Dutch journalism in the (dis)information society
How journalists in the Netherlands perceive their profession
in times of uncertainty and doubt

Student Name: Johan Boere
Student Number: 509918

Supervisor: Dr. Jason Pridmore

Master Media Studies - Media & Business
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis
June 2020

ABSTRACT

The (dis)information society proves to be a challenging time for professional journalism. Information, misinformation, and disinformation are being spread rapidly in society, leaving many audiences to wonder if the information they consume is reliable. Meanwhile, journalists face increased scepticism from a polarised public debate in which their legitimacy is being tested. As society is faced with uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic This research aimed to answer the question: *How do journalists in the Netherlands perceive the effects of the (dis)information society?* A total of eleven interviews were conducted with journalists active or recently active within Dutch journalism. Following the grounded theory approach for the analysis of these interviews, a total of four overarching themes have been found.

First, journalists *emphasize their responsibility to society* as a strategy to prove their legitimacy and relevance. The traditional role of journalism as a watchdog in society also remains the dominant perception across journalists in the Netherlands. However, journalists also express concerns over disinformation within society as it seems to utilize societal issues to remain relevant. Efforts by journalists to tackle disinformation are not able to reach people who are especially susceptible to disinformation. Second, journalists *perceive the democratisation and politicisation of the news as the primary disruptions* in society that affect how they operate. The distinction between professional journalism and citizen journalism has been ambiguous, which is perceived as a threat to the credibility of professional journalism. Furthermore, as politicians become news producers, it has been increasingly challenging to factcheck without journalists being publicly harassed for being politically motivated. Third, *journalists increasingly communicate transparency* through disclosure of their methodology and editorial considerations. They integrate this transparency within regular reporting or create a new dedicated content category. And last, journalists navigate a dilemma endemic to audience interaction. They feel vulnerable to harassment through online interaction, but also experience the positive opportunities that thoughtful audience interaction offers in terms of increased transparency and constructive dialogue. This research shares many insights with research conducted in other countries. Furthermore, the findings of this research present various implications for existing theory on the (dis)information society and implications for other journalists, institutions, businesses, politicians, and governments. Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations are given to encourage future research.

KEYWORDS: (dis)information society, disinformation, media criticism, transparency in journalism, online audience interaction

Table of contents

1. Introduction

"The spread of disinformation to undermine and destabilize the democratic legal order is a real threat. This threat often manifests itself online" (Ollongren, 2018, p. 2).

1.1 Disinformation in contemporary society

In 2018, Minster of the Interior, Kasja Ollongren informed the Dutch parliament on the threat of disinformation in the Netherlands (Ollongren, 2018). The report followed an incident earlier that year in which four Dutch news outlets were marked for spreading disinformation by the European organisation EUvsDisinfo, which is responsible for detecting pro-Kremlin disinformation (Raalte, 2018). The media outlets decided to file a lawsuit. EUvsDisinfo removed the Dutch articles from its archive not short thereafter (Wijngaarden, 2018). The encounter exemplifies the complexity and ambiguity surrounding disinformation in our contemporary society. States are now actively involved in disinformation campaigns in foreign countries (Zannettou et al., 2019). Meanwhile, social media facilitated the spread of information and disinformation in society. This creates an information ecosystem in which the legitimacy of any form of information can be questioned (Talwar, Dhir, Kaur, Zafar, & Alrasheedy, 2019). Minister Ollongren later wrote that not just the government but several stakeholders within society would be needed to combat disinformation (Ollongren, 2019). These stakeholders are all involved in providing information to the public, such as journalists, lawmakers, governmental organisations, academics, media outlets and social networking companies. However, journalists have traditionally been the main source of news for many people in society. As such, they are considered as a key element for a democratic constitutional state. People depend upon independent news media to know what is happening in the world, how public figures manage events, and how these events and decisions affect their personal lives (Fallis & Mathiesen, 2019).

As of 2019, 8 out of 10 people in the Netherlands consume news daily (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2019). Nonetheless, the places where we get our news from have changed over the years. With the information society, our opportunities to access, consume and share information have expanded rapidly (Webster, 2014). Nowadays we combine news from traditional media on print, tv and radio. Moreover, we also consume news on online media such as social media, websites, blogs, and nowadays even podcasts (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2020). This diverse media landscape offers new ways to reach audiences, disseminate news and to give a voice to people that would not be able to find one within traditional news media. However, as events over the last few years have now shown, new media inherently also have a downside. They have allowed individuals, groups, and organisations alike to spread disinformation rapidly seemingly without any oversight (Reilly, 2018).

The proliferation of disinformation in society should not be considered as a new phenomenon. Instead, the sheer scope and real-life ramifications have increased dramatically. As such, disinformation has now entered the mainstream public debate. An often-cited instance related to the matter is the spread of fake news in the months leading up to, during, and after the US presidential election in 2016. Throughout this period, content containing false statements or entirely fabricated information was shared on social media. This content attempted to change voters' perceptions, cause chaos in the news cycle, and force public figures and businesses to act. Research showed that fake news content during the election outperformed genuine news content on social media (Silverman, 2016). A study on similar content in the Netherlands showed similar results. Fake news content on Facebook would attract significantly more interactions from users than news content from mainstream media (Burger, Kanhai, Pleijter, & Verberne, 2019). This also signifies that disinformation such as fake news should not be considered as solely an American phenomenon. In early 2017 several Dutch politicians had already posted or shared fake news that supported their political agenda (Bouma, 2017). Two years later, in 2019, new reports showed an increase in the number of politicians sharing disinformation online. This included false accounts of events, hoaxes, and altered visuals (Bouma, 2019; Henley, 2020; Misérus & Van Der Noorda, 2017). This is just another example of disinformation being utilized in our contemporary society.

1.2 Polarisation entering the media landscape

Politics and the spread of information have a long history. In the Netherlands political parties and the outlets within the Dutch media landscape were heavily related. Each party was associated with a specific outlet such as a public broadcaster or newspaper. This is known as the system of pillarization. But these relations slowly dissipated over time in favour of a more independent and critical style of journalism. This coincided with the appearance of commercial news media and changing media consumption in society (Brants & Praag, 2006). Since the start of the new millennium however, researchers have reported an increase in polarisation within Dutch politics as well as society (Oosterwaal & Torenvlied, 2010). This directly affects the media landscape. For example, in the US, polarisation has manifested itself in an increasingly bigger divide between the two major political parties (Bump, 2017). This, in turn, has coincided with the rise of hyper-partisan news media and populism within society (Rae, 2020). For example, the current president of the United States has routinely criticized journalists by calling their reports 'fake news', and framed media outlets as 'dishonest', 'corrupt', or even 'the enemy of the people' to discredit critical reporting on his administration (Flegenheimer & Grynbaum, 2018; Siddiqui, 2018; Tandoc, Jenkins, & Craft, 2019).

This kind of media critique has also entered the Dutch media landscape and has had effects on the freedom of the press in the Netherlands. In 2020, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), released

its annual press freedom index which ranks 180 countries based on press freedom. The Netherlands now ranks the fifth best country when it comes to press freedom. However, two years prior, the Netherlands was still in third. The RSF contributes the drop partially to an increase of political media critique that aims to delegitimize professional reporting (Schipper, 2020). An example is the steady stream of comments made by a right-wing populist politician in Dutch politics. This prompted a large number of Dutch academics to send a signed letter, urging him to stop criticizing universities, journalists and citizens that do not align with political views of the party (Van Leeuwen, 2019). Another instance that same year involved a journalist being verbally intimated by a politician as the journalist attended a local party gathering in Utrecht (Aalberts, 2019).

Other groups within the Netherlands have also voiced criticism towards Dutch news media. Some protesters in the Netherlands have started to use the term 'fake news' to criticize the Dutch public news broadcaster NOS, even though evidence for these accusations remains absent (Van den Berg, 2020). Furthermore, Dutch journalist Arnold Karskens has critiqued the Dutch national news broadcaster NOS for discrimination, alliance with the ruling government, and a lack of objectivity (Moszkowicz, 2019). The journalist is also one of the people behind the new public broadcaster Ongehoord Nederland, also known as ON!, which aims to offer an alternative voice against the established Dutch public broadcasters. The new broadcaster has been supported by two Dutch right-wing political parties (Tienhooven, 2019). Another illustration of how politics and polarised views are entering the media landscape.

1.3 Uncertainty in society due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Disinformation and polarisation are just two factors that are now present in our society. In March 2020, the Netherlands enacted a national lockdown to limit the spread of COVID-19. Several studies are currently conducted to understand the effects of the national lockdown (Smaling, 2020). However, these measures have brought uncertainty within society (Tempelman, 2020). This uncertainty has also given a sudden influx in disinformation on social media such as WhatsApp and Facebook (Delcker, Wanat, & Scott, 2020; Rajan, 2020). Supposed cures, false accounts and conspiracy theories about the virus continue to spread in many countries across the globe. In the Netherlands, at least 160 unique tweets were shared that included links to articles that were false or that can be marked as disinformation. Entire websites were devoted to sharing disinformation that would question the legitimacy of the governmental decisions and information shared by official institutions (Vermanen & Van Bree, 2020). Meanwhile, social media companies are rapidly taking measures to combat the spread of disinformation, while also helping their users find official information on the virus from local authorities and the World Health Organization (Hern, 2020; Marr, 2020).

Similarly, journalists are trying to combat disinformation with debunks, factchecks, and tutorials on how to detect fake news (Bakker, 2020a). This is especially relevant as the uncertainty within society due to the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a substantial increase in people looking for news from professional journalism. Research showed that news outlets in the Netherlands have all experienced increased traffic to their websites as well as more people watching tv news. This trend is not limited to the large Dutch outlets such as NOS, NU.nl, AD, Telegraaf and RTL Nieuws, but also smaller local and regional news outlets (Pasveer, 2020). These instances illustrate how the changes in society have presented new challenges and opportunities for journalists in the Netherlands.

1.4 Research question

As societal changes rapidly affect the information and disinformation reaching the public, several past and present studies try to make sense of the extent of these effects. Since the widespread adoption of the term 'fake news', a considerable amount of research is dedicated to finding solutions to detect and halt the spread of fake news and disinformation (Ciampaglia, 2018; Conroy, Rubin, & Chen, 2015; Haigh, Haigh, & Kozak, 2018; Kim, Moravec, & Dennis, 2019). Only a few researchers have studied these effects from a journalistic perspective (Brandtzaeg, Følstad, & Domínguez, 2018; Koliska & Assmann, 2019). As our contemporary society is faced with disinformation and uncertainty, the following research question has been formulated: *How do journalists in the Netherlands perceive the effects of the (dis)information society?* To answer the research question, three additional sub-questions were formulated:

- SUB-RQ1; How do Dutch journalists perceive their role in the (dis)information society?
- SUB-RQ2; How do Dutch journalists describe their reporting in the (dis)information society?
- SUB-RQ3; How do Dutch journalists experience interaction with their audience in the (dis)information society?

This research aims to explore and understand how the (dis)information society has affected Dutch journalists. The main concepts within this research are the (dis)information society, disinformation, the societal role of journalism, news reporting and audience interaction. These concepts are further discussed in the theoretical framework.

1.5 Societal relevance

The widespread emergence of disinformation in our society has implications for journalism. Traditionally, journalists report independently on events in society and hold those in power accountable (Wolfgang, Vos, & Kelling, 2019). Journalism has been historically seen as the watchdog of society, keeping the public informed and reporting on the truth. This has made it one of the pivotal institutions within society. Meanwhile, disinformation does not abide by commonly accepted

journalistic standards and ethical considerations. As it presents itself as genuine, some within society end up believing disinformation to be truthful. This creates uncertainty and doubts within society that can affect established and genuine reporting. Disinformation delegitimizes professional journalism, questioning their independence and honesty, while also discrediting professional reporting (Tarran, 2019). This leaves room for uncertainty in the public discourse and limits professional journalism in performing its pivotal role within society. In 2019, about 53 percent of people in the Netherlands believe that the news is to be trusted. But when compared to earlier years there seems to be a slight decrease in trust. Furthermore, people tend to have more trust in news media that they use, compared to news media that they do not use (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2019). This has potential detrimental implications when people consider disinformation as truthful. To grasp the full extent of trust in journalism, we should look beyond the concept of news and again considering journalism as an institution. Research showed that in 2019, 36,1 percent of people in the Netherlands trust the press, a slight increase compared to earlier years. However, trust in large corporations (37,5%), banks (41,5%), parliament (40,0%), and fellow citizens (61,8), is significantly higher than established journalism (CBS, 2019). Therefore, as disinformation can affect public trust in journalism, it is important to explore how journalists perceive their role in society and how they consider this when performing their profession. Insight into these perceptions and actions might be beneficial to current and future journalists to work on their public trust. Furthermore, understanding how journalism as an institution is affected by the disinformation society is imperative for taking the necessary actions to ensure its continuity.

The spread of disinformation can have real-life consequences for society. Fake news connecting the spread of COVID-19 and 5G cellular technology could be related to several mobile masts being set on fire (Vincent, 2020). The UK experienced similar incidents in the weeks before the events in the Netherlands (Van den Dikkenberg, 2020). Although no scientific proof has been found that would link the two, the conspiracy gained significant traction on social media leading up to the incidents (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). As these mobile masts are part of the critical infrastructure to reach emergency services, the Dutch National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Safety (NCTV) issued a statement expressing its concerns (NCTV, 2020). Journalists were quick to respond with articles debunking the conspiracy theory while also shedding light on those that believe in it (Bakker, 2020b).

Disinformation can also affect small businesses and organisations, as exemplified by recent events in the Netherlands. For instance, a fake news post shared on several social media platforms mentioned a Chinese restaurant based in Rotterdam supposedly had several employees testing positive for the virus (Bakker, 2020a). Similar incidents included alleged virus outbreaks at Dutch high schools, a university, and hospitals. Although the allegations were later debunked by the press, the

impact of such disinformation can be detrimental for businesses that are not used to deal with it. In the past, larger businesses such as New Balance and PepsiCo were critique based on disinformation about the brands on social media (Talwar et al., 2019). Other businesses including Starbucks, Coca-Cola, Costco, and Microsoft, had to actively communicate statements debunking disinformation about their brands (Ferraro & Chipman, 2019). All these incidents illustrate the importance of journalism to inform the public in times where disinformation spreads rapidly. Insight into the reasoning journalists use for reporting and how they report on such widespread disinformation might be beneficial of others within journalism.

Lastly, we should consider the economic aspects of journalism. Over the last decade, journalism has seen a decrease in revenue from traditional paying audiences. As social media and online news consumption gained traction, traditional advertising revenue decreased while new revenue from online activities was limited. This resulted in established news outlets having trouble to make a profit, forcing lay-offs, and relying more on freelance journalists (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Kivits, 2016). Some news outlets have vanished over the years, others have now been consolidated into larger media companies such as DPG Media and Mediahuis. These companies own a vast number of local, regional, and national news media brands in the Netherlands (Paapst & Mulder, 2016). Now more than ever, journalism is dependent on other revenue streams such as adverts and premium articles that are only available to paying subscribers. These vital business models are now under threat in the disinformation society. Research finds that fake news content often outperforms genuine news content on social media (Silverman, 2016). Aside from ideological motivations, financial incentives are often related to the spread of disinformation (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019). Using false and emotionalist headers to get audiences to view websites and videos that create revenue for the creators of fake news content through advertisements. This research describes how journalists feel about their business models and revenue streams being affected by the disinformation society.

1.6 Scientific relevance

There has been a considerable increase in research on disinformation, fake news, and media critique in relation to journalism. For instance, Hanusch and Vos (2019) showed that new research on fake news is professionalizing and including diverse perspectives from different countries. However, current literature primarily focuses on fake news, disinformation, and the media landscape in the US. Especially the presence of fake news during the 2016 US presidential election and the use of the term by the current president have been well documented by researchers over the last five years. The recent influx of disinformation concerning COVID-19 has illustrated the need for additional research that sheds light on disinformation outside the US. Currently, several studies are conducted in Europe.

A recent study in the Netherlands researched the current spread of disinformation online (Burger et al., 2019). As journalists have shown to be key in debunking disinformation and keeping the public informed, their perspective on the matter should be considered as an important segment of the extensive academic discourse needed to properly understand and combat the spread of disinformation in our society.

However, current studies still leave a gap in the available literature. Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) argue in their research agenda on fake news that still too little is known about the actual ramifications of the use of the term fake news in media critique. They continue to support their argument by citing that previous studies have used content analyses to understand the responses of journalists rather than directly involving journalists within their research. Similarly, a few years earlier Hanusch (2015) called for additional research on forces driving change in journalism. The widespread emergence of fake news and other disinformation could be considered as such a force. Moreover, combined with the uncertainty within society and the polarisation within media critique, these forces relate to the media landscape that journalists work in.

Research in the last decade in which journalists were directly involved only encompassed specific elements of the disinformation society. For instance, Koliska and Assmann (2019) conducted a study on the term 'Lügenpresse' (translated Lying press) which is being used as media critique. They interviewed editors at German news outlets about their perceptions, evaluations, and responses. Although their findings are relevant for this study, the research solely focused on media critique and thus did not go into the implications of the spread of disinformation. Similarly relevant is a study by Martin (2017) which looked at the information practices of Australian journalists in the 21st century. Moreover, Schapals (2018) interviewed a total of eleven journalists from the UK and Australia about how journalists should approach the spread of fake news online. This research aims to iterate upon their findings by considering all features of the disinformation society. Thus, the results of this research that focuses on the Dutch media landscape can still be relevant for the international academic discourse on disinformation.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter explores current academic literature on the (dis)information society and the role of journalism within society. Understanding the democratisation of media exposes an important driver of change in society and the media landscape journalists must navigate. To understand this better, the definitions related to disinformation within the public domain are explored. This also illustrates once more the ambiguity that accompanies mainstream terms such as misinformation, disinformation, and fake news. This chapter also explores the guiding principles that professional journalism is based upon and how audience interaction is used by journalists.

2.1 Journalism and society

2.1.1 Traditional views on the information society

Over the last decades, many scholars have argued that we now live in the information society: that is, that information is readily available, and that information is a driving feature of modern society. Although the information society is commonly accepted within the academic discourse, an overarching understanding of its exact features has been debated over the last decades. This can be partially contributed to the various approaches compliant with different academic fields (Webster, 2002). Webster (2014) identified five different criteria that can be derived from definitions previously proposed by other scholars. These criteria are technical, economical, occupational, spatial, and cultural. These criteria should be considered as drivers of change in our society. For instance, in the case of the technical criteria, the advancements in information and communication technologies that have happened in the last fifty years have undoubtedly changed society. Similarly, other scholars who connect the information society to the economic criteria argue that information itself has overtaken other industries to such a degree that our economy is partially based on information activities. Moreover, the criteria occupational relates to this notion of economic information activities. Instead of physical labour, more and more jobs have become based upon concepts related to information such as communication, knowledge, and creativity. As for the spatial criterium, the advent of unrestricted and international information networks is an important element in connecting people in our contemporary society. Lastly, the criteria culture refers to the vast amount of information available as well as the ability to communicate identity and culture through new means of communication (Webster, 2014).

An additional perspective is proposed by Webster (2014) which helps us understand how the certain characteristics of information affect society. He argued that information is not singular but instead can have various meanings. As such, the character of information is a sixth criterion that influences society as Webster argues that *"theoretical knowledge/information is at the core of how*

conduct ourselves these days" (2014, p. 11). In this sense disinformation can be considered as one of the various meanings that information can take. These criteria signify the various influences of information on our contemporary society, which is useful in understanding the past and present societal context in which journalists operate.

2.1.2 The democratisation of media

As mentioned in the previous section, information is at the core of our daily lives in the information society. Understanding the origins of the widespread availability of information is thus advantageous as it presents a framework for the societal role of journalists. Traditionally information dissemination through media is bestowed upon a select group of people that hold a certain amount of power within society (Carpentier, Dahlgren, & Pasquali, 2013). However, throughout the last centuries, technological advancements have allowed for the creation of new forms of media that are accessible to an increasingly larger portion of society. The increased access of the public to create and spread information is often referred to as the democratisation of media (Girard et al., 2003). For instance, the printing press allowed for books and other print media to become available on a scale that was unheard of previously. This technological advancement eventually enabled the conception of newspapers, which allowed more and more people to participate in the creation and spread of information. Similarly, after new inventions such as the radio and television, commercial and alternative news media were established in the '60s, which further enabled people to disseminate information (Carpentier et al., 2013).

The next milestone in the democratisation of media is the arrival of the internet to the masses. This new technology gave ordinary individuals, who were not part of any organized media structure, the means to create and spread their content. This is now commonly referred to as user-generated content (Carpentier et al., 2013). Concerning journalism, this increased media democratisation allowed for alternative citizen journalism, which uses online tools such as blogs and social media reach their audiences. This has also been referred to as participatory journalism as citizens that were previously only considered as audiences became news producers themselves (Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & de Zúñiga, 2010). Thus, the democratisation of media has changed the media landscape in which journalists operate. For one, new entries in the media landscape are now competing with professional news outlets that need to maximize profit to ensure their survival (Kaul, 2012). This is a potential threat to the integrity of the journalistic institution as journalists feel forced to choose profit over their responsibility to the public. This is aided by the sheer amount of information that the audiences now have access to. They are free to choose which information to consume, whether that is produced by a professional journalist or a citizen journalist. This leads to another issue in which the public can be manipulated as they choose to consume content which only

supports their existing prejudices (Pew Research Center, 2005). This should be considered as a genuine concern as research shows that fake news is shared significantly faster on social media compared to real news (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). In this research, it thus interesting to understand how journalists experience the influences of the democratisation of the media.

2.1.3 The role of journalism in society

Although the democratisation of media has drastically altered the media landscape, journalism is still an important provider of information to the public. Journalism today can be defined as *"the business or practice of producing and disseminating information about contemporary affairs of general public interest and importance"* (Schudson, 2003, as cited in Josephi, 2016, p. 15). This perspective on journalism considers both citizens and organisation as potential participants in providing information on events within society. This relates to the understanding that the dissemination of information is no longer restricted to a singular party within society following the democratisation of media. The inclusion of citizens in this perspective differs from the traditional view on the role of journalism in society. In a time before the online media, journalists were perceived as the watchdogs of society who would speak truth to those in power on behalf of the people (Josephi, 2016). This related to the ability of journalists to act as gatekeepers for the information that reached the public. Furthermore, from this traditional perspective, journalists were able to influence the topics in the news through agenda-setting. As such, journalism was considered an independent institution within society that acted and reports on topics that were of interest to the people. This view is still widely accepted by many journalists and continues to drive the practices of journalists today (Goode, 2009).

However, citizen journalism has become a serious provider of information in our society but does not abide by formal journalistic standards (Ahva, 2017). This directly challenges the traditional perspective as established journalism is not the sole supplier of information. Additionally, with disinformation from various sources entering the media landscape, journalists have expressed their concerns whether this traditional perspective is still viable (Schapals, 2018). Waisbord (2018) acknowledged this issue and argued that the role of journalism should be reconsidered as the meaning of news and truth are diminished in society. A sign of this issue is the use of the term 'fake news' by politicians, media critics and the public alike to discredit established journalism. Thus, the economic, political, and societal pressure that journalists face within society threatens the traditional views that for long have legitimized the reports of journalists and their practices (G. Berger, 2018). These differing views on the role of journalism in society present a tension that journalists will have to cope with while making their reports.

2.1.4 Shift toward the (dis)information society

There have been several terms utilized in the past decade to describe the current state of the information society. For instance, 'post-truth' an 'post-fact' have been used signify the notion that objective facts are subject to scepticism. Instead, information that correlates with emotions and existing beliefs is preferred over factual truths (Martin, 2017). Concepts such as 'alternative facts' and 'fake news' are examples of how the scepticism towards the meaning of truth has manifested in society (Himma-Kadakas, 2017). As people are subjected to a vast amount of information it has become challenging to distinguish fact from fiction. Marshall (2017) argues that the occurrence of disinformation in society is a societal characteristic that should be expected in the information society. In all stages of information creation and dissemination, the information will inherently produce a counterpart in the form of disinformation (Pertierra, 2019). From this perspective, referring to the current state of society as the '(dis)information society' is more appropriate as it signify the ambiguity that related to the nature of information.

Various factors contribute to the (dis)information society. For example, the multitude of available information continuously makes it harder to differentiate between information, disinformation, and anything in between. To cope with this uncertainty, people are more inclined to favour information that reinforces existing beliefs rather than being factually accurate. As a result, people are more sceptical towards information that does not correlate with their existing beliefs. Moreover, institutions such as governmental organisations as well as professional journalism are met with distrust. The lack of trust then poses a substantial threat to an informed public which is detrimental to the functioning of a democratic society (Marshall, 2017).

Dubious motives that can be related the production and dissemination of information are another factor contributing to the (dis)information society. Economical en political incentives encourage the utilization of disinformation for personal gains (Marshall, 2017). Meanwhile, consequences for the use of disinformation have been limited as illustrated by the use of political figures and states over the last few years (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Baker & Karni, 2020; Bouma, 2017). These insights into the (dis)information society shed light on the specific factors in society that might affect the perception of journalist in the Netherlands.

2.2 Disinformation versus information

2.2.1 Differentiating between misinformation, disinformation and malinformation

As mentioned, the (dis)information society increasingly poses challenges in differentiating between fact and fiction. Moreover, even researchers have struggled with outlining clear boundaries as to what constitutes as disinformation or information. Based on previous research, Wardle and

Derakshan (2017) proposed an information disorder framework in which differentiation is made based on the truthfulness of the content and whether the creators had harmful intentions with the content. Based on these two criteria is possible to recognize clear distinct differences between disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation. This information disorder framework is useful in understanding the kinds of disinformation that journalists might encounter while working in the (dis)information society.

Disinformation is *"information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organization or country"* (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 20). Disinformation can manifest in various forms. First, the context in which the information is presented is false. In this case, the information is presented as genuine information. However, it mimics certain aspects of genuine information to seem legitimate. Aspects include such elements as a journalistic format or a specific renowned brand. Furthermore, disinformation can also be altered content such as an altered photo or video. Lastly, disinformation can be a complete fabrication. In this case, the content is completely made up and has no correspondence with factual reality (Wardle, 2019).

Meanwhile, misinformation should be considered as *"information that is false, but not deliberately created with the intention of causing harm"* (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 20). Misinformation can either contain a false connection, can be misleading or inaccuracies. The apparent distinction between the two theoretical concepts is the intention of the creators of the information. Those who spread disinformation are driven by economic or political incentives, or even just to cause chaos in society. Meanwhile, those that spread misinformation are not aware of the falsehoods or misleading nature of the information. Instead, they are driven by sociological incentives, for example sharing content that reinforces their beliefs. As such, when an individual unknowingly shares disinformation, it becomes misinformation (Wardle, 2019).

Lastly, there is malinformation. This can be defined as *"information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on person, organization or country"* (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 20). It shares the incentives of its creators with disinformation. However, malinformation is based upon actual genuine information. This would be for example leaks of confidential documents or correspondence. Furthermore, Wardle and Derakshan (2017) included types of harassment as well as hate speech within this definition. They argue that these are often based upon real information, for example, race, which is then used in a harmful way.

2.2.2 Definitional ambiguity of fake news

When it comes to disinformation is society, the term 'fake news' has become commonly used in the public debate (Albright, 2017). However, several researchers have argued that the typology of

fake news is problematic. Researchers have different opinions on why, where and whether the term should be used (Burger et al., 2019; Fallis & Mathiesen, 2019; Reilly, 2018). For instance, a common understanding of the precise meaning of fake news is absent within academic discourse. As such, a range of definitions that have been utilized in previous studies that do not provide proper clarification (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018). The cause of this discrepancy originates in the initial introduction of the term in the public discourse. Fake news has previously been linked to satirical late-night television shows such as The Daily Show (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019). However, it was a tweet in 2014 from BuzzFeed News journalist, Craig Silverman, that coined the term into the mainstream. Silverman used the term to refer to the false information in an article and the economic incentive of the creators that made it. Silverman (2017) later explained how the term had been weaponized against the press as the president of the United States used the term 'fake news' to delegitimize reporting by CNN and BuzzFeed News. The term has since been used by other politicians, public figures, and protesters to discredit the work of journalists (Flegenheimer & Grynbaum, 2018). These instances illustrate the ambiguity of the term 'fake news' as well as the politicized meaning it has gotten in public discourse. Some researchers have suggested discontinuing its use altogether (Habgood-Coote, 2019). For example, a recent study by Burger et al (2019) chose to use the term junk news instead. It is useful to understand the ambiguity related to the term as it allows for the proper operationalisation of disinformation and its related concepts within this research.

Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) argued that the discontinuation of the term 'fake news' is not feasible. Instead, they suggest clarifying the term by considering fake news as a two-dimensional phenomenon. This approach also resembles the experiences of journalist Craig Silverman more closely. The first dimension is the fake news genre. This is defined as *"the deliberate creation of pseudo journalistic disinformation"* (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019, p. 98). The inclusion of disinformation exemplifies the understanding that fake news is intentionally false. This is similar to the definition of disinformation has been discussed earlier. Furthermore, by mentioning pseudo journalistic, this definition can classify fake news within the concept of disinformation. Fake news pretends to be news by utilizing elements that are commonly found in professional reporting. Content of the fake news genre is typically characterised by a low level of facticity, presentation of the content in a journalistic format, and the intention by the creators of the content to deceive audiences. A low level in facticity implies that content within the fake news genre contains a certain amount of false information. Furthermore, by imitating a journalistic format, audiences are given the impression that the fake news genre content is legitimate. Lastly, and identical to disinformation, fake news is intended to deceive audiences, which is motivated by a political, ideological, or

economic incentive (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019). This approach to fake news as a genre allows us to exclude other forms of media that were previously associated with the term.

Moreover, the second dimension of the fake news label allows us to distance the term from actual information. Instead, the fake news label is defined *as "the instrumentalization of the term to delegitimize news media"* (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019, p. 98). It represents the use of the term fake news to discredit news reporting and harass journalists. The use of the term allows for the attribution of the negative characteristics associated with the fake news genre to genuine and truthful reporting. Furthermore, this allows those that use the fake news label to suggest that news media are biased and actively mislead audiences with their reporting (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019). We must acknowledge that other terms share similarities with the fake news label and thus should be considered in this research. These terms include 'the enemy of the people', 'Lügenpresse' and the words 'dishonest', 'lying' or 'corrupt' in relation to the press (Flegenheimer & Grynbaum, 2018; Koliska & Assmann, 2019).

2.3 Aspects of news reporting

A considerable difference between information from journalists compared to citizen journalism or disinformation is the adherence of professional journalists to specific principles. Different cultures and societal compositions can affect which principles are more prevalent over others (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). However, principles from professional journalists are based on similar concepts that outlined ethical and accountable journalism. Using these principles journalists aim to ensure clarity in reporting and increase trust towards official journalism (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). These principles are important for this research as a previous study has shown that journalists enhance journalistic values and practices to tackle criticism. Moreover, journalists attempted to establish trust and maintain legitimacy by actively reporting on these principles (Koliska & Assmann, 2019). Thus, it is useful to understand how the journalistic principles are translated into actions within the reporting of journalists in the Netherlands.

2.3.1 Accuracy

Journalists should ensure that the facts they report are accurate as they cannot always ensure to report the truth (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). This leads directly to the inherent discussion on what exactly constitutes truth, which also leaves a gap for alternative facts and truths to enter the public discourse. Waisbord describes truth *as "pragmatically shaped as contracts of readership and belief between certain news stories/information and certain publics"* (Waisbord, 2018, p. 1872). As such, truth itself must be regarded as a social construct which is bound to change with societal beliefs and the relations between audiences and journalists. This also explains why trust in specific

news media is different among groups within society. Instead of absolute truth, we need to consider that journalists seek a journalistic truth that is based on accuracy. This leads to the practice of verification which signifies the actions taken by journalists to cross-check information with various sources to ensure accuracy. In this context, accuracy implies that reporting reflects reality, thus alteration of that reality is not permitted in reporting (Thomson Reuters, 2008). This principle creates a challenge for (beat) journalists that are required to report on events unfolding in real-time. Especially in the (dis)information society where the accuracy of online sources should be critically examined during verification.

2.3.2 Independence

Journalists should be independent, meaning that their actions are not shaped by conflicts of interests be they formal or informal (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). This also means that journalists should be critical and remain open to different perspectives within the public discourse. Furthermore, independence is often related to the traditional role of journalism of speaking truth to power. Journalists have the obligation to report in the interest of the public, reporting on both positive and negative events that shape our social reality (American Press Institute, 2020). Journalists' independence has been criticized by those that do not agree with reporting. Several researchers have found perceived news media bias to be related to the political ideologies of the audience. In cases of republican or right-wing audiences, they perceived the mainstream media as being liberally biased against their personal beliefs (Eveland & Shah, 2003). In the last few years, politicians such as the president of the United States have accused news media of siding with their political opponents. This illustrates how this core principle is now being politicized (Baker & Karni, 2020).

2.3.3 Fairness

As for the principle of fairness within journalism, this implies that journalists must be open-minded and perspicacious in all stages of reporting. Sifting through different opinions and perspectives, weighing these responsibly when disseminating information for the public interest (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). The principle of fairness is closely related to the concept of justice. In a journalistic context, this materializes as the equal treatment of perspectives within reporting. By adding sufficient context and displaying the diverse approaches to events in society, journalists can strengthen public trust in their reporting. Furthermore, fairness must be considered in relation to balance and impartiality (Altmeppen, Arnold, & Kössler, 2012). Both concepts have been directly associated with fairness and in some cases have been a substitute when outlining journalistic guidelines. However, impartiality has been perceived as having a stronger connection to the idea of objectivity. Because of this reason, the term has been shunned by some, as objectivity is a problematic concept (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). Journalists are required to be critical on the

perspectives they encounter while covering a story, thus journalists must contextualize and add additional information on the messages put forward by different people in society. This inherently means that objectivity is never attainable. Instead, the principle of fairness allows journalists to comprehensively report in the interest of the public (Wijnberg, 2017).

2.3.4 Confidentiality

Journalists are generally expected to protect their sources during reporting. Especially on sensitive topics, disclosure of the identity of the source could have serious consequences (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). To ensure the safety of information sources, the principle of confidentiality is regarded as non-debatable for journalists to do their job keeping the public informed. It can be detrimental for trust between sources and journalists when anonymity cannot be guaranteed. However, the rise in digital communications, as well as new governmental and corporate surveillance technologies, have become a serious threat to journalistic confidentiality. When sources feel at risk, they might be hesitant to work with journalists. Therefore, the possible increased risk could limit the ability of journalists to keep those in power accountable (Vobič & Kovačič, 2015). Furthermore, anonymous tips are often key in reporting on topics kept secret from the public. Thus, journalists are constantly creating new ways for sources that require confidentiality to share information in secure ways (Hiltner, 2018). Additionally, research has found that gender is of significance in relation to confidentiality and might therefore also be considered within this research. Female journalists encounter significantly greater risk when working with confidential sources. Physical assault, targeted violence, and harassment have driven female journalists to be even more defensive to ensure the anonymity of their sources (Posetti, 2017).

2.3.5 Humanity

Journalism can have a significant impact on the lives of individual people. The humanity principle implies that journalists should always consider the impact of their reporting. When weighing the impact of a report on a topic, organisation or person, journalists should always consider the interest of the public. Therefore, reporting from journalists can be harmful to those involved. Examples would be exposing illegal activities of organisations, corruption by public figures, or societal problems (Ireton & Posetti, 2018).

2.3.6 Accountability

If journalists are to build trust with their audiences, it is of great importance that they are accountable for their work. For example, when mistakes or inaccuracies occur within reporting, a proper rectification is needed. Furthermore, journalists should be open to feedback from audiences. When questions arise, journalists should be able to address concerns and clarify when needed.

Moreover, as journalism is an independent institution, journalists are expected to regulate themselves. Although there is no universal code of conduct that journalists must abide by, journalists are expected to take basic journalistic values into account (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). This kind of voluntary accountability within journalism is broadly respected, as misconduct by one journalist can affect the overall reputation of journalism within society. Thus, the principle of accountability must be seen in direct relation to all other principles of professional journalism (Newton, Hodges, & Keith, 2004).

2.3.7 Transparency

The principle transparency focuses on the news making process that journalists partake in. Being transparent means that a journalist communicates how their reporting is constructed and which decisions they must make during this process. Moreover, transparency contributes to accountability while also illustrating legitimacy and building trust (Allen, 2008; Ireton & Posetti, 2018). However, it must be noted that transparency should not overrule the principle of confidentiality (Phillips, 2010).

2.4 Audience interaction

With the mainstream introduction of social media, interaction with audiences has become a strategic focal point of many news media. However, the interaction between journalists and their audience is still considered as standardized practice. Instead, this audience interaction is profoundly influenced by the underlying business models of news outlets and their organisational culture (Lawrence, Radcliffe, & Schmidt, 2018). Interaction with audiences can come in various forms which are often categorized under *participatory journalism*. This also means that the level of participation between journalists and their audiences can vary drastically. For example, citizen journalism is a form of participatory journalism (Wall, 2017). Meanwhile, the incorporation of user-generated content to add context to professional reporting is equally considered as a form of participatory journalism (Lawrence et al., 2018). Twitter has, for instance, become an important source for journalists, and interaction on Twitter has been found to trigger news reporting (Broersma & Graham, 2013).

The increased possibilities to interact with audiences have also brought some negative consequences. It is also online where journalists encounter criticism such as the infamous use of the fake news label by the current president of the United States. Journalists have reportedly felt the need to defend themselves against these types of criticism as they have infringed upon their legitimacy (Koliska, Chadha, & Burns, 2020). However, research also suggests that journalists are less inclined to respond to criticism when this is not factual and fair (Cheruiyot, 2018). This presents a possible tension that is interesting to further explore with this research.

2.5 Conclusion

To conclude the theoretical framework of this research there are various concepts and research findings that are of interest in answering the research questions. Although journalists have traditionally been seen the watchdog of society, this might have been changed in (dis)information society. The democratisation of the media has opened journalism up to citizen involvement. This development could be seen as positive since more people can find a platform to voice concerns and report on societal issues. However, journalists might perceive this as a potential threat to the legitimacy of the traditional role of journalism in society. Thus, this research needs to consider as one of the potential drivers behind the role perceptions of journalists.

Furthermore, the number of different views on the concepts of disinformation and fake news illustrate the ambiguity that is connected to these concepts within the public discourse. Commonly accepted distinctions between the fake news category and the fake news label remain absent. As such journalists participating in this research might experience this ambiguity first-hand. Therefore, it will interesting to consider the ways they might have to mitigate the effects of these terms by members of the public.

Journalists have used their principles as evidence of their legitimacy in being able to report independently on events in society. As such these principles are the main drivers of reporting by journalists. Thus, it will be interesting to uncover whether one, some, if not all these principles are in any affected by the (dis)information society. Moreover, interaction with audiences has also become more integrated into journalism through participatory journalism. Research suggests that this interaction can create tension as social media have proven to be a source for information while also being a platform through which journalists can be easily criticised. Therefore, it will be interesting to see how journalists use audience interaction in the (dis)information society.

3. Method

To answer the research questions presented in this research, a solid and clear methodology is needed. The research questions together with theoretical framework were used as a basis for the research design. As this research aims to understand the perceptions of journalists in the Netherlands in-depth, the research design is centred around qualitative research. This chapter outlines how a diverse sample was created using non-purposive snowball sampling. Furthermore, following the unstructured nature of interviews, the steps taken to gather and analyse the data are explored. The data gathered in this research is sensitive for some of the participants, thus the researcher reflexivity and ethical considerations are addressed.

3.1 Research design

Journalists are at the forefront when it comes to describing and explaining how our social reality is shaped and altered. This research aims to create an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of journalist in the Netherlands in relation to the (dis)information society. Suggestions by previous researchers were considered in the research design to properly contribute the current literature on journalism and the (dis)information society. For instance, Hanusch (2015) argued that research should focus more on the experiences of journalists since the news industry changes rapidly. Similarly, Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) suggested to directly involve journalists in research on the actual use of the fake news label in society. Considering both the suggestions for future research, qualitative research was deemed most suitable as it allows the researcher to interpret concepts, meaning and relations of human experiences (Brennen, 2017).

To gather rich and insightful data it was important to be able to directly interact with participants and can explore their perceptions and experiences in-depth. Furthermore, the topics discussed with participants were sensitive to some. Thus, a controlled environment in which the participant could be comfortable was needed (Babbie, 2014). This simultaneously ensured their anonymity as other individuals were not involved aside from the researcher and participant. In-depth interviews were found to be most suitable as properly conducted interviews allowed the researcher to gather large amounts of data. Moreover, the proper sampling strategy, this data encompasses a vast range of perspectives among Dutch journalists. The interviews can be defined as "in-depth conversations that consider both verbal and non-verbal responses" (Brennen, 2017, p. 34). The inclusion of conversation within this definition illustrates the two-way interaction between both researcher and participant.

To further utilize the flexibility that the interview research method offers, this research opted to conduct unstructured interviews and tailor specific questions to the individual characteristics of

each participant. Although an interview guide was used during the interviews, the unstructured nature of each interview allowed for topics to be discussed whenever they would emerge during the conversation. The interview guide was iterated upon during the interview process as new relevant topics emerged while other topics were deemed less relevant. This method allowed for more flexibility which was needed while perceptions and experiences from journalists that did not directly align with the theoretical framework. The ability to ask follow-up questions allowed us to go beyond simple answers and dive into the complex meaning-making processes. Additionally, non-verbal cues that signify emotions and experiences could be observed and acted upon while conducting the interview (Brennen, 2017). However, the observation of non-verbal cues was limited as the interviews had to be conducted using a video conferencing service. Nonetheless, the unstructured interview method provided sufficient means for an exhaustive understanding which is required to answer the questions presented in this research.

3.2 Sampling

3.2.1 Units of analysis

This research focusses on the perceptions of journalists in the Netherlands and they thus considered as our units of analysis. The exact number of journalists in the Netherlands is unknown. However, previous research has suggested that in 2015, around 18.000 professionals were working within journalism in the Netherlands. These include freelance journalists, editors, researchers, photojournalists, videographers, reporters, correspondents, and content creators. Moreover, these journalists worked for various outlets ranging from print media, radio, television, online news outlets and other journalistic media formats (Kivits, 2019).

3.2.2 Sampling strategy

Purposive snowball sampling was utilized to create the sample for this research. This allowed the researcher to use the networks of participants and gatekeepers to recruit additional participants (L. Given, 2008). A preliminary inquiry directed to find whether journalists would be open to participate in this research suggested that having a common acquaintance establish the first connection would be beneficial. Therefore, the non-purposive snowball sampling strategy was found to be best suitable. Nonetheless, snowball sampling can lead to several participants originating from a single network within Dutch journalism which would potentially lead to a biased sample (Morgan, 2012). Furthermore, the viability of gatekeepers granting access to their network can be affected their relation with the researcher (Flick, 2007). This research negated these limitations by utilizing several different initial gatekeepers. Moreover, several potential participants were directly contacted

through social media and email. This bypassed the gatekeepers entirely and expanded the range of journalists have participated in this research.

A detailed description of the sample can be found in Appendix A. This sample comprised of eleven participants, three female and eight male. Furthermore, they are employed in a variety of positions at nine different journalistic outlets in the Netherlands. This includes an established anti-establishment news outlet that is often associated with populism (Mazzoleni, 2008), public broadcasting and commercial news media. Thus, the sample can be considered as heterogeneous. However, the results of this research cannot be generalized due to the limited sample size in comparison to the large number of journalists employed in the Netherlands.

3.3 Operationalization

An interview guide was created for the in-depth unstructured interviews. This guide consisted of five topics: *background, motivations and views on journalism*, *working as a journalist*, *the view on society and societal trust in news media*, *the spread of disinformation online*, and *criticism towards journalism.* These topics were based upon the theoretical framework. Each topic was accompanied by several questions. Additionally, the specific topics and questions were iterated upon during the data collection period due to the unstructured nature of the interviews (Firmin, 2008). The improvements made allowed for increased attention to concepts that emerged during previous interviews. Furthermore, research was done into the work, social media, and opinions of each participant before the interviews. This was done to understand and be able to relate easier to anecdotes and references made during each interview. Moreover, specific questions could be asked based upon known experiences of the participant. The interview guide can be found in Appendix B

3.4 Data collection and processing

The interviews were conducted in April, May, and June 2020. During this period, the Netherlands experienced lockdown measures to limit the spread of COVID-19. This caused all interviews to be conducted online using the Microsoft Teams service. This service proved to be familiar for most participants while also offering the features need to record the interview that respected the participants' privacy. As a result of using an online service, the kind of direct face-to-face interaction between interviewer and participant was different compared to a physical meeting. In some instances, the screen of the interviewer or participant would be frozen for extended periods, limiting the ability to pick up non-verbal communication while also making it harder to establish rapport with the participants. Efforts were made to mitigate these limitations as trust between the interviewer and the participant was essential to gather meaningful data when conducting in-depth unstructured interviews (Brennen, 2017). Several actions were undertaken to build trust between

the interviewer and the participant. Before each interview, participants were sent a consent form with information about the interview, research, researcher, privacy, and their rights as a participant. Signing this document was deemed unnecessary due to the online nature of the interview and participant's concerns regarding anonymity. Instead, verbal consent was given at the start of each interview. Moreover, the online environment in which the interviews were conducted turned out to be beneficial, even though this environment could not be controlled. All the participants were in a familiar and private environment such as their own homes or personal offices. This meant that they were often more comfortable and were full control of the situation. This enabled the researcher to establish rapport and ask questions about sensitive or confidential information. This is best illustrated by the comment below as trust that has been established between the interviewer and the participant. Other participants shared similar comments; however, these were made outside of the recorded interviews.

> *I do have, it is tricky but, you should not quote me on this because it can be traced back to me, but I will tell you anyway.* (Eric, May 11, 2020)

Furthermore, each interview was preceded by a short conversation in which the interviewer would clarify the research goals and measures taken to ensure the privacy of participants. After each interview, participants were asked to help with snowball sampling. They were also informed about the option to receive the results of this research. All the participants expressed their interests in these results.

A total of eleven interviews were conducted with the recordings varying in time between 35 minutes and 83 minutes. These times do not include the conversation between the interviewer and participant before and after the interview. When considering these, the entire conversations varied between 49 minutes and 121 minutes. The interview guide was used, however, due to the unstructured approach to the in-depth interviews, the order and focus of topics changed with each interview. Only a few notes were taken during the interviews. Instead, the interviews were recorded so that the interviewer would not be distracted trying to document the participant's answers immediately. Several interviews faced low audio quality issues, such as stuttering audio, which resulted in select portions of the interviews becoming inaudible on the recording. In most of these instances, the interviewer asked participants to repeat their answer. Amberscript was used to create preliminary transcripts which were later finalized manually by the interviewer. The final transcripts ranged from 4.000 to 12.000 words. It must be noted that the final interview with chief editor Sophie could not be transcribed as an issue occurred with the recording of the interview. Instead, a description of the interview was written which provided additional data. This research considers the

total amount of data to be adequate in understanding the perceptions and experiences of the participants. All the interviews were conducted in Dutch, however, quotes used within this thesis have been translated to English by a native Dutch speaker to ensure the retention of meaning as best as possible.

3.5 Analysis

A grounded theory approach was used to analyse the data as this research aims to understand how journalists perceive and experience the (dis)information society. Grounded theory is characterized by developing a focus on a deep understanding based on data instead of relying on existing theoretical models to explain phenomena (Brennen, 2017; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). The transcripts were analysed using a coding process that considered all comments made during the interviews. The ATLAS.ti software was used to make this process structured and flexible as new interview were analysed. First, the transcripts were coded separately which resulted in open codes which describe the underlying concepts of comments in the interviews. These open codes were altered and enriched based upon insights from the steps in the coding process. Axial coding allowed for the clustering of open codes and identified several themes across the interviews. Axial codes were iterated upon as new interviews would yield additional open codes. Moreover, select codes were made to further identify the main themes or selective codes found across all interviews. Following the iterative process of coding, a total of eight axial codes were categorized into four selective codes. The complete coding scheme of this research can be found in Appendix C.

3.6 Reflexivity

3.6.1 Validity and reliability

This research utilized unstructured interviews while also having an interview guide as a reference to the topics that could be covered in each interview. This allowed for consistency within the topics discussed and made comparing perceptions and experiences feasible. Thus, the interview guide offers a framework by which the interviews are repeatable (Flick, 2007). Furthermore, operationalisation also considered previous research. Thus, the concepts included within the interview guide share similarities with research such as Robison and DeShano (2011), Tarran (2017), Koliska and Assmann (2019), Balod and Hameleers (2019), and Koliska et al. (2020). Nonetheless, the grounded theory approach, and qualitative research in general, is inherently based on subjective interpretation (Barbour, 2014). Therefore, this research aimed to supply sufficient explanations of the observed phenomena using direct quotes from the participants and additional clarification with relevant literature.

3.6.2 Ethical consideration

During the research process, several ethical considerations have been made. As common with the interview research method, all participants were required to give informed consent before an interview could commence. Consent was given verbally so no signed document could connect participants directly to an interview if they were to be accidentally made public. Furthermore, the recording of each has not been shared outside of this research and was deleted directly after a transcription had been finalized. Care was taken to anonymize the transcriptions. Names, brands, and topics that could be used to identify the participant were removed. This is an additional precaution even though the transcripts themselves are not be made public. The description of the sample in Appendix A was deliberately simplified to ensure the anonymity of the participants and pseudonyms were added to reference individual participants. These pseudonyms only correlate with the gender of the participants and do not represent other individual characteristics of the participants.

4. Results and discussion

The coding analysis has presented four main themes that describe how Dutch journalists perceive the effects of the (dis)information society. In this chapter, the themes and related sub-themes are described and contextualised using data and literature. Firstly, the data suggests that journalists feel that disinformation has emphasized the importance of their responsibility to society. Secondly, journalists tend to identify several disruptions that have altered the media landscape in which they operate. Third, journalists have been increasingly focused on communicating transparency. The fourth and last theme revolves around the struggle that journalists experience while interacting with their audiences.

4.1 Selective codes

Table 4.1 contains an overview of the definitive select and axial codes identified after the analysis.

Table 4.1. select and axial codes

Selective code	Axial code
Emphasizing societal responsibility	Sense of responsibility to society
	Concerns over disinformation
Dealing with disruption	Democratisation of information
	Navigating a politicized media landscape
Communicating transparency	Communicating methodology
	Experimenting with journalistic formats
The dilemma endemic to audience interaction	Vulnerability as a journalist
	Thoughtful audience interaction

4.2 Emphasizing societal responsibility

The first result of this research shows how the (dis)information society has emphasized the importance of journalism in society. There is no indication that Dutch journalists' perception of their traditional role in society has changed. Instead, journalists stress the importance of reporting, as the public needs to be able to rely on professional news media to stay informed. Staying true to the core principles of journalism means that journalists feel a responsibility to stand up against disinformation. Journalists made efforts to clarify uncertainty, fact-check politicians, and debunk conspiracy theories seems to be driven by the intrinsic motivation of journalists to seek the truth. They rely on their existing practices of verification, triangulation, and common sense to identify

disinformation. The influx of disinformation related to COVID-19 is considered a strengthening factor in the beliefs of journalists that they need to double down on disinformation.

4.2.1 Sense of responsibility to society

> *The foundation of our work is facts, we provide factual journalism that is useful to citizens, because they can rely on it and make choices based on it, regarding their own life. That is our self-imposed assignment, it is not an assignment given by God.* (David, May 14, 2020)

David, a chief editor for a commercial news outlet, with a long career in journalism, outlined why he and his colleagues strive towards factual reporting in the (dis)information society. He perceived his work as a journalist as a service upon which people in the society can rely on to make informed decisions. The notion fits the traditional views on the role of journalism in society. It relates to the origins of the modern press, in which the news media has a moral obligation to serve society. By offering authentic, factual, and comprehensive accounts of events that can then be critically assessed with the public discourse (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004). David's comment illustrates how journalists in the Netherlands use the societal need for truthful information to legitimize their reporting in the (dis)information society. He was not alone this belief, all journalists who participated in this research felt the intrinsic motivation to take responsibility for making reliable information available to the public.

However, when it comes to handling disinformation within society, the perceptions of journalists differ slightly. This difference in perception of a journalist's responsibility seemed to be related to whether a journalist feels responsible for all information available to the public. Only four out of the eleven participants voiced the need to deal with disinformation in the public domain. Daniel, a data journalist at a public broadcaster in the Netherlands, explained how his debunks of disinformation were important to quickly distinguish fact from fiction within the public discourse.

> *That [tackling the issue of disinformation online] is the responsibility of me as a journalist because debunks can quickly demonstrate what is right and what is not. That is the main job of a journalist. Making a distinction between fake news and actual news. Making a distinction between nonsensical sources and actual sources.* (Daniel, April 23, 2020)

Similar to findings by Koliska and Assman (2019), the feeling of responsibility to tackle the societal issue of disinformation is related to the kind of outlet a journalist is employed at. As all journalists that were actively or previously employed at a public broadcaster expressed this intrinsic motivation. One could argue that this difference is related to the economical underpinnings of

commercial news media. These media rely on advertising revenue and paid subscriptions to finance their operations. Moreover, research has suggested that this has a negative effect on the motives of journalists (Witschge & Nygren, 2009). Interestingly, six journalists voiced their concerns of increased commercialization leading to a decline in quality in reporting. However, they did not connect economic incentives to their societal responsibility. These journalists were all involved in commercial news media themselves. Moreover, three out of these six journalists had experience with being employed as a freelancer. Research suggests that freelancers tend to conform to commercial news media needs as these better ensure sustained income (Das, 2007). Thus, the familiarity with choosing economic considerations over public needs could explain why all freelance journalists in this research expressed the potential quality decline in journalism due to commercialisation.

It must be noted that even journalists from commercial news media do feel an increase in responsibility to society as disinformation becomes more commonplace within society.

> *I do think that we have to consider that we now see that there is a lot of nonsense circulating about corona. […] Not that I am very happy with that, but as a lot of relevant fake news circulates in the Netherlands, you really feel the intrinsic motivation to do something about it. We actually missed that for a long time.* (William, May 14, 2020)

William, a chief editor for a commercial online news outlet which has been involved with factchecking, explained how the increase of disinformation related to the COVID-19 virus has provided additional motivation for journalists to take responsibility for tackling disinformation. This notion that disinformation has become top-of-mind due to its prevalence in the (dis)information society was expressed by several journalists. Research among journalists in the Philippines found similar results, as the salience of disinformation and scepticism in society encouraged journalists to become more actively involved in factchecking and debunking (Balod & Hameleers, 2019). Thus, the results of this research might indicate that the (dis)information society positively contributes to the sense of responsibility of commercial journalists in the Netherlands.

In support of this increased sense of responsibility, several *journalists argued that they experienced an influx in people in need of accurate, legitimate, and truthful information from professional journalism*. These experiences correlate with the observed increased news media consumption since the start of the COVID-19 crisis in the Netherlands (Pasveer, 2020). As the (dis)information society creates uncertainty and doubt, the need for professional journalism increases. Therefore, the (dis)information society should be considered as a possible turning point in the relation between the public and the press. This also supports the view of previous researchers;

that disinformation is an instigator for a renewed sense of importance towards quality journalism and its societal responsibility (Tandoc et al., 2019). This perception that the (dis)information can have a positive effect on journalism contradicts earlier research by Hanusch (2015). At the time, journalists in Australia were concerned that standards for journalism were decreasing due to the influx of disinformation in the public debate. Instead, this research suggests journalists are doing more to adhere to these standards and meet the information needs of the public.

> *I think in general the need [for professional news coverage] is there. We already see that in the figures, there is such a need for information, and it should remain that way. We must continue to bring that. We have to continue to provide people, we have to be able to take the worries away from people sometimes because that's what you want to do.* (Michelle, April 13, 2020)

Michelle, a journalist for a commercial newspaper, illustrated that she felt the need to keep the public informed. Sophie, a chief editorial for a commercial news outlet, noted a similar feeling as she felt her audience was counting on the reporting of her outlet to make informed decisions in these times of uncertainty. She emphasized the need to adhere to quality standards that her audience has come to expect. The notion that journalists can remove uncertainty and doubt is an example of journalists going beyond their initial responsibility to an informed public. The reporting of journalists is in that case also able to fulfil the psychological needs of the public. This shares similarity with reporting more commonly seen in extreme cases of crisis, such as ongoing terror attacks (Riegert & Olsson, 2007). Thus, the results suggest that the societal responsibility of journalists in the (dis)information society goes beyond the provision of information and a watchdog, but now also includes a physiological aspect that provides comfort and clarity.

4.2.2 Concerns over disinformation

When it comes to disinformation, journalists describe various characteristics which can be consolidated into two major cause for concerns. Firstly, *journalists experience that disinformation, in particular fake news, can utilize existing societal issues to reach larger audiences*. In recent months, those issues primarily concerned COVID-19 (Bakker, 2020a). Before the pandemic, other sensitive societal issues such as migration, nationalism, governmental oversight, censorship elitism, and a distrust of established institutions, were commonly observed in disinformation.

> *What happens with fake news, I think you really see that nowadays, that fake news addresses several issues and concerns that makes people feel that it's about them. […] I think that is one of the particular strengths of fake news. It*

> *benefits greatly from this [societal relevance] and thus it is shared very*
> *quickly. I think that is quite a worrying development.* (Mark, April 22, 2020)

The concerns of journalists are justified, as research has suggested that news consumption on social media contributes to information overload, that coincides with additional challenges to discern inaccurate or false reporting from official reporting (Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014). Moreover, because of these challenges, social media users are less likely to verify the authenticity of news on social media before resharing it (Talwar et al., 2019).

Several journalists shared experiences in which even people within their personal and professional networks would share disinformation. However, they do perceive the impact of disinformation in society to be limited. As such, the second cause for concern as felt by journalists in the Netherlands is *the assumption that most of the fake news resonates with only a select group in society.* Journalists experience that the disinformation within society is targeted at specific groups that are particularly vulnerable due to a lack of media literacy.

> *It [fake news] has a big influence on a very select group of people, that's*
> *where fake news is directed at. Websites are being copied, that sort of thing.*
> *We do not easily fall for that, but there are plenty of people who fall for it.*
> *Just like an online scam. Yes, the Nigerian prince, his emails and stuff like that.*
> *I would never donate any money, but a lot of people actually do. Why else*
> *would it last so long?* (Daniel, April 23, 2020)

The connection drawn between phishing and fake news by Daniel is interesting, as research also suggests that both resonate with adult audiences (Lee, 2018). It is precisely these audiences that journalists appear to have the most concerns about. They express experiencing filter bubbles in which they are not able to enter. With confirmation bias at the core of news consumption within a filter bubble (Bakir & McStay, 2018), journalists are pessimistic about their ability to reach these limited audiences with professional reporting.

> *When it comes to fake news debunking, you should not have the illusion that*
> *you can convince the people who share that kind of information*
> *[disinformation], that you can convince them with an article. The point is that*
> *you can reach the people who possibly have doubts. But those who really*
> *believe that you get corona from 5G, you will not convince them with a fact*
> *check.* (William, May 14, 2020)

William notes the tension between the intrinsic motivation to inform the public and the inability to do just that with some sceptical audiences. Efforts made to debunk beliefs that have previously been reinforced by disinformation prove to be ineffective. In some cases, journalists within this research expressed fears that disinformation on social media could encourage some audiences to even stop consuming professional journalism altogether. This fear is not farfetched, several previous studies have found that ideology can significantly affect the effectiveness of factchecking efforts of journalists (Nieminen & Rapeli, 2019). As noted by William and other journalists in this research, factchecking and debunking disinformation allows them to reach an audience that is still open to different perspectives. Therefore, this result shows the struggle that journalists in the Netherlands have while actively reporting on fake news, as they also need to accept that these reports will not be able to tackle disinformation in society entirely.

4.3 Dealing with disruption

The second result of this research shows how certain disruptions are affecting the media landscape that journalists in the Netherlands are required to navigate. Two key issues arise from the interviews. Journalists express how technology has democratized the whole concept of news. At present, any person can claim to be a journalist, regardless of any formal education, editorial oversight, or respect for the core principles of journalism. This has slowly affected the traditional gatekeeping practice. Individuals can create and share anything with only limited control by the justice system and technology companies. These disruptions happen in a (dis)information society that has seen news become political. Dutch journalists remark the polarisation within the public debate, while politicians have taken more prominent stances that affect the journalistic institution. Moreover, journalists argue that governments should distance themselves from efforts to actively control disinformation or journalism.

4.3.1 Democratisation of news

Information has become more available to the public than ever before possible in the (dis)information society. Meanwhile, the democratisation of media has given the public access to create and spread information (Girard et al., 2003). The journalists in this research described how this has influenced the media landscape in which they operate. These experienced changes in the media landscape were to be expected. Just a few decades ago, journalism was the main source of information about the events happening in society. Journalists, editors, and others in the media industry could control what citizens would read, hear, or see in the news. Through gatekeeping, journalists were able to aggregate the news that they deemed relevant to disseminate with the public (Bruns, 2011). Thus, the potential consequence of a person sharing disinformation was considerably smaller, as their means to do so were limited. However, journalists express that their

gatekeeping function seems to be diminished (Tarran, 2017). Citizens, celebrities, politicians, and organisations can create and share content that is consumed by audiences on a global level.

> *In the past, it used to be the task of a journalist mainly to lift the tiles, to uncover information that was unknown to the public. That task is still there. It is still super important, not less important. Only a task has been added, [...] namely to weigh and interpret the amount of information that is already there.* (William, May 14, 2020)

This excerpt from William illustrates an interesting addition to the tasks of journalists. Weighing and interpreting existing information could be considered as logical steps within gatekeeping. However, the task described here by William more closely resembles the practices referred to by Bruns (Bruns, 2011) as gatewatching. This means that journalists in the (dis)information society now must closely observe information that is already published through various sources such as social media and blogs (Duffy, Tandoc, & Ling, 2018). Through gatewatching, journalists can curate and add meaning to news stories, therefore adding value which illustrates their legitimacy and relevance to society.

The democratisation of media has also democratised news itself. Citizen journalism has often positioned itself as an alternative or even in opposition to professional journalism (Goode, 2009). It can be beneficial in situations where professional journalists are not able to operate. Furthermore, citizen journalism allowed for reporting on topics that would otherwise not have seen the light of day or give voice to those in society who would otherwise not be heard (Riaz & Pasha, 2011). However, journalists in this research expressed their concerns regarding the absence of journalistic principles within this form of journalism.

> *In principle, everyone can call themselves a journalist, it isn't a protected profession. So, when my neighbour says: "I'm a journalist", and he's going on to share fake news. Yeah, well, then he's just a journalist like you and me. With the only difference that we studied for it and that we know something about creating reliable information.* (Daniel, April 23, 2020)

Daniel notes that the title journalist is not linked to any formal education. This issue has been pointed out by researchers even before social media was commonly used for news dissemination in society. Berger (2002) argued that there is no set of criteria which can be used to determine whether a person is eligible to present themselves as a journalist or not. As no clear solution has been introduced, this issue is still experienced by Dutch journalist in the (dis)information society.

When citizen journalism came up, I was enthusiastic about it. Because I thought the more critical minds the better. But it makes it exceedingly difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff because a lot of citizen journalism is also very professional. What people assume then, it [any citizen journalism] will be correct." (Eric, May 11, 2020)

This comment by Eric, a reporter for a public broadcaster, is noteworthy as it illustrates the issue with citizen journalism in the (dis)information society. Although journalists in this research had several examples of truthful and relevant citizen journalism, these experiences were overshadowed with incidents involving citizen journalism which did not coincide with the traditional journalistic principles. Incidents with harmful and unbalanced framing, falsehoods, or even completely fabricated stories seem to be common among journalists who reported on national and internal topics. As Eric explained, due to the amount of content created by citizen journalists, it becomes harder for audiences to distinguish proper citizen journalism from bad citizen journalism. This result supports earlier research which found that journalists perceive citizen journalism as a potential threat to their legitimacy. The argument being that citizen journalism lacked professional values and thereby diminishes the public reputation of journalists (Robinson & DeShano, 2011). However, it is important to note that the democratisation of news has also contributed to the sense of responsibility that journalists experience.

The difficult part with social media is that there is so much on it, everyone can put all kinds of things on it. That, in turn, means that traditional media and journalism are only more valuable and important. And we must take our work very seriously to ensure that if people really want to know what is going on, they can rely on us. (Karen, April 29, 2020)

As Karen, a journalist at a commercial newspaper, argues, the ease at which people can share information on social media has made journalists feel increasingly valuable to the public. Thus, this result must be seen in relation to the earlier finding which showed how the (dis)information society is giving journalists in the Netherlands an increased sense of societal responsibility. Therefore, the democratisation of news should be considered as an additional characteristic of the (dis)information society. Marshall (2017) explained how the multitude of available information and disinformation leads to scepticism and doubt. However, this research shows that it is important to consider the potential positive effect of the (dis)information society on journalists' role perceptions.

The democratisation of news has also enabled the 24-hour news cycle. The constant flow of new information entering the news cycle has proven to be a challenge in the (dis)information society.

News consumer expectations have quickly adapted, following the almost instant news coverage using social media. Previous research has also found that a focus on a 24-hour news cycle, especially breaking news, negatively affects quality and independence in reporting (J. Lewis & Cushion, 2009). However, these findings to do not correspond with the experiences of journalists within this research. Instead, principles of verification were perceived as more important than being the first outlet to report in the (dis)information society.

> *We wanted to have it verified ourselves before we publish it. That is quite a tough challenge because sometimes you are not able to match that speed [of other news outlets], especially when you look at the speed with which the news is brought. But if you do, then time and time again your reports are correct, they are solid, they are checked, that way you will, of course, grow as an authority.* (Mark, April 22, 2020)

Mark, a former chief editor at commercial news outlet and former journalist at a public broadcaster, noted that accuracy would be preferred over fast-paced reporting as the latter might influence the long-term credibility of the news outlet. However, his perception that the preference of accuracy over speed is related to public broadcaster did not resonate with journalists within this research who were employed at commercial outlets. Moreover, only two out of the eleven journalists argued that the 24-hour news cycle had forced some outlets to diminish quality over speed in reporting.

4.3.2 Navigating a politicized media landscape

Journalists experience that politicians and political parties are now actively participating in the creation and dissemination of news. This correlates with findings that a new form of political propaganda has emerged on social media. In these kinds of propaganda, the news is reframed, perspectives or sources are left out of reporting, and true intentions are concealed on order to deceive and influence audiences (Farkas & Neumayer, 2018). Journalists are genuinely concerned about their ability to report on the things that these people are communicating. Several journalists experienced incidents in which they were criticised for holding politicians accountable. Moreover, they seemed to also encounter a lot of disinformation with political origins.

> *It is a very smart way from politicians to bind voters to you. Create your own media. Because you see at Forum [Forum for Democracy, a Dutch right-wing party] of course, very smart with their own channel [FVD Journaal, a YouTube news outlet produced by the political part FVD] and supporting broadcaster ON! [Ongehoord Nederland, a new aspiring public broadcaster that is in*

direct opposition of national public broadcaster NOS] and such. [...] It seems
as if the people who, the supporters of those politicians just don't care if it's
true or not. If you debunk it [disinformation spread by political parties] then
supporters argue "yes, but it could have been true". That continues to amaze
me I really think, yes, that's perhaps what I worry about. (Eric, May 11, 2020)

This comment by Eric is interesting as it shows how journalists are concerned as politicians have become actively involved in the creation of news. The example he used to illustrate his point was brought by several journalists within this research. In 2019, two Dutch political parties officially supported the then newly announced broadcaster Ongehoord Nederland. Their reasoning being that established journalism lacked reporting on the anti-establishment messages they believed needed to be heard by the people (Tienhooven, 2019). The broadcaster fits in a trend of media populism within Europe which has been identified by previous research. Some media have been found to support populist messages while the validity of these messages has been disregarded (Wettstein, Esser, Schulz, Wirz, & Wirth, 2018). Thus, it is interesting that such a trend is now also experienced by journalists in the Netherlands.

When it comes to disinformation, several governmental actions have been undertaken to limit the spread of disinformation and increase media literacy among the public. Journalists in this research were critical of these actions. Several journalists noted the actions of EUvsDisinfo as a form of censorship that damages the freedom of the press. This result was to be expected, as Dutch journalists have previously voiced criticism towards this organisation (Rogmans, 2018). Nonetheless, the passion expressed by journalists in this research indicates that Dutch journalists consider governmental or political interventions as a serious threat to their independence. This might be explained in relation to anti-establishment outlets who have argued that Dutch journalism, public broadcasting particularly, is controlled by the state or an elitist agenda (Engelbart, 2016). Thus, governmental actions might be weaponized to support these ideas and delegitimize professional journalism in the (dis)information society.

A similar result was found regarding the independence of journalists from political parties and aiding in political campaigns. As journalists felt political attitudes towards journalism become more hostile. Some of them referenced similarities between actions by Dutch politicians to discredit reports and the strained relations between the current US president and much of the American press. However, several journalists argued that the media landscape within the Netherlands could not be compared with its American counterpart. Dutch professional journalists were perceived as highly diversified. Thus, they argued that polarisation, hyper-partisan news content, or hyper-

partisan political affiliations could not flourish within the Dutch mainstream media. James, a reporter at an established anti-establishment news outlet, experienced an incident in which a populist politician had suggested to actively work together.

> *You cannot say: Media, you must become my ally and we must band together. You should do that with your friends and involve the business community, I don't care. You do your thing. But a journalist can never commit to a political party. […] Government really has to stay so fucking far away [from journalism] and political parties like Thierry, they have to really distance themselves far away from journalism.* (James, April 17, 2020)

James' passionate response could be related to his determination to always seek the truth with his critical style of reporting, while also being fair by treating politicians equally regardless of their political ideologies. Furthermore, the mere notion that political parties, governments, or other special interest parties should directly involve themselves with journalism, directly infringes upon these principles of independence and fairness. Thus, these results could be another characteristic of the (dis)information society. Governments and political figures become actively involved in controlling information published by professional journalism. These actions infringe upon the independence of journalists, while also supporting a frame for anti-establishment outlets to support the idea that mainstream media are controlled by an elite.

4.4 Communicating transparency

The third theme found in this research shows how journalists in the Netherlands have been shifting towards transparency within their communication about the creation of our social reality in the (dis)information society. Journalists express the awareness for the methods they use when researching and reporting a story. Rather than just covering a story, there seems to be a transition where journalists use new technologies to explain how they operate. Journalists feel that transparency about the editorial decisions they make will help audiences understand the world around them. Moreover, transparency helps journalists defend their independent position and counter sceptics. Showing the human side of journalism by making stories about people in society and in journalism itself contributes to the relationship with audiences. Furthermore, new technologies have given journalists new formats to experiment with. A shift towards video, alternative shows, and open editorial meetings offer new opportunities to publish and disseminate information to the audiences that might otherwise not be reached.

4.4.1 Communicating methodology

To mitigate critique and build up trust with audiences, eight journalists described how they were incorporating their methods in reporting. This result supports earlier research by Koliska and Assman (2019) who found that journalists in Germany were increasingly trying to communicate their principles and practices with audiences. Thus, it is telling that journalists in the Netherlands indicate a similar strategy to gain trust and accentuate legitimacy. Eric explained the importance of communicating his methods to be transparent.

> *The complicated thing is if you want to do something about it [scepticism toward professional journalism], then as media, you have to operate as transparently as possible. So, you have to go out as much as possible, not just make your story and say this is my story and that's how it is. But you also have to explain more and more how you make that story. What you run into. What the dilemmas are. What did not succeed? All kinds of nuances, your research methods. Then you actually have to explain that to, let's say, sceptical readers.* (Eric, May 11, 2020)

As Eric noted, explanations of methods and considerations that shape reporting might decrease scepticism in the (dis)information society. This strategy has been observed by previous research to some extent (Hickerson & Palanski, 2019). Furthermore, researches have also advocated for this shift in journalism, as incorporating extrinsic arguments and sufficient clarification within reporting could support increased legitimacy (Carlson, 2018). Thus, this result indicates that this shift has been gradually adopted by Dutch journalism. However, the question remains whether communicating methodology is effective. When it comes to communicating transparency to the public, timeliness, accuracy, and clarity are essential (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). Hickerson and Palanski (2019) argue that transparency can be detrimental to the credibility of journalism if not done exhaustively. In these instances, transparency might not be properly contextualized which can lead to confusion among audiences.

Two approaches for communicating methodology can be derived from the many examples described by the journalists who participated in this research. First, there is *directly incorporating methodology in reporting about a topic*. Using an explanatory disclaimer with the content or mentioning the journalistic dilemma's as the story is being explored in the content.

> *I think that it [disclaimer with journalistic method] is becoming more and more normal and it is also getting easier because, look in the newspaper you will not add that quickly because it is expensive paper waste, so to say on*

paper. But online you can, of course, do that much more easily in a frame just

in a corner or somewhere and then you can do that without losing space.

(Eric, May 11, 2020)

As Eric noted, the use of explanatory sections on editorial decisions and methods has been aided by the flexibility that is associated with online communication. Disclaimers can easily be added to articles, as space on a webpage has no direct limitations. Furthermore, journalists can publish entire interviews for people to watch, instead of the shorted versions that they were previously restricted to.

The second approach is to *create an entirely new category of content dedicated to explaining how news is made*. This allows journalists to really go in-depth and thoroughly explain editorial decisions that can be ambiguous if not properly explored. This kind of content has been used previously in investigative reporting from outlets such as Vice News and The Washington Post (Casey, 2017; Turse, 2018). However, findings from this research indicate that this form of 'behind the story'-content is becoming more common in mainstream beat reporting. Aside from explaining methodology, journalists are also creating stories about journalism that do not relate to a specific topic but instead focus on the individuals working within journalism. Michelle explained how the newspaper she works for introduced this kind of content only recently.

In recent weeks we have also produced articles in which we describe a

working day of, for example, an editor-in-chief, a reporter who goes out, the

newspaper makes. […] I like that we can offer that to the reader. Because you

notice that there are just a lot of questions. Sometimes how do you get these

things? And how does it work? It is quite possible to remove that ambiguity

through such pieces. (Michelle, April 13, 2020)

An interesting note to Michelle's explanation is the notion that this new content is in response to questions from audiences. As such, these results show that journalists in the Netherlands utilize reporting on their practices, methods, and editorial considerations to mitigate scepticism in the (dis)information society. These kinds of reports also support the earlier finding of this research as journalists can use this content to exemplify their responsibility to society.

4.4.2 Experimenting with journalistic formats

The use of technology has historically shaped and altered how journalism operates (Pavlik, 2000). This research finds that journalists are experimenting with new media formats to communicate transparency. These formats allow them to connect and interact with audiences, while also utilizing the newest opportunities in communication technology. Journalists mention that the

reality we live in today demands creativity in the way journalism communicates. The (dis)information society has driven journalists to adapt their proven formats into new formats that better suit audience needs. An example brought up by two journalists was *the utilisation of podcasts to involve audiences in the editorial process*. They noted using weekly podcasts as a public editorial meeting in which editors, journalists, correspondents, and photojournalists would discuss editorial decisions and respond to audience questions or criticism. The utilisation of podcast for this purpose is rather interesting, as previous research indicates that podcasts can be used to create a more personal and direct engagement with audiences (Lindgren, 2016). This might explain why journalists have started to use this new format. However, it must be noted that the journalists were uncertain about the positive effect on audiences and critics, as measuring audience responses was felt to be limited.

Journalists are also looking into how they can *utilize the characteristics of social networks to get information to the public*. Several journalists noted the problem they faced with disinformation on closed social networks such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Messenger, and member-only Facebook groups. The spread of disinformation on a closed social network is an issue that is difficult to tackle (Verma, Singh, & Pareek, 2020). William was the only participating journalist who presented a solution for this issue by utilizing the shareability of images on these enclosed social networks.

> *We also very consciously created an infographic of all the measures regarding corona that you could share with each other through WhatsApp. It was meant to be for that. [...] Your mission is to spread good information, and you do so primarily through your own site. But you also do that on social channels, and you could do that via WhatsApp.* (William, May 14, 2020)

The infographic he mentioned utilized the shareability of images within these closed social networks (Verma et al., 2020). William's approach is especially interesting as past research has mainly focused on WhatsApp and similar networks as a source of information for journalists (Dodds, 2019). It thus serves as another indication that journalists in the Netherlands are experimenting with a new format to fulfil their societal responsibility in informing the public.

Two different journalists described *a new media format that focused on positive news* which was introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. News is often publicly viewed as negative, due to the reality that most news stories are based around conflict. Moreover, this negative news perception can lead to declining audiences and negative sentiments of the public in regard to events in society (McIntyre, 2019). Therefore, a positively oriented news format might help to mitigate or even counter the effects that are commonly associated with conflict-based news.

The virus is unknown to everyone, and at some point, I hear things like "The media scare me", "What's in store for us?" […] At some point we said that we should approach it a bit more positively. We also need to find people who have something positive to say or who have been healed, for example, you know. So, we started paying more attention to that. (Michelle, April 13, 2020)

It is important to note that in this case, the positive news format originated from audience feedback. It illustrates the ability of Dutch journalists to closely monitor the needs of their audiences and act accordingly.

4.5 The dilemma endemic to audience interaction

As new information technologies were introduced, the importance of including participation within modern journalism increased. Nowadays, journalists can rely on public sources, and members of the public have become actively involved in the news making process (Peters & Witschge, 2015). Interacting within the audience is thus relevant for journalists in the (dis)information society. Moreover, engaging with audiences has been a major focus of professional journalism in the last decade (Lewis, Holton, & Coddington, 2014). However, the interaction between audiences and journalists is linked to the precise business models and cultures present with journalism. Thus, the extent to which journalists engage with their audiences can vary significantly across the journalistic spectrum (Lawrence et al., 2018). This research has found similar results.

Journalists in this study cited the insignificance of their reporting as a reason to not engage with audiences. Meanwhile, others outlined that audience interaction was more a personal choice, and the dominant culture within journalism generally did not encourage interaction. However, previous research has suggested that interaction with audiences can potentially alleviate scepticism and facilitate dialogue (Feighery, 2011). Thus, it is important to consider why journalists decide whether to engage with their audience and critics or not. This research finds that journalists experience a dilemma when engaging with audiences. As they make themselves available for interaction, their online presence leaves them vulnerable to blatant media critique. However, journalists also considered interaction with audiences to be beneficial as they can consider different perspectives and contribute to the public debate on events they cover. As such, journalists experience a dilemma which is created by the tension between their online vulnerability and valuable interactions with their audience. Some journalists note confronting those who critique them with additional context and clarification. Meanwhile, other journalists choose to no avoid hostilities by avoiding interaction with audiences altogether.

4.5.1 Vulnerability as a journalist

Attacks and criticism towards journalism have become more commonplace in the (dis)information society (Koliska et al., 2020). Journalists in this research are feeling vulnerable to harassment as they try to engage with their audiences. This result supports previous research by Lewis & Molyneux (2018) who argued that the research up to that point had an unwarranted positive perspective on the effects of social media usage by journalists since social media enabled easy and anonymised harassment of journalists. Eric was one of several journalists who has experienced harassment while trying to interact with his audience.

> *I try entering the discussion with people on Twitter and other ways. But the tricky part is that it also makes you very vulnerable, because if you as a journalist open up to the dialogue with your audience. Then that also means that you will be attacked very quickly on Twitter and people will attack your person, and people will pull things out [of context].* (Eric, May 11, 2020)

This comment by Eric is a perfect illustration of how journalists experience vulnerability as they attempt to actively participate in public dialogue about topics of their reporting. Out of the eleven journalists in this research, only three journalists were actively engaging with their audiences. The other journalists often recalled the massive amount of harmful criticism they would potentially come across as a reason to avoid online interaction.

> *I see a lot of journalists who therefore also shut down Twitter or quit social media because they are done with all the bullshit. I think it works both ways.*
> (Mark, April 22, 2020)

Although Mark actively engages with his audiences, most of his colleagues were discouraged as they did not want to handle or could not handle the amount of irrelevant engagement that they encountered on Twitter. Not being able to have a dialogue without also being attacked proved to be the biggest hurdle for these journalists. Another explanation that journalists in this research gave for tuning out of social media, is the supposed nonsensical nature of most comments made online as noted by James.

> *I'm really not interested at all [in nonsensical comments]. I occasionally go and watch the reactions. Not always. And of course, you like a compliment more than if someone shits on it.* (James, April 17, 2020)

It must be noted that the established anti-establishment James is employed at, is infamous for the nonsensical, satiric, and sometimes offensive comments posted by its audience. However,

this experience with encountering irrelevant comments resonated with the experiences of journalists who worked for commercial outlets and public broadcasters. For example, some journalists received comments on their content that have no relation to the topic of their reporting whatsoever. Thus, an incentive to engage with these audiences remained absent. Journalists would often disregard these comments altogether as to not facilitate negative interaction.

Nonetheless, the experienced vulnerability is a troublesome finding, as news dissemination through the personal Twitter accounts of journalists is generally more effective in reaching audiences than the corporate accounts of news outlets (Bruns, 2012). Thus, the vulnerability to harassment must be considered as a negative consequence of journalism in the (dis)information society, which potentially limits professional journalism in disseminating news to a large online audience.

When it comes to the use of the fake news label, journalists appear to agree that the use of it is dangerous. It is perceived as a direct infringement upon the traditional role of journalism, which as this research has found is being emphasised by Dutch journalists in the disinformation society. It is also important to note that journalists do not feel personally offended when the fake news label or a similar term is used to delegitimize their reporting in the (dis)information society. Instead, they accentuate the need to defend their journalism as a whole. This is true for journalists who, directly or indirectly, faced criticism in which the fake news label was utilized.

> *I would always stand up for my profession, but I won't lie awake from it [the fake news label] either. […] I think it would be worse if no people believe us anymore. But we also still get a lot of people who are also very happy with journalism.* (Karen, April 29, 2020)

Another important finding in this excerpt from Karen is the argument she uses to downplay the effects of the fake news label. This argument has also been found by other researchers, as journalists try to convene the effect of media criticism from politicians to be fairly limited (Koliska et al., 2020). Therefore, the vulnerability of journalists in the (dis)information society cannot be directly contributed to the use of the fake news label. Instead, various factors are to be taken into consideration.

4.5.2 Thoughtful audience engagement

As explained in the previous section, journalists feel indecisive whether to interact with audiences, due to their vulnerable position online. Thus, it is important to consider how some journalists are still able to facilitate and pursue thoughtful interaction with audiences. There were two motivations found to be key in continuing interacting with audiences in the (dis)information society.

Firstly, journalists are motivated to engage with audiences as this enable them to socialize, conversate about reporting and topics of interest, and share ideas or additional perspectives to an already published story. Active social media usage of journalists has shown to positively affect audience perceptions of these journalists in the past. Engaging in online conversation allows journalists to show their personality and humanity (Lee, 2015). Thus, this motivation can be related to our finding of journalists increasingly communicating transparency in the (dis)information society.

> *Readers are often very nice people, so it is sometimes just a nice social thing,*
> *to be able to talk to people about your work, to be able to exchange things.*
> *It is important because I think that you will also gain new stories. People who*
> *drop something in a sentence.* (Daniel, April 23, 2020)

As Daniel notes, aside from a social incentive to interact with his audience, there is also an instrumental motivation to interact with audiences. As interaction might lead to new topics to report upon, or additional perspectives to be included in the reporting. This finding has so to be seen in the context of the democratisation of media. As journalism has moved towards a more participatory focus, in which citizens now evolved in the news production process of professional journalism (Wall, 2017). Thus, direct interaction between journalists and audiences provide new editorial opportunities that could justify overcoming the vulnerability of journalists that has been found within this research.

Journalists are also moted to pursue online interaction. This allows them *to facilitate dialogue among members of their audience*. Thus, audiences can be encouraged to think critically and consider perspectives and opinions brought up by other members of the audiences. William works for one of the several news outlets in the Netherlands that support direct audience interaction on their news website. He notes that offering additional insights through audience interaction leads to better-informed citizens.

> *The majority of people who read comments don't respond, but it gives them*
> *other insights, and it's a better way to form their opinions. So, it helps them*
> *to understand something better, I think.* (William, May 14, 2020)

William's positive view on facilitating interaction within his audience is interesting, as research has shown that exposure to different perspectives positively affects tolerance towards opposing perspectives (Mutz, 2002). Furthermore, the findings of this research indicate that journalists do experience this themselves when interacting with critics. However, it must be noted that in these instances, journalists prefer to interact through closed online communication, rather

than publicly interacting on social media. Eric is one of the few journalists in this research who chose to interact with critics to explain his editorial process.

> *When I get viewers mail from very angry people who are very outraged about something, I often try to explain how a production came about. The choices that have been made […] then, surprisingly, a fairly reasonable and normal e-mail exchange happens in my experience. So, I always go into that very seriously.* (Eric, May 11, 2020)

The efforts made by Eric to clarify and disclose his decisions, practices, and sources, illustrate how thoughtful and deliberate interaction with audiences is used to communicate transparency in the (dis)information society. By looking for ways to alleviate some of the vulnerability of online interaction, journalists can be able to overcome the audience interaction dilemma. Thus, transparency, humanity, and dialogue are at the core of audience interaction in the (dis)information society.

5. Conclusion

The (dis)information society proves to be a challenging time for professional journalism. Information, disinformation, and all that in between are being spread in society, leaving many audiences to wonder which information they consume is legitimate. Meanwhile, journalists face increased scepticism from a polarised public debate in which their legitimacy is being tested (Marshall, 2017). These challenges, combined with the other characteristics of our contemporary society, have led researchers to argue that journalism is facing a critical turning point that alters the way journalists operate and report (Tandoc et al., 2019). Moreover, by emphasizing the traditional role of journalism, upholding journalistic principles, communicating transparency, and interaction with audiences, journalists have been able to mitigate some of the potentially detrimental effects of the (dis)information society (Balod & Hameleers, 2019; Koliska & Assmann, 2019; Koliska et al., 2020). In this research, evidence for these changes in role perceptions, reporting, and audience interaction has been found.

This research has explored the effects of (dis)information society on journalists in the Netherlands. Rather than a focus on a single characteristic of our contemporary society as previous studies have done, the findings of this research offer a broadened understanding. As a result, new insights show how the characteristics of the (dis)information society are interconnected and all contribute to changes in perceptions and action of journalists. Thus, these insights provide the means to answer the research question presented within this research; *How do journalists in the Netherlands perceive the effects of the (dis)information society?*

To answer this research question along with the sub-questions, a total of eleven interviews were conducted with journalists active or recently active within Dutch journalism. Following the grounded theory approach for the analysis of these interviews, a total of four overarching themes have been found. First, journalists *emphasize their responsibility to society* as a strategy to prove their legitimacy and relevance. Thus, the traditional role of journalism as a watchdog in society remains the dominant perception across journalists in the Netherlands. Second, journalists *perceive the democratisation and politicisation of the news as the primary disruptions* in society that affect how they operate. The distinction between professional journalism and citizen journalism has been ambiguous, which is perceived as a threat to the credibility of professional journalism. Furthermore, as politicians become news producers, it has been increasingly challenging to factcheck without journalists being publicly harassed for not being independent. Third, *journalists increasingly communicate transparency* through disclosure of their methodology and editorial considerations. They integrate this transparency within regular reporting or create a new dedicated content

category. And last, journalists navigate a dilemma endemic to audience interaction. They feel vulnerable to harassment through online interaction, but also experience the positive opportunities that thoughtful audience interaction offers for increased transparency and constructive dialogue.

5.1 Theoretical implications

It is important to note that the results presented in this research resemble those found in previous research. Moreover, the results found in this research resemble those found in by researchers in other countries. Thus, this research can be considered a partial validation of existing understandings within the academic discourse (Sousa, 2014). This research shows journalists continue to perceive themselves as an independent institution that seeks the truth above all and remains responsible for an informed public. Journalists reaffirm their journalistic principles to justify their role perception and position themselves as inherently different from citizen journalists. This justification has been explained as an effort to strengthen the public reputation of journalism (Koliska et al., 2020). Interestingly, this study found another justification. Journalists use data showing the increase in public interest towards professional journalism as an indication for their importance to society. Meanwhile, the recent increasing amount of disinformation in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic has also fuelled the motivations of journalists to tackle the disinformation society. Thus, to conclude the way journalists increase their legitimacy does not solely rely on internal beliefs but is also reliant upon a positive influx of newly interested audiences and the presence of misinformation and disinformation in society.

As journalists face ambiguity in the (dis)information society, they have become increasingly communicative about their practices, principles, and editorial considerations (Koliska & Assmann, 2019). However, this research indicates that there is no difference between public broadcasters and commercial outlets, which was only partially suggested in earlier research. Therefore, academics should consider this move towards communicating transparency as a general trend within journalism in the (dis)information society. Journalists feel that this newly utilized transparency allows them to alleviate some of the scepticism and ambiguity that are common within our contemporary society. Moreover, the incorporation of transparency in existing reporting and the creation of new content categories dedicated to the transparency of the editorial process, indicate that practices previously associated with investigative reporting have been passed on to mainstream beat reporting. This shift might be explained as new online forms of investigative reporting, such as Wikileaks and Bellingcat, have produced newsworthy events which have now grabbed the attention of mainstream news media (Lynch, 2010; Rosman, 2019). Therefore, this research argues that the increased efforts to transparency should partially contribute to the prevalence of citizen journalism in the (dis)information society.

Fitting with Marshall's (2017) description of the (dis)information society, journalists experience a dilemma which is endemic to audience interaction. The efforts needed to achieve thoughtful interaction on social media have discouraged a substantial number of journalists to be actively available for interaction. In these cases, vulnerability to harassment seems to be a direct consequence of the interaction with audiences. As such, the dilemma must be considered as a distinct characteristic of journalism in the (dis)information society. This coincides with the politicized media landscape in which politicians actively concern themselves with the production of news. This finding similarly contributes to a more exhaustive understanding of the (dis)information society, as this politicization should be considered as an additional characteristic which was not prevalent in Marshall's (2017) original description.

5.2 Societal implications

This research presents implications for various parties within the (dis)information society. As for journalists, the results within this research illustrate their ability to adapt to the issues and needs of society. However, it can be argued that the adaptation of new solutions is still slow, considering disinformation and scepticism towards professional journalism has been around for some time in society (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Schapals, 2018; Tandoc et al., 2019). Journalists themselves even remarked during the interviews that disinformation, such as fake news, has been a prolonged issue within society. Thus, it should be considered as somewhat surprising that the content related to transparency has only been around for a short period. Therefore, this research concludes that journalists could follow the examples set by the journalists in this research to further enhance their transparency in the (dis)information society.

Businesses, organisations, and other institutions have faced similar issues regarding scepticism, disinformation, and fake news over the last few years (Talwar et al., 2019). Thus, the strategies which are now used by journalists to communicate transparency might be beneficial of business and organisations in the (dis) information society. This research has shown how 'behind the story'-content can be utilized to mitigate scepticism and strengthen credibility.

A definitive struggle for journalists is the lack of governance regarding the use of title journalist. This research does not present a solution for this issue but rather hopes to instigate a conversation that would benefit all of those involved. Whether that be it political parties creating news platforms or citizen journalists genuinely trying to inform their audiences in society. Removing the ambiguity currently present with the title might also benefit citizens who then have a clear idea of what principles they are to expect from the information they get from a journalist.

The final implication of this research concerns governmental actions. Although the government has stressed the importance of tackling disinformation (Ollongren, 2019), journalists perceive their actions to be inadequate or even counterproductive. The EUvsDisinfo incident was mentioned by several journalists as a potential for censorship. Furthermore, journalists feel that Dutch politicians have infringed upon the freedom of the press by proposing public partnerships with new journalistic outlets or producing news themselves. Therefore, this research concludes that substantial steps should be taken by policymakers to ensure the continuation of the Dutch press as an independent institution that is only accountable to the public. The perspectives of journalists in this research outline that governments should not be involved in the assessment of information. Instead, they suggest that the government should focus on media literacy and prevention of disinformation through the democratic rule of law.

5.3 Limitations and recommendations

Even though several measures were taken this research was subject to several limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the grounded theory approach used to analyse that data involved the researcher actively using creativity to construct new theoretical models from the data (Cutcliffe, 2000). Therefore, the presented findings are subject to the researcher's interpretation. However, this research mitigated this limitation through a process of continuous iteration and critical reflection during the data collection and analysis steps of this research.

Furthermore, the sample created for this research included journalist from diverse expertise, ideologies, and media types. However, it must be noted that the sample size of eleven journalists is relatively small compared to the number of journalists currently employed in the Netherland. Nonetheless, this research achieved theoretical saturation as the additional interviews did not generate new insights for the grounded theory approach (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, the results found within this research corresponded with findings from similar research in other countries. Thus, this research concludes that the results presented are reliable but are not to be generalized as the sample is not sufficiently exhaustive (Sousa, 2014).

The interview research method has allowed this research to gather in-depth data. However, the circumstances in which these interviews were conducted might have had an impact on the responses of participants. For instance, several participants had expressed the need for anonymity to participate in this research. Although steps were taken to alleviate any concerns, it possible that some participants did not completely feel comfortable to share their full experiences.

This research provides topics of interest which future research could investigate further. The current research has focused on a diversified sample that comprised several perspectives which have

produced a broad understanding of how journalists perceive the effects of the (dis)information society. Nonetheless, future studies should consider using a larger sample size as this will allow for better comparison between groups within Dutch journalism. These studies can take both a quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods approach. The latter will be useful for generalizability with a rich understanding of journalists' underlying motives, experiences, and perceptions. A survey study could additionally help to generalize the findings of this research as well as the studies that have found similar results when it comes to journalists in the (dis)information society.

Moreover, future research should further investigate the influences of COVID-19 on journalism. As several journalists noted new approaches to reporting as well as increased interest from the public in reliable news from professional journalism. As this research has indicated, journalists have focused on different formats of reporting as well as positively oriented reporting to meet societal needs. A content analysis of articles published during the Dutch COVID-19 lockdown could discover to what extent reporting has been focused on the informational and psychological needs of the public. Furthermore, additional studies could investigate the effects these kinds of reporting have on audiences. It will be interesting to see whether audiences have indeed changed their uses and gratifications for news consumption in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Results of such a study could help to explain the increase in news consumption that journalists in this research observed.

Additional research should also investigate the incorporation of transparency in reporting. As this research has shown this is done either through methodological disclaimers content or the creation of a content category dedicated to transparency. Current literature on this topic is limited as this to be considered as a more recent development in professional reporting. Future research on this topic could utilize content analysis to understand which elements are used and how core principles of journalism are structured in 'behind the story'-content. Furthermore, it also important to consider the effects of this approach to communicate transparency on audiences and critics. Experiments might show how elements of journalistic transparency are perceived by the public and whether there is a difference in the effectiveness of each approach to communicating transparency.

Moreover, this research has shown that journalists experience a dilemma when it comes to interaction with their audiences. Although the usage of social media by journalists and its effects has been researched in the last decade, there is still a gap in the literature when it comes to thoughtful audience interaction. Current literature mainly concerns audience interaction relation participatory journalism (Wall, 2017). Thus, future research should focus on the journalist's perspective on the use

of audience interaction to legitimize journalism and facilitate exposure to different opinions in society.

Lastly, future research needs to consider that the (dis)information society is continuously changing and actors within adapt to mitigate its challenges. Social networks have only recently taken bold steps to limit the spread of misinformation and disinformation on their platforms (Hern, 2020; Marr, 2020; Seetharaman, 2017). It is thus relevant to continue research on the effects these actions of social networks have on groups within society. Furthermore, it will be relevant to see whether these actions can alleviate the vulnerability that leaves some journalists today in a dilemma. Insights might also be useful to shape future legislation as well as guidelines that make people more accountable for spreading misinformation and disinformation.

Overall, this research has found that journalists continue to adapt to the new reality that is the (dis)information society. They feel responsible or even empowered by the uncertainty in society to emphasize their role as watchdogs of society and tackle the issue of disinformation. However, their efforts have also been limited by ambiguity to the influx of citizen journalists and politicians into news production. Politized media criticism and ambiguity over credibility must be considered as common and unavoidable in the (dis)information society. Through communicating transparency journalists are now able to legitimize their reporting efforts and strengthen relations with their audiences. However, interaction with audiences remains a topic of concern as journalists experience a dilemma due to their vulnerability harassment online. Nonetheless, this research indicates that thoughtful and constructive interaction between journalists and their audiences is still achievable in the (dis)information society. This research shares many of insights with results from researchers in other countries. Therefore, additional studies are encouraged by this research to further the understanding of the (dis)information society and the actors that live in it.

References

Aalberts, C. (2019). Chris Aalberts—Bij Forum voor Democratie klapt men harder voor intimidatie van journalisten dan voor eigen Statenleden. Retrieved from https://tpo.nl/2019/09/21/chris-aalberts-bij-forum-voor-democratie-klapt-men-harder-voor-intimidatie-van-journalisten-dan-voor-eigen-statenleden/

Ahva, L. (2017). Practice theory for journalism studies. *Journalism Studies*, *18*(12), 1523–1541. doi: 10.1080/1461670X.2016.1139464

Albright, J. (2017). Welcome to the era of fake news. *Media & Communication*, *5*(2), 87–89. doi: 10.17645/mac.v5i2.977

Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *31*(2), 211–236. doi: http://dx.doi.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211

Allen, D. S. (2008). The Trouble with Transparency. *Journalism Studies*, *9*(3), 323–340. doi: 10.1080/14616700801997224

Altmeppen, K.-D., Arnold, K., & Kössler, T. (2012). Are the media capable of fair reporting? Remarks on the principle of fairness in professional journalism. In E. Kals & J. Maes (Eds.), *Justice and Conflicts: Theoretical and Empirical Contributions* (pp. 329–343). doi: 10.1007/978-3-642-19035-3_20

American Press Institute. (2020). The elements of journalism. Retrieved from https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/what-is-journalism/elements-journalism/

Babbie, E. (2014). *The Basics of Social Research* (6th ed.). Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.

Baker, P., & Karni, A. (2020, February 28). Trump accuses media and democrats of exaggerating coronavirus threat. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/28/us/politics/trump-accuses-media-democrats-coronavirus.html

Bakir, V., & McStay, A. (2018). Fake news and the economy of emotions. *Digital Journalism*, *6*(2),

    154–175. doi: 10.1080/21670811.2017.1345645

Bakker, S. (2020a). NUcheckt: Nepnieuws lijkt toegenomen na coronabesmetting in Nederland.

    Retrieved from https://www.nu.nl/nucheckt/6034550/nucheckt-nepnieuws-lijkt-

    toegenomen-na-coronabesmetting-in-nederland.html

Bakker, S. (2020b). Hoe complottheorieën over 5G en het coronavirus zich verspreiden. Retrieved

    from https://www.nu.nl/coronavirus/6044727/hoe-complottheorieen-over-5g-en-het-

    coronavirus-zich-verspreiden.html

Balod, H. S. S., & Hameleers, M. (2019). Fighting for truth? The role perceptions of Filipino journalists

    in an era of mis- and disinformation. *Journalism*. doi: 10.1177/1464884919865109

Barbour, R. S. (2014). Quality of Data Analysis. In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*

    (pp. 496–509). doi: 10.4135/9781446282243

Berger, G. (2018). Is there a future for journalism? *Journalism Practice*, *12*(8), 939–953. doi:

    10.1080/17512786.2018.1516117

Berger, L. L. (2002). Shielding the unmedia: Using the process of journalism to protect the journalist's

    privilege in an infinite universe of publication. *Houston Law Review*, *39*(5), 1371–1416.

Bouma, R. (2017). Nepnieuws en sociale media als wapen in politieke campagnes. Retrieved from

    https://nos.nl/l/2159802

Bouma, R. (2019). 'Politici plaatsen steeds vaker desinformatie op sociale media'. Retrieved from

    https://nos.nl/l/2304514

Brandtzaeg, P., Følstad, A., & Domínguez, M. (2018). How journalists and social media users perceive

    online fact-checking and verification services. *Journalism Practice*, *12*(9), 1109–1129. doi:

    10.1080/17512786.2017.1363657

Brants, K., & Praag, P. (2006). Signs of media logic. Half a century of political communication in the

    Netherlands. *Javnost / The Public*, *13*, 27–41. doi: 10.1080/13183222.2006.11008905

Brennen, B. S. (2017). *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies* (2nd ed.). New York:

Routledge.

Broersma, M., & Graham, T. (2013). Twitter as a news source. *Journalism Practice*, *7*(4), 446–464. doi:

10.1080/17512786.2013.802481

Bruns, A. (2011). Gatekeeping, gatewatching, real-time feedback: New challenges for Journalism.

Brazilian Journalism Research, *7*(2), 117–136. doi: 10.25200/BJR.v7n2.2011.355

Bruns, A. (2012). Journalists and Twitter: How Australian news organisations adapt to a new medium.

Media International Australia, *144*(1), 97–107. doi: 10.1177/1329878X1214400114

Bump, P. (2017, November 13). Analysis | How polarization and splintered media are fostering a

world of doubt. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2017/11/13/how-polarization-and-

splintered-media-are-fostering-a-world-of-doubt/

Burger, P., Kanhai, S., Pleijter, A., & Verberne, S. (2019). The reach of commercially motivated junk

news on Facebook. *PLOS ONE*, *14*(8). doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0220446

Carlson, M. (2018). The information politics of journalism in a post-truth age. *Journalism Studies*,

19(13), 1879–1888. doi: 10.1080/1461670X.2018.1494513

Carpentier, N., Dahlgren, P., & Pasquali, F. (2013). Waves of media democratization: A brief history of

contemporary participatory practices in the media sphere. *Convergence: The International

Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, *19*(3), 287–294. doi:

10.1177/1354856513486529

Casey, L. (2017, December 8). Analysis | how Washington Post journalists broke the story of

allegations against Roy Moore. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/12/08/how-washington-post-

journalists-broke-the-story-of-allegations-against-roy-moore/

CBS. (2019). Vertrouwen in mensen en in organisaties; persoonskenmerken. Retrieved from

https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/cijfers/detail/82378NED

Cheruiyot, D. (2018). Popular criticism that matters. *Journalism Practice*, *12*(8), 1008–1018. doi: 10.1080/17512786.2018.1494511

Christians, C., & Nordenstreng, K. (2004). Social responsibility worldwide. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *19*(1), 3–28. doi: 10.1207/s15327728jmme1901_2

Ciampaglia, G. (2018). Fighting fake news: A role for computational social science in the fight against digital misinformation. *Journal of Computational Social Science*, *1*(1), 147–153. doi: 10.1007/s42001-017-0005-6

Commissariaat voor de Media. (2019). Mediamonitor 2019: Nederlanders blijven zich breed oriënteren voor nieuws. Retrieved from https://www.mediamonitor.nl/nieuws/mediamonitor-2019-nederlanders-blijven-zich-breed-orienteren-voor-nieuws/

Commissariaat voor de Media. (2020). Digital News Report 2020: Interesse in nieuws in Nederland blijft hoog en stabiel. Retrieved from https://www.cvdm.nl/actueel/digital-news-report-2020-interesse-in-nieuws-in-nederland-blijft-hoog-en-stabiel

Conroy, N., Rubin, V., & Chen, Y. (2015). Automatic deception detection: Methods for finding fake news. *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, *52*(1), 1–4. doi: 10.1002/pra2.2015.145052010082

Cutcliffe, J. R. (2000). Methodological issues in grounded theory. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *31*(6), 1476–1484. doi: 10.1046/j.1365-2648.2000.01430.x

Das, J. (2007). Sydney freelance journalists and the notion of professionalism. *Pacific Journalism Review*, *13*(1), 142–160.

Delcker, J., Wanat, Z., & Scott, M. (2020). The coronavirus fake news pandemic sweeping WhatsApp. Retrieved from https://www.politico.com/news/2020/03/16/coronavirus-fake-news-pandemic-133447

Dodds, T. (2019). Reporting with WhatsApp: Mobile chat applications' impact on journalistic practices. *Digital Journalism*, *7*(6), 725–745. doi: 10.1080/21670811.2019.1592693

Duffy, A., Tandoc, E. C., & Ling, R. (2018). Frankenstein journalism. *Information, Communication & Society*, *21*(10), 1354–1368. doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2017.1313884

Egelhofer, J., & Lecheler, S. (2019). Fake news as a two-dimensional phenomenon: A framework and research agenda. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, *43*(2), 97–116. doi: 10.1080/23808985.2019.1602782

Engelbart, T. (2016). Staatsomroep NOS fungeert als gratis propagandamachine voor DENK, en maakt promofilmpjes voor ze. Retrieved from https://www.dagelijksestandaard.nl/2016/11/staatsomroep-nos-fungeert-als-gratis-propagandamachine-voor-denk-en-maakt-promofilmpjes-voor-ze/

Eveland, W. P., & Shah, D. V. (2003). The impact of individual and interpersonal factors on perceived news media bias. *Political Psychology*, *24*(1), 101–117. doi: 10.1111/0162-895X.00318

Fallis, D., & Mathiesen, K. (2019). Fake news is counterfeit news. *Inquiry*, *0*(0), 1–20. doi: 10.1080/0020174X.2019.1688179

Farkas, J., & Neumayer, C. (2018). Disguised propaganda from digital to social media. In J. Hunsinger, L. Klastrup, & M. M. Allen (Eds.), *Second International Handbook of Internet Research* (pp. 1–17). doi: 10.1007/978-94-024-1202-4_33-1

Feighery, G. (2011). Conversation and credibility: Broadening journalism criticism through public engagement. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *26*(2), 158–175. doi: 10.1080/08900523.2011.559806

Ferraro, M. F., & Chipman, J. C. (2019, February 8). Fake news threatens our businesses, not just our politics. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/fake-news-threatens-our-businesses-not-just-our-politics/2019/02/08/f669b62c-2b1f-11e9-984d-9b8fba003e81_story.html

Firmin, M. (2008). Unstructured Interview. In L. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. doi: 10.4135/9781412963909.n475

Flegenheimer, M., & Grynbaum, M. (2018, January 17). Trump hands out 'fake news awards,' sans

the red carpet. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from

https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/17/business/media/fake-news-awards.html

Flick, U. (2007). *Designing Qualitative Research*. doi: 10.4135/9781849208826

Girard, B., Ó Siochrú, S., Banda, F., Deane, J., Dixit, K., Guédon, J.-C., … Waisbord, S. (2003).

Communicating in the information society. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for

Social Development.

Given, L. (2008). Sampling. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. doi:

10.4135/9781412963909.n413

Goode, L. (2009). Social news, citizen journalism and democracy. *New Media & Society*, *11*(8), 1287–

1305. doi: 10.1177/1461444809341393

Habgood-Coote, J. (2019). Stop talking about fake news! *Inquiry*, *62*(9–10), 1033–1065. doi:

10.1080/0020174X.2018.1508363

Haigh, M., Haigh, T., & Kozak, N. (2018). Stopping fake news. *Journalism Studies*, *19*(14), 2062–2087.

doi: 10.1080/1461670X.2017.1316681

Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., … Yuen, E. K. W. (2011).

Mapping journalism cultures across nations. *Journalism Studies*, *12*(3), 273–293. doi:

10.1080/1461670X.2010.512502

Hanusch, F. (2015). Transformative times: Australian journalists' perceptions of changes in their

work. *Media International Australia*, *155*(1), 38–53. doi: 10.1177/1329878X1515500106

Hanusch, F., & Vos, T. (2019). Charting the development of a field: A systematic review of

comparative studies of journalism. *International Communication Gazette*, 1–23. doi:

10.1177/1748048518822606

Henley, J. (2020, February 4). Dutch rightwing leader under fire over false account of harassment.

The Guardian. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/04/dutch-

rightwing-leader-under-fire-over-false-account-of-harassment

Hern, A. (2020, March 19). Twitter to remove harmful fake news about coronavirus. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/19/twitter-to-remove-harmful-fake-news-about-coronavirus

Hickerson, A., & Palanski, M. (2019). Journalism needs to practice transparency in a different way to rebuild credibility. Retrieved from http://theconversation.com/journalism-needs-to-practice-transparency-in-a-different-way-to-rebuild-credibility-111474

Hiltner, S. (2018, September 19). How to tell us a secret. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/19/reader-center/confidential-tip-line.html

Himma-Kadakas, M. (2017). Alternative facts and fake news entering journalistic content production cycle. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *9*(2), 25–40. doi: 10.5130/ccs.v9i2.5469

Ireton, C., & Posetti, J. (2018). *Journalism, fake news & disinformation: Handbook for journalism education and training*. Paris: UNESCO.

Josephi, B. (2016). Digital journalism and democracy. In *The SAGE Handbook of Digital Journalism* (pp. 9–24). doi: 10.4135/9781473957909

Kaufhold, K., Valenzuela, S., & de Zúñiga, H. G. (2010). Citizen journalism and democracy: How user-generated news use relates to political knowledge and participation. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *87*(3–4), 515–529. doi: 10.1177/107769901008700305

Kaul, V. (2012). Changing paradigms of media landscape in the digital age. *Journal of Mass Communication and Journalism*, *2*(2), 1–9. doi: 10.4172/2165- 7912.1000110

Kim, A., Moravec, P., & Dennis, A. (2019). Combating fake news on social media with source ratings: The effects of user and expert reputation ratings. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, *36*(3), 931–968. doi: 10.1080/07421222.2019.1628921

Kivits, N. (2016). Aantal freelancers met een derde deel gestegen in vijf jaar tijd. Retrieved from https://www.villamedia.nl/artikel/aantal-freelancers-met-kwart-gestegen-in-vijf-jaar-tijd

Kivits, N. (2019). Arbeidsmarkt journalisten in herstel, maar niet voor iedereen even veel. Retrieved

from https://www.villamedia.nl/artikel/arbeidsmarkt-journalisten-in-herstel-maar-niet-voor-

iedereen-even-veel

Koliska, M., & Assmann, K. (2019). Lügenpresse: The lying press and German journalists' responses to

a stigma. *Journalism*, 1–18. doi: 10.1177/1464884919894088

Koliska, M., Chadha, K., & Burns, A. (2020). Talking Back: Journalists defending attacks against their

profession in the Trump era. *Journalism Studies*, 1–18. doi: 10.1080/1461670X.2020.1763190

Lawrence, R. G., Radcliffe, D., & Schmidt, T. R. (2018). Practicing engagement: Participatory

journalism in the web 2.0 era. *Journalism Practice*, *12*(10), 1220–1240. doi:

10.1080/17512786.2017.1391712

Lee, J. (2015). The double-edged sword: The effects of journalists' social media activities on audience

perceptions of journalists and their news products. *Journal of Computer-Mediated

Communication*, *20*(3), 312–329. doi: 10.1111/jcc4.12113

Lee, N. M. (2018). Fake news, phishing, and fraud: A call for research on digital media literacy

education beyond the classroom. *Communication Education*, *67*(4), 460–466. doi:

10.1080/03634523.2018.1503313

Lewis, J., & Cushion, S. (2009). The thirst to be first: An analysis of breaking news stories and their

impact on the quality of 24-hour news coverage in the UK. *Journalism Practice*, *3*(3), 304–

318. doi: 10.1080/17512780902798737

Lewis, S. C., Holton, A. E., & Coddington, M. (2014). Reciprocal journalism: A concept of mutual

exchange between journalists and audiences. *Journalism Practice*, *8*(2), 229–241. doi:

10.1080/17512786.2013.859840

Lewis, S., & Molyneux, L. (2018). A decade of research on social media and journalism: Assumptions,

blind spots, and a way forward. *Media and Communication*, *6*(4), 11–23. doi:

10.17645/mac.v6i4.1562

Lindgren, M. (2016). Personal narrative journalism and podcasting. *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, *14*(1), 23–41. doi: 10.1386/rjao.14.1.23_1

Lynch, L. (2010). "We're going to crack the world open": Wikileaks and the future of investigative reporting. *Journalism Practice*, *4*(3), 309–318. doi: 10.1080/17512781003640752

Marr, B. (2020). Coronavirus fake news: How Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are tackling the problem. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2020/03/27/finding-the-truth-about-covid-19-how-facebook-twitter-and-instagram-are-tackling-fake-news/

Marshall, J. P. (2017). Disinformation society, communication and cosmopolitan democracy. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *9*(2), 1–24. doi: 10.5130/ccs.v9i2.5477

Martin, N. (2017). Journalism, the pressures of verification and notions of post-truth in civil society. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *9*(2), 41–56. doi: 10.5130/ccs.v9i2.5476

Mazzoleni, G. (2008). Populism and the media. In D. Albertazzi & D. McDonnell (Eds.), *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (pp. 49–64). doi: 10.1057/9780230592100_4

McIntyre, K. (2019). Solutions journalism. *Journalism Practice*, *13*(1), 16–34. doi: 10.1080/17512786.2017.1409647

Misérus, M., & Van Der Noorda, R. (2017, March 7). Nu duikt ook de neppeiling op: Politici trappen in 'knutselwerkjes'. *De Volkskrant*. Retrieved from https://www.volkskrant.nl/gs-b999d746

Morgan, D. L. (2012). Snowball sampling. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. doi: 10.4135/9781412963909

Moszkowicz, M. (2019, January 17). Arnold Karskens: 'Ik geloof het NOS Journaal niet meer'. *Revu.* Retrieved from https://revu.nl/artikel/1716/arnold-karskens-nos-journaal

Mutz, D. C. (2002). Cross-Cutting Social Networks: Testing Democratic Theory in Practice. *The American Political Science Review*, *96*(1), 111–126. Retrieved from JSTOR.

NCTV. (2020). Reactie NCTV op sabotage en brandstichting zendmasten Nederland. Retrieved from

https://www.nctv.nl/actueel/nieuws/2020/04/10/reactie-nctv-op-brandstichting-

zendmasten-nederland

Newton, L. H., Hodges, L., & Keith, S. (2004). Accountability in the professions: Accountability in

journalism. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *19*(3–4), 166–190. doi:

10.1080/08900523.2004.9679687

Nieminen, S., & Rapeli, L. (2019). Fighting misperceptions and doubting journalists' objectivity: A

review of fact-checking literature. *Political Studies Review*, *17*(3), 296–309. doi:

10.1177/1478929918786852

Nieuwenhuis, M. (2020, April 11). Complotdenkers slaan toe: 'Er is een link tussen 5G en corona'.

Algemeen Dagblad. Retrieved from https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/complotdenkers-slaan-

toe-er-is-een-link-tussen-5g-en-corona~a4dbfa06/

Ollongren, K. H. (2018, December 13). Kamerbrief over dreiging desinformatie en beïnvloeding

verkiezingen. Retrieved from

https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2018/12/13/kamerbrief-over-

dreiging-desinformatie-en-beinvloeding-verkiezingen

Ollongren, K. H. (2019, May 14). Kamerbrief inzake voortgang uitvoering EU Actieplan tegen

desinformatie. Retrieved from

https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/05/14/kamerbrief-inzake-

voortgang-uitvoering-eu-actieplan-tegen-desinformatie

Oosterwaal, A., & Torenvlied, R. (2010). Politics divided from society? Three explanations for trends

in societal and political polarisation in the Netherlands. *West European Politics*, *33*(2), 258–

279. doi: 10.1080/01402380903538880

Paapst, M. H., & Mulder, T. (2016). Media pluralism monitor 2016: Netherlands. Retrieved from

https://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor/mpm-2016-results/netherlands/

Pasveer, L. (2020). Coronacrisis zorgt voor fors meer mediaconsumptie. Retrieved from

https://www.villamedia.nl/artikel/coronacrisis-zorgt-voor-fors-meer-mediaconsumptie

Pavlik, J. (2000). The impact of technology on journalism. *Journalism Studies*, *1*(2), 229–237. doi:

10.1080/14616700050028226

Pentina, I., & Tarafdar, M. (2014). From "information" to "knowing": Exploring the role of social

media in contemporary news consumption. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *35*, 211–223. doi:

10.1016/j.chb.2014.02.045

Pertierra, R. (2019). Book review: Disorder and the disinformation society: the social dynamics of

information networks and software. *Human Technology*, *15*(2), 293–299. doi:

10.17011/ht/urn.201906123160

Peters, C., & Witschge, T. (2015). From grand narratives of democracy to small expectations of

participation. *Journalism Practice*, *9*(1), 19–34. doi: 10.1080/17512786.2014.928455

Pew Research Center. (2005, February 1). A New Journalism for Democracy in a New Age. Retrieved

from https://www.journalism.org/2005/02/01/a-new-journalism-for-democracy-in-a-new-

age/

Phillips, A. (2010). Transparency and the new ethics of journalism. *Journalism Practice*, *4*(3), 373–382.

doi: 10.1080/17512781003642972

Posetti, J. (2017). *Protecting journalism sources in the digital age*. Retrieved from

http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002480/248054E.pdf

Raalte, J. van. (2018, January 19). EU-factcheckers bestempelen Nederlandse publicaties onterecht

als 'desinformatie'. *De Volkskrant.* Retrieved from https://www.volkskrant.nl/gs-bffa03a4

Rae, M. (2020). Hyperpartisan news: Rethinking the media for populist politics. *New Media & Society*,

1461444820910416. doi: 10.1177/1461444820910416

Rajan, A. (2020, March 14). Coronavirus and a fake news pandemic. *BBC News*. Retrieved from

https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-51858555

Reilly, I. (2018). F for fake: Propaganda! hoaxing! Hacking! partisanship! and activism! in the fake

news ecology. *The Journal of American Culture*, *41*(2), 139–152. doi: 10.1111/jacc.12834

Riaz, S., & Pasha, S. A. (2011). Role of citizen journalism in strengthening societies. *FWU Journal of

Social Sciences*, *5*(1), 88–103.

Riegert, K., & Olsson, E.-K. (2007). The importance of ritual in crisis journalism. *Journalism Practice*,

1(2), 143–158. doi: 10.1080/17512780701275457

Robinson, S., & DeShano, C. (2011). 'Anyone can know': Citizen journalism and the interpretive

community of the mainstream press. *Journalism*, *12*(8), 963–982. doi:

10.1177/1464884911415973

Rogmans, D. (2018). Minister Ollongren wil nu ook af van EU vs Disinfo. Retrieved from

https://www.villamedia.nl/artikel/minister-ollongren-wil-nu-ook-af-van-eu-vs-disinfo

Rosman, C. (2019, June 19). Wie zijn de onderzoekers van Bellingcat?. *Algemeen Dagblad*. Retrieved

from https://www.ad.nl/buitenland/wie-zijn-de-onderzoekers-van-bellingcat~aa41ed00/

Schapals, A. (2018). Fake news. *Journalism Practice*, *12*(8), 976–985. doi:

10.1080/17512786.2018.1511822

Schipper, N. (2020, April 22). Nederland zakt een plaats op de jaarlijkse persvrijheidindex. *Trouw*.

Retrieved from https://www.trouw.nl/gs-b7649860

Schnackenberg, A. K., & Tomlinson, E. C. (2016). Organizational transparency: A new perspective on

managing trust in organization-stakeholder relationships. *Journal of Management*, *42*(7),

1784–1810. doi: 10.1177/0149206314525202

Seetharaman, D. (2017, August 4). Facebook steps up fight on fake news. *Wall Street Journal*.

Retrieved from https://search-proquest-

com.eur.idm.oclc.org/docview/1925628742/fulltext/849BFE1425BF45EAPQ/1?accountid=13

598

Siddiqui, S. (2018, January 18). Donald Trump faces backlash as he reveals 'fake news awards'

winners. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/us-

news/2018/jan/17/trump-fake-news-awards-winners

Silverman, C. (2016). This analysis shows how viral fake election news stories outperformed real

news on facebook. Retrieved from

https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/viral-fake-election-news-

outperformed-real-news-on-facebook

Silverman, C. (2017). I helped popularize the term "fake news" and now I cringe whenever I hear it.

Retrieved from https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/i-helped-popularize-

the-term-fake-news-and-now-i-cringe

Smaling, E. (2020). Acht corona-onderzoeken aan de EUR ontvangen beurs van NWO. Retrieved from

https://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/2020/04/16/acht-corona-onderzoeken-aan-de-eur-

ontvangen-beurs-van-nwo/

Sousa, D. (2014). Validation in qualitative research: General aspects and specificities of the

descriptive phenomenological method. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *11*(2), 211–227.

doi: 10.1080/14780887.2013.853855

Talwar, S., Dhir, A., Kaur, P., Zafar, N., & Alrasheedy, M. (2019). Why do people share fake news?

Associations between the dark side of social media use and fake news sharing behavior.

Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, *51*, 72–82. doi: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.05.026

Tandoc, E., Jenkins, J., & Craft, S. (2019). Fake news as a critical incident in journalism. *Journalism

Practice*, *13*(6), 673–689. doi: 10.1080/17512786.2018.1562958

Tandoc, E., Lim, Z., & Ling, R. (2018). Defining "fake news". *Digital Journalism*, *6*(2), 137–153. doi:

10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143

Tarran, B. (2017). Why facts are not enough in the fight against fake news. *Significance*, *14*(5), 6–7.

doi: 10.1111/j.1740-9713.2017.01066.x

Tempelman, O. (2020, May 22). Dood en chaos: We zijn er niet meer aan gewend. *De Volkskrant*.

    Retrieved from https://www.volkskrant.nl/gs-b759dc8e

Thomson Reuters. (2008). Accuracy—Handbook of journalism. Retrieved from

    http://handbook.reuters.com/index.php?title=Accuracy&oldid=1419

Thornberg, R., & Charmaz, K. (2014). Grounded theory and theoretical coding. In *The SAGE Handbook*

    of Qualitative Data Analysis (pp. 153–169). doi: 10.4135/9781446282243

Tienhooven, G. (2019, November 25). Nieuwe omroep Ongehoord Nederland wil plek in publieke

    bestel. *Algemeen Dagblad.* Retrieved from https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/nieuwe-omroep-

    ongehoord-nederland-wil-plek-in-publieke-bestel~a1ada69e/

Turse, N. (2018). How we reported this story. Retrieved from

    https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/ywkg97/how-we-reported-this-story-drc

Van den Berg, E. (2020, January 6). Zijn roeping: NOS bashen. *NRC*. Retrieved from

    https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2020/01/06/zijn-roeping-nos-bashen-a3985851

Van den Dikkenberg, B. (2020, April 30). Het complot: Helpt verbranden 5G-mast tegen corona?

    Reformatorisch Dagblad. Retrieved from https://www.rd.nl/meer-rd/wetenschap-

    techniek/het-complot-helpt-verbranden-5g-mast-tegen-corona-1.1658361

Van Leeuwen, M. (2019, March 29). Meer dan tweehonderd academici tekenen 'anti-Baudetbrief'.

    Algemeen Dagblad. Retrieved from https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/meer-dan-tweehonderd-

    academici-tekenen-anti-baudetbrief~a299a031/

Verma, A., Singh, M. K., & Pareek, D. A. (2020). Information, misinformation, and disinformation

    about covid-19: A content study of closed-cross platform messaging using WhatsApp.

    International Journal of Advance Science and Technology, *29*(10), 7797–7804.

Vermanen, J., & Van Bree, T. (2020). Flinke stijging van onbetrouwbaar nieuws over coronavirus op

    Twitter. Retrieved from https://pointer.kro-ncrv.nl/node/280

Vincent, J. (2020). Conspiracy theorists say 5G causes novel coronavirus, so now they're harassing

    and attacking UK telecoms engineers. Retrieved from

https://www.theverge.com/2020/6/3/21276912/5g-conspiracy-theories-coronavirus-uk-telecoms-engineers-attacks-abuse

Vobič, I., & Kovačič, M. P. (2015). *Watchdog journalism and confidential sources: A study of journalists' negotiation of confidentiality with their sources*. *52*(4), 591–611.

Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, *359*(6380), 1146–1151. doi: 10.1126/science.aap9559

Waisbord, S. (2018). Truth is what happens to news. *Journalism Studies*, *19*(13), 1866–1878. doi: 10.1080/1461670X.2018.1492881

Wall, M. (2017). Mapping citizen and participatory journalism. *Journalism Practice*, *11*(2–3), 134–141. doi: 10.1080/17512786.2016.1245890

Wardle, C. (2019). Misinformation has created a new world disorder. Retrieved from https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/misinformation-has-created-a-new-world-disorder/

Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making. Retrieved from https://edoc.coe.int/en/media/7495-information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research-and-policy-making.html

Webster, F. (2002). The information society revisited. In *Handbook of New Media: Social Shaping and Consequences of ICTs* (pp. 22–33). doi: 10.4135/9781848608245

Webster, F. (2014). *Theories of the information society*. doi: 10.4324/9781315867854

Wettstein, M., Esser, F., Schulz, A., Wirz, D. S., & Wirth, W. (2018). News media as gatekeepers, critics, and initiators of populist communication: How journalists in ten countries deal with the populist challenge. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *23*(4), 476–495. doi: 10.1177/1940161218785979

Wijnberg, R. (2017). Why objective journalism is a misleading and dangerous illusion. Retrieved from

https://thecorrespondent.com/6138/why-objective-journalism-is-a-misleading-and-

dangerous-illusion/157316940-eb6c348e

Wijngaarden, L. van. (2018, March 8). EU-commissie trekt beschuldiging van nepnieuws tegen De

Gelderlander in. *Algemeen Dagblad*. Retrieved from https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/eu-

commissie-trekt-beschuldiging-van-nepnieuws-tegen-de-gelderlander-in~a32c1dd3/

Witschge, T., & Nygren, G. (2009). Journalistic work: A profession under pressure? *Journal of Media

Business Studies*, *6*(1), 37–59. doi: 10.1080/16522354.2009.11073478

Wolfgang, J., Vos, T., & Kelling, K. (2019). Journalism's relationship to democracy: Roles, attitudes,

and practices. *Journalism Studies*, *20*(14), 1977–1994. doi: 10.1080/1461670X.2018.1547123

Zannettou, S., Caulfield, T., De Cristofaro, E., Sirivianos, M., Stringhini, G., & Blackburn, J. (2019).

Disinformation warfare: Understanding state-sponsored trolls on Twitter and their influence

on the web. *Companion Proceedings of The 2019 World Wide Web Conference on - WWW

'19*, 218–226. doi: 10.1145/3308560.3316495

Appendix A: Description of the sample

Ref.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Profession	Media description	Interests	Interview date
1	John	30's	Male	Freelance journalist	National newspaper	Regional news	10/04/2020
2	Michelle	20's	Female	Journalist	National newspaper	Celebrity news	13/04/2020
3	Robert	20's	Male	Radio journalist	Commercial media	Meta journalism	16/04/2020
4	James	40's	Male	Reporter	Established anti-establishment online news	Politics and public debate	17/04/2020
5	Mark	30's	Male	Chief editor	Commercial news media	(inter-) national news	22/04/2020
6	Daniel	30's	Male	Data journalist	Online public broadcaster	Data journalism	23/04/2020
7	Karen	30's	Female	Journalist	Established national newspaper	Regional news	29/04/2020
8	Eric	40's	Male	Reporter	TV public broadcaster	Investigative reporting	11/05/2020
9	David	40's	Male	Chief editor	Commercial news media	(inter-) national news	12/05/2020
10	William	40's	Male	Chief editor	Commercial news media	(inter-) national news	14/05/2020
11	Sophie	40's	Female	Chief Editor	Commercial news media	Business news	10/06/2020

Appendix A: Interview guide

Topic 1: background, motivations and views on journalism

- *Could you please introduce yourself?*

- *What got you into journalism?*

- *What do you like the most about your work? (What do you dislike?)*

Topic 2: Working as a journalist

- *How is your workflow?*

- *How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your work?*

- *How do you decide to cover a certain topic?*

- *Can you describe how you cover (e.g. techniques, procedures, habits) a topic?*

- *How do you interact with your audience?*

Topic 3: the view on society and societal trust in news media

- *What is your view on the current state of journalism in society?*

- *What factors would you consider relevant in this current state?*

- *What is your view on public trust in news media?*

- *What factors (e.g. reliability / authority / reputation) are of importance for trust in journalism?*

Topic 4: the spread of disinformation online

- *What is your view on the spread of disinformation online?*

- *What constitutes fake news according to you?*

- *Can you elaborate on your experiences with fake news and other disinformation?*

- *How has disinformation affected your work as a journalist?*

- *Which actions (e.g. governmental / journalistic actions) need to be taken against disinformation online?*

Topic 5: Criticism towards journalism

- *What is your view on people (e.g. public figures, audiences, politicians, celebrities) critiquing reporting by professional journalists?*

- *How does media criticism (e.g. the use of the fake news label, claims of political bias) affect your work as a journalist?*

- *How do report on topics commonly associated with media critique? (e.g. black Pete discussion, race, migration, politics, populism, conspiracy theories)*

- *Can you elaborate on your experiences with media critique?*

Appendix C: Coding scheme

Selective codes	Axial codes	Open codes
Exemplifying societal responsibility	Sense of responsibility to society	Emphasized societal role, Trust in traditional journalism, Independent institution, Quality journalism, Passionate journalism, Increase in demand for news, Upholding journalistic principles, Truth-seeking, Authentic reporting, Dynamic work environment, Balanced reporting, Holding politicians accountable, Uncensored journalism, Impactful journalism
	Concerns over disinformation	Disinformation becoming mainstream, Definitional ambiguity of disinformation, Reliable news typology, Limited disinformation impact, Exploiting societal uncertainty, Harmful disinformation, Monetizing sensationalism, Inaccurate reporting, Disinformation as a journalistic specialism, Reporting challenge, Virality of disinformation, Timeless disinformation issue, Fabricate journalistic values, Low engagement debunks
Dealing with disruption	Democratisation of news	Information in the social networking society, Debating free speech, Ineffective government actions, Open information access,

		Harmful censorship, Diversity in the media landscape, Citizen journalism dilemma, Media literacy education, Unobstructed news dissemination, Obsolete gatekeeping, Tech taking responsibility, Online news consumption Commercialized journalism, Fast-paced news cycle, Potential quality decline, Sensationalist journalism, Market-driven media landscape, Focus on virality, Standardized journalistic product, Employment uncertainty
	Navigating a politicized media landscape	Lack of quality media criticism, Politicizing news, Politicized media criticism, Politicized disinformation, Public aversion to news, Inadequate media literacy, Creation of disinformation filter bubbles
Communicating transparency	Communicating methodology	Communicating research methods, Additional contextual journalism, Human-centred storytelling, Method driven reporting, Humanizing journalism, Journalistic accountability, Positive reporting, Enclosed media community, Transparency in journalism
	Experimenting with journalistic formats	Creative storytelling, Focus on online, Declining print-based

		journalism, Diversified journalistic content, Pay-wall reporting, Outdated media formats, News content monetization, Information provision as service, Pay-per-view journalism
The paradox with audience interaction	Vulnerability as a journalist	Polarised media criticism, Polarised media landscape, Audience interaction dilemma, Vulnerable online transparency, Personality-based interaction, Defenceless position of journalism, Unfair labelling, Social control
	Thoughtful audience engagement	Thoughtful audience interaction, Significance-based interaction, Interactive news content, Flexible online content, Constructive media criticism, Interaction for explanation