of this research, an answer to the research question, its theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research. Appendix A will present the profiles of the respondents to this research, while Appendix B will show proof of the coding process. Finally, Appendix C will contain the topic list used during the interviews.

2. Theoretical framework

In order to be able to answer the research question above, a number of concepts have to be grounded in existing scientific literature. First, it will be clarified what is meant by social media and social networking sites starting from what Web 2.0 is (the environment in which social media exist), before defining what trust is, what different types of trust there are, and how it relates to news media. Then, the different approaches to studying media trust and media credibility, two terms that have historically been used somewhat interchangeably, will be compared. Next, it will be explained how the readers' perceptions of trust in news media will be qualitatively investigated, by introducing a scale (Kohring & Matthes, 2007) that has been used to measure levels of audience trust in news media along four dimensions. Said scale, while previously used in quantitative studies, will be adapted to qualitative research as discussed in the method section of this thesis. Finally, it will be detailed why focusing on trust is significant when analyzing the relationship between media and its consumers by examining what effects different levels of trust have on both news consumers and news organizations.

2.1 From Web 2.0 to social media

In order to examine the potential influence a social media presence has on readers' perception of trustworthiness, it is first necessary to define what SNS specifically, and social media more generally, are. A useful point to start from is the architecture where social media operate, and that allowed their development and success. In 2005, O'Reilly defined this platform as Web 2.0, in contrast with the Web 1.0 which was present before the crash of the dotcom bubble in the early 2000s. It is worth noting that the terms Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 are a way of referring to a cultural shift in how the Internet was perceived and operated. However, it is important not to mistake the 1.0 and 2.0 as signifying a software iteration – there never was a 1.0 version of the Internet, just like there is no version 2.0. Simply, this evolution of the platform changed the base that was Web 1.0 in a number of ways so significant that the result could nearly be seen as a new version of the platform. The changes that Web 2.0 brought are the following.

First, Web 2.0 is founded on the idea of delivering services rather than products. Web applications went from being sold like any other software (Netscape, for instance), to being always-available services that often the user does not have to directly pay for, such as Google

search. Web 2.0 also ended the software development cycle. Indeed, unlike offline programs which are iterated from build to build (version to version), no new build is ever released on the Web 2.0. Most importantly for the eventual rise of social media, another characteristic of Web 2.0 is the focus on group level development, rather than individual level. This shift towards designing the architecture to rely on wide number of users not only helped in the continuous improvements described above, by often including users in "software development," but also resulted in the platforms' ability to harness collective intelligence and focus on user generated content (O'Reilly, 2005). Wikipedia is one of the most well-known examples of this paradigm shift.

The reliance on user generated content (UGC), collective intelligence, and a group-based design are at the very foundation of social media. Indeed, social media have been defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). It seems quite obvious, then, that the changes brought by Web 2.0 were not only instrumental to the rise of social media, but also a necessary foundation for their appearance.

2.2 Social media and social networking sites

The term social media, however, is an umbrella term, which encompasses a variety of different platforms, from blogs to collaborative projects such as Wikipedia, from social networking sites such as Twitter to content communities such as YouTube, and more (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For this research, it is therefore necessary to define what differentiates SNS from social media at large. Once again drawing from Kaplan and Haenlein, SNS will be defined as "applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other (2010, p. 63).

This research will specifically be focused on the SNS most widely used by news organizations in their contact with the audience (Ju, Jeong, & Chyi, 2014), which are also the ones *De Groene Amsterdammer* relies on the most and has the largest audience on: Facebook and Twitter. The Reuters Digital News Report data for the Netherlands shows that, as of 2017,

Facebook is still by far the most-used SNS for news, with 47% of users relying on it for news on a weekly basis. The report also shows that YouTube (22%) is actually more used for news access than Twitter, with 10% (Newman et al., 2017, p. 11). However, YouTube is not a social networking site, but rather a content community, as previously discussed. Moreover, it is no longer used by *De Groene Amsterdammer* and will therefore not be considered.

Since the emergence of social media, much has been published on the relationship between social media and journalism, from a number of different angles. Researchers studied how social media impacts news organizations, journalistic practices, and journalists and audience behavior. Ju, Jeong, and Chi (2014), for instance, analyzed the effectiveness of different SNS platforms in relation to journalism, while Russell (2017) studied the various ways in which news organizations themselves use the tools available on SNS. In terms of journalistic practices, different studies examined how web and social metrics impact newsroom decisions (Arenberg & Lowrey, 2019; Lischka, 2018) and how social media themselves can be considered a journalistic source (van Nordheim, Boczek, & Koppers, 2018; Paulussen & Harder, 2014). Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2013) and Gulyas (2013), on the other hand, reported the different ways in which the journalists themselves rely on social media as part of their job. Researchers also studied the relationship between social media and news audiences: from how the audience perceives web metrics-driven news selection mechanisms (Thurman, Moeller, Helberger, & Trilling, 2018), to what impact social media has on news consumption (Hermida et al., 2012), to how social news consumption influences political participation (Park & Kaye, 2018). Finally, Fletcher and Park (2017) analyzed the relationship between trust and online behavior. However, no study has yet reversed this perspective, analyzing whether the social media presence of news organizations influences the extent to which readers perceive news organizations to be trustworthy. In order to better explore this angle, however, it is necessary to first establish what trust is.

2.3 Trust: an expectation of positive future behavior

The issue of what trust is and how it can be defined has been widely studied in a number of different fields: sociology (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Möllering, 2001), business (Burchell & Wilkinson, 1997), and business ethics (Brenkert, 1998), among others. Generally speaking, one of the most widely used definitions of trust is that given by Meyer, Davis, and Schoorman, as

"the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control the other party" (1995, p. 712). This definition entails that trust occurs between a minimum of two different parties, that one of the parties expects the other to carry out a certain action, and that they have no ability to control if the agreed upon action will be carried out. But how can this definition be translated to cover the type of trust that news consumers have in news organizations? Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, and Steindl (2018), updating Meyer et al.'s (1995) definition, describe trust in news organizations as "the willingness of the audience to be vulnerable to news content based on the expectation that the media will perform in a satisfactory manner" (p. 5). In the same study, the authors also further define the different characteristics that trust as a concept possesses: a certain amount of risk, a future-oriented outlook, and a limiting of social complexity (Hanitzsch et al., 2018).

Trusting involves risk in that the trustor has no control over the trustee; rather, s/he believes (trusts) that the trustee will act in a positive manner. The presence of risk is then quite straightforward. If the trustee disattends the expectations of the trustor, whatever was at stake in the trust judgment will be put in jeopardy (Hanitzsch et al., 2018). For instance, if one trusts the news to provide them accurate economic information, and they base their investments on that information, a failure of the media to be accurate would result in potentially losing the money invested. In this specific case, "losing investments" was the implicit risk to trusting. Said risk is necessarily relative and dependent on what the trust judgment is – the more significant the action one is entrusted to, the higher the inherent risk will also be.

Trust is future oriented, rather than past oriented. Indeed, trust is not based on past experiences, but is instead an expectation of positive behavior in the future. Clearly, one cannot trust someone to act in a certain way in the past – no trust would be needed, as one would know if the expectation was respected or not - but only in the future. This difference sets trust apart from most types of judgement. In fact, while most judgments are made based on past experiences and information, "a decision to trust involves assessing to what extent a party can be expected to fulfill a certain expectation in the future" (Vanacker & Belmas, 2009, p. 112). This assessment, in turn, necessarily results in uncertainty. However, the authors continue, once again uncertainty is not only intrinsic to any trust-based action, but also a necessary characteristic of trust. Indeed,

if one trusted someone else with the same certainty they have towards the fact that one plus one equals two, no trust would actually be involved. They would simply know.

Finally, trust diminishes social complexity in that its delegating aspect eases decision-making in an environment saturated with different options to choose from (Prochazka & Schweiger, 2018). For instance, news readers trust the news media to inform them about the most important things that are happening. In other words, news consumers trust the media to inform them of what they need to know. This clearly greatly diminishes social complexity, in that one does not have to manually search for everything that is happening at any given moment in the world. Rather, they simply trust the news media to inform them of the things that are necessary, or important, for them to know. The same is true regardless of what type of product, company, or institution that different people trust in.

Before discussing what the different types of trust are, one last feature of trust in general has to be stressed: the fact that trust is always intentional. Indeed, according to Vanacker and Belmas (2009), any trust relationship requires the trustor to have an active role in giving their trust. On the other hand, the trustee has an active role in accepting that trust, and in taking steps to mend the trust if breached in any way. Therefore, it is impossible for there to be inadvertent trust – any action taken randomly and not purposefully will be necessarily based on chance, rather than trust.

2.4 Two types of trust

A 2008 study by Greyson, Johnson, and Chen identified two different types of trust, which in turn have two sub-categories each: narrow-scope and broad-scope trust. Narrow-scope trust, as the name suggests, is trust in a single individual, known as interpersonal trust, or organization, known as firm-specific trust (Greyson et al., 2008). For instance, one person may trust a certain journalist, while at the same time not necessarily trusting all journalists. This is an example of narrow-scope, interpersonal trust. The person in the example trusts one individual because of whatever reason (past experiences, personal relationship, etc.), but said trust is not automatically extended to the broader group.

Broad-scope trust, on the other hand, "applies to all organizations and individuals operating within a particular context" (Greyson et al., 2008, p. 242). Trust in any system larger

than the individual level is an example of broad-scope trust. For instance, trust in an industry or institution in general – i.e. the news media at large, the government, the police. One thing to stress about broad-scope trust, the authors continue, is that the term still refers to an individual trustor, and not to trust that is held widely by many. As with narrow-scope trust, also the broad one has two different subsets. The first is system trust, which refers to the trustor's belief that a certain system they give their trust to will have safeguards in place to deal with individuals who break said trust. The presence of these safeguards, in turn, makes it possible for the trustor to retain their trust in the system at large regardless of potential violations by individuals within the system. For instance, a news story could be published with a factual error in it. This, clearly, would be a breach of trust in the objectivity of reporting. However, if a correction is promptly and correctly ran then there should be no change in broad-scope trust, in that the system performed efficiently and effectively within the boundaries of the established trust relationship. The second type of broad-scope trust, the authors continue, is generalized trust. This one, simply enough, means trusting people in general, and, unlike the other three types of trust discussed is not influenced by different situations or experiences with individuals, but rather is largely dependent on upbringing, culture, and socio-economic status. In different terms, generalized trust indicates an individual's "disposition to trust" in general (Greyson et al., 2008, p. 243).

Before discussing how trust research evolved over time in the field of media studies, one last consideration about trust in news media has to be made. While the trust that is most widely studied is the broad-scope, system one, this does not mean that the other types are not represented as well. Indeed, all different aspects are potentially represented on a spectrum, as seen in Figure 1, an excerpt of Vanacker and Belmas's (2009) suggested model for news media trust.

Figure 1. Detail of Vanacker and Belmas (2009) suggested model for news media trust.

Individual journalist (e.g., a blogger)	Media organization (e.g., Fox News)	Specific medium (e.g., network news)	Media as institution

As seen above, the left extremity of the table refers to narrow-scope trust and it moves along the spectrum to arrive at the broad-scope, system-based trust of media as an institution. The existence of trust in news media along a spectrum, rather than fixed points, indicates the possibility for different people to have different types of trust in news media, potentially all at

once too. For instance, an American Trump supporter might trust an individual CNN journalist while not trusting CNN as an organization. On the other hand, a liberal one might trust media as an institution while not trusting single organizations (Fox News), or media (political talk radio).

2.5 Trust research in media studies

In media studies, research on trust has initially appeared as an investigation of the *credibility* of the media, a concept investigated mostly through quantitative research (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). In 1971, Roper Research Associates released a longitudinal study measuring audience perception of media credibility between 1959 and 1971 on a number of different platforms, including print, radio, and television (Roper, 1971). This scale, however, was later discovered to have methodological flaws, for instance in the wording of questions, that potentially influenced the respondents' answers (Yale, Jensen, Carcioppolo, Sun, & Liu, 2015). To solve this issue, in 1986 a 12-dimension scale to measure media credibility was developed by Gaziano and McGrath (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). This credibility scale, or later ones such as the one developed by Yale et al. (2015), have then been used to measure trust in subsequent studies (Tsfati & Cappella, 2005; Kiousis, 2001), effectively conflating the two concepts. Generally speaking, these different approaches to the research of media credibility have been criticized not only because there seems to be no validated definition of credibility itself, but also because the dimensions that are used to study credibility are "neither theoretically derived nor integrated in a theory of media credibility" (Kohring & Matthes, 2007, p. 237).

In 2007, Kohring and Matthes published an article in which they created the "first theory-derived, successfully validated scale in credibility and trust research" (p. 248). To do so, they developed four dimensions in which trust can be divided: trust in selectivity of topics, in selectivity of facts, in the accuracy of depictions, and in journalistic assessments (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). It is worth mentioning that the Kohring and Matthes scale has been used to measure generalized trust in the media – or broad-scope trust – while this research focuses on narrow-scope, firm-specific trust in relation to *De Groene Amsterdammer*. However, the four dimensions investigated, detailed below, are as easily applicable to a single organization as they are to the media at large.

The first factor, selectivity of topics, refers to the belief that the news media will focus on, and cover, relevant topics for the audience. Said focus, in turn, refers not only to topic selection but also to the frequency a certain topic is covered, and with what kind of continuity as compared to different topics (Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

The second dimension, selectivity of facts, deals with how the topics being covered by the media are contextualized. In this sense, it refers to the comprehensiveness of the information being presented, its variety, and the emphasis that is put on different aspects of the story at hand (Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

The third dimension, accuracy of depictions, is somewhat more straightforward. Indeed, it solely deals with the extent of accuracy of the facts being presented in the coverage of a certain story (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Out of the four dimensions this one is arguably the more objective, in that it is not a matter of opinion whether the coverage of any story is factually correct or not.

Finally, the fourth and final factor, trust in journalistic assessment, refers to the usefulness, suitability, and clearness of journalistic commentary. Once again clarification is needed, in that "journalistic commentary" does not refer solely to commentary as a format (as in opinion-writing), but widely signifies the journalistic practice at large (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). The four dimensions have been visualized below, in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Visualization of Kohring and Matthes' (2007) dimensions of trust
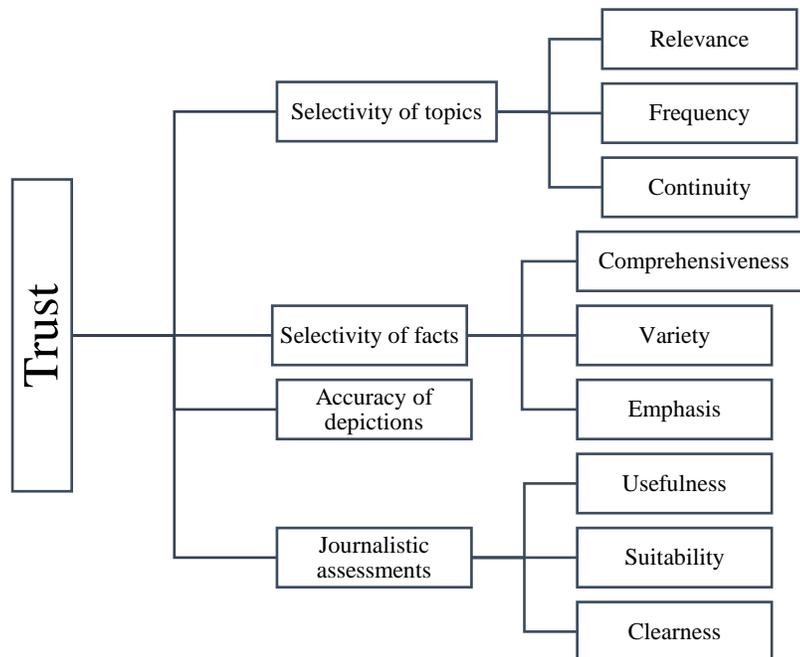
2.6 Trust instead of credibility

The decision of Kohring and Matthes (2007) to focus on trust, rather than credibility, in the development of their scale, is based on two main reasons. First, because the previously described fuzziness surrounding the concept of credibility, which has been described both as a synonym for trust (Kiousis, 2001) and as a dimension of trust (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Second, focusing on trust specifically allowed Kohring and Matthes to link media studies research with the larger body of sociological investigation of trust (2007).

One issue with this scale was its focus on a single topic (unemployment in the US). However, in 2018, Prochazka and Schweiger successfully replicated the scale, albeit with slight adjustments in the questions presented to respondents – but without altering the four dimensions of trust discussed above (2018).

A final consideration regarding the Kohring and Matthes scale needs to be addressed: their scale does not directly measure trust. Indeed, trust as a concept is a higher order construct that is established by measuring the four lower order constructs – the four dimensions discussed above (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). As previously mentioned, the scale will not be used directly in this research, as it is a quantitative research tool, but choosing the more apt one to measure generalized trust is certainly recommended also when relying on the scale simply as a tool to draw guiding concepts from. Indeed, using a theory-derived and validated scale as the Kohring and Matthes (2007) one will arguably allow to define and use more precise and theoretically sound concepts than would be possible using one of the previously discussed credibility scales.

2.7 Predictors of trust

Considering the complexity of trust as a concept, and the difficulties in measuring trust levels, are there factors that allow researchers to predict trust in the news media? If yes, the potential emergence of said predictors in the course of the data gathering would add an additional lens of interpretation for the findings of this research. Tsfati and Ariely (2013), measured a number of different factors to establish to what extent they were predictors of media trust. Their study was based on data obtained from the 2005-2008 World Value Survey, a survey of representative samples from 44 countries (N = 57,847). While their analysis was focused on both the micro, or individual, and macro level, given the qualitative nature of this thesis the most

significant results for this specific project are found at the individual level. The authors discovered that there are three predictors for high levels of trust in the news media: generalized trust, political involvement, and news consumption through print or television. On the other hand, the authors identified news consumption through the Internet and, somewhat surprisingly, education as negative predictors.

The negative predictors are especially interesting. Indeed, lower levels of trust when news consumption happens through the Internet could be resulting from a higher likelihood of exposure to non-mainstream views online. Education, instead, could be a negative predictor in that less educated people trust the media more because not as equipped "with critical abilities and other tools with which to challenge media texts" (Tsfati & Ariely, 2013, p. 16). These predictors allow to speculate on the characteristics of the sample for this research. Indeed, the audience of *De Groene Amsterdammer* is generally a higher educated one than the population of general news consumers. Therefore, it is expected that respondents will have a more critical disposition toward the news at large, and broadly speaking lower levels of generalized trust in the news.

2.8 Effects of trust

A literature review shows that different levels of media trust have a large number of effects on both audience and news organizations: from choosing which sources to consult (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003), to a change in frequency and mode of audience online behaviors (Fletcher & Park, 2007), to an increasing of political polarization (Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, & Steindl, 2018), to impacting the effectiveness of news media themselves (Ladd, 2011). It is worth discussing these effects one by one.

In terms of media exposure, Tsfati and Cappella (2003) demonstrated how different levels of trust result in the choice of using different news outlets or channels. Indeed, they discovered that people who have high broad-scope trust towards the media tend to consume more mainstream sources (network television news, print news organizations). People who have a higher mistrust of the media at large, on the other hand, are more likely to consume a larger number of non-mainstream sources, be it independent online blogs or political talk radio. It is worth noting that this distinction does not mean that people with lower levels of trust do not

consume mainstream media. Rather, they do consume lower quantities of it, while they seek out a higher number of non-mainstream sources. Tsfati and Cappella's research is from 2003, therefore before the explosion of internet usage by both individuals and organizations. However, subsequent studies such as the Tsfati and Ariely (2013) one described in the section above, and Fletcher and Park (2007) seem to confirm the trend. Considering the high education levels of *Groene* readers and the inverse relationship between education and trust in the news, it is expected that respondents to this research will consume a higher number of alternative sources than the general population.

Fletcher and Park, in their 2007 study, instead focused on how different levels of trust impact both the frequency and the way in which people engage with news media online. They discovered that people with lower levels of trust will actually be more likely to engage in online participation, both for sharing and commenting articles. While the authors are very cautious in establishing causality, they do suggest a number of reasons for this difference in behavior. One is that people who are less trustworthy of the material posted will be more incentivized to express their disapproval of a given article. On the other hand, the authors continue, their lower trust levels could entice them to try and verify what is being posted and sharing their results, if not directly try to contribute to the news production process (Fletcher & Park, 2007). Similarly, and based on the expectations previously detailed, respondents to this research are expected to frequently engage with the news on SNS.

Trust levels have also been found to both influence, and be influenced by, levels of political polarization. Hanizsch, Van Dalen, and Steindl (2018) discovered that a generalized falling of confidence in the news media corresponds to a similar decrease of trust in political institutions. The same can, arguably, be observed also in reverse. Significant for this research are two aspects that the authors stress. Firstly, the relationship between media trust and political trust is growing over time. Secondly, the tight link between the two areas could justify seeing low levels of media trust, such as those observed in the later years, to be the "canary in the coal mine" for falling levels of public confidence in a country's political institutions (Hanizsch et al., 2018).

Finally, trust also has an impact on how effective the news media can be. In his 2011 book *Why Americans Hate the Media and How It Matters*, Ladd identified a number of phenomena that are influenced by trust: agenda-setting, priming, and framing (Ladd, 2011).

Agenda-setting refers to the media's ability to drive the public conversation, or, in other words, to decide what should be talked about in society. Priming, on the other hand, refers to the media's capability of leading news consumers to weigh more heavily on the topic the media are covering when making political decisions. Framing, finally, refers to the ability to shift public opinion by focusing on different parts of a story. All three of these foundational aspects of the media are, according to Ladd, heavily impacted by trust levels. Indeed, his research shows that people with more mistrust of the media are much more resistant to the different phenomena listed above (Ladd, 2011). In other words, the lower trust in the media is, the less effective the media will be as well. Because of this, interviewees for this thesis are expected to be more critical of, and resistant to, the three characteristics of news production detailed above.

2.9 Conclusion

Because of the large and heterogeneous effects of trust, using a validated, theory-derived scale as a heuristic starting point to investigate trust levels will allow the researcher to better contextualize on the way the audience describes trust, and to investigate how a news organization's social media presence potentially influences perceptions of trustworthiness. Moreover, doing so from a qualitative perspective, rather than the quantitative one mostly used in previous research, will allow for a better understanding of the personal experiences and perceptions of individual readers, rather than the macro-level dispositions of the audience at large. The main theoretical concept investigated in the course of this research, then, will be firm-specific, narrow-scope trust (Greyson et al., 2008). As previously discussed, trustworthiness will not be examined directly, but rather through the four dimensions suggested by Kohring and Matthes (2007) mentioned earlier in this chapter. These four dimensions will be adapted to a qualitative investigation, as will be used in this thesis. The adaptation will result in slight modifications of the concepts, as will be discussed in the next chapter under the operationalization section. The effects of media trust, in turn, have been examined in order to firmly establish both the relevance of this research and the significance of trust in itself. Finally, the predictors of trust previously discussed, while they will not directly be used in the course of the interviews, will potentially add nuance to the results of the research.

3. Method

Following the discussion of the main theoretical concepts that informed this research in the previous chapter, this chapter will focus on detailing the methodological aspects of this thesis. The chapter will begin with a justification of the reliance on qualitative research in general, and semi-structured interviews in particular as the main research tool. Next, the sampling method used in this research will be discussed and justified. Then the main concepts being investigated in order to answer the research question will be operationalized and clarified by providing examples. Following a recount of the data collection process, and the various aspects it entailed, a detailed description and justification of the data analysis process utilized for this research, thematic analysis, will be provided. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of issues of validity and reliability for this research.

3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research has been defined as "interdisciplinary, interpretive, political and theoretical in nature" (Brennen, 2017, p. 4). Its focus, rather than being on objective data as is the case with quantitative research, rather rests on subjective meaning-making and relationships. As such, qualitative research starts from the recognition that reality is socially constructed, particularly through the use of language, and that there is no singular, positivist, capital letter "truth," but rather many subjective truths that are dependent on the individual and its surroundings (Brennen, 2017). Because of its nature, qualitative research has two main foci: language and context. Language, as previously discussed, is one of the cores of qualitative investigations in that discourse, be it in writing or in speech, is used not only as a tool of communication, but also in the creation of social realities and the construction of communities (Brennen, 2017, p. 14). The focus on context, on the other hand, is necessary to make sense of the multitude of meanings that all people express when communicating. Since qualitative research is fundamentally an interpretive process, context is necessary to anchor the empirical data to reality, or, in other words, to root the researcher's interpretation into the most apt context, be it political, cultural, economic, or historical. Indeed, as Brennen (2017) wrote, the meaning of a person swinging a golf club during a golf game is much different than one performing the same action towards an intruder (p. 22).

Because of the nature of qualitative research, any research process that focuses on such a method will have a number of different characteristics, as described by Creswell (2007). Qualitative research is focused on the meanings created by the participants in the research, which, in turn, entails necessary caution for the researcher not to "contaminate" said meanings with personal or literature-driven preconceptions. The research process itself is *emergent*, in that at any point during the research there can be changes to research questions, forms of data collection, etc. (Creswell, 2007). This aspect, in turn, results in qualitative research being flexible. This flexibility is also observable in the data analysis for qualitative methods, which is inductive. In this sense, data analysis for qualitative research presupposes that the researcher will work from the data to abstract, more general themes. Finally, because of the previous characteristics indicated, qualitative research will not be concerned with trying to establish causality, but rather with trying to determine the intersection of different factors in any given situation – in other words, researchers in qualitative research are trying to create a holistic account of the issue being investigated (Creswell, 2007).

The characteristics that qualitative research have, however, are useful not only to better understand the various qualitative research methods, but also to inform researchers of when it is most appropriate to rely on such a method. Generally speaking, Creswell (2007) identified qualitative research as the most appropriate when trying to achieve a detailed and complex understanding of the issue being investigated, or when trying to understand the context surrounding said issue. It is also useful as a follow-up to quantitative research, in order to include personal, contextual perspectives to broader findings. Finally, qualitative research is especially useful when investigating something not easily measurable in a quantitative way; for instance, interactions between people (Creswell, 2007).

Considering the characteristics of qualitative research and that the focus of the research question for this thesis lied on the experience of individual readers, qualitative research was most appropriate. Indeed, this research aimed at getting a complex understanding of not only the trust relationship between readers, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, and social media, but also the context surrounding this relationship. Moreover, this thesis is one of the few examples of qualitative research in an area, trust research, widely dominated by quantitative studies. As such, while the existing data deals extensively with levels of trust the general population has in the media at large, little if any research deals with the experience and perception of individual news readers.

3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Out of the various tools that qualitative research offers, interviews were the research method used in this project. Indeed, what was investigated was the personal relationship between subscribers of *De Groene Amsterdammer* and the magazine itself, and how this relationship was influenced by the social media presence of the magazine in terms of the readers' perception of trustworthiness of *De Groene*. According to Brennen (2017), interviews are most appropriate for exactly this kind of investigation: one dealing with interpretation, personal experiences, and feelings. Indeed, the main focus of interviews does not lie on quantifiable data collection, which can later by generalized, but is rather concerned with the meanings, opinions, and interests mentioned by each interviewee, and the surrounding context.

While interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured, this thesis relied upon semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are based around a topic list, or an established set of questions, which is discussed with all participants. However, unlike structured interviews, the topics or questions are tackled organically, and are therefore not necessarily asked in the same order to each participant. Moreover, semi-structure interviews give the researcher the possibility to ask follow-up question, allowing for clarification or expansion on any given topic (Brennen, 2017). Being a qualitative research method, in semi-structured interviews the researcher is not only interested in what is being said, but also in how it is being said. As such, semi-structured interviews are concerned with both the content and the form of the conversation (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Because of their characteristics, semi-structured interviews are used for various purposes: exploratory, explanatory, and evaluation research. Most significant for this thesis are the first two purposes, exploration and explanation. Indeed, an exploratory use of semi-structured interviews is common when analyzing previously under-investigated areas, or when exploring a new perspective on a given topic. In explanatory research, on the other hand, semi-structured interviews are used to explore feelings, personal experiences, and opinions on the topic being investigated (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

Because of these characteristics and applications, semi-structured interviews were the most apt for this research. Indeed, what was analyzed was not only a new angle of investigation, as previously detailed for the scientific relevance of this thesis, but one from a very personal and subjective perspective. Moreover, semi-structured interviews gave the structure necessary to

investigate specific aspects of a larger phenomenon, while maintaining enough freedom on the subject's part to expand upon topics and make connections in a way potentially different than "expected" based on the author's biases or the theoretical framework. Finally, semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method because they allowed a close investigation of, other than the aspects mentioned previously, the way that the subjects relate themselves to the part of the social world being investigated (Matthew & Ross, 2010); in this case the audience's relation with "social" news media.

3.3 Sampling

For this research, 10 interviews were held with an average length of 54 minutes, the shortest being 43 minutes long and the longest 70 minutes long. Since the author was working together with *De Groene Amsterdammer* on this research project, and in light of their acceptance of providing the author with access to their subscribers, the participants in the interviews were selected by using purposive sampling. Such a sampling method is quite common for semi-structured interviews, in that interviewees are chosen because of experiences or characteristics that directly relate to the research question and the area being investigated (Matthews & Ross, 2010). As such, the respondents were current subscribers of *De Groene Amsterdammer* who followed the magazine's page on either Facebook, Twitter, or both. The respondents' profiles can be seen in Table 1 below. Respondents were generally older, with eight out of 10 being over 50 and five over 60. Gender distribution, on the other hand, was 60-40 male to female. Both age and gender distribution were generally in line with the distribution of the wider population of *Groene* subscribers. All respondents but one, who was currently enrolled in university, had attained higher education. Finally, half the respondents had been reading the *Groene* for over 10 years, with three respondents being second generation subscriber who grew up with their parents being subscribers to the *Groene.*

Table 1. Respondents' profiles

Name/Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Higher education	Length of *Groene* reading
Respondent 1	70	Male	Yes	2 years
Respondent 2	36	Female	Yes	24 years (2nd generation)
Respondent 3	67	Male	Yes	2 years

Respondent 4	60	Female	Yes	10 years
Respondent 5	72	Male	Yes	4 years (2nd generation)
Respondent 6	70	Female	Yes	2-3 years
Respondent 7	54	Male	Yes	10+ years
Respondent 8	19	Male	-	2 years
Respondent 9	50	Male	Yes	30 years
Respondent 10	57	Female	Yes	20+ years (2nd generation)

The sampling for this research proved to be very challenging. In order to gather the ten respondents indicated above, a call for interviewees was posted on the *Groene*'s website and shared through their Facebook and Twitter pages, other than their newsletter, on three separate occasions per channel. The call for interviewees was also shared, on those three occasions, on the researcher's Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Subscribers who respected the characteristics described above where first asked to contact the magazine. When this first approach resulted in only one response, the blog post containing the call for interviewees was changed to include a Google form where interested subscribers would leave their email to be later contacted by the researcher. Despite the call for interviewees having a reach, at a minimum, of 52.000 people per time it was shared (the smallest audience size between the three channels), only 34 people answered. Of those 34, the 10 respondents shown in Table 1 were the only ones to accept being interviewed. As such, the sampling was forced to contain only the minimum of 10 respondents rather than a preferable 12 to 15 respondents.

3.4 Operationalization

Social media presence was defined as the sum of activities that the magazine engages in on Facebook and Twitter: posting, commenting, engaging with readers, liking posts or comments. Subscribers, on the other hand, were defined as people who had, at the time of the interview, an active subscription to *De Groene Amsterdammer*. Trust was defined as "the willingness of the audience to be vulnerable to news content based on the expectation that the media will perform in a satisfactory manner" (Hanitzsch et al., 2018, p. 5). As previously discussed, the four main concepts that were used to structure and analyze the interviewees' perceptions of trust in *De*

Groene were the following, based on Kohring and Matthes' scale (2007): (1) trust in selectivity of topics, (2) trust in selectivity of facts, (3) trust in the accuracy of depictions, and (4) trust in journalistic assessments, as seen in Table 2. Because of the partly exploratory nature of this research, focusing on only the four dimensions indicated below, rather than on a larger selection, allowed the researcher more freedom in exploring the ideas, experiences, and opinions of the interviewees, enabling for a more nuanced understanding of the complex phenomenon being investigated.

Before moving on to describe the data collection process, it is important to recount how the definitions above were derived from the Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale. In the original scale, selectivity of facts was investigated with four questions asking respondents whether a certain topic received "necessary attention" and "adequate status," and if said topic was covered with "adequate frequency" and on a "necessary regular basis" (p. 245). Given the similarity between the first two and the last two questions, for this research the definition of selectivity of topics was collapsed to encompass two areas: relevance of the topic, encompassing necessary attention and adequate status, and frequency, encompassing the two latter questions.

Selectivity of facts, on the other hand, originally investigated whether the reporting included "essential points" and "all important information" regarding a certain topic, if the focus of the story was "on important facts," and if the story included "different points of view" (Koring and Matthes, 2007, p. 245). For this research, the first two aspects were summarized as the relevant facts to the story, where the focus of the story rests, and the inclusion of different point of views was defined as being balanced in the contextualization of the story.

Considering that in the Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale accuracy of depictions solely dealt with the truthfulness and accuracy of the information reported, this dimension was not altered for this research – the definition used here is simply paraphrased. Journalistic assessment, finally, originally related to the "comprehensibility, usefulness, and appropriateness of journalistic commentary" (p. 246). In this research, appropriateness is defined as fairness, comprehensibility as well-thought opinions and conclusions, and usefulness as contribution to the discussion surrounding a topic. All these dimensions are subject to being somewhat changed, or to have new aspects added to them, based upon contribution from the respondents.

Table 2. Dimensions of trust, definitions, and examples.

Concept	Dimension	Definition	Examples
Trust	Selectivity of topics	Readers' trust in journalists to cover topics that are relevant for the audience, and to do so with an adequate frequency	*De Groene* covers topics that interest me. The articles in *De Groene* are about issues I care about. *De Groene* covers [any topic] often enough.
	Selectivity of facts	Readers' trust in journalists to relay, and focus on, all the relevant facts to the story, and to be balanced in their contextualization of the story	Articles in *De Groene* give me all the facts I need to form an opinion. *De Groene*'s coverage focuses on the most important facts. *De Groene* presents multiple point of views.
	Accuracy of depictions	Readers' trust in journalists to be accurate and to present verifiable and	What is reported in *De Groene* is true. When a mistake is made, *De Groene*

		truthful information in their articles.	promptly runs a correction.
	Journalistic assessment	Readers' trust in journalists to be fair in their assessment of stories and to report well-thought opinions and conclusion, other than contributing to the discussion surrounding the topic being covered.	The opinions of *De Groene* journalists are well-argued and justified. The coverage of *De Groene* journalists adds to the discussion around an issue.

3.5 Data collection

The interviews began from a general overview of the participants' news consumption and predisposition towards the news, before moving to their perceptions of trust in *De Groene*. To do so, concepts from Kohring and Matthes quantitative scale (2007) were extracted and adapted to this qualitative research. More specifically, the four dimensions of trust they identified - trust in the selectivity of topics, trust in the selectivity of facts, trust in accuracy of depiction, and trust in journalistic assessment – were used as guiding concepts to investigate to what extent subscribers perceive *De Groene* to be trustworthy.

It is important to clarify that adapting Kohring and Matthes's (2007) scale to be used in qualitative research resulted in these concepts being used in a less structured way than in the author's research, for instance by not relying on the sub questions Kohring and Matthes used to define the four dimensions, as discussed in the operationalization. Moreover, the respondents were also queried about these concepts in an organic manner for the interview at hand, resulting in the four areas of trust being investigated at different points, and somewhat differently, from interview to interview. For example, respondents were asked to clarify what made a news

organization trustworthy to them, and what made *De Groene Amsterdammer* trustworthy specifically. When aspects related to the four dimensions above were not organically mentioned by the respondents in their answers to these questions, the respondents were specifically asked about the missing dimension following the topic list consultable in Appendix C.

Next, interviewees were asked to detail their social media use, first generally and then in relation to news organizations. Special emphasis was put on how often and in what way they encountered and/or interacted with *De Groene*'s social media accounts. Next, they were asked about their perception of *De Groene*, before being asked to evaluate the use that *De Groene* makes of SNS. The interviewees were then asked whether their previously stated perception of *De Groene* had changed in any way since the magazine started expanding its social media presence. The interviews concluded, as mentioned, by specifically querying the respondents about the dimensions of trust that did not organically come up during the interviews. A number of questions were investigated more in depth through follow-up questions, on a case by case basis. It is important to mention that while these questions were asked of all respondents, the order of the questions changed somewhat from interview to interview, depending on the answers received and possibility of follow-up questions.

3.6 Data analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcribed, after which the data was analyzed through a three-step qualitative content analysis based on Boeije (2010). The reliance on such an analysis method was necessarily dependent on the research method used for data gathering. Indeed, qualitative content analysis is first of all very helpful in reducing data by focusing on the aspects related to the research question. This reduction was greatly helpful in tackling the large amount of data that 10 hour-long interviews produce. Secondly, qualitative content analysis is highly systematic, in that it requires the examination of all data relevant to the research question in a systematic manner. As such, the method counteracted one of the dangers of qualitative research, that of interpreting the data through the researcher's biases. Finally, this analysis method is more concerned with context-dependent and latent meaning, a characteristic that it shares with interviews and that strengthens the reliance on qualitative content analysis for analyzing interview-gathered data (Schreier, 2013).

As previously mentioned, the data was analyzed through three steps of coding: open, axial, and selective. First, an open coding of the data, was carried out. This first step consisted of a detailed examination of the interview transcripts, followed by an interpretation of what was being said, and the assignment of codes to all fragments of the transcripts. This, in turn, resulted in the emergence of a first list of codes (Boeije, 2010). Once no new codes were necessary to cover all the data, axial coding was carried out. This second step refers to the reassembly of data in new ways according to the connections between various categories. In axial coding, sub-categories were related to categories, it was determined which elements of the research were dominant, and data was reduced and reorganized. This process enabled the structuring of said categories in a hierarchical manner and a focusing of the analysis (Boeije, 2010). Finally, selective coding was carried out. This final step was instrumental in determining what core categories existed in the data, in identifying the relationship between different categories, and in answering the research question (Boeije, 2010). Step one and two, open coding and axial coding, were carried out relying on the software *ATLAS.ti*. Selective coding, on the other hand, was carried out manually.

3.7 Validity and reliability

The intrinsically subjective and personal nature of interviews, and later of qualitative content analysis, renders it difficult to determine issues of validity and reliability. Indeed, both concepts are mostly used in quantitative research. The term validity indicates whether what was investigated was indeed what the researcher set out to measure. Reliability, on the other hand, refers to the replicability of the research (Noble & Smith, 2015).

The reliance on the adapted Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale and on a fixed topic list, allowed the researcher to approach the interviews in a structured and consistent manner. Moreover, the fact that interviews were recorded and transcribed allowed the author to revisit the words of the interviewees at any point during the analysis process, ensuring that he remained true to their words and did not let personal biases affect the analysis process. Said structure and direct reliance on the data, coupled with the clear description of the method used and the operationalization of the main research concepts, ensured the internal validity of this research, what in qualitative research is referred to as *credibility* (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The clear

description of the sampling criteria and characteristics of the sample, in turn, ensured external validity, or *transferability* (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). This term refers to the applicability of the research to another context or with different respondents. It is not certain whether the results of this research would be consistent in another context, for instance for readers of daily news rather than periodicals. However, it is expected that utilizing the same sampling of this research to subscribers of a different periodical, for instance, would yield similar results.

Reliability, on the other hand, is mostly identifiable with the qualitative concept of *dependability*. While similar to the quantitative idea of a study being replicable, the term rather refers to the ability of other researchers to follow the decisions of the researcher in the original study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The clear description given of the methodology, theoretical background, and results obtained ensure the dependability of this research.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter detailed the methodology used in this research. First, the reliance on qualitative research in general, and semi-structured interviews in particular, was justified. Next, the sampling process was detailed, before presenting the operationalization of the core concepts of this research. The data collection and analysis processes were then recounted, before discussing issues of validity and reliability of this research.

Before presenting the results of this research, it is worth shortly discussing the role of *De Groene Amsterdammer* in this thesis. The magazine, one of the Netherlands' oldest and most respected periodicals, has recently started expanding their social media presence. Active on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, the *Groene* arguably uses these channels as ways to spread their content beyond the audience of subscribers, and as a way to reach new potential subscribers. As for the *Groene's* contribution to this thesis, the researcher was given access to the subscribers of the magazine and help in the reaching of potential interviewees, as detailed in the sampling section of this chapter.

4. Results

This study aimed at investigating the following research question: *what role does the social media presence of De Groene Amsterdammer play in its subscribers' perceptions of trustworthiness of the magazine itself?* The presentation of the findings will be divided into three main topics which reflect the structure of the interviews: (1) the relationship with the news, (2) selective trust, and (3) social networking sites. Each topic will be discussed in its own section, by means of the most important themes that came out of the analysis. Under the first topic, the relationship with the news, two main themes emerged: (1) commercialization of the news negatively affects quality, and (2) perception of the news is negative, brand loyalty is high. The second topic, selective trust, was also divided in two themes: (1) trust drives news selectivity and (2) trust is multifaceted. Finally, under the third topic, social networking sites, three themes emerged: (1) dangers of SNS for news, (2) *De Groene*'s SNS strategy: informative but not engaging, and (3) *De Groene*'s SNS strategy: changing perception but not trust. All themes are furtherly divided in a number of sub-themes, which will be presented accordingly in the respective sub-sections. The presentation of each theme will be grounded in the academic literature discussed in chapter two of this thesis (whenever applicable) and concluded by a short summary. All quotes presented have been edited for clarity, by removing repetitions, both of words and concepts, and hesitations in speech, such as "uhm."

4.1 The relationship with the news

In this section, different aspects related to the relationship between the respondents and the news, both at large and in regard to *De Groene* specifically, will be discussed. Two main themes emerged from the analysis. The first theme, (1) commercialization of the news negatively affects quality, analyzes the ways in which chasing profit as a primary goal detracts from the quality of news production. The second theme, (2) perception of the news is negative, brand loyalty is high, examines the respondents' relationship toward both the news in general and the *Groene* in particular. Said relationship is examined both in terms of perception and motivations for news consumption. These themes are significant in that they will allow the establishment of the respondents' perception of and motivations for news consumption – both in general and specifically for *De Groene Amsterdammer*. This will provide the context in which considerations

about trust in the *Groene* can be grounded. Indeed, the respondents' perceptions of trust of the *Groene,* which is explicitly part of the research question, are necessarily connected to their general perception of the magazine.

Before discussing the themes under this topic, it is worth presenting the news consumption practices of the respondents. As a more contextual finding this does not necessarily fit under the themes discussed below. However, awareness of the news consumption practices of the respondents is necessary to better contextualize the issues that respondents had with news production. All respondents consumed a very international selection of news, with no respondent following news outlets from less than three different countries. Such countries were, among others: the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. All respondents also had a quite negative outlook of the news in general, which was reflected in their motivations for consuming different types of news. Indeed, while respondents did consume daily news, they did so mostly to stay up to date with current developments or for professional reasons. This happened for written news, the main avenue of consumption for all respondents, radio news, or televisual news. The respondents' consumption of periodicals, on the other hand, was done mostly for background purposes. In other words, they consumed periodicals such as the *Groene* to get a better contextual understanding of the daily news and wider societal developments.

4.1.1 Commercialization of the news negatively affects quality

Generally speaking, respondents found the chase for profits as a primary driver of news production to reduce the quality of the news. A reduction in quality, in turn, negatively colored their perception of, and trust in, news organizations which they saw as more commercial. Likewise, their perception of news organizations which are less commercial, such as the *Groene,* was higher, as discussed in more depth in section 4.1.2. From the analysis of commercialization and quality, four sub-themes emerged: (1) worrying about conflicts of interest, (2) rising of sensational news presentation, (3) losing the societal function of news, and (4) blurring the lines between fact and opinion. These sub-themes will be discussed, in this order, in the following paragraphs.

4.1.1.1 Worrying about conflicts of interest

The most present sub-theme across interviews was the issue of conflicts of interests in journalism. Five respondents saw an increase in the conflicts of interests faced by journalists, a conflict which could then impact the coverage they would produce in regard to certain topics. Conflicts of interest, in this theme, refers both to financial pressure and ideological/political leanings. For the respondents, both of these aspects negatively impacted the quality of news organizations by reducing how critical organizations could be in covering topics related to the conflicted interest. Respondent 5, for example, said:

> Many journalists are forced to earn their money not only as freelancers but they are forced to take commercial things like drafting a year report of a big company. This used to be something of an exception. But nowadays most of the journalists have this mixed kind of responsibilities and that is a risk, of course the very good ones they know to separate their one and the other responsibility. But we are all humans and not everybody is as holy as it should be. (Respondent 5, 72, male)

The respondents saw this commercial pressure as something not only impacting individual journalists, but also the news organizations that sought profit as a primary driver, resulting in mistrust from the audience. As respondent 3 (67, male) argued:

> If I read [newspaper] I know that they are right wing. And I always said you could not trust them in the first world war and even not in the second one. So it's that they have this commercial attitude that we present what you want to hear, you know. (Respondent 3)

4.1.1.2 Rising of sensational news presentation

The commercial attitude of presenting "what you want to hear" documented in the quote above also reflected in both an increasingly sensational way of presenting the news, the second sub-theme. Three respondents pointed towards a rise of sensationalism in presentations, an increase which regarded especially so-called quality news organizations. As one respondent put it, "now those quality ones have become more and more and more sensational, more and more tabloid tabloid-y. So it bothers me a lot because you lose the quality of it" (Respondent 8, 19, male). This rise in sensationalism, as seen in the quote from Respondent 8, was deemed to subtract from the overall quality of news organizations. How are issues of sensationalism

connected to commercialization? Arguably, to create hype, as another respondent summarizes: "there's a bunch of news outlets that I suspect are more looking for creating sensations and hype and whatnot rather than giving people accurate information" (Respondent 2, 36, female) Said hype, in turns, translates to more engagement with sensational pieces of news and more engagement directly translates to higher reach and economic returns, especially considering the engagement-based financial structure of social networking sites.

4.1.1.3 Losing the societal function of news

The third sub-theme deals with another worry regarding commercialization, the loss of the societal function of news. This expression stands for the role of news organization as a check upon the more powerful forces of society: politicians and corporations, for instance. This role has commonly been referred to as the watchdog role of the media. As Respondent 10 (57, female) mentioned,

> I see media is part of... important part of the democracy. So if media becomes only a thing to make money off then my trust will run away. Of course they have to make money because they have to pay people and have to have a little profit also to make new things and innovate and do something extra. But if it's just to make money then to satisfy shareholders then things go wrong because then you start doing things not because of being part of people who produce news. But then you're making money so you will do other things you won't like. (Respondent 10)

Both the issue of sensationalism and societal function can be tied back to the effectiveness of different functions of the media as discussed by Ladd (2011): agenda-setting, priming, and framing. Having profits as a primary driver for coverage will necessarily result in the agenda-setting aspect of the news leaning towards covering not what is necessary for journalism as a fourth estate, or check upon political, governmental, or commercial institutions. As seen in the quote above, Respondent 10 saw a chase of commercial profits as subtracting from media as an important part of democracy, thereby implying a shift in the agenda-setting aspect of the news. Other respondents saw this commercialization of the news impacting not only the agenda-setting, but also the framing of stories, in the sense of "we present what you want to hear." This development in the news has in turn been indicated to decrease from the overall quality of the

news, especially the so-called quality news, by driving the framing of stories towards being sensationalized, in order to boost a news organization's financial bottom line.

4.1.1.4   Blurring the lines between fact and opinion

The final implication of the conflicts of interest and having profit as a primary driver of the news, and fourth sub-theme, is the blurring between fact and opinion in the presentation of the news. Three respondents indicated a necessity for very clearly stating the separation between fact and opinion. As Respondent 5 (72, male) mentioned, "conflict of interest is increasing as a thing and you see also there have been developments in the papers even explicitly promoted by the people to no longer separate [between] interpretation and description" (Respondent 5). This sentiment is echoed also by another interviewee, who said: "nowadays opinion and the news articles are more and more combined. So then you have to really have to think is this the opinion of the writer or not" (Respondent 10, 57, female). It is important to mention that the fact news organizations are opinionated or have a certain political or social leaning was not seen as a problem by any of the respondents, but rather a normal fact of life. Indeed, as summarized by Respondent 6 (70, female), "[the news] have a certain bias but I also think this idea that the news media should not be biased this is a completely false preconception. Because media are people and people always have some kind of bias". Therefore, having a bias is expected, but hiding said biased was seen as negative. Indeed, the interviewees indicated the important thing in relation to conflicts of interest and biases to be *transparency* about them both. As transparency heavily impacts trust as well, it will be discussed in more detail under the trust section of this chapter.

4.1.2   Perception of the news is negative, brand loyalty is high

When detailing their perception of the news in general, all respondents showed a negative outlook of the news at large, while having a positive perception of individual brands, the *Groene* in particular. This negativity in outlook was reflected in the motivations for news consumption. Likewise, the respondents' motivations for reading the *Groene* was heavily influenced by their perception of the brand itself. In this theme, this mutual exchange between perceptions and motivations will be analyzed according to the following sub-themes, in this order: (1) news perception and the *Groene*, and (2) the motivations for reading the *Groene* reflect the

characteristics of the magazine. The high levels of brand loyalty can also be observed by the number of years that respondents have been reading the *Groene*. Indeed, while half the respondents were somewhat new readers, having read the magazine for 2-4 years, the other half had been reading the *Groene* for 10-30 years. Moreover, three of the respondents were second generation subscribers, indicating very high perception of, and trust in, the magazine.

4.1.2.1   News perception and the *Groene*

All respondents had a somewhat negative outlook of the news in general, as evidenced by the issues of commercialization and quality detailed in the previous theme, and the lack of generalized trust in the news. However, the respondents' perception of the specific brands they followed was positive. More specifically, all respondents had an overwhelmingly positive perception of the *Groene*. When asked to describe what the *Groene* was, imagining the researcher had no previous knowledge of the magazine, the respondents characterized it in a

Figure 3. Respondents definitions of De Groene Amsterdammer
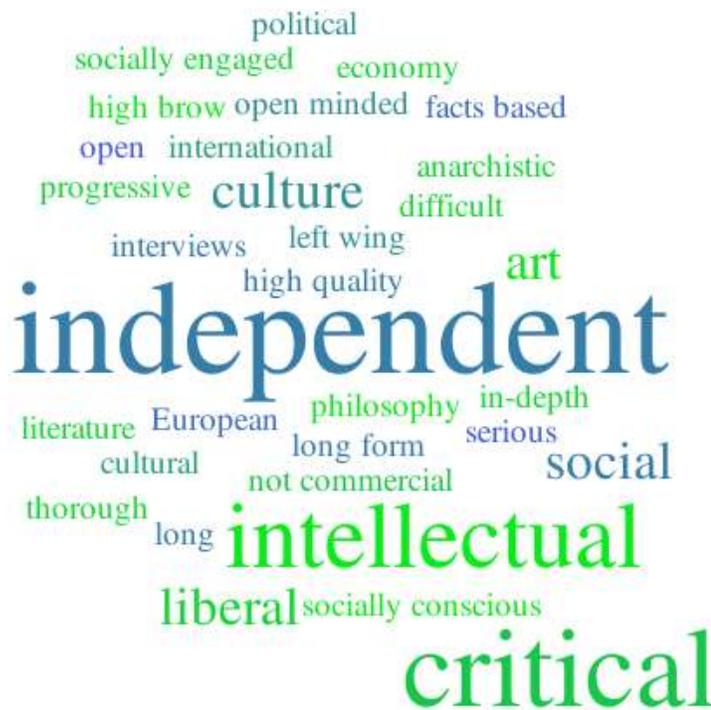
number of different ways, as shown in the word cloud above. The word cloud was created by pasting the nouns and adjectives defined by the respondents as being characteristics of the *Groene* in a word cloud generator. By far the most mentioned adjective to describe the *Groene*

was independent, followed by critical, intellectual, open-minded, and in-depth. For instance, Respondent 8 (19, male) said, "that's the word I was searching, independent. Very important to me actually, independent. So yeah. High quality, independent, intellectual and more of a European and worldwide perspective. That's what I'm after and that's what they are giving" (Respondent 8). This focus on independence, both financial and ideological, can be tied back to the previously discussed concerns of commercialization driving and impacting coverage and quality. Indeed, another respondent elaborated,

> De Groene is not commercial in the sense that they have not very short articles, not very much pictures. So that the image is this is the image of a serious magazine which takes its readers serious and it's not primarily looking to find that extremely large market by presenting very simple news, you know? (Respondent 3)

Especially from the quote of Respondent 3 (67, male) above, it is clear the connection between "taking its readers seriously" and not trying to "find that extremely large market by presenting very simple news." This characterization of a serious magazine, coupled with being independent as a primary positive aspect, link back to and qualify the significance of worries about commercialization.

4.1.2.2   The motivations for reading the *Groene* reflect the characteristics of the magazine

The characteristics of the *Groene* were also reflected in the respondents' motivations for reading it. Indeed, respondents indicated a significantly different set of incentives for reading the *Groene* as compared to daily news, drawing a wider difference between daily news and periodicals such as the *Groene*. The *Groene* being in-depth, especially in terms of context established and background provided, was indicated by multiple respondents as being the primary reason for consuming the magazine. As a respondent explained:

> The regular acute daily news is over the radio or on the TV, so I expect an ideal paper to give me the background. What's the case, why people in Venezuela are suddenly doing away with Maduro for instance. I want to read a paper […] that they give me an idea of what has been researched. And I'm happy to pay for that. (Respondent 1, 70, male)

The quote above also introduces the second main motivation for reading the *Groene*: financially supporting quality news organizations, especially in light of the negative outlook the respondents have of the news at large. The sentiment is made even clearer by Respondent 6 (70, male): "I

wanted to follow the news more closely and I decided to support certain news outlets, financially, in the struggle against fake news and manipulation." Finally, the third main reason for consumption has been found to be the positive view that respondents had of individual journalists and editors of the magazine. Indeed, the presence of the *Groene*'s new editor-in-chief, for instance, was listed by two respondents as a reason for subscribing. As Respondent 2 (36, female) said, "they feel more relevant since they have the current editor in chief. She absolutely helps set the tone in a way […] that I'm a subscriber for" (Respondent 2). The fact that individual journalists or editors drive the consumption motivations of the audience is significant in that the opposite phenomenon was not detected in the course of the interviews. Indeed, while a few respondents mentioned disliking individual journalists at the *Groene*, this fact was not translated in a change of perception or relation to the magazine. They would simply not read said journalists, while their image of the magazine would remain untarnished.

4.1.3 Conclusion

In this section, the relationship between respondents and the news were examined. Such relationship was analyzed both in relation to the news at large and *De Groene Amsterdammer* specifically. The analysis discussed the news consumption practices of the respondents, such as following an international news selection and consulting dailies for staying up to date while periodicals, such as the *Groene*, for background purposes. Different aspects related to the commercialization of news were discussed as impacting the quality of the news. These, such as presenting the news in a sensational manner, not being transparent about conflicts of interest, and not stressing the difference between fact and opinion, have thus emerged as pitfalls to avoid in order to retain a positive perception of the audience. Indeed, the research showed that the respondents had a generally negative perception of the news at large, while retaining high levels of brand loyalty in respect to the *Groene*. This finding is consistent with the difference in broad-scope trust and narrow-scope, firm-specific trust (Greyson et al., 2008) detailed by the Reuters Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2017). Said brand loyalty depended on the characteristics of the magazine as indicated by the audience, such as being independent, critical, and in-depth – in other words, characteristics of a brand which does not suffer from the commercialization-induced pitfalls previously discussed. Moreover, it was shown that the motivations for

consuming the *Groene* reflected the characteristics of the magazine, suggesting that a failure to maintain said characteristics would result in decrease in perception of the brand and a lessening of the motivations to consume it.

These results also allow for an evaluation of two of the expectations put forth in the theoretical framework of this thesis. Both expectations were connected to the idea of respondents having low generalized trust in the news because of their educational background. Indeed, it was shown that education is a negative predictor for trust in the news (Tsfati & Ariely, 2013). Based on this, it was expected that respondents would be more resistant towards news characteristics such as framing and agenda-setting (Ladd, 2011) and that they would consume a higher number of non-mainstream sources (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Both expectations were arguably correct: worries of commercialization made respondents more wary and critical of news organizations that engage in such practices, confirming the link between trust and news effectiveness discussed by Ladd (2011). Moreover, all respondents consumed a very international news production, consulting news from a number of different countries. Such a practice can be linked back to using alternative sources (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003), in that news organizations from different countries can be considered alternative, in terms of topics treated and points of view offered, to the mainstream, national news. Both these expectations rested on another assumption: that respondents would have low generalized trust in the media. Their perception of the news at large was certainly negative, and a link between perception and trust was established. A more specific detailing of trust-related issues, and whether this expectation was correct as well, will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

4.2 Selective trust

In this section, trust will be examined. As the central concept investigated for this research, a deep understanding of how the respondents related to the concept of trust in the news and what drove them in considering certain news organizations trustworthy is needed in order to answer the research question. From the analysis of trust, two main themes emerged: (1) trust drives news selectivity and (2) trust is multifaceted. The first theme examines how the respondents defined trust and how the different drivers of trust that emerged from the analysis drive the selectivity of news organizations consulted. Finally, the second theme discusses the application of the adapted

Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale to the respondents' perception of trustworthiness of *De Groene Amsterdammer*. Both themes are further divided into sub-themes, as detailed under the respective themes. Generally speaking, no respondent claimed to trust the news in general, while they all trusted the news they followed. This finding echoes the differences in trust levels between broad-scope and narrow-scope trust (Greyson et al., 2008) documented in the Reuters Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2017), and confirms the correctness of the expectation discussed at the end of the last section. Moreover, all respondents indicated having higher trust levels in periodicals than they did in daily news. This fact can be linked to the characteristics of periodicals, such as providing more background, which are part of the selectivity of facts dimension of trust identified by the Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale.

4.2.1 Trust drives news selectivity

During the interviews, respondents were specifically asked to describe both what trust is, and what makes a news organization trustworthy. In this theme, it will be detailed what were the main concepts to emerge from these queries and how they relate to the definitions of trust drawn from the literature used in this thesis. From the analysis, it emerged that respondents have a number of different expectations to be able to define a news organization as trustworthy: good sources, being open, balanced and transparent, and providing background and context, among others. A few of these characteristics, such as being transparent and providing background, can be reconducted to the dimensions of trust detailed in Kohring and Matthes' (2007) scale. As such, they will be analyzed in more depth under the theme trust is multifaceted. However, other aspects not strictly connected to said dimensions, for instance good sources, were still instrumental in coloring the perceptions of trustworthiness of the audience. Moreover, it emerged from the analysis that these attributes of trustworthiness contributed to driving the selectivity of the respondents in terms of news organizations consulted. Indeed, while no respondent claimed to trust the news in general, they all trusted the news organizations they followed. As such, it can be claimed that trust drives the news selection of the audience. The results of this theme will be discussed in five sub-themes: (1) independence and honesty, (2) believing the (good) sources, (3) confirmative coverage, (4) establishing and maintaining a background of trust, and (5) knowledge increases critical attitude.

4.2.1.1   Independence and honesty

The respondents were asked to first define trust in general, and then to detail what characteristics a news organization should possess for them to consider it trustworthy. The results of both definitions have been pasted into a word cloud generator, following the same

Figure 4. Respondents' definition of trust in the news

process used to detail the respondents' perception of the *Groene* presented in the previous section. The results of their definitions can be seen in Figure 4 above. These definitions can be widely connected to the idea of news organizations performing in a satisfactory manner, as part of the definition of trust in the news given by Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, and Steindl (2018, p. 5) as "the willingness of the audience to be vulnerable to news content based on the expectation that the media will perform in a satisfactory manner." What the satisfactory performance of the media should be is clearly a subjective consideration, depending on the values and expectations of the individual reader. In this research, respondents defined their expectation as being open, independent, honest, objective, and transparent.

The openness and transparency are strictly connected to independence, in terms of commercial and/or political independence – linking back to worries about conflicts of interest previously discussed. Indeed, openness and transparency were related by the respondents to disclosing eventual present conflicts of interest, and not letting it affect, as much as possible, the journalistic process. As one respondent summarized, "trustworthy if they are independent, they should not be related to one major interest group a political party, big companies, whatever. Or they should fairly explicitly illustrate in what way they are related to such a thing" (Respondent

5, 72, male). This also goes back to the issue of news having biases. As previously mentioned, respondents did not find it problematic, but rather expected, that news have different leanings, be them political, social, or cultural. However, readers expected news organizations they trust to be honest about them and to disclose them.

Being honest and being objective, finally, can be linked to being aspects of the trust dimensions of selectivity of facts and accuracy of depictions described by Kohring and Matthes (2007). Indeed, being honest can be interpreted as having two aspects. The first aspect would be honesty in the sense of truthfulness, and thus strictly connected to issues of accuracy of depictions. The second aspect, similarly to being objective, refers instead more to the contextualization of journalistic coverage. In this sense, being honest and objective signified not letting, as far as possible, personal and/or organizational biases from coloring the coverage. As such, both being honest and objective can be summarized as being fair, an aspect that links back to the dimension selectivity of facts.

4.2.1.2   Believing the (good) sources

The second aspect that drives the selection of news source is based on the perceived quality of the sources of news. This meant both in terms of the source of the article, as in who wrote it, and sources for the article. Respondent 8 (19, male), quoted below, is an example of the former:

> So what's for me a trustworthy news outlet it's outlet that has produced or has had very credible very, well known journalists among their ranks or people that have come later to politics or people that have come later and done something else, or that they have written books, that are very well critically received that kind of stuff. (Respondent 8)

Respondent 6 (70, female), on the other hand, is an example of the latter:

> Good sources. Either direct quotations from the people who have given the news. Or if that's not possible at least the mention that they know who the person is but for some reason the person does not want his or her name to be mentioned. I think that's most important. I think for me that's most important, that what [they] tell us is based on a trustworthy source. (Respondent 6)

This emphasis on the quality of the sources can be linked to issues of accuracy of depictions, one of the dimensions of trust identified by Kohring and Matthes (2007), which will be discussed in more depth in the next section of this chapter.

4.2.1.3   Confirmative coverage

The third sub-theme, confirmative coverage, was mentioned by half of the respondents as one of the reasons for trusting what they read. For instance, Respondent 10 (57, female) said, "maybe I trust them also because I think they share my ideas about looking at society" (Respondent 10). One of the respondents identified this selectivity of news one agrees with by the name of confirmation bias. This characterization is somewhat apt, as seeking out evidence (or sources) which confirm pre-existing belief has been widely documented in psychological literature. It is important to clarify that confirmation bias has been defined as the "unwitting selectivity in the acquisition and use of evidence" (Nickerson, 1998, p. 175). However, the key term in this definition is unwitting. As the respondents for this study were aware of personal opinions driving their selection of sources, it is perhaps fairer to qualify their behavior simply as one of multiple drivers for selectivity, as discussed below, rather than the single, stronger cause which confirmation bias seems to be.

4.2.1.4   Establishing and maintaining a background of trust

This sub-theme will present how there appears to be a difference between the establishment and the maintenance of trust. Indeed, the trust that respondents had in journalistic coverage can then be qualified not only to be selective, but to have a strong historical foundation. Respondents were found to trust sources that have a history of expertise or credible, trustworthy coverage. This finding is quite interesting, in that it somewhat contradicts Vanacker and Belmas's (2009) definition of trust as strictly future-oriented, differentiating it for all other kinds of judgement which are instead past-oriented. While it is obvious that trust is still mostly aimed at expecting a certain future behavior, it seems clear from the inferences of the respondents for this study that trust also has a strong historical dimension, or what one of the respondents defined as "a background of trust." Indeed, the historical dimension of trust is the third driver for the selectivity of trust in different organizations.

When asked about what makes a news organization trustworthy to them, and therefore drives their selectivity of which sources they consult, six out of 10 respondents indicated history as being one of the drivers of their trust. History, in this case, refers both to the history of the news organization itself and to the existence of a background of trust towards individual journalists. For example, Respondent 6 (70, female) said, "I don't trust a lot of the online news organizations because I don't know them. I don't know their reputation." In this case, the lack of a background of trust with the organizations translates to a sort of baseline mistrust, echoing the intentionality of trust, or in other words, the active role that the trustor has in giving his/her trust (Vanacker & Belmas, 2009). However, history can also work as a way to somewhat delegate individual considerations of trust to a larger audience over time, as the quote from once again Respondent 6 below shows,

> I think the fact the fact that it's an old established magazine, it survived a lot of different times, it's still existing and still rather thriving... that to me means that they have a good policy and a good board. (Respondent 6)

Similarly, Respondent 3 (67, male) talked about a background of trust influencing his perception of individual journalists. Indeed, he said, "I trust news when the person is trustworthy. So when it is already a person I know who has a background of trust" (Respondent 3). This characterization of course poses some interesting questions. For instance, will he automatically mistrust sources he has not read before? And if so, how can trust be then established? Moreover, this quote already seems to somewhat contradict the intentionality of trust Vanacker and Belmas (2009) wrote about. In the same vein, Respondent 2 (36, female) said,

> And something similar has happened with, with my newspaper and *De Groene* and *De Correspondent*. So they're pretty good at both giving me context that after a while I'll sort of assume that they have done the background reading that's involved which I suspect is an expression of trust. (Respondent 2)

Is trust then always an active choice of the audience? Arguably, and based on these interviews, not necessarily. The initial decision to give someone trust is definitely active. However, what these findings indicate is that once trust, or a background of trust, is established, the maintenance of trust is passive. As such, it can be said that the establishment of trust is active, while the maintaining of it is passive.

4.2.1.5   Knowledge increases critical attitude

While the aspects described in the sub-sections above drive the trust in, and therefore selection of, the news organizations consulted by the respondents, do different aspects drive mistrust? One aspect which came up in three interviews, and is presented in this sub-theme, is knowledge in the topic treated or in the journalistic process. Indeed, one respondent said, "well a friend of mine said I mostly I believe what is in the paper, except for the fields that I know saying something about, and sometimes I have the same experience" (Respondent 5, 72, male). In-depth knowledge of the topic covered is then a reason for mistrust, in that it increases how critical respondents will be when reading news coverage. This is dependent on the necessary selectivity of information conveyed in a journalistic piece, one that cannot be as in-depth and detailed as one aimed at specialized audiences, but rather one meant for a mass audience. Said selectivity of facts (Kohring & Matthes, 2007), which is one of the guiding concepts for this research and will be discussed shortly, is necessarily an individual choice, as all news is a selection of what is happening. However, the fact that the selection is necessarily somewhat subjective also emerged as a reason for mistrust, as said by Respondent 3 (67, male): "when you saw the decision what is news is made as an individual, individual's choice and you cannot trust it, you know?" (Respondent 3). However, it is important to stress that selectivity does not necessarily lead to mistrust, as the previously discussed openness about existing biases and acceptance of the audience of the inevitability of biases can contextualize what is being reported.

> There's biases in the selection of the people who select and also if you write an article
> which things you take out of the whole bunch of information you have. So there's always
> a bias. But that does not mean that I don't trust them. (Respondent 10, 57, female).

The fact that knowledge of the topic treated or the journalistic process enhances a critical attitude towards journalistic coverage echoes the findings of Tsfati and Ariely's (2013) research which found education to be a negative predictor of trust – in that higher educated people are more likely to be critical toward journalistic coverage.

4.2.2   Trust is multifaceted

The analysis of what aspects contributed to the respondents' trust in the *Groene* indicated their trust in the magazine to be multifaceted. Indeed, under this theme, four sub-themes were

identified that contributed to trust, and will be discussed in this order: (1) presenting a consistently interesting news selection, (2) providing context and background, (3) reporting verifiable facts and being accountable, and (4) offering new perspectives. All four sub-themes can be linked back to the dimensions of trust identified by Kohring and Matthes (2007), as discussed under the respective sub-themes. Said scale, as discussed in chapters 2 and 3, was used as the main guiding tool for assessing the trust that respondents had towards *De Groene*. As such, the four dimensions that Kohring and Matthes identified, selectivity of topics, selectivity of facts, accuracy of depictions, and journalistic assessment, were directly asked of the interviewees when they did not come up organically. In this sense, organically means that different aspects of the four dimensions were often mentioned by the respondents when discussing both what made a news organization trustworthy, and what made the *Groene* specifically trustworthy. Interestingly, while different aspects related to selectivity facts and accuracy of depictions were at various point mentioned by the respondents, both selectivity of topics and journalistic assessment were identified as a reason for trusting the *Groene* specifically, but not news organizations at large. The possible reasons for this fact will be discussed shortly in the respective subsections.

4.2.2.1   Presenting a consistently interesting news selection

This first sub-theme details the contribution that the *Groene's* news selection made toward the respondents' trust in, and motivation for reading the *Groene.* All respondents claimed that the magazine covered topics of interest to them and did so in a timely fashion and with appropriate follow-ups to stories as needed. This aspect can be linked back to the first dimension of the Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale, selectivity of topics. Said dimension was adapted to this research as indicating that *De Groene* focuses on topics that are relevant, important, or necessary for the respondents to know, and that the coverage of said topics reflected, in terms of frequency of coverage, the importance of the topics. As mentioned, aspects related to this dimension was mentioned by respondents in relation to the news in general, but only for the *Groene* specifically. Respondents, for example, mentioned the selection of topics of the *Groene* as one of the reasons for reading the magazine. They were subsequently queried specifically about the two aspects of this dimension, selection and frequency. All respondents indicated both the selection and frequency of *Groene* coverage to be satisfactory. The two aspects, selection and frequency, will be discussed separately below.

4.2.2.1.1 Selection and surprise

While all respondents found the selection of the *Groene* to be appropriate, it is worth noting that for the respondents a positive evaluation of the selectivity of topics did not mean that all topics treated were initially of interest to them. However, they found the balance between topics they knew they were interested in and topics they were previously unaware of to be satisfactory. For instance, Respondent 10 (57, female) said, "mainly they're very relevant and what I think is also good that they make things which are not in mainstream media and not always there and that they take out topics which deserves attention" (Respondent 10). Of course, it would be impossible for any publication to treat topics that are always of interest to the entirety of the audience. However, as the quote from Respondent 10 indicates, the *Groene*'s selection is still leaning toward the majority of the topics being of interest to the audience. Moreover, the quality in the selectivity of topics was also found to reflect into the respondents being happily surprised by topics they were not previously aware of, or did not expect to encounter:

> I may not always know beforehand if it's the stuff that I wanted to know but I definitely always feel that I should know these things. So one of the reasons that I subscribe is because they can surprise me. Just the balance between surprise and things that I knew I needed to know and things I didn't, the unknown unknowns is, it's pleasant. (Respondent 2, 36, female)

The quote above can also be linked back to one of the characteristics of trust in the news: that of being vulnerable to news content (Hanitzsch et al., 2018). Indeed, the willingness to be surprised by what topics are covered and/or considered to be important indicates an acceptance of said vulnerability. Moreover, respondents were happily surprised by the news selection of the *Groene*. Because of this, it can be claimed that respecting audience expectations in this regard translates to a higher perceived trustworthiness of the magazine.

4.2.2.1.2 Frequency and follow-up

The second part of this sub-theme deals instead with frequency of coverage. In this sense, an appropriate frequency means that a topic is treated on the necessary time-basis that the topic deserves. Once again, all respondents found the *Groene* to treat the topic on a timely necessary

basis, clearly depending on what topics their interest rested. For example, one respondent that consulted the *Groene* principally for its cultural coverage said, "yeah, because there's always yeah something written about new books or new literature" (Respondent 4, 60, female). Others, instead, appreciated the serialization of the *Groene*'s coverage, for instance by running in-depth series of articles about a certain topic:

> You see a lot of things come back in their article. Recently they did a series […] on Europe. I think they had five interviews with five different people about Europe and every week you saw one interview and it was a whole series. Also they had one on the migration, on the migrants, there are also five of them I think. So it always comes back. You're always updated. (Respondent 8, 19, male)

Another part of the frequency aspect, seen above, is the bringing back of previously treated topics when necessary, whether for an update or a new development. Also in this sense, respondents claimed that their trust in the *Groene,* and likelihood of reading it were thus boosted.

4.2.2.2   Providing context and background

The second sub-theme which emerged from the analysis details how the context and background provided by the *Groene* boosted the respondents' trust in the magazine. All respondents were positive in their evaluation of the *Groene* in this regard, often mentioning that the providing of context and background was sort of the strong suit of the magazine. These aspects were brought up by respondents when asked to detail what made the *Groene* trustworthy to them, and they were later specifically asked about this based on the topic list found in Appendix C. An example of the respondents mentioning these aspects is the answer Respondent 7 gave, when asked about what made the *Groene* especially trustworthy to him. He said, "because of the context, they give secondary more secondary news than news flash, breaking news. Last week this happened and look at what the story behind it" (Respondent 7, 54, male). Similarly, other respondents claimed one of the reasons for their trust in the *Groene* to be the amount of work and effort that the *Groene* puts into research, providing context and background. For instance, one respondent claimed, "yes [giving context] is more worked on than that at the other mainstream media" (Respondent 9, 50, male). The more background provided by the *Groene* thus boosted the respondents' perception of trustworthiness.

This aspect can also be tied back to issues of trust as a driver for selectivity of sources previously discussed, and in general stress the higher perception of periodicals that respondents had compared to daily news. Finally, through the selection of facts presented and background provided, the *Groene* was also able to convey the amount of effort that went into producing an article, as Respondent 4 (60, female) shows, "very well explained, yeah. And I think that you feel when you are reading it that that there is more time and effort in their publications" (Respondent 4). As the quotes above show, the respondents appreciated not only the background provided, but also the presentation of said background. Indeed, the way in which the background was presented consisted of both explaining the reason for the coverage and showing the amount of work that went into producing the article.

The providing of background and context can be linked to the second dimension of the Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale: selectivity of facts. Indeed, this dimension encompassed whether all the relevant facts of the story were presented, and if the story was balanced in its contextualization. The analysis showed that aspects related to this dimension played indeed a part in the respondents' trust in the *Groene*.

4.2.2.3   Reporting verifiable facts and being accountable

The third most mentioned contributor to trust in the *Groene* by the respondents was the presentation of verifiable facts and figures, and the willingness to be accountable for mistakes if/when they happen. This verifiability and accountability can be linked to the third dimension of the Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale, accuracy of depictions. While the dimension solely dealt with the accuracy of the reported information, the presenting of verifiable facts was shown to boost the trust respondents had in the accuracy of the magazine. For example, as one respondent said, "like two sentences in this article about Turkey it says "Istanbul Turkey has 389 press prisons. But will build an extra 193." They [De Groene] give you immediately information which you can check" (Respondent 3, 67, male). This presentation of verifiable facts boosted the trust that respondents had in the *Groene*, confirming the relevance of the dimension as discussed by Kohring and Matthes (2007). Importantly, one aspect that is not directly discussed by Kohring and Matthes but ties back to Greyson et al. (2008) discussion of broad-scope, system trust, is the issue of corrections. Indeed, as previously discussed, Greyson et al. (2008) indicated that individual breaches of trust do not subtract from system trust, if safeguards are in place to

obviate the situation. While trust in the *Groene* would not be broad-scope trust, but rather narrow-scope, firm-specific trust (Greyson et al., 2008), the same has been found to be true in this respect. Indeed, respondents said that the eventual lack of accuracy of reporting in the *Groene* does not subtract in any way from their trust in the publication so long as said errors are acknowledged and deal with in an open and transparent manner. This sentiment is best illustrated by Respondent 2 (36, female), who said, "so the corrections part of the paper is an important part as far as I'm concerned. So seen to be fixing them and being transparent about that is a way to fix that" (Respondent 2). The issue of running corrections in an open manner, and admitting mistakes made can be summarized as being accountable and can be tied back to the more general concept of transparency, as discussed in section 4.2.1.1.

4.2.2.4   Offering new perspectives

The offering of new perspectives was the fourth and final aspect that respondents mentioned as boosting their trust in the *Groene*. Indeed, when asked about what made the Groene trustworthy, three respondents mentioned the adding of new perspectives. For instance, Respondent 10 (57, female) said, "[*De Groene*] gives me different views and also ideas of the way of looking which are new for me" (Respondent 10). It is important to mention that respondents strongly emphasized that not only the *Groene* presents relevant perspectives, but that it is another of the strong suits of the magazine. For instance, they said,

> Yes. This is a strong suit. […] They're strong on investigative journalism. But that's also a point of view. How you look at society and what what's going on. It is not only that they pretend, they are looking deeper and further. (Respondent 7, 54, male)

> That's also the reason why I read it. I think very often is just another viewpoint or from an order perspective. Same topic but differently. And because I read a lot, you get a more complete picture. They're very creative also, they don't just take yes for an answer they just go or they look different and ask different questions. (Respondent 10, 57, female)

The offering of new perspectives can be linked to the fourth and final dimension of the Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale, journalistic assessment. This aspect investigated whether the *Groene* published well-thought opinions and conclusions, and whether its coverage introduced perspectives contributing to the public discussion surrounding a certain topic. As previously

mentioned, aspects related to journalistic assessment were only encountered directly regarding the *Groene*. The fact that respondents mentioned aspects of the journalistic assessment only in relation to the *Groene*, rather than the media at large, is surprising in that the Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale has been validated and successfully replicated to measure generalized trust in the media. As such, the encountering of this dimension as well during the discussion of the news media and their trustworthiness at large was expected. The fact that this was not the case could have two possible reasons, the dimension of the sample or the wording of the dimension itself. The first possible explanation is quite straight-forward: with a sample of ten respondents it is not to be expected that all theoretical concepts will be organically mentioned. Alternatively, the fact that the dimension investigates whether coverage adds relevant respective to the public discussion could be the culprit. Indeed, most of the public discussion on any topic takes place on and is largely formed by the news media itself. As such, it is not apparent that respondents would spontaneously bring up the adding of relevant perspectives in relation to the news media at large, as most of the perspectives we encounter in daily life are a direct product of the news media themselves.

4.2.3 Conclusion

In this section, the central theoretical concept of this research, trust, was investigated. It was first detailed how the respondents perceived the concept of trust, and thus what made a news organization trustworthy to them, both generally and specifically for the *Groene*. Respondents identified a trustworthy news organization to be first of all independent and transparent, linking back to worries about commercialization, other than being honest and objective, or fair. Moreover, it was shown that trust was a driver for the selectivity of news organizations consulted, based on the positive evaluation of journalistic sources, the confirmation in the coverage of pre-existing beliefs or positions, and the existence of a background of trust. This latter characteristic suggested the existence of an historical dimension to trust, somewhat contradicting Vanacker and Belmas's (2009) definition of trust as strictly future oriented and intentional. Indeed, it was established that the forming of trust is intentional and active, while its maintenance is passive. Moreover, it was discussed why trust is not strictly future oriented, but

rather possesses a strong historical foundation, or what respondents called a "background of trust."

It was also shown that knowledge of the topics covered or of the journalistic process enhanced the critical attitude of the audience, echoing Tsfati and Ariely's (2013) identification of education as a negative predictor for trust and confirming the first expectation for the respondents detailed in the theoretical framework of this thesis. Finally, the main aspects which contributed to the respondents' trust in the *Groene* were discussed and linked to the dimensions of trust identified by Kohring and Matthes (2007). Interestingly, while the four sub-themes related to the Kohring and Matthes (2007) dimensions were discussed in order of importance (in how often they were mentioned by respondents, as seen in Appendix B), the order of said sub-themes ended up reflecting the order of the dimensions given by Kohring and Matthes (2007). Finally, the analysis confirmed the applicability of such a quantitative scale for broad-scope trust also in a qualitative research about narrow-scope trust. Indeed, aspects related to all four dimensions were indicated by the respondents to be either a reason for the consumption of *De Groene Amsterdammer*, or for their trust in the magazine.

4.3 Social Networking Sites

The third and final topical area discussed in the course of this research has been that of social networking sites. As discussed in the theoretical framework of this thesis, social networking sites have been defined as "applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 63). Moreover, of the wide range of social networking sites available, only Facebook and Twitter have been considered, as the two most used for news (Ju, Jeong, & Chyi, 2014) that the *Groene* is active on. Three themes were observed in regard to SNS: (1) dangers of SNS for news, (2) *De Groene*'s SNS strategy: informative but not engaging, and (3) *De Groene*'s SNS strategy: changing perception but not trust. The first theme details the impact that respondents identified SNS having on the journalistic process. As such, this theme is strictly connected to wider considerations of quality of the news and trust in the news that have been previously discussed. The second theme recounts the evaluation the respondents had of the *Groene*'s SNS strategy and

its limitations. Finally, the third theme seeks to analyze in what ways said SNS strategy has changed the respondents' perception of the *Groene,* and thus answer the research question. All themes are further divided into sub-themes and will be discussed in the order above. This topical area will allow establishing the respondents' perception of the *Groene*'s SNS strategy and evaluating its implications.

As done with news consumption, before analyzing the themes that emerged from this analysis it is worth to describe the use and motivations that the respondents make of SNS for news. Respondents had two main motivations in using SNS for news: news aggregation and article previewing. Multiple respondents indicated following news organizations on SNS as a way to have a tailored selection of news organizations appear in a single environment, reducing the need to individually check the websites of the various organizations. Importantly, the fact that SNS allow the audience a tailored aggregation ties back to the selectivity of news organizations previously described. Indeed, SNS allow users to customize their experience with the news, and thus focus, by following, news organization that they see worthy – and trustworthy. Moreover, considering that all respondents had a very international news consumption, with all of them following news organizations from at least three, but often more, different countries, the aggregation mechanisms of SNS allowed them to stay up-to-date with the news from an international perspective, also obviating to issues of biases or polarization encountered in distinct news media markets, as shown by Newman et al. (2017) and Ladd (2011). It is worth noting that said use of SNS as news aggregators was seen by most respondents as being something more geared towards live and short-term developments, with Respondent 7 (54, male) saying that Twitter was "perfect for the heat of the moment" and Respondent 2 (36, female) claiming, "he way that I use my social media is more geared toward what happens on a day to day [basis]" (Respondent 2).

The second main way in which respondents reported using SNS in relation to news, and connected to their use as aggregators, was to preview articles that they wanted to read, both for a convenience motivation, given the previously discussed aggregation, and as a way to decide which articles to purchase, given the ever-increasing presence of paywalls. The following of news organizations on SNS, especially when following a number of different organizations, allows the respondents to somewhat circumvent the issue of paywalls, as many news organizations offer a number of free articles per month. As such, using SNS as aggregators and

for previews of article allows the respondents to pick and choose which article to read from where organization, somewhat diminishing the impact of paywalls.

4.3.1 Dangers of SNS for news

This theme details the dangers that SNS in more general sense pose for news organizations. Respondents saw the developments presented to pose a danger for both the journalistic production and the trust of the public in the news media. Generally speaking, these areas depict cautionary tales of practices that a news organization that engages of SNS has to be aware of and properly deal with. Said impact can be divided in three somewhat distinct sub-themes: (1) driving and spreading of fake news, (2) increasing the difficulty on running corrections, and (3) speeding up of the news cycle. These sub-themes will be presented, in this order, in the following paragraphs. This theme is somewhat more contextual, in that it is not strictly connected to the SNS strategy of the *Groene*. However, knowledge of the dangers that respondents saw with news organizations on social media is necessary for an organization that uses such platforms. Indeed, falling into the pitfalls discussed in the sub-themes for this section would have an impact on how a news SNS strategy would be perceived by readers, and perception and trust have previously been linked.

4.3.1.1 Driving and spreading of fake news

The first issue to come up in multiple interviews was that of fake news. While a couple of respondents stressed that fake news is not a new phenomenon, most respondents were wary of and worried by fake news. Generally speaking, the reason for a heightened preoccupation with fake news was identified in the ease of creation and spreading of fake news given by the democratization of speech on SNS and the continuous coverage of issue related to fake news by journalists.

> In that sense there is more fake news now because millions of people can produce it, the most stupid and idiot things, you know. […] But I still think that it […] seems to have a lot of interest because journalists write about it. (Respondent 3, 67, male)

Interestingly, while many respondents were worried about fake news, the majority thought they could identify them, and thus avoid them, quite easily. Indeed, as Respondent 8 (19, male), for

instance, said, "I can very well see which sites look dodgy which sites are kind of good. I can spot fake news pretty well" (Respondent 8). As such, their worry about fake news seemed to be more of a political worry, rather than a personal one. The discriminator here is found to be personal experience with fake news. In other words, respondents that had been "victim" of fake news were much more wary about their danger and their impact. Two respondents have had a personal experience with fake news. One of them detailed the effort it went into fixing the situation: "you know it cost me a lot of effort to try to correct everything and then it's already spread over the Internet and it's clearly fake news. Just do your research before you put something on in the paper" (Respondent 1, 70, male). This quote above also indicates an implication for news organizations in regard to fake news: the need for more in-depth research and accuracy in reporting the news in a digital sphere.

4.3.1.2   Increasing the difficulty of running corrections

Very much connected to the issue of fake news is the second impact SNS had on the news that respondents identified, the increased difficulty of running corrections on these platforms. Said difficulty resulted from the loss of control over secondary sources. In other words, even though a news organization would run a correction, it would not be automatic that all other sources (news aggregators, other news organizations, blogs) would do the same; nor was it considered to be likely, as the experience of Respondent 1 with fake news detailed above shows. Indeed, as Respondent 4 (60, female) said,

Yes that is always of course a difficult thing. And when it's linked to the original source, you can bring in the correction in that particular source but […] in such a situation that it can't be updated to the next steps in the flow of communication, then you will always have a problem. (Respondent 4)

Generally speaking, this seemed to be a problem not necessarily of news organizations themselves, but rather of SNS and news aggregators. However, this does not change the impact such practices have on readers – as such, one of the respondents, for instance, has suggested a necessity of more awareness on the part of journalists of the dangers of SNS, identifiable in a change to journalistic practices and a higher emphasis on fact-checking:

And the correction is there from the journalist but the correction is not there from the other side. Basically the journalists should come to some kind of agreement. How do we

put something out there, especially on the social media that doesn't you know serve its own life. (Respondent 1, 70, male)

4.3.1.3 Speeding up the news cycle

Finally, the third and final danger identified, one very much connected to the other two, has been that of speeding up the news cycle. Indeed, many respondents found SNS to be pushing news organizations toward being first, reducing consideration of accuracy to a secondary driver. Said speeding up of the news cycle, respondents found, was driven, at least partly by the structure of SNS, as one respondent said. "I'm pretty sure that social media had a role to play in speeding up the news cycle. That is definitely a risk factor for developing and maintaining trust, public trust not just me individually" (Respondent 2, 36, female). Significantly, the lessening of emphasis on accuracy in favor of speed has implications also for trust in the news. Indeed, as previously shown, accuracy directly affects the trust that readers have in news organizations. The speeding up of the news cycle was also reiterated by another respondent, who identified the causes for such an effect:

> And then they also say we want to be the first. So if they hear something they put it on the on the web and then later on they start checking if it's correct or not. They want to be first because they want to have clicks and then making money becomes more important than to have this role in society. (Respondent 10, 57, female)

This third impact, as mentioned in the quote above, is very much connected to the financial structure of social networking sites. Indeed, the financial structure of social networking sites is a click-based one, with therefore a different structure of incentives compared to "regular" news production.

4.3.2 *De Groene's* SNS strategy: informative but not engaging

This theme deals with how the respondents perceived the *Groene*'s SNS strategy. In the investigation of this aspect of the research, respondents were first asked to evaluate how the *Groene* used social networking sites, before describing what limitations they found with said strategy. Three sub-themes emerged from the analysis: (1) using SNS as advertisement, (2) lacking engagement, and (3) lacking exposure. The sub-themes will be discussed, in this order, in

the following sub-sections. Generally speaking, respondents found the *Groene*'s strategy to be informative, but not engaging, as will be detailed in the following sub-sections. It is important to mention that while the first sub-theme is somewhat more contextual than the other two, it is still necessary to discuss, because the evaluation of the *Groene*'s SNS strategy is necessary connected to the analysis of whether it played a part in the respondents' perception of the magazine.

4.3.2.1   Using SNS as advertisement

In terms of evaluation, most respondents found the *Groene*'s presentation to be one mostly advertisement-based, rather than engagement-based. As such, they qualified the strategy to be one that highlighted what articles were published. For example, one responder said, "[It is] we have a big article in in our magazine. It's also you can read it online. And this is the link" (Respondent 9, 50, male). This, the respondents claimed, was probably a conscious choice of the magazine, one that focuses of having more of an institutional voice, rather than a more personal one as used by other news organizations, as one respondent observed: "They seem to be using it mostly as a way to show what pieces they're running that week either coming up or having been posted, not so much to develop sort of a voice or a tone-of-voice" (Respondent 2, 36, female). While the respondents did not identify said choice to be negative, they did claim that such a strategy resulted in being less of a conversation-starter, and as such, less engaging than that of other news organizations, as will be discussed in the next sub-theme. However, the choice of having a more institutional, strictly advertisement-based voice can also be seen as positive, as it arguably lessens the danger of sensationalism.

4.3.2.2   Lacking engagement

The lack of engagement on the *Groene*'s SNS channels was the second limitation multiple respondents identified with the *Groene*'s strategy. It is worth noting that such a limitation is possibly dependent on the target audience of the *Groene*: one older and higher educated than other popular magazines. For example, Respondent 8 (19, male) claimed,

> Build the community around them. But most of their readers is above 60 and they don't they don't post on social media a lot. So they have to do a retargeting, they have to do a repurposing […] if the Groene wants to stay relevant. (Respondent 8)

This idea of using SNS sites to build engagement, as also mentioned in the above quote, can be reconducted to the idea of reciprocity as a tool of community building discussed by Lewis, Holton, and Coddington (2014) and Malmelin and Villi (2015). This is especially significant in regard to the research question for this research. Indeed, trust and a feeling of community have been identified to be part of a positive feedback loop, by which when one increases the other does as well in a self-reinforcing cycle (Malmelin & Villi, 2015). As such, a news organization which manages to boost its readers' engagement will increase a feeling of community with the brand (and vice-versa), arguably boosting overall perceptions of trust.

4.3.2.3   Lacking exposure

The second limitation with the *Groene*'s strategy was found to be the desultory exposure that respondents would get to the magazine's post. Indeed, respondents said, "I follow them on social media. But the thing is I don't see their articles, they have zero engagement and I have to specifically search for them to find them" (Respondent 8, 19, male). Another respondent echoed the sentiment, "but I don't see them. They're not very active in that respective. No I don't see them that much" (Respondent 10, 57, female). Both the first and the second limitation are clearly linked to one another. Obviously, there can be no engagement if the posts are not even encountered, or if they have to be specifically looked for. However, given the use that the audience makes of SNS as news aggregators, and considering the large number of publications most of them followed on SNS, a lack of encountering the posts translates to an effective near-invisibility of the magazine, impacting not only the potential community building Lewis, Colton and Coddington (2014) talk about, but also hindering the use of SNS as an advertisement mechanism that the *Groene* makes. Indeed, as Respondent 8 who incidentally was the only millennial respondent, claimed

> But I mean the human brain is distracted so fast, how can I remember ok today I have to
> search *De Groene*. No, I'm not going to do that even though I like their publication. I like
> them a lot but I won't, I'm not going to search them. (Respondent 8, 19, male)

As such, these issues identified with the *Groene*'s strategy have also implications for the future and the creation, or retaining, of a young, and therefore future, audience.

4.3.3 *De Groene*'s SNS strategy: changing perception but not trust

The final theme considered in this analysis was the part that the *Groene*'s SNS strategy plays on the respondents' perception of trustworthiness. This part was especially difficult to investigate, especially in light of the characteristics of the strategy just discussed. Indeed, a more impersonal voice, coupled with limited engagement and exposure resulted in the respondents having little to say in regard to the *Groene*'s strategy. Perhaps because of this, no respondent indicated having a different perception of trustworthiness for the *Groene* because of their SNS strategy. However, two respondents mentioned a positive effect of the *Groene*'s strategy on their perception of the magazine. As such, two sub-themes will be discussed in this section: (1) rejuvenating the brand and boosting the historical dimension and (2) not changing trust levels. They will be analyzed, in this order, in the following sub-sections.

4.3.3.1 Rejuvenating the brand and boosting the historical dimension

While trust levels were not impacted by the *Groene*'s SNS strategy, their presentation did positively contribute to two respondents' perception of the magazine. Indeed, one respondent indicated that the *Groene* SNS rejuvenated the brand for him. While before he perceived the *Groene* to be the literary equivalent of a cigar-smoking intellectual, with the use of SNS he said, "well their image of the cigar smoking intellectual was of course a bit dusty and too much of an intellectual standpoint. And now that they're more relevant in the context of now, to date" (Respondent 7, 54, male). Similarly, both him and another respondent found the practice of the *Groene* to post older articles on SNS when they become relevant again to be a positive one. Indeed,

> Yes. It's a positive thing because they provide a lot of background and nuance but also they see long term views. So sometimes they put out a link to an article from three years ago four years ago, maybe even more, when it's got actual value. (Respondent 7)

Even though their trust in the *Groene* did not change because of this strategy, their positive evaluation is very much connected to both journalistic assessment and selectivity of facts as defined by Kohring and Matthes (2007). Indeed, posting older articles when again relevant, whether because of new developments or recurring themes, was found to add background and nuance, thus adding to both the context of the story (selectivity of facts) and the relevance of the

perspectives portrayed (journalistic assessment). Finally, it allowed the articles in the *Groene* to emphasize the historical dimension which was previously discussed to be another aspect of trust in the magazine.

4.3.3.2   Not changing trust levels

As mentioned, the *Groene*'s SNS strategy did not play a part in the trust of the respondents. However, if the *Groene*'s strategy does indeed have aspects which impact a number of dimensions of trust, why has the perception of trustworthiness of the respondents not changed? Arguably, because they had all already high levels of trust in the *Groene*, with multiple respondents claiming it to be either their favorite magazine or one of, if not the, best magazine in the Netherlands. As such, the only way for the *Groene*'s SNS strategy to play a part in the trust of the readers would be in a negative way, and this was not found to have happened to the respondents.

Could the *Groene*'s strategy add to the trust of the readers? Arguably yes, with a few caveats. A change in trust would be arguably dependent on the audience considered. While the magazine's SNS strategy did not necessarily influence the trust the considered subscribers had, it is possible that it would do so for readers who are not subscribers. Indeed, readers will probably have a "weaker" perception of, and trust in, the magazine compared to subscribers. As such, they would be more susceptible to positive changes in perception, and relatedly, in trust, as a result of the *Groene*'s SNS strategy. Moreover, adopting a SNS which focuses on positive engagement would boost the readers' feeling of community around the *Groene* (Malmeling & Villi, 2015), in turn increasing the sense of belonging to and trust in the magazine. This aspect, while surely stronger for people who have less initial trust in the magazine and are thus susceptible to a bigger increase in trust, would arguably also be expected for subscribers as well.

4.3.4   Conclusion

This section began by detailing the motivations for the respondents' use of social networking sites for news. Said motivations were shown to be of two types: news aggregation and article previewing. Later, the dangers that respondents identified SNS having for journalism were detailed. These issues, such as a speeding up of the news cycle, an increased difficulty of

running corrections, and the spreading of fake news, were identified as pitfalls to avoid for a news organization operating on SNS. Indeed, the three aspects have been shown to be connected to dimensions of trust, such as accuracy of depictions (Kohring and Matthes, 2007), driving both the audience's perception of and selectivity in news organizations. The respondents' evaluation of the *Groene*'s SNS strategy was then presented as one mostly focused on advertising the magazine's article, rather than engaging the audience. This aspect was indicated as one that, while not inherently negative, resulted in both desultory engagement and a limited exposure to the magazine's SNS posts, pointing to the necessity of an update of the magazine's strategy.

It was also shown that while the *Groene*'s strategy did not, strictly speaking, change the respondents' trust in the magazine, it did somewhat contribute to making the brand more contemporary and boost its historical dimension. Because of the previously mentioned link between perception and trust, this last result is especially significant for the *Groene*. Indeed, it can be extrapolated that the magazine's SNS presentation could be boosting trust in readers who have a weaker relationship with the magazine compared to the respondents interviewed. Finally, a focus on engagement and community building (Malmelin & Villi, 2015) was identified as a way forward for the magazine to positively influence their readers' trust in the magazine. This aspect and wider theoretical and practical implications will be discussed in the following chapter.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results discussed in the previous section, what part did the magazine's SNS strategy play in the respondents' trust in the *Groene*? The answer is little, if at all. This, however, does not necessarily mean that SNS strategies play no part in forming perceptions of trustworthiness. Indeed, the results suggest that this is dependent on the characteristics of the respondents, the specific SNS strategy the *Groene* utilizes, or both.

Through the analysis of the relationship between respondents and the news, it was discovered that respondents belonged to a very specific group of news consumers. They were shown to be quite critical and to have a negative perception and mistrust of the news at large. This negativity stemmed from practices linkable to commercialization that they saw as detracting from the quality of journalism. However, their negativity towards the news in general was counterbalanced by a very positive perception of, and trust in, news organizations they consumed, such as *De Groene Amsterdammer* – echoing the findings of the Reuters Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2017). This axis of general mistrust and very selective trust was also shown to be the driver for deciding what news to consume. Effectively, respondents were shown to be readers of the *Groene* because of their trust in the magazine. In other words, their trust in the magazine was already at the highest levels. Because of this, it seems safe to claim that any changes in their trust in the *Groene* would only be observable in the case of a negative presentation, one that would subtract from trust – for instance by relying on sensationalism in news presentation. Therefore, it is expected that focusing on a sample with a lower baseline trust would shed more light on how a SNS presentation can contribute to trust, as will be discussed in the limitations and future research section of this chapter.

The way in which the *Groene* uses SNS could also explain the limited part that their strategy was found to play in the respondents' trust. Indeed, their strategy was shown to be more informative, rather than engaging. This lack of engagement, in turn, resulted in a limited visibility of the *Groene* SNS channels. As a result, respondents were somewhat limited in their evaluation of how the *Groene'*s uses SNS, in that a desultory exposure coupled with the informative nature of said strategy translated to respondents not having a strong, or opinionated perception of the magazine's strategy. Two more considerations are necessary in this regard. First, given the link between engagement, community building, and trust (Malmelin & Villi, 2015; Lewis et al., 2014), it is possible that the lack of changes in trust levels could be a result of

the informative, but not engaging nature of the *Groene*'s strategy. However, it is unclear whether this is a primary driver, or simply one aspect, the other being the respondents' high baseline trust in the magazine. Second, two respondents were shown to have their perception of the magazine somewhat positively changed by the *Groene*'s strategy. Considering the link between perception and trust, this finding suggests that a positive SNS presentation could potentially improve the trust in a new organization. However, if accurate, this would only be observable in regard to a news organization which was not considered to be particularly trustworthy, or for a sample with lower baseline trust.

5.1 Theoretical implications

This research presents a number of theoretical implications, specifically in regard to trust. First, it showed the wider applicability of the Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale. Indeed, the scale had been developed as a quantitative measuring tool, other than one to be used about generalized trust in the news, or broad-scope trust (Greyson et al., 2008). This research showed that this scale can be successfully adapted to qualitative research, in that aspects related to all four dimensions of trust were identified in the course of the data collection. Moreover, as all four dimensions were indicated by respondents to be aspects of what made *De Groene Amsterdammer* trustworthy, it has been established that the scale can successfully be used to analyze narrow-scope, firm-specific trust (Greyson et al., 2008) as well.

Second, while the four dimensions of trust previously discussed did serve to measure trust, they were not the only considerations involved in determining trustworthiness. Indeed, trust in a news organization was shown to be influenced also by considerations about the quality of the sources used, by agreeing with the point of view presented in the coverage (in being more trusting of confirmative coverage), and by the existence of a background of trust. As such, it can be argued that trust in a news organization is wider than the four dimensions of the Kohring and Matthes (2007) scale. However, the additional aspects of trust indicated above are arguably specific for individual news organizations, rather than the news in general. Indeed, it seems unlikely that the quality of sources could be evaluated for the news in general, for example. Therefore, any modification to the scale to include the three aspects discussed above would be

advisable only when measuring narrow-scope trust, while it should remain as it is for measuring generalized trust.

Third, and connected to the existence of an historical component to trust, two characteristics of the concept are somewhat put into question: its strict future-oriented outlook (Hanitzsch et al., 2018) and its intentionality (Vanacker & Belmas, 2009). Indeed, while the establishment of trust is certainly intentional, its maintenance is not. Rather, the existence of a background of trust points to the fact that maintaining trust is instead a passive process. In other words, once trust is established intentionality is no longer necessary, as trustors will simply assume the trustworthiness of, for instance, an article, unless proven otherwise. Similarly, it can be argued that trust is not solely future-oriented. Again, the establishment of trust implies an expectation of future positive behavior. However, once a background of trust is established, said expectation arguably shifts to regarding both the future behavior and the present behavior – a maintenance of trust.

Fourth, broad-scope, system trust was defined as not being affected by individual breaches of trust so long as safeguards were present in the wider system (Greyson et al., 2008). This research has shown that the same concept is applicable also to narrow-scope, firm-specific trust. Indeed, breaches of trust from individual journalists were not found to diminish the trust in the wider news organization so long as the appropriate safeguards were in place – for example, running corrections.

Fifth, Tsfati and Cappella (2003) identified higher levels of trust to reflect in a mainstream news consumption, while lower levels to reflect in the seeking out of alternative sources. All respondents in this research had low levels of trust. Yet, they consumed mainstream sources. This, however, does not disprove the Tsfati and Cappella (2003) study, but rather signifies the need for a wider definition for alternative sources. Indeed, if by alternative sources one means sources which provide coverage from different angles or perspectives, the findings of this research would be consistent with Tsfati and Cappella's (2003) results. In fact, generalized trust in the news indicates the levels of trust readers have in the wider news environment of a specific market (the Netherlands, the United States, etc.). As such, consuming an international selection of news can be seen as using alternative sources, in that their coverage will necessarily be influenced by the specific sensibilities of the market in which they operate.

5.2 Practical implications

This research also presents a number of practical implications for *De Groene Amsterdammer* and, arguably, similar news organizations. Indeed, the respondents indicated practices related to commercialization, such as presenting the news sensationally or letting conflicts of interest influence coverage, as factors that a) subtract from the quality of journalism, and b) negatively color their perception of news organizations which engage in such practices. Also considering the link between perception of a news organization and trust in said news organization, these findings suggest that a quality organization such as the *Groene* should be wary of these pitfalls. While the magazine was not found by the respondents to engage in sensationalism, for example, a more sensational presentation could be identified as the easiest way to build more engagement with their SNS channels. However, not all engagement is equal. Indeed, people with lower trust were shown to engage more with news content they disagreed with (Fletcher & Park, 2017), cautioning against using web metrics as the sole determinator of success of any SNS strategy. Where could the *Groene* then start from to expand their reach? The characteristics of the magazine, such as independence, being critical, being open, were identified by the respondents as both reasons for their trust in the magazine, and motivations for their consumption of the magazine. Therefore, any strategy the *Groene* implements should start by highlighting these characteristics that make them a quality news organization and separates them from other more negatively perceived, and less trusted, news organizations.

The limited engagement and exposure that respondents reported in regard to the magazine's strategy also suggest a need for an updated SNS strategy more focused on engaging the audience. Indeed, the presentation of SNS has largely moved away from a chronological display of results. While both Twitter and Facebook offer the possibility of displaying the posts/tweets in a chronological manner, this feature has to be specifically chosen by the user; the default is instead a display based around top results. Top results are, in turn, determined by a number of factors strictly connected to engagement with the posts, by both the individual user and his/her network (Bucher, 2012). In other words, social media algorithms work by presenting to the user more of what s/he has already engaged with. A limited engagement with the *Groene*'s SNS channels, then, suggests a risk of decreasing visibility of the brand as a whole, as also reported by the respondents. This is significant for two reasons: audience expansion and community building. Audience expansion refers specifically to reaching a younger audience, and

thus pose the foundations for the future audience of the *Groene*. Indeed, according to the Reuters Digital News Report, over 30% of people 18-24 used social networking sites as a primary source for news (Newman et al., 2017). Moreover, young people were shown to see an algorithmic selection of news, rather than an editorial curation, to be a better way of receiving the news (Thurman et al., 2018). Therefore, considering these two facts, a more engaging SNS presentation would be necessary to be seen, and thus potentially read, by a younger audience. How to achieve higher engagement then? Certainly, the pitfalls previously discussed are to be avoided. Perhaps the most appropriate way could be for journalists and editors to directly engage with the audience. Such a strategy would bring two benefits. First, it would help the journalists in gaining a deeper understanding of the audience. Second, it would strengthen a sense of community in the audience, increasing both commitment to and engagement with the brand (Malmelin & Villi, 2015).

5.3 Limitations and future research

The first limitation with this study has to do with sample size. While a larger sample was impossible to achieve given the difficulties detailed in the third chapter of this thesis, a future research would be strengthened by interviewing more respondents. Indeed, a larger sample would potentially add new perspectives both in regard to general issues of perception and trust in the news, and in suggesting ways forward for the *Groene*'s social networking sites strategy.

Second, the methodological approach. This research allowed for qualifying the individual attitudes of ten *Groene* subscribers. However, the qualitative approach of this research does not necessarily allow for the generalization of the findings to the entirety of their subscriber base, or to readers of similar quality periodical at large. Because of this, a future research interested in examining the audience's relationship to a news organization's SNS strategy could approach the topic by using a mixed method. For example, by carrying out first a more quantitative research about the audience's attitudes in relation to SNS strategies, with the data ideally gathered directly on social networking sites, for example through a survey. This would allow to establish a generalizable evaluation of SNS practices. Once this is done, interviews or focus groups should be carried out with a sample of respondents to the initial survey, allowing to better qualify the

general findings of the first part of the study and add the levels of nuance that characterizes qualitative research.

While not a limitation per se, the considering of subscribers for this research potentially impacted the results. Indeed, the respondents being subscribers arguably implied that their trust levels in the magazine was already quite high. As such, a follow-up study to this research could instead consider readers, but not subscribers, of the *Groene*. Such an approach would allow to better examine whether the magazine's SNS strategy plays a part in perception of trustworthiness, in that readers who are not subscribers have arguably less strong of an attachment, and perception, of the brand.

Finally, another way to consider the implications of SNS strategies for trust could be by experiment. This research found that the establishment of trust is active, while the maintenance of trust is passive. Because of this, an experiment that considers the perception-forming and establishment of trust in a previously unknown news organization could be carried out. Such an experiment would need to consider two comparable groups of respondents and introduce them to a news organization new to them. One group would be exposed to said news organization solely through their social media presentation, while the other solely through non-social channels, either print or digital. An experiment carried out in this way would allow researchers to compare the differences in perception forming and trust building without having to deal with pre-existing perceptions and levels of trust, which necessarily influence the results. Moreover, it would allow to firmly establish whether SNS sites contribute differently than other channels in forming the audience's trust in a news organization.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Respondents' profiles

Name/Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Higher education	Length of *Groene* reading
Respondent 1	70	Male	Yes	2 years
Respondent 2	36	Female	Yes	24 years (2nd gen)
Respondent 3	67	Male	Yes	2 years
Respondent 4	60	Female	Yes	10 years
Respondent 5	72	Male	Yes	4 years (2nd gen)
Respondent 6	70	Female	Yes	2-3 years
Respondent 7	54	Male	Yes	10+ years
Respondent 8	19	Male	-	2 years
Respondent 9	50	Male	Yes	30 years
Respondent 10	57	Female	Yes	20+ years (2nd gen)

Appendix B

Figure B1. Open/axial coding

Name	Grounded	Density	Groups	Created by	Modified by
Providing relevant stories	18	0	[Selectivity of topics]	Axel	Axel
Providing context	17	0	[Selectivity of facts]	Axel	Axel
Accuracy of depictions	16	0	[Accuracy of depictions]	Axel	Axel
News consumption modes	12	0	[Motivations for news consumption]	Axel	Axel
Journalistic assessment	12	0	[Journalistic assessment]	Axel	Axel
Being transparent	12	0	[Accuracy of depictions]	Axel	Axel
SNS use	11	0	[SNS motivations]	Axel	Axel
Trusting news organizations one follows	10	0	[Discriminators of trust]	Axel	Axel
History	10	0	[Drivers of trust]	Axel	Axel
Length of groene reading	9	0	[Perception of news groene]	Axel	Axel
Not trusting the news in general	9	0	[Perceptions of trust]	Axel	Axel
Trusting background news more than breaking news	9	0	[Discriminators of trust]	Axel	Axel
Trusting periodicals more than dailies	9	0	[Discriminators of trust]	Axel	Axel
Believing the sources	8	0	[Drivers of trust]	Axel	Axel
Critical, open-minded, independent, in-depth	8	0	[Perception of news groene]	Axel	Axel
Details SNS use	8	0	[SNS motivations]	Axel	Axel
Digital, written news as main source	8	0	[Motivations for news consumption]	Axel	Axel
Selectivity of facts	8	0	[Selectivity of facts]	Axel	Axel
Trusting De Groene	8	0	[Perceptions of trust]	Axel	Axel
Changing perception of news organizations	7	0	[Impact on journalism]	Axel	Axel
Using SNS as "your own telex"	7	0	[SNS motivations]	Axel	Axel
Limited engagement	7	0	[Groene strategy]	Axel	Axel
Using SNS as advertisement	7	0	[Groene strategy]	Axel	Axel
Presenting new perspectives	7	0	[Journalistic assessment]	Axel	Axel
Showing background research	7	0	[Accuracy of depictions]	Axel	Axel
Conflicts of interest impacting coverage	7	0	[Perception of news issues]	Axel	Axel
Running corrections becoming harder	6	0	[Impact on journalism]	Axel	Axel

Table B1. Selective coding

Topic	Themes	Sub-themes
The relationship with the news	Commercialization of the news negatively affects quality	- Worrying about conflicts of interest - Rising of sensational news presentation - Losing the societal function of the news - Blurring the lines between fact and opinion
	Perception of the news is negative, brand loyalty is high	- News perception and the *Groene* - The motivations for reading the *Groene* reflect the characteristics of the magazine

Selective trust	Trust drives news selectivity	• Independence and honesty • Believing the (good) sources • Confirmative coverage • Establishing and maintaining a background of trust • Knowledge increases critical attitude
	Trust is multifaceted	• Presenting a consistently interesting news selection • Providing context and background • Reporting verifiable facts and being accountable • Offering new perspectives
Social Networking Sites	Dangers of SNS for news	• Driving and spreading of fake news • Increasing the difficulty of running corrections • Speeding up the news cycle
	De Groene's strategy: informative but not engaging	• Using SNS as advertisement • Lacking engagement • Lacking exposure
	De Groene's strategy: changing perception but not trust	• Rejuvenating the brand and boosting historical dimension • Not changing trust levels

Appendix C

In this appendix it is possible to see the topic list used during the course of the interview. Point 16. is indicated as extra in that not all questions in that section were asked. Rather, only the ones regarding dimensions of trust which did no emerge organically during the interview.

1. Demographic questions: name, age, profession, education level
2. News use (non-social): which news do you consult in various channels, how often, for how long
3. How would you define trust?
4. What makes a news organization trustworthy?
5. General assessment of the news: do you trust the news?
6. Do you trust certain organization more than others? How so?
7. How long have you been reading the Groene?
8. Why did you start reading the Groene?
9. If you had to describe to me what De Groene Amsterdammer is, what would you say?
10. Do you find the Groene to be trustworthy? What makes it so?
11. Social media: which SNS do you use? How often in a day? For how long? What for?
12. Social media news: which news organizations do you follow on social media? On which SNS?
13. How often do you access news through social media?
14. How often do you encounter and/or interact with De Groene's SNS accounts?
15. De Groene, SNS and perception
    a. If you had to evaluate how De Groene utilizes social media, what would you say?
    b. Has your image of De Groene changed in any way since they started focusing more on social media? If yes, how so?
    c. If yes to the question above, has the same happened also for other news organizations? Which, how, why?
16. EXTRA - De Groene and trust:
    a. Selectivity of topics
        i. Sample question: Do you feel like De Groene focuses on topics that are relevant/important/necessary to you?
    b. Selectivity of facts

      i. Sample question: When De Groene covers a story, do you think that they present all the relevant facts? Is the context provided for the story fair and relevant?

c. Accuracy of depictions

      i. Sample question: To what extent are the articles in De Groene factually correct? If a mistake is made, do you think the magazine acts promptly and appropriately in running a correction?

d. Journalistic assessment

      i. Sample question: Do articles on De Groene add relevant information and perspectives on the discussion surrounding the topics they tackle?