



The Future of News: Presentation, Storytelling and Use of Web Technologies on Traditional and Startup News Websites

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Supervisor: Dr. T. Timan
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Abstract

This explorative thesis research was conducted because there has been little to no literature researching the specific topic of presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies on online news websites in the last decade. At the same time a recent wave of new (startup) natively digital news websites show interesting differences with the online efforts of traditional news organizations and are able to somehow realize growth in a declining industry. In this thesis the topic is researched by performing both a content analysis of three traditional and startup news websites, and conducting interviews at traditional newspaper organization De Volkskrant and its parent organization de Persgroep. This thesis research proves that it is indeed useful for researchers to reconsider researching the topic, by finding extensive differences in the presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies between those two types of organizations and exploring several possible strategies, motivations and circumstances that could explain these differences.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Nowadays practically every traditional, printed newspaper is also available in an online format. Online these traditional online newspapers share their presence with many online-only news websites. While circulation revenues of these printed newspapers is still substantial according to The Pew Research Center (2013), its revenues from online ads are steadily, but only very slowly, increasing. At the same time print newspaper ad revenues, which traditionally had been a major source of revenue for newspapers, have been declining at a rate that is 15 times faster than online ad revenues were increasing in 2012 (The Pew Research Center, 2013). To exemplify, while the total newspaper advertising revenues in the Netherlands were around €1049 million in 2001, they were only €295 million in 2013 (NDP, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). One of the reasons why these ad revenues are going down this significantly is because of the increased competition in the entire advertising market. The likes of Facebook and Google AdSense (The Pew Research Center, 2013), for instance, are able to show better targeted and more lucrative ads than dedicated newspaper sites can. Rather than competing in the advertising market, more and more online newspapers are moving to paid-access models, like a monthly fee for readers to access articles. They do this to try and create new revenue-streams and to gradually make their customers accustomed to paying for their online news consumption (Chiou & Tucker, 2013; Farhi, 2009; Cook & Attari, 2012). While some papers, such as the New York Times, have had limited success using this approach (Chiou & Tucker, 2013) many others have had no success at all and even in the best-case scenario, readership is still affected negatively by introducing paywalls (The Pew Research Center, 2013; Chiou & Tucker, 2013). Interestingly, circulation revenue of print newspapers never really went down significantly since the introduction of free online newspapers (The Pew Research Center, 2013). In fact, in the Netherlands the total circulation revenue of all newspapers combined was €845 million in 2001, while it had increased to €884 million in 2013 (NDP, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). At the same time however, only about 200,000 of the total 2,950,000 newspaper subscriptions were digital-only in 2013 (HOI, 2014; De Correspondent, 2013). What this seems to imply is that the problem is not

that customers are not willing to pay for news anymore, but that they are not willing to pay for online news. This is an interesting issue as technology arguably allows for online newspapers to offer better value propositions than would be possible in printed form (e.g. Obijiofor & Green, 2001; Sagan & Leighton, 2010). An example of this is futureofstorytellingproject.com, a showcase of what technology can do to enhance the process of storytelling in, amongst others, presentation of news. Exploring the spectrum between possible reasons for the problem of paying for online news, two far end-explanations would then be that either customers are not interested in the offered value propositions of online newspapers, or online newspapers do not actually offer the value propositions that are made possible by using online platforms, thus not utilizing the platform to its fullest extent. Concerning the latter, it is not difficult to imagine that this might even be a deliberate strategy of some newspapers; like the article “Build That Pay Wall HIGH” (Farhi, 2009) suggests, expensive paywalls may lead to an increase in the traditional newspaper sales, which is why making online newspapers a worse alternative to printed newspapers may, at least in the short term, be an economically sound strategy for traditional newspaper publishers.

Recently, several new, smaller players in the online newspaper industry have seen the light of day. They aim to offer newer and better value propositions in the paid online newspaper industry, e.g. The Post Online Magazine; De Correspondent; Atavist; Blendle; Younialist; and eLinea. These startups form interesting research subjects, as they do not have the problem of cannibalizing their own printed newspaper sales and have no historical revenue numbers to live up to. Therefore, they can focus entirely on how to offer the best online value proposition for their readers, thereby cannibalizing the readership of the larger traditional newspaper publishers. At first glance, the result is that at least some of them seem to be taking a radically different approach to online news as compared to some of the traditional newspapers¹.

The question that rises is why these new online newspapers have a place to exist in times when traditional online newspapers have trouble keeping afloat. What is so different

¹ Please note that on the basis of the thesis proposal for this thesis a small unpublished exploratory paper was written by the author of this thesis to test the validity of the thesis topic. As such, some smaller parts of the content analysis may bear resemblance to this exploratory paper, albeit extensively altered and extended.

about these natively digital newspapers as compared to traditional online newspapers? Some aspects of online newspapers have been extensively discussed in academic literature fairly recently, such as the influence of user generated content (UGC), social media and consumer participation or payment models (e.g. Chung, 2007; Chung & Nah, 2009; Larsson, 2012; Domingo et al., 2008). However, other aspects of online newspapers have been left largely undiscussed for over a decade, like the presentation and format of the news, the content itself. While the topic of online newspapers and their presentation seems to have been discussed fairly extensively when newspapers first moved to the Internet in the late nineties (e.g. Li, 1998), a preliminary search in academic literature shows that no such discussion has been taking place in the last decade. One exception to this is Jacobson (2012) who investigated interactive elements of The New York Times, but she too notes that “many more studies are needed to further our understanding of how digital media technologies are reshaping the boundaries of journalism and news storytelling” (p. 882). This forms an interesting gap in literature as developments in the way in which news can technically be presented online have been numerous in this last decade. New Internet technologies (software) allow for vastly different approaches on how to present news online which is especially worthwhile as newer consumption devices (hardware), such as smartphones and tablets, have already practically converged with the Internet as a platform due to developments like HTML5 (Melamed & Clayton, 2012). These recent developments allow for a similar approach to presentation of news on many different platforms that are in existence now (and in the near-future). This makes this an interesting aspect of online news to research, as findings are likely to stay relevant for the near future as well.

Summarizing, this thesis will explore the topic of online newspapers and their presentation of content, storytelling and use of web technologies. More specifically, the aim of this thesis is twofold: firstly to find out what differences can be found between the ways in which news is presented, storytelling is performed and web technologies are used in old, traditional newspaper websites as compared to more recent startup-type online-only newspapers. This will be done by analyzing front pages of online news websites as well as online articles. Secondly, this thesis will explore what motivations, strategies or circumstances could have caused these differences by conducting interviews at an online newspaper organization. A technological perspective is used because it seems reasonable to

argue that the move from paper to the web is a technologically driven move and certainly the presentation of news is directly reliant on what the technology enables newspapers to do. Using a technological perspective would thus show what is technically possible, which can be compared to what is practically being done. In other words: how far is a newspaper willing to go in adopting these web technologies? Ideally, this thesis would make claims about the current state of news presentation from the comparative case study of traditional and new online-only news websites, as well claims about the future strategies of these newspapers based on the conducted interviews. Additionally, it would be possible to find aspects of each of the two presumably different strategies and practical results and see how traditional online newspapers could learn from the new online-only news websites and vice versa. It is therefore important to compare several online newspapers with sufficiently distinguishable end-results in terms of presentation and format, rather than comparing a traditional online newspaper that is relatively forward thinking to a new online newspaper that adheres to most of the traditional standards.

To research this topic in this specific context the following research questions have been formulated. The first research question needs to be answered first before the second and third research questions are to be studied:

RQ1: *“To what extent is there a difference in the presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies between natively digital and traditional digitized online news websites?”*

RQ2: *“What current and future strategies, motivations and circumstances could cause the differences explored in RQ1?”*

RQ3: *“What could traditional digitized online newspapers learn from natively digital newspapers and vice versa in terms of their strategies regarding presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies?”*

CHAPTER 2

Literature review

As has been discussed in the introduction, limited literature has been published in the last decade on the presentation of online news, storytelling and use of web technologies for the purposes of presenting online news. As an alternative I will draw from three perspectives on this topic, using academic literature from: 1) the field of media theory; 2) the field of online storytelling, web technologies and presentation; 3) the field of newspaper strategies and specifically journalist roles and routines. Combining these three different perspectives will help put the specific topic of this thesis: presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies in online news, in a nuanced academic framework. An overview of these three perspectives is provided in the following chapters.

Media theory

Marshall McLuhan's (1964) media theories are widely recognized and in this specific case too of great value in building an appropriate theoretical framework. In his work surrounding the famous 'the medium is the message' statement we can find several claims and arguments that McLuhan made that could help us to understand what is happening to the use of technology in- and presentation of news in online newspapers.

First of all the statement 'the medium is the message' itself defines the importance of the way news is presented. It is important to keep in mind though that the medium in McLuhan's writing is not the same as a medium in our everyday language, but rather anything that extends ourselves which can be anything from innovations, inventions or ideas to ideals (Federman, 2004). Also, any extension of ourselves is thought of by McLuhan as an ever-growing and ever-changing medium. The medium thus is anything from which change emerges in our extended self and this makes the slow evolution of media and any change to the medium just as important as any revolutionary change in media. McLuhan even argues that these subtle changes are especially important because of their subtlety and their chances of going unnoticed initially (Federman, 2004).

Some scholars however argue that the Internet is an environment that is especially suited and used for multimedia content (e.g. MacGregor, 2003), while traditional media scholars like McLuhan have never even mentioned the term multimedia in their writings. According to Rourke (2007) however, multimedia is exactly what McLuhan was talking about as “The 'content' of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph. If it is asked, 'What is the content of speech?,' it is necessary to say, 'It is an actual process of thought, which is in itself nonverbal.’”(McLuhan, 1964, p. 8). A medium is therefore always a mixed medium according to McLuhan’s conception of media and thus not needs to be specifically defined as such (Rourke, 2007).

Translating McLuhan’s theories to the topic of this thesis, it can be stated that researching these subtle changes in new media is potentially more fruitful than looking, only, at radical changes of media used in conveying “the news”. While the content of newspapers has not radically changed, a change in presentation or incorporation of technologies in news websites could be seen as the evolution of an existing medium in which it slowly, but ultimately radically, changes the message that is being conveyed. It is then important to realize how changes in the presentation of news could influence the message that is conveyed.

Although the conveyed message changes with the changing of a medium, like from a newspaper to websites and from a website in the late nineties to a website a decade later, that does not necessarily mean that a new medium or the contents of the new medium cannot bear some resemblance to an old medium. Like McLuhan formulated “When faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future.” (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967, p. 74). This could explain why online newspapers might often be presented in a form similar to traditional newspapers, even though the medium used is completely different.

Connected to this concept of the rear-view mirror is the concept of remediation as coined by Bolter and Grusin (2000), who argue that new digital media are constantly remediating its predecessors (television, radio, print journalism and other forms of old media); a process where characteristics or content of an old medium are used in a new

medium. This resembles McLuhan's claims that we will see new media in a way that attaches it to old media we already know. In some cases the medium changes, altering the message while the content practically stays the same.

While McLuhan (1964, 1967) and Bolter and Grusin (2000) help to understand why even subtle changes to a medium can potentially change the entire message and the medium itself, their concepts pose a problem for defining what the medium of online news, the subject of this thesis, is. To draw from a more recent media theorist, Rogers (2013) defines the concepts of 'natively digital' and the 'digitized' respectively as "objects, content, devices, and environments that are 'born' in the new medium and those that have 'migrated' to it" (p. 19). Strictly speaking this would make an online newspaper digitized as newspapers have existed in an old medium -paper- before. Using the reasoning of Bolter and Grusin (2000) too, every medium is digitized because every medium has remediated older media at some point in time. On the other hand, if taken into account the evolutionary subtle developments that occur to media as described by McLuhan, one might argue that all online newspapers are natively digital because they are all a slightly different medium from before. For the sake of clarity these concepts will be used in a literal sense: individual online newspapers that have existed before in printed form are digitized, while online newspapers that have never existed outside of the Internet are natively digital. This division helps to define and classify different online newspapers in this thesis.

Online storytelling, technologies and presentation

Besides defining the translations of news media over different media through time, a next step is to understand how these different media affect or have affected content. In order to do so, this thesis will look at different scholars that have dealt with (online) storytelling. Manovich (2002) describes the digitization of such non-natively digital online newspapers as the process of 'transcoding'; one of the five principles that provide a foundation for understanding what is new about digital media. Similar to McLuhan (1964, 1967) and Bolter and Grusin (2000), Manovich (2002) states that the initial content of new digital media are based on old media which occurs through the process of transcoding from the old medium to the new medium. This transcoding is not limited to digitized media though, even natively digital media needs transcoding in some way because there is a

‘cultural layer’ that needs to be translated to a ‘computer layer’: one cannot input culture in a computer one on one. What this ultimately means is that the computerized form has an influence on what the end result is. As Manovich puts it: “Since new media is created on computers, distributed via computers, stored and archived on computers, the logic of a computer can be expected to have a significant influence on the traditional cultural logic of media [...] The result of this composite is the new computer culture: blend of human and computer meanings ... ” (p. 63). In other words, being transcoded to digital media changes the meaning of content, similar to how the McLuhan’s (1964, 1967) medium changes the message regardless of the content.

According to MacGregor (2003), in reality not many of the predictions have actually become true while the prospects for online storytelling and combining different types of content (multimedia) have been promising. While MacGregor (2003) identified many possibilities to provide online news website visitors with enhanced experiences and a more immersive platform, most newspaper websites seemed to simply put their offline news article offerings online without making use of any of these storytelling enhancements. One particular peculiarity MacGregor (2003) identifies is the lack of convergence on online newspaper websites. Rather than converging different kinds of media on the online platform, newspaper websites seem to present their multiple types of media elements separately instead of integrated. Four different possible explanations for these findings are given. Firstly, according to MacGregor (2003) sitting still in front of a computer is not active enough for the viewer to make experimenting with storytelling worthwhile, it will always be a passive experience regardless. Secondly, the Internet allows for non-linear storytelling which is promising and several examples show this is perfectly possible (e.g. Niemandsverdriet, n.d.) but according to MacGregor (2003) journalists have been having trouble coming up with a story that can be experienced in a non-linear way and still make sense. Thirdly, Macgregor (2003) argues that we do not know enough about multimedia platforms at all, the last extensive research into the subject was done by McLuhan, but things have changed since then and McLuhan is no longer entirely relevant anymore. Lastly, online media highlight different values than traditional media, it is not as immediate as some of the other media such as television because we are able to watch or view it whenever we want at our own pace.

In a more recent article, Jacobson (2012) explains that indeed the consensus is that “Previous studies suggest that online journalism has the potential to incorporate new forms of expression that the Web makes possible, but news organizations have yet to fully embrace these features.” (p. 869) Adding to that, building on Deuze (2003), “News organizations tend to repurpose their ‘offline’ media from print or TV for publication on the Web” (p. 868) by which he confirms Manovich’s (2002) theory. When Jacobson (2012) analyzes the extent to which The New York Times has incorporated multimedia technologies in their articles from 2000 until 2008, however, she finds that The New York Times has taken serious steps to incorporate multimedia elements and that over the years the sophistication and number of ‘multimedia packages’ has grown significantly. A point worth noting is that most of these ‘multimedia packages’ seem to have been produced as add-ons to stories published in the print edition of The New York Times. Jacobson (2012) thus questions whether these interactive elements will ever reshape or replace the main product, the printed newspaper. These insights will critically inform the content analysis to-be-performed in this thesis, whereby the question is if indeed natively digital newspapers go beyond these ‘add-on’ packages when it comes to presenting their stories.

Himmelboim and McCreery (2012) too examine the use of interactive features and they do so on 100 different international online newspapers papers. Their main findings are that the news is adapting to the user, but users cannot yet influence the news themselves. New ways of presenting online news are seen as posing a threat to traditional norms and values in newspaper practices. In most cases Himmelboim and McCreery (2012) found the choice of features to include on an online news website were still determined by the technology of their traditional media (such as a newspaper or television channel). They also conclude that the hierarchical relationship with the user is still present and actively preserved, which is reflected in the choice of incorporated features. Practically no information is flowing back from the user to the editor or journalist and when it is, the journalist has a strong position as gatekeeper, i.e. information flows always pass through the journalist who then decides whether to use the information from the user or not. This raises the question of the role of newspapers in society at large. Because the journalist only has a role as a gatekeeper at the specific newspapers, but not in the case of, for example, social media platforms.

Matheson (2004) performed a similar case study on a weblog by The Guardian in 2004, they conclude that “there is much about the Guardian weblog that is ‘old media’” (p. 460). The role of the journalist as a gatekeeper is still dominant in the same way as Himelboim and McCreery found in their research. According to Matheson (2004) The Guardian still pointed to the journalist as the authority and did not let the user talk. In other words, they argue that The Guardian did not provide the new personalized democratic space that people expected. Journalist’ roles are grounded in tradition even when there is some limited evidence that these roles are slowly changing.

The question then is whether the usage of interactive elements on newspaper websites are actually useful, or if the news website users would not care about these elements even if they were used, rendering implementing them unnecessary and useless. Chung and Nah (2009) research exactly this: what is the effect of interactivity in online community newspapers on the perceived user satisfaction. They found strong evidence that user satisfaction was positively correlated with the usage of interactive elements in online community newspapers. However, Chung and Nah (2009) also investigated what types of interactivity were most commonly incorporated and their findings suggest that the most incorporated feature was doing content submissions, where a user can suggest or send information to an editor or journalist after which he or she can decide on what to do with this information. This directly corresponds with what Himelboim and McCreery (2012) found in their research as they too found that whenever interactive elements were implemented that allow for information flowing back to the journalist, the journalist was still strongly positioned as a gatekeeper that decides what happens with the information. Most of the findings of Chung and Nah are regarding interactive features, rather than presentation itself. That is why they conclude that future studies are needed since “still very little is known about the effects of news presentation on user perceptions of their news consumption experiences” (p. 868).

This thesis research established that scholars agree that the Internet as a platform to carry news content provides promising opportunities in terms of storytelling, presentation and incorporation of new technologies. It also established that online newspapers are often not using the opportunities to the fullest extent, while users do indeed seem to value the usage of interactive elements when they are used. What then remains to be investigated is

what those opportunities are exactly. What features does the Internet enable online newspapers to incorporate in news items regarding storytelling and presentation? In other words: what is possible using present technologies?

Other scholars that performed case studies have looked at several different aspects of online news websites to determine their degree of interactivity and usage of Internet-specific features. Jacobson (2012) for example looks at aspects such as 'audio', 'video', 'slide show' and 'interactive features', as well as 'hypertext links'. The overarching characteristic for Jacobson (2012) in selecting these features is the fact that these features cannot appear as-is in a printed newspaper. Li (1998) uses different aspects such as pictures, graphs and links. Almost all of the features Li (1998) investigates however are able to appear in print newspapers as-is, which is different from Jacobson (2012)'s case study. Yet another scholar, Cooke (2005) takes an entirely different approach by categorizing the features of online newspapers as either structural or graphical.

These previous scholars too seem to be taking a 'rear-view mirror' approach as described by McLuhan (1967) however, as almost all of the indicators they use are borrowed from pre-existing media such as television. It seems reasonable to assume that the Internet can also provide features or opportunities that were not present in earlier media and are unique to the Internet as a medium itself. Hyperlinks, which are mentioned in previous research, is one of these features, but arguably more unique features are present. Cooke (2005) provides an interesting approach to finding these unique features by looking at structural differences in addition to the different elements the other scholars seem to be interested in. A possible reason for this absence of really 'new' aspects of the Internet in the previous case studies could be that these authors approach the Internet as the 'old' Internet, web 1.0, whereas there is a 'new' Internet, web 2.0, now that highlights different values.

Alexander and Levine (2008) detail such structural differences between web 2.0 and other media, that are not so much about presentation but about storytelling instead. Similar to the argument by Macgregor, Alexander and Levine (2008) argue that web 2.0 marks the end of the story with a beginning and an end, stories are now told a-linear. They coin the term 'web 2.0 storytelling' for describing this telling of stories using web 2.0 tools, technologies and strategies. Some features that are unique to this web 2.0 storytelling

according to them, are microcontent, small chunks of content with each chunk conveying a primary idea or concept (e.g. wiki edits, comments and blog posts), and social media.

Anthes (2012) speaks of the emergence of a web revolution and attributes this to the recent HTML5 web standard. HTML5 according to Anthes (2012) transforms the web from a collection of static documents to a platform for online applications, allowing developers to create a similarly seamless experience across devices including features such as interactivity. Anthes (2012) essentially argues that the innovation on the web is driven by the technology behind it and they are not the only ones with this argument. In essence Melamed and Clayton (2009) and Prince (2013) argue the same thing as they argue the technologies allow for easier and cheaper development of interactive and feature rich online experiences.

Newspaper strategies, journalist roles and routines

Following the theoretical discussion on online storytelling, technologies and presentation, the next step in this thesis is to investigate whether a difference in storytelling and (non) use of different types of media is being done deliberately, or 'by accident'. In other words, what kinds of strategies can be found in current newsrooms, and by whom are they advocated? Cottle and Ashton (1999) use a case study of the BBC newscenter to make claims about the relationship between changing technology and journalist practices in the context of multi-media news production. According to Cottle and Ashton (1999) the radical promises that new digital technologies have provoked have not become true, which corresponds with the findings of Deuze (2001, 2003) and MacGregor (2003). Cottle and Ashton (1999) have some indications on why this might be. Like one Broadcast Journalist stated "We don't have the time to be creative. It's not that the equipment will not let us be more creative, it's physically we don't have the time to be as creative as we used to be" (p. 41). Cottle and Ashton (1999) attribute this to the fact that journalists have to be multi-skilled and have to be able to fulfill multiple roles and functions in order to produce multimedia content. While this, according to Cottle and Ashton (1999), in itself does not necessarily has to pose a problem since multi-skilled journalists are more flexible than those that are not, management has mistakenly tried to use multi-skilled and multi-media practices in an effort to reduce costs and increase efficiency, whereas they would in fact be better suited to

increase creativity at the cost of efficiency. This has ultimately led to a work overload for journalists, with uncreative and lower quality journalism as a result.

Several years later, O'Sullivan and Heinonen (2008) show that the situation regarding journalist roles and practices has changed quite dramatically as we have progressed into, what they call, "the second decade of news' encounter with the Net" (p. 367). O'Sullivan and Heinonen (2008) argue that journalists are more than comfortable with the Internet and have adopted it with little difficulty. More importantly, journalists do not perceive the Internet as a threat to the quality of journalism, which is a significant difference from what Cottle and Ashton found in 1999. O'Sullivan and Heinonen (2008) do however pose the question whether journalists will continue this move or not. Moreover, O'Sullivan and Heinonen do not make claims about interactivity or user participation, just that moving to an online platform in itself is not an issue.

Thurman and Lupton (2008) seem to mostly agree with O'Sullivan and Heinonen (2008), from their in-depth interviews with editors and managers at English online newspapers they too conclude that editors and journalists are embracing new technologies. However, text is still reported by Thurman and Lupton (2008) as being the main activity and cornerstone of online newspapers. Other issues arising from this embracing of new technologies and subsequently the convergence of different media and corresponding newsrooms is that journalists are required to be multi-skilled, which could implicate that they can do everything but are not particularly good at anything. As a result Thurman and Lupton (2008) find that the BBC, while increasingly converging newsrooms and multiple forms of media, now acknowledges that online and TV have different requirements. In practical terms this means for the BBC that their website will still incorporate elements such as video, but these will be different videos from those that are aired on television. Another finding by Thurman and Lupton (2008) is that the Internet allows for interesting ways to present stories but these applications are expensive and time consuming to create. Moreover, this requires expertise that is, as of yet, not readily available in current newsrooms.

Contrastingly, in their case study of De Volkskrant and its parent organization 'De Persgroep', Tameling and Broersma (2013) found that De Volkskrant and its parent organization have re-diverged the newsrooms of their online and offline news offerings,

after having converged them some years ago. By doing this they are taking the process occurring at the BBC a step further by not only diverging the content for their different platforms (media), but also the physical newsrooms and journalists working with the platforms. Instead of incorporating vertical convergence they are engaging in horizontal convergence, incorporating an entire publishing house in one online newsroom. It also investigates what the reasoning behind this change would be: publishers are not sure how to make money using online news and opt for lowering costs as much as possible instead.

This dichotomy between journalists as helpless victims of rapidly changing Internet technologies versus the journalist as a tech-savvy promoter and instigator of online news innovation suggests that a revisiting -and grounding of- these claims is needed, by exploring what is currently going on in these newsrooms. The aim of this thesis is to do exactly that, within geographical -and time scope- limits.

CHAPTER 3

Theoretical framework

Based on the three theoretical perspectives examined in the literature review several core concepts can be identified from the works of previous authors in the field. These core concepts are news strategy and journalist routines, available technology, storytelling, presentation, medium, news content and the message or article. By exploring the connections between these different concepts as drawn by previous scholars, a theoretical framework can be identified and formulated. This theoretical framework, as seen in figure 1, will be explained in depth in the following paragraphs.

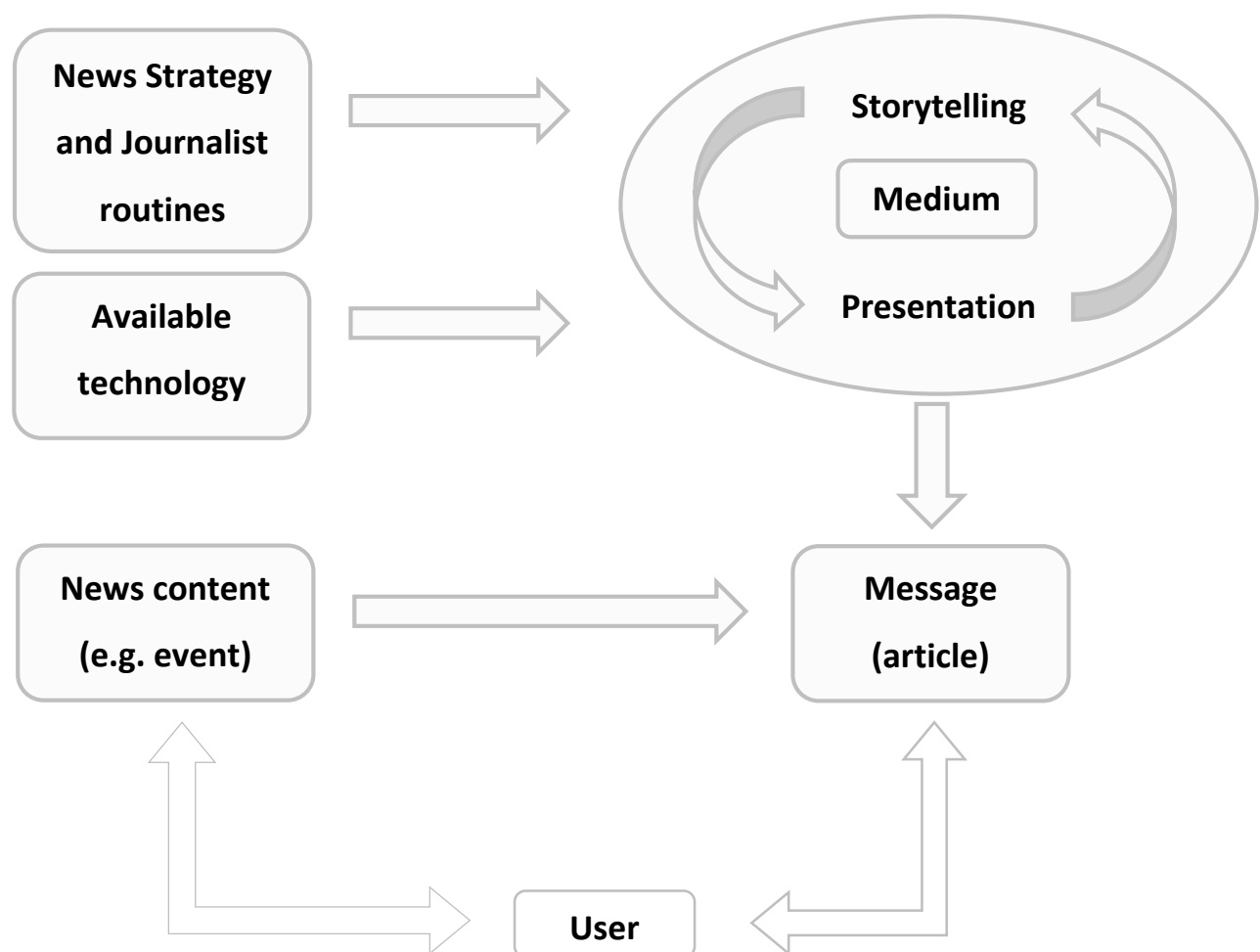


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

The concept in one of the first steps of the theoretical framework is news strategy and journalist routines. News strategy and journalist routines, as identified and researched by scholars such as Cottle and Ashton (1999), Thurman and Lupton (2008) and O'Sullivan and Heinonen (2008), lie at the heart of what influences the decision making process in online newspapers and consequently are a first step in affecting the outcome of the processes occurring at an online newspaper. The strategy and routines at an online newspaper are key to how any of the other concepts in the theoretical framework are put to use and are of such importance that it can potentially overrule the importance of most other factors or concepts in the theoretical framework.

Another concept that is placed at the first step in the theoretical framework is the available technology. Storytelling and presentation are dependent on what is technically possible. While some scholars such as Anthes (2012) and Prince (2013) even seem to suggest that innovation (in the news industry or other industries) is ultimately technology driven, other reviewed literature attribute this to the strategy rather than the available technologies. It is reasonable to assume that at the least the available technology together with the strategy and routines are driving (the adoption of) innovation in online newspapers.

As a result of newspaper strategies and journalist routines, and the concept of available technologies, a second step is formulated in the theoretical framework, consisting of three interrelated concepts. First of all, scholars such as MacGregor (2003) have examined the use of storytelling in online newspapers and from the reviewed literature evidence was found that the incorporation of storytelling is highly influenced by the availability of technologies and the newspaper strategies and willingness of journalists to incorporate such elements.

Likewise, the presentation of online newspapers too is dependent on those same two concepts. However, the presentation of online newspapers also affects the concept of storytelling and vice versa, as one cannot exist or change without the other. For example, to change the storytelling in an online newspaper, the presentation would have to be changed to fit as well and to change the presentation would have an effect on the storytelling process. The two concepts of presentation or storytelling are thus interrelated and both highly dependent on newspaper strategies and the available technology.

Based on traditional media theory such as McLuhan (1964, 1967), Bolter and Grusin (2000) and Manovich (2002) it is arguable that the concepts of presentation and storytelling of online newspapers together make up the medium itself. While one could argue that the medium as a concept consists of much more than just storytelling and presentation, which could indeed be true, these are the only two elements deemed relevant for the purposes of this thesis which is why, for the purposes of this paper, the medium is indeed only made up by the combination of presentation and storytelling.

Separated from the other concepts is news content, which is the event or series of events that is to be covered in the online newspaper. For the purposes of this thesis it is sufficient to regard this as a constant factor as there is no reason to suspect that the subject of this thesis paper, the presentation of news, has an effect on what the news is, or in other words: what happens in world that needs to be covered. As an example, the news content could be an armed robbery, but the way we present this is only relevant after the robbery has taken place and thus cannot influence the event itself. The selection of topics or framing of a specific event are thus not taken into consideration in this limited framework. Together with the outcome of all of the previously discussed concepts (which result in the medium), the news content leads to the final concept: the message or article.

The message or article is the final output of the online newspapers that will be discussed in this thesis paper. The message is the article we can read or the news website we can visit on the Internet. The form is defined by the medium and the concepts leading up to the medium. The content is defined by the constant factor of what happens in the world. Even though research could potentially expand the theoretical framework to include the reception of this final product (the message), by the user, or the influence of the user on any of the other concepts. This is outside of the scope of this thesis research primarily because concepts such as user generated content and user perception have been sufficiently discussed in literature already.

This theoretical framework gives some guidance on what to look for and how to categorize results in this thesis research. The framework also gives an overview of the examined literature by putting it in a broader context. Where and how I will conduct my fieldwork will be explained in the methodology section below.

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

In order to investigate the topic of differences in presentation and use of web technologies between natively digital and digitized online news websites, two different qualitative methods will be used. Firstly, to introduce the topic and context, an explorative content analysis will be performed to find out what differences exist in the way content is presented, storytelling is performed and web technologies are used on the websites of three different newspapers, and how this has developed over the recent past. One of these newspapers would have to be a traditional newspaper company that has an online newspaper in addition to their main product, a printed newspaper. Another newspaper would have to be a new, natively digital online newspaper/startup that has never existed in print. As discussed before, it is important to compare news websites with sufficiently distinguishable end-results in terms of presentation and format, rather than comparing a traditional newspaper website that is relatively forward thinking with a new news website that adheres to most of the traditional standards. Secondly, interviews will be conducted at a newspaper organizations. For these interviews people working at a newspapers, 'ins', are needed. Due to the limited timeframe available for this thesis research and the difficulty of finding respondents that are willing to cooperate multiple employees of only one newspaper organization will be interviewed. A compensating factor is the fact that many newspaper employees have worked at multiple news organizations before, both startup and traditional.

Method 1: Content analysis

For the first part, the content analysis, the developments of traditional digitized online newspapers over the recent years will be analyzed in order to construct a chronological overview of the developments in the industry. Consequently, the current state of the digitized online newspaper will be analyzed and compared to the new natively digital newspapers. It seems reasonable to use a timeframe of 10 years from the year 2004 until now, as the majority of the existing literature seems to stem from the period before this. The online newspapers and their articles will be qualitatively analyzed and compared in terms of

their presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies. This would provide a basis for the interviews in the second part, trying to find out what the strategic motivations are for the differences perceived in the case study.

To research what the differences in presentation and use of web technologies are between natively digital and traditional newspapers, a case study design that could best be categorized as a holistic multiple case design ($n=3$) is used (Yin, 2009). Three different newspapers will be researched and even though the case study design between these cases will be identical, they are not part of the same organization or connected to each other in any way and are thus three separate cases. The case study is descriptive with the purpose of exploring the case study material and subsequently comparing the three cases.

Sample

For the purposes- and merely explorative nature of this study a small sample is adequate, which is why only three newspapers are analyzed. For each of these three newspapers three different articles are analyzed, and the topic of each article will be similar for all of the three newspapers, i.e. there are three topics for which an article is selected in all three newspapers. The number of articles analyzed is three for the purposes of data triangulation, ensuring a more reliable result (Yin, 2009). In this case study data triangulation and methodological triangulation, by using multiple methods, are used. The newspapers are selected based on the experience of the author with newspapers on the criteria of being a fairly traditional digitized newspaper that has a print newspaper as their primary product, a relatively forward thinking digitized newspaper that still has the print newspaper as its main product and the third being a new forward thinking natively digital newspaper. Because the Dutch media landscape is quite progressive and modern -in 2001 already 67 out of a 100 Dutch newspaper had an online presence (Deuze & Dimoudi, 2002)- three Dutch newspapers that fit the criteria are selected: De Volkskrant as a traditional digitized newspaper, The NRC as a relatively forward thinking digitized newspaper and De Correspondent as a new natively digital newspaper. De Volkskrant has been around since 1919 and is the third largest paid newspaper of the Netherlands, with a print circulation of over 230.000 newspapers (De Volkskrant, 2013). The NRC is the fourth largest Dutch newspaper with a circulation of around 202.000 (NRC, 2014) and was founded relatively recently in 1970. De Correspondent

has launched only very recently in September 2013 and had over 25.000 (paying) members at the end of 2013 (De Correspondent, n.d.).

Due to the different approaches to news that De Correspondent, the NRC and De Volkskrant take, it is difficult to find articles in all three online newspapers that are about the exact same topic. The online Volkskrant and NRC tend to publish articles on recent and current events of the day as well as opinion articles on events that have happened in the recent past. De Correspondent publishes articles that are reflecting back on events that have happened fairly recently, but not at the time of publishing, similar to De Volkskrant's or NRC's opinion articles but mainly without the opinion aspect. Since a small exploratory look at De Volkskrant's, the NRC's and De Correspondent's websites show that most articles on each of the websites are presented in the same way and with the same incorporation of technologies, it seems safe to assume that most articles are indeed similarly presented per newspaper. Therefore it is safe to use articles in the online newspapers that are only somewhat about the same topic, rather than exactly similar. The first three articles analyzed are about education: "Wie wint de strijd om het klaslokaal: de leraar of de computer?" (Visser, 2014), "Toezicht op onderwijs grondig hervormd – 'goed' nieuwe norm" (Funnekotter, 2014) and "'Niet iedereen is geschikt om pyjamastudent te zijn'" (Truijens, 2014). The second group of articles analyzed are about the petrochemical industry: "Waar rook is, is Vitol" (Vanheste, 2013), "Activisten Greenpeace gearresteerd bij actie tegen Russische olietanker" (Boon, 2014) and "Is 1,2 miljard compensatie voor Groningen genoeg?" (de Waard, 2014). The last group of articles are about Nelson Mandela's death: "Hier leeft Apartheid nog voort" (de Putter, 2013), "Lichaam Mandela aangekomen in Oostkaap – 'Tutu niet bij begrafenis'" (Huiskamp, 2013) and "Herdenking Mandela: 'De hele wereld komt naar Zuid-Afrika'" (De Volkskrant, 2013).

To be able to get an insight into how these newspapers have developed over the recent years a sample of front pages and articles is drawn from the online Internet archive Archive.org. Since De Correspondent was launched fairly recently it is not included in this historical sample but both the NRC and De Volkskrant are. For both newspapers the first available snapshot (i.e. January 1st, if available) of the years 2004 up till and including 2014 are stored and analyzed. If available the first articles on the front pages were stored and

analyzed as well. However, in some cases this proved impossible as either the articles were pay-to-view or Archive.org simply hadn't indexed the articles at some point in time.

Additionally, for each of the redesigns that have occurred over the past ten years the code is briefly analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of the motives of certain choices over presentation.

Research method

The literature and theory discussed in the earlier sections of this thesis proposal show that there are multiple ways to approach analyzing the presentation of online news articles, and indeed previous case studies have all looked at different aspects of presentation. Several of these will be discussed, but it is important to keep in mind that the justification of this thesis is a research gap in recent literature. It is thus important to look out for aspects of and findings in the analysis that have not been discussed in literature before, as there is little or no literature that fits this particular case fully. The thesis should thus ideally not limit itself to what has been studied before and keep an open mind as to what to expect or look for.

As has been discussed in the literature review, Jacobson (2012) is one of the few scholars that has recently investigated the presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies in an online newspaper, specifically the New York Times. She does this chronologically over the time period between 2000 and 2008. Jacobson (2012) looks at several aspects such as 'audio', 'video', 'slide show' and 'interactive features', as well as 'hypertext links'. The overarching characteristic that these aspects share and in which Jacobson (2012) is interested, is the fact that they cannot appear as-is in a printed newspaper.

The less recent article by Li (1998) also investigates presentation elements of online news websites, as a result of the (back then) recent development of newspapers moving from print to online. Interestingly, Li (1998) investigates aspects that are fairly different from the measures Jacobson (2012) used 14 years later, namely: pictures, graphs and links. Surprisingly the elements Li (1998) investigates are largely (except for the links) also able to appear in print newspapers as-is, which marks a difference from Jacobson (2012)'s case study.

Another article that has been discussed in the literature review, by Cooke (2005) focuses on the visual convergence of print, television and the Internet in the last 40 years. Cooke (2005) takes yet another approach to analyzing the media, and her measures are divided into two categories, which were partly based on Li (1998). The first category is 'structure', with elements such as the usage of grids, whitespace and modular design. The other category is 'graphics', which includes elements such as photographs, maps, charts, illustrations, information graphics, composite graphics and animated sequences.

A bit more elaborate on features is the research by Himelboim and McCreery (2012), as they have assembled a list of 23 different features that are incorporated in (at least some) online newspapers. Their features include fairly basic features such as a printer friendly option or a search function, but also some more advanced features such as forums, mobile updates and sharing stories on social networking sites. This list of features too will be kept in mind when performing the content analysis in this thesis.

These four different approaches and collections of features should together provide some starting points and preliminary guidance on what to look for and ideas of measures to use when qualitatively analyzing online news articles and comparing them. They will also provide a challenge for this thesis; to expand and solidify (a) methodological framework(s) for researching online news.

Method 2: Interviews

A subsequent goal of the thesis is to find out motivations, strategies and circumstances that explain the differences found in the content analysis. In order to do so, the story behind the newspaper; behind the screen will be explored. Considering the (geo-linguistic) scope of the thesis, this thesis uses interviews as a qualitative and explorative method to investigate explanations of how and why online news looks the way it looks and read the way it reads in the Netherlands.

Drawing on semi-structured interviews, topics in these interviews will be informed by the outcomes of the previously conducted content analysis, combined with a more theoretically-informed notion of newspaper (business) models and strategies. Aiming to interview several disciplines, most importantly 'engineers' and 'journalists' (insofar as they are not one and the same person), the interviews will have to be developed in such a way

that both general (meaning discipline-independent) as well as specific (meaning discipline-dependent) topics can be addressed. The interviews should be of a semi-structural nature, because there needs to be space and room for exploration and/or explanation of certain topics by the interviewee. The role and challenge for the researcher is to make the journalist, often the one interviewing rather than being interviewed, give their honest and full opinion. The interviews will be recorded with consent of the interviewee. The recorded audio will be transcribed². If audio recording is not allowed by the interviewee notes will be taken during the interview.

Sample

While only one newspaper organization, De Volkskrant and its parent organization De Persgroep, was found to be willing to cooperate with this thesis research, the nature of the organization and the background of the individual interviewees result in a valuable and interesting sample nonetheless.

De Persgroep Nederland is currently in the process of taking over a regional newspaper publisher through which it will become the largest newspaper publisher in the Netherlands, with a reach of about 5 million readers (Benjamin, 2014). Not only does De Persgroep own newspapers like AD, De Volkskrant, Het Parool and Trouw, it also owns radio station Q-Music and websites like Tweakers.net, AutoTrack, Intermediair and NationaleVacturebank. In Belgium too De Persgroep is one of the largest newspaper publishers, with titles such as De Morgen, Het Laatste Nieuws and 7Sur7 but also television station such as VTM and 2BE. De Persgroep Nederland is located in the INIT building in Amsterdam, but the Amsterdam offices are highly dependent on their Belgian counterparts located in Kobbegem, near Brussels, for IT services and the like.

While the thesis research is focused specifically on De Volkskrant, the recent focus on horizontal integration at De Persgroep makes it difficult to fully separate findings on De Volkskrant from the larger organization as the interviewees themselves do not even work for one specific newspaper title due to this horizontal integration. In this thesis the terms De Persgroep and De Volkskrant are therefore both sometimes used interchangeably, but in

² Transcripts are available on request, contact the author of this master thesis at jesse@jazzle.nl.

general De Persgroep refers to the larger overarching strategy while De Volkskrant refers to the specific newspaper.

De Volkskrant, like many of De Persgroep's titles, currently has two editorial staffs: one for online and one for print (Kranenberg, 2014). This stems from De Persgroep's strategy of a few years ago to minimize the costs of online offerings as much as possible because there was no clear business model. Unsurprisingly, this has led to a major difference in the quality of journalism in the print newspaper and the online website. Recently however, De Persgroep has gained a renewed focus on online news because it acknowledges that printed newspapers are due to be replaced sometime in the future. As a part of this renewed focus De Persgroep is currently working on an entirely new digital platform that will be developed for and deployed first at De Volkskrant, and is only later, if successful, to be implemented at the other newspaper titles.

The new platform has been a work in progress for several years and is due to be launched in the coming months (Kranenberg, 2014). The platform is designed specifically to integrate the articles by the print newspaper editorial staff with the online platform, levelling the online and print Volkskrant experience in terms of editorial quality and making the website a true and viable alternative for readers of the printed Volkskrant. In addition the platform will provide an enhanced, multi-platform reading experience and provide a payment platform to support the online platform with some form of business model that is not solely dependent on advertising

While this renders the content analysis in this thesis research somewhat out-of-date the change is arguably one of the largest overhauls in the history of traditional (Dutch) newspapers online that could provide unique and extremely current insights, especially now when strategic choices are still to be made to determine the exact tactic of implementation.

To get the most out of the interviews at De Volkskrant and De Persgroep it is important to interview employees with different roles within the organization. While anonymity was not requested by the interviewees, interviewees will not be named in this thesis research. Judging from the theoretical framework that was formed as a result of the reviewed literature, roles should be relevant for the concepts of strategy, journalist routines and technology. The chief editor of the online De Volkskrant was contacted directly via email, while two other interviewees were referred to by this first interviewee. A fourth

interviewee was also contacted directly and, like the first interviewee, selected from De Volkskrant's colophon based on job description and the way it fits with the theoretical framework. Based on this sampling method the following employees were interviewed.

Interviewee A is employed at De Persgroep as Editor-in-Chief Digital Selective, in other words, chief editor of all the websites of the 'selective' titles, which are the Dutch Volkskrant, Trouw, Het Parool, and the Belgian DeMorgen. In previous occupations interviewee A has been the chief editor of natively digital nu.nl and natively digital webwereld.nl before that. As chief editor at various occupations interviewee A is the person most suited to elaborate on journalist routines.

Interviewee B is employed at De Persgroep Digital as Director Product Development, in other words he is the one responsible on a strategic level for developing quality digital products. In previous occupations interviewee B has been cofounder of the Dutch ICT related news site Tweakers.net. Interviewee B is the interviewee most suited to answer questions on the concept of newspaper strategies.

Interviewee C is employed at De Persgroep Digital as Product Manager, in other words, one of the employees who has the task of being a 'product owner', leveraging the needs and wishes of different roles within the organization such as editorial staff, IT and ultimately, the end user. At previous occupations interviewee C has worked at De Telegraaf Media Groep in the role of 'Internet product development', as well as Voetbal International and smaller sports-related startup organizations.

Interviewee D is employed at De Persgroep Digital as Web Analyst, in charge of analyzing the digital products at De Persgroep. In previous occupations interviewee D has worked at AD as Business Developer Multimedia and at IDG as Product Manager New Business. Together with interviewee C, interviewee D is most suited to answer questions on technology and more specifically the work relation with IT, which is located in Belgium and as such not available for interviews directly.

Together these four interviewees have a diverse background, and even more diverse occupational history and will allow for a relatively complete overview of different roles within the organization of De Persgroep and De Volkskrant specifically. Additionally, while no startup organization was found willing to cooperate with the thesis research almost all interviewees have had extensive experience with working at a startup from previous

occupations, as such comparisons with the interviewees' previous working experiences can be drawn in the interviews.

Research method

When analyzing qualitative data like interviews it is important to first code the data, assigning different pieces of text, f.i. from a transcript, to codes. In this thesis coding is done through the use of a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) software program called 'MAXQDA'. Codes can be different ideas, concepts or themes but they all allow the researcher to categorize the raw qualitative data. In this particular thesis a hybrid of pre-set (deductive) and emergent (inductive) coding will be used, i.e. some codes are derived in advance from both the literature and other prior knowledge of the material while other codes emerge only during or after the interviews. This is useful since in this case not all possible explanations have been explored in advance. Similarly, even pre-set codes can be further refined as a result of the interviews. Consequently, the theoretical framework devised from the reviewed literature can be revised when the core concepts have been refined through the interview data.

Subsequently, the coded qualitative interview data will have to be analyzed, which will be done using two distinct approaches. Grounded theory (Yin, 2009) will be used to develop themes from the codes that seem to recur throughout the interviews. The second approach will be to try to link back the data to hypotheses based on existing literature and theory. As such a hybrid of both grounded theory and traditional research methods will be combined.

The results of the analyses performed in this thesis will primarily be presented in the traditional written master thesis form. Additionally, a website will be created³ that presents the results of this thesis paper in a format that makes optimal use of the available technologies and platforms. This would not only be an excellent showcase and example of what is being discussed in the thesis paper itself, but it would also be a very interesting and useful way to feedback the results to all of the interviewees. The website will potentially have higher chances of being read by the interviewees, as it would not only provide a quick

³ The website is located at <http://www.futureofnews.nl>. Please note that the website will not yet be finished when this thesis is submitted.

insight into the results, but it should also be an interesting 'read' in the way the website is presented.

Interview themes

Since there are three different groups of interviewees (interviewee C and D are interviewed together) there are three sets of interview guides (see Appendix A for an example) as well. While there will be some differences between these three sets of interview guides, there will be plenty of similarities as well. The themes occurring throughout the interviews in which the questions are categorized will be the same for all three groups of interviewees, namely: routines, presentation and perspective. By following these three themes in this order the interview will progress from the overall practice of working at an online newspaper and the specifics of presentation of an online newspaper to the underlying perspective of the interviewee her or himself. The reasoning behind this specific order of themes in which the interviewer goes from the factual questions and reality to more abstract questions on feelings and perspectives is that the interviewer is less likely to influence the answers of the interviewee in the later part, as they have already provided their answers on the more concrete questions and inconsistencies within their answers can easily be identified.

Routines

Within the theme of routines the topics of roles within the organization, daily practices and different approaches per platform should be discussed. An important aspect within this theme is the aspect of history, for each question it would be valuable to learn both the current situation and its development over time. Questions could include but are not limited to: "what does your daily routine look like?" and "(how) has this routine changed over the years?" These questions about routines would provide a starting point to understanding where the answers to the follow up questions later in the interview are coming from, e.g. to know how to associate which answers with what background. The topic of different approaches for different platforms is especially important as well, particularly when comparing the answers of the different actors within the online newspaper business as there

are quite some indications already from the content analysis that not everyone will be giving the same answers to these questions.

Presentation

More specific than any of the other two themes is presentation. Within this theme interviewees are asked about the specifics on how they regard and use certain presentational tools, elements and technologies, as well as how (and if) they regard storytelling in their online productions. It would be especially important to find out how the presentation of online newspapers websites are decided upon and whether it is a process of collaboration between all three involved parties or rather one of the parties deciding what an article should look like and the rest following suit, and if so, which one of the parties does so? Does every group of interviewees have a say in what technologies are incorporated or is it just the engineering team deciding what is possible and what is not? All these questions are aimed at providing an insight in the process and considerations that are made within the organization of an online newspaper.

Perspective

Because the overarching aim of the thesis is to find out the underlying strategies behind the differences identified in the content analysis it is necessary to ask questions relating to strategy as well. However, only one of the three groups of interviewees is directly involved with deciding on strategy making. Luckily, all three of the groups will likely have personal perspectives on how to cope with changes and situations in their work environment, which is why this theme is named 'perspective' instead. Perspective as a theme allows for asking about strategy directly as well as personal perceptions. Within the theme questions can be asked on the topics of declining paper circulation, increasing online viewership, difficulties with monetizing online news, differences between startup online newspapers and traditional online newspapers as well as what is the ideal that one should aim to achieve using online newspapers and the added value of quality journalism when there is fast and free citizen journalism. All of these topics could give an indication of different opinions and stances towards the issues presented between the different actors within online newspapers, and between online newspapers.

CHAPTER 5

Findings

Part 1: Content analysis

Results

Current situation

In this section, the most relevant differences in how articles are presented and web technologies are used on De Correspondent, the NRC and De Volkskrant websites will be described. Elements and structure will be analyzed separately, similar to how Cooke (2005) analyzes graphics and structure separately. Cooke (2005) defines the graphics category as “The pictorial representation of information, including: photographs, charts, maps, illustrations, information graphics, composite graphics, and animated sequences” (p. 28) and structural category as “The layout of information on the page/screen –including: grids, white space, and modular design – that form a visual framework.” (p.28). Using these categories is useful since, from taking a preliminary glance at the sampled material, a difference in findings between these two categories is expected. Figure 2, 3 and 4 show the front pages of the three online newspapers in the sample.



Figure 2. Screenshot of an article on De Volkskrant website

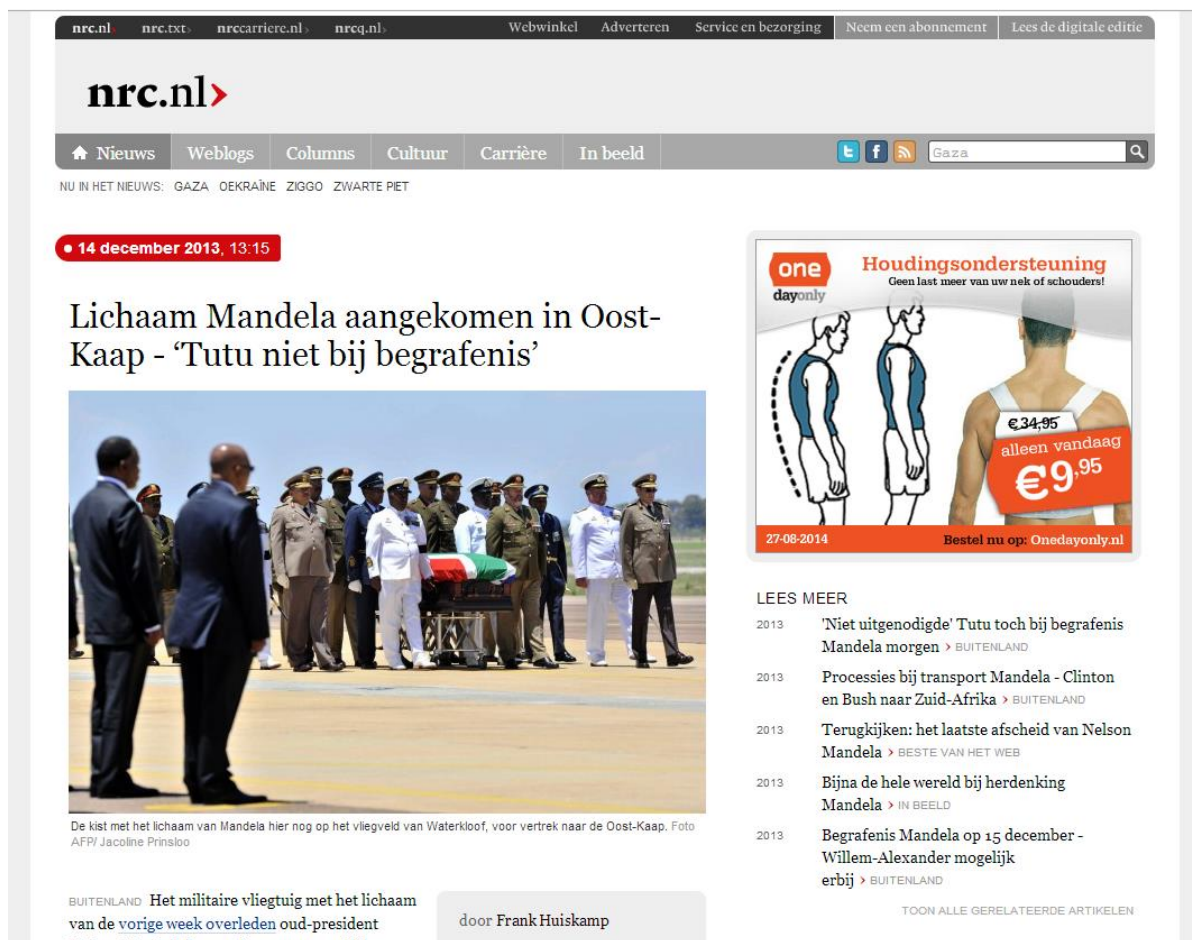


Figure 3. Screenshot of an article on the NRC website

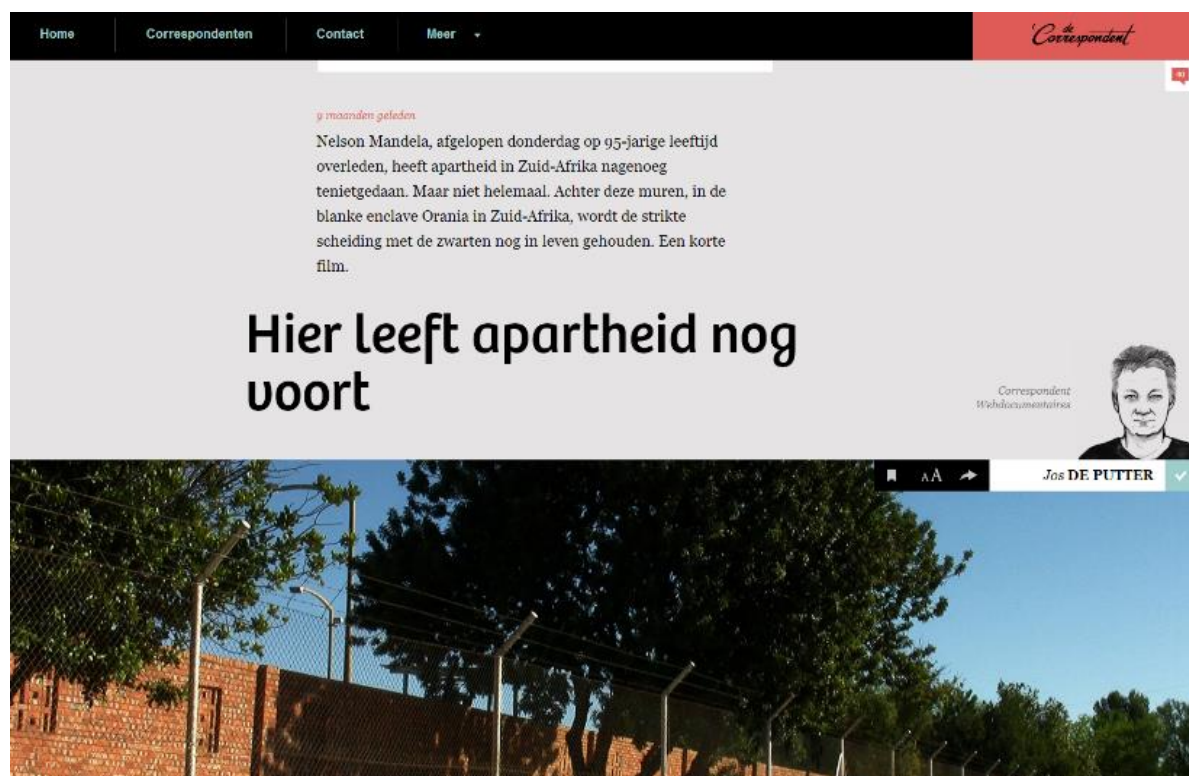


Figure 4. Screenshot of an article on De Correspondent website

First of all, in terms of elements used, De Correspondent makes use of photos and illustrations slightly more often. No article is published without an accompanying image. Moreover, the images are presented much more prominent in De Correspondent than in any of the other two newspapers (figure 2, 3, 4). Every article in De Correspondent has a main image, illustration or often a drawing that takes up the entire width of the window or screen that is used for viewing, while all other images are at least as wide as the entire block of text. On the website of De Volkskrant images are either of the same width as the text or exactly



Figure 5. Width of text on De Correspondent website

half the width of the text while they are always the same width as the entire column on the website of the NRC.

What is important to note however, is that the text, or the main column, is only 468 pixels wide on De Volkskrant

website, while it is the width of the entire screen with a maximum of 900 pixels on De Correspondent website (figure 5), with the NRC website being somewhere in the middle.



Figure 6. Quotation block on De Volkskrant website



Figure 7. Quotation block on De Correspondent website



Figure 8. Quotation block on the NRC website

Another common element on all three websites is the usage of quotation blocks that stand out from the main text (Figure 6, 7, 8). The presentation of these blocks is fairly similar although De Correspondent uses a far larger font and more whitespace. The frequency of these quotation blocks is very similar in all three online newspapers. Videos are an

important element on all three websites as well. While the websites seem to use the same amount of videos in their articles (one out of three for all of the online newspapers in this sample), the presentation of the videos is different. Just like the images and quotation blocks the videos on the website of De Correspondent are larger and much more prominent than on the website of De Volkskrant, while again the NRC situates itself somewhere in the middle. Similarly, within the sample, graphs and charts were only

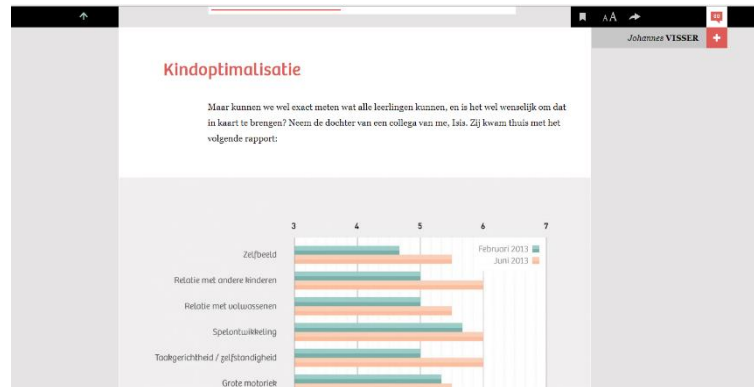


Figure 9. Bar chart on De Correspondent website

found on De Correspondent (figure 9) while the personal experience of the author shows that De Volkskrant and the NRC do sometimes use charts or graphs as well. In this case too however, De Correspondent presented them much more prominent and also more in-line with the style of the rest of the website.

A few elements do not occur on the website of De Volkskrant or the NRC while they do on the website of De Correspondent. Links on the side of the text, rather than in-text in the article point out references for passages of text (figure 10). Another element that is used is in-line explanation blocks: some words or sentences are highlighted and upon clicking a box with explanation on what the sentence or word means is expanded (figure 10). Yet another difference is the ability to comment. De Volkskrant and the NRC allow for commenting on some articles, but not all of them, and the amount of comments seems to



Figure 10. In-line explanation block and side links on De Correspondent website

be quite low. In the sample there is only one article from De Volkskrant that includes comments and the number of comments on this article is 18. In the sample none of the articles in the NRC featured comments but from the experience of the author the number of comments is usually comparable with that of De Volkskrant. In De Correspondent the sample had between 33 and 73 comments per article. This would suggest that the natively digital newspaper invites more to comment and engage in a story than the other, traditional online newspapers. Another difference regarding comments is that the authors in all three of the articles of De Correspondent in the sample commented on the commenters themselves and in some cases even other journalists from the online newspaper joined in the discussions. Additionally, De Correspondent shows a sketch of the author at the top of every article and it allows readers to email the authors directly, while neither De Volkskrant nor the NRC give readers the possibility to contact the author directly. This also suggest a different strategy, or role given to the journalist, again inviting to engage its audience more in the story.

Structurally, there are major differences between the three online newspapers (Figure 2, 3, 4). While De Volkskrant has many visual elements distracting from the actual content of the article, such as ads, menus, related articles, cartoons and even a job search function, De Correspondent has as little distractions visible as possible. Specifically, a difference is that in a full-screen browser window on a modern PC De Volkskrant's main text takes up only one fourth of the width of the screen while this is the entire screen with De Correspondent, even though they add lots of whitespace for readability. In general, the presentation of articles in De Correspondent include larger headlines, larger photos or illustrations, large lead-ins taking up the entire screen, lots of whitespace and double spacing. This is related to the way columns are handled on the three different websites. De Volkskrant consistently divides its website in three columns, the NRC in two columns and De Correspondent uses only a single column. By doing this, the actual content has far more space on the website of De Correspondent, which is also why they can 'afford' to use large fonts and white spaces. Title fonts are 72px on the website of De Correspondent while they are only 34px or 30px on the websites of De Volkskrant and The NRC respectively. The same is evident from the front pages of the websites; on the website of De Correspondent a visitor only sees one or two articles on first glance, on the website of the NRC this is 4 to 6 while the visitor can see the headlines of up to 23 articles on first glance on the website of De Volkskrant. The landing-

page strategies, then, are highly variable; where de Volkskrant seems to have chosen the model of the landing-page as a portal to other (often ad-related) items, De Correspondent seems to have taken the strategy of 'content is king' (Nielsen, 1999), proving a completely different model of revenue. Why these strategies are chosen the way they are, will be discussed further on in this thesis.

In terms of the use of web technologies, the differences are mainly structural too, instead of differences in the usage of certain interactive elements. For example, the website of De Correspondent allows readers to adjust the text size to their liking, which the website of De Volkskrant or the NRC do not. Another technology used by the Correspondent is the presence of a small bar at the top of the screen that shows how far along the reader is in reading the article, the bar fills up when scrolling down the page (figure 11).



Figure 11. Reading progress bar on De Correspondent website

Another such a feature is the incorporation of 'endless scrolling' on the front page, meaning that one can scroll to the bottom of the page and have new articles load automatically rather than clicking on 'next page'. One of the main differences visually however, is the fact that the website of De Correspondent uses 'responsive design' (Gardner, 2011). This responsive design means that the size, layout and design of the website and its articles changes with the size of the window in which it is viewed, or the device that is used for viewing. For example, when viewed on a tablet, the website of De Correspondent removes most of the whitespaces because it is less of a problem (the screen is smaller) and on a smartphone some elements are removed entirely (figure 12). For example, the sketch or drawing of the author at the top of every article is replaced by just the name of the author, taking up less valuable space on a smartphone screen. While De Volkskrant and the NRC do offer a mobile website, this is not the same. They offer only two predefined



Figure 12. Responsive website of De Correspondent

versions of their website, while the website of De Correspondent changes dynamically for every type of display or device available, such as varying sizes of tablets, using HTML5 (Melamed & Clayton, 2012).

Just looking at whether certain elements or structures were used or not seems inadequate to make valuable claims regarding the differences in presentation and storytelling between natively digital and digitized online newspapers. We need to look beyond these superficial indicators. One of the things that can be identified by looking beyond these indicators is that the presentation of the website of De Correspondent seems to be less 'urgent' which is exemplified by elements such as the date of publishing that is shown as '3 days ago' or even 'a month ago' rather than the exact date and time precisely on the minute on the other two news websites. Also, rather than showing 5 different share buttons for all of the available social media networks (even including Hyves, which does not exist anymore⁴) like De Volkskrant, De Correspondent hides them all under one unobtrusive button. Concerning the incorporation of social media buttons in order to link and 'spread' articles, there seems to exist different strategies between these three websites. The question raises then if the strategy of the natively digital newspaper brings about a new type, or way, of readership and storytelling.

Concerning this content, there are differences to be found in the types of content presented on the three online newspapers. De Volkskrant has 'standard' fairly short text articles and photo galleries at times and the NRC adds longread articles to this list. De Correspondent adds other media elements as well, such as (audio) podcasts, video reports, and what they call 'notes' (short pieces of text in which the author adds small pieces of information to their previous articles or updates readers on an upcoming article) as content. This makes De Correspondent more a truly multimedia platform than the other two that essentially recycle text content and enhance it with some multimedia elements here and there. This begs the question if and how the forms and types of storytelling are changing and if so, in what direction they will develop. Whereas the traditional online newspapers still seem to see text as their main medium, augmenting it with the occasional image or video, the natively digital newspaper experiments with multiple types of media as the basis of their

⁴ The Hyves button has been removed after the original sample for this thesis research was taken

storytelling. Reasons for this difference in defining what a (proper) news medium is, might be found by looking at the history of the two digitized newspapers.

History

In terms of a historical perspective some interesting developments were identified. Via the Internet archive website Archive.org, the digital histories of both the NRC and De Volkskrant were investigated. Both the website of De Volkskrant and the NRC were already quite feature-rich in the first snapshots of the sample in 2004 (figure 13, 14). Both online



Figure 13. Front page of De Volkskrant website on January 25, 2004

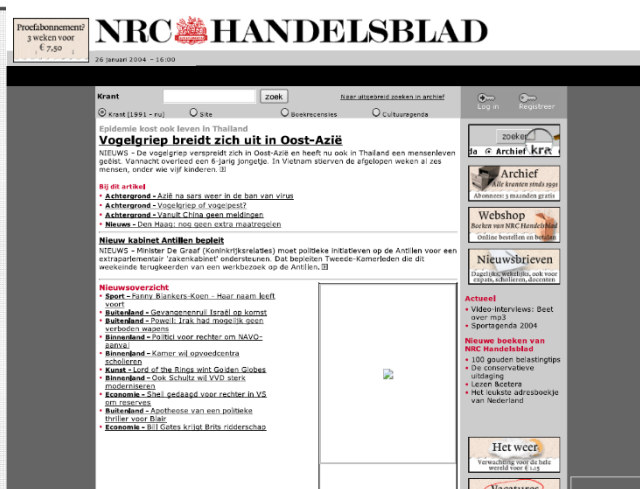


Figure 14. Front page of the NRC website on January 28, 2004

newspapers featured search, email options, related articles, pictures, videos and weather info. Interestingly, both newspapers featured a paywall for content behind the front page and the NRC even had a paywall protecting the weather forecast while De Volkskrant offered weather forecasts for free. Also, De Volkskrant featured a dedicated discussion forum and other extra features such as stock information and traffic info which the website of the NRC did not. In terms of presentation, De Volkskrant seems to have had quite a head-start compared to the NRC as well. The website of the NRC features almost no color at all and mostly uses different shades of grey whereas the website of De Volkskrant did use colors. Also, the front page of the website of the NRC featured only a single column of content with a small sidebar containing mostly irrelevant content (e.g. a webshop button), while De Volkskrant featured two to three main columns of content, a sidebar and an additional side menu. De Volkskrant also used far more article-related images on their front page and overall, the website of De Volkskrant seems more mature from the start. A contrasting

difference between the two online newspapers is that the website of De Volkskrant seems to mimic a printed newspaper, not just by mimicking the layout, but also by providing a paper colored background. The website of the NRC seems to do no such thing and may seem more 'native' to the Internet by not trying to copy the physical newspaper.

In the years after the start of the sample however, the website of the NRC gradually improved, where the website of De Volkskrant did not change all that much. In 2005 the website of the NRC had gotten a slight redesign which introduced more color, extended menus and surprisingly, a variable width that fits to the size of the screen. This feature has disappeared on both websites of present day (2014) (De Correspondent does have this feature currently). In the years after, the two websites developed in more or less the same way without any radical changes in either of the websites but rather adapting the designs slightly to fit the current times, adding more pictures and updating the design style-wise. This seems to suggest that there was no urgent need to be ahead of the game, web-technology-wise, but rather to follow the trend.

In the 2011, the NRC website underwent a complete overhaul, taking many cues from what online blogs looked like at the time (figure 15). To be more precise, it copied much of the layout and style from their own sister-website, the NRC Next blog. New features include tags and share buttons, and in general they use more whitespace. Also, information is presented less dense than before. The website of De Volkskrant (figure 16) did not change dramatically between 2004 and the present at all and much of the presentation still dates back to 2004 although 'upgraded'.

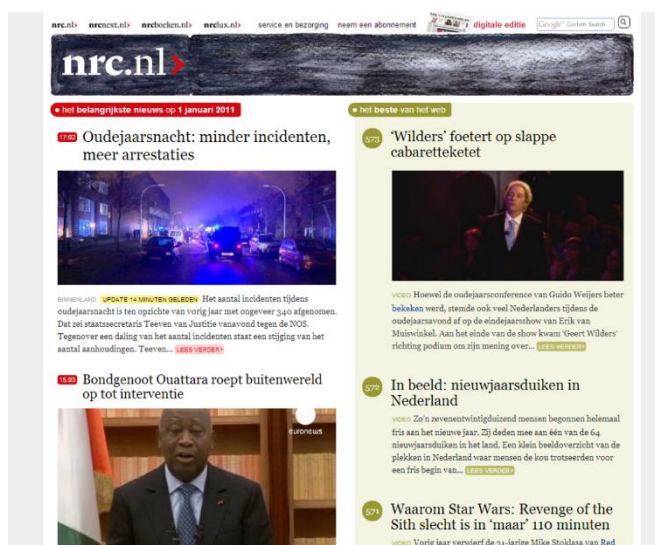


Figure 15. Front page of the NRC on the January 1st, 2011

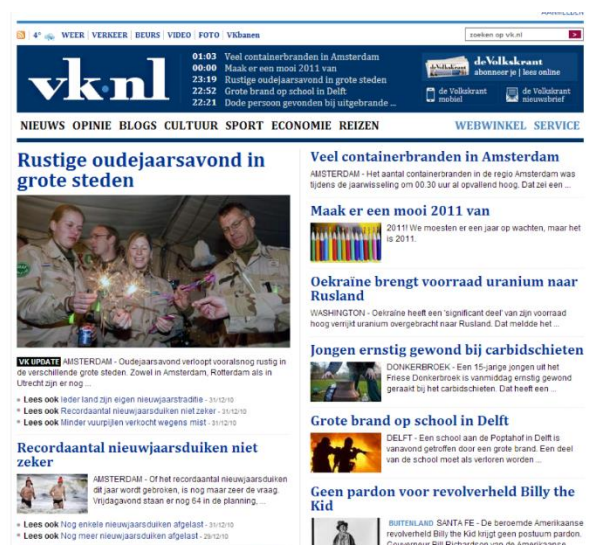


Figure 16. Front page of De Volkskrant on January 1st, 2011

Regardless of whether the digitized newspaper website has been overhauled completely between now and 2004 the actual content has changed less drastically for both of the two traditional digitized online newspapers. As mentioned in the previous section, it would be unreasonable to assume that the only differences in presentation and storytelling of an online newspaper are what elements they include. As such, in a historical context we should too try to look behind this. In 2014 the content is not really different from how it was in 2004 for any of the two digitized online newspapers. More articles include pictures or videos but they are still only used as small additions to otherwise mainly text-based articles, very similar to how Jacobsen (2012) found out the New York Times uses add-on packages to its articles. The question thus remains whether storytelling practices have actually changed over the past 10 years for the traditional digitized newspapers.

Code

When looking at the underlying (markup) code of these two digitized online newspapers over the recent past, this thesis identifies some significant transitions. At the beginning of the sample, it was common practice for both De Volkskrant and the NRC to use table layouts, a way of constructing a web page that is static, and makes it difficult to have it adapt to different screen sizes (Frain, 2012). While nowadays layouts are mainly built up from CSS code⁵, the early websites of the NRC and De Volkskrant used only limited CSS, around half a page of code. Interestingly, both the websites seem to be outdated code-wise, even by 2004 standards. Both websites contain references to Internet Explorer 4.0, a browser that was launched in 1997 and only accounted for less than 1 percent of all Internet browsers in 2004 (The Counter, 2004). Also, some functionality that is done using server-side scripting⁶ nowadays is done in client-side JavaScript⁷ on the website of the NRC, which could indicate that the website did not make use of an advanced Content Management System (CMS)⁸ at all. In the years after, only gradual changes were made to the code each year, but

⁵ A way to keep style, layout and content separated that allows for more advanced styling of web pages, as well as adapting to screen sizes and devices (Frain, 2012).

⁶ Code on the web is either executed server-side, meaning on the server, or client side, meaning on the clients' computer (W3Schools, n.d.).

⁷ A form of client-side code (Mozilla Developer Network, 2014).

⁸ A system designed to make the input and management of content possible in a user-friendly environment without editing code directly, thus keeping content separate from code (United States Patent No. US6356903 B1, 2002).

altogether the website of the NRC had a couple of pages of CSS code and almost no remaining table-layouts in 2007. In 2010 however, when the NRC revised its NRC Next sister website, it is clear that it uses a different codebase altogether. The code is fully up to standards, semantic⁹, and more importantly, it is based on the off-the-shelf blogging platform Wordpress. A year after the normal NRC website is also revamped, and too based on the Wordpress platform. Since the code of the NRC Next in 2010 contains jokes and puns (“<!-- Flash, a-haa, Savior of the Universe -->” to indicate where the Flash player should be, referring to a song by Queen), and the new revised NRC website does too, while the old website did not include these types of jokes. This might indicate that the technical team behind the website was replaced when the website was revamped.

Analysis

In answering the research question *“To what extent is there a difference in the presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies between natively digital and traditional digitized online news websites?”*, the results of this small-scale case study research can inform the following: Rather than the natively digital newspaper startup having much more elements like videos and pictures in their articles like previous research seems to suggest (Jacobson, 2012) the actual number of these elements does not differ that much between the researched online newspapers. In other words, the new natively digital online newspaper shows not that much more pictures, illustrations and videos in their articles than the traditional digitized online newspaper. What does seem to be different is the exact presentation of these elements and the usage of new technologies to enhance the reading experience.

Some of the differences in presentation of the articles between De Correspondent, the NRC and De Volkskrant seem to come down to the fact that all of the elements used in De Correspondent were dynamically adjusted to fit the device or window size used to read the online newspaper, while they were not in De Volkskrant and the NRC. In other words, they used responsive design: they make use of the space available when it is present and enhance readability on devices or situations when it is not. It is important to note that the usage of

⁹ Meaning the correct ‘labels’ are used for each web element, e.g. not using ‘table’ web elements to create layouts, but only to create tables (Frain, 2012).

responsive design online, while increasingly common now (Gardner, 2011), is a very recent development. Regularly upgrading the website of De Volkskrant might just not be financially feasible for them when their website is not their main product, which is exemplified by the inclusion of social media buttons for the Hyves social network that does not even exist anymore¹⁰. The online website does not take priority and this becomes clear throughout many aspects of their online newspaper. Also, while De Correspondent tries to unobtrusively include new technologies that enhance the reading experience, no such features are available on the website of De Volkskrant or the NRC.

If the amount of multimedia elements is more or less the same over the three different online newspapers, but the differences lie more in the way they are presented, one question remains. Do the online newspapers actually go beyond using the multimedia elements as ‘add-on’ packages to traditional content like Jacobson (2012) described, or is there some sort of discrepancy between the setup and design of the online newspaper and the actual content that is published? When talking about the two traditional digitized online newspapers it seems that, judging from the content analysis, this could indeed be the case.

Looking at the historical content analysis of the NRC and De Volkskrant online newspapers, it seems like the content of the news articles has not changed much at all in the past 10 years while the platforms on which these news articles are published have. Especially in the case of the NRC the website has changed dramatically over the past 10 years, as is the way in which articles are presented but the actual ‘input’ into the website by journalists has not. As an example, one could take an article from the NRC website in 2004 and put it on the new NRC website so that it gets the new look and feel and it would look like an article written for the NRC website in 2014. The changes are coming from changing the structure of the website rather than changing the content. For the NRC, the presentation did change, as have the web technologies that are used, but neither of these changes work towards a change in how storytelling takes place or making the content more native to the online platform. In short, the digitized online newspapers therefore do not go beyond the multimedia add-on packages, the multimedia elements are still added to the traditional content as an afterthought.

¹⁰ The Hyves button has been removed after the original sample for this thesis research was taken

When taking a look at the only natively digital online newspaper discussed in this thesis, De Correspondent, it is clear that there are quite some differences compared to the more traditional digitized online newspapers. While the presentation and structure of the website are also far more advanced and more native to being digital than any of the other analyzed online newspapers, this is not necessarily the most important thing about De Correspondent. The other newspapers and especially the NRC too have made their platform at least to some extent more native to the web. What is more important though, is how De Correspondent has content that is native to the platform that is set up, i.e. the content posted on the correspondent is made without any prior history in the printed newspaper industry, and no preconception on what a 'newspaper' article looks like. An example of this is how sometimes there is a small text to accompany a piece of audio or video, while the traditional digitized online newspapers would only post a piece of audio or video to accompany a text. A possible explanation for this is that the 'correspondents' (as De Correspondent names its authors) are often not journalists but people with different backgrounds, so they might not even be acquainted with traditional journalism standards.

Discussion & research limitations

Unfortunately, the scale of this case study is too small to make confident claims about the differences in the way articles or news is presented between new natively digital newspapers and traditional digitized newspapers as a whole. While some differences were found the case study research focused on just three online newspapers, which limits the generalizability of the case study. Nevertheless, some key points were found that allow for explorative conclusions about the online newspapers that were studied as well as providing evidence to support further research into the topic. From the results of this small-scale content analysis it is clear that there are indeed differences between the presentation and storytelling of online digitized and natively digital newspapers. To answer the first research question, *"To what extent is there a difference in the presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies between natively digital and traditional digitized online news websites?"*, the differences are indeed there. While the traditional digitized online newspapers are at least playing catchup regarding presentation and web technologies, they are different altogether from the natively digital online newspapers concerning storytelling.

Judging from the content analysis it seems like not all actors within the traditional digitized newspapers work towards the same end result. In the case of the NRC for example, the website and its layout and design seems to be taking a different approach than the content, i.e. there is a discrepancy between what is presented and how it is presented. It would be interesting to find out what causes this and who or what the forces are that decide, for example, that the website should be in a blog form, or what an article should look like. The natively digital online newspaper did not seem to have this problem though, their content was a good fit for their platform, which is likely due to the absence of any traditional notions of what journalism or a newspaper is or should be like.

The case study research gives enough evidence that point to there being at least some strategic and organizational differences between natively digital and digitized newspapers to justify researching the underlying strategies using a different methodological approach. It would be interesting to see whether these changes are due to some deliberate strategy, or some an unintended side effect of another. Moreover the slight discrepancy between the website structure and the actual content suggests it might be useful to look into differences in perceptions and strategies of the different roles within the (traditional) newspaper organizations.

Part 2: Interviews

Since evidence was found that suggests that there are at least some strategic or organizational differences between natively digital and digitized newspapers another methodological approach, conducting interviews, was taken. The results of these interviews are described in the following sections.

Results

In this section the results from the conducted interviews will be presented and structured by (sub) codes. This thesis uses a hybrid of pre-set (deductive) and emergent (inductive) coding, i.e. some codes were derived in advance from both the literature and other prior knowledge of the material while other codes emerged only during or after the interviews. While the interview guides for each of the interviews were based on codes gathered exclusively from the theoretical framework, as expected, additional codes emerged

from coding the transcribed interviews that were not accounted for in the theoretical framework, while some other codes derived from the theoretical framework were less relevant than expected. As a result, the theoretical framework should be revised after having discussed the interview results and emerged codes to include some of these codes, alter others, and overall form a better starting point for establishing themes in the analysis part later on in this thesis. The distinction between different codes is at times rather arbitrary, because interviewees tended to blur the lines between different subjects by a fair bit, but will nonetheless be of use in the analysis section. Some of the newly emerged codes would not fit in a theoretical model, even if it were revised but are nonetheless interesting to discuss at the end of the results section to provide extra context.

Strategies and Perspectives

The first code that emerged from transcribing and subsequently coding the conducted interviews is 'strategies and perspectives' which partly originates from the theoretical framework made beforehand. In terms of strategies the different interviewees within the sample had a wide range of different views, which more often than not did not strictly represent the strategies of De Persgroep, but rather their personal perspectives on strategy. Because it is hard to draw a line between these formal strategies and standpoints and the personal perspectives of the individual interviewees, the code from the theoretical framework is altered to account for the latter as well as the former.

Business models

Within the overarching code of strategies and perspectives, in terms of business models the product manager and web analyst speculated that the future of De Persgroep might lie in the long tail¹¹, as described by Chris Anderson (Anderson, 2008). Although both the product manager and the data analyst agreed that the Netherlands is too small of a market to succeed with such a strategy they both would suspect that going beyond the

¹¹ "The theory of the Long Tail is that our culture and economy is increasingly shifting away from a focus on a relatively small number of "hits" (mainstream products and markets) at the head of the demand curve and toward a huge number of niches in the tail. As the costs of production and distribution fall, especially online, there is now less need to lump products and consumers into one-size-fits-all containers. In an era without the constraints of physical shelf space and other bottlenecks of distribution, narrowly-target goods and services can be as economically attractive as mainstream fare." (Anderson, 2005)

Dutch border would make such a strategy viable. In addition the product manager and web analyst both indicated that the same is true for strategies based on micropayments¹², like Blendle employs. In this same vein the product manager coined the possibility of taking over a smaller, soccer related, journalism initiative that currently publishes on Blendle, inadvertently serving as an example of how to reach this long tail.

Other interviewees like the editor-in-chief were less speculative about the business model strategies. The editor-in-chief described how the online strategy at De Persgroep used to be focused on minimizing costs because they were not able to generate any significant revenues from their online efforts but have now shifted to investing heavily in online in order to brace themselves for the online oriented future before they are too late. The product manager acknowledges this renewed focus on investing in online by explaining that “if you have a good idea and you present it to the right people, I think you’d be able to work on it [...] so it’s not formal but if you have an entrepreneurial mindset you can get things done here, if you tell them this is the business model etc. they’ll say here is some money, go ahead”. Interestingly, the editor-in-chief thinks that this is exactly the right time to invest and that they are not at all too late yet and even argues that investing sooner would’ve been too soon because people only just now are starting to accept paying for an online product. The director product development seems to fully agree with this as he argues that it would be best to let startups like Blendle and De Correspondent do the experimenting so that they can learn from them about what works for the customer and what does not.

In terms of revenue streams the interviewees all suggest that while the online advertising revenues are still rising at the moment, it is unlikely that it will ever become the main source of income according to the editor-in-chief, or even come close to what it used to be per user in the offline world according to both the product manager and web analyst. Instead, revenue will have to come from the paid online platform that De Persgroep is currently developing for a pilot at De Volkskrant. According to the director product-development it might take a long time before their complete customer base switches over from print to their online platform so that they can stop producing the print newspaper

¹² A micropayment is an e-commerce transaction involving a very small sum of money in exchange for something made available online, such as an application download, a service or Web-based content (Rouse, 2009)

however, because the different groups of readers have their own reading habits. What De Volkskrant will be doing to encourage switching over however, according to the editor-in-chief, is making sure readers get a better value proposition online, rather than taking away things from the print newspaper reader. According to the product manager it is likely that the printed newspaper will someday be replaced by online offerings completely since print circulation is going down ever so slightly but will eventually get to a point where it is no longer useful to print the newspaper. The director product development argues that when they reach this point when nobody is willing to pay for the printed newspaper anymore that does not mean people are not willing to pay for quality journalism anymore, but rather that they are not willing to pay for the particular medium, paper.

The editor-in-chief seems to emphasize that online and print are two entirely different things and stresses that they should not just do online what they are doing in the print newspaper, adding that, “half of the [print] articles are screaming for a nice online approach”. The web analyst agrees, as he too argues that online and offline are different things, the same stories packaged and told in a different way rather than a copy of the paper version. This is slightly different from the editor-in-chief’s view though as he argues in favor of keeping two separate editorial staffs and the need to consider for every news items which of the two platforms is most appropriate, rather than having the same stories on each of the two platforms. At the same time however, the web analyst does not seem to consider this change as far-reaching as some others seeing as he would still consider text to be the basis of online news, with some additions to enhance the text, rather than the other way around. This relates to how the editor-in-chief argues that it is his task to guide and encourage journalists to make use of what they are enabling with the new online platform.

Technology

Another sub-code that emerged from the interviews is the strategies and perspectives regarding technology. The editor-in-chief argues that not everyone needs to be ‘good’ with IT in the organization of an online newspaper, but is necessary to at least have some journalists who are. He gives the example of the data journalist and data visualist that De Persgroep employs, who are both in essence programmers. Later in the interview the editor-in-chief adds that “it’s useful if you at least speak the language of the engineers”. When asked whether the editor-in-chief thinks that technology is a driving force of innovation in

the news media he argues that you need to be technology driven when working online, adding that even creativity can just as well be done by technical people. Interestingly the product manager was of the opinion that developments online are sometimes too technology driven, giving the example of an organization that does something because the technology that enables it looks interesting, rather than having a goal that can be achieved using some technology. The director product development described how De Persgroep would ideally have an editorial staff with different disciplines like designers, graphic artists, frontend developer and data journalists, rather than multi-skilled journalists. Journalists would then work together with technical staff to 'enhance' articles. He also says that De Persgroep is still a long way from having a technologically capable editorial staff, but that this is partly due to the fact that the sandbox that the editorial staff needs is not fully realized either and he reckons that this will take another year or so.

Experimentation

Yet another sub-code of strategies & perspectives is 'experimentation'. All of the interviewees had some ideas on how an organization like De Persgroep experiments or should experiment. Regarding structural changes in terms of the news outlet websites by De Persgroep, the web analyst claims that usability tests and panels are extremely common, in fact performing these is one of the main aspects of the web analyst's job description. On the other hand, while journalists are willing to do more special things and experiment with things like *scrollytelling*, according to the product manager, while experimenting sometimes they would like to experiment more constantly. There might thus be a discrepancy between the experimentation in structure (the platform and website) and the content (the articles). The editor-in-chief too seems to acknowledge this issue as he "[tries] to emphasize that it's not always sufficient to present in a fairly classical format, which strangely everyone still seems to do... a head, intro, body; that doesn't always suffice. That's why we began experimenting with these snowfalls, longreads scrolling stories, that sort of thing." Additionally the editor-in-chief argues that besides this new way of thinking there is also a need for technology to enable this, similar to how the director product development argued in the previous sub-code of technology that they are still working on completing the 'sandbox'. Yet, the editor-in-chief promises that this experimenting is actually happening more and more and while we might not see it yet as readers, we will in the near future. The

director product development adds to why experimenting is important by explaining that consumers are really conservative and that they should come up with new things the consumers didn't know they want or need.

Future perspective

The last sub-code under strategies & perspectives is 'future perspective'. According to the product manager it will become more difficult to still deliver investigative journalism instead of ANP news articles when budgets become smaller. This is why the editor-in-chief suggests that the future will bring multimedia scrolling articles and other 'special' articles behind a paywall. The director product development on the other hand says that the future will bring a wide range of different products and payment models to, for example, not only appeal to the readers that want the complete package but also various groups of readers that want only certain parts, like Blendle now already provides. According to the director product development this won't significantly bring down circulation revenue because the people that would want that wouldn't have a subscription for the complete package now anyway. He adds that "anything is possible" in terms of pricing models, giving the example of Spotify that we wouldn't dare think of a service that would let us listen to all the music ever made for only 10 euros a month either, 10 years ago. When asked to more freely speculate the product manager comes up with a future where there is the option to choose a topic and decide as a reader how far-in-depth you want to go, personalized to what the reader wants from a high level to micro level, "choosing my own path" by utilizing the long tail. The web analyst would rather see an emphasis on cross device compatibility, start reading an article on one device in the morning and get an extended version during lunch on another device, and a documentary on the subject on yet another device in the evening.

Organizational Routines

While the original theoretical framework included a 'journalist routines' code and a large part of the interviews do fit under such a code, from transcribing and coding the interviews a slightly broader and better fitting code emerged: 'organizational routines'. As it turns out many of the journalist routines are interrelated with the routines of other actors within the organization and even the lines between who, for example, is a journalist and who is an engineer are blurring, like in the case of the data visualist. It is therefore that this

code from the theoretical framework is altered to include any routines within the newspaper organization, instead of merely journalist routines.

Journalist autonomy

One sub-code of organizational routines is journalist autonomy, which is also one of the few codes within which all interviewees more or less agree with each other. The editor-in-chief says that “nothing is just possible, but that [trying to open up possibilities] is what I do”. The web analyst is of the same opinion and attributes this to journalists bumping into technical limitations because the CMS is rather limited. The product manager exemplifies why by pointing out that the CMS is shared across the different Persgroep titles and all of them want to have their functionality implemented in their own preferred way, creating tensions and solutions that are far from ideal. Lastly the director product development too admits that the CMS is too strict and not flexible enough because it is integrated with so many different workflow processes and titles.

Developer relationship

An issue all of the interviewees described was how their relationship with IT, located in Kobbegem, a place near Brussels, Belgium, affects their routines. While, according to the editor-in-chief, the relationship itself with IT is not an issue, the fact that there is such a large distance between IT and the editorial staff, and the fact that IT has to balance their workload between a large number of different titles, is. He describes how they currently need the help of their colleagues in Kobbegem for every non standard format. The product manager explains that it would be better to have teams with all the different disciplines working together in near proximity of each other. The editor-in-chief too emphasizes the importance of having the editorial staff and IT in close proximity if they want to be innovative. He explains that they are currently working on this and that a small IT team is now forming within the Amsterdam offices as well.

Technology

Some people within the organization are better with IT than others and according to the web analyst and product manager this does indeed form a bottleneck with those that are not. Even so, at most of De Persgroep titles employees are very willing to learn and relatively young which helps. There is an advantage to having all the different titles integrated tightly as well, some systems can be reused with only some slight alterations

between titles, according to the director product development. At the same time however, he argues that De Persgroep and its titles are not as flexible as they should be yet, giving the example of a journalist that should be able to write a scrollytelling story without the help of the IT department. One of the reasons that De Persgroep is not as flexible as it should be yet is that they need to develop their own platform rather than using an off-the-shelf platform because of the tight integration with the printed newspaper and the large number of different titles, this costs time and money to develop according to the editor-in-chief.

Legacy

Because De Persgroep is an existing organization they risk the chance of cannibalizing their own (still very profitable) print newspaper sales when introducing a new product with a different value proposition and price, according to the product manager. Another drawback of an existing (large) organization is that while they have lots of capacity and lots of possibilities it is difficult to quickly react to changes, something that other, smaller organizations are better able to do. Unfortunately, according to the director product development, the Persgroep does not define the market, so they have no choice but to adapt. A compensating factor according to the director product development however is the fact that lots of people still read the printed newspaper and pay for it as well, revenues are high enough to support the investments needed for innovating. The downsides of having these traditional printed newspaper readers is that it brings legacy, even if a Persgroep title changes something as trivial as the arrangement of different sections they get complaint letters from customers that do not like the minor change, says the director product development.

External Circumstances

While the first code that emerged from transcribing and coding the interviews had to do with intention (strategy) and the second code with internal circumstances (routines), external circumstances were described and consequently coded, too.

The product manager argues that customers will need to switch mindsets to pay for news, the mindset that news is and should be free is fairly new and couldn't hold up very long. Similarly the director product development describes how the value perception on digital products is much lower than the value perception of their non-digital counterparts. At

the same time, (total) advertising revenues are diminishing, making budgets smaller, while a need for journalism still remains according to the product manager. Adding to that, while it was customary to take a printed newspaper subscription when you'd reached a certain age and income before, that is no longer the case according to the director product development.

At the same time however, the editor-in-chief argues that the possibilities have changed dramatically, making a scrollytelling or other innovative or new story much faster and cheaper than it was before. This could actually lower the costs of quality journalism somewhat. Interestingly, the editor-in-chief primarily looks at other countries as an example of what direction to take because they are, he argues, much further than most Dutch news organizations in adopting new ways of storytelling and experimenting with news. This is an advantage to them as they can see what will happen to their industry in the near future from looking at countries like Germany and the UK, and adapt their strategies accordingly.

Change process

Another topic that was often discussed, and thus emerged when coding the interviews, was the process of change within De Persgroep itself. Because De Persgroep is currently in a transition phase where online efforts are upgraded from being on the backburner to becoming central to De Persgroep's strategy all of the interviewees mentioned aspects of that change process that worked particularly well or not at all.

The product manager and web analyst talk about the fact that changes in these kinds of (digital) projects used to be fairly large before, major versions being released every few years. As of late however, they argue, changes have become more gradual, Facebook is constantly changing but is not often overhauled completely. The product manager and web analyst argue that the project at De Persgroep is in a sense an 'old' type of project, inducing massive changes that have a big influence on how the end user will be using their product. While the editor-in-chief doesn't mention this as a drawback he does confirm that De Persgroep is currently, and has been for some time, working with 80 developers on the back end which indicates that it will indeed be a major redesign rather than gradual change. The director product development mentions that while this would not have been such an issue at his previous occupation as one of the founders of Tweakr, where every user was an

early adopter, it is at De Persgroep. Another example he gives is that printing presses will have to be replaced in about 10 years, which is very costly, and that those new printing presses will be good to use for another 25 years from then on. That means that De Persgroep will have to invest for printing presses to be used up until the year 2050, in 10 years already. While chances are slim that the printing presses will still be used in the year 2050 and they will have to stop printing someday when nobody wants a printed newspaper anymore, they cannot stop printing before that moment has come, which forms an interesting dilemma.

Another change that is mentioned by the director product development as being a challenge is that the editorial staff will have to alter their rhythm from looking at what will need to be published tomorrow to what will need to be published in 10 minutes. To achieve this they have at least had one successful change of their organization, the separate editorial staffs of the Volkskrant, for online and print, have been largely -and are in the process of being- merged after having been separated only a few years ago.

Comparison

Another topic that came forward in all of the interviews was the comparison with other newspapers, either traditional newspapers or startup-type online only news outlets. In terms of traditional newspaper publishers, according to the product manager and web analyst, in their experience, ways of working are of course slightly different at each organization but the problems are largely the same at every newspaper. According to the editor-in-chief print newspaper circulation revenues go down overall but there are differences between the different papers, revenues of de Telegraaf go down quickly while Trouw and Volkskrant are both relatively stable. De Persgroep is thus in a unique position according to the director product development, there is still a lot of money available to be put in innovation projects, there is a large audience, radio, television, and other comparable newspapers are only one title rather than 9 at De Persgroep. Upsides of this are economies of scale and a large user base, downsides are that everyone and everything wants to have a say in every decision, which sometimes makes it difficult to innovate according to the product manager.

In terms of comparisons with startup-type online-only news organization the comparison with De Correspondent is often made. One difference between De Correspondent and De Volkskrant or any of De Persgroep's titles is described by the product manager as having a different mindset, doing exactly what Rob Wijnberg, cofounder of De Correspondent has envisioned and worrying whether it is economically feasible later, rather than economically safe and sound innovation based on spreadsheets. He adds that startups have an integral approach, start with a clean slate and have little of the ballast that large organizations have. The editor-in-chief explains that "we [De Persgroep] try to have a bit of the startup mentality, but that is easier said than done, in fact it is one of our biggest challenges. [...] everyone, even at the top of the company, agrees that we should have more of that mentality and that we should just try things without 'excel-ing' it through immediately. But at the same time they are scared to death that everyone will have their own team, making the organization a chaos". The director product development goes as far as saying that a startup like Tweakers simply cannot be compared to a large organization like De Persgroep, because it much easier to manage an organization that you built from the ground up yourself than an organization that you haven't. He adds that "many of the people that worked for Tweakers were also a Tweakers fan, but here... am I a Persgroep fan? Who is a Persgroep fan? That doesn't even exist. Not that that's a bad thing, it doesn't matter but [...] it is more abstract there, this is company like thousands of others, with many unique challenges but just less of that magic [...] it is much more just a job." The editor-in-chief too acknowledges that his previous occupation at Nu.nl was easier, because of the smaller size he argues that IT, the organization and business models were all easier to manage and utilize. A particularly interesting difference is one that the product manager notes, that at his previous occupation at a startup changes were much more continuous and there was a lot of contact with the end users. When asked whether De Persgroep would be able to do what De Correspondent does, the director product development argues that they could if they left out the content that De Correspondent doesn't have. However, he argues, it would be impossible to generate a 900 million euros yearly revenue in such a small niche market.

Revised framework

Based on the original theoretical framework and the results from the conducted interviews, the theoretical framework is revised to better fit the gathered data and allow for a better analysis of these interviews in the coming sections of this thesis research.

While the original theoretical framework included a combined concept of “News Strategy and Journalist routines” these two concepts have been separated and further refined into “organizational routines” and “strategies and perspectives”. Organizational routines has been chosen over journalist routines since there are more routines that influence the end-product in news organizations than only those of the journalist. Additionally the lines between what is a journalist and what is not are not as clear-cut as they used to be, since the organizations now also employ people that could both be considered IT and a journalist, like a data visualist that is essentially a journalist and a programmer at the same time. Strategies and perspectives has been chosen as a concept over just strategies because the interviewees had a hard time separating personal perspectives and official strategies. On the other hand, it could even be argued that these perspectives are just as important as the official strategies because these are bound to their perspectives anyway. Additionally, the technology concept has been replaced by the concept of external circumstances. While technologies are still likely to fit into this model from the interviews it becomes clear that it is not the only one but just one of many possible external circumstances that fit perfectly under the same concept. Other codes that emerged from the conducted interviews are ‘comparisons’ and ‘change process’, but neither of those fit in the (revised) theoretical framework. Both are productive in terms of providing extra context and to better understand the concepts that are included in the revised theoretical framework however.

In other words, it is both internal circumstances (organizational routines; strategies and perspectives) and external circumstances that influence storytelling and presentation, and thus, the medium. Subsequently this medium and the news content result in a message that is conveyed to the end-user.

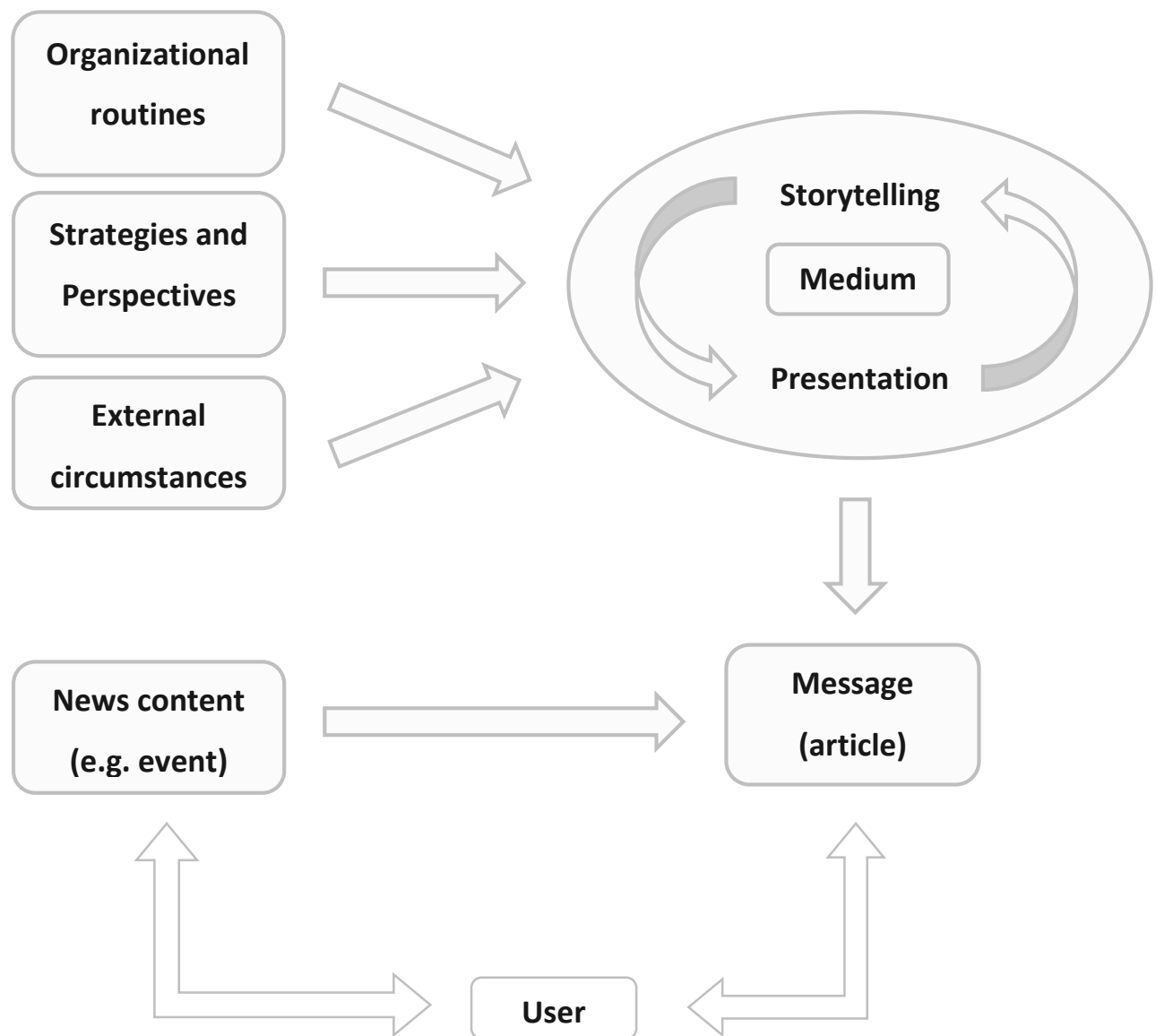


Figure 17. Revised Theoretical Framework

Analysis

In order to analyze the results, each of the coded concepts have been put into a set of three different matrixes, all of them with the four different job titles of the interviewees on the horizontal axis and the three different codes on the vertical axis. There are three distinct matrixes, the first (Table 1) one being the concepts regarding traditional newspaper organizations, the second one (Table 2) regarding startup-type online only newspaper organizations and lastly the external circumstances code for both (Table 3), as they are independent of being a startup-type or a traditional news organization.

	Editor-in-chief digital	Director product development	Product Manager	Web analyst
<i>Organizational routines</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nothing is just possible for journalists, my job to open up possibilities - IT has to balance workload - IT is far away - Need help from IT with every non-standard format - Would be better to have IT team on the same floor - Need a custom platform instead of off-the-shelf because of circumstances, this costs time and money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CMS is not flexible enough because of workflow integrations - Some systems can be re-used between titles - Scrollytelling should be possible without help from IT - Slow to react to changes, but no other choice - Many people still read and pay for printed newspaper - Legacy: complaints from readers even due to tiny changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CMS is shared across Persgroep titles - Would be better to have IT team on the same floor - Everyone is willing to learn IT - Chance of cannibalizing own printed newspaper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technical limitations for journalists because of CMS limits - Some are better with IT than others, this forms a bottleneck
<i>Strategies & Perspectives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From minimizing costs to investing in online - Investing earlier would've been too soon - Advertising will not become main source of income - Deliver better value proposition online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Let others experiment first so we get to know what works - It will take a long time before the entire customer base switches over to online - People are willing to pay for journalism, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long tail might be the future - Netherlands too small for long tail but larger could work - Take over a smaller initiative - Good ideas get money to try out - Printed newspaper will probably be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Netherlands too small for long tail but larger could work - Advertising revenue will not get back to pre-online levels - In favor of two separate editorial staffs

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Print and online are two different things - Need to have a few people that are good with IT - Technology is a driving force - Emphasize that a classic format is not always enough, but we are getting there - Need a sandbox for this - Special articles behind a paywall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> just not for the paper medium - An editorial staff would ideally have all disciplines rather than multi-skilled journalists - Sandbox not fully realized yet - Consumers are conservative, we need to come up with stuff they didn't know they need - Wide range of different products and payment models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> replaced completely someday - Technology should not be the driving force - Usability tests and panels are common - Need to have more constant experimentation - Difficult to deliver investigative journalism with smaller budgets - Future: from high level to in-depth, personalized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Text at the basis of online news - Emphasize cross-device compatibility
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Table 1. Matrix analysis traditional news organization

	Editor-in-chief digital	Director product development	Product Manager	Web analyst
<i>Organizational routines</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smaller size, easier manageable IT, organization and business models - [implied] less issues integrating existing workflows - [implied] off the shelf solutions are useable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Startup and organization like De Persgroep cannot be compared - There are no Persgroep fans - It's just a job here - [implied] no legacy - [implied] less issues integrating existing workflows - [implied] no re-using of systems - [implied] fast to react to changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clean slate with little ballast - Changes are much more continuous - More contact with end-users - [implied] no cannibalization issue 	

<i>Strategies & Perspectives</i>		- [implied] no userbase that pays for print, less revenue		
	- Everyone knows we should have a startup mentality too but too scared of organizational chaos	- Would never generate 900 million euro yearly revenue	- There is a different mindset - Not worrying about economical feasibility - [implied] there is more constant experimentation	

Table 2. Matrix analysis startup news organization

	Editor-in-chief digital	Director product development	Product Manager	Web analyst
<i>External Circumstances</i>	- Storytelling has become cheaper than before - Other countries are further in this change than Dutch news organizations	- Value perception of digital products is much lower than their non-digital counterparts - It was customary to take a newspaper subscription whenever you'd reach a certain income level and age, this is no longer true	- Customers will need to switch mindsets to pay for news - Revenues in the industry are diminishing while a need for journalism still remains	

Table 3. Matrix analysis general external circumstances

Main themes

From the codes and coded interview fragments in the matrix analyses several recurring themes can be identified that were mentioned multiple times and can therefore be considered the main findings.

The first theme that was identified is the fact that the Content Management System (CMS) used by De Persgroep is not flexible enough, which was mentioned by several of the interviewees. They argue that the CMS is a compromise between what the different Persgroep titles want implemented and how they want it to be implemented, seeing as the CMS platform is shared across titles. In addition, the platform is integrated tightly with all the different workflow processes that are present at an organization like De Persgroep. The example was given of the fact that every article and its content and content-types should be able to load within the mobile apps as well. Implementing a new feature or content-type on the website of one of the titles thus means that it has to be implemented not only on all titles websites', but also the mobile apps. Taking the issue even further it is difficult to automate the process from copying an article from the online redaction to the printed newspaper and vice versa when the possibilities on the platforms are different. It is because of this CMS platform that one of the interviewees suggests that "nothing is just possible" regarding experimenting with different forms of storytelling, adding that they (the journalists) need the help from IT for every non-standard format, which leads to the next theme that arises from this analysis.

The second theme identified from the analysis of the codes and coded interview fragments in the matrixes is IT problems. According to all of the interviewees the ideal situation from a journalist perspective would be to have journalists and front-end developers, graphics artists, designers and coders all on the same floor working on the same things together. This is needed because these jobs are becoming an integral part of what online journalism entails and it is clear from both the literature (Cottle & Ashton, 1999) and the interviews that a multi-skilled journalist is not easy to find, nor is it possible for a journalist to have as much expertise in coding as he or she has in journalism. The interviewees confirm that indeed, while willing, the IT skills of the editorial staff still forms a bottleneck for those that are not as skilled in IT. The only solution then is to let employees have different skills and make them work together. Unfortunately, in the current situation at

De Persgroep this is not the case yet. The IT team of De Persgroep is located near Brussels, Belgium, while the editorial staff of many of De Persgroep's titles are located in Amsterdam. This has the consequence that instead of working together in near proximity, questions of the editorial staff are answered by the IT department using a ticket system, which is far from ideal. In addition to being far away physically however, the IT department is shared across all of De Persgroep's titles and several interviewees suggests that this can sometimes lead to competing for IT's resources, where some titles are given priority over others in handling and answering tickets. While the interviewees are currently working on building a small IT or innovation team in the Amsterdam offices they do suggest that this has been somewhat of a strategic struggle with management since they are afraid of an organizational chaos when everyone has its own IT team. Still, the hiring of a data journalist and data visualist are a small step in the direction of having both IT and journalists on the same floor.

A third theme that can be identified is the issue of cannibalization. Many people still have a subscription to a printed newspaper, as is supported by the total print circulation revenue numbers (HOI, 2014; NDP Nieuwsmedia, 2013) in the past years. In the case of De Persgroep many of the titles have even sustained stable numbers of subscribers, that haven't gone down significantly at all over the past few years. Revenue from online subscriptions is still minimal compared to print subscriptions however (HOI, 2014). Unsurprisingly, it is clear from the interviews that De Persgroep is afraid of losing their print subscribers in favor of far less profitable online subscriptions. This situation makes it difficult for De Persgroep and its titles to fully focus on their online efforts, as they have to keep balancing the priorities of keeping their print subscribers with innovating the online alternatives. What doesn't help is that, according to the interviewees, consumers are fairly conservative and don't come up with new ideas. I.e. it could take a long time before consumers will stop using the printed newspaper if De Persgroep keeps providing one. The dilemma De Persgroep thus faces is that they will lose the majority of their revenue if they stop the printed newspaper now, but they will lose as well when they do not have a viable alternative once the customers stop using the printed newspaper by their selves.

Related to the cannibalization issue is the fourth theme that was identified as a result of the analysis, the value perception of digital products. According to the interviewees the problem of generating revenue from online efforts to support De Persgroep is that people

are not as willing to pay as much for online news products as they are for printed products. While some of the interviewees suggest that this is not a problem as the costs of online news are lower because there is no need to print and distribute. Other interviewees however argue that even so, the value perception of digital products is even lower, giving the example of a newspaper costing the same as or more than a broadband Internet subscription that provides access to almost all the information available in the world. While some, leaner, organizations might be able to support themselves on these lower subscription fees this will prove difficult for a large and inefficient organization such as De Persgroep. Still, at least some of the interviewees suspect that a low priced subscription model will be the future of De Persgroep titles as well.

The fifth and final theme that was identified from the analysis is the theme of being a follower rather than an innovator. While it is clear from the interviews that De Persgroep is willing to invest to stay relevant and that they are currently doing so by building a new future-proof platform, they either do not seem to have a clearly decided on a direction yet or have decided not to disclose it. Interviewees suggest that it would be best to let others, like Blendle and De Correspondent, experiment first to find out what works for the customer. At the same time interviewees are determined that De Persgroep is trying to have more of a startup mentality, but seeing which way the wind blows can hardly be called a startup mentality. On top of that, the interviewees argue that this is the right time to invest in online products, adding that investing earlier would've been too soon. While this may or may not be true it surely is not the way for De Persgroep to become an innovator in online new products as there simply are too many alternatives on the market already.

Connected to literature

In connecting the interview findings and themes back to the reviewed literature earlier in this thesis one of the first reviewed authors is McLuhan (1964), who, amongst other things, argues that people tend to look at the present through a rear-view mirror. This is arguably one of the most relevant statements in the light of the conducted interviews. Indeed the current online efforts of De Volkskrant, as can be seen from the content analysis, bear some resemblance to the print newspaper. Judging from the interviews however, it is unlikely that this will change when the new platform will be launched. In fact, while the

current strategy at De Persgroep includes a separate editorial staff for online efforts, the print editorial staff will become responsible for the online platforms as well as soon as the new platform launches (Kranenberg, 2014), which only increases the chances of approaching the website through a rear-view mirror. Aside from the quality of journalism, which will without doubt improve, in terms of a rearview mirror or the repurposing of offline content for the web (Deuze, 2003) this a step backwards rather than a step forward. A similar issue was found by Thurman and Lupton (2008), who argued in their research on the BBC's online news, that the BBC has been correct to stop repurposing their TV material for online use and publish videos made exclusively for online usage instead, which suggests the BBC moved in the complete opposite direction of De Volkskrant when it comes to repurposing material. Although interviewees did mention that offline content would likely be enhanced and extended for usage online, it begs the question whether these added elements will ever go beyond just being 'add-ons' and reshape the main product or content, like Jacobson (2008) questions in her case study of the New York Times.

While Himmelboim and McCreery (2012) argue that new ways of presenting online news are seen as posing a threat to traditional norms and values in newspaper practices, little or no evidence supporting this claim can be found in the interviews at De Persgroep. While indeed it is clear that this was true in the past and to some extent on the current platform of De Volkskrant, it is not likely to be true in the new situation. Regardless of existing fears of losing profitable print newspaper subscribers, De Volkskrant seems (admittedly, subjectively) to be determined in making a viable digital alternative to their printed offerings. As a matter of fact, interviewees suggest it is the aim to not take anything away from print newspaper subscribers but rather to provide an even better product online, directly contradicting Himmelboim and McCreery (2012).

As for journalist practices and routines several claims were made in the reviewed literature, journalists would have no time to be creative anymore and multi-skilled journalists would be used in an effort to cut costs (Cottle & Ashton, 1999). Both are quite different from the interview findings in this thesis research however. One of the major problems of De Volkskrant and its online productions is that journalists need to deal with an IT department that is far away and needs to balance its workload between the different Persgroep titles. If journalists were truly used as multi-skilled employees however this would

not be as much of a problem since they would not need IT. One example in which multi-skilled journalists were specifically named was the case of the newly hired data journalist, but this was seen as an exception rather than the norm. Also, the emerging strategy of slowly building up an editorial staff with multiple roles working together on the same floor suggests that skills are still separated by role. Another argument from the reviewed literature, that journalists would not have the time to be creative also does not seem relevant in the case of De Volkskrant. In their case the current Content Management System (CMS) is an issue that is often raised because it limits creativity, not time. This issue with the limitations of the CMS does confirm why experimentation with storytelling is still so limited however, like Thurman and Lupton (2008) conclude, without streamlined CMS, experimenting with storytelling requires expertise that is simply not readily available in current newsrooms and this is true for De Persgroep as well. As a result, text is still, and will likely be for some time judging from the interviews, the cornerstone of online news like Thurman and Lupton (2008) suggest.

Discussion

It is difficult to give a concise answer to the second research question *“What current and future strategies, motivations and circumstances could cause the differences explored in RQ1?”*, as in reality it turns out there is a myriad of factors influencing the presentation and storytelling, and consequently medium that (online) newspapers use. While the entire list of factors can be found in tables 1, 2 and 3, it is important to realize that all of these factors are either as a result of strategies & perspectives, organizational routines or due to external circumstances as can be derived from the revised theoretical framework. Additionally the five most important and common themes that occurred throughout the interviews are CMS (in)flexibility, IT problems, cannibalization, value perception of digital products and lastly, following rather than being ahead of the trend. As such these five themes are what constitutes an explorative answer to the second research question, and thus are some of the potential reasons of the differences that were explored in research question 1. An explorative answer to the third and final research question, *“What could traditional digitized online newspapers learn from natively digital newspapers and vice versa in terms of their strategies regarding presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies?”* can be based

exclusively on the findings of the second research question. The themes of CMS (in)flexibility, IT problems and following the trend rather than being ahead of the trend all pose possible areas in which traditional digitized newspapers could learn from natively digital newspapers. The issue of cannibalization on the other hand is unique to traditional digitized newspapers and is not relevant for natively digital newspapers. Unfortunately, it is not possible to formulate any indications of what natively digital newspapers could learn from traditional digitized newspapers without knowing what issues are present at these natively digital newspaper organizations, which is due to not finding any natively digital newspaper willing to cooperate.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

This thesis was aimed at investigating the future of news in terms of presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies on traditional and startup news websites, and in particular the differences between those two types of organizations. Two distinct methodological approaches were used to perform an exploratory study on this topic, a content analysis of three different newspaper websites over time to identify the exact differences on the one hand, and interviews with employees of a newspaper organization to find the underlying explanations for these differences on the other.

A preliminary look at the literature showed that, while many different aspects of online news websites are changing or have been changing in the last decade, one of these aspects has been left largely undiscussed in literature for the past decade: the aspect of presentation and storytelling from a technological perspective. Interestingly this particular subject was a popular topic of research two decades ago when newspapers first moved to the Internet, but has been left undiscussed since then. In this paper a theoretical framework (figure 1) was established from three different theoretical fields to bridge this gap in literature and provide a solid basis for researching the subject. Literature regarding three distinct theoretical perspectives was reviewed: 1) media theory; 2) online storytelling, technologies and presentation; and 3) newspaper strategies, journalist roles and routines. Using these three theoretical perspectives a theoretical framework was devised to inform both the content analysis (method 1) of traditional and startup online newspaper websites, and the interviews (method 2) with several key employees in different roles at traditional newspaper publisher De Persgroep. As a result of the two methodological approaches the initial framework was revised to better fit the reality of researching the subject in an inductive-deductive hybrid fashion. Interestingly, some findings support the reviewed literature while other findings directly contradict the often outdated literature, showing that it is indeed valuable to reconsider researching the topic of this thesis, something for which the revised theoretical framework in this thesis could provide a starting point for other researchers.

In the content analysis differences between presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies were indeed found between the natively digital startup-type online news website and digitized traditional news websites. On the topic of presentation and use of web technologies traditional digitized news websites seem to be playing catchup with the researched natively digital startup news website, while they are operating on a whole other level regarding storytelling. Interestingly, there are indications that there might be a discrepancy between what is presented and how it is presented at traditional digitized newspapers, e.g. while the website of the NRC is in a blog form the actual content is presented far more 'traditionally'. This might be an indication that different roles within the organization have different views on the topic. In analyzing the natively digital news website no such discrepancies were identified. In practical terms some of the major differences that were found between the presentation, storytelling and use of technologies on natively digital and digitized online news websites are: less of a rear-view mirror approach in designing the natively digital news websites; higher information density on digitized news websites; no responsive design/cross device optimization on digitized news websites; 'content is king' approach on natively digital news websites; and lastly, contrary to what the reviewed literature suggests, natively digital news websites did not use more 'multimedia' elements than their digitized counterparts.

In terms of strategies, motivations and circumstances that could have caused the differences explored in the content analysis a rather extensive list of factors (tables 1, 2 & 3) could be found through the in-depth interviews with several employees of De Persgroep. The main themes that were found are CMS (in)flexibility, IT problems, cannibalization, value perception of digital products and lastly, following rather than being ahead of the trend. As a result of these interviews the theoretical framework was revised (figure 17) to now include 'external circumstances', 'strategies & perspectives' and 'organizational routines' to be the main drivers behind storytelling & presentation at an online news website. Unfortunately, because every employee had a different future perspective it is impossible to prove that one role within the organization has a different strategy than the other as this would need a larger sample with multiple interviewees per role. Also, because no startup news organization was found to be willing to cooperate, it is not possible to come up with any recommendations for what natively digital organizations could learn from digitized news

organizations, since it is not known what issues play a role at natively digital organizations. The five main themes pose a good starting point for traditional news organizations to look for at their own organization as it is likely that these will important indicators of presentation and storytelling processes at their own organizations as well.

Recommendations

This research was conducted because there has been little to no literature researching the specific topic of presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies on online news websites in the last decade, while a recent wave of new (startup) natively digital news websites show interesting differences with the efforts of traditional news organizations. This thesis research proves that it is indeed useful to look into this topic by finding extensive differences in the presentation, storytelling and use of web technologies between those two types of organizations and exploring several possible underlying motivations, strategies and circumstances. However, because of the limited nature of this study, both in terms of content analyzed and interviews conducted, several conclusions could not be draw and others are uncertain. It is therefore essential that other studies continue researching this topic, as there is still a lot left to be discovered. Future studies could benefit greatly from using the revised theoretical framework (figure 17) to base their research on and subsequently improve, complement or criticize it as they see fit.

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Appendix A. Example interview guide [Dutch]

- [interviewee B], Director Product Development Persgroep Digital
- Hiervoor: Lange carrière bij Tweakers/VNU

Routines

- Omschrijf rol / omschrijf takenpakket
- Gemiddelde werkdag / vergelijking met een aantal jaar geleden? (Tweakers...)
- Wat is je invloed op het eindproduct en anderen en de werkwijze? (bijv. presentatie)
Wie nog meer?
- Vrij om veranderingen door te voeren? Grote organisatie handig of juist niet?
- Samenwerking met ontwikkelaars in Kobbegem/België?

Presentation

- Volkskrant nieuw platform – gratis+betaald combo / hoe tot stand gekomen?
- Vrijheid voor journalist om visuele elementen/storytelling e.d. te gebruiken? (e.g. slideshow/chocolate special)
 - o En de ontwerper/ontwikkelaar? Welke rol speelt hij/zij in die keuze.
 - o Vast template?
 - o Meer/minder bij verschillende Persgroep titels?
 - o Zijn collega's goed genoeg met ICT hiervoor?
- Philippe remarque in interview: dat je 'op de nieuwe website alle kwaliteiten van de traditionele krant hebt maar daarbij ook nog eens een aantal internet-kwaliteiten, je kan dus bijvoorbeeld bewegend beeld toevoegen bij een artikel'.
 - o Dan mist de papieren lezer iets?
 - o Kan niet een integraal deel zijn?
 - Wat is het hoofdmedium?
 - o Maakt papieren krant onaantrekkelijk?
 - o **Hoe van add-ons naar multimediaal**
- Welke rol speelt technologie? Als gevolg van verandering of als oorzaak van verandering in krantenwereld?
- Vergelijking verschillende titels binnen de persgroep
 - o Uitbreiding van nieuw platform naar b.v. AD?
 - o Implementatie verschillend per titel?
 - o Verschillende houding van medewerkers tussen titels?
- Vergelijking met iets als nu.nl niet relevant maar bijv. correspondent of nrc zelfde publiek, toch grote verschillen: waarom? Beter/slechter?
- Vergelijking met Tweakers

Perspective

- Mijn vooronderzoek: mensen betalen wel voor papier maar (relatief) weinig mensen voor online (voornamelijk bij trad. Kranten), bied online niet juist meer mogelijkheden en gemak?

- Wat is zo aantrekkelijk aan papier tegenover digitaal?
 - Gaat papier wel echt verdwijnen?/wanneer?
- Hoe genereer je omzet uit online bezoekers? Nu/straks/toekomst? Spotify? (ad revenue!)
- Kijk naar startups: verbaast over succes of verwacht?
 - Missen jullie niet de boot?
- Inherente verschillen tussen startup en trad. Krant?
- Innovators dilemma: van toepassing of niet?
- Kunnen trad. Kranten verwachtingen bijstellen en downsize?
- Slotvraag: hoe zou je de persgroep titels idealiter voor je willen zien over 5 jaar?