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A collage of five images showing various media equipment and environments. The images include a close-up of a metal frame, a stack of blue and black boxes, a dark industrial setting with pipes, a large blue machine, and a person working at a desk.

Lost In Transition

*Media Innovations
in the Netherlands*

Marco van Kerkhoven

Lost In Transition

Media Innovations in the Netherlands

Marco van Kerkhoven

Cover photo courtesy of Emily Bell.



Here's @jayrosen_nyu climbing on a
disused printing press #jrc
<http://yfrog.com/h0fbabw>

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Lost In Transition

Media Innovations in the Netherlands

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1

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

Original news production is a costly business (Leadbetter & Oakley, 1999; Dorroh, 2008; Meyer, 2009). News production that lives up to a high quality standard has become even costlier (Mensing & Rejrek, 2005; Deuze, 2008). Due to a new attitude of both news consumers and advertisers - people living in the media, with its 24/7 online free news environments, rather than with the media (Deuze, 2012) - most news media in the Western world are going through a deep crisis. Publishers of regional newspapers in the Netherlands are amongst the hardest hit and worst performing news companies in Europe (Leurdijk, Slot & Nieuwenhuis, 2012). They are losing audiences and advertisers to the Internet and are still unsuccessful in making a profit from that same Internet, as many case studies show.

The objective of this study is to explore to what extent and how regional newspapers in the Netherlands respond to the consequences of the loss in readers and advertisers. I investigate the current role of regional news media, innovation strategies of incumbent publishers and the potential of alternative local news business models.

TROUBLE IN THE REGION

The newspaper industry has had to react to this loss of market share (Lin, Salwen, Garrison & Driscoll, 2005; Picard, 2014). At first, it started to reduce costs. Editorial processes were forced into cheaper schemes, and cost-efficient production technology was introduced (Killebrew, 2005; Dupagne & Garrison, 2006).

Not only did the news consumer and the traditional media advertiser change, news production changed as well. The Internet has given room to thousands of new news companies around the world, competing for the attention of the news consumer and the increasingly happy selective advertiser. The latter has benefited tremendously from the monopoly-breaking effect of digital start-ups. This process is especially visible in the local news ecosystem, where new news businesses erupt in a rapid fashion (Jenkins 2001, Anderson, 2013). Although there is evidence that online readers do not consume and retain news any differently from readers of the print versions (d'Haenens, Jankowski & Heuvelman, 2004), news consumers seem increasingly to use online news environments instead of traditional print newspapers (Naldi & Picard, 2012). Newspapers are present on the Internet, but various competitive news portals and news aggregators are stepping in, often solely depending on advertising revenues with low cost news production.

The digitization of news work and newsroom production was another force that hit traditional media work (Jenkins, 2006; Deuze, 2007; Picard, 2011). In essence, the transition from analogue to digital made it possible to represent every single piece of information by a

series of ones and zeros, the fundamentals of digital data transfer. All media products could be synchronized, offering new ways of producing and channelling news. The coining of this innovation potential as 'convergence' goes as far back as the beginning of the 1980s, when Sola Pool (1983) addressed 'blurring the lines between media' as a 'convergence of modes' (p. 23).

The Internet and digitization have fundamentally altered the value chain of news production and distribution. Digital start-ups and online-only news providers have a competitive advantage over the traditional print dailies, as they do not carry the burden of the high-cost legacy model (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009). Producing and publishing a newspaper is an expensive business. The fixed costs, such as printing presses, ink, paper and labour, are considerable, while marginal costs are low. In other words, to make one single newspaper, publishers need to invest heavily, whereas subsequently selling the copies from the point of break-even is relatively cheap.

An advantage for existing newspapers, of course, is that they already produce news and should therefore be able to spread to the online news market relatively easy. However, both offline and online companies face the same dual market problem in selling news to readers and selling readers to advertisers: that neither those readers nor advertisers are hardly willing to pay for news services online (Leurdijk, Slot & Nieuwenhuis, 2012).

A third major change, a process that has been going on for some decades now, was that ownership has shifted from individuals and families to detached shareholders. The latter had neither the urge nor the devotion to invest in a social role for the media, and furthermore introduced a well-known business approach to the media: that of harvesting the fruits of their market position (Meyer, 2009, p. 14). This take-the-money-and-run-strategy involves lowering costs to a level where it is difficult to maintain a quality product, and sustaining this situation for as long as it takes before consumers recognize that they are being deceived. By then, the company and the product may already be ruined, and the owners either sell or close down the company, completing the 'harvest' (Porter, 1993).

Quite plausibly, as news consumption is moving from print to online, advertising follows in an unsurprising fashion. Between 2005 and 2009, the decline in advertisement income for twelve European countries ranged from 5.8% to 38.8%, while the total amount of worldwide advertising expenditures grew from 350 billion US dollars in 2005 to almost 500 billion US dollars in 2012 (Leurdijk, Slot & Nieuwenhuis, 2012).

REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS' MARKET SHARES

Regional newspaper markets are defined by Lin, Salwen, Garrison & Driscoll (2005) as areas where the 'coverage centres on a large geographic region, such as a metropolitan area, with emphasis on local and regional news. Coverage includes substantial national and international news' (p. 264). It is argued that in the Netherlands, due to a changing audience, the rise of digital technology and a long-term economic setback, the position of regional newspapers as a primary source of political news for almost three million people is highly uncertain (Bakker, 1998; Brinkman, 2009; Buijs, 2014).

For the six European countries with the largest regional newspaper circulations (Germany, UK, France, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands) the average yearly decline in sales between 1996 and 2010 varied from 0.5% to 15 % (WAN-IFRA, 2011). In thirty years, regional newspapers in the Netherlands have seen their circulation drop from 2.7 million in 1980 to 1.8 million in 2012. In some regions, daily newspapers have even withdrawn from the market completely. One can wonder if consequently there is a negative impact on press diversity and the democratic right of citizens to be well informed (Levy & Nielsen, 2010). From a civic society point of view, the question has been raised of what happens in a regional news ecosystem - which has been defined as all available media platforms in a given area (Anderson, 2013) - if political news is no longer covered by daily newspapers (Anderson, Bell & Shirky, 2012, Jarvis, 2014). This research focuses therefore on the weaknesses, the strengths, and the future potential of the regional newspaper, specifically as a function of the local news ecosystem.

Regional publishers have found it difficult to develop new business models that could cope with the loss of market share. The reasons for this could be both autonomous (due to external influences such as social-economic developments) and disruptive (such as technological innovations with a high business and organisational impact). In general, regional newspapers are more vulnerable to a decline in audience and advertisers due to smaller markets and smaller budgets (Mensing & Rejfek, 2005; PEW, 2009; Bakker, 2010). Recent research in the Netherlands shows how regional newsrooms struggle with the day to day consequences of new digital strategies (Buijs, 2014), and, on a more anecdotal level, how regional publishers have to cope with the economic reality of hedge funding and mismanagement (Geijn, 2014). Historically regional newspapers tend to have an older audience, which nowadays is getting even older, and that increasingly has its impact. In the Netherlands, the average age of a regional newspaper reader is 52 while that of the overall newspaper reader is 48. These figures show a negative renewal rate; while subscriptions usually end due to natural causes, growth in the younger age cohort is lacking. Inevitably this leads to lower investment power due to weaker growth perspectives. The largest regional newspaper in The Netherlands balances around a paid circulation of 140 000 readers.

The same pattern is true for the United Kingdom. Currah (2009) defines two key problems with the position of regional news media: news consumers expect regional news on the Internet to be free, and advertisers expect a large and well-defined audience and want to target it for as little money as possible. 'The digital generation tends to skim and view, rather than read and explore', he writes (p. 3). In the United States, a predominantly regionalised news market, 74% of the readers are over 45. In 2010 this used to be 50% (PEW, 2012). According to Meyer (2009) the glory of the American newspaper business used to be its ability to match its success as a business with a proud attention to its social-service mission. Today that is no longer the case, he stated. The household penetration of newspapers (ratio circulation to household) went down from 130% in the 1920s and 1930s to 44% in 2007. In The Netherlands the household penetration of regional newspapers dropped from 47% in 1990 to 21% in 2014 (Bakker, 2015).

WHY A PROBLEM?

Why is it a problem that the business models of regional news media seem to be ill prepared for the digital future? In other words, what is so bad about regional newspapers disappearing?

First of all, regional newspapers are often the leading news source in a region (Bakker, 1998; The Netherlands Press Fund, 2004; Brinkman, 2009). But 'when a city loses an established paper it loses far more than a tax-paying business and employer, it also loses an institution's memory [...] an institution that is equipped to raise the profile of a community, inform citizens and campaign on issues of local relevance' (Currah, 2009, p. 7). This potential news gap is considered a serious threat to democracy. Changes in the availability of regional newspapers can have an effect on the democratic process, regionally as well as on a local level (Allan, 2007; Brinkman, 2009; Clogston, 2014). Empirical studies show for instance that a regional daily newspaper is essential to public life (Schulhofer-Wohl & Garrido, 2009) and political debate (Gentzkow, Shapiro, & Sinkinson, 2009; Cyr, Carpenter, & Lacy, 2010), and enhancing political knowledge and participation (Kaufhold, Valenzuela, & De Zúñiga, 2010). Another impact that might disappear with a vanishing newspaper is a sense of community. Paasi (2002) suggests: 'The regional newspaper discourses can promote 'regional' feelings and ways of thought in the articles published' (p. 143).

The question to what extent regional dailies play a vital role in informing audiences about regional politics is of particular interest. This is especially relevant in the context of the present debate around new business models for regional newspapers and the suggestion that regional publishers should receive public financial support.

INNOVATIONS IN THE REGION

At present economic rationalization seems to be the predominant business strategy for Dutch regional dailies in general. Some of them are suffering from investors whose strategies are not always clear (Geijn, 2014), while others are struggling with ownership changes or are recovering from mergers. At the same time, all publishers have been occupied with cutting costs and layoffs. In the preceding half decade there seemed to be little room for thoroughly pondering alternative innovation strategies.

Present economic developments urge news media to better connect or even reconnect with news consumers. In the media economy in general, two driving forces of innovation policies can be recognized that address that reality: one that follows economies of scale - selling the same product to more targeted people, or simply more people - and one that follows economies of scope - selling more products to the same people (Van Kranenburg, 2005).

A typical example of a process innovation in the first category is the rationalization on the production level, leading to a narrowing or broadening of distinguishable audience groups. This way companies can enhance the advertising value by either focusing on a smaller, but well described, clientele in terms of, for example, income, age or gender; or, alternatively, go after the masses and reach out to as many people as possible and sell advertising space accordingly. An example of the scale approach is that of the British media-investor Mecom. In 2005, David Montgomery, the former chief executive officer of the Mirror Group and former editor of the Today newspaper, founded this media investment vehicle. The company acquired assets in the Netherlands (Wegener a.o.) following the reasoning of the economies of scale that with different European newspapers in Denmark, Germany, and Norway together Mecom could serve a common goal of gaining synergy. The Norwegian media conglomerate Schibsted has explored the same route. The Schibsted newspapers Aftenposten, Bergens Tidende, Stavanger Aftenblad, Fædrelandsvennen have joined editorial forces to 'take advantage of the economies of scale which editorial and commercial collaboration can offer' (Schibsted.com, 2010). What they do is to replicate internationally successful synergy advantages between news and service websites.

A typical example of innovations following the economies of scope can also be found at Schibsted. It centralized advertising sales for the different types of websites it owns - media, lifestyle, or peer-to-peer marketplaces and so on – thus offering one advertiser, but different products. Commonly, economies of scope develop a broad range of product portfolios in an attempt to spread risks and to be more adaptive to change. In the Netherlands, the *Telegraaf Media Groep* followed a strategy that involved economies of scale by broadening their portfolio over different new terrains. In 2010, TMG bought, for instance, the social network site Hyves (43 million euro) to gain access to the upcoming phenomenon of social media, in

which people mainly share information based on the opinion of peers.

In practice, the two economic tactics are not as opposite as it seems. An integrated newsroom model, or convergence as it is also branded, is an example of economies of scale as well as economies of scope; it gives access to new ways of disseminating news as well as offering synergy advantages in terms of newsrooms cooperation and joined operational technology. It means, among other things, that the news organization needs to be restructured to offer not only text but also audio and video via additional digital channels (Quinn, 2005; Nguyen, 2008). Singer (2001) and Currah (2009) suggest that regional and local newspapers could survive the digital crisis because of their function in the community and because they contain need-to-know information. In this study, two promising innovation approaches are put to the test:

1. Convergence practice at regional legacy newspapers.
2. Alternative local news business models.

Both are examples of economy of scale as well as economy of scope and represent innovation strategies that aim to gain organisational and editorial synergy, and engage audiences.

1. Convergence practice at regional legacy newspapers

Transition to the integrated newsroom model, or convergence, is widely expected to be an answer to today's media consumption patterns (Quinn, 2005; Jenkins, 2006; Nguyen, 2008), where people are connected to social online networks around the clock and are used to an instant news offer. According to Jenkins (2006), extension (broadening the media scope), synergy (profit from control over the wide range of media outings), and franchising (same content, different product) are pushing media industries towards convergence. The PC as a web tool is the primary instrument here, but other publication platforms such as mobile phones, pads, net books or e-readers are impending too. The possible economic advantages of convergence are well documented. In 2002, WAN-IFRA, the global organization for the newspaper industry, claimed that 'the potential for cost savings [were] enormous' (Aquino, et al. 2002), mostly due to trained cross-media workers, reduced work forces and technology-assisted repurposing.

Convergence directly affects four key aspects of mass media industries: the content of communication, the relationship between media producers and consumers, the structure of firms, and ultimately how communication professionals do their work (Deuze, 2007). The reasons for the high expectations directed towards convergence are:

- For one, that multiplatform publishing might offer synergy (see Deuze, 2007, p. 68)
 - which could lead to more efficiency and thereby to cutting costs. Standardization of media platforms and tools offers the possibility of streamlining media work and,

by doing so, making media production, easier. It could bridge the differences in media skills for media workers, as it offers flexibility, control over workflow, and thus efficiency (Quinn, 2005).

- Secondly, there is the prospect of expansion into new markets; a regional newspaper that goes local, for example, with a community video project that might attract new customers (Currah, 2009).
- Thirdly and finally, connecting to news consumers in a two-way communication means a better understanding of what it is the consumer wants (Jenkins, 2006). Since the consumer is changing, advertisers may follow by also using cross-media platforms (Thurman & Herbert, 2008).

For these purposes, four measures seem necessary (Deuze, 2004):

- Partnerships within (or with other) media organizations to provide, promote, repurpose, or exchange news.
- Crossmedia (integrated) production marketing and management.
- Establishing a research and development strategy.
- Contextual factors: e.g., local or industrial legislation favouring cross-media enterprises.

Some regional media have already tried out the opportunities of converging to multimedia and cross-media publishing. In case studies, editors and management state that convergence – of course, among other things – presents a possibility to connect advertisers with the audience, and the pushing dominance of available digital technology; technologically, multimedia publication creates opportunities, so why not use them (Singer 2003; Killebrew, 2005; Dupagne & Garrison, 2006)? The term multimedia, or crossmedia, refers here to being present with the same content on different platforms. Interviews with senior editors and managers from a selection of the UK's national online news providers questioned to describe and analyse their current experimentation with multimedia and video storytelling (Thurman & Lupton, 2008) showed that editors are willing to embrace convergence.

In the Netherlands, Tameling and Broersma (2012) explored crossmedia innovation initiatives at three Dutch media companies. Between 2005 and 2011, they analysed how policy was defined and implemented there. They carried out an ethnographic study, carried out a desktop white paper research and conducted semi-structured interviews. They conclude that all three enterprises show a complex route towards convergence and cross-media production. Balancing constantly between journalistic and economic principles, technology proved to be a factor of importance. Change of cultures and routines seemed to be inevitable, as well as restructuring the coordination between the different media channels involved.

Erdal (2008) studied the Norwegian public service broadcaster NRK's central newsroom at

Marienlyst. It produces the national news and the regional Østlandssendingen for Oslo and Akershus. Over the last two decades, NRK has gone through significant changes in the organization of news production. Radio, television and web news were integrated. Erdal starts from the question of how digital technology is used 'in order to change the way news is produced and published.' At NRK, television and radio, web, teletext and mobile media have their own separate news desks. Television, radio and web have separate morning meetings, due to different deadlines. The web desk is on a 24/7 schedule and therefore is the main deliverer of online news, including all the digital features available, such as video and audio. Erdal refers to this task as following 'web logic', whereas television and radio have their own logic, or routines. The production for the web usually means, according to Erdal, interactivity, user participation, hyperlinking, debate and allowing user generated content. NRK has all that.

What Erdal found shows similarity with Carr's (2011) analyses on the convergence level at the Tampa Tribune. Carr finds different levels of convergence in media production, though. While the Tribune website is well equipped with digital news and service tools, to what level these are available to news consumers depends on the story. In 2000, the newly formed News Center combined three news units, The Tampa Tribune, the NBC-affiliated WFLA-TV, and Tampa Bay Online (TBO.com), in one building (Strupp, 2000). The goal here was to find synergy by bringing 'together the depth of newspaper coverage, the immediacy of television and the interactivity of the Web' (in Garrison & Dupagne, from *Media General 2002 Annual Report*, 2003b, p. 4; see also Gabbettas, 2000). One of the fears (Dupagne & Garrison, 2006) was that the convergence newsroom would damage the editorial independence of news operations and reduce the amount of original content and the amount and type of local news coverage (Gabbettas, 2000; Strupp, 2000). This appeared not to be the case. Boczkowski and Ferris (2005) found that news publication at TBO.com, the central online platform from which all channels publish online, are still different platforms with different rhetoric and recognizable different presentation. In 2012, however, the News Center sold The Tampa Tribune, leaving Media General with only broadcasting units.

Fears about convergence

Although promising, converging traditional print publications with multimedia and cross-media publishing is still feared to have its drawbacks. Convergence is assumed to compromise journalistic quality, for example. Synergy could lead to a lowest common denominator, i.e., tabloidization (Allan, 1999). Gans (2003) warns that vulgarization of the news must be expected; as a result of the risk that convergence is merely used as a means to be cost-efficient. Im (1997), Bardoel and Deuze (2001) and Örnebring (2010) are critical of convergence because it may destroy craftsmanship and hence result in a degradation of media workers and their labour ('deskilling'). There is reluctance towards convergence

because former news text writers, specialists in their own field of work, may be forced to diversify by learning new skills. Bromly (1997) fears 'the dismantling of demarcations between journalists and technicians, writers and camera operators, news gatherers and news processors, and between print, radio and television journalism'. This will inevitably undermine basic journalistic skills and standards and fosters so-called 'multi-skilling' in newsrooms, which Bromly sees as the result of economic pressure that cuts back on resources while increasing workloads.

Added to that is the fear of a standardization of news production. Deuze (2007) elaborates on these consequences of convergence a step further as he states that 'commercialization and cross-media mergers have gradually eroded the distinct professional identities of newsrooms and their publications (whether in print or broadcast)'. Journalistic judgment as such no longer determines what is valued (as) news, 'what counts as 'news' will be severely constrained within the limits of corporate culture' (Allan, 2004, p. 191).

2. Alternative local news business models

Online news models are expected to play a leading role in local news markets as their presence could add value to the political news ecosystems (Jarvis, 2009). They are more flexible and cheaper to operate, especially in terms of production and distribution (Howley, 2009; Nielsen, 2015). Because the threshold for participation seems low, these media could also use citizens as contributors (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004; Wall, 2015). A special brand of alternative local news businesses is a so-called hyperlocal. Basically they are local initiatives that aim to produce news gathered in and focused on a designated local area. But, according to Howley (2009, p. 2), hyperlocals go beyond the traditional description of 'community media'. He defines them as 'a range of community-based activities intended to supplement, challenge, or change the operating principles, structures, financing, and cultural forms and practices associated with dominant media'. Challenging hyperlocal media could engage better with audiences due to closer proximity in a local news ecosystem (Jarvis, 2009).

For regional newspapers, going local might be economically sensible, a pragmatic strategy that, in theory, bridges the *news gap* – however, the choice of many legacy media is to retract from the community-orientated news production, often due to an economic demand for consolidation (Van Kranenburg, 2005; Metzgar, Kurpius & Rowley, 2011).

Historically, media research in general had privileged national and international news media as a body of study over local media (Nielsen, 2015). In recent years, however, academic interest is renewing its attention towards local media and the local infrastructure in which it operates. Although there is no single explanation, according to Anderson (2013), the fact that in different countries the same process of a retreat of media from the local news

market is visible could be one reason for this renewed focus. In the US, (Ryfe, 2012), the UK (Franklin, 2006), Sweden (Ekström, Johansson & Larsson, 2006) and the Netherlands (Kik, Bakker & Buijs, 2013) work on local journalism practice has revealed the decline of a vivid local news infrastructure. They all see national or regional publishers withdraw investments from the local news market in an attempt to cope with challenges elsewhere that arise from digitization, a matter I addressed before.

Another motive for academic interest in local journalism is the noticeable rise of new forms of citizen journalism (Picard, 2014). In different ways local start-ups experiment with community or grassroots journalism, expressing new forms of civic journalism (Robinson, 2013). It is this innovation of the hyperlocal media in the Netherlands that is one of the topics in this study.

Expectations about local news environments

Optimists like Gillmor (2008) and Radcliffe (2012) expect that local news environments will change for the better, even when the presence of legacy media decreases. Gillmor emphasises how new media opportunities could offer citizens the possibility to operate their own media by easily accessible technology. A fairly successful strategy, as it appeared. 'The emergence of "mymedia" has accelerated at a remarkable rate', Gillmor writes (p. 14). According to Radcliffe (2012) there are 'many reasons why hyperlocal media is gaining popularity' (p. 10). But he focuses primarily on technological possibilities and commercial opportunities, rather than motive, operations and perspective.

In addition, the audience could more easily participate in the political process through online communication (Jenkins, 2006; Beckett, 2010). And even when the so-called keystone media decline, people will be informed in other ways, in particular by new online and hyperlocal news initiatives (Wall, 2015). Especially local online community news sites launched by entrepreneurial journalists are expected to play a role in the local democracy (Downie & Schudson, 2009).

Bowman & Willis (2003) predicted that by 2021 non-professional journalists would be responsible for at least 50% of all news stories. Hyper-locals funded by the Knight Foundation were described by the foundation as successfully combining high-quality journalism with business and technology skills. However, in all these cases the empirical evidence is mainly anecdotal. If hyperlocal start-ups are indeed a response to the failure of traditional media to cover the community any longer, (Metzgar, Kurpius & Rowley, 2011 and Radcliffe, 2012, p. 10), then this should also be visible in an analysis of the news infrastructure.

American hyperlocal non-profit websites have various revenue sources, Remez (2012)

found: grants, donations, sponsorships, selling content, and providing services. Nee (2013) explored how journalists who lead hyper-locals see digital and social media as part of their strategy of convergence, and how they use these to connect with local consumers in the same ecosystem.

An issue I am seeking to address is that of whether these new forms of challenging local reporting are journalism at all, as Anderson (2013) questions. Another subject focus will be on to what extent local news infrastructures are capable of sustaining original (editorial or self-produced) news production in a community. In perspective of the acknowledged role of local journalism as providers of independent political news, as I have pointed out earlier, these are relevant questions when it comes to understanding the importance of local news infrastructures or ‘news ecosystems’.

The concept of the news ecosystem

The idea of the news ecosystem offers a model to study the dynamics of a local news infrastructure, longitudinally as well as horizontally. Being a concept developed in biology, the term news ecosystem was applied to media and communication studies for the first time early this new millennium in an academic context (Anderson, 2013). The term itself can be traced back to Jenkins (2001), who wrote in *Technology Review*: ‘A medium’s content may shift, its audience may change and its social status may rise or fall, but once a medium establishes itself, it continues to be part of the media ecosystem. No one medium is going to “win” the battle for our ears and eyeballs’ (p. 93).

It would take another four years before the term ecosystem was used in a specific journalistic perspective. In a report of a Harvard media conference (MacKinnon, 2005) the term was used in relation to comments by Internet theorists Jay Rosen and Jeff Jarvis. Yet it would take again another five years before the term appeared in peer-reviewed journals. This included publications by Anderson (2010) and PEW (2010). ‘By 2012, Google Scholar listed more than 50 articles and books that referenced news ecosystems,’ Anderson (2013, p.2) writes.

It is important to distinguish the term media ‘ecosystem’ from the term ‘media ecology’ that has a different history and connotation. When Lowrey (2012) describes news ecology, he refers to a model both for a media outlet as well as the professionals working for it. He sees tendencies within professional media that have similar forms and practices and that develop in comparable ways. ‘The emergence and maintenance of media populations correspond with the drive for acceptance and legitimacy’, he writes (p. 215). ‘Populations tend to be conservative, path dependent, and homogenous, and this helps explain similar tendencies in media managers’ decisions, as well as constraints on news practices and content’ (p. 215).

In an extensive review that explores both literary and philosophical perspectives, as well as anthropological and psychiatric influences, Strate (2004) defines three different approaches towards media ecology. There is the ecology of a news organization. One can distinguish the life cycle of news production. And there is the ecology of the media as a professional niche with its complex interactions between productions, professionals and traditions, the latter showing similarities with Lowrey's (2012) definition. Strate sees the fundamentals of media ecology in McLuhan's axiom 'The medium is the message'. Even more so today, the environment in which media content is created or co-created, and the producers of the content are interacting in many ways, if not merging.

It was Postman (1970), inspired by McLuhan, who introduced the term media ecology (Strate 2012). At the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English in 1968, Postman defined media ecology as 'the study of media as environments' (p. 161). The term environments could be interpreted broadly: not only did it mean their structure, content, and impact on people, but also technologies, symbols as well as tools, information, systems and machines could be incorporated in a study. Lowrey (2012) as well as Strate (2012) argues that the dynamics in a media population are of a higher order and that they shape decisions across newsrooms around the world at individual media outlets.

Practical use of the concept of 'news ecosystem'

Lowrey (2012) uses an ecosystem approach for news sites – including blogs – in two US cities (see also Lowrey, Parrott and Meade, 2011). The model of the ecosystem seems well suited to map the dynamics of specific markets and the changing relations between players. It suggests, e.g., to study relations between online outlets (links, aggregation, content curation and sharing), how they compete for advertisers, use sources and target audiences. That the concept of a news ecosystem, based on its biological parallels, can be a valuable tool in describing and explaining local news infrastructures, is shown by Anderson's (2013) local-newsroom ethnography of Philadelphia. He includes a social-network analysis and online archival research to explore the cultural, economic, and technological challenges of a news ecosystem.

A study in Denmark shows a struggling local news ecosystem. Nielsen, Andersen & Almlund (2014) describe the dynamics and interaction between all media involved with the production of local political news in rural Denmark, and show that not all players have equal powers. It was Nielsen (2014) who coined the words 'keystone media' for the providers of independent and professionally produced news in a local news ecosystem. The term 'keystone medium' was introduced in analogy to the 'keystone specimen' used in conservation biology to describe the specimen that can make or break an ecosystem. Keystone media play a comparably critical role in the production and circulation of

information in a local information environment.

Studies on local news ecosystems as a whole are still rare. Often only one aspect of the system is highlighted. For instance, studies on how hyperlocal news sites operate, the editorial choices they make, and how successful they are in entering and serving a local news ecosystem, have been conducted in Chicago (Churchill & Ubois, 2009), Seattle (Fancher, 2011), and by Radcliffe (2012), who offers an overview of the UK hyperlocal landscape. Metzgar, Kurpius and Rowley (2011) cover six US initiatives; Thurman, Pascal and Bradshaw (2012) studied the *Local People* websites.

Studying a news ecosystem in its full potential would offer the advantage of valuing the different players and their roles within the dynamics of the ecosystem. In the study of the Baltimore news ecosystem, the Pew Research Center (PEW, 2010) found for example that about 50% of the news leads in all the online and offline channels available in the Baltimore area had the local newspaper as their main source.

In the Netherlands, empirical data that show the value of original local reporting are practically non-existent. Studies on the role of new news initiatives other than traditional daily news media in keeping a news ecosystem alive are particularly limited. Bakker and Bosch (2011) studied the appearance and functioning of the media in two municipalities in the Netherlands. Digital media mainly publish second-hand stories by aggregating news from websites of local freesheets and the public institutions' press websites. Kik, Bakker & Buijs (2013) and Kik & Landman (2013) made a general inventory of the availability of news in Dutch regions. They share the vision that regional news in general is in decline.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of this study is to explore to what extent and how regional newspapers in the Netherlands respond to the consequences of the loss in readers and advertisers. I investigate the current role of regional news media, innovation strategies of incumbent publishers and the potential of alternative local news business models.

The over-arching central research question (CRQ) of this study is:

How can Dutch regional news media develop and implement innovation strategies in order to fulfil their democratic functions and being economically viable?

To answer this question, I first look into the position that regional dailies hold in local news ecosystems (Chapter 2). For this purpose, I analyse a case of a no-paper city:

RQ1

How does a regional news ecosystem where a regional newspaper is absent, develop over time?

Then, I examine if and how convergence is able to offer regional daily newspapers in the Netherlands the necessary response to the challenges they face.

RQ2

Can innovative convergence at regional news media generate sufficient synergy and the much-needed strategy to reconnect to the political news audience?

From this general question, several sub-questions were derived. First of all: *To what extent is convergence adapted as an innovation strategy in the newsroom?* Secondly: *What are the factors according to managers and editors that support the success of convergence in the newsroom?* (Chapter 3). In addition, I want to know: *Are convergence tools implemented effectively?* (Chapter 4).

As a second innovation strategy I investigated hyperlocal news production. I explore the potentials of low budget local online news services, as an additional alternative business model for regional newspapers.

The questions I asked are:

RQ3

What are the characteristics of the hyperlocal news sector in the Netherlands?

RQ4

What business approach do hyperlocal news services apply?

RQ5

What are the motivations of hyperlocal owners to initiate their business?

In Chapter 5 I will inventory the hyperlocals in the Netherlands; I specifically look at innovation practice, and creativity and diversity of the news production. In Chapter 6, I study motivations, editorial and organisational strategy, and the way hyper-locals engage with the community.

METHODS AND DESIGN

The overall objective of this thesis is to study how Dutch regional newspapers can develop and implement innovation strategies in order to sustain their role as source for original and independent political information and stay economically viable. In the perspective of the debate around the value of independent political news in the democratic process, I choose to focus on local news ecosystems, the consequences of innovation strategies of legacy publishers and the potential of alternative local news business models as the corpora of my study.

First, the study aims to study what role regional newspapers play in the local media system, given the assumption that they are a major source of original and independent political information. Secondly, empirical data should give insight into the way a local news outlet community is capable of maintaining the provision of news in the absence of such a regional daily newspaper. A case study of a local media situation in which a daily newspaper is absent is a practical and valid approach here; this from the notion: you don't miss what you have, until it's gone.

Based on the definition of a news ecosystem, a concept that was elaborated on before, an inventory of all news media reporting on the local political news market needed to be made. This is a matter of defining, scanning, identifying and counting all available media and conduct quantitative and qualitative content analyses on production level and putting their interrelations in longitudinal perspective. In Chapter 2 the considerations and the details concerning the method are given.

The main organizational and economic characteristics of the news providers' actors - ownership, business model and staffing – have been explored by scanning publicly available information, via the *Dutch Press Handbook*, and by interviewing owners. This was done in the initial year, 2010, and the following years whenever a news player entered the market. Every site was coded for ownership, 'about us' and contact information, advertising model, and staff information. See Chapter 2 for operational details.

Convergence policies

The second purpose of this research is to evaluate innovations that could result in synergy and improve the engagement with audiences of regional daily newspapers. The question of how regional print news publishers in the Netherlands - at both the management and newsroom levels - are coping with convergence as an innovation strategy is the focus here.

In order to examine to what extent and how convergence is able to create synergy between strategies at regional media companies I needed to shed light on the view of those concerned with the implementation and management of this process, and how organisations were dealing with the impact of convergence on both the organisational and news production levels. I interviewed therefore the decision makers in the implementation of convergence as an innovation strategy at regional news organizations. It was my aim to speak to all managers and editors in the Netherlands that are concerned with the implementation and management of this process on the matter of how organisations are dealing with the impact of convergence on both the organisational and news production level.

In the follow up on this study I have put the claimed convergence strategies to the test. Does convergence indeed offer the promising innovation strategy it is claimed to offer? I aimed to identify a number of factors that managers and editors said that would support the success of convergence in the newsroom and carried out explorative analyses of all platforms of a selection of regional newspapers in the Netherlands. Which convergence tools are truly implemented is the central question in this part of the study. See Chapter 3 and 4 for the considerations and the details concerning the operationale methods in both linked studies.

Investing in local news models

The third pillar under the overall research is that of the search for economic and editorial parameters of the different hyperlocal news business models in the Netherlands developed, as these independent online news start-ups seem to gain ground in local news ecosystems.

Here I have put to test whether going hyperlocal is a feasible alternative innovation strategy that answers the objectives of a sustainable media economy and creates synergy as well as more public engagement. For this concluding part of the study, and to address the potentials of investments in the local news ecosystem, I looked at the news production of hyperlocals, their business modelling, motivation, and the way owners view digital and social media as part of their strategy to connect with consumers. My research aimed to inventory all these hyperlocal models in the Netherlands and understand their goals.

Local news start-ups were identified that within certain criteria could be listed as independent producers of local original news. Online platforms of newspapers, weeklies, and local or regional broadcasters were discarded, as were local aggregation sites that only contained news scraped by robots from other sites. Content analyses and interviews with the owners were conducted. In both the published chapters 5 and 6 the conciderations and the details concerning the selected methods are explained.

Qualitative interviews

Since I'm especially after general thoughts on innovation, views and interpretations on organizational processes, experiences with change and impact, and perceptions of work and motivation, the qualitative interviewing seems most useful (Kvale, 1996; Healey-Etten & Sharp 2010). For the convergence studies it makes little sense surveying all regional journalists in the Netherlands. Apart from a possible low return, validity might be a problem: asking the right questions to the wrong people. Interviewing the decision-makers at regional newspapers though, will give me access to the relevant information. They are responsible for implementation innovations that seek organisational and editorial synergy and audience re-engagement, and therefore best suitable for capturing and describing the relevant processes, exploring individual differences between experiences and outcomes with these processes, and evaluating the success of programs or initiatives.

For both interview series (managing convergence and operating a hyperlocal) I have chosen the semi-structured, or interview guide, approach over the informal conversational interview or the standardized open-ended interview. It offers the advantage of a systematic and comprehensive collection of views, while the setting can remain conversational and informal. With a basic standardized questionnaire all interviews were conducted according to an outline of topics and issues, giving the option of revealing whatever the participants feel relevant to mention in relations to the topic or issue (Patton, 1990). The personal choice of words adds to the credibility and validity of the answers, in contrast to preliminary categorized answer options.

The semi-structured interview requires an interviewer who is skilled and experienced to be able to make sure that all topics on the outline are covered, and to recognize views or facts that add to the research goals. Face-to-face interviews are vulnerable to moods and interpersonal dynamics. These subjective elements will not be threats to the validity as long as given facts are verifiable and the questions and the setting in which the answers are given ensure a detailed understanding of the participant's views and experience.

Transcripts of qualitative interviews need to be condensed, interpreted, coded, and categorized to be able to compare and generate meaning. This is a process vulnerable to validity and reliability issues, which are addressed in the chapters involved. In this study I will be conducting all the work in the analysing process, minimising bias within the concluding data. The generalizability remains an issue here. Although less so for the interviews concerning convergence strategies since all relevant actors will be spoken to. For the hyperlocal study all participants will be given the option of reviewing their answers and correcting them for factual errors.

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2

NEWS IN A NO-PAPER CITY

*A longitudinal case study of news production in a
city without a regional daily newspaper*



ABSTRACT

Regional newspapers in the Netherlands are reducing their coverage of local communities. In some cases publishers have withdrawn local editions from regional markets completely. It has been hoped that online news media would eventually fill the emerging news gaps, contributing to the role media can play in local democracy. This premise is based on the idea that online digital media could be capable of maintaining a news infrastructure with news sites and amateur blogs. But that's the theory, how about the practice? Over a period of five years, I have studied the news infrastructure of Almere, a metropolitan area in the Netherlands, which is without a local daily newspaper. Every year, for two weeks around local, regional and national elections, I examined the news infrastructure, explored production channels and platforms used to provide political news, and measured the number of original political news stories. Results show that although the total number of news producers increased, the number of news organizations that generate original political news dropped. The number of original political news stories around elections showed a downward trend as well. It seems that when a local news infrastructure lacks a leading daily news producer an overall declining original news environment is a serious risk.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that newspapers play a central role in informing local societies. A recent review study showed a loss of political information and a decline in political participation as a result of newspaper closures and circulation decline, and also a modest overall drop in voter turnout (Clogston, 2014). That the availability of news focused on local public affairs in an individual's municipality affects political participation, was shown by Filla and Johnson (2010). They surveyed voter's behaviour related to the availability of weekly and daily newspapers in municipalities surrounding Los Angeles. In an earlier review, Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Sinkinson (2009) state that 'newspapers have a robust positive effect on political participation' (p. 32). But, 'in a market with no newspapers and no alternative media sources, turnout is depressed because voters have limited information about issues, candidates, and elections' (p. 33). Local print news readership also enhances communal solidarity at both the individual level as well as in communities with higher levels of social interaction, Paek, Yoon, and Shah (2005) found in a study where the use of local print news was related to community participation. Studies in the UK show that still two in five adults read a paid-for local newspaper at least once a week. Radio and television remain another source for news: four in every five adults watch regional TV news at least once a day and about half listen to local radio (Barnett, 2010). He provides these findings also to suggest that local news not only matters from a market perspective, but that a more informed, participative citizenry can contribute to a critical and constant monitoring of local political and economic elites.

So, local news seems to enhance political knowledge and promotes political participation in the community. But this is not without preconditions, according to Allan (1999). Above all, he argues, news needs to be relevant in addressing issues and it has to be understandable in representing points of view. Therefore, news workers must know what questions to ask a source 'in order to get at the right facts', he adds (p. 73).

Also the type of medium seems relevant. Moy et al (2004) analysed a consumer survey carried out in Seattle and concluded that attention to news in newspapers as well as on television enhances perceptions of knowledge. Political participation, however, was specifically promoted by attention to local news in newspapers, in both positive and negative perceptions of the news. And also Gentzkow, Shapiro, and Sinkinson (2009) in their study are hinting at the idea that newspapers play a central role in civic participation and that alternative media sources, like online television, are instrumental in that process. A Baltimore study by PEW (2010) found that about 50% of the news leads in all the online and offline channels available in the Baltimore area indeed had the daily local newspaper as their main source.

It is this issue that lies at the heart of the research presented here, with a focus on the media situation in the Netherlands. If local political news is that important, and if regional newspapers are vital in the production of local news, what will happen to a local news infrastructure if it is lacking a daily regional newspaper?

Online local news

Well, for one, not everyone shares the fear for severe consequences of declining local legacy media. It is sometimes assumed that people will be informed in other ways, in particular by new online local news initiatives. Local news environments could change for the better, even when the presence of legacy media decreases. Gillmor (2004) emphasises how new 'hyperlocal' media opportunities could offer citizens the possibility to operate their own media by easily accessible technology. A fairly successful strategy, as it appeared. 'The emergence of "we media" has accelerated at a remarkable rate (p. 14)', he writes. According to Radcliffe (2012) 'many hyperlocal sites possess some of the characteristics and content we expect from journalists and traditional media' (p. 10). That audiences more easily participate in the political process through online communication, was addressed by Jenkins (2006) and Beckett (2010).

A recurring theme in the literature on these online news channels is that they are often a response to the failure of traditional media to cover the community adequately (Metzgar, Kurpius, & Rowley, 2011). Since digital communication can be more topical locally, it usually has a lower threshold for starting news production. Ordinary citizens can be the founders and

users of these start-ups. Bowman and Willis (2003) predicted that by 2021, non-professional journalists would be responsible for at least 50% of all news stories. Hopefully this will come true, because more audience members can then participate in the political process through online communication (Jenkins, 2006; Beckett, 2010). Local online community news sites launched by entrepreneurial journalists are expected to play a significant role in local democracy (Downie & Schudson 2009). Hyperlocals funded by the Knight Foundation were described by the foundation as successfully combining high-quality journalism with business and technology skills (2012).

News media particularly contribute to the political debate when they produce original news, in other words: self-produced or staff-written news (Picard, 2000; Knox, Hall, & Oppenheim, 2011). Original news adds to the political debate since it contributes new information. This is not a recent issue. Two of the most important indicators for newspaper quality are the 'Ratio of staff-written copy to wire service and feature service copy', and the 'Number of staff-bylined features', according to Bogart (1989), who surveyed 418 newspaper editors. In the study, a story with a byline mentioning the author was considered a new production, or at least a story by others, enhanced to a level that it could genuinely claim to be a story with new news. Meyer and Kim (2003) call Bogart's survey of editors 'a landmark for measurable newspaper quality indicators', (p. 4), while Picard (2014) shows that a story without an author is hard to trace back and could easily be a matter of old facts under a new headline.

Local news infrastructure

Online news media are potentially capable of filling emerging news gaps, providing an alternative to the role legacy media play or played in local democracy. However, empirical data on how online digital media maintain a news infrastructure with, for example, news sites and amateur blogs, remains limited. In order to provide insight into the capacity of a local news infrastructure to adapt to change – within the perspective of the acknowledged crucial role of local journalism as an independent provider of political news – the emerging 'news ecosystem' model gains popularity. The concept of looking at a local media landscape as a news ecosystem, based on its biological parallels, is considered a valuable tool in describing and explaining local news infrastructures (Anderson 13a; Nielsen, 2015).

The term 'news ecosystem' has been applied in an academic media and communication study for the first time early this millennium (see Anderson, 2013a). The term ecosystem in an academic context can be tracked back in time to Jenkins (2001), who wrote in *Technology Review*: 'A medium's content may shift, its audience may change and its social status may rise or fall, but once a medium establishes itself, it continues to be part of the media ecosystem. No one medium is going to "win" the battle for our ears and eyeballs' (p. 93).

That the model is considered suited to map the dynamics of online news models in specific markets and the changing relations between players is supported by Anderson's (2013b) local-newsroom ethnography of Philadelphia. He includes a social-network analysis and online archival research to explore the cultural, economic, and technological challenges in a news ecosystem. Lowrey (2012) uses an ecosystem approach for news sites – including blogs – in two US cities (see also Lowrey, Parrott & Meade, 2011). The impact of the journalism crisis on local news ecosystems was studied in Toulouse (France) and Seattle (US) by Powers, Zambrano, and Baisnée (2015). The local media ecosystems of Leeds (UK) and Philadelphia (US) were compared by Anderson, Coleman, and Thumim (2014).

Another example is a recent study in Denmark, showing that when a local news environment is lacking a strong player the remaining news producers do not manage to keep a vivid news ecosystem alive (Nielsen, Andersen & Almlund, 2014). 'Ironically' (p. 1), they write, after the disappearance of what they call 'keystone' media as providers of independent and professionally produced news, the infrastructure of local journalism shrank. Keystone media play a comparably critical role in the production and circulation of information in a local information environment. In the Danish study online news initiatives seemed hardly capable of filling that gap. It was Nielsen (2014) who coined the words 'keystone media' for the providers of independently and professionally produced news in a local news ecosystem and it was introduced in analogy to the 'keystone specimen' used in conservation biology to describe the specimen that can make or break an 'ecosystem'.

Practical value?

Practically, the news ecosystem model offers the option of naming and valuing the different local players interacting in their effort to contribute to the existence of a news infrastructure. If it is clear how media are interdependent (symbiotic or competitive) and interconnect locally, the news ecosystem model offers the possibility of typecasting what happens when a local keystone medium vanishes transversally, as well as addressing the dynamics of a local news infrastructure responding longitudinally.

As a theoretical model, however, the news ecosystem approach hasn't been standardised yet. Ecosystem studies aim to provide opportunities to elaborate on how all members of the system maintain their existence. But they do it each in their own way. One could question, furthermore, the added value of describing a local media landscape by using a biological metaphor. It would be possible to study relations between legacy media, online models (links, aggregation, content curation and sharing), and institutional sources – how they compete for advertisers, and target audiences for instance – by simply analysing the media and their relations.

In this study the concept of the news ecosystem is applied to see if two indicators deliver additional insights on the results - which is the keystone medium and the question of whether there are dependent or independent parties recognisable (or is the system predominantly symbiotic or competitive). An intensive network analysis is not a goal.

Situation in the Netherlands

In the past thirty years regional daily newspapers in the Netherlands have seen their circulation drop by a third, from 2.7 million in 1980, to 1.8 million papers in 2014. Household penetration also declined severely: in 1990, 47 copies were distributed in every 100 households; in 2013 this number fell to 23. Today, six independent regional publishers remain, while there were 20 in 1984, and while the number of titles decreased from 35 in 1980 to 17 at present (Bakker, 2015).

In some regions of the Netherlands, publishers decided to withdraw their daily print publication, merge titles or leave local markets uncovered, and this process seems to be accelerating. Bakker and Bosch (2011) studied media in two municipalities in the Netherlands that lacked coverage by a regional daily. The digital media mainly published second-hand stories by aggregating news from the websites of local freesheets and the public institutions' press websites. A few years later, researchers made an inventory on the availability of news in Dutch regions – see Kik, Bakker, and Buijs (2013) and Kik and Landman (2013, 2015). They show to what degree the availability of regional or local news for the local market in general is in decline. This is a development that has been visible in the US (Smolkin, 2009; Nielsen, 2012), the UK (Currah, 2009), and other European countries as well (Leurdijk, Nieuwenhuis, & Slot, 2012).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHOD

Given the fact that local keystone media decline or disappear and that they are supposed to play or have played an important role in local democracy, the central question of this chapter is: are alternative news outlets - new online and hyperlocal news initiatives - covering local issues? In addition to this matter, the question can be raised: are the remaining media capable of producing news of high quality, for instance, original political news that is produced independently?

This study is particularly interested in shedding light on what are these new outlets that provide original, local political news to a community and how these outlets interact over time, and to get an idea of whether the original political news production can be maintained in a news ecosystem that lacks a keystone medium. For this study I selected the Dutch city of Almere. Its situation offers an exclusive opportunity to observe the dynamics of a local news

ecosystem when a regional daily newspaper is absent. Almere is the first major metropolitan city in the Netherlands (with ambitions to grow from 200 000 inhabitants now to 350 000 by 2030, see Duivestijn (2009)), without a regional daily newspaper. In 2003 the *Dagblad van Almere* was replaced by a local freesheet.

I have operationalized my goals by posing the following research question (RQ1): What are the news outlets that provide original, local political news to the community and how have these outlets interacted over time?

To assess their economic position and possible sustainability, and the number of journalists potentially available for (political) reporting, I will ask the question (RQ2): What are the main organizational and economic characteristics of the producers of original local and regional political news in terms of ownership, business model and staffing?

Concerning the usability of the concept of the news ecosystem as a way to explain relations and dynamics in the local news infrastructure, in this study the goals are limited to exploring longitudinal relations in terms of dependency or independency, financial relations and an overall classification of the news ecosystem as either being symbiotic or competitive. As stated a network analysis is not part of this study.

With RQ1 and RQ2 I will also identify who are competitors, whether they have recognisable dependent and independent parties, and whether the system is predominantly symbiotic or competitive.

Following the idea that the audience should be provided with political news that has additional value, I pose the question (RQ3): How did the number of original political news stories produced by media develop over time?

As we have seen, data show how local news start-ups are sometimes a response to the failure of traditional media to cover the community. This could become visible when the news ecosystem concept is applied, since that aims to analyse and identify all relevant news producers, their interrelations and the development of the local media landscape over time.

To follow the dynamics in the news ecosystem in Almere over time, I chose periods of investigation over five years. My content analyses started seven years after the regional newspaper of Almere printed its last edition, enough time to give new local outlets of all sorts a chance to fall into place. The seven days before local, regional or national elections in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2014 respectively were taken as the initial research periods. The amount of political news should be particularly large then. Another seven days were analysed two weeks after the elections, as a period of control.

The first step was to collect all outlets that offered local information and news, offline and online - in print, broadcast, websites, blogs, and social media. At this stage all publicly available outlets within the community were taken into account, as were institutional and political sources. For this purpose I used online search tools (Google, Webcrawler, Twitter search and Facebook search) and a publicly available media database, *the Dutch Press Handbook* (Handboek Nederlandse Pers).

The next step in the study was to identify the news media outlets. Communication channels of political parties, businesses, and institutional or government organisations were therefore filtered out and excluded. From the remaining media outlets their journalistic ambition was checked, online or by asking for a written or spoken statement.

As a third step I selected in 2010 all news media that in the three months before my first research week produced at least one original political news story. I defined 'political' news all stories with at least one reference to regional or local political affairs, that is, political decision-making processes, party politics, policies and public declarations of politicians or civil servants. To call a political story original, a journalist had to be named explicitly in the by-line (Bogart, 1989). Or it needed to be clear that the publication was produced by the editor of the website, which could be the case with personal blogs. It is a journalistic code and general practice that a media outlet only names an author when original content is added. If this indicator is nonetheless overestimating the number of original stories, it does so for all outlets and can be considered a one-sided bias.

Finally, the main organizational and economic characteristics of the news providers - ownership, business model and staffing - were explored by scanning publicly available founding information, via the *Dutch Press Handbook*, and by interviewing owners. This was done for the initial year, 2010, the following years and whenever a new player entered the market. Every site was coded for ownership, about us and contact information, advertising model, and staff information. When questions remained, the site owner was contacted by mail or phone. The data was gathered through the years with the help of in total six students. The author did all the coding and analysis.

RESULTS

RQ1

What are the news outlets that provide original, local political news to the community and how have these outlets interacted over time?

In 2010, I found 61 news outlets reporting on political events concerning Almere; three print media, two public radio and television stations, six news sites, ten blogs and forty Twitter accounts. All print and audio-visual media have a website and social media accounts as well. The total list had grown substantially over the years, mainly due to an increase in social media accounts.

The number of news channels providing *original* political news is considerably lower than the total amount of news sources in general. Many of them are simply aggregators. The number of independent news organisations that produce original political news, however, went down from nine in 2010 to seven in 2014. Table 1 provides an overview of the independent news media in all four years and their availability.

Table 1: News media in Almere that produced at least one original political news article.

	2010	2011	2012	2014
Freesheets (print and site)				
Almere Vandaag	X	X	X	X
Almere Deze Week	X	X	X	X
De Almere	X	X	#	
Radio and television (incl. site)				
Omroep Flevoland	X	X	X	X
Stadsomroep Almere	X	-	X	X
Online				
www.persbureaualmere.nl/	X	X	X	X
www.almere.org/	X	X	X	X
almere.webregio.nl/	X	X	X	#
almere.nieuws.nl/	X	X	X	-*
www.almere-nieuws.nl/				x
Totals	9	8	8	7

Merged with hyperlocal site *Dichtbij.nl*.

* *Almere.nieuws.nl* is Under Construction.

The local TV station has a daily broadcast; half news and half feature stories. Programmes are repeated until midnight. On weekdays the local radio station broadcasts local news three times a day. On the website, radio and television programmes are streamed as well. In addition, radio programmes (archived from August 2008) can be retrieved from the website. The station shares all the news on the Internet.

The local radio station can only be received via cable. It broadcasts live on the Internet. The programme consists mostly of reruns. In March 2011, the local radio and television station had filed for bankruptcy; in 2012 it restarted under a different name and announced a stronger focus on politics, sports and events.

The growth of social media reporting on political issues in Almere is worth highlighting (Table 2). By 2014, the number of Twitter-accounts and Facebook-profiles devoted to political news, independent from any media or non-media institution in Almere, had more

than doubled since 2010. They mainly recirculate existing news headlines; none of them produce original news.

Table 2: Independent political social media accounts in Almere in 2010 - 2014.

Social media	2010	2011	2012	2014
Twitter political news	19	28	35	39
Facebook politics		2	3	11
Totals	19	30	38	50

RQ2

What are the main organizational and economic characteristics of the independent producers of original local and regional political news in the news ecosystem of Almere: ownership, business model and staffing?

The category of news channels with original reports on local politics in Almere consists of two print freesheets with their websites, one regional and one local television and radio station and a few online news services (table 3). The oldest publication *de Almere* was started in 1976. There are four different legacy publishers active on the local market of Almere, of which two are funded by public means. For the others, advertising is the dominant business model.

Table 3: Legacy news producers Almere; ownership, business model and staffing, 2014.

Name	Started	Owner	Model	Staffing
Almere Vandaag	2003	TMG	Advertisements	Two editors
Almere Deze Week	1980	Rodi Media	Advertisements	Three editors
De Almere	1976 imprint <i>Telegraaf</i> (1978 independent)	TMG	Advertisements	Merged with Almere Vandaag
Omroep Flevoland	1989	Foundation / > 50 % subsidised by Province	Public financing	One fte editor dedicated to Almere
Stadsomroep Almere	1980	Foundation	Public financing, Google ads.	10+ volunteers

One of the two free door-to-door local papers went down from being published four days a week to two days a week in the end. Its circulation remained around 78 000. The paper lost four full-time editors – from six in 2010 to only two in 2014, after a merger with the

other freesheet. Until 2012, the other one had an unchanged circulation of 81 000. The newsroom was staffed with three journalists. Six employees dealt with advertising. In 2012, the two leading freesheets merged their newsrooms. In 2014, it became known that the new entity was scaling down from four to two fulltime staff members. Table 3 shows the staffing situation in 2014.

In terms of who are competitors The Dutch Telegraaf Media Groep (TMG) is a remarkable player. The publisher is dominant in Almere. It used to own two out of the five print outlets and a productive online local outlet. It merged two print freesheets, effectively increasing its presence to 50%.

The other dominant player is the regional broadcaster, in fact, in television Omroep Flevoland used to have a monopoly.

For the online start-ups I have listed ownership, business model and staffing in a separate table, see Table 4. The oldest of the sites that are still around, were started in 2006. The dominant business model is that of advertising revenues, others are sponsoring or public funding. No online news medium in Almere is older than eight years.

Table 4: news sites Almere; ownership, business model and staffing, by 2014.

Name	Founded	Owner	Model	Staffing
persbureaualmere.nl/	2008	Henk Struik	Advertisements	One editor
almere.org	2006	Foundation Digitaal Almere, Peter Aggenbach	Advertisements	One editor
almere.webregio.nl/	2008	Telegraaf Media Group	Advertisements	Two editors (merged)
almere.nieuws.nl/	2006	Citynews bv.	Advertisements (franchise)	No staff (2014)
www.almere-nieuws.nl	2013	Max Joling Media & Entertainment	Sponsoring, Google ads.	10+ volunteers

The oldest local news start-up Almere.org was founded in 2006, the same year the franchise branch almere.nieuws.nl went online in Almere. There are five different hyperlocal publishers active on the local market of Almere, of which none is funded by public means. Revenue from advertising is the dominant business model, but what this means for journalistic or business independence isn't clear.

As for the question whether there are recognisable dependent and independent parties, results are hard to give. The local government is reported to support Almere Vandaag financially, but what this means for journalistic or business dependency cannot be drawn from this analysis. Overseeing the news ecosystem of Almere, it cannot be classified as a strong, competitive market. It seems to represent a symbiotic coexistence of different news producers.

RQ3

How did the number of original political news stories produced by media develop over time?

In 2014 in the first research week the total number of political news stories in Almere was considerably higher than in the years before. Before the elections in 2014, a total of 38 political news stories were published in the first week, and 28 in the second. In this period *Omroep Flevoland* published the majority of the stories. The website of *Stadsomroep Almere* shows a rather infrequent news production over the years.

Of the total of 51 political news articles appearing in the leading news publication *Almere Vandaag*, published online and offline in the first research week of 2010, twelve had a byline. Other political news was based on press releases by the municipality, the Chamber of Commerce, or public transport companies.

The local freesheet *Almere Vandaag* had the highest number of original stories. *Almere Deze Week*, actually had only one (Table 5).

Table 5: Independent news platforms in Almere and the total number of original political news stories produced in the week before the elections of 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014 and the two weeks after elections.

Name	2010	2011	2012	2014
	Week before elections	Two weeks after elections	Week before elections	Two weeks after elections
Freesheets				
Almere Vandaag	12	13	10	7
Almere Deze Week	1	1	3	1
De Almere	1	1	1	1
Radio and television				
Omroep Flevoland	4	1	6	2
Stadsomroep Almere	1	2	-	1
Totals	19	18	22	11
				4
				4
				38
				28

Up until 2012, the broadcaster Omroep Flevoland hardly reported on Almere, according to my analyses. In 2014, however, in the week before the elections, 25 original items alone had to do with local politics, so a strong increase in reporting had taken place. In the week after the elections the number totalled seven original political items. Almere Vandaag, the leading freesheet also showed an increase in the production of original political news, after two slow years. With fifteen stories after the local elections of 2014 this was the highest production measured so far.

Table 6: Start-up online news sites in Almere and the number of original political news stories produced per outlet in the week before the elections of in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2014 and the two weeks after elections (week 2).

Name	2010		2011		2012		2014	
Name	Week before elections	Two weeks after elections	Week before elections	Two weeks after elections	Week before elections	Two weeks after elections	Week before elections	Two weeks after elections
persbureaualmere.nl/	6	5	3	1	1	2	1	3
almere.org	1	0	1	1	-	1	1	0
almere.webregio.nl/	9	9	3	5	4	5	8	4
almere.nieuws.nl/	12	11	1	3	-	-	-	-
almere-nieuws.nl/	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Totals	28	25	8	10	5	8	10	7

The analyses of original news produced by online news channels show that there is original political news on the hyperlocal blogs and websites (Table 6). However, the number of original political news stories produced per outlet in the week before the elections and two weeks after the elections (week 2) show a steady but firm decline over the years 2010-2014. This is mainly due to the withdrawal of almere.nieuws.nl and the lower production of persbureaualmere.nl. Almere.org had an average of 0,5 to one news article over the periods of analyses.

Although the number of Twitter-accounts and Facebook-profiles devoted to political news in Almere has more than doubled since 2010, no accounts with original news were found on Twitter or Facebook in the final year.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This case study provides new insights into the way a local news landscape without a daily newspaper is constructed and developed over time. I started my research from the assumption that online digital media technologies could be an alternative to legacy news producers. But at least in my case, privately owned blogs account only marginally for the production level of original political news. In contrast, it is the local freesheets that seem to play a central role as the main source of those stories. But one of the two disappeared and the remaining one depends on the city as a financial resource.

In the no-newspaper city of Almere, the media landscape has changed dramatically over the past five years. Although the total number of news outlets grew, taking social media into account, the number of news media that produce at least one original political news article went down from nine to seven. Due to mergers and downscaling of newsrooms the number of available professional journalists in Almere also declined, effectively from eight to six FTE, that is 25% down.

However, the number of general online news channels reporting on politics has grown substantially in Almere. This is mainly due to the growth of social media accounts like Twitter and Facebook. But unfortunately, these sources in Almere are all aggregators and do not produce original news.

What do my findings mean for the public, for journalism studies and for journalism?

Public

For one, since two out of the three leading freesheets merged and significantly sized down the number of available reporters, it is possible that independent political news coverage will become under even more pressure than it is now. Although the number of original political reports before and especially after the election of 2014 grew impressively, this is by no means a guarantee. One could expect problems in the future when a city of 350 000 inhabitants would need to be covered by two reporters.

For the regional radio and television station, Almere was not an area it focused on. One reason for this could be that it has to cover the whole of the province with its six communities. By 2014, the outlet seemed to have reprioritised its focus, as the number of original political news stories in Almere grew substantially. Another positive development is that the local TV and radio station, that had known a history of budget problems and eventually filed for bankruptcy in early 2011, restarted under a different name in 2012 and remained alive up to 2014. With fewer resources, but with a greater focus on politics.

Journalism Studies

In this study, the usability of the concept of news ecosystems for journalism studies was explored by applying a limited number of indicators to the results (who are the competitors, are their dependent and independent parties recognisable, and is the system predominantly symbiotic or competitive?) to see whether this delivers additional insights. What can be concluded about Almere as a news ecosystem is limited. It's not a strong competitive market and it should be identified as a symbiotic coexistence of different news producers.

But the added value of describing a local news infrastructure in biological terms proved to be questionable. Although it offers opportunities to recognise who are the obvious dependent and independent members, this classification, as used in this study, does not offer any predicting value, for instance. One can wonder if this will ever be the case. However, an intensive network analysis might shed some light on interdependency and, thus, on when and where a local news ecosystem is vulnerable, economically and journalistically.

Journalism

Whether I have gained a better insight into how the local news ecosystem of Almere might develop over time is hard to tell. It is remarkable however that, contrary to popular belief and despite the fact that amateur blogs do play a role in the political news production, in this case the number of hyperlocal original news producers decreased over time. Whether this has something to do with the lack of a keystone medium in Almere can't be concluded based on this study alone.

What can be concluded is that a thriving online news community doesn't yet compensate for the absence of a regional newspaper as a keystone medium in Almere. I rather signal the opposite happening: online media struggling to maintain a certain level of original news production, while legacy media (in this case freesheet weeklies), although decreasing in number, managed to increase the production of political news stories very recently. Whether this revival persists has yet to be seen; overall the media situation in the 'no-paper city' of Almere remains worrisome.

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3

LOST IN TRANSITION

Managing convergence at regional newspapers



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ABSTRACT

In many countries, regional newspapers have lost readers and advertisers to new online services. Converging the print newsroom with the online operation to launch a digital-first strategy has become a popular attempt to reconnect with news consumers. I investigate to what extent and how Dutch regional newspapers implement and manage convergence strategies. Thirty managers, editors and market experts at all six regional newspaper-publishing companies were interviewed. Results indicate that converging media platforms is acknowledged as a solution to new market realities, provided certain critical factors are taken care of. While most regional dailies experiment with convergence, they hardly seem to invest in reskilling journalists or in new content concepts. Furthermore, the management of regional newspapers in the Netherlands tends to operate indecisively. The lack of successful examples seems to play a role in the hesitation to invest.

INTRODUCTION

Regional newspapers are probably the hardest hit and worst performing media companies in Europe. News consumers favour online news environments over traditional print newspapers. They welcome the speed and the choice of multiple free news sources. They also value the possibility of interacting and having personal visibility. And although newspapers have become serious Internet players, various competitive news portals and news aggregators are stepping in more successfully, often solely depending on advertising revenues, combined with low cost news production. Regional newspapers have yet to find successful new business models for news production.

Due to this changing audience, the rise of digital technology and a long-term economic setback, the position of Dutch regional newspapers as a primary source of political news for almost four million people in the Netherlands is highly uncertain (Bakker, 2015). In 1980, 2.7 million regional newspapers were distributed in the Netherlands per day. Until the mid-1990s the situation hardly changed. In 2000 regional publishers still sold 2.4 million copies, although by 2005 only 2.1 million, a decrease of twelve percent in five years. Today circulation balances around 1.7 million, but the numbers keep dropping nationwide by an average of five percent a year. Also household penetration has decreased, from 35 households with a regional newspaper in every 100 households in 2000, to 23 in 2013 (Bakker, 2014).

The presumed reasons why regional publishers have shown difficulties in finding rewarding new business models in a response to the loss of market shares come from both autonomous factors (economic lifecycles; mismanagement) and disruptive origins (digitalisation, social media) (Currah, 2009; Bakker, 2010, 2014; Nielsen, 2015). In general, regional newspapers are more vulnerable to a decline in audience and advertisers due to smaller markets and smaller budgets (Mensing & Rejzek, 2005; SCP, 2006; Herbert & Thurman, 2007). Historically regional newspapers tend to have an older audience, which nowadays gets even older. In the United States, a predominantly regional news market, 74 % of the readers are over 45 dropping to 50 % by 2010 (PEW, 2012). In the Netherlands the average age of a regional newspaper reader is 52, while that of the overall newspaper reader is 48. These figures show a negative renewal rate: while subscriptions usually end due to natural causes, growth in the younger age cohort is lacking. Inevitably this leads to lower investment power due to lesser growth perspectives.

As news consumption is moving from print to online, advertising follows in an unsurprising fashion. Between 2005 and 2009, the decline in advertisement income for newspapers in 12 European countries ranged from 5.8% to 38.8%, while the total amount of worldwide advertising expenditures grew from 350 billion dollars in 2005 to almost 500 billion dollars in 2012, for a large part accompanied by a shift towards online (Leurdijk, Nieuwenhuis &

Slot, 2012). For the six European countries with the largest regional newspaper circulation (Germany, UK, France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands), the average annual decline in turnover between 1996 and 2010 varied from 0.5 to 15% (WAN-IFRA, 2011).

Surely dramatic figures, but why would it be a problem if regional newspapers were to disappear? Some possible adverse effects primarily concern the role local and regional newspapers play in society. Empirical studies show for instance that independent regional daily newspapers are essential for political debate (Schulhofer-Wohl & Garrido, 2009). And also the quality and the number of media could play a role in this too. A study of city government reporters at US metropolitan daily newspapers indicated that more (online) competition increased the number of city government stories (Cyr, Carpenter, & Lacy, 2010). In Norway, Bruns and Himmler (2011) found that among 150 newspapers, a decrease in local newspaper circulation could be associated with lower levels of local government efficiency. Politicians do work harder with a local newspaper present, according to Snyder and Strömberg (2008). They found that members of the American Congress bring more economic activity home and testify for more committee hearings because of local newspaper coverage. And local newspapers support a sense of community (Paasi, 2002).

Legacy regional news publishers do respond to the new realities. They are adjusting organisational and editorial strategies, and are looking for ways to reconnect to audiences (Siles & Boczkowski 2012). The objective of this research is to understand how regional newspapers in the Netherlands consider and manage convergence strategies, a widely embraced innovation. As I explained in the introduction, convergence potentially offers synergy at strategic level and it answers to today's shift in media consumption (MacGregor, 2013). Although convergence has many organisational consequences (Quinn, 2005; Nikunen, 2013), it often comes down to a standardization of media platform technology and tools. Converging multimedia skills and tools - such as blogs, photo, video, new platforms and so on - and using them on different new publication channels - often seems to be a bottleneck in the transition from traditional print routines to a digital-first newsroom orientation. So I also focus on the consequences of convergence at newsroom level.

Convergence

In general, convergence affects four key aspects of mass media industries: the content of communication, the relationship between media producers and consumers, the structure of firms, and ultimately how communication professionals do their work. Different media formats become standardized. Exchanging and repurposing - or 'windowing' - multimedia content becomes more manageable (Deuze, 2004, p. 68). I use Deuze's definition (p. 143) of convergence on the organizational level – it means: partnerships within (and with other, journalistic and non-journalistic) media organizations to provide, promote, repurpose or exchange news; cross-media (integrated) marketing and management projects; the establishment of a joint editorial and organisational research and development strategy.

The integrated newsroom is probably the most visible consequence of convergence as an innovation strategy for newspaper publishing companies. Practically this means that – in the case of newspapers – newsrooms no longer only produce written texts and photos, but also audio, video, live blogs, social media feeds and so on via additional digital channels. In day-to-day media practices convergence also makes it possible to streamline media production, to offer flexibility for media producers, to control the workflow, and to create more efficiency (Dupagne & Garrison; 2006, García-Avilés, Kaltenbrunner & Meier, 2014). Or as Jenkins (2006) summarises it: extension (new product, new public; broadening media scope), synergy (surplus from reordering media outings), and franchising (same content, different product; broadening media scale) are pushing media industries into an acceptance of convergence. To describe what convergence means for individual media workers, Quinn (2005) states: 'media convergence [...] involves a shared desk where the key people, the multi-media editors, assess each news event on its merits and assign the most appropriate staff for the story' (p. 14).

Converging from traditional print publications to multimedia and cross-media publishing may also have its drawbacks. It is feared to compromise journalistic quality (Allan, 2007; Currah, 2009). Former news text writers, specialists in their own field of work, are, for example, forced to diversify by learning new skills (Nguyen, 2008). The dismantling of demarcations between journalists and technicians, writers and camera operators, news gatherers and news processors, and between print, radio and television journalism could harm craftsmanship (Örnebring, 2010). In addition, a standardization of news production is feared as a result of a concentration of ownership due to mergers of formerly different types of media companies, especially in the region (MacGregor, 2013).

Promise

Since market pressures have urged Dutch regional newspapers to act, convergence has been regarded as an important organizational and journalistic innovation. However, the

question remains whether convergence works out for Dutch regional dailies and whether it is a sustainable strategy in both economic and editorial terms. Does crossmedia convergence at regional news media in the Netherlands really offer the perspective it promises, business synergy and audience engagement? Although the convergence of print, radio, television and Internet publications into cross-medial offerings may already have become a reality in the Netherlands, I did not know what the consequences of this transition are for the organisational structure of regional media, production processes, journalistic output and the economic position of publishers. Above all, one may wonder whether media diversity doesn't suffer and whether the quality of journalistic work isn't compromised.

These uncertainties lead to my research questions covering the regional dailies in the Netherlands. For the first time empirical data have been gathered about one of the dominant innovation strategies of Dutch regional newspaper publishers. With regards to possible explanations for the successful (or unsuccessful) implementation of convergence I turned to the theoretical concepts of rational-choice versus institutional theory (Lowry & Woo, 2010). Rational choice assumes that managers tend to react to change by keeping closely in touch with their environment to evaluate options on a cost-benefit basis. Rational choice would presume that managers closely monitor and assess customer behaviours and resources, scrutinize the organization's efficiency, and share information across divisions. Lowry and Woo (2010) describe this process as 'tight coupling'. Decisions predominantly take efficiency into account (Koch, 2008).

Institutional theory, on the other hand, suggests that companies may merely mimic their competitors or may not even react at all to challenges. In a strictly institutional organization the feeling for a need to adapt is simply absent, usually due to a lack of external stimuli, such as an economic setback. Both theoretical concepts offer a perspective on the behavioural aspect of adapting or implementing an innovation such as convergence. Typical 'institutional' companies respond to uncertainties, such as emerging disruptive technologies, by following a path of what is referred to as 'loose coupling', market independent behaviour, often due to the fact that economic pressure is less felt because of for example undisputed major public funding.

In both cases uncertainties in this process - such as the introduction of disruptive technology like the Internet and subsequently new digital tools for consumers (mobile devices, tablets, apps, and so on) make it harder for managers to predict behaviour and to enhance results. One would expect, therefore, that managers will put effort in closely monitoring and assessing customers and resources, scrutinizing the organization's efficiency, and sharing information across divisions, as Lowry and Woo (2010) describe this process of tight coupling a typical rational-choice behaviour. The ultimate goal here is to enhance the success of a rapid response to changing markets and establish the best path to follow.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

For this study thirty managers and editors that are decision-makers in the implementation of innovations at regional daily newspapers were interviewed (see the appendix for an overview). As has been stated, convergence directly affects four key aspects of mass media industry (Deuze, 2004): the organisational aspects of the newsroom, the content and the way news is channelled, the way journalists do their work, and ultimately the relationship between media producers and consumers. From these aspects my research questions have been derived.

First of all (RQ1): To what extent has convergence been adapted as an innovation strategy in the newsroom? If convergence is indeed seen as a promising innovation strategy, I want to identify the factors that managers and editors say support the success of convergence in the newsroom.

This is my second question (RQ2): Which factors do managers and editors say critically determine the success of the implementation of organizational and editorial convergence?

As I focus on the implementation of convergence technology as a way for regional newspapers to establish economic synergy, I want to know (RQ3): Which convergence tools are said to be implemented?

And subsequently (RQ4): How are newspapers managers and editors enabled to shape and direct the convergence processes?

Semi-structured interviews were conducted according to an issue-focused interview protocol (Weiss, 1994; Stanford University, 2003). Based on a list of 40 general 'issues' derived from literature research and considered critical to convergence, a general interview protocol was composed on which each issue was addressed at least once (see appendix). An issue-focused protocol links what a respondent says to categories derived from the initial list of issues. Excerpts of interviews were analysed and coded for the categories. An issue, for example, could be managing the implementation of a new convergence tool (such as video). Asked after the importance of video in production of news, a respondent could answer positively in different ways. This answer would be scored.

All interviews were carried out between spring 2010 and early 2012. The author conducted 18 of the interviews, while 12 trained journalism students, who all took care of one interview, completed the interview series. All the student interviews and three others, 15 in total, were recorded either on video or on audio. All interviews were transcribed and analysed by the author. In all other cases full-quote notes were taken. The interviews took an average of one hour and ten minutes, ranging in length from 45 to 90 minutes.

At all six publishing companies I started with the managing editor or the highest-ranking individual responsible for the practical convergence strategies and their implementation. This was the first stage of analysis. They yield basic information and the answers to most of the questions. In the second round of analysis interviews with newsroom editors were conducted - print and online - divided over the different publications, to go through the same questions and to specifically fill any factual blank spots in the coded data matrix with the answers to the questionnaires. A series of interviews with market experts was conducted to crosscheck the information given in the first two rounds to see whether I needed additional information to complete my data set. Still missing information was gathered from secondary sources such as public interviews and annual accounts.

In order to answer RQ1 the interviewees were asked how cross-media publishing is formulated as a strategy, what they expected the consequences would be at the organisational and the newsroom levels, and what they expected that convergence would do in terms of meeting the needs of news consumers and advertisers. Questions leading to answering RQ2 addressed the experience with cross-media publication in the last five years, financial performance, and staff training.

Questions regarding RQ3 were focused on cataloguing an inventory of the different tools that were effectively put in place, such as social media, audio-video instruments or possibly extended cooperation between the marketing department and the newsroom. RQ4 questions were all about how managers and editors were facilitated to use the tools implemented, what kind of choice they had to make, and what practical consequences they recognised for organizational needs and structures, and for editorial routines.

RESULTS

RQ1. To what extent has convergence been adapted as an innovation strategy in the newsroom?

Respondents from all regional newspapers in the Netherlands recognize convergence as a possible solution for their problems. For eleven out of 18 newspapers the initiative to change the newsroom came from management. Asked about long-term ambitions for convergence, all interviewees said that they aimed for a broadening of their Internet presence in different new media outlets.

One daily used its website as a simple bulletin board only, with no news features or cross-media applications to attract more visitors. One newspaper was about to integrate the different media platforms, paper and online, but a new owner stopped the process and split

the online and traditional newsrooms again. Four dailies started convergence but without mentioning synergy in cross-media publication as their main target. Twenty respondents representing twelve newspapers mentioned that they were in the middle of the process of transition to an integrated newsroom through converging specific journalistic tasks.

In terms of revenues exemplary remarks are:

Nobody knows the golden formula.

You can't say: It doesn't work, so we will stop.

The web shop works well. But we should focus more on online advertising in our news product.

Except for one paper, all newspapers stated that they earn revenues from the website, although only three papers say they actually make a small profit from online activities. Merchandising sometimes does create a profit.

RQ2. Which factors managers and editors say critically determine the success of the implementation of organizational and editorial convergence?

The semi-structured interviews produced several thousand lines of answers that were analysed by hand. The semi-structured approach of the interviews allowed new issues brought up by the interviewees to be taken into consideration and valued. Later all transcripts were also analysed for these new topics and added depending on relevance. Excerpts of the interview were interpreted and categorized according to criteria and codes. From the interview matrix this process delivered a total of 27 different factors that were mentioned by all interviewees – in their own words - as being critical for the success of convergence as an innovation strategy.

I sorted these factors according to their potential influence on either the organisation or the editorial production process - a classification related to the different responsibilities of management and journalists in a publishing company. Six categories could be distinguished this way – again based on literature review and connected to either business synergy or audience engagement - in order to structure the factors along their functional impact on either organisational or newsroom (editorial) level (3*2). Therewith fitting the general set-up of news organisations in terms of being a possible key to change in innovation strategy. Table 1 shows the six categories and 27 factors that are considered critical in this transition. These categories are Policy, Perspective, and Newsroom, for organisational convergence factors: User Generated Content, Networking, and Online Publishing for the Newsroom, or editorial convergence factors.

Table 1. Key factors for the journalistic and organisational convergence process.

Organisational Convergence Factors	Editorial Convergence Factors
POLICY Initiative Cohesion newsroom Online chief in board Multi media training Cooperation regional broadcaster	UGC Believe UGC has value UGC present UGC leads to stories Moderate comments
NEWSROOM Designated internet editors Video editors Team productions Editors blogging Additional time to blog External bloggers Who controls the web	NETWORKING Cross publishing paper/internet Cross linking paper/internet External linking Digital first
PERSPECTIVE Turnover Profit Marketing instrument	ONLINE PUBLISHING Video productions Live blogging Exclusive internet dossiers Enriching stories

Policy

In terms of possibilities for future policy change, all interviewees mentioned the importance of keeping an eye on initiatives from the newsroom as critical to the success of convergence. A coherent functioning newsroom is another overall returning issue, together with the wish for the presence of an online chief in the editorial board. The cooperation with a regional broadcaster is seen as an opportunity to expand and also a promising way to find synergy in covering news. Multimedia training is considered essential in the transition to the converged fully digital environment.

Newsroom

The presence of one or more designated Internet editors was mentioned as a prerequisite to gear up the convergence process. Ultimately all editors and journalists should be capable of working in an online environment. A video editor was considered as practical overall if new forms of digital reporting would autonomously evolve, but, in most cases, it was considered wishful thinking. Working more in teams on multimedia projects was seen as essential. Management as well as editors would like to see more journalists do blogging in extra time that they should be granted. And also external bloggers would add extra value to the presence on the web. The question who oversees the web productions remains an issue at all publishers. No interviewee could tell who effectively directs him or her while implementing innovation concerning the newsroom.

Perspective

When it comes to the organisational perspectives of convergence, a commitment to increasing turnover and profit was mentioned as essential. All interviewees agreed on the idea that successful convergence would be beneficial for marketing both the newspaper as well as the content.

UGC

User Generated Content is believed to have added value for the newspapers questioned. All Dutch regional dailies use or have used UGC at some time, and this is believed to have led to actual stories. Comments should always be moderated, interviewees say, although it is recognised that this will have impact on newsroom capabilities.

Networking

In all cases it is believed that there is cross publishing between paper and the Internet, although it might not happen on a daily bases about one third of respondents agrees. Cross-linking between paper and the Internet, however, should be a daily routine, as well as external linking, that is linking to other sources than the newspaper. Digital first is considered as a necessary strategy overall.

Online publishing

All newspapers say exploring video productions would be a wise experiment and could provide an answer to the expectations of online and mobile news users. They share the same opinion about live blogging. Editors as well as managers say that enriching online text stories with photo and video or exclusive Internet dossiers could enhance the online news experience.

RQ3. Which convergence tools are said to be implemented?

So far I know which factors managers and editors at the Dutch regional news dailies say will be critical in determining the success of the implementation of organizational and editorial convergence. This does not mean that this is all common practice. Asking about which convergence tools are effectively implemented would give a different image.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONVERGENCE FACTORS

Convergence tools and routines vary greatly – due to the number of staff members, company policy, and business approach. At six newspapers, the online editorial board is integrated into the print newsroom. In other newsrooms, the online journalists are physically separated from the hard copy editors. And I found an online office solely responsible for the structure of the website and for advertising, while the journalists all have access to the site and publish autonomously.

In all these cases, the communication between the online and the print editors was characterized as weak. In this respect, exemplary remarks are:

Cooperation is not the way it should be.

There is too little cohesion.

Some are very flexible, others distrust Internet and say: listen, I am from the newspaper.

I found that little or no professional multimedia training is provided for journalists at the print newsroom. Seven newspapers do not offer any form of new media reskilling courses or training. In seven cases more experienced colleagues offer ad-hoc internal group training and individual guidance. Two papers offer external courses and two offer internal ones.

EDITORIAL CONVERGENCE FACTORS

Asked how convergence works out in the practice of news production, all dailies admitted that they were still in an experimental phase. User-generated content is generally seen as a possible valuable contribution; however, it has not lived up to expectations. In twelve cases journalists themselves used tools such as RSS, video, live blogging, or Twitter. Four out of the eighteen newspapers said that their journalists have increasingly worked with blogs and comments from the public. However, they considered these responses to be of limited value.

Three out of the eighteen papers include User Generated Content on their site. In two-thirds of the cases comments are not moderated. In total, eleven newspapers editors say that user tips sometimes lead to news stories. One newspaper stopped using UGC altogether. In this respect exemplary remarks are:

In most case reactions of the audience are useless.

Ninety-nine percent of the comments are useless.

UGC is an expense with limited profit.

There is limited cooperation between online and print journalists, while there is also reluctance to link online content from other sources:

There is hardly any cross-referencing, and possible scoops are kept secret

sometimes.

We'd like to keep our readers on our website, so we do not refer to other sites or even to our own newspaper. Neither does the paper, by the way.

Referencing to the newspaper website is our structural policy. But don't expect much of it.

Three out of the eighteen newspapers implemented a wide range of convergence tools, both organisational and editorial, in an effort to make the full transition to an integrated newsroom. Only one of the newspapers said explicitly that it had made the full turn toward a digital-first company. Other newspapers wished they could work with software enabling them to publish stories on different platforms simultaneously with no extra handling: 'one-click publishing.' Only one newspaper used that kind of software already.

Of the 18 newspapers, 13 newsrooms editors do blog from time to time. This gives them more freedom to choose topics, and the opportunity to connect with a new online audience.

Convergence tools such as online video or mobile services were used on a limited scale. Twelve dailies tried different ways of video news production. These were sometimes initiated by incidental subsidies. They started their own online television show, for instance, with two-minute news broadcast three times a day. Live coverage of important events was also part of the new convergence strategy. In three cases, cooperation had been established with regional broadcasters. At the majority of the newspapers, journalists were expected to take photos themselves or to film an interview or event.

All regional newspapers in the Netherlands, except for one, experiment with small-scale projects like live blogging. Cross-linking between offline and online publications is common practice at seventeen newspapers. About two-thirds enrich newspapers stories with images, videos or dossiers when published online.

Social media

Social media are used broadly. Twitter is far more popular than Facebook. Six newspapers don't post any news on Facebook or don't even have an official page, but all use Twitter. Virtually all papers only automatically post headlines from the website in Twitter. Most of the newspapers had more than 1,000 followers, two of them more than 5,000. Twitter is rarely used for interaction, though.

Relatively few other accounts are followed; there are almost no replies or re-tweets. Human interference is incidental. The account with the highest number of followers – *Dagblad van het Noorden* – even stopped tweeting for three months because of a technical issue. Also on the sub-accounts (sports, local, events) the dominant mode is automatically tweeting headlines with a link. There are, however, also individual journalists Twittering – these

accounts were not included in the research.

RQ4. How are newspaper managers and editors enabled to shape and direct the convergence processes?

At ten papers the chief online editor takes part in the daily editorial meetings. This means that contact between the newspaper and online newsrooms is relatively efficient and could streamline convergence initiatives, such as the exchange of content between the newspaper and the website. In the period of the research the average number of Internet editors at regional newspapers in the Netherlands was 3.6, ranging from 0 to 9.

A major criticism was that all controllable factors - such as multimedia training, communication and cooperation between departments, the number of online editors and the connection with news consumers through user-generated content – were nowhere implemented to their full potential. Instead, management tends to operate in a cautious way. Investments and funding opportunities for new ideas are limited. Management tends to adopt conventional print paper based organisational models. The typical attitude here is to favour daytime work hours above working in two or three shifts - which would be more suitable for 24/7 news production; or another aims to boost circulation numbers with an expensive redesign of the hard copy newspaper, rather than investing in software that enables online sales of single digital copies of the newspapers. In terms of journalistic convergence tools, social media like Twitter or Facebook are considered necessary, but the required technological features and process adjustments aren't being facilitated. Some managers say they simply follow boardroom policies that rule this restrained attitude. In a few cases this might be the result of bad investment decisions in the past, according to some journalists.

Exemplary remarks here are:

Management's perspective is: newspaper first and then online.

Management is lacking critical reflection.

That Twitter course we initiated ourselves.

Most interviewed journalists say that their management is more reluctant to adopt a strategy like convergence than the newsroom editors themselves. Management at regional news publishing companies should invest more in multimedia technology and its possibilities of reaching out to a new audience, is a common remark. Other remarks are:

Management should support the willingness to cooperate more with the newsroom and to share the concerns of the newsroom staff.

The responsibility for communication between the online and print newsrooms lies with the journalists, but should in fact be coordinated centrally.

The fact that management has an open mind for new technology comes from my background. I've worked for radio and television.

All online editors interviewed are explicitly in favour of an integrated newsroom. They realise that this means a better education of the employees and more funding for the technical infrastructure of convergence. They also suggest that the online journalists should participate in the daily editorial meetings, and to be consulted on a structural basis by the editor in chief and the management.

The online unit misses visibility in our company.

At a certain moment you should cut the cutbacks.

So far, online business models have shown that they don't work.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Although management and editors say they are strongly committed to convergence with all its consequences, there is a remarkable discrepancy between these ambitions and practice. This is true for the organization as well as for the newsroom level. An illustration is that training journalists for today's digital standards was broadly acclaimed; while in reality most journalists are not trained at all, or receive only some on-the-job instructions by colleagues. As it seems, convergence practices are only skin deep. Traditional journalistic routine remains common practice.

Another notable finding is the difference between the vision of the management and that of the editors on how convergence could and should lead to synergy. Most online editors have more ambitions than the middle management to approach the new market for online news through an integrated newsroom. Management tends to operate safely while the journalists want systematic investment both into the education of employees and the technical framework for convergence. Journalists also suggest they want to take part in the daily editorial meetings and be consulted regularly by the editor in chief and the management.

Between the six different publishing companies I studied, important differences are visible in the ways convergence strategies are adopted. This is demonstrated by the variety of often ad hoc decisions on the tools and routines chosen to implement convergence. Most experiments mentioned by the publishers were in fact only small-scale projects that could be discontinued easily. Online video news, reporting by Twitter feeds, or stimulating journalists to blog – these were all ad-hoc endeavours that received neither the trust nor the funding to become a structural effort.

I do not see substantially common patterns in the newspapers' strategies, not even at the papers of the same publishing company. This suggests that, positively speaking, they enjoy a great deal of freedom in implementing convergence or, put negatively, lack a clear vision and strategy.

Media companies

All regional newspapers in the Netherlands - in their own way - underestimated the consequences of implementing convergence as a synergy tool in the struggle to preserve their news market share. Reluctance, hesitation and the absence of a clear strategy, shared by everyone, seem to be significant in explaining the slow and somehow undirected actions. The lack of a systematic collection of experiences and of taking them into account in the next step is striking.

The factors that were mentioned by all the interviewees as being critical for the success of convergence show how substantial the impact of innovation strategies can be on an organisation. Were they to be addressed, they would also offer the lead to implement convergence to its full potential, in both the organisation and in the journalistic production process. For instance, regional daily newspapers could organise media-skills training for their journalists to improve the transition to convergence. Furthermore, the communication between management and work floor journalists should be enhanced. Sharing experiences between different media channels within the same publishing company would be worthwhile. Finding out about the most successful innovation strategies should also mean that pilot studies and experiments could be implemented on a more durable scale and be given the chance to demonstrate their market value.

Rational-choice versus institutional theory

For the first time, empirical data, by way of semi-structured interviews, have been gathered about one of the dominant innovation strategies of Dutch regional news dailies. In an attempt to explain the challenges editors and management name in the process of responding to market change - and to further theoretical knowledge on change processes in media organizations that could lead to practical enhancements of the digital transition processes going on in the media - I have placed my results in the perspective of the opposing economic approaches of rational choice versus institutional theory. This will be limited for management practice and editors at a newsroom level.

The rational choice model assumes that managers tend to react to change by keeping in close contact with the environment of change, evaluating the options and define decisions predominantly in terms of efficiency. Institutional behaviour, on the other hand, shows more insecurity, rhetoric approach and a tendency to mimic other companies or extend business as usual.

In this study I've seen that the Dutch regional news industry seems less goal-oriented and optimized than one would expect following the broadly announced digital first strategies. Management shows that typical 'institutional' companies respond to uncertainties, such as emerging disruptive technologies, by following a path of what is referred to as "loose

coupling”, market independent behaviour. In a strictly institutional organization, the feeling for a need to adapt is simply absent, which might have to do with the fact that economic pressure is less felt because of former relatively easily earned revenues. The introduction of disruptive technology like the Internet - and subsequently new digital tools for consumers (mobile devices, tablets, apps, and so on) – does not seem to enhance an incentive to act. The expected close monitoring and assessing customers and resources, scrutinizing the organization’s efficiency, and sharing information across divisions seem absent. A rapid response to changing markets and the goal of finding the best path to innovate are lacking in the industry in general.

Journalism studies

On the basis of my findings, further investigation should address the question of whether convergence is such a good idea after all. Maybe it is even good for the quality of journalism that it has not been implemented perfectly. So, it would be enlightening to investigate how the different strategies, as unplanned and undirected as they seem, work out in practice. A content analysis of the journalistic output at different stages of the convergence process would therefore be needed, as would research on the question of whether the audience really increases or at least remains stable because of the new measures.

Journalism education

For young journalists entering the market it is important to realise that ‘institutional’ behaviour at legacy news media and traditional newsrooms might be at the root of slow innovation, as could be seen in this study. Journalism schools should consider a focus on media innovation and business strategies, on top of training established journalism skills and digital ‘converged’ technology. Developing entrepreneurial skills will better prepare for the constant flow of new developments.

Limitations

My findings and conclusions are limited to the regional newspaper companies in the Netherlands at the beginning of the 21st century. Although key players from all of those companies were interviewed, an even greater number of respondents would be useful. I hope that my study will be replicated in due time in the Netherlands to find out what is changing and how. And I hope that my study will be replicated in other countries as well, enabling us to compare regional convergence strategies and their implication across countries.

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4

¹PRACTISE WHAT THEY PREACH?
Managing convergence at regional newspapers



¹Data on social media first published in the chapter Social Media Strategies and Practices of Integrated Media Companies, by Piet Bakker, Sanne Hille, and Marco van Kerkhoven, in the *Handbook of Social Media Management Value Chain and Business Models in Changing Media Markets*, edited by Mike Friedrichsen and Wolfgang Mühl-Benninghaus, Springer 2013.

ABSTRACT

In the past decade, Dutch regional news dailies have realized that converging from 'print only' to 'digital first' could be a useful response to readers' and advertisers' shift to online news platforms. But has a digital publication strategy indeed been implemented, and if so, which tools and platforms have actually been used? In this study, I explore to what extent digital ambitions are reflected in everyday online production reality. An analysis of eight regional newspapers from four major Dutch publishers was conducted to investigate the way political news is published in the print and digital editions, on the website, mobile platforms, and social media channels. Results show in everyday online production practices that poor visibility and weak functionality of digital tools and platforms are the rule. A full commitment to digital innovation seems still missing. In general, the cases researched differ substantially.

INTRODUCTION

The transition to an integrated newsroom, the most visible consequence of convergence as an innovation strategy for newspaper publishers, has been widely expected to be the answer to today's media consumption patterns, as I have discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3: convergence is supposed to offer synergy and opportunities to engage with audiences.

The first reason that news organisations have high expectations about convergence is that multiplatform publishing could lead to more efficiency and hence to reduced costs; in other words, seeking synergy (Deuze, 2007). Convergence implies a standardization of media platform technology and tools as well as a streamlining of organisational and editorial procedures (Quinn, 2005). It conveniently bridges the possible differences in media skills for media workers as it offers flexibility, control over workflow, and efficiency (Quinn, 2005; Dupagne & Garrison, 2006). The possible economic advantages for convergence are well documented (Thurman & Lupton, 2008). In 2002, WAN-IFRA, the global organization for the newspaper industry, said that the potentials for cost savings with convergence strategies could be enormous (Aquino, et al. 2002).

Secondly, interactivity as a result of incorporating social media as part of a convergence strategy could enable publishers to improve the understanding of what news consumers want (Larsson, 2011). As a consequence, newspapers will no longer focus on producing written texts alone but on producing audio and video information via additional digital channels in addition (Nguyen, 2008). More and more people are connected to social online networks 24/7 and are used to instant news on offer via PCs, laptops, mobile phones, and tablets. Case studies (see Dupagne & Garrison, 2006; Killebrew, 2005; Singer, 2003) show that news media feel driven to adopt multimedia and cross-media publishing as an answer to that new audience behaviour, the rise of digital technology and the long-term economic setback. The term 'multimedia' refers to being present on different platforms - cross-media publications are expected to create synergy between channels through cooperation.

Finally, since the consumer is directing the change – with his demand for speed, the choice of multiple free news sources, interactivity, and social presence - it seems obvious that advertising agencies expect publishers to reach out to their audiences with cross-media publications (Mensing & Rejzek, 2005).

IMPLEMENTING CONVERGENCE

As high as these expectations are, implementing convergence is no guarantee of successful innovation. For example, it can have an adverse effect on news genres available to the public, as I have addressed in Chapter 3. Convergence also worries scholars because it might compromise journalistic quality (Allan, 1999; Jenkins, 2006; Deuze, 2008). Gans (2003) warns that vulgarization of the news can be expected. Journalistic quality might suffer when executives believe that commercial models of news media simply need to be re-engineered into a more cost-efficient, collaborative and integrated - that is, converged – form, focusing on short-term profits, as Currah (2009) fears. Örnebring (2010) is critical of convergence for another reason. He suggests that it destroys craftsmanship and hence results in a degradation of media workers and their labour. Thurman and Lupton (2008) found that only certain online tools could be considered a useful contribution to news publications. Video is often complementary to syndicated content, for instance, so although costly in time and money they do not add to the availability of news. And most British editors regarded podcasts as a niche only and take-up was proving to be slow.

Although empirical evidence on how convergence impacts upon daily newspaper practice is scarce, there are some enlightening examples. In a study of the merged Tampa Tribune, the NBC-affiliated WFLA-TV, and the Tampa Bay Online (TBO.com) (Dupagne & Garrison, 2006) the goal was to see whether bringing together ‘the depth of newspaper coverage, the immediacy of television and the interactivity of the Web’ (Media General, 2003, p. 4) revealed that a thoughtful convergence strategy and synergy had been created. Interviews with staff members showed that the introduction of convergence in the newsroom was primarily experienced as positive. Multimedia storytelling was felt to be an alternative method of reporting. Respondents expressed the importance of cross-media skills for reporters, although the basics of writing, reporting, and communication should not be forgotten.

In a content analysis of the overall news output, Boczkowski and Ferris (2005) concluded that TBO.com, the central online platform from which all channels publish online, still shows that different platforms have a different rhetoric and recognizably different images. Interactivity and user participation is achieved by hyperlink navigation and under the web’s archive functions.

Erdal (2008) studied the Norwegian public service broadcaster NRK’s central newsroom, which produces the national news, and the regional office Østlandssendingen, which covers Oslo and Akershus. Over the last two decades, the NRK has gone through significant changes in the organization of news production: Radio, television and web news production have been integrated. So, the web desk is the main provider of the online news, including

all the digital features available, such as video and audio. Erdal refers to this task as following ‘web logic’, replacing the traditional logics of television and radio. This web logic means interactivity, hyperlinking, and incorporating user-generated content (UCG). Erdal concludes that convergence at NRK has been fairly successful, considering that there was an emerging difference between reporters working on totally new productions according to the convergence procedures, and those working with existing stories that only needed an adjustment or an update to fit a different platform.

Research at two Dutch national newspapers by Tameling and Broersma (2012) showed that reporters’ hesitation to accommodate change, combined with convergence that was enforced upon the newsroom and the lack of a promising business model, made both publishers involved decide to return to a separation between the print and online newsrooms. However, convergence ambitions, as a means to seeking synergy and audience engagement, are still a business target.

DUTCH REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS

In Chapter 3, I examined how convergence processes strategically and operationally were influencing Dutch regional newspapers. Thirty journalists, editors, managers and consultants at all six regional newspaper-publishing companies were interviewed. I examined how cross-media publishing was formulated as a strategy of satisfying needs of existing customers and at the same time attracting new readers and advertisers. I also asked what convergence meant for organizational structures and editorial routines in practice.

My study revealed a high degree of insecurity in approaches to newsroom innovation. Virtually all interviewees aired the opinion that it remained unclear to them what strategy yields the best results in a transition from the traditional newspaper newsroom to a newsroom with a digital strategy. A considerable number of key factors (27), affecting both organisation and newsroom differently (6 levels) were considered to be essential to the success or failure of convergence. Whether sufficient advertising turnover resulted from the new initiatives remained unknown. None of the interviewees reported a profit from new online platforms. In general, management tended to operate safely, experimenting with small projects that could be easily stopped if they failed. Middle management, those actually responsible for implementing convergence on the work floor, however, put more emphasis on the education of employees and the technical infrastructure of convergence –thus pursuing a long-term strategy.

This study and the case studies mentioned above show that converging print, radio, television and Internet publications into cross-media concepts produced by integrated newsrooms has become an established ambition although its practical impact remains

uncertain. Multiplatform publishing, seeking synergy in streamlining news production and connecting to the audience via UGC and social media are considered the most promising tools available in common convergence strategies, literature revealed. It is still unclear, however, if and how this concept of cross-media convergence works out in the daily routine of newspapers. Do they practise what they preach?

This explorative study provides a follow-up to my previous interviews. I want to have a better understanding of how the plans and ambitions work out in the everyday practice of newsroom production. The study explores how convergence is indeed implemented (and not only planned or promised) in regional newspapers in the Netherlands. I specifically look at the most promising instruments in common convergence strategies: multiplatform publishing (as a way to accommodate the online news consumer), ways of seeking synergy in news production (enhancing economic efficiency) and tools to connect more closely with the audience (addressing news consumers newspaper loyalty and giving publisher the opportunity to improve its understanding of what it is the news consumer wants).

Producing news centrally and publishing the same stories on different platforms is one of the most common ways of implementing convergence, and a first step towards generating synergy. To get a better understanding of what digital news publication platforms are offered to the public I tracked regional political news stories in the different channels of cross-media, checked their sources and the way they are shared on the different platforms (that is, as shovelware). My interviews revealed that concepts of crossmedia were justified by their potential impact on the local and regional political debate. So I looked at news stories that involve political actors. The managers and editors I spoke to still regard themselves primarily as watchdogs in the democratic process. Therefore, strategic decisions were allegedly based predominantly on their potential contribution to the public debate. So, if a convergence strategy is indeed implemented, it should at least be visible in the coverage of regional politics.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This study aims to explore how convergence is indeed implemented (and not only planned or promised) in regional newspapers in the Netherlands, and visibly reflected in everyday online production reality. Streamlining and digitising news production processes are supposed to generate synergy by saving costs and re-engaging with audiences. Producing news centrally and publishing the same stories on different platforms is one of the most common ways of generating synergy, as are multi-platform publishing and using social media in terms of re-engaging audiences. I will therefore specifically look at the most encouraging instruments in convergence strategies: multiplatform publishing (as a way to accommodate the online news consumer), ways of seeking synergy in news production

(enhancing economic efficiency) and tools to connect more closely with the audience (addressing news consumers newspaper loyalty and giving publisher the opportunity to improve its understanding of what it is the news consumer wants).

As was shown in the previous chapter, Dutch regional dailies consider converging from 'print only' to 'digital first', as a promising response to readers' and advertisers' shift to online news platforms. The newspapers see opportunities for both creating synergy, as well as re-engaging with audiences. They named a number of issues as being critical to successful convergence. I categorized these factors according to their expected influence on either the organisation or the journalistic production process (see table 1 in Chapter 3). For this explorative study, I selected factors that actually could demonstrate convergence practised on the different platforms.

To get an impression of if and how digital tools were implemented for the digital newspaper and website I looked at if and how video was used in the political news production and if stories were enriched otherwise, with photos for instance (dossier), based on the claim that both features have added value for the online news consumer. Another necessity for successful convergence claimed by managers and newsroom editors were cross content publishing and the tolerance towards User Generated Content and online comments. Therefore I looked at to what extend original material or shovelware was used online, if cross promotion was common practice and to what extend UGC and comments were allowed, and for the latter also the number of comments by viewers. Special attention in the study has been paid to the availability of mobile sites and applications (apps). Both managers and newsroom editors mentioned these tools as a means to create synergy and being significant in re-engaging with audiences. Here I looked at the number of postings a day and to what extend either original material or shovelware was used. Finally, I looked at the way social media were used. In terms of journalistic convergence tools, social media like Twitter and Facebook were considered necessary, especially as a way of re-engaging with audiences. I counted the followers on Twitter and the numbers of stories on Facebook.

To get a broad picture of how crossmedia is implemented in the Netherlands, I selected eight out of the eighteen regional newspapers from the four major regional newspaper publishers in the Netherlands for my analysis (Table 1). The papers were geographically evenly distributed over the Netherlands, as a consequence of how the market is divided according to ownership. The biggest regional publisher, Wegener (Mecom), owns four newspapers. Two newspapers were part of the Telegraaf Media Group, one newspaper owned by De Persgroep, a Belgian publisher, and one owned by the last major independent publisher, NDC/VBK. In terms of the market power of the newspapers, four of them had a comparatively large circulation, with more than 100,000 copies sold in 2013.

Table 1. The newspapers under study (2013).

Newspapers	Publisher	Circulation
Dagblad de Limburger / Limburgs Dagblad	Mecom	150,000
Noordhollands Dagblad	Telegraaf Media Group	119,000
Dagblad van het Noorden	NDC/VBK	113,000
Brabants Dagblad	Wegener (Mecom)	111,000
TC Tubantia	Wegener (Mecom)	99,000
AD/Utrechts Nieuwsblad	De Persgroep	76,000
Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant	Wegener (Mecom)	48,000
Gooi- en Eemlander	Telegraaf Media Group	23,000

For all the newspapers I used their digital version (e-paper) as the starting material for my analysis. In all cases, these were identical to the print version and downloadable as a PDF or as an online accessible digital file. With a group of students, I analysed each paper for a whole week, between September and December 2011. Because I focused solely on local and regional news, news items did not overlap between papers. Results should not be biased by a choice for different random research periods. I chose research weeks that were without any extraordinary events in the region, because such events might have determined the way content was produced and distributed, deviating from daily routines that would have been performed under normal conditions.

Each newspaper offered up to three publication platforms – I analysed all of them:

- Digital newspaper
- Website
- Mobile sites
- Applications (apps)
- Social media (Facebook and Twitter).

Local and regional political news production was analysed on every platform - from Monday to Saturday around the clock. The analyses were started at 9 a.m. by looking at the edition of the digital newspaper. All platforms were checked for the indicators mentioned above. I repeated this procedure for the online, mobile and social media platforms, around noon and at 5 p.m. I listed the titles of all the articles that met my criteria of local political news: all news and feature stories that involved political actors concerning the area of circulation. Here the same selection criteria were used as in the study reported on in Chapter 2.

To test the reliability of my analysis, all three coders analysed the same newspaper for

one week, that is, almost 12% of the total data gathered. The agreement was 93% at a minimum. In the appendix an example can be found of the coded selection.

RESULTS

In general, the regional newspapers studied here show that convergence is indeed practised. However, its amount and elements differ substantially between the eight newspapers analysed. All of them have a website and, in addition, a mobile site. All except one newspaper use social media. Only five out of the eight also offer an app - two of them have apps for Apple as well as for Android. Half of the newspapers do not actively use Facebook. One of these does not even have an account open to the public. More detailed results per publication platform are presented below.

DIGITAL NEWSPAPER AND WEBSITE

Which elements of a convergence strategy were exactly visible in the daily news routine practice? All newspapers but one in this study publish images with the articles on a regular basis. One website refrains from images almost totally. As a result, the homepage looks especially pale, as it contains only text with the logo of the newspaper.

Half of the titles regularly put videos online. Often videos from Youtube and the national public-service broadcaster NOS.nl are used. One newspaper broadcasts a video news journal on the website at 10 a.m., 4 p.m. and 10 p.m. However, videos are hardly ever used for political news. None of the titles uses audio.

Synergy

Table 2 shows that cross-content promotion is rare, on average appearing less than three times a week. In total, 254 political news articles were analysed. Track back analyses showed that most of the stories were shovelware or just shortened. Two newspapers direct visitors to a hyperlocal sister site for news from a selection of cities. If an article from a printed newspaper appears online the same day, the content is usually slightly altered, either shortened or illustrated with a (stock) photo. Dossiers of earlier stories on the same topic added to news stories are infrequent.

Table 2. Convergence practice at the news website (based on political news)

Newspapers			
	Features	Cross content	UGC/ Comments
Gooi- en Eemlander	No video/ dossiers rare	Standard, shovelware, no cross promotion	No UGC/ Comments average 0-1
Dagblad van het Noorden	No video/ dossiers rare	Rare, no paper articles appear online, regular cross promotion	No UGC/ Comments not possible
Brabants Dagblad		Standard, shovelware, regular cross promotion	No UGC/ Comments average 3
AD/Utrechts Nieuwsblad	No video/ dossiers rare	Rare, no paper articles appear online, no cross promotion	No UGC/ Comments not possible
Noordhollands Dagblad	Irregularly video/ dossiers rare	Standard, generally shortened and illustrated, regular cross promotion	No UGC/ Comments average 2 (0-85)
Dagblad de Limburger / Limburgs Dagblad (Mecom)	No video/ dossiers rare	Rare, generally shortened and rarely illustrated	No UGC/ Comments <5,
TC Tubantia	One video production/week (TV Oost)	Standard, generally shortened and illustrated	UGC (mostly pictures)/ Comments average 24
Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant	Daily video news bulletins/ dossiers rare	Standard, generally shortened and illustrated	No UGC/ Comments >5 <20

Re-engaging the audience

One newspaper occasionally asks its readers to send pictures of events in the region. A large upload button reminds everyone of it. The community uses the reply function extensively with dozens of comments under almost every story. Only one newspaper, however, allows textual UGC.

In six out of the eight newspapers, visitors are allowed to comment on articles on the website. The highest number of comments on an article was 102. Almost two-thirds (64 %) of the articles have no comments.

MOBILE SITES AND APPLICATIONS

Synergy

About two-thirds of the news stories on the mobile sites originated from press agencies, indicating that the newsroom did not contribute to mobile publications on a regular basis, see Table 3. The stories also carried small photos in an irregular fashion. Video was absent completely.

Five out of eight newspapers offer news for mobile use, but sometimes a maximum of only three stories were offered at the same time. The mobile messages are usually shortened articles from the print version. None of the studied newspapers had a mobile website or phone or tablet application that, in terms content or presentation, showed considerably different news compared to their website. News items were predominantly random selections and abbreviated versions of the main stories. One newspaper offers paid apps for Apple and Android. There are no exclusive stories for the app.

Table 3. Convergence practice on the mobile sites and applications

Newspapers				
	Mobile site	Postings	Cross content	App/content
Gooi- en Eemlander	Yes	Frequent >3 stories/day	Shovelware	Apple/ shovel-ware
Dagblad van het Noorden	Yes	Frequent, <3 stories/day	Mostly press agency and shovelware	Apple/ shovel-ware
Brabants Dagblad	Yes	Frequent >3 stories/day	Shovelware	No
AD/Utrechts Nieuwsblad	Yes	Infrequent, <3 stories/day	Shovelware and abstracts	Apple and Android/ shovel-ware
Noordhollands Dagblad	Yes	Frequent >3 stories/day	Shovelware and abstracts	Apple/ shovel-ware
Dagblad de Limburger / Limburgs Dagblad (Mecom)	Yes	Infrequent, <3 stories/day	Shovelware	Apple and Android/abstract from site
TC Tubantia	Yes	Frequent >3 stories/day	Shovelware	No
Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant	Yes	Infrequent	Abstracts	No

SOCIAL MEDIA

Connecting to the audience

In general, social media are actively used, see Table 4. All titles have more than one Twitter account. In most cases, there is one general account and some topical accounts. An average tweet consists of a headline, dateline, partial first line of the lead, and a shortened URL, directing straight to the regular website, obviously making this a 'copy content' or 'redirecting' service.

On August 25, 2011, both Twitter feeds from one newspaper, the one with largest number of followers, suddenly stopped for two months. Some of the digital work is done carelessly: Tweets are posted twice, or with incorrect or missing links, sometimes referring to the wrong articles.

Three out of eight titles have no active Facebook page. One newspaper has a Facebook-page that members may 'like', but it does not share any news or other content on that page. One newspaper is on Facebook, but only with a company page, not as a news channel.

Table 4. Convergence practice with social media

Newspapers		
	Twitter followers (main account)	Facebook (posts)
Gooi- en Eemlander	1600	Every other day
Dagblad van het Noorden	9300	One daily
Brabants Dagblad	3000	Company info
AD/Utrechts Nieuwsblad	-	-
Noordhollands Dagblad	1400	Empty
Dagblad de Limburger / Limburgs Dagblad (Mecom)	600	Empty
TC Tubantia	6800	3 a day
Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant	4300	Empty

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Synergy

Coherent digital first or cross-media strategies seem absent in the cases researched. Digital platforms are not used to their full potential. The printed newspaper seems the dominant and most important publication platform, at least visible in the efforts presented to the public. None of the newspapers seemed to have a structured online approach at the time of the content analyses.

Cross content promotion is virtually non-existent. Newspapers regularly place articles on the digital platforms using copied content and extend the article for print. This method allows the print edition to retain its added value over digital platforms.

My finding that everyday crossmedia news production practices differ between the eight newspapers analysed indicates that there is no commonly accepted practice of crossmedia news production. This implies that a durable and economic viable business model has yet to be developed. This conclusion is backed up by the notion that even between two newspapers from the same publisher, the functionality and visibility of crossmedia news production varies notably. Although this might demonstrate (laudable) autonomy of the newsroom, it also shows a lack of central vision by the company.

In itself, different strategies are not necessarily a sign of a lack of effort or the absence of one's own digital strategy. However, after more than 15 years of experience with digital platforms, one would expect that some common ground would have developed, as publishers could monitor and create their own approach as well as keep an eye on the practices of others. The opposite seems to be the case; publishers seem to be still in an 'experimentation phase,' with many newspapers trying something different. It suggests that publishers are still evaluating the possibilities and results of different strategies.

Engaging audiences

Many solutions to distribute content online show an unplanned character. This is most visible in the social media and online applications, where publication frequency and content quality differ strongly. News items that are placed on digital platforms during the day are usually copied immediately to the social media available. For every four to five political news items, just one tweet is sent.

None of the newspapers studied here had a mobile website or phone or tablet application that, in terms of content or presentation, showed news considerably different from that on their websites. Mostly, the news stories were seemingly rather random selections and shortened versions of the main stories, another example of a print-first strategy.

IMPLICATIONS

Journalism

The lack of a sound innovation strategy, taking a digital-first strategy seriously, shows that management seems incapable of altering the haphazard way in which convergence is carried out in practice. My findings show missed opportunities in the newsrooms, which are unable to output news professionally on all platforms.

Most media companies seem to follow an incremental and muddling-through innovation process and lack a long-term strategy on innovation and convergence. Crossmedia publishing seems to be something publishers pay lip service to, but in effect is an innovation they appear to introduce on the side.

Journalism studies

Further investigation should address the question of why regional newspapers in the Netherlands hesitate to fully implement convergence. Is convergence not such a good idea after all, because the cost outweighs the benefits, or is adopting innovation strategies a process that simply needs more time?

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5

THE HYPERLOCAL IN PRACTICE

Innovation, creativity and diversity



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ABSTRACT

Local reporting has become an endangered occupation. Print publications merge, close down or face budget cuts because audiences and advertisers move online. The result is that fewer journalists are covering local affairs. Online models could be expected to take the role of traditional print and broadcast media as they are more flexible and cheaper to operate, especially in terms of production and distribution. In the Netherlands I identified 123 hyperlocal news websites. I studied how they organized their business, how they were geographically distributed, what sources of revenues they relied on, and what their editorial strategy was. Data were gathered through content analyses of websites and interviews with owners. Results indicate that models are diverse, ranging from fully staffed operations to home-operated websites. Editorial and economic foci differ substantially. Offering local content is not the biggest problem. Many sites, however, underperform in terms of organisation and revenues. Maintaining a site seems to be a bigger issue than launching it.

INTRODUCTION

Online local news models could be expected to replace traditional local media as they were thought to be more flexible and cheaper to operate, especially in terms of production and distribution. Because the threshold for participation was low, these media could also use citizens as contributors. In theory, the *news gap*, the result of the smaller footprint of traditional local media, could be bridged.

In practice, however, operating a viable hyperlocal business has proved more difficult than expected. US hyperlocal website *Everyblock* closed down while AOL-operation *Patch* is facing heavy losses. In Europe, hyperlocal networks like *Myheimat* (Germany), *Het Belang van Limburg* (Belgium), *Local People* (UK) and *Dichtbij* (the Netherlands) are successful in terms of number of visits although little is known about their financial operations. These online hyperlocal news operations are all part of major media companies or operate a nationwide or regional network, but little is known about how smaller sites survive. Radcliffe (2012) studied a large number of hyperlocal models, mainly based in the UK. His research shows that there is a high number of very different local websites in the UK, but also that there is a high degree of entry and exit and a heavy reliance on volunteer work and individual entrepreneurship.

In terms of content, many independent hyperlocal initiatives seem to be based on campaign journalism - campaigning for a specific cause - rather than having a general news approach. Sites that are predominantly commercially driven are still rather exceptional (Thurman, Pascal and Bradshaw, 2012). The advertising model of traditional media - using banner advertising - is the dominant revenue source. Social media consultancy, merchandising and

events were mentioned as additional sources of income. Some of the operations covered 'are simply tools to help coordinate campaigns, or provide a platform for individuals to build a portfolio of work for future employment, or a way to express themselves or build status within a particular community' (Thurman, Pascal and Bradshaw 2012, 10).

In this research I want to follow up on these findings by exploring all Dutch independent hyperlocal news sites. I research how they are organized, how they are geographically distributed, and what their business model and editorial strategy is.

A MODEL FOR HYPERLOCAL NEWS

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American cable TV operators first coined the term 'hyperlocal' in the 1980s to describe local television content. About two decades later we saw the rise of online alternative local news websites and bloggers (Thurman, Pascal and Bradshaw 2012). There is no shortage of literature on the promises of those local online news initiatives. An important part of this literature, however, is normative or technologically deterministic. Empirical evidence usually is anecdotal. Normative and technological deterministic thinking can show possible directions for new initiatives. In *We Media* (Bowman and Willis 2003) and *We the media* (Gillmor 2004) independent local news initiatives were often referred to as hyperlocal grassroots initiatives. Both publications focused on how new online models could offer citizens the possibility to start their own media by easily accessible technology.

According to Radcliffe (2012, p.10) there are 'many reasons why hyperlocal media is gaining popularity'. His focus is on technological possibilities, expected audience behavior and possible commercial opportunities. It is assumed that engaged and committed citizens will use technology to start blogging or contribute to digital platforms in other ways.

A recurring theme in the literature on (hyperlocal) news models is that these initiatives are often a reaction to an (assumed) news gap: the failure of incumbent media to cover the community any longer (Metzgar, Kurpius and Rowley 2011). Recent Dutch research, however, showed that new initiatives emerge in areas with many other media (Kik, Bakker and Buijs 2013). Site owners can even under those circumstances *perceive* the current offer of local news as meagre. All new initiatives are a reaction to a perceived market failure. If the market was seen as well served, there would be no reason to start anything new.

Chen et al. (2012) suggest that grassroots web-based initiatives are capable of filling the local news gap that is emerging due to disinvestments of legacy media. According to Beckett, 'independent hyper-local journalism ... is a potential amelioration of the drastic problem of declining professional regional and local news media' (2010, p.11).

Local online community news sites launched by entrepreneurial journalists are also expected to play a role in the local democracy (Knight Foundation 2012; Downie and Schudson 2009). Hyperlocals that were funded by the Knight Foundation were described as successfully combining 'high-quality journalism' with business and technology skills.

Thurman, Pascal and Bradshaw (2012) analyzed the level of audience engagement at the *LocalPeople.co.uk* sites by surveying users, a content analysis and interviews with ten 'community publishers'. The *Local People* project describes itself as a network of websites 'for people to discuss issues affecting them locally ... find and communicate with others, search for local places and services, read and write news stories and share photos' (*Local People* 2011). The 400 websites are owned by Northcliffe Media and Iliffe News and Media and serve towns with populations between 10–50,000 people in the South West of England and some London boroughs. Each *Local People* site has at least one part-time curator, called a 'community publisher'. The study aims at offering insight into 'the extent to which this type of "big media" local news website can succeed as a local social network, reinvigorate political engagement, or encourage citizen reporting' (p.1).

DIVERSITY AND CONTRAST

Metzgar, Kurpius and Rowley (2011) define 'hyperlocal media operations' along six characteristics; sites should target a specific geographic area, have a community orientation, contain original news reporting, should be indigenous to the web, should fill perceived news gaps and stimulate civic engagement. This definition contains several normative elements (having a community orientation, stimulating civic engagement, filling a perceived news gap) that make a categorization difficult, as it needs careful examination of goals and motives of the people who operate the sites. A site that just wants to 'make money with local news' would not qualify. Although 'original news' can be problematic to define, I do focus on websites that at least claim to produce part of their content themselves. Aggregation sites can be hyperlocal but are discarded in this research. 'Indigenous to the web' means in this research that I discard online media that are brand extensions of traditional print and broadcast media. I include, however, hyperlocal sites sponsored by or set up in cooperation with other businesses. That could be media businesses as well, as long as the hyperlocal website does not function as a brand extension, republishing content from the print or broadcast medium.

Compared to 'traditional' local initiatives, new models are often more commercial. *Examiner.com* is owned by Denver media-tycoon Philip Anschutz, and was present in 244 markets in the US in 2012. The site employs 'hundreds of professional journalists' (*Examiner.com Media Kit* 2012). *Patch* is owned by AOL (also owner of *Huffington Post*) and delivers content to more than 800 US communities in 2012 (*Patch, Nieman Lab* 2012). The German site

myheimat.de (2006) covers all of Germany and cooperates with more than a dozen major regional publishers. More than 37,000 volunteers were registered in 2010 (Fröhlich, Quiring and Engesser 2012). The Belgium *Belang van Limburg* websites cover all 48 municipalities in the province of Limburg. The site recruits 'news hunters' to contribute content (D'heer and Paulussen 2012a, 2012b). At the website a 'combination of regular journalists and citizen journalists' provide the content (Bijnens, 2012). In the Netherlands, *Dichtbij.nl* by Telegraaf Media Group (TMG) operates more than 80 websites, covering all Dutch municipalities. In 2012, 140 people were working for *Dichtbij* (Jimenez, 2012).

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Commercial issues and how hyperlocals function within the local news system have not been researched on a nation-wide scale. D'heer and Paulussen (2012a) researched the content of *Belang van Limburg*; Fröhlich, Quiring and Engesser (2012) focussed on citizen bloggers for *Myheimat*. Metzgar, Kurpius, and Rowley (2011) covered six US initiatives that are large and established local operations. Thurman, Pascal and Bradshaw (2012) focus on audience engagement and user contributions. Radcliffe's (2012) study is mainly descriptive, mapping the UK hyperlocal landscape.

Lowrey (2012) uses an 'ecosystem' approach for news sites – including blogs – in two US cities (see also Lowrey, Parrott and Meade 2011). The model of the ecosystem is particularly well-suited to map the dynamics of online news models in specific markets and the changing relations between players. It would be possible to study relations between online models (links, aggregation, content curation and sharing), how they compete for advertisers, use sources and target audiences. This approach, however, is too elaborate for my study as I compare hyperlocal models in more than 100 markets. I will, however, investigate relations between media and other players in the local market.

Similar studies on hyperlocal news – but without a longitudinal ecosystem approach – have been conducted in Chicago (Churchill and Ubois 2009), Baltimore (PEW, 2010), and Seattle (Fancher 2011). In contrast to my research, these studies focus on large US-markets.

Remez (2012) found that American hyperlocal nonprofit websites have various revenue sources: grants, donations, sponsorships, selling content, and providing services. Nee (2013) explored how journalists who lead hyperlocals see digital and social media as part of their strategy of convergence, and how they use these to connect with consumers. Respondents indicated that they experienced more freedom to experiment with technology.

Naldi and Picard (2012) studied three local news sites. The authors show that pre-existing expectations and experiences of owners can play a decisive role in the future of a website. Owners can have a very clear idea of what they want with a news site – usually in line with their past experiences – but adapting to the market and changing the model seems to be

much harder; these are cases of *formational myopia* according to the authors.

In respect to the literature reviewed, I focus on independent news websites that target specific local areas. I discard topical sites with a specific audience – sports, health, music, or technology. I don't narrow my research to *grassroots* or citizen initiatives; businesses, non-profit organizations, groups or individuals can operate hyperlocal sites. These sites are included as well in this study. I investigate content, business model, ownership, organisation, and technology.

METHOD

My research covers all models in one country. Based on research conducted in 2012 by Kik, Bakker and Buijs (2013), I identified all digital media in every Dutch municipality. Online platforms of newspapers, weeklies, and local or regional broadcasters are discarded, as were aggregation sites that only contained news scraped by robots from other sites. The original research was conducted by searching (using Google) for the keywords 'nieuws' (Dutch for 'news') and the name of the municipality. The first 30 results were checked.

All websites were visited again in 2013 – some of the operations had closed down, were inactive for at least a month, or changed from news site to aggregator. I identified 350 sites, operated by 123 different businesses or organisations, covering 199 municipalities, meaning 1.8 sites per municipality: 35 owners operated more than one site; on average these 'chains' owned 7.5 different sites (Figure 1).

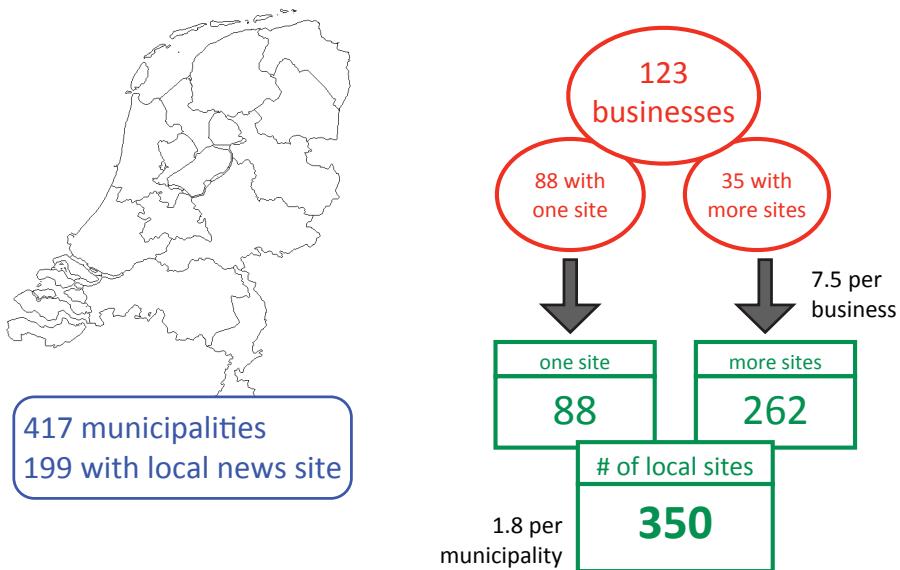


Figure 1. Municipalities, businesses and local websites.

Every site was coded for ownership, “about us” and contact information, advertising rates, content categories, staff information, number of ads and number of articles, subject of articles, source of articles, social media and the frequency of posting. When questions remained, the site owner was contacted by mail or phone. From the chains I selected one site, when possible the largest, first or most important site (for instance where ownership was based).

RESULTS

Ownership

Almost half of the Dutch municipalities have one or more local news sites (Figure 1); the majority (262) is operated by owners who own more than one local website. The ‘chains’, however, are usually rather small. 26 chains operate ten sites or less, nine chains are bigger than that; but only two consist of 20 sites or more (Figure 2). There is, in other words, already some consolidation in this area, with a number of major players and many *one-man-bands*.

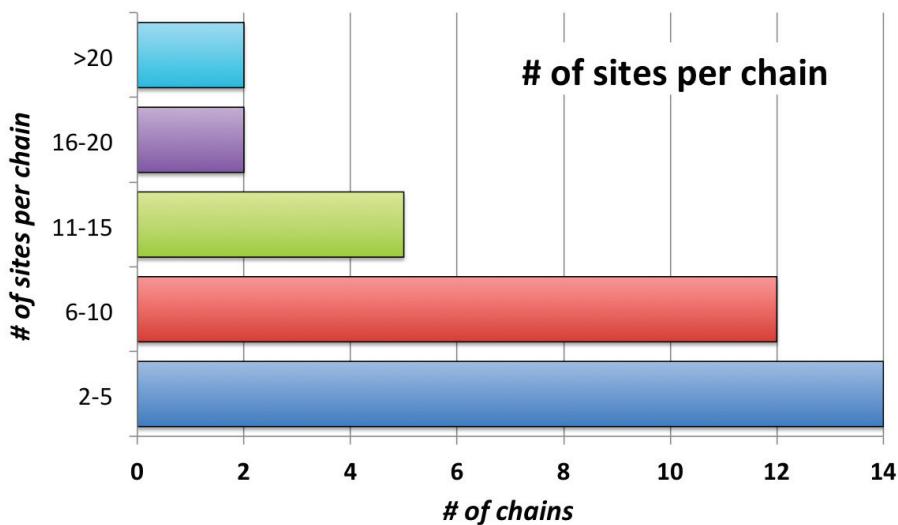


Figure 2. Number of sites per 'chain'.

70% of the sites (86) contained some sort of information on the purpose of the operation. After mail and telephone contact I obtained ownership information for 101 sites; 58 had individual (personal) ownership, 41 sites were owned by a company (Table 1).

Table 1. Ownership and information (123 local models)

	# of sites with...	Percentage
Information "about us" on site	86	70%
Site ownership	101	82%
Individual ownership	58	
Business ownership	41	
No ownership reported	22	

For 43 sites I could assess the number of people involved, this included full-time employed staff members, part-timers and volunteers. Other sites were individual operations or would not provide this information. Almost all of these sites worked with volunteers or people only employed part-time; a small number of staff (2 to 5 people) was the dominant model (Table 2). Organisations with more people often operated more websites (the 'chains').

Table 2. Number of employees/volunteers (43 local models)

	# of sites with...	Percentage
1	14	33%
2-5	19	45%
6-10	6	14%
11 or more	3	7%

Usually, every operation has at least one or two people with a journalistic background working for the site:

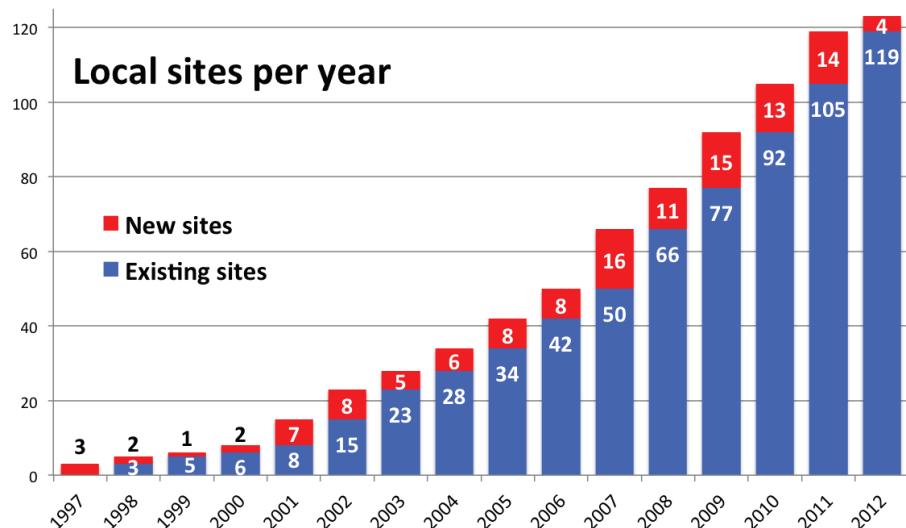
I have been a freelancer for 20 years. The [two] others don't have a journalistic background.

We come from ICT, others are committed citizens and journalists.

I have been a journalist for 40 years.

I was a publisher of free weeklies.

Half of the operations (66) were more than five years old, some going back to 1997. From 2007 on, more than ten news sites were founded every year (Figure 3). I cannot say anything about 'growth' because I have no data on sites that closed. Comparing the 2012 and 2013 data, however, I found indeed some sites that closed down within a year.

**Figure 3.** Local sites founded per year.

Regional distribution

Local news sites are unevenly distributed over the twelve Dutch provinces. Friesland and Zuid-Holland have more than 70 different sites, Limburg, Flevoland and Drente less than ten. But as the population is also very unevenly distributed, a comparison based on the number of municipalities would be better because I am interested in how these local communities are covered – how many local websites on average cover a municipality in a province?

Friesland leads when the number of websites per municipality is taken into account: almost three websites per municipality. Also the small province of Zeeland has a high number of hyperlocal websites per municipality. The ‘middle’ group, Zuid-Holland to Utrecht has (almost) one website per municipality; all other provinces score below that (Figure 4).

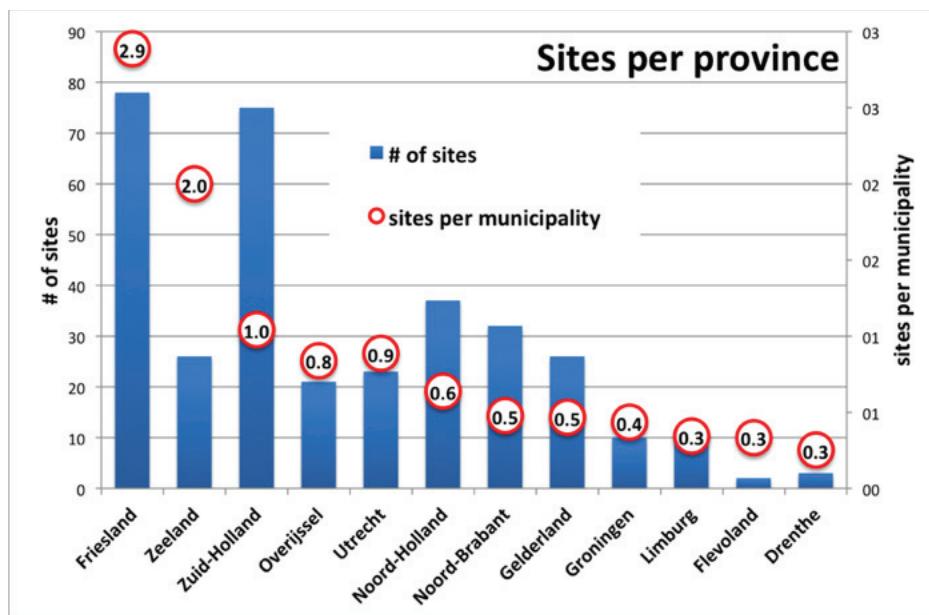


Figure 4. Distribution of sites per province.

The research by Kik, Bakker and Buijs (2013) also showed a high number of media in general in Friesland. In their research they found a relation between the number of traditional media and the number of independent online media. In other words: online media can be found where there are also other media, they need a market and probably news from other media as well. In 2012, Friesland was the only province with two independent newspapers; also a number of independent broadcasters are based in that province. That new online initiatives emerge where other media fail, was not demonstrated.

Content

It is not surprising that visitors can find a category *News* on a local website (on 80 of the sites). But less than 30% of the sites have a *Video* or *Photo*-section (Table 3). Producing original audio-visual content is expensive; which could explain this finding. Almost all sites, however, have several other categories.

Table 3. Content categories (123 local models)

	# of sites with...	Percentage
News	99	80%
Video	36	29%
Columns	20	16%
Dossiers	20	16%
Photo	36	29%
Other	118	96%

95% of the sites contained at least one news item that was posted in the last week. The average number of news items per day during the last week was 3.9. Nine sites post more than ten news items on average every day (measured for a seven-day week). More than half of the sites (66) offer users between one and five items per day; 24 sites contain less than one item per day (Table 4).

Table 4. Content frequency (123 local models)

	# of sites with...	Percentage
Recent news (last week)	117	95%
Average # of items per day	3.9	
# of sites with (items per day)		
More than 20 per day	2	2%
Between 11 and 20 per day	7	6%
More than 5, less than 10 per day	18	15%
More than 1, less than 5 per day	66	54%
1 or less	24	20%
No recent news items	6	5%

Politics was the most popular topic when the most recent ten items were surveyed, 98 sites contain political items, with an average of almost two items per day. Also *Crime and accidents* with an average of 2.5 per day, *Human Interest, Business and Organisations, Culture* and *Sports* were popular (Table 5). I found 20% of the sites without political news, mostly because there are eight sites totally devoted to 911-news and eighteen sites with more than half of the items devoted to these issues.

Table 5. Subjects - last 10 items (123 local models)

	# of sites with...	Percentage	Average
Politics (all subjects)	98	80%	1.9
Crime and Accidents	80	65%	2.5
Human Interest	54	44%	0.9
Business and Organisations	62	50%	0.9
Culture	83	67%	1.6
Sports	43	35%	0.7
Non-local	23	19%	0.4
Other	51	41%	0.8

More than a hundred sites state that they produce their own content, 30% use aggregated content and content from partners. On average, six out of ten items are original productions according to the sites themselves – whether this was genuine original production was not checked (Table 6).

Table 6. Sources of news- last 10 items (123 local models)

	# of sites with...	Percentage*	Average # of items
Own production	101	82%	6.1
Aggregation	39	32%	1.2
Partners/other	38	31%	1.2
Unknown	33	27%	1.4

* Total can exceed 100% as more answers were possible

More than 100 of the 123 sites have a Twitter account but only 85 (69%) offer users the opportunity to share stories by offering a *Tweet this* button. 80 Sites (65%) have a Facebook account, but only 55 have a *Like* button under stories. 35 Sites have a registration option and offer users options like submitting comments and contributing content (Table 7).

Table 7. Contact / social media (123 local models)

	# of sites with...	Percentage*
Registration option	35	28%
Twitter account	103	84%
Tweet this...	85	69%
Facebook account	80	65%
Like button	55	45%

* Total can exceed 100% as more answers were possible

The chains

Chains could be expected to be more professional in terms of staff, ad sales and technology. The overview (Table 8) shows why Friesland is so well served. No less than four chains are active in this province. Also Zeeland (two chains), Zuid-Holland and Noord-Holland have more than one chain of local news websites. More than half of the provinces have no chains at all – two chains, however, operate on a national level.

Table 8. Chains (more than five editions) per province.

	# of sites	Province
Waldnett†	7	Friesland
It Nijſs	27	Friesland
HvNieuwſt	27	Friesland
Harlingen online	5	Friesland
112 Brabant Nieuwſt	6	Noord-Brabant
GooiNieuws	6	Noord-Holland
Vandaag.nl*	8	Noord-Holland
112ijmond†	5	Noord-Holland
023 Magazine	5	Noord-Holland
Salland Centraal	6	Overijssel
112Valleit	18	Utrecht
Zeeuwſeregio.nl	13	Zeeland
HVZeeland†	13	Zeeland
Voorne-Putten	5	Zuid-Holland
VOL NIEUWS	15	Zuid-Holland
Sleutelstad	10	Zuid-Holland
Ambacht NET etc.	5	Zuid-Holland
nieuws.nl	12	national
Dichtbij*	20	national

* Both Vandaag and Dichtbij are owned by TMG, the largest Dutch newspaper publisher, Vandaag uses material from regional newspapers but is not marketed as a brand extension; Dichtbij sometimes exchanges content with local free weeklies from TMG.

† 911-sites (accidents, crimes and fires)

Chain-websites differ from stand-alone sites. They use Twitter and Facebook more often, in particular the *Tweet this* option and the *Like* button. The majority have a registration opportunity (average for all sites 28%) so users can contribute content. The number of ads is somewhat lower but more evenly distributed. Chains also produce more news themselves while they publish 5.6 news items per day (3.9 on average for all sites).

Six chains cover only or mainly 911-news (112 in the Netherlands), meaning news, pictures and video on accidents, crimes and fires. As they use police and fire brigade information as their main source, only accidents and crimes themselves are reported, hardly any arrests and almost never any court cases.

Dichtbij.nl, with more than 80 websites, each covering several municipalities, is the most ambitious Dutch hyperlocal network. It covers the whole country although not all websites have an editorial team. Sites without editors – or ‘community-editors’ as they are called - use aggregation (scraping by robots) as a content strategy.

DISCUSSION

The results could give the impression that many websites are poor performers; they have not implemented social media, don't have sufficient advertising, lack original news or publish hardly any news. But what I see is actually a mixed picture. On the one hand I see a true entrepreneurial spirit, seizing opportunities wherever they are, sometimes half-hearted but mostly full of initiative and enthusiasm. On the other hand I see a permanent underperformance: sites with no contact information, sites with ads but no information about how to place ads, sites with no, or few, ads. Even the site with 83 ads does not seem to be an example of a sound business model; it makes no sense to have an endless chain of banners on a site.

I also see underperformance in terms of social media use: sites have a Facebook account but offer no opportunity to share stories. Some sites are without a Twitter account or without the opportunity to tweet stories. Facebook and Twitter are actually very efficient ways to steer traffic to websites – a missed opportunity for a substantial number of sites. Also registration (contributing content) is missing at the majority of the sites. Thurman, Pascal and Bradshaw (2012) also found a digital skills gap, training for such skills was in general not available. One

of their conclusions, that the sites they studied lag behind ‘in terms of engagement with users’ (p. 10), could be partly related to these lacking technological skills.

The underperformance argument tends to overlook the difficult situation many sites are facing. The economy is problematic, advertising rates are low while the competition is fierce. With this in mind, it is also possible to argue that many sites are performing quite well. Apparently these owners are surviving under difficult circumstances – and with a true entrepreneurial spirit.

Other studies also show a high number of local news websites, a high diversity among those sites and a high level of entry and exit (Churchill and Ubois 2009, Fancher 2011, Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism 2010, Radcliffe 2012). Issues concerning commercial operation and funding are also well documented (Lowrey 2012, Metzgar, Kurpius and Rowley 2011, Naldi and Picard 2012, Radcliffe 2012).

I see, however, a rather good performance in terms of local content – dominant for all models – and a substantial share of original content. The actual problems seem to be in other areas – running the business in the long term. My study suggests that hyperlocal news websites are both promising and vulnerable. There is potential to grow, but depending on a very few members of staff could seriously hamper development. Continuity could be a real problem while change might be difficult. Naldi and Picard (2012) state that site owners all had to rethink their business model after a while; which actually seemed to be harder than the launch itself. Changing a site (navigation, focus, business model, staff), adapting to new market circumstances (competitors, advertising), new audience behaviour (social media use) and funding (investors, ad-sales, sponsoring) are not simply needed but remain impossible for most ‘one-person-operations’ as the knowledge and skills required for such a switch might not be available. This could explain why chains perform somewhat better on some issues; a team is better suited to organize and implement changes.

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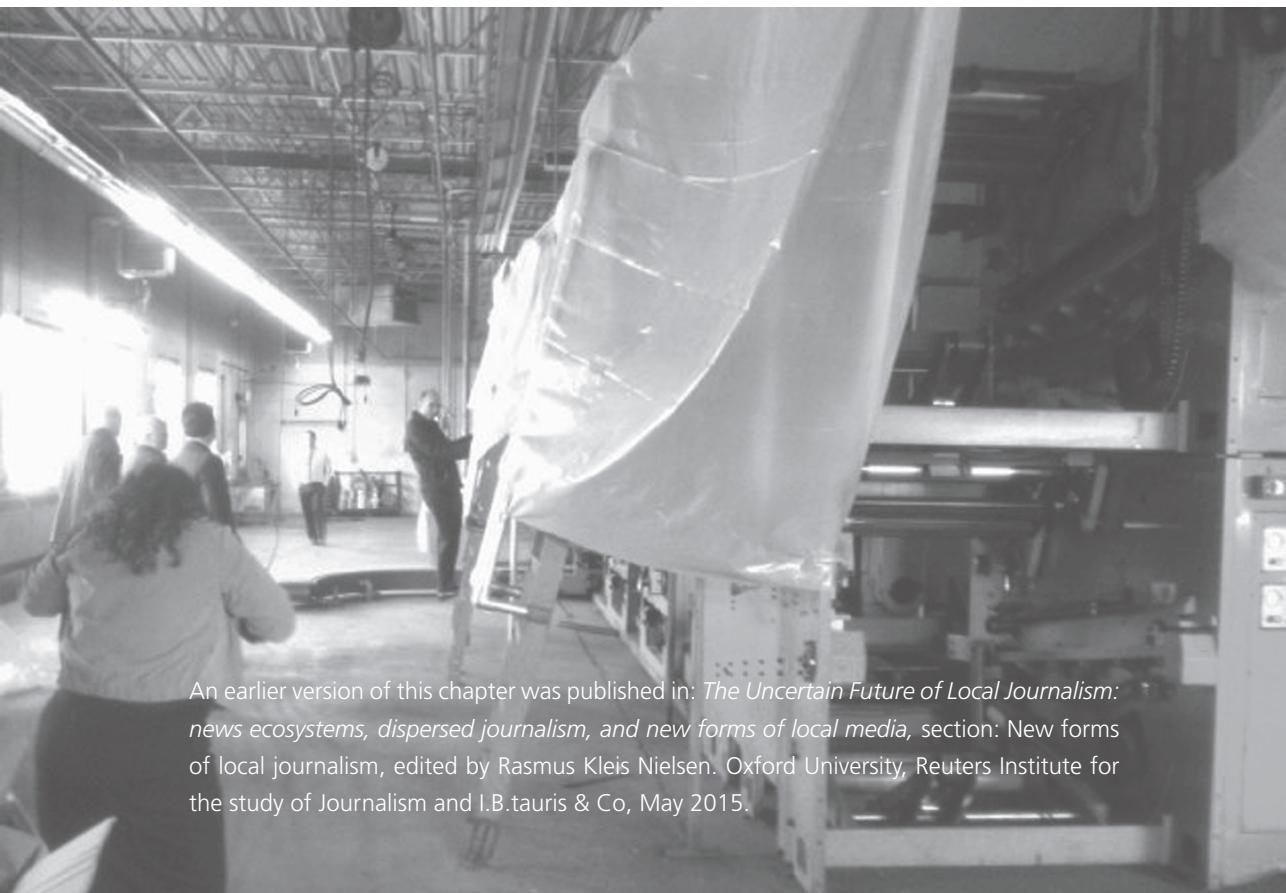
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6

HYPERLOCAL WITH A MISSION

Motivation, strategy, engagement



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ABSTRACT

Independent online news start-ups seem to gain ground in local news ecosystems. To what extent they demonstrate to be a sustainable asset remains to be seen. Based on content analyses of 123 local news websites and 97 interviews with owners of hyperlocals in the Netherlands, I studied motivations, editorial and organisational strategy, and the way hyperlocals engage with the community. Results indicate that the motivation to start a local online news website is for the better part grounded in the perception of a local news gap. But I also found sites predominantly motivated by commercial objectives. In all cases a common business strategy is that owners operate the service on a 'no-staff, no-budget' basis. Most sites rely on banner advertising. Crowd funding has been tried on a small scale only. The indications that a majority seem to disavow a journalistic approach as a leading strategy in the newsroom are remarkable. Practical and commercial opportunities prevail. In terms of strategy and claimed engagement there are only a few differences between ideologically non-profit hyperlocals and commercial chains. In general, sites underperform in terms of efficient use of resources, attracting readers and advertisers and the way they connect with sources and audiences. The sustainability of local news websites, therefore, is far from secured.

IDENTIFYING THE HYPERLOCAL

Hyperlocals are online local initiatives that aim to produce news gathered in and focused on a designated local area. Hyperlocal news operations can be defined as those media that target a geographic area, have a community orientation, contain original news reporting, are indigenous to the web, fill perceived news gaps and stimulate civic engagement (Kennedy, 2013; Metzgar, Kurpius & Rowley, 2011). I limit my research to online news hyperlocals that cover one or more geographic areas, contain original news, and are independent from traditional media operations.

Furthermore, a hyperlocal is not a blog (Lowrey, 2012). Publishing local news on a both regular and frequent basis is a necessity, for instance. It also needs to operate according to some sort of business model, including having some sort of (professional) staff. The operation has to follow some basic journalistic rules as well (Anderson, 2013; Kennedy 2013).

Local online news services are expected to play a significant role in adding value to local and regional political news ecosystems - defined as the complex infrastructure of various competitors, the municipality, businesses, and all others that are part of a dynamic symbiotic or parasitic collective: the news network. Hyperlocals are supposed to be more flexible, cheaper to operate, and more innovative, especially in terms of production and distribution. There are also high expectations concerning citizens as contributors. Could these hyperlocals take over the role of traditional media, or is another contribution to a local news ecosystem possible?

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission issued a report on the future of American journalism (Waldman, 2011) in which it acknowledges the potential of regional and local community investigative news sites, referring to it with optimism: 'independent non-profit websites are providing exciting journalistic innovation on the local level' (p. 191). The Knight Foundation agrees with the FCC, in expecting more non-commercial local online news websites to be launched in the United States by entrepreneurial journalists (Downie & Schudson 2009; Knight Commission, 2009). These enterprises are expected to have the capacity of combining high-quality journalism with business and technology skills (Knight Foundation, 2011). Bowman and Willis (2003) predicted that in the year 2021 amateur journalists would be responsible for half of all the news produced. But these are all speculations.

Information on the practical consequences of setting up and rolling out an independent hyperlocal, for instance, is scarce. The US FCC is optimistic but also issues a warning: 'A handful [independent non-profit websites] have created sustainable business models—but

most either are struggling to survive or are too small to fill the gaps left by newspapers' (p. 191). The most viable of the online American non-profit websites have a broad range of revenue sources, Remez (2012) found: foundation funding, grants, donations, corporate sponsorships, selling content to other media, and providing services such as education and training.

A new digital platform without the backing of an experienced editorial and healthy company depends heavily, as one might expect, on its entrepreneurial spirit and ideological position. The question for the hyperlocal newcomer on the local media market is: how do entrepreneurial or ideological spirits work out in relation to the hyperlocal's ambitions? How do they affect the organisational and editorial model? And is motivation alone sufficient for maintaining a viable hyperlocal news website that can play a significant role in society? This research aims to provide new insight into these topics.

NEW(S) BUSINESS IN TOWN

Online news media face difficulties when entering a new market (Lowrey, Parrott & Meade, 2011; Harte, 2013). Traditional news production is characterized by high start-up and fixed costs (Bakker, 2009). This is due to substantial investments in people and technology, so only the few companies that can make a profit quickly are able to survive (Naldi & Picard, 2012). Due to this 'first-mover effect', newcomers will find little market share left for them (Bakker, 2009). Moreover, incumbents can lower their prices to keep competitors out, since redistribution costs for news are close to zero. This might be different when online media use business models based exclusively on redistribution of freely gathered news, rather than on being producers themselves – because news production costs are known to form the bulk of operational expenses. The more interesting phenomenon, therefore, is why the apparent increase of news hyperlocals has occurred at all.

Studies on how hyperlocal news sites have been operating, what editorial choices they make, and how successful they are in entering and serving a local news ecosystem have been conducted in Chicago (Churchill & Ubois, 2009), Baltimore (PEW, 2010), Seattle (Fancher, 2011), and by Radcliffe (2012), who offers an overview of the UK hyperlocal landscape. Metzgar, Kurpius and Rowley (2011) cover six US initiatives; Thurman, Pascal and Bradshaw (2012) studied the *Local People* websites. Earlier research worth mentioning here is *We Media* (Bowman & Willis, 2003) and *We the media* (Gillmor, 2004), which gives insight in the ambitions and editorial strategy of independent news initiatives. The approach of Gillmor, however, concerned mainly how new models could offer citizens the possibility to operate their own media by easily accessible technology. A fairly successful strategy, as it appeared. 'The emergence of "we media" has accelerated at a remarkable rate', Gillmor writes (p. 14) According to Radcliffe (2012, p. 10) there are 'many reasons why hyperlocal

media is gaining popularity'. But he focuses primarily on technological possibilities and commercial opportunities, rather than motive, operations and perspective.

Examples of big media hyperlocals are *Examiner.com*, owned by Denver media-tycoon Philip Anschutz, with presence in 244 markets in the US (*Examiner.com Media Kit*). *Patch* was another big player in the US, owned by AOL, and served 800 US communities in 2012 (*Patch, Nieman Lab, 2012*). In Europe, there is for instance *myheimat.de*, which covers Germany and cooperates with more than a dozen major regional publishers. The Belgium *Belang van Limburg* websites cover all 48 municipalities in the province of Limburg. The 400 *Local People* websites are part of the media company Local World, owned by Northcliffe Media and Iliffe News and Media. Since June 2009, it serves cities with populations between 10–50,000 people in the South West of England and some London boroughs. The Netherlands has *Dichtbij.nl*, a product of Telegraaf Media Group (TMG). It operates more than 80 websites, covering all Dutch municipalities.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

The operation and strategies of hyperlocal news business is the focus of an increasing number of studies, as I have seen. What motivates people to start or participate in a hyperlocal news website, however, is still unmapped territory. Could it be as diverse as there are individual characteristics of participatory journalists? Surely, it is depending on socio-demographics, expertise, qualification and gender parameters, as Fröhlich, Quiring and Engesser (2012) put it. They asked writers of *myheimat.de* what their societal and individual motivations were. The authors find personal motivations such as individually perceived creativeness, the fascination of publishing and the enjoyment of presenting one's own ideas to a larger public. Typical journalistic motivations mentioned were balancing different perspectives and informing other people (*Ibid.*, 1056). For one, they seek it in professional journalistic self-conceptions - often defined by the idea of being a watchdog, playing a role in agenda setting, and informing the public so that people can participate in the democratic process. On the other end of the spectrum there is the concept of entertainment journalism, offering advice, showing new trends. The authors state that it is impossible to predict theoretically motivational patterns. 'Motivation has to be measured in the specific context of each journalistic product' (*Ibid.*, 1047). In their context, they distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. The first show which hyperlocal website owners connect to the goals and ideals of an open source community, basically supported by the idea of empowering social contacts, follow-up communication, and belonging to a social group. Extrinsic motivations, on the other hand, are based on a user's need to find a solution for product or service deficiencies. An ideological and a commercial distinction can be identified here, something I will build upon in my own research.

Three local news sites in the US, INDenverTimes, NewJerseyNewsroom, and Public Press in San Francisco, were studied and showed that pre-existing expectations (optimistic vs realistic), and the experiences of owners, can play a decisive role in the future of a website (Naldi & Picard, 2012). Owners can have a very clear idea on what they want with a news site – usually in line with their past experiences – but adapting to the market and changing the model seems to be much harder; these are cases of *formational myopia* according to the authors.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

Independent online news start-ups seem to gain ground in local news ecosystems. The goal of my study is to examine to what extent they seem to have a sustainable business model, adding value to a local news ecosystem. As I have shown, starting and successfully maintaining an online news website is assumed to depend on motivation, strategy and the civic consciousness of the owners. This is why my research questions are:

- What is the motivation of the owners of a hyperlocal website (RQ1)?
- What is the business approach of the owners of hyperlocal news services in terms of their organisational and editorial strategies (RQ2)?
- How do hyperlocals engage with society, the local news ecosystem and their community in particular (RQ3)?

Interviews with the owners of hyperlocal websites were conducted to provide the answers to these questions. For this purpose, all Dutch hyperlocal news websites - independent from traditional media operations - were taken into consideration that contained some original news reporting at least, and published regularly. Online platforms of newspapers, weeklies, and local or regional broadcasters were discarded, as were local aggregation sites that only contained news scraped by robots from other sites. This resulted in a database with 123 owners of 350 websites, 74 of which (59%) agreed to be interviewed with my research questions. From website chains I selected the site where the ownership was based, otherwise the largest or the first site. The 74 hyperlocal website owners were interviewed in the spring of 2013 by telephone or on camera (16), using the same semi-structured questionnaire.

To answer RQ1, all interviewees were asked what the main reasons were for having started their hyperlocal news website. I also used the content analyses of the entire website to check on additional information on motivation, often found in the 'About' section, or in separate files. For RQ2 I inquired after the business approach the owners claimed to have for their hyperlocal news services. Based on a geographically even spread, maximum variation in business scale and maximum variation in production level, I selected 23 owners for an additional interview to explore journalistic and business ethics. I specifically asked

how owners of hyperlocals value and implement journalistic codes, how they combine advertorial based business models with independent news production and how they deal with conflicting interests, especially in cases where local economic and political powers seem to interfere. RQ3 asked the owners about their involvement and interactions with the community and the news ecosystem. The telephone interviews lasted an average of 17 minutes; the camera interviews took an average of 42 minutes. All the interviews were transcribed afterwards.

RESULTS

The 123 websites I analysed covered 199 municipalities, meaning 1.8 sites per municipality. Of these businesses or organisations, 35 operated more than one site; on average these 'chains' owned 7.5 different sites. Figure 1 gives an overview of the geographical distribution of the hyperlocals. They are concentrated in the west of the country, which is not unexpected since two thirds of the population live in the west of the Netherlands, and most of the larger cities are located there.



Figure 1. Overview of the geographical distribution of the hyperlocals in the Netherlands.

Motivation (RQ1)

The majority of the owners say they want to serve the community and play a social role. ‘Doing business’ came second. And commercial motives were the most often combined with either serving the community or political incentives – often expressed negatively: to compensate for a lack of decent political coverage (Table 1). Owners of hyperlocals with different first or dominant reasons, such as gaining experience or being asked to join a start-up, or sites for which it remained unclear what motivation played a role, together made up 17% (21 owners) of the sites.

Table 1. Motivation of owners (123 local models)

	# of owners	Percentage
Social/Community	53	69%
Business/financial/commercial	27	35%
Providing political news	22	31%
Other	8	
Unclear	13	

* Total exceeds 100% as more than one answer was possible.

From some owners it wasn't clear what motivated them. Other reasons mentioned for starting or operating a hyperlocal were the fact that they were asked to take over, that they saw it as a way to pass time, and the fact that they missed being a reporter.

Most owners emphasized local cooperation as the most important reason to start a hyperlocal. Reports on art and culture, politics, science, human interest, and economy were mentioned as inspired by members of the community. Often confidence was expressed; communities are still full of creativity, and people value a new source:

That might be my ultimate goal: to build bridges between communities. That people understand each other more.

Our philosophy is that society needs to do more.

We started with music programmes, later we did more and more: news, and community coverage.

We started the site to promote community feeling in our city and to help local businesses.

I started this project when I was a teacher in civic journalism. I believe in community journalism.

Making money was the second-most mentioned motive. Financial independence and being able to hire professional journalists and sales staff were considered important. For this category finding subsidies was not the number one goal, but was mentioned as being part of a commercial business strategy. Most sites were happy to be able to break even, but it is a tough fight still, for all of them:

If we don't make money at the end of the year, I will be pulling the plug.

Until 2008 I worked for another site that closed because they found out they could not make enough money (also because they had to pay my salary). After that I started this site with volunteers.

Well, things are gradually improving, but it's obviously been a rotten time in recent years in terms of commerce.

Being unhappy with 'traditional' media reporting on mainly political news appeared to be the third important reason to start a hyperlocal. The start-ups felt they had to fill that gap:

Regular media neglected policy and politics.

We just think it's important to let people know what happens in our city.

We started as a response to the disappearance of local newspapers.

Professional journalism was not practiced here, so I jumped into that gap.

Business approach/strategy (RQ2)

As I saw, commercial objectives of selling paid content in a news environment are the second-most important reason to found and maintain a hyperlocal site. One dominant business strategy discovered is a no-staff, low-budget one. More than 90% of the sites (112) carried advertising (by others sources than the site or its owners) on their homepage in the period under survey. Strangely enough, only 88 of them (72%) offered information on how to advertise on the site.

Table 2. Advertising (123 local models)

	# of (home or central) sites with...	Percentage
Information on advertising	88	72%
Sites with ads	112	91%
Average # of ads on home page	8,5	
More than 50 ads	1	
Between 41 and 50	-	
Between 31 and 40	3	
Between 21 and 30	2	
Between 11 and 20	22	
Between 1 and 10	84	

Ads are unevenly distributed over the 123 sites. The top five of the hyperlocal websites contained a third of the total number of ads. Half of the ads were in the top 20 of the sites.

Keeping the costs low, as a way of coping with little turnover, is a widely embraced practice. Banner advertising dominates, but it is not the only source of income. Crowd funding had been tried, but has not amounted to considerable sums of money. Some hyperlocals tried selling stories to third parties.

We make money from banner ads and press releases from commercial parties.

Non-profit organizations can publish their content for free.

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We work without publisher, without subsidies, without subscribers, without a sugar daddy, without guardian angels, yes, even without God. Without your help we will die. So: how can you help? Donate! (...) we also sell some articles to the local newspaper.

We all work for free. We all work for our own CVs.

The lack of money is recognized as a serious continuity risk, but for many owners it seems not seriously jeopardising their optimism:

We are heavily supported by amateur reporters. They deliver the texts and images.

That hardly ever goes wrong, since, online, every bullshit story is immediately corrected by the public.

Many retired people are working with us, often with a background in journalism.

People are certainly watching us with some pleasure. They sometimes want to contribute. They are all volunteers, and volunteers do not worry about their income.

We have an editorial board of freelancers and contributors who have worked in journalism before. And then a group we call co-writers, amateurs who make up for about a quarter of the content.

Other strategies are the cooperation with regional news agencies and building new media tools benefiting from crowd sourcing:

We are a kind of broker between broadcasters and other media.

One of my bloggers has his own IT business. He developed an app for us. I knew nothing about it, but I liked it very much.

On most websites amateur reporting seems to be important. Only some of the journalists interviewed previously worked for traditional news media outlets. Committed to keeping the site lively, this sometimes means rethinking the editorial strategy and sometimes compromising on journalistic standards:

We work together with the police and the fire department.

You are pondering business-oriented news.

We are careful not to become a 911 site. Although we know that this is a market.

For instance by writing articles on assignment, advertorials, but with freedom to choose the content, not necessarily the subject. We think we can maintain journalistic quality, this way.

There is churn in the hyperlocal sector in the Netherlands. As in most other countries, sites open, then either stop updating or close down altogether. In the Netherlands, in 2013, half of the operations (66) were more than five years old. Despite the limitations of searching the digital archives of the Internet, I found some sites going back as far as 1997. Things changed from 2007 on. From then on, the number of local news sites increased almost every year. The churn rate over the first period, up to 2007, is hard to establish since definitive data on closings cannot always be obtained from the archives of the Internet. The crude growth rate I estimated decreased from 50 % in 2001 and 2002 to 5 % in 2012. Comparing the 2012 and 2013 data, I found that almost 10 % of the sites closed down within a year.

Ethics

Analysing the websites I found that about twenty per cent state that journalistic codes, either the Code of Bordeaux or its national derivative, or a self-proclaimed work protocol that involves fact checking and hearing both sides of a story, play a role in daily newsroom routines. The overwhelming majority, however, does not mention any journalism related principles on their website.

Based on the 23 interviews conducted on this issue, results show that ethics do play a role in editorial choices and practical news production, but views and practices differ substantially. The majority of the owners of hyperlocals reject the idea of being strictly a journalist, although bringing independent news is still an acclaimed primary goal. They rather allow

themselves the liberty of crossing the traditional line between the economic and democratic interests of their business. In half the cases this is said to be a necessary step in order to survive. In three of the 23 hyperlocals they specifically allow political interests to interfere with journalistic interests.

Table 3. Adapting ethics in newsroom and business

	Yes	No
Using a style book	2	21
Recognising Press Council	10	13
Publish verdict Press Council	14	9
Familiar with ethical code (Dutch)	19 (and sometimes: 1)	3
Implementing ethical code (Bordeaux)	6	16
Hearing both sides	9 (and sometimes: 6)	8
Dealing with complaints	23 (correction afterwards)	-

In 14 of the 23 cases, the sites work with journalists that have been active in journalism before, or who have some formal journalism training. In 19 cases, the website owners were able to pay contributors some compensation for their work. So, as one owner put it: Making them less vulnerable for sloppy work.

None of the owners of a hyperlocal said that they regularly considered journalism ethics in their daily routines. Two say they have a journalistic book of codes available. In four cases, they say being able to write proper Dutch is the most important rule that needs to be addressed.

Interestingly, ten owners of hyperlocals recognize the self-regulatory Netherlands Press Council. Although none of them had to deal with the Netherlands Press Council so far, 14 would publish a verdict on their website if they were asked to.

The ethical idea of hearing both sides is not commonly practised. All owners say they would rather publish a story and do the checking afterwards. This also means that stories are corrected after publication. One owner said that in those processes they preferably rely on their own sources.

If we have a good news story we simply publish the facts that are known to us, often without checking at the official sources. Recently we heard about a kid that got seriously injured at a soccer dug out. We were the first to report, within 20 minutes. We had two independent sources. We didn't consult the police since their press department is usually later informed than we are.

Ten out of the 23 interviewees say they do not apply hearing both sides of a story as standard procedure. Five hyperlocals say they put effort in working according to Dutch codes for journalism (*Leidraad voor de Journalistiek*). Seven owners know the Code of Bordeaux, none of them uses it on a daily bases.

Complaints are in all cases handled in the same way: stories are adjusted or corrected if the protest is well grounded. One of the hyperlocals has been in court for a case.

ENGAGEMENT (RQ3)

The local news start-ups in my study have difficulties in defining their role in a local news ecosystem. It is usually a small community in which the hyperlocals have to operate, in my study between 7000 up to a maximum of 300.000 potential news costumers, with an average of 55.000. Relation with local elites, government and business are sometimes delicate, since hyperlocals often cover the same people that buy ads or decide over financial support.

To discern what kind of community roles the hyperlocals want to perform, I specifically looked at how they use social media to connect with audiences, how they use the community as a source, and how their visibility in the community helps them.

Many owners express the ambition to have around-the-clock news on Twitter and Facebook. Facebook is seen as a platform that offers advantages. It is faster and it appeals more to younger people, an audience that is of particular interest to hyperlocals.

Hyperlocals by nature encourage people to get involved. Some of them do it by explicitly stating what the platform is all about, how they operate and what it can offer people that want to join. Others cooperate with people that already publish online elsewhere. Most sites use volunteers. An experienced copy editor is often necessary - although owners risk discouraging amateur contributors if they correct them too often. Professional contacts with organisations offering content, such as press releases, are common. Interaction is encouraged on most websites. On the majority of sites, people can react, although owners say they do not always find the time to respond to those comments or stories. In some cases people can also participate, either on their own initiative or invited. Most sites allow people and organisations to post their own unedited press releases. The difference between editorial content, advertorials and press releases is not always clear.

Hyperlocals treasure their contacts with the municipality. Some are regularly in touch with spokespersons, colleagues from other media and other key players to establish good relations. Some say they prefer working in anonymity, to guard their independence. And

being around all the time is a demanding task. Like going to town hall meetings on a regular basis, as many do not succeed in doing, or in being the local 'friend' of an outsider:

We even help people find their lost cats or dogs. Later they call us and let us know how happy they are. That's also a way to socialize.

We have people that speak Korean. So we attract people from South Korea too, for instance, if they happen to live there but originate here.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

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The motivation to start a local online news website is for the better part grounded in the perception of a local news gap. However, I also found sites predominantly motivated by commercial objectives. In both cases, these are what Fröhlich, Quiring and Engesser (2012) would call extrinsic motivations. In any case, practical and commercial opportunities prevail. In terms of strategy and claimed engagement, there are only few differences between ideologically non-profit hyperlocals and commercial chains.

In all cases a common business strategy is that owners operate the service on a 'no-staff, no-budget' basis. Most sites rely on banner advertising. Crowd funding has been tried on a small scale only.

One of the goals of hyperlocals has a more intense relationship with both the public and advertisers in their community – but without losing independence. My study showed how the lack of resources has triggered ingenuity and forced owners, employees and volunteers to commit themselves and to adapt to new situations.

Ethically speaking, hyperlocals are vulnerable. If one is prepared to allow advertorials in between original or independent political news, and if one permits third parties to publish unedited press releases in a news environment, a news platform risks losing its credibility. This is why there seems to be a gap between noble motives on the one hand and the business approach on the other. Sometimes ideology is getting in the way of sound organisational and editorial decisions. If an owner decides to operate only with qualified staff, for example, but has insufficient revenues to pay for them, then the business is seriously jeopardised economically.

Based on my interviews I conclude that hyperlocals do not show a great deal of ambition towards journalistic ethical codes or even practical protocols. They see providing news as their main result; journalistic practices in this process are instrumental rather than conditional. Checking facts has become part of the follow up of a story, and does not seem to be an

inseparable part of the editorial production process.

Ethical behaviour as a quality indicator means that hyperlocals do not live up to expectations and they might take a risk in losing credibility and the trust of the audience. This means that news consumers might start wondering if the news that they are reading is fairly and thoughtfully produced. This might lead to a loss of visitors to the site.

Finally, online local news sites in the Netherlands underperform in terms of efficient use of resources, acquisition of readers and advertisers and connecting with the audience in general. Regarding the latter, finding its civic role locally, I am signalling a discrepancy between ambition and practice. All the participants indicated that their digitally native platform gave them more freedom to experiment with newer technologies in ways they could not have done while working for traditional news outlets. At the same time, taking advantage of all the new tools and ideas is often not considered a priority, though often this may be due to lack of time and money.

For the Netherlands I now know who the local online news start-ups are, where they are located, and what they do. Perhaps more importantly, I know what drives the entrepreneurs to start an online news site. The next step in my study is to follow evolution in this market over time, and see how the organisational, editorial and economic practices develop. I will also address the developments concerning the ethical and economic vulnerability.

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7

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS



SUMMARY

Although regional media companies in the Netherlands have become fully aware of the consequences of the digitalization of the mass media, they have shown reluctance to change. They have cut costs and imposed austerity as a first response, rather than reconsider their strategies, innovate and invest. With broadband Internet came a full-scale digitisation of media publications and platforms, and a seemingly inevitable shift towards 'online first.' New players entered the market who have literally pushed aside the legacy publishers and have gained a market share in an unprecedented rapid way.

The central research question of this study is: *How can Dutch regional news media develop and implement innovation strategies in order to fulfil their democratic functions and being economically viable?* I looked at the role of regional news media, the innovation strategies of legacy publishers and the potential of alternative local news business models. The purpose of my research was to evaluate innovations that could result in synergy and improved engagement with audiences. So far, there have been two promising strategies: implementing convergence and going hyperlocal.

I explored how local news is being maintained in the absence of a regional keystone medium. I gauged empirical data showing how regional print news publishers in the Netherlands are still lost in the digital transition - at both the management and newsroom levels. And I've investigated the consequences of the consolidation tactics of regional publishers - pulling back from the local market and allowing local start-ups to step in. With enthusiasm and low-cost strategies, the hyperlocals started to compete with incumbents, and in many cases with success.

I started my research with a longitudinal explorative study of a local news ecosystem without a regional daily newspaper. The role and importance of such a newspaper in that news ecosystem was tested in a situation where a keystone medium was absent. The urgency of the next steps of my investigation was proven by that study.

Next, I investigated to what extent and how convergence, a broadly embraced innovation, was expected to create synergy. I studied the opinions of those concerned with the implementation and management of this process, and how organisations were dealing with the impact of convergence on both the organisational and news production levels. I investigated how regional newspapers implemented cross-media news production in a self-acclaimed attempt to address modern digital news consumption and as a presumably promising way to reconnect with their audiences. I studied specifically how convergence ambitions were actually put into practice for daily news production.

In addition, I investigated the economic parameters of the different hyperlocal news business models in the Netherlands, in order to explore whether going hyperlocal is a feasible alternative innovation strategy that answers to the objectives of a sustainable media economy and creates synergy as well as more public engagement. For this concluding part of the study, and to address the potential of investments in the local news ecosystem, I also took a closer look at the news production of hyper-locals, business motivation, and the way owners view digital and social media as part of their strategy of convergence to connect with consumers.

The main results of my study can be summarized as follows:

1 LOCAL NEWS ECOSYSTEMS SUFFER FROM THE LACK OF KEYSTONE MEDIA

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The absence of a regional newspaper is not necessarily compensated for by a thriving online news ecosystem. At least not in the Dutch municipality of Almere, a city without a local newspaper, but also not in comparable situations elsewhere in the world, according to recent empirical studies in Denmark, England and the United States. Rather, I see the opposite happening: a deserted media landscape where local political news is the first victim. The political news production in a no-paper city is below average compared to regions with a strong media player. The ecosystem of online news channels (not connected with traditional print or broadcast media) publishing on local politics in Almere is actually structured around two freesheets with their websites, one regional and one local broadcaster and a few amateur online news services.

The number of online news channels reporting on politics has grown substantially, mainly due to social media accounts like Twitter and Facebook. However, both offline and online news channels that report on political issues consist for an important part of aggregators and other websites - with no, or only very few, members of staff.

2 CONVERGENCE LACKS A CLEAR AND SHARED VISION AND SERIOUS INVESTMENTS

Convergence of print, radio, television and Internet publications into crossmedial concepts produced by integrated newsrooms has become a reality for regional newspapers in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, there is a measurable difference between the vision of the management and that of the editors on how convergence could and should lead to synergy. Most online editors have more ambitions than their management. Management tends to operate safely while the journalists want systematic investments, both into the training of employees and the technical infrastructure for convergence.

There are important differences in the way convergence strategies are adopted between the six different publishing companies I studied. Regional newspapers in the Netherlands – each in their own way – seemed to underestimate the consequences of implementing convergence as a synergy tool for at least preserving their news market share. A general reluctance and the absence of clear and common strategies seem to explain the slow and somehow undirected actions. The lack of a systematic collection of experiences, and of taking these experiences into account for the next phase in innovation, is striking. I did not see substantially similar patterns in the newspapers' strategies, not even at the different papers of the same publishing company. This suggests that, positively speaking, newspapers enjoy a great deal of freedom in implementing convergence or, to put it negatively, they lack a clear vision and strategy.

Although management and editors of regional newspapers in the Netherlands say how strongly committed they are to convergence with all its consequences, there is a manifest discrepancy between these ambitions and practice. The overall convergence practice makes a disorganized impression. So, for instance, regional newspapers in the Netherlands rarely produce political content that is enriched or produced especially for online purposes.

The lack of a consistent convergence strategy at all levels of the company is mirrored by important differences visible in the way convergence strategies were adopted. Online video news, reporting by Twitter feeds, or stimulating journalists to blog – these were all ad-hoc endeavours that received neither the trust nor the funding to become a structural effort.

3 ONLINE HYPERLOCAL NEWS OFFERS ARE GROWING, AND THOUGH STRUGGLING, HERE TO STAY

In the Netherlands, hyperlocal start-up news websites are gaining importance, in spite of all the obstacles I identified. In the past ten years, over a hundred and twenty owners of independent news websites have managed to survive locally and have become more professional, and some of their sites are even profitable.

In general, however, the hyperlocal business model is still a low-budget concept based on volunteers. The use of social media is not yet optimal, and advertising revenues are hardly sufficient. But there is a growing entrepreneurial spirit, visible in a rather good performance in terms of local news – dominant for all models – and a substantial portion of original content.

The motivation to start a local online news website is for the better part grounded in the perception of a local news gap: owners of these sites are not satisfied with the local news offered by traditional news providers. Of course, many site owners are also motivated by

commercial objectives. In terms of strategy and claimed engagement, however, there are only a few differences between ideologically non-profit hyperlocals and the ones that are more commercially orientated. Overall, owners show a passion for serving a community. However, a majority of site owners are somewhat uncomfortable with a true journalistic approach. Commercial goals prevail. This is why, in attempts to find new avenues of income, hyper-locals permit third parties to publish unedited and paid press releases in a news environment.

Online local news sites in the Netherlands underperform in terms of an efficient use of resources, the acquisition of readers and advertisers, and in their attempts to connect with audiences. Nevertheless, the lack of resources has triggered ingenuity and has forced owners, employees and volunteers to commit to their project and to adapt to new situations. Although there is more freedom to experiment with technologies compared to traditional news media, taking advantage of new tools and ideas is often not considered a priority, mostly due to lack of time and money and certain skills.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of my studies have a number of implications for the stakeholders involved in regional news ecosystems, and they could inspire future research.

Media organisations

A first general implication of my findings is that, for regional publishers, distribution and not circulation is the most important business parameter. Convergence towards an integrated approach of the news market and an online first strategy seem inevitable. However, it will only create synergy when strategy and practical implications are both defined well and broadly shared in the company. So, the variety of often ad-hoc decisions on the tools and processes chosen to implement convergence should be replaced by a more informed strategy based on national best practices and international benchmark studies.

Re-investing in local news could be an answer to growing competition. The hyperlocals I have studied show that start-up costs are low, as is digital technology that allows social interaction with news consumers, a critical factor in gaining customer loyalty. Re-entering local or hyperlocal markets and being more in touch with the audience would be logical steps for incumbents as well.

Journalists

For journalists, convergence is a means to be sought, and not a goal in itself. Not 'how' news is brought to the consumer is relevant - the choice of platform and so on - but 'what' news. Digital technology has advanced to such a degree that technical skills are not the main bottleneck anymore; journalistic choices in what news to offer, and to what extent, are more important.

In addition, presenting the mere news facts alone cannot beat the competition of low-cost aggregators and online start-ups. Added value – that is, quality – has to be created in original stories (self-produced), scoops and follow-ups, skilled political interviews, and multimedia dossiers. Journalists have to extend their skills to be present on different platforms and to lead public debates and voice opinions on online and offline platforms. Being visible in the public space as an ambassador for democracy and social integration seems a natural role for a journalist.

Journalism education

The results of my study have clear implications for journalism education. Journalism schools should not only train students in established journalism skills and in ever-changing digital technology, but also in media innovation and business strategies. Developing entrepreneurial skills will enhance the awareness that journalism is increasingly subject to market rules. This demands more flexible media work. It is also important for journalists to realise that 'institutional' behaviour might be at the root of the slow innovation visible in the transition to economic realities. All media workers need to take responsibility individually to keep the news business viable. What this means for media ethics need to be subject of ongoing debate.

My results also indicate that the local news ecosystem is a potential - albeit challenging - job market. As this study shows, local news has reclaimed attention and importance, both as a foundation for democracy as well as a commercially attractive product.

Local online start-ups

As we have seen, the hyperlocal markets and their business models in the Netherlands show a number of problems. There is insufficient investment in the production of a steady stream of original news and in securing advertising revenues. Moreover, hyperlocals could do more in terms of their visibility and presence. This is why they need to expand their social-media strategy and to produce more original news.

Owners of hyperlocal news businesses could benefit from training programmes on developing their site, in terms of navigation, focus, business model and staffing, on adapting to new market circumstances (competitors, advertising), and on the behaviour of the audience.

There is actually no lack of initiative, enthusiasm, and motivation. But let's face it: noble motives on the one hand and the business approach on the other present a severe dilemma. Sometimes ideology is getting in the way of sound economic, organisational and editorial decisions, and vice versa. Both situations cause damage to basic principles of professional journalism.

Society

My explorative case study in Almere gave new insights into the way a local news ecosystem without a daily newspaper develops over half a decade. The lack of a regional daily – or another keystone medium - means that there is a serious risk that many local political events and issues are not covered at all. This has consequences for the availability of independent news, harming the political discourse. At the same time, however, local start-up news producers do try to fill the news gap and show potential.

For the democratic process in local communities, this means that all is not lost. A substantial growth in the number of online news channels with a working business model might create a promising and rewarding local news market. However, which business model is sustained locally needs further research, as does the question of how hyperlocals persist in performing journalistically, ethically and businesswise at the same time.

In any case, governments at all levels need to recognise that a lively local news ecosystem is vital to a local community. As I have seen in my literature studies, news media inform people as voters, foster integration and are key to political checks and balances. A structural public support for media, profit-making and non-profit-making, and local journalism in particular, should therefore be taken into serious consideration. It seems unsustainable for a credible government to persist in drawing the line at radio and television when it comes to supporting mass media with a legal task for culture, sports and political news. When local news production is platform-independent, and when local news needs special attention, it is evident that the funding of local journalism should be platform-independent as well.

Journalism research and media studies

My study supports the academic consensus that the future of (regional) newspapers shows many ominous signs. Technological convergence is mainly implemented as a way to reduce costs and force efficiency into the newsroom, rather than a way to adapt to behaviour of

the news consumer. I now better understand why implementing convergence is such a slippery road. McKercher (2002) stated: 'In recent years the convergence of technology has proceeded hand in hand with the convergence of corporations that ... above all seek to profit from technological innovations' (p. 3). Deuze (2007) concluded that empirical studies on newsroom convergence have noted how 'the biggest obstacles to seamless integration always boils down to cultural clashes' (p. 115) - culture clashes between management and work floor, between junior and senior staff, and between text and radio, photo and video. That this makes the transition to a *digital first* newsroom a complex and difficult process became apparent in my study of the regional newspapers in the Netherlands.

Therefore, not surprisingly, studying the effects of innovation processes, and understanding its consequences, is a complex process too. It obviously needs an integrated approach. A standard set-up should at least take into account social, technological and economic factors and has to look at developments over time. Adding to this complexity is the fact that media function in an economic reality where it is important to differentiate between news content and the news producer, the news organization and the media workers, and between media as technologies and media as cultural entities. This means, for instance, that the consequences of implementing a digital-first strategy cannot be totally controlled by an organization.

My research was bound to space, scope and time, as research inherently is. I leaned on explorative case studies, and in the time between data gathering and data analyses changes were under way. My findings and conclusions focus on the regional newspaper companies in the Netherlands at the beginning of the 21st century. As part of my multi-perspective qualitative and quantitative explorative studies, I interviewed key players from all of those companies. But certainly, and as always, an even greater number of respondents would be useful. My research in Almere should be replicated in due time to see what is changing in the regional news ecosystem - especially when it comes to how efficiently social media can help local news start-ups to lure visitors to the website. Moreover, I hope that my study will be replicated in other regions as well to show how generalizable my results are.

In addition, my research supports the idea that studying media management is important in gaining lasting insights into strategic choices, the urgency towards change and the willingness to invest. I explored whether responses of regional newspapers to market change can be explained by rational-choice decisions. However, the Dutch regional news industry seems less goal-oriented than one would expect. It behaves institutionally, rather than in a market-orientated way. Why this is the case, and how organisational theory offers opportunities to challenge and change this attitude, deserves further research.

Whether independent news start-ups are appropriate substitutes for, or an addition to,

legacy news media certainly depends on answers to the question of what political news should look like when serving public debates on issues.

Exploring the strategies for adding value to news production beyond just implementing convergence is worthwhile. The same goes for questions concerning how owners of hyperlocals value and implement journalistic codes of conduct, how they combine advertorial-based business models with independent news production and how they deal with conflicting interests, especially in cases where local economic and political powers seem to interfere.

Still, like Quinn (2005) and Thurman and Herbert (2008) have shown for British and American newspapers, I found enough encouraging signs in the Netherlands that could signal a change in media work for the better. With Singer (2001) and Currah (2009) I trust that regional and local news media are most likely to survive the digital crisis due to their place in the community and their fundamental role as a source for *need-to-know* information.

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SAMENVATTING



INLEIDING

Aanleiding

Mede als gevolg van economische tegenwind en de opkomst van veelal gratis online alternatieven verkeren regionale kranten in Nederland al enige jaren in zwaar weer. Gedrukte oplages lopen terug en online blijven advertentie-inkomsten achter. Het bestaande verdienmodel van de regionale krant staat onder druk.

De cijfers zijn veelzeggend. In 1980 werden er in Nederland nog 2.7 miljoen regionale kranten verspreid. Tot halverwege de jaren negentig van de vorige eeuw daalde dat aantal nauwelijks, maar in de tweede helft van dat decennium veranderde de trend ingrijpend. Sinds de eeuwwisseling is de oplage van de regionale kranten met 30 procent gedaald en komt nu uit rond de 1,4 miljoen. Wat daar aan digitale abonnees nog bij kan worden opgeteld, is onduidelijk, die cijfers worden nog niet gestandaardiseerd gemeten. De websites van kranten bereiken wel een miljoenenpubliek, maar voor het raadplegen van de meeste sites hoef je geen abonnee te zijn. In het najaar van 2015 zijn er nog vijf onafhankelijke uitgeverijen van regionale kranten, en is het aantal onafhankelijk opererende titels gedaald van 35 in 1980 tot 17 nu.

De toekomst van de regionale nieuwsvoorziening heeft al enige tijd de zorg van uitgevers, journalisten, wetenschappers en de overheid. De Tijdelijke Commissie Innovatie en Toekomst Pers (2009) die in Nederland onderzoek deed naar overlevingsstrategieën voor kranten, en waarin deze groepen ook vertegenwoordigd waren, stelde dat in het bijzonder regionale nieuwsmedia in moeilijkheden verkeren:

‘Regionaal is de situatie urgenter en lijken de gevolgen acuter in te grijpen dan op landelijk niveau. De markten waarop regionale dagbladen moeten opereren zijn beperkter; de teruggang in oplages en advertentieomzet wegen daarom zwaarder. Bovendien bestaan er in de regio minder media die de noodzakelijke rol van de pers in de democratie kunnen invullen.’ (p. 6)

Regionale kranten zagen de ontwikkeling zelf ook, en keken bepaald niet lijdzaam toe. Als antwoord op de oplage- en inkomstendaling ontwikkelden kranten digitale producten en verkenden ze nieuwe markten. Een breed gedragen ‘digital first’ strategie zorgde ervoor dat het journalistieke handwerk en de organisatie van de redactie ingrijpend zijn gewijzigd. Van een dagelijkse deadline gingen de meeste kranten naar een 24 uur per dag productieproces, zeven dagen per week, terwijl journalisten vaak plotseling voor meerdere platforms crossmediaal moesten produceren. Ook het verdienmodel van de nieuwsorganisatie veranderde fundamenteel. Onder meer bleven online advertentietarieven achter bij advertenties in de

gedrukte krant, tot soms wel een tiende van de marges.

HET PROBLEEM

Een marginalisering van de regionale pers zal niet alleen negatieve gevolgen hebben voor de pluriformiteit van de pers in Nederland en de werkgelegenheid in de media maar vooral voor de nieuwsvoorziening in de regio. Het democratisch recht van burgers op een brede, onafhankelijke informatievoorziening in de regio zal daarmee onder druk komen te staan.

In Nederland hebben het verlies van lezers en adverteerders geleid tot kritische vragen over de bruikbaarheid van de gangbare businessmodellen. Redacteuren en managers van krantenredacties spraken de wens uit een transitie door te maken naar een aan de markt aangepast productiemodel, met het digitaal en online uitgeven als uitgangspunt. Dit betekende verregaande keuzes voor ingrijpende investeringsstrategieën, terwijl succesvolle voorbeelden daarvan niet vorhanden waren, ook niet in het buitenland. Kostenbesparing, gevolgd door krimp en strategische terugtrekking uit lokale markten, leken daarom aanvankelijk het belangrijkste antwoord van de regionale uitgeverijen.

Maar ook de ontwikkeling van crossmediale businessmodellen werd een continue praktijk - een dure praktijk van proberen en bijsturen. Websites genereerden na verloop van tijd enige omzet uit advertentie-inkomsten, maar van substantiële winstmarges was en is nog geen sprake. In de meeste gevallen konden nieuwswebsites niet kostendekkend worden gemaakt. Hoe in de toekomst regionale kranten geld kunnen verdienen met internet is een vraag waar vooralsnog geen antwoord op is gevonden.

Regionale kranten zijn de grootste journalistieke werkgever in Nederland. Een gedwongen transitie naar meer crossmediaal werken in een digitale omgeving - met teruglopende inkomsten - heeft naar verwachting grote invloed op de wijze waarop journalistieke opleidingen het curriculum inrichten. De markt is immers ingrijpend veranderd: er werken niet alleen veel minder mensen, er wordt door de overblijvers ook anders gewerkt.

DE PERSPECTIEVEN

Een belangrijk verschil tussen print en online edities is het inkomstenmodel. Print draait voor een groot deel op abonnees, online is vrijwel geheel afhankelijk van adverteerders. Onder vakmensen en wetenschappers heerste de verwachting dat internetgebruikers nimmer bereid zullen zijn te betalen voor nieuwscontent. Deze veronderstelling is gebaseerd op het feit dat hetzelfde nieuws elders gratis is te verkrijgen is en waarschijnlijk blijft, op het gegeven dat digitaal eigendom in de overheersende internetcultuur technisch moeilijk te beschermen is, en op het feit dat er nog altijd veel technische barrières zijn voor microbetalingen op internet.

De meeste kranten lieten hun nieuws gratis lezen in een poging bezoekers te trekken en zo te verdienen aan de advertenties. Voor sommige informatie werd wel geld gevraagd, meestal de informatie die uniek was voor de krant. Dit zorgde voor extra inkomsten, maar er waren ook aanwijzingen dat dit als functie had de krantenplage te beschermen. In het algemeen heerde er een optimisme over de te verwachten inkomsten uit online modellen, inclusief content voor mobiele telefoons en andere online nieuwsproducten. Maar de verwachting was dat alleen een select publiek bereid zou zijn te betalen voor online content, en dat zou geen basis voor een inkomstenmodel zijn. Online kranten kunnen alleen inkomsten van enige omvang genereren door het laten betalen van lezers, is de algemene conclusie. Dat dit mogelijk is bewijst het succes van een concept als iTunes, waar een gebruiker betaalt voor content met toegevoegde waarde die elders niet of moeilijk te krijgen is.

Convergentie

Naast de beschreven problemen die door de omschakeling naar digitaal publiceren dreigen te ontstaan bij uitgeverijen, liggen er ook kansen. Multiplatform-publiceren wordt bijvoorbeeld gezien als een manier om beter aan te sluiten bij de wensen van de moderne nieuwsconsument, terwijl het ook de productiviteit van medewerkers zou kunnen verhogen en een manier is om een groter deel van de online advertentiemarkt te verwerven. Voor de redacties betekent dit een ingrijpende omschakeling van werken voor de gedrukte krant, met zijn eigen dynamiek, naar werken in een omgeving, redactioneel en organisatorisch, waarin online publiceren en digitaal produceren leidend zijn. In de volle breedte wordt dit proces samengevat als convergentie, het laten versmelten van oude en nieuwe routines. Convergentie is een breed begrip dat op verschillende manieren wordt geïnterpreteerd. In deze studie wordt voor convergentie een definitie gebruikt die is samen te vatten als: bedrijven ontwikkelen samenwerking tussen (journalistieke en niet-journalistieke) redacties en organisaties om nieuws te maken, te promoten, te hergebruiken of uit te wisselen, en voor de introductie van crossmediale (geïntegreerde) concepten (naar Deuze, 2004).

In een poging nieuwsconsumenten en adverteerders terug te winnen, experimenteren regionale kranten al volop met crossmediale projecten. In sommige gevallen leidt dit tot een blijvende innovatie, ondanks het uitblijven van succesvolle verdienmodellen. Publiceren voor meer platformen tegelijk is de norm geworden. Waar het eerst vooral de aanwezigheid in meer mediasectoren betrof, gaat het inmiddels een stap verder: dezelfde of verwante 'content' publiceren op meer platforms waarbij die content geproduceerd wordt door één team. Er is hier sprake van een businessstrategie: het realiseren van synergie door verschillende mediavormen te laten samenwerken. Het dominante nieuwe publicatieplatform is in eerste instantie Internet. Andere digitale platformen zoals mobiel en tablets zijn sterk groeiend.

Hyperlocals

Niets wijst erop dat de vraag naar regionaal nieuws zal verdwijnen. Dat bewijzen ook de nieuwe lokale nieuws start-ups, de hyperlocals, die de afgelopen jaren opduiken. In hoeverre zij erin slagen publiek en adverteerders duurzaam te binden is nog grotendeels onbekend, wel is duidelijk dat het om honderden nieuwe initiatieven gaat. De vraag is of de eigenaren van hyperlocals een model in handen hebben dat ook regionale uitgevers een kans biedt om de aansluiting met de nieuwsconsument te hervinden. Sluit convergentie met name aan op de wens om synergie te creëren binnen bedrijfsonderdelen, het produceren van nieuws in een hecht lokaal nieuws ecosysteem kan aansluiten bij de behoefte van nieuwsconsumenten om dichter op het nieuws te zitten, en meer betrokken te zijn bij wat er in hun directe omgeving gebeurt, met name politiek.

Vormen van lokale netwerkjournalistiek zijn er in grote diversiteit. Het bundelt de potentiële kracht van interactieve communicatie tussen journalistieke en burgercompetenties. Maar duidelijk is ook dat nieuwsblog-initiatieven een korte levensduur hebben en over het algemeen het harde nieuws negeren. Een verklaring is dat het bloggers over het algemeen aan journalistieke vaardigheid ontbreekt om hard nieuws te volgen en te brengen. Maar dat biedt naar verwachting ook kansen, bijvoorbeeld voor het laagdrempelig instappen van nieuwsondernemers. De journalistiek opent zo mogelijkheden om van zichzelf te leren en in een continu proces een noodzakelijke evolutie door te maken.

HET ONDERZOEK

Het nastreven van convergentie voor regionale nieuwsmedia en het veroveren van de lokale nieuwsmarkt bieden kansrijke strategieën voor het herwinnen van lezersbereik en het genereren van inkomsten. Het sluit beter aan bij de hedendaagse mediaconsumptie (sociale onlinenetwerken, beeldcultuur, 24/7 nieuws, mobiel internetgebruik) en zou een antwoord kunnen zijn op de behoefte van adverteerders om hun publiek online beter te begrijpen en beter te bereiken, en daarmee een duurzaam verdienmodel veilig te stellen. Journalistiek en organisatorisch vereist een dergelijke transitie grote veranderingen. Van journalisten worden andere vaardigheden gevraagd en daarbij ook een andere instelling ten aanzien van deadlines, het delen van informatie en de participatie van het publiek. In de praktijk, op de redactievloer, wordt dat vaak aangeduid als een ‘newsroom’-ontwikkeling, waar publicatie op verschillende platforms gecoördineerd wordt. Verslaggevers zijn geen specialisten meer maar flexibele nieuwsgaarders, ondernemender, die los van platformen moeten kunnen denken maar ook specifieke content voor verschillende platformen kunnen genereren, produceren en publiceren.

In een aantal gevallen is de samenvoeging (convergentie) van verschillende journalistieke uitingen (krant, radio, televisie, internet) tot één crossmediale redactie (newsroom) al realiteit. Onbetwist is dat het publiek de (veelal gratis) digitale nieuwsvoorziening intensief gebruikt, en er bestaat ook geen twijfel bij mediabedrijven over de noodzaak om daarop met investeringen te anticiperen. Een belangrijke vraag is of de nieuwe op synergie gerichte crossmediale nieuwsorganisatie voldoende inkomsten genereert, en waar in de markt de economische kansen liggen.

Het doel van deze studie was dan ook te onderzoeken hoe Nederlandse regionale dagbladen innovatie strategieën kunnen ontwikkelen en implementeren die bijdragen aan een democratische taakopvatting en economisch levensvatbaar zijn. Er is daarvoor gekeken naar de rol van regionale kranten in een lokaal nieuwsnetwerk, naar innovatiestrategieën van uitgevers en het potentieel van lokale nieuws start-ups. Het doel hiervan was innovaties in beeld brengen die kunnen leiden tot synergievoordelen en het verbeteren van de betrokkenheid met het publiek. Uit het literatuuronderzoek kwamen convergentie en hyperlokale journalistiek als twee veelbelovende strategieën naar voren. Daar ligt dan ook de focus van deze studie.

In Nederland, en ook in andere landen, neemt het aantal regio's toe waar geen regionale krant meer verschijnt. De vraag is wat dit betekent voor de lokale nieuwsvoorziening, eenvoudig gezegd: stort deze in elkaar of nemen nieuwe initiatieven het voortouw? Dit onderzoek is van start gegaan met een longitudinale studie (2010 – 2014) van een lokaal nieuws ecosysteem zonder regionaal dagblad, in deze studie de gemeente Almere (hoofdstuk 2). Nog niet eerder is over een dergelijk lange periode een lokaal nieuwsnetwerk gevuld. De rol van een regionale krant – ook wel *keystone medium* genoemd - wordt met name zichtbaar in een situatie waar hij ontbreekt, dit vanuit de gedachte: je weet pas wat je hebt als het kwijt bent. Deze casus had mede het doel de urgentie van de volgende stappen in het onderzoek in beeld te brengen.

Daarnaast is onderzocht in hoeverre convergentie als een breed omarmde innovatie de verwachte synergievoordelen en de aansluiting bij de nieuwe nieuwsconsument zou kunnen creëren (hoofdstuk 3). Hiervoor is een serie interviews gehouden met managers en redacteuren, de beslisser in het innovatietraject, van alle achttien regionale kranten in Nederland. De visies en ambities van de betrokkenen bij de implementatie en het beheer van het convergentieproces, zijn hiervoor geanalyseerd, alsmede de antwoorden op vragen over hoe organisaties omgaan met de gevolgen van convergentie voor zowel de organisatie als de nieuwsproductie. Daarna is onderzocht hoe de regionale kranten crossmediale nieuwsproducties daadwerkelijk uitvoeren (hoofdstuk 4). De vraag hier was: zijn de ambities ook terug te zien in de dagelijkse praktijk?

De derde pijler van deze studie was het met behulp van interviews, content-analyses en casestudies in kaart brengen en analyseren van de belangrijkste economische en journalistieke parameters van hyperlokale nieuws start-ups in Nederland (hoofdstuk 5). Ook dit was nog niet eerder gedaan. Hier was de vraag in hoeverre hyperlokale journalistiek een haalbaar alternatief vormt voor bestaande nieuwsmedia. Aansluitend is gekeken naar de motivaties om een online nieuwsdienst te beginnen, naar de gevolgde nieuwsstrategieën en naar de manieren waarop hyperlocals zich proberen te verbinden met de consument (hoofdstuk 6).

DE RESULTATEN

1 Lokale nieuws ecosystemen lijden onder de afwezigheid van een *keystone* medium

Het ontbreken van een regionale krant wordt niet zomaar gecompenseerd door een online nieuwsvoorziening. Althans niet in en rond Almere, een stad zonder een plaatselijke dagblad. En ook niet in vergelijkbare situaties elders in de wereld, zoals recente empirische studies laten zien. Eerder het omgekeerde lijkt te gebeuren: het ontstaan van een desolaat medialandschap zonder noemenswaardige lokale politieke nieuwsvoorziening.

De offline en online nieuwskanalen die rapporteren over politieke kwesties bestaan voor een belangrijk deel uit websites van bestaande huis-aan-huisbladen en omroepen, allerhande aggregatoren en een enkele hyperlokale start-up – zonder uitzondering met geen of een zeer kleine staf. Is nationaal het aantal online en het soort nieuwskanalen met politiek als onderwerp sterk gegroeid tussen 2010 en 2014, in Almere is tegen deze trend in het aantal producenten van origineel lokaal politiek nieuws juist teruggelopen.

2 Het ontbreekt bij regionale kranten aan een heldere en gedeelde visie en aan serieuze investeringen

De convergentie van print, beeld en geluid tot cross-mediale concepten die worden geproduceerd door samenwerkende redacties volgens een digital first online strategie, is in meer of minder mate staande praktijk geworden bij de regionale dagbladen in Nederland. Er is wel een duidelijk verschil waarneembaar tussen de visie van het management en die van de redactie over de manier waarop convergentie zou moeten leiden tot synergievoordelen en een betere aansluiting bij de wensen van de moderne nieuwsconsument. Op de redacties is meer ambitie dan bij het management. Daar heert de neiging om veilig te opereren, terwijl op de redacties de wens klinkt voor meer systematische investeringen, zowel in de opleiding van de medewerkers als in de technisch voorwaarden voor convergentie.

Hoewel er grote verschillen bleken te bestaan tussen de gekozen strategieën, niet alleen tussen kranten maar ook binnen krantenconcerns, kwam overall naar voren dat bij alle kranten de ambitie om digitaal uit te bouwen de boventoon voerde. Synergie was de toekomst, en dat was het al een aantal jaar. Bundeling, ontbundeling, centrale desk, digital first; ambities genoeg, maar of dit ook het gewenste effect zouden hebben, was voor de geïnterviewden onzeker. Alle respondenten zagen ruimte voor verbetering. De factoren waarvan collectief is gezegd dat ze daarop van invloed zijn, zijn in kaart gebracht.

Uit de interviews werd duidelijk dat tussen kranten grote verschillen bestaan wat betreft de aanpak van de convergentie. Waar één krant de multimediale internetactiviteiten ziet als een inhoudelijke bijdrage aan de nieuwsvoorziening, mikt een andere krant op de servicepotenties van internet. Opmerkelijk was dat ook binnen kranten niet altijd overeenstemming is over de te volgen convergentiestrategie. Er zijn tussen kranten ook grote verschillen in de wijze waarop de convergentiestrategieën zijn ingebed in de structuur van het krantenbedrijf. Bij de ene krant vormt de onlineredactie een onderdeel van de redactie, bij een andere krant is de internetredactie een aparte eenheid die alleen verantwoordelijk is voor de website. Ten slotte is er de variant waarin de internetredactie een centrale desk is, fysiek in een ander gebouw, die vooral de functie heeft artikelen van redacteuren door te plaatsen en de site technisch te ondersteunen.

Opvallend is ook dat er weinig tot geen multimediale opleiding geboden wordt aan redacteuren en dat de communicatie tussen de verschillende redacties in alle gevallen als onvoldoende wordt getypeerd. Het maken van eigen videoproducties is in een pril stadium, ook omdat er bij de redacties de gedachte overheerst dat lezers niet op video zitten te wachten. Redacteuren zeggen wel steeds meer te doen met blogs en publieksreacties, maar de meeste reacties worden als onbruikbaar beschouwd. Qua verdienmodel presteert het nieuwe model nog onvoldoende. Volgens de ondervraagden maakt geen van de uitgevers winst met hun nieuwsgerelateerde internetactiviteiten.

Bijna alle kranten zijn aanwezig op alle platforms, maar ze brengen voornamelijk hetzelfde nieuws via die kanalen. Het hebben van meer platforms betekent in de praktijk vooral een verdubbeling van nieuws, nauwelijks een uitbreiding, aanvulling of verdieping. De kranten bleken weinig tot niets te doen met de mogelijkheden die de verschillenden crossmediale technieken bieden. Nieuws uit de krant werd online, mobiel of in de sociale media ook niet of nauwelijks verrijkt met functionele illustraties, ondersteunende data of archiefmateriaal. Dossiervorming bleek beperkt, en ook het aansluiten op actuele online discussies werd weinig gedaan.

Bij geen van de kranten kon een consequent publicatiebeleid worden herkend. Initiatieven bleken nogal eens een ad hoc of experimenteel karakter te hebben. Zo was er een krant

met twee twitteraccounts, met samen meer dan 9000 volgers, die de berichtgeving volledig stopzette gedurende twee maanden. Een andere krant plaatste soms op een dag een eigen lokaal bericht, gevolgd door dagen met vele berichtjes rechtstreeks van persbureaus of andere kranten.

Opvallend was de opkomst van hyperlokale zustersites onder redactie van de rompkrant. Hoewel er op die sites meer debat leek te ontstaan rondom sommige onderwerpen, waren het in alle gevallen berichten die ook op de homepage van de krant te lezen waren. Bij videonieuws bleef onduidelijk wat de specifieke meerwaarde kon zijn. De meeste videoberichten waren ook als tekst met beeld terug te lezen in de krant of online.

Publicaties via tablet of phone app waren in de meeste gevallen samenvattingen van langere online berichten. Opvallend was dat geen van de onderzochte kranten het regionale nieuws daarin als belangrijkste nam. Hoe exotisch Facebook voor sommige kranten is, ten slotte, mag blijken uit het verschil in presentatie op dit sociale netwerk, dat in Nederland ruim zes miljoen dagelijkse gebruikers heeft. Sommige kranten bleken niet aanwezig, andere hadden alleen een uittreksel of verwijzing naar Wikipedia gepost, anderen publiceerden dagelijks nieuws.

Niet waar te nemen waren wezenlijk vergelijkbare patronen tussen de strategieën van de kranten, ook niet bij kranten van dezelfde uitgeverij. Dit suggereert dat, positief gezien, kranten een grote mate van vrijheid genieten bij de uitvoering van zoiets als convergentie, maar negatief gezegd, dat er ook een gebrek aan gedeelde visie en strategie is.

Hoewel het management en de redactie van de regionale dagbladen in Nederland allemaal zeggen sterk te geloven in convergentie, was er dus een duidelijke discrepantie zichtbaar tussen die ambities en de productiepraktijk. Online videonieuws, het stimuleren van journalisten om te bloggen, het inzetten van sociale media, in veel gevallen waren dit voorbeelden van zichtbare ad hoc inspanningen, die het vertrouwen noch de financiële middelen leken te hebben om een duurzame bijdrage te kunnen leveren.

3 De markt voor online hyperlokale nieuws start-ups groeit, ondanks bedrijfsmatige en redactionele problemen die zich met name na de opstartfase manifesteren

In de afgelopen tien jaar zijn in Nederland meer dan driehonderd onafhankelijke online nieuwssites de markt op gekomen, van minstens 123 exploitanten, die ook eigen politiek nieuws brengen. Er is een trend van professionalisering en uitbouw van bedrijfsmatige elementen zichtbaar. Echter, het hyperlocal bedrijfsmodel kenmerkt zich door lage omzetten

en leunt sterk op de inzet van vrijwilligers. Sociale media worden nog niet ten volle benut, en op het gebied van marketing en advertentie-inkomsten blijven de veelal kleine bedrijven achter. Wel te zien was een groeiende ondernemersgeest. Lokaal nieuws is dominant en de productie van eigen nieuws wordt belangrijk gevonden.

De motivatie om te beginnen met een lokale online nieuwswebsite is deels geworteld in zorgen over een teruglopend lokaal nieuwsaanbod. Maar ook commerciële doelstellingen spelen een rol. In strategische ambities en mate van betrokkenheid blijken er weinig verschillen tussen ideologisch non-profit hyperlocals en degenen die meer commercieel georiënteerd zijn. Een meerderheid van de eigenaren zegt een journalistieke aanpak niet als een voorwaarde te zien, commerciële kansen prevaleren. Daarom bestaat tegen het plaatsen van commerciële boodschappen van derden tussen redactieën kopij weinig principieel bezwaar.

De online lokale nieuwssites in Nederland profiteren nog niet optimaal van de mogelijkheden die de online omgeving en de digitalisering van de media bieden. In vergelijking met traditionele media nemen de hyperlocals wel meer vrijheden om te experimenteren met redactieformules en online technologie. Maar door een gebrek aan tijd en geld en technologische vaardigheden worden ook die mogelijkheden niet ten volle benut, aldus de geïnterviewden.

DE CONCLUSIES

De resultaten van de studies leiden tot een aantal conclusies die op verschillende manieren van belang kunnen zijn voor partijen die functioneren binnen regionale en lokale nieuws ecosystemen.

Het nieuws ecosysteem

Een eerste algemene consequentie van de bevindingen is dat convergentie een even complexe als onvermijdelijke strategie is voor een betere aansluiting op de nieuwe nieuwsmarkt, waarin online en mobiele toepassingen dominant zijn. Maar dit zal alleen daadwerkelijk synergie creëren – een voorwaarde voor een gezonde bedrijfsmatige exploitatie - wanneer de strategie en de praktische implicaties breed worden gedeeld binnen het bedrijf en de daad bij het woord wordt gevoegd. Experimenteren met innovaties is een noodzakelijk en beproefd middel, maar werkt alleen als de uitvoering voldoende tijd en middelen krijgt. De diversiteit van beslissingen die thans vooral ad hoc worden genomen, moet worden vervangen door een weloverwogen strategie gebaseerd op nieuwe wetenschappelijke studies, *best practices* en benchmark-studies.

De veelbelovende opkomst van de lokale nieuws start-ups laat zien dat de lokale markt nog commerciële kansen biedt en dat sociale interactie met nieuwsconsumenten leidt tot meer betrokkenheid. Voor de regionale uitgeverijen betekent dit een extra overweging om de lokale bezuinigingen terug te draaien en een hernieuwde focus op de lokale markten te overwegen.

Voor de journalisten blijkt convergentie vooral een middel, niet een doel. Dat betekent dat de vraag ‘hoe’ nieuws voor de consument wordt gebracht – nu vaak leidend in het debat over convergentie - ondergeschikt wordt gevonden aan ‘welk’ nieuws wordt gebracht, terwijl daar toch de kansen lijken te liggen toegevoegde waarde te creëren voor nieuwsproducten. Het besef van deze discrepantie tussen theorie en praktijk wint aan relevantie nu digitale technologie steeds eenvoudiger en goedkoper wordt. Technische vaardigheden zijn niet langer meer de bottleneck, er komt tijd voor vragen over journalistieke en ethische keuzes. Nieuwsondernemingen zouden met die vragen intern het debat moeten aangaan, en daar ook alle redacteuren bij betrekken. Discussie bijvoorbeeld over de toegevoegde waarde van eigen nieuws, scoops en follow-ups, bekwame politieke interviews, en de inhoud van (multimediale) dossiers bieden uitzicht op een antwoord op de vraag: wat is nog journalistieke kwaliteit en kunnen daar lezers mee worden teruggevonden?

De resultaten van de studie hebben ook implicaties voor het journalistieke onderwijs. Voor de scholen voor journalistiek en de academische journalistiekopleidingen betekent dit dat studenten niet alleen in journalistieke vaardigheden zou moeten worden getraind, maar ook in anticiperen op steeds veranderende digitale technologieën, op de gevolgen van media-innovatie in de praktijk en in het versterken van de inzichten in zakelijke mediestrategieën.

Zoals blijkt uit de studie, heeft lokaal nieuws hernieuwde aandacht en belang gekregen. In termen van democratie en als commercieel aantrekkelijk model biedt dit een optimistische kijk op de toekomst van de journalistiek. De resultaten betekenen dus ook het revitaliseren van de visie op het lokale nieuws ecosysteem als een potentieel kansrijke en uitdagende arbeidsmarkt. Stages bij lokale nieuws start-ups zouden tot de mogelijkheden kunnen gaan behoren.

Natuurlijk vertonen de hyperlokale markt en de verdienmodellen van start-ups nog de nodige problemen. Er wordt te weinig geïnvesteerd in marketing, en ook over journalistiek-inhoudelijke overwegingen wordt nog beperkt nagedacht. In veel gevallen is dat een gevolg van de beperkte middelen. Hyperlocals kunnen ook meer doen aan zichtbaarheid en aanwezigheid. Social media bieden daarvoor kansen. Eigenaren van hyperlokale nieuwsbedrijven zouden kunnen profiteren van trainingen en workshops op dat gebied.

Kwetsbaar zijn de start-ups zoals gezegd als zakelijke motieven journalistieke afwegingen

in de weg staan. Als bijvoorbeeld commerciële inhoud wordt verpakt als redactionele kopij. Nieuwsconsumenten kunnen dan het onderscheid tussen reclameboodschappen en onafhankelijke berichtgeving niet meer maken. Dit heeft op lange duur mogelijk gevolgen voor het vertrouwen van nieuwsconsumenten en kan leiden tot schade aan de basisprincipes van een professionele journalistieke aanpak. Debat hierover zou onderdeel kunnen zijn een professionele training van eigenaren van hyperlocal start-ups.

De exploratieve casestudie in Almere heeft nieuwe inzichten opgeleverd in de manier waarop een lokaal nieuwsecosysteem zonder dagblad zich over een half decennium ontwikkelt. Het ontbreken van een dagelijkse nieuwsvoorziening betekent dat er een risico bestaat dat lokale politieke kwesties niet meer worden gevuld. Dit heeft gevolgen voor de beschikbaarheid van onafhankelijk nieuws, en heeft mogelijk een negatief effect op het democratische proces en het politieke debat.

Overheden dienen niet alleen te erkennen dat een levendig lokaal nieuws ecosysteem van vitaal belang is voor een samenleving, ze zouden ook moeten overwegen wat hun praktische bijdrage zou kunnen zijn nieuwsnetwerken levend te houden. Structurele overheidssteun voor alle media, profit en non-profit, in het algemeen en de lokale journalistiek in het bijzonder, zou in overweging moeten worden genomen. De overheid is niet consequent als het alleen radio en televisie een wettelijke taak voor cultuur, sport en politiek nieuws toekent, en nieuws dat wordt gepubliceerd op andere platformen niet als zodanig als essentieel erkent. Digitale nieuwsproductie is inmiddels platformonafhankelijk. Het lijkt onvermijdelijk dat de financiering van massamediaproducties dan ook platformonafhankelijk zou moeten zijn.

Het journalistiek onderzoek

Deze studie kenmerkt zich door een multimethode-aanpak en een empirisch karakter. Hiervoor zijn kwalitatieve en kwantitatieve onderzoeksmodellen gebruikt. De consequenties en de omvang van twee belangrijke journalistieke innovaties zijn van dichtbij waargenomen. De bijdrage aan inzichten in de innovatieve journalistieke praktijk is tastbaar en bieden kansen om toekomstig en wenselijk onderzoek te sturen.

Het onderzoek ondersteunt de wetenschappelijke, in zijn aard speculatieve consensus dat de toekomst van de regionale krant vele onheilspellende tekenen vertoont. Het valt nu beter te begrijpen waarom in een reactie daarop, met de transitie van het klassieke krantenmodel naar de digitale realiteit, uitgeverijen verloren kunnen raken. De implementatie van convergentie is een moeizaam proces, en het zomaar starten van een nieuwsbedrijf blijkt ook niet eenvoudig. Er is ook meer duidelijk over de innovatieve kansen en hoe deze in de praktijk te benutten. Wetenschappelijk empirisch onderzoek als dit kan daarin een rol spelen.

Met name het ‘institutionele’ karakter van klassieke uitgevers, daterende uit een tijd dat omzetten en winsten geen zorgen opleverden, heeft lange tijd het zicht op de noodzaak voor een transitie naar een meer marktgerichte organisatie vertroebeld. Vanuit dit theoretische model en dat van de *rational choice* is te zien dat het bestuderen van processen in mediamanagement en interne organisatie betere inzichten kunnen geven in de strategische keuzes, de gevoelde urgentie voor verandering en de bereidheid om te investeren. Daar hoort ook bij de vraag: hoe kan een uitgever met het toevoegen van waarde aan nieuws zich onderscheiden in de gratis - en deeleconomie? Theoretisch zijn dit ook interessante overwegingen, want het gaat uit van de veronderstelling dat kwalitatief betere journalistiek zal leiden tot betere omzetten. Maar de vraag wat precies bij kwalitatief goede journalistiek hoort, blijkt constant in beweging te zijn en heeft nog een vruchtbare debat te gaan.

Wat betreft de ontwikkeling van de hyperlokale nieuws start-ups, valt er voor wetenschappelijk onderzoek, theoretisch en praktisch, ook nog eer te behalen. Hoe werkt het implementeren van journalistieke codes, hoe zijn advertorials te combineren met onafhankelijke nieuwsproductie, en hoe gaan de hyperlokale redacties om met deze ogenblikkelijk tegenstrijdige belangen? De vraag of onafhankelijke nieuws start-ups in staat zijn de traditionele media aan te vullen of te vervangen kan alleen worden beantwoord door meer vergelijkingen in tijd en plaats.

Beperkingen en perspectief

Dit onderzoek is uiteraard gebonden aan ruimte en tijd. Ook tussen dataverzameling en data-analyses zit een periode waarin de tijd niet stilstaat. Maar ondanks de beperkingen die interviews en desktopanalyses als momentopname in zich hebben, meen ik dat het onderzoek een bijdrage kan leveren aan het inzichtelijk maken van factoren die succes en falen van innovaties bij regionale en lokale nieuwsorganisaties bepalen en kunnen aanzetten tot handelen.

Een groter aantal respondenten in het hyperlocalonderzoek zou nuttig zijn geweest. Dat draagt bij aan de generaliseerbaarheid van de resultaten. Voor wat betreft de studie in Almere hoop ik dat die zal kunnen worden gereplaceerd, hier of in een vergelijkbare stad of situatie in het buitenland. Beter begrip over hoe ook andere - niet alleen Almere’s - nieuwsecosystemen veranderen in de tijd is een voorwaarde voor het kunnen verklaren van ontwikkelingen in de lokale nieuwsmarkt.

Tot slot, mijn keuze in dit onderzoek de focus te leggen bij de redactionele kansen en risico’s van media-innovatie, is gegrond in de overtuiging dat toegepast onderzoek met name zijn nut kan bewijzen als de suggesties die eruit voortvloeien ook daadwerkelijke implementeerbaar zijn. Vaak zijn autonome technologische, economische of sociale

ontwikkelingen nauwelijks beïnvloedbaar, terwijl de manier waarop management, journalisten of eigenaren van nieuws start-ups werken, ontwikkelingen in nieuwsmedia in gunstige zin kunnen veranderen. Inderdaad vond ik genoeg bemoedigende opties die de perspectieven voor nieuwsmedia positief kunnen veranderen. Ik vertrouw er dan ook op dat regionale en lokale media nog altijd kans hebben om de digitale crisis te overleven en hun functionaliteit in een gemeenschap en hun essentiële rol in de democratie kunnen uitbouwen.

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APPENDIX



ALMERE 'NEWS ECOSYSTEM', 2014

The Almere media ecosystem was analysed according to the following steps.

1

Collecting all news channels that offered regional news offline and/or online; in print, broadcast, websites, blogs and social media.

Collecting all public channels within the community, including institutional and political sources.

The online search tools Google, Webcrawler, Twitter search and Facebook search were used, and a publicly available media database, *Dutch Press Handbook*. We repeated the search three times in a row but no new sources were found.

2

We then selected the independent news channels; independent from ideological or financial input by third parties. We based this on its self-declared ambition, either stated on the platform itself or to us explicitly in a written or spoken statement. All political party websites, business, institutional or governmental organisations were excluded.

3

In the third step we identified the platforms that produce 'political' news; stories with at least one reference to regional and local political affairs, i.e., political decision-making processes, party politics, policies, and public declarations of politicians or civil servants. These stories had to appear in the news section or in sections named politics, public affairs or economy, if present. Sections such as business, sports, culture, leisure etc. were not taken into account.

To call a political story an 'original' one, a journalist had to be named explicitly in the by-line. Furthermore we coded for number of original political stories, number of editors involved, total number of news items interviews in the report, number of follow up audio / video, the kind of article and the comments. An example of a codesheet has been incorporated.

4

The main organizational and economic characteristics of the news providers actors - ownership, business model and staffing - were explored by scanning publicly available founding information, via the *Dutch Press Handbook*, and by interviewing owners. This was done the initial year, 2010, and the following years whenever a new player entered the market.

Every site was coded for ownership, 'about us' and contact information, advertising model, staff information. When questions remained, the site owner was contacted by mail or phone.

POLITICAL MEDIA OFFER IN ALMERE

Print media

- Almere Vandaag
- Almere deze Week
- De Almere

News sites

- <http://www.persbureaulamere.nl/>
- <http://www.almere.org/>
- <http://www.112-almere.nl/>
- <http://almere.webregio.nl/>
- <http://almere.straatinfo.nl/>
- <http://almere.nieuws.nl/>

Blogs and Twitter

- Zeven twitterende Almeerse politieke partijen
- Twee twitters over verkiezingen
- Vier twitters over nieuws en media
- Twee twitters van gemeente
- Zeven overige twitters
- Acht twitterende Almeerders
- Acht twitterende politici
- Negen blogs van raadsleden

Audiovisuel Audio-visual media

- Omroep Flevoland
- Stadsomroep Almere

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Political parties:

<http://twitter.com/AlmerePvda>
<http://twitter.com/TrotsopAlmere>
<http://twitter.com/GLAlmere>
<http://twitter.com/CUAlmere>
<http://twitter.com/CDAAlmere>
<http://twitter.com/LeefbaarAlmere>
<http://twitter.com/D66Almere>

Elections:

<http://twitter.com/politiekalmere>
<http://twitter.com/OFverkiezingen>

Media & news:

http://twitter.com/echo_almere
<http://twitter.com/AlmereNCRV>
<http://twitter.com/almeremedia>
<http://twitter.com/AlmereNL>

Municipality of Almere:

<http://twitter.com/almere>
<http://twitter.com/gemeentealmere>

Other:

<http://twitter.com/AlmereBusiness>
<http://twitter.com/weeralmere>
<http://twitter.com/Dromenrijk>
<http://twitter.com/GenietenAlmere>
<http://twitter.com/atcalmere>
<http://twitter.com/SchburgAlmere>
<http://twitter.com/BiebAlmere>

Residents of Almere:

<http://twitter.com/Almerianus>
<http://twitter.com/JGDijk>
<http://twitter.com/martijnbrouwers>
<http://twitter.com/Kanteldenker>
<http://twitter.com/HenkStruik>
<http://twitter.com/jadema>
<http://twitter.com/alMEEReNIEUWS>
<http://twitter.com/HartVoorAlmere>

Politicians:

<http://twitter.com/ajdir2009>
<http://twitter.com/abegeer>
<http://twitter.com/Johanvdkroef>
<http://twitter.com/muurlink>
<http://twitter.com/RuPet>
<http://twitter.com/FritsHuis>

<http://twitter.com/KlaasWolzak>
<http://twitter.com/martinevisser>

Council members:

<http://elmadkouri.wordpress.com/>
<http://almere.old.cda.nl/column.aspx>
<http://www.fritshuis.nl/>
<http://www.johanvanderkroef.nl>
<http://kindereninalmere.blogspot.com/>
<http://kazernealmerebuiten.web-log.nl/kazernealmerebuiten/>
<http://almerenetniet.blogspot.com/>
<http://almerebuiten.blogspot.com/>
<http://almere.ncrv.nl/blogs>

Stand.Almere

Almere on Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/search/?q=almere&init=quick#/nederland.almere?ref=search&sid=1365517990.2301185958..1>
<http://www.facebook.com/search/?q=almere&init=quick#/group.php?gid=13871721247&ref=search&sid=1365517990.2301185958..1>

Almere on forum.fok.nl

<http://forum.fok.nl/topic/873598>
<http://forum.fok.nl/topic/900032>
<http://forum.fok.nl/topic/900032>
<http://forum.fok.nl/topic/1058072/1/50>
<http://forum.fok.nl/topic/1233282>

Profiles in Almere:

<http://www.almere4you.nl/>

Forums on Almere:

<http://www.almeerderforum.nl/>
<https://www.almererulez.com>

DUTCH REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS 2010-2014

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Publisher <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Newspaper
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mecom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Mediagroep Limburg <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dagblad De Limburger/Limburgs Dagblad * ◦ Wegener <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brabants Dagblad * ▪ BN/ DeStem ▪ de Stentor ▪ Eindhovens Dagblad * ▪ De Gelderlander ▪ PZC ▪ De Twentsche Courant Tubantia • De Persgroep Nederland <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Het Parool * ▪ (AD regionaal) * • Telegraaf Media Groep <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ HDC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Noordhollands Dagblad * ▪ Haarlems Dagblad ▪ IJmuider Courant ▪ Leidsch Dagblad * ▪ De Gooi- en Eemlander • NDC/VBK Uitgevers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ NDC Mediagroep <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dagblad van het Noorden * ▪ Leeuwarder Courant • Koninklijke BDU Uitgevers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Barneveldse Krant • Friesch Dagblad BV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Friesch Dagblad

*Newspapers interviewed in initial survey.

INTERVIEWEES FOR CONVERGENCE STRATEGY

Interviewees	Organization (publishers)	Form
First round (publishers/editors/innovation managers)		
1. Aalze Vriezema	Friesch Dagblad Management Innovation	Full quote notes
2. Jan Geert Majoor	Editor-in-chief HDC Media (TMG)	Recorded (audio)
3. Henk Blanken	Dagblad van het Noorden (NDC Mediagroep)	Recorded (audio)
4. Erik Louwes	Manager Innovation (Gelderlander Wegener)	Full quote notes
5. Johan van de Beek	Deputy editor-in-chief web dev. De Limburger / Limburgs Dagblad (Mediagroep Limburg)	Full quote notes
6. Daan Bleuel	Editor-in-chief Barneveldse krant (BDU)	Recorded (audio)
7. Irene de Bel	Chief Online, Het Parool (De Persgroep)	Full quote notes
Second round (editors/newsroom editors/chief online)		
8. Hans Snijders	Editor-in-chief Leeuwarder Courant	Recorded (audio)
9. Peter de Vries	Former Head of innovations TMG	Recorded (video)
10. Wim Wegman	Chief Online HDC Media/Leidsch Dagblad/Noordhollands Dagblad	Recorded (audio)
11. Ad van Heiningen	Editor in Chief De Gelderlander	Full quote notes
12. Andre Vis	Editor in Chief, TC Tubantia	Full quote notes
13. Erik Gigengack	Manager Innovation Wegener/Stentor	Full quote notes
14. Simon Terhorst	TC Tubantia	Full quote notes
15. Arie Leen Kroon	Deputy editor PZC	Recorded (video)
16. Cyril Rosman	Coordinator Multi Media BNDeStem	Full quote notes
17. Jos Straathof	Deputy editor in chief Brabants Dagblad	Recorded (video)
18. Johan van Uffelen	Editor in Chief BNDeStem	Recorded (audio)
19. Martijn Verburg	Coordinator Multimedia AD	Recorded (audio)
20. Ton Rooms	Editor in Chief Brabants Dagblad	Recorded (video)
21. Mark van Bergen	Editor Eindhovens Dagblad	Recorded (video)
22. Henk van Weert	Editor in Chief Eindhoven Dagblad	Recorded (video)
23. Roel Ophelders	De Limburger / Limburgs Dagblad	Full quote notes
24. Edmond de Boer	Online manager Het Parool	Full quote notes
Experts (perspective)		
25. Hans van Kranenbrug	Advisor De Limburger / Limburgs Dagblad	Consult
26. Henk van Ess	Chef internet Algemeen Dagblad	Consult
27. Bart Brouwers	Editor in Chief Dichtbij.nl	Consult
28. Rimmer Mulder	Former Editor in Chief Leeuwarder Courant	Consult
29. Jeroen Maters	Local and regional publisher	Consult
30. Ton van Brussel	Former editor in chief Leidsch Dagblad	Consult

BASIC QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWS ON REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS CONVERGENCE

Online publiceren

- Hoe lang hebben jullie al een website?
- Wat kan de bezoeker van de website verwachten, naast de krant?
- Wordt de inhoud van de website aangepast op de online gebruiker?
- Welk level van convergentie passen jullie toe op de website? (Cross conference, Copy content - shovelware, Cooperation - repurposing; re-write; re-edit, Joint-production met Central Desk en Teamproduction.)
- Wat zijn jullie kengetallen voor online bezoek? (hits, unieke bezoekers, terugkerende bezoekers)

UGC

- Hoe betrekken jullie de gebruiker bij de website?
- Kunnen mensen reageren?
- Is er redactie op comments
- Zijn er bloggende redacteuren

Networking

- Wie is jullie publiek?
- Is de doelgroep aan het veranderen? Zo ja, spelen jullie daarop in?
- Linken jullie naar buiten de site?
- Verwijst de krant naar de site en vv?

Organisatie

Bezetting

- Is er een aparte internetredactie?
- Wie is verantwoordelijk voor innovaties binnen de krant?
- Welke veranderingen vinden er plaats binnen redacties met het oog op nieuwe online activiteiten.
- Worden redacteuren opgeleid in nieuwe media?

Beleid

- Kiezen jullie, naar aanleiding van de website, tevens een nieuwe koers in het nieuws brengen?
- In hoeverre heeft de uitgever invloed op de inhoud van de krant?
- Visie t.a.v. journalistieke vrijheid vs commerciële belangen?
- Worden journalisten gestuurd in hun artikelen ten gunst van adverteerders?

- Is een paywall een overweging om inkomsten te genereren?

Perspectief

- Heeft u een verandering opgemerkt binnen de lezersgroep van de krant met de komst van de website?
- Genereert de krant inkomsten met de website?
- Zijn er ideeën om op andere manieren geld te verdienen?

INTERVIEW MATRIX SHARED CONVERGENCE FACTORS SHEET.

Friesch Leeuws Dagblad Stentor TC/Tuba De Geld De Limb Eindhov Brabant BN DelP2C AD regt Het Par Leidsch Haarlem Noordh Gooi- er Barneveldse Krant

POLIC	Initiativ manag ement ment	manag ement ment	newsro om	manag ement ment	manag ement ment	newsro om	newsro om	newsro om	newsro om	newsro om	manag ement ment	Manag ement ment	Manag ement ment	manag ement ment	manag ement ment	newsroom
Cohesio n	good	Inadequ ate	Inadequ ate	Inadequ ate	good	good	good	good	good	good	non	non	Inadequ ate	Inadequ ate	good	Inadequ ate
Online cno	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	yes
Multi medi	no, Inte no															
Cooperatio	yes	no, own no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	no, own no	no	no	no	no	no	no
NEWSR Number	1	0	6	2	3	0	4	4	4	4	5	9	2	5	5	5
Video ex0	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	5	0
Team pres	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	yes
Editors lno	yes	yes, IIm yes	yes, IIm yes	yes, IIm yes	yes, fre yes	yes, fre yes	yes, fre yes	yes, fre yes	yes, IIm no	no	yes, fre yes	yes, fre no	yes, fre no	yes, fre no	yes, fre no	yes, fre no
Additio n	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
External no	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no
Who cor marketi	newsroc	Internet	Internet	Internet	Internet	Internet	Internet	Internet	Internet	Internet	marketi	newsroc	newsroc	Internet	newsroc	newsroom
PERSPI	Turn own	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Profit no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
Marketi yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
UGC	Believe UGC has value	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	yes
UGC pre no	no	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	not any	not any	yes	not any no
UGC/coi no	yes	more of sometim	sometim	yes	sometim	more oft	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	yes	no	no
Moderat	no	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no
NETWO	Cross pno	50/50	40/60	unknow	unknow	50/50	unknow	unknow	unknow	unknow	unknow	no	60/40	60/40	50/50	60/40
Cross lin	no	good	not eno	good	good	not eno	good	good	good	good	no	no	not eno	not eno	good	not eno good
External no	yes	not eno	yes	yes	yes	not eno	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	not eno	not eno	yes	not eno yes
Digital fno	no	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	no	yes	no
ONLINE	Video pno	yes	yes	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Live blo	no	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	sometim	yes	no	yes	no	no	no	no	no	no
Exclusi	no	no	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	no
Enrichin	no	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	sometim	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no	no

code sheet sum

Initiative	manage 11	Additional time t no = 0 18	Moderate comm no = 0 12
	newsroc7	yes = 1 0	yes = 1 6
Cohesion newsr	non = 1 3	External blogger no = 0 15	Cross publishing paper/Internet
Inadequ	6	yes = 1 3	Cross linking paper/Internet
good = .9		Who controls the newroc 9	External linking no = 0 1
Online chief In bno = 0 10		Internet 7	yes = 1 17
yes = 1 8		marketi 2	Digital first no = 0 13
Multi media tra	in 0 7	no = 0 1	yes = 1 5
internal 7		yes = 1 17	Video produc no = 0 7
yes = 2 4		Profit no = 0 15	yes = 1 11
Cooperation regi	n = 0 13	Marketing instru no = 0 0	Live blogging no = 0 11
own = 12		yes = 1 18	yes = 1 7
yes = 2 3			Exclusive Intern no = 0 9
Number of Internet edito	3,6 average	Believe UGC has value no = 0 4	yes = 1 9
Video editors	0,83 average	yes = 1 14	Enriching stories no = 0 6
Team production	no = 0 5	UGC present no = 0 15	yes = 1 12
yes = 1 13		yes = 1 3	
Editors blogging	no = 0 5	UGC leads to sto no = 0 7	
yes = 1 13		yes = 1 11	

EXAMPLE OF A CODE SHEET USED IN THE CONTENT ANALYSES

CODE BOOK LOCAL ONLINE NEWS START-UPS

Colofon/over ons:

1=ja 0=nee

Eigenaar:

1=persoon 2=bedrijf

Inlog / registratie optie:

1=ja 0=nee

Informatie over adverteerden:

1=ja 0=nee

Aantal advertenties (van derden) op voorpagina

[aantal]

Heeft site een Twitter-account?

1=ja 0=nee

Kan je berichten zelf door-twitteren?

1=ja 0=nee

Heeft site een Facebook-account?

1=ja 0=nee

Kan je berichten liken?

1=ja 0=nee

Rubrieken op voorpagina

1=nieuws

1=ja 0=nee

2=video

1=ja 0=nee

3=colums

1=ja 0=nee

4=dossiers

1=ja 0=nee

5=foto-albums

1=ja 0=nee

6=adverteerden

1=ja 0=nee

7=anders

1=ja 0=nee

Aantal nieuwsberichten eerste pagina

[aantal]

Totaal aantal berichten

[aantal]

Laatste 10 onderwerpen:

O1. lokale politiek, ruimtelijke ordening, verkeer, onderwijs

[aantal]

O2. ongevallen, misdaad, branden

[aantal]

O3. human interest

[aantal]

O4. bedrijven, instellingen

[aantal]

O5. cultuur

[aantal]

O6. sport

[aantal]

O7. niet-lokaal

[aantal]

O8. anders

[aantal]

Bron

1= eigen nieuws

[aantal]

2= geaggregeerd / andere medium

[aantal]

3= partners, andere bron

[aantal]

4= onbekend

[aantal]

Ambities

1= politiek

1=ja 0=nee

2= sociaal

1=ja 0=nee

3= financieel

1=ja 0=nee

Medewerkers

[aantal]

Overige zaken

[tekstveld]

CODE FORM LOCAL ONLINE NEWS START-UPS

Bedoeling van het onderzoek is om alle lokale online nieuwsmedia in kaart te brengen: waar zitten ze, wat doen ze, hoe verdienen ze geld, wie zijn het?

Gebruik de contactinformatie om later het (telefonisch) interview te houden. Als het niet anders kan is email of contactformulier ook mogelijk.

Als mensen meer informatie willen, kunnen we ze dat sturen.

Vraag naar informatie die we niet uit de site af kunnen leiden (beginjaar, eigenaar etc.) en check informatie (verspreidingsgebied).

Drie zaken zijn van groot belang voor ons om te weten:

- I. Hoe ziet het businessmodel eruit, wat zijn de inkomstenbronnen, met wie wordt er samengewerkt, doet men naast site nog andere zaken?
- II. Hoe komt men aan informatie, wie werken voor de site, is er sprake van een journalistieke invulling (zelf achter informatie aan, checken)
- III. Relatie met andere media, bronnen, overheid en met community, hoe worden ze gewaardeerd, wat is hun impact, etc.

Maak duidelijk dat al onze uitkomsten openbaar zijn, dat we ze op de hoogte houden (noteer e-mail in dat geval) en dat we wellicht later nog contact opnemen voor een langer interview.

Naam:

Onderkop / toevoeging bij naam:

URL:

Plaats/gemeente:

Eventueel: ruimer (meerdere plaatsen, gemeenten) of minder ruim (deel van plaats of gemeente) gebied:

"Over ons" uitlegtekst (ergens op de site):

Eigenaar (persoon/bedrijf, via contactgegevens of links op de pagina)

URL contact-pagina:

Sinds wanneer bestaat site?

Inlog / registratie optie?

Waarom registreren? (wat krijg je dan als opties?)

Rubrieken op voorpagina (navigatiebalk op beginscherm):

	(met V aangeven)
nieuws	
video	
columns	
dossiers	
foto-albums	
adverteren	
Anders (welke?)	

Informatie over adverteren / URL:

Aantal advertenties (van derden) op voorpagina:

Heeft site een Twitter-account?

Kan je berichten zelf door-twitteren?

Heeft site een Facebook-account?

Kan je berichten liken?

Zijn er andere / meer opties? Welke:

Aantal nieuwsberichten op eerste pagina:

Aantal berichten per dag (7 dagen, eerste dag is gister), geef aan welke dag het was (bv. 1 (woensdag 6/2)

#	Dag	Aantal
1	Bv (wo 6/)	
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

Wat zijn de laatste 10 berichten (vanaf nu / vandaag gerekend) over?

	Datum	Kop	Categorie	Bron
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

Bij Categorie:

- lokale politiek (beslissingen/plannen van, kritiek op gemeente, b&w, gemeenteraad, partijen, acties bewoners), ruimtelijke ordening (bouwen, straten), verkeer (parkeren), onderwijs
- ongevallen, misdaad, branden
- human interest (50 jaar huwelijk, bijzondere personen, huisdieren)
- bedrijven, instellingen
- cultuur (uitgaan, evenementen, schrijvers, musici)
- sport
- niet-lokaal
- anders

Bij Bron:

- eigen nieuws
- geaggregeerd / andere medium
- partners, andere bron
- onbekend, geen bron genoemd of te achterhalen (bij twijfel kop selecteren en via rechter muisknop "zoeken in Google".

LOCAL ONLINE NEWS START-UPS (2013)

GM_CODE	titel	website (url)
GM0392	023 Magazine	http://www.023magazine.nl
GM0638	100% Zoeterwoude Online	http://www.zoeterwoudeonline.nl
GM0860	112 Brabant Nieuws	http://www.112brabantnieuws.nl/
GM0542	112 Krimpen	http://112krimpen.nl/
GM0375	112ijmond	http://www.112ijmond.nl/
GM0307	112Vallei	http://112vallei.nl
GM0738	Aalburg Net	http://www.aalburg.net/
GM0055	akkrum.net	http://www.akkrum.net/nw-25321/nieuws
GM0482	Alblasserdams Nieuws	www.alblasserdamsnieuws.nl
GM0537	Alles over Katwijk	http://www.allesoverkatwijk.nl/
GM0344	Alles over Utrecht	http://www.allesoverutrecht.nl/
GM0345	Alles over Veenendaal	http://www.allesoverveenendaal.nl/
GM0141	AlmeloNieuws	http://www.almelonieuws.nl/
GM0484	Alphen.com	www.alphen.com
GM0484	Alphens	http://www.alphens.nl
GM0060	Amelander	http://ameland.wordpress.com
GM0200	Apeldoorn-actueel	www.apeldoorn-actueel.nl
GM0200	ApeldoornDirect	http://www.apeldoorndirect.nl/
GM0202	arnhem.nieuws.nl	http://arnhem.nieuws.nl/
GM0202	ArnhemDirect	http://www.arnhem-direct.nl/
GM0106	ASSER journaal	http://www.asserjournaal.nl/
GM0005	Bedumer	http://www.bedumer.nl
GM0753	Best Bekijken	http://www.bestbekijken.nl/
GM0758	Breda Vandaag	http://www.bredavandaag.nl/
GM0216	Culemborg Nieuws	http://culemborgnieuws.blogspot.nl/
GM0277	Dag Roosendaal	http://www.dagroosendaal.nl/
GM0148	Dalfsennet	http://www.dalfsennet.nl/
GM1883	de Dorpskrant	http://sittardgeleen.blogspot.nl/
GM0055	De Grouster	http://www.degrouster.nl/
GM0344	De Stad Utrecht	http://www.destadutrecht.nl/
GM1525	De Teyding	http://www.deteyding.nl/
GM0518	Den Haag Direct	http://denhaagdirect.nl/
GM0400	Den Helder actueel	http://www.denhelderactueel.nl/
GM0758	Dichtbij Breda	http://breda.dichtbij.nl/
GM0585	Digitaal dorp s-gravendeel	http://www.s-gravendeel.net/
GM1672	Digitale krant Rijnwoude	http://dkr.digitalekrantrijnwoude.nl/
GM0546	District 16	http://www.district16.nl/
GM0221	DoesburgDirect	http://www.doesburgdirect.nl/
GM0024	Eemskrant	http://www.eemskrant.nl/

GM0580	Flakkee Nieuws	http://www.flakkeenieuws.nl/
GM1896	Genemuiden-actueel	http://www.genemuidenactueel.nl
GM0376	GooiNieuws	http://www.gooienieuws.nl/
GM0014	Groninger Internet Courant	http://www.gic.nl/
GM1900	groot sneak	http://www.grootsneek.nl/
GM0518	Haagsallerlei	http://haagsallerlei.nl/
GM0158	Haaksbergen Nieuws	http://www.haaksbergen-nieuws.nl/
GM0518	HAGAZ!NE	http://hagazine.wordpress.com/
GM0797	Hallo heusden	http://www.halloheusden.nl/
GM0072	HARLINGEN online	http://www.harlingen-online.nl/
GM0405	Hoorngids	http://www.hoorngids.nl/
GM1900	HvNieuws	http://www.hvnieuws.nl/
GM0687	HVZeeland	http://www.hvzeeland.nl/
GM0580	iGO.nl	http://igo.nl/nieuws
GM0150	IJsselNieuws	http://www.ijsselnieuws.nl/
GM1774	In en Om Ootmarsum	http://www.inenomootmarsum.nl/
GM0352	Internetportaal voor Wijk bij Duurstede	http://www.ditiswijk.nl/
GM0059	It Nijs	http://itnijs.nl/
GM1892	Jouw Zuidplas	http://www.jouwzuidplas.nl/
GM0051	JouwJoure	http://www.jouwjoure.nl
GM0537	Kattuk	http://www.kattuk.nl/
GM0118	KILROY	http://www.kilroynews.net/
GM0082	Lemster Nijs	http://www.lemnsternijs.nl/
GM0344	Lombox	http://www.lombox.nl/
GM0935	Maastricht Aktueel	http://www.maastrichtaktueel.nl/
GM0420	medemblikaanzee	http://www.medemblikaanzee.nl/
GM1987	Menterinfo.nl - Digitale gemeentegids voor Menterwolde	http://www.menterinfo.nl/
GM0946	Nederweert24	http://www.nederweert24.nl/
GM0599	Nesselande	http://www.nesselande.net
GM0571	Nieuw-Lekkerlandsnieuws.nl	http://www.lekkerlandsnieuws.nl/
GM0310	Nieuws over De Bilt	http://www.nieuwsover.nl/debilt/
GM1859	Nieuws uit Berkelland	http://www.nieuwsuitberkelland.nl/
GM0171	Nieuws uit de Noordoostpolder	http://nopnieuws.weblog.nl/
GM1735	Nieuws uit Delden	http://www.nieuwsuitdelden.nl/
GM0828	Nieuws Uit Oss	http://nieuwsuitoss.nl/
GM1708	Nieuwsnet Steenwijkerland	http://www.nieuwsnet-steenwijkerland.nl/
GM0358	Nieuwsover	http://www.nieuwsover.nl/aalsmeer/
GM1581	Nieuwspost Heuvelrug	http://www.hillridge.nl/
GM0268	nijmegenleeft.nl	http://www.nijmegenleeft.nl/
GM0342	NU soesterberg	http://www.soesterberg.nu/
GM0177	NuHeino	http://www.nuheino.nl/

GM1895	Oldambt regionieuws	http://www.inhetoldambt.nl/regionieuws
GM0590	Papendrecht NET	www.papendrecht.net
GM0590	Papendrechtsnieuws	http://www.papendrechtsnieuws.nl/
GM0356	Pen	http://www.pen.nl/
GM0060	Persbureau Ameland	http://www.persbureau-ameland.nl/
GM0736	Petershotnews	http://www.petershotnews.nl/
GM0765	Prachtig Pekela	http://www.prachtigpekela.nl/
GM0273	Putten.net	http://www.putten.net/
GM0119	Regio Meppel	http://www.regiomeppel.nl/
GM0177	Regio Salland	http://www.regiosalland.nl/
GM1708	Regio Steenwijkerland	http://www.regiosteenwijkerland.com/
GM0874	Regio.nl Woudrichem	http://www.regiowoudrichem.nl/
GM0603	Rijswijk te kijk	http://www.rijswijktiekijk.nl/
GM0599	ROTTERDAM Vandaag & Morgen	http://www.vandaagenmorgen.nl/
GM0889	Ruiver	http://www.ruiver.nl
GM0441	Schagen vandaag	http://www.schagenvandaag.nl/
GM0051	Skarsterlannieuws	http://www.skarsterlannieuws.nl/
GM0093	Skylgenet	http://www.skylgenet.nl/nieuws/
GM0546	Sleutelstad	www.sleutelstad.nl
GM1900	Sneker Internetkrant	http://www.snekerinternetkrant.nl/
GM0342	Soestactueel	http://www.soestactueel.nl/
GM0358	Spanknieuws	http://www.spanknieuws.nl/
GM0612	Spijke Nieuws	http://www.spijkenieuws.nl/
GM0612	Spijkenisse aan de Maas	http://www.spijkenisseaanademaa s.nl
GM0392	Stad-haarlem.nl	http://www.stad-haarlem.nl/
GM0193	Stadshagen Nieuws	http://www.stadshagnieuws.nl
GM0855	Tilburgers	http://tilburgers.nl/
GM0183	TubbigNieuws	http://www.tubbignieuws.nl/
GM0844	Tv Schijndel	http://www.tvschijndel.nl
GM0148	Vechtdal Centraal	www.vechtdalcentraal.nl
GM0622	Vlaardingen 24	http://vlaardingen24.nl
GM0626	VOL NIEUWS	http://www.volnieuws.nl
GM1916	Voorburg Insite	http://voorbburginsite.nl/
GM0501	Voorne-Putten	http://www.voorne-putten.nl/
GM0737	WâldNet	http://www.waldnet.nl/
GM0193	Weblog Zwolle	http://www.weblogzwolle.nl/
GM0870	WerkendamActueel	http://www.werkendamactueel.nl/
GM1783	Westlanders	http://westlanders.nu
GM0462	Wieringernieuws	http://www.wieringernieuws.nl/
GM0632	Woerden TV	http://www.woerden.tv/
GM0687	Zeeuwseregio.nl	http://zeeuwseregio.nl/
GM0473	zvoort	http://www.zvoort.nl/
GM1896	Zwartewaterkrant	http://www.zwartewaterkrant.nl/



NAWOORD



Het is een cliché, maar daarom niet minder waar: onderzoek doe je nooit alleen. Je kan literatuur lezen en plannen maken tot je een ons weegt, uiteindelijk is het onmogelijk een promotiestudie helemaal in je uppie uit te voeren, zeker empirisch werk als dit.

Daarom, allereerst mijn diepe respect en dank voor Klaus en Piet. Het geduld en inzicht waarmee jullie mij talloze keren met raad en daad hebben bijgestaan is volgens mij ongeëvenaard. Lang leve de latte macchiato van Dauphine en de biertjes van Stef's.

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J.Lab'ers in Utrecht, we hebben in zes jaar tijd uit het niets een groep neergezet die in de mediastudies en het journalistieke onderwijs van zich doet spreken. Zowaar een glansrijke prestatie. Yael, Sanne, Chris, Gerard, Renee, Remko, Ad, Els, Renate en al die andere oude en nieuwe collega's - binnen en buiten de SvJ, dank dat ik hieraan mocht bijdragen en dank voor jullie support.

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Ten slotte, Louise, Felix en Saskia, gedane zaken nemen geen keer - om ook te eindigen met een cliché – maar ik ga de afwezige uren goedmaken. Te beginnen met dit boek aan jullie op te dragen: alsjeblieft, mijn allerliefsten, mijn bijdrage en jullie offer aan de democratie.

Marco
Pont du Bois, 2016

OVER DE AUTEUR



Marco van Kerkhoven volgde een studie milieukunde en een studie biologie (UL). Na zijn afstuderen in 1995 werkte hij als onderzoeker bij het Leiden/Amsterdam Center for Drug Research, als projectcoördinator bij Stichting Wetenschap en Techniek Nederland en als wetenschapsjournalist voor *KIJK*. Daarnaast schreef hij voor diverse kranten, tijdschriften en omroepen, waaronder *de Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad* en de *RVU*. In 2003 verbleef hij een periode in bezet Irak, waar hij een bijdrage leverde aan de opzet van een school voor journalistiek. Vanaf 2003 werkte Van Kerkhoven als correspondent in Brussel en later als redacteur bij *De Standaard*. Sinds 2008 was hij de uitvoerend hoofd- en eindredacteur van Sync.nl, magazine over innovatie. Van Kerkhoven schreef diverse boeken, waaronder *De Ramptoerist*, 2009 (AKO Longlist), *Koehandel*, het verhaal van de boer, 2005, *Haagse Bluf en Brusselse Lof*, 2002, uitgave bij gelijknamig RVU tv-programma en *Hooggeleerd Publiek!*, 2000, succesvolle projecten in de wetenschapscommunicaties. Hij won de derde prijs in de Citibank Journalistic Excellence Award (2005) en was de eerste winnaar van de Ton Hoogenboomprijs (1998). Sinds 2008 is Van Kerkhoven werkzaam bij de School voor Journalistiek in Utrecht.

