# News stories in a hybrid media environment

## The role of media platforms, actors, and time in the construction of election news

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*Voor Jolanda*

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# Introduction

One Saturday morning in May 2014, the Twitter timelines of followers of Flemish politics were in a state of uproar. In the middle of the election campaign, they were surprised to read in their morning newspaper that a top candidate of the front-running party in the polls had taken a controversial position in the debate on social benefits. According to him, any house owner who has been receiving unemployment benefits for three years should be required to sell their house and use these funds before they can continue to be eligible for welfare benefits. This went against his own party line. Pundits, citizens, and politicians alike were quick to take to Twitter to discuss this anomaly. The party and its supporters themselves, it seems, were as surprised and used the social medium to vehemently deny that these words were even uttered by the politician in the first place. Responding to this, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper joined the Twitter debate and made the article with the exact quotes available for free on the newspaper's website, thereby invalidating the political party's denials. The party eventually had to give in and forced the candidate to give a press conference to apologise for the remark. All of this happened within a mere six hours.

This episode is an extreme yet revealing illustration of the dynamics within the contemporary news media landscape. Just the fact that this took place on a Saturday morning is already telling. Before online news media existed, this used to be a comparably calm day for news, with many journalists having their day off and a lack of news publications and broadcasts. In that setting, the debate about the politician's exact words and how they should be interpreted might well have dragged on for days after the initial publication. Now it was settled in mere hours. This swiftness attests to a change in the role of temporality. Additionally, the way in which a newspaper article affected the debate on Twitter demonstrates how interconnected different media platforms are. Information from 'old' media platforms like newspapers blends seamlessly with the contributions from a 'new' media platform like Twitter. These contributions, furthermore, can come from virtually anyone. Social media enables any person, from laypeople to presidents, to give their take on an actual news event. This

contrasts with older media platforms, that require information to pass through gatekeepers (White 1950) who select and reject information that is 'fit to print'.

These observations raise questions about the ways in which news is told and re-told in this contemporary news media landscape. The importance that is attached to report news quickly seems a given, but as the example above shows, it is not always the quicker online news media outlets that are the first to report on a certain news story. Is this case an outlier or, rather, does it represent a pattern, with online news media being only quicker in theory? Does it even matter where the story begins, or are all stories told in the same fashion, regardless of the media platform that covers it first? How does news spread throughout the media landscape? What can be said about the contributions of different media platforms to news stories? Moreover, what is the role of non-elites in telling the news? This dissertation provides answers to these questions.

## Theoretical background

Digital technology has been an important driver of changes in the media landscape in the last two decades. The broad adoption of the internet and the subsequent introductions of Web 2.0, social media platforms, and mobile internet have profoundly affected the ways in which content is produced and circulated. These technological innovations have facilitated the formation of a tightly-connected media environment, through which content can flow freely among and between actors, organizations, and outlets (Anderson 2013, Hermida 2014). Before, we may have had reason to speak of *mass* media in the sense of the classical sender-receiver model, with a very limited number of senders and an audience of unspecified recipients of their broadcasted information. Now, instead of following a unidirectional path, the flow of content can be (and often is) multidirectional, with many steps in between.

Media scholar Henry Jenkins (2006) argues that the change that these innovations have brought upon is not primarily technological in nature. According to him, the connection between different media forms that digital technology facilitates is merely the backdrop against which a more important cultural shift has taken place. This shift involves a different appreciation of the age-old dichotomy between producers and consumers. Whereas access to means of media content production used to be limited,

now virtually anyone with access to the internet is able to produce and distribute their own content. Rather than drawing a rigid line between active producers and passive consumers, we "might now see them as *participants* who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands" (3, italics mine). A 'participatory culture' then arises, in which the notion that anyone can play an active role in the creation and distribution of media content becomes acceptable.

This does not imply that the playing field is levelled, however. Legacy media organizations do not sit idle while the formerly passive media consumers make use of their newfound opportunities to tell their stories and listen to peers who do the same. Instead, they exploit their traditionally dominant position to "seek to extend their reach by merging, co-opting, converging and synergizing their brands and intellectual properties across all of these channels" (Jenkins and Deuze 2008, 6). Thus, the media landscape comes to be shaped by the simultaneous top-down influences of corporations, as well as the bottom-up influence of consumers.

Echoing this principle, Andrew Chadwick (2013) portrays the media system as an unstable dialectic process between 'older' and 'newer' forms of media. When the logics, practices, and values of both forms collide, the yield is a hybrid system that shows properties of both. The success of a certain practice in one type of media compels other media to adapt or reinvent their old ways. Newspapers, for example, that migrated to the online realm as the internet became widely adopted, initially maintained the practices that were already used in the print version of the publications. Articles with a rounded narrative, featuring a headline, by-line, and lead, became the form of choice. However, the website form offers different affordances than print, like the ability to update a story with new information (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2017). Newspaper websites were therefore able to implement the successful breaking news format that had hitherto been typical of cable television's rolling coverage. Likewise, the success of microblogging service Twitter have provided legacy media outlets new sources of information, as well as new ways to publish their work (Broersma and Graham 2013, Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith 2014).

This leads to fundamental questions about the nature of different media platforms. What 'is' a newspaper if it is no longer *just* a print publication? Moreover, as the

literature has always viewed media platforms as static and easily definable ontological entities, to what extent can the findings of these studies be transferred to this changed (and changing) media environment? After all, while the production of content for a platform like the print newspaper is relatively straightforward – it is fully determined by its editorial staff – the way in which social platforms like Twitter or Facebook are shaped is much more diffuse. Here, following the work of Chadwick (2013), I single out *power* and *time* as two essential concepts of social-scientific research that need to be reconsidered.

## News and political communication in a hybrid media system

*Power, control, and influence in a hybrid context*

Power, as a concept that describes relationships between social actors, has traditionally been conceived of as a structural and top-down mechanism. In this vision, the interactions that affect how we all make sense of the world are disproportionately shaped by an elite (Lukes 2005). This elite, including governing officials, politicians, and journalists, has a top-down influence over how all of us make sense of the world around us. They produce the "cultural and ideational contexts" (Chadwick 2013, 16) in which meaning is made. Nowadays visible in the mass media, their voices (and the weight that is attached to them) are indications for the prevailing power relations (Blumler and Gurevitch 2000). In this conceptualization, politicians' power is attested by the prominence of their words in the (news) media.

Social media have fuelled phenomena like the Arab Spring, the Egyptian uprisings of 2011, the Black Lives Matter movement, as well as the Me Too-hashtag, to various extents (Bonilla and Rosa 2015, Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith 2014, Meraz and Papacharissi 2013). In these cases, the power relationships between governments, politicians, citizens, businesses, and journalists were different from what one might expect, given this rigid way of thinking about power. We can see how these phenomena easily become singled out as evidence that social media have overturned the pre-existing power relationships. However, as we will see later on, there is ample reason to think that these phenomena are of a different kind than the structural

relationships that we would traditionally associate with the concept of power (Chadwick 2013).

One of the fundamental assertions of the hierarchical power relations in the media is that access to the news is restricted. Journalists and editors have a key role as gatekeepers who allow or prevent information to be communicated via the media channels (Shoemaker and Reese 1991, White 1950). In the choices they make, a tendency towards hierarchical orders is apparent. Elite actors are favoured over non-elites in the implicit guidelines of noteworthiness that media workers use – an event that does not evolve any elite actors has a much smaller chance of being covered than an event that does (Galtung and Ruge 1965, Harcup and O'Neill 2001). The same principle holds for the issues that are discussed in the media. According to the 'indexing hypothesis', the (political) news revolves around a set of issues that are discussed by an elite group of actors (Bennett 1990, 1996). These topics and the spectrum of the elite actors' pertaining views are regarded as 'legitimate' voices that may be included in the news coverage. Conversely, views and topics that are not within this spectrum are generally excluded from political news coverage. Thus, elites have a high degree of influence on which stories will make it into the news, as well as which views are taken into account.

On an institutional level, the press reproduces these structural relationships over and over. Different media outlets tend to cover the same news stories in a similar way, because journalists are intensively following what their peers at other media outlets produce (Breed 1955). This 'standardization' of media content, as the theory of inter-media setting hypothesises, goes from 'higher' to 'lower' media outlets. (Atwater, Fico, and Pizante 1987, Danielian and Reese 1989, Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008). This means that there is an informal hierarchy of media outlets' status or credibility. Thus, the content of newspapers like the *New York Times*, *The Guardian* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* influence the topics and style choices of 'lower' newspapers, whose journalists look up to them for substantive guidance in their daily work. It should be noted that the coordination of content between different media is organic and not brought about by any form of coercion or censorship. Rather, as the work of Stuart Hall has consistently pointed out, it is rooted in the very practices of journalism in liberal

democracies that put values like impartiality, objectivity, and balance at the forefront (see, for example, Hall 1974, Schudson 2001).

How, then, does it follow that phenomena like the Me Too-hashtag depart from this hierarchical and structural view of power and influence? Two observations on social media dynamics are the basis for this claim. First, as Hermida (2015, 1) notes, "[a]ctors who inherit structural power from outside social media, such as officials or journalists, do not necessarily retain their influence within the network". While it is likely that an already-popular politician or celebrity will gather a sizeable following on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram, that does not entail that their influence within these networks will display the same magnitude. A certain savviness and understanding of the distinct logics of the social media outlet in question is necessary to communicate in a way that achieves the intended effects (Enli and Skogerbø 2013, Jungherr 2014).

Second, though structurally powerful actors cannot always carry their influence onto the social media realm, the inverse is also true. Actors who are not influential in the traditional structures can become so on social media, as "[a]d hoc publics may choose to elevate a particular actor at a certain time in the context of an issue" (Hermida 2015, 1). Here, an actor's capacity to have their message be 'elevated' – that it is selected and highlighted from an endless stream of messages that appear in an ever-present ambient media environment (Hermida 2014) – may be greater. Three things follow from this quote. One, that the gatekeeping role has shifted from an elite group of journalists to 'ad hoc publics', or groups of connected (yet not organised) actors rallying around an issue or news event at a certain point in time (Bruns and Burgess 2011). Two, that the assessments made by these publics can differ from those made by the traditional gatekeepers, who are inclined to look within the spectrum of 'legitimate' voices and issues. Three, that the context of the message on social media matters more. While the opinion of a minister will always prevail for traditional gatekeepers, at least within the indexing framework (Bennett 1990), ad hoc publics can choose to highlight the informed opinion of a knowledgeable citizen instead. It seems that these publics are more willing to elevate a message based on its inherent merit within a certain context, regardless of the reputation or position of its sender. Evidently, formerly-unknown social media actors may even emerge as opinion leaders

for a certain topic when their messages are consistently spread around the social network (Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith 2014, Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012).

Hence, when we think about the power that actors can have in the contemporary media context, we should acknowledge its preliminary character. This contrasts with older, more rigid views that emphasise stability. It makes sense to conceive of power as something that is "relational, (...) evolving from a series of interactive exchanges among those who are articulated by chains of dependence and interdependence" (Chadwick 2013, 17). These exchanges, as we have seen, may potentially involve anyone. Hence, power in the media is a hybrid of older power logics, built around the influence of institutions and elites, and newer power dynamics, which, depending on the circumstances, can put *any* layperson in a powerful position. Each moment, one voice may be elevated to an influential position, to potentially be succeeded by another voice in the next (Hermida 2015).

The same principle applies to the organizational and institutional levels as well. The hybridised older and newer power dynamics prevent us from making *a priori* judgments about the assumed influence that certain media platforms (newspapers, television, radio) or outlets (the *Washington Post,* the *Guardian*, *Die Zeit*) have over other media. The inter-media agenda setting literature looks to model these influences in generalizable patterns (McCombs and Shaw 1972). Even if they look to explain how media's agenda setting influence is contingent on certain variables (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008), the underlying assumption remains that a model can be deduced that can be applied structurally. 'If we just know the right variables and the right equation, we should be able to predict how the content of one medium affects that of others', the implicit argument seems to run. Yet, in the contemporary media landscape, influence does not flow from certain media to others in top-down fashion. Influence is assigned situationally and in a cross-medial fashion, which makes it possible that the weblog *babe.net*, with virtually no standing by traditional measurements, was able to affect the coverage of dozens of media outlets by publishing allegations of sexual assault against comedian Aziz Ansari. Similarly, the research platform *Bellingcat.com*, which involves the public via social media to conduct highly specific investigations into conflict zones, might not be regarded as an elite media outlet, but they have become

a key source for other media for news about the MH17 passenger aircraft that was shot down above Ukraine. Another example is the investigative reporting of website *The Intercept* about government surveillance programs, of which scoops were reported on by various media outlets around the world.

Apprehending the concept of power in a way that emphasises its flexible nature, then, means that we "move away from abstract, structural prejudgments and generalizations about the specific categories of people who are supposedly powerful or the specific roles that people must supposedly always perform if they are to be powerful" (Chadwick 2013, 17). In other words, researchers should take an agnostic stance regarding intuitions about who is powerful, and how power can be gained. The extent to which someone or some medium can be influential can vary per specific moment and context.

The implication is that the study of the media landscape in simple one-on-one relationships – for example, the 'influence' that 'social media' has on 'traditional media' – does not provide sufficient insight on a conceptual level. Drawing clear boundaries between different types of media in the first place has become increasingly difficult, because of their hybridised nature. Where is the line, if even one single article on a news website may include a written account of what happened (taken from a press agency), footage from a television channel (hosted on YouTube), someone's embedded reply from Twitter, a screenshot of a Facebook post, and links to other news websites?

To fully acknowledge the changed nature of the media environment means to reject this type of binary thinking, and re-examine to what extent the methodologies that have hitherto been used in the study of media are still valuable. After all, these tools were devised in times in which the power logics within the media were arguably more straightforward to grasp. However, as the media environment itself becomes harder to define, and power in the media becomes more situationally assigned, rather than 'imposed' top-down from highly-esteemed news platforms and outlets, they cannot be applied unconditionally any longer.

*Time and temporality in the hybrid media system*

Like the concept of 'power', the concept of 'temporality' is also deserving of a reappraisal. The journalism studies field typically characterizes the changed role of time in the contemporary media environment in a minimal way. That is, the notion that there is a 24-hour news cycle now, which amplifies the time constraints for journalism as they struggle to produce content, is taken as a basis for the empirical work in this field (Reich and Godler 2014). This, paired with the already-existing pressures as a result of declining readership and revenue in recent decades, gives rise to normative concerns about the quality of journalism. Time pressure might lead to 'churnalism' and a homogenization of content across different media, an incessant battle to be the first to report on a story at the expense of vigorous verification, and the continuous re-hashing of stories with new angles (Chadwick 2013, 62).

These effects of an increase in speed may all be there, but as Chadwick (2013, 62) argues, it is uncommon to see the conceptualization of 'time' being explored beyond this. Nevertheless, speed is just one aspect of temporality. The quality of timeliness, the ability to "create and to act on information in a timely manner" (Chadwick 2013, 18) is not necessarily linked to 'being the quickest' to communicate. It is about the *right* moment that is required for an actor to communicate successfully in order to serve their interests best. For example, a political actor that has some salacious information about an adversary may sometimes be smart to take the initiative to break it to the media, while in other cases they might have more impact by waiting until a news wave comes along before putting that information out.

Analogous to the idea that 'timeliness' cannot be reduced to 'swiftness', the manner in which journalists produce content for different media platforms and how this content is esteemed is not just governed by the speed that these media platforms offer. A broader range of time-related characteristics of these media platforms, labelled *temporal affordances* (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2017), are affecting this. Temporal affordances are "the potential ways in which the time-related possibilities and constraints associated with the material conditions and technological aspects of news production and dissemination are manifested in the temporal characteristics of news narratives" (3). For instance, it is true that news websites are

theoretically quicker than print newspapers. They provide the affordance of immediacy, enabling the coverage of news events without having to wait for the next iteration of the medium. Besides, they offer transience, meaning that their stories can be updated with new information as it becomes available. The content does not need to be presented in a finished form. Print newspapers offer neither immediacy nor transience. Yet, the ephemeral and non-material nature of news websites may prevent them from being as authoritative as a print newspaper. The reason is that print newspapers have an afforded fixation in time. This means they cannot be updated after they are printed, so they are expected to feature a concise and rounded narrative (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2017). This makes their content more definitive and possibly authoritative than their digital counterparts. Thus, taking speed into account is a necessary yet insufficient prerequisite for the study of news in the current media landscape.

*From news cycles to political information cycles*

Despite the refinements that can (and should) be made to the understanding of power and temporality, the implementation thereof has not yet occurred on a wide scale in the literature. Indeed, although many studies take the big changes in the media landscape as their starting point, the dominant model of enquiry remains rooted in the traditional paradigm of the 'news cycle' (Chadwick 2011). This idea comprises a day-based rhythm in which media outlets publish their content on standardised and predictable intervals. It stems from an era in which daily newspapers and evening television broadcast were arguably the most defining news media publications (see, for example, Atwater, Fico, and Pizante 1987). Temporality has a relatively straightforward connotation in this setting, with fixed deadlines and a clear period that separates two issues of the same publication – between which no other issues are published.

These news cycles revolve around a small number elite news media outlets, which are assumed to be 'opinion leaders' that influence the 'lower' media in a top-down fashion (Breed 1955, McCombs 2005). In addition, news coverage is seen as a "tightly controlled game involving the interactions and interventions of a small number of

elites: politicians, officials, communications staff, news workers, and, in a small minority of recent studies, elite bloggers" (Chadwick 2011, 7).

Given the characterization outlined in the sections above, we can see how these fundamental assumptions are misaligned with the current media landscape in terms of temporality and power. For this reason, Chadwick (2011) pleads for a move beyond news cycles and introduces the notion of 'political information cycle' as an alternative framework for empirical research. Political information cycles can be regarded as 'episodes' of coverage pertaining to a certain subject, such as a gaffe or an election campaign. In such a cycle, "personnel, practices, genres, technologies, and temporalities of supposedly 'new' online media are hybridised with those of supposedly 'old' broadcast and press media" (Chadwick 2011, 7). In other words, typical aspects of 'old' media are loosely blended together with typical characteristics of 'new' media, as well as hybridised properties that have come into existence as a result of the collision between older and newer media. Together, these constitute a narrative.

This way of looking has two conceptual advantages over the news cycle paradigm. One, in terms of power, the notion substitutes the fixation on elite actors and elite media outlets for a more comprehensive vantage point. This viewpoint is able to take non-elite actors into account as well, should they be(come) relevant in the respective political information cycle. This is more in line with the opportunities that networked media landscape offers to actors to be involved in the narration of the news. Likewise, it can take media outlets into account that may well be overlooked in a traditional news cycle approach. Media outlets that are on the fringe in terms of their content (think of *Breitbart* or *Infowars*), or media forms that are devoid of much regularity and structure (think of Instagram or Snapchat) are usually neglected, for they do not fall within the schemes that the news cycle paradigm, and associated approaches like inter-media agenda setting, require. Yet, they might be influential outlets, dependent on the circumstances.

Two, the political information cycle allows for more complex temporal structures. News cycles are about regularity and predictable intervals, but the hybridised media structures of today defy any rigidity. While a news cycle would traditionally be

considered as one day, the news might now reach its saturation point within mere hours (Buhl, Günther, and Quandt 2016). The obvious solution would be to decrease the length of such cycles, but this way out is unsatisfactory. After all, the changes in temporality do not just involve the compression of time. It also means that episodes may be much longer, with fragments of potential stories lying dormant for some time before they resurface. In that case, a news cyclical approach would fail to capture the dynamics that account for this.

## Studying election news construction in a hybrid media system

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the dynamics of the current news media landscape, while taking the theoretical and practical challenges that I outlined above into account. Throughout the three chapters that follow, I operationalise an alternative level of measurement, termed 'news stories' (also see below), and test its merits in three different empirical analyses. I focus on the origins of news stories, their dissemination through the news landscape, and the way in which the news stories are told in this networked environment. The overarching research question, then, is:

**RQ:** How do the interactions between time, media platforms, and actor types shape the way in which news stories are told?

For each of these three aspects, I look at how the power of both media platforms and different actor types is interacting with temporality. That is, in Chapter I the question of which actors and media platforms succeed in having the scoop in telling news stories is studied. There, I zoom in on how this beginning is associated with their respective lifespan, reach, and size. Next, in Chapter II, the influence of each media platform and actor on the dissemination process of the news stories is compared. Finally, in Chapter III, the role of media platforms and actor types in the phases that a news story goes through in its lifespan are studied.

*The 2014 election campaign in Belgium*
The research in this dissertation uses a sample of media content from the Belgian election campaign of 2014. These data were gathered in almost a month before the elections, starting at May 1, Labour Day, on which political parties (especially, but not

exclusively leftist) present their concerns for the period afterwards. This day marked the *de facto* start of the campaign, with left parties lashing out against the conservative proposals of the regionalist party N-VA (the eventual winners of the elections). The collection of data ended on May 24, the day before the actual Election Day. On May 25, elections were held for three levels: the federal parliament, the regional parliament, as well as the European parliament. The fact that there were three different types of elections was not obvious in the election campaign, however. The coverage of federal and regional matters tended to be lumped together, with top candidates often talking and being asked about policy pertaining to a level for which they did not run, whereas specific European affairs were barely visible at all. Since Belgium is separated by a language barrier (dividing the country into Wallonia, the French-speaking southern part, and Flanders, the northern Dutch-speaking part), in practice the country features two media systems. This dissertation only considers the Flemish media sphere.

Admittedly, the election campaign is an atypical period in terms of news coverage. Political actors, journalists, pundits and citizens are very much concentrated on one upcoming event of which the date is known beforehand. Hence, there is a relatively narrow focus and a clear horizon, which is not the default state in (political) news. However, exactly this focus gives the opportunity to capture a vast array of related news items. The coverage is thematically linked and many stories can be detected in a relatively short amount of time. Although the volume of communication between different groups of actors is higher, these interactions do reflect processes that are embedded within the day-to-day work routines – albeit at a higher pace. This makes the election campaign a suitable period to study.

*Cross-media data collection*
News stories are not locked within one media platform, but rather spread around freely between platforms as there are a multitude of links between them. Radio bulletins may report on a story in the print newspaper, print newspapers can rehash their articles on their website, websites can take content from social media, and posts on social media can be discussed on television. In order to trace their origins and paths of dissemination, without falling back on a case study approach, it is therefore

necessary to collect a sample of data as comprehensive as practically feasible. In this dissertation, the data collection spans the five aforementioned media platforms: print newspapers, television programs, radio bulletins, news websites, and Twitter.

It is important to note that I have explicitly opted not to study individual media outlets or media organizations. This dissertation can therefore not draw inferences about the circumstances under which one certain newspaper or one Twitter account can be influential. Likewise, the media are not studied on an organizational level. While the sample contains both print newspapers, as well as their own websites, which might overlap in terms of content and staff, the two are disentangled. The rationale behind these choices is that the platforms are equal across different media systems, while the outlets and organizations in the sample – and the dynamics of their interactions – are specific to the Flemish context. In any national context, media platforms offer the same possibilities to both journalists and social media users (at least technically). The use of this level prevents the findings from becoming too idiosyncratic. It contributes to the comparability across different media systems. Besides, it enables linking back to the existing (inter-media agenda setting) literature, which has usually used the platform as its level of measurement.

With respect to the study of social media, this dissertation only looks at Twitter. The main reason to study Twitter is put well by Puschmann et al. (2014):

> Twitter's embeddedness in everyday social and communicative interactions across so many nations of the developed world, and its role as a very public, global, real-time communications channel highlight the fact that it – alongside other major social media, like Facebook or YouTube – provides a window on contemporary society as such, at national and global levels. (426)

Its predominantly public nature makes it a true treasure trove for researchers, enabling them to easily access and study the content on the medium. This is in stark contrast to platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook, which may be more widely adopted, but a lot of the activity is hidden from the public eye. Another factor is the latter three are heavily affected by algorithms, which is not just a hurdle for researchers to collect data in a consistent way, but effectively make these media a black box – we do not have much, if any, indication about which content is served to their users. Twitter does score better in this respect.

I explicitly choose to position Twitter as one media platform that exists on the same level as television, newspapers, news websites, and radio. In this way, it is possible to retrace the interplay between newer and older logics and practices. With Twitter functioning as a hub of information, including it as a platform next to the others enables a minute-by-minute view of the ways in which news flows between media platforms, and how it is perceived by different groups of actors. Unlike the majority of empirical studies have hitherto done, these differences in actor types are accounted for. The medium is not considered as one homogenous entity. Precisely because this platform allows different publics, from laypeople to celebrities, to interact, claims about the 'influence' of 'Twitter' as a whole leave too much open for interpretation. Even if we may maintain that social media is populated by the abstract notion of the 'crowd', we need to know *which* voices shape the discourse on this media platform.

*A news story level approach*

This dissertation aims to advance new ways to study news making processes that acknowledge the shifting power- and time-related factors. A starting point here is to have a more open, flexible, and inductive methodology. Instead of fitting the data into a preconceived scheme, based on assumptions that flow from the traditional news cycle paradigm, this dissertation claims that researchers should provide some leeway to let the data speak for itself. That means that any methodology devised to study contemporary media platforms should allow for intervention of non-elite publics, as well as the fact that publication cycles may not adhere to a fixed schedule.

These premises converge in the 'news story' level of measurement (also see Beckers et al. 2017, Thesen 2013, Welbers 2016, for similar approaches) that is further conceptualised and developed in the three studies in this dissertation, in conjunction with the aforementioned sampling choices that are made. A news story comprises all of the items (in this case tweets, radio bulletin segments, television news segments, newspaper articles, and news website articles) that deal with the same time- and place-specific event and the aftermath thereof. Making use of the news story as the unit of analysis allows for tracing the storyline from its beginning to the last time the event is mentioned in the data set. Irrespective of whether one item appeared minutes or weeks after an earlier item about the same story, the news story allows the analysis

of the full storyline. It also enables to draw comparisons between the media platforms in their respective influence on the narration of the news stories (both quantitatively, in Chapters I and II, and qualitatively, in Chapter III).

The aim of the news story level is to find a middle ground between issue-level analyses and case study approaches. Indeed, the traditionally used issue level is able to account for big data sets, as it requires coding relatively few variables. Yet, as argued in Chapter II, measurement of issues may be too broad for dealing with the specific dynamics within the hybrid media landscape of today. Case studies, on the other hand, sacrifice sheer quantity for depth. A case study-based approach like Chadwick's (2011) is able to capture a political information cycle in very much detail, but the downside is that doing so for a large amount of data is unfeasible. The news story level is an attempt at finding a compromise between the two.

## Outline and structure of the dissertation

This dissertation consists of three substantive chapters, in which different aspects of the networked media landscape are studied. In each chapter, the news story level is employed in different ways to study power- and time-related dimensions of the news dissemination process.

Chapter I presents a quantitative analysis of election news stories that is explorative in nature. It deals with finding out the platforms where news stories start, and features explorative analyses of their lifespan (measured in hours) and how many platforms the stories tend to reach, broken down per media platform.

Chapter II is about the spread of the stories across the media landscape, and measures how long it will take each media platform to cover a given story after another media platform has covered it. It compares the news story level with a more traditional time series analysis of the data, aggregated per topic.

Chapter III appears here for the first time and applies a qualitative analysis to the news story level. It delves deeper into the content of the news stories by exploring how media platforms' temporal affordances (the possibilities and constraints that different

platforms offer for news organizations and journalists) have an impact on the development of the stories content-wise.

The dissertation ends with a general conclusion. A coda, detailing the construction of the data set, is added.

# Chapter I

# Making Sense of Twitter Buzz

The cross-media construction of news stories

in election time

As the use of social media becomes more common, it is often claimed that a media environment arises in which traditional distinctions between concepts like online and offline, producer and audience, citizen and journalist become blurred. This study's purpose is to identify and explore the implications for contemporary news stories. Using a content analysis of Belgian election campaign coverage in 2014, we study the role of five newspapers, two daily television newscasts, seven current affairs programmes, radio news bulletins, three news websites, and a selection of Twitter accounts in creating and shaping news stories. We find that the analytical distinction between platforms still matters, since they have different roles in creating and shaping news stories, suggesting that different platform-specific logics are at play. Twitter is an important factor in launching and shaping news stories, but it tends to be dominated by establishment actors (journalists and politicians), whereas citizens only play a modest role.

# Introduction

The amount of research on the role of Twitter in journalism and political communication is growing fast (Klinger and Svensson 2014, Hermida 2013). Several studies describe how Twitter is increasingly being adopted by journalists for professional purposes, not only as a news source (Broersma and Graham 2013, Paulussen and Harder 2014), but also as a networked 'social awareness system' for monitoring the continuous streams of news and information (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013, Hermida 2010). Other studies have focused on the ways in which both politicians and citizens are using Twitter to broadcast opinions and participate in direct, public conversations (Bruns and Highfield 2012, Enli and Skogerbø 2013, Graham et al. 2013). While most studies on the use of Twitter among journalists, politicians and citizens have looked at the microblogging platform as an emerging networked 'social space' or a new 'arena of political communication' (Enli and Skogerbø 2013), our study explicitly aims to position Twitter within the broader cross-media environment. This means that we try to examine the 'Twittersphere' not in isolation but in relation to the broader media ecology and public sphere of which it is an integral part. Following Chadwick (2013), we conceptualise today's cross-media news environment as a 'hybrid media system'. Although we use the dichotomous categories 'traditional news media' and 'social media', it is not our intention to compare and stress the differences, but rather to explore their mutual interactions and to understand to what extent and how they have become interdependent. In this chapter, we illustrate this point by describing how news stories emerge and spread in today's cross-media news environment.

Literature on new media has a tendency to emphasise change over continuity and difference over similarity. Hence, scholars studying social media are likely to argue that a new 'public sphere' is emerging, one that is networked rather than centralised, user-centred rather than professionally controlled, participatory rather than elitist, and messy rather than overseeable (Klinger and Svensson 2014, Papacharissi 2014, Singer et al. 2011). In his book *The Hybrid Media System*, Chadwick (2013) stresses that the 'newer' media logics do not simply replace 'older' logics, but they mutually build upon and interact with each other. The result of these interactions is a hybrid media system where these newer and older logics can no longer be understood in isolation, but

should be considered as interrelated and interdependent. The boundary between 'networked' and 'traditional mass' media spheres becomes very theoretical, for it is clear that mass media are an integral part of the networked media environment and networked communication patterns are (re)shaping the processes of news production and distribution of mass media. The hybridity concept provides an analytical framework to understand the mutual interactions between online and offline, networked and traditional media. To understand the construction and flow of news within the hybrid media environment, Chadwick (2013, 62-63) argues that we should look beyond the 'news cycles' of a single medium. In today's cross-media environment, news continuously travels between and across different media platforms, resulting in what Chadwick calls 'political information cycles':

> Political information cycles possess certain features that distinguish them from 'news cycles'. They are complex assemblages in which the logics (...) of supposedly 'new' online media are hybridised with those of supposedly 'old' broadcast and newspaper media. This hybridization process shapes power relations among actors and ultimately affects the flow and meanings of news. (Chadwick 2013, 63)

The notion of hybridity does not only help to understand the cross-media flows of news, but also relates to the blurring lines between the producers and users of news. Social media are typically regarded as the focal example hereof. Particularly Twitter has attracted a considerable amount of scholarly attention. Several authors view it as a social space where news and opinions are collaboratively 'prodused' by 'networked publics' of both professionals and citizens (Papacharissi 2014). According to D'heer and Verdegem (2014), who studied the conversations between political, media and citizen actors on Twitter, the public debate can be understood as "a combination of and overlap between three fields" (731), thereby echoing its hybrid nature. Their analysis shows that despite the prominence of citizens in the debate, established political and media agents still tend to hold central positions in these Twitter networks. Hence, Twitter does not only represent a 'logic of the public' (Brants and van Praag 2015), but at the same time reflects the older political and media logics that we are likely to associate with traditional news media. Highlighting individual aspects of hybridity in the current media ecology is one thing, but a holistic approach to examine the extent to which processes of hybridisation are visible in the news is another. In this study, we address this open issue by exploring the life cycles of news stories. We specifically look

into two aspects of contemporary news cycles. First, one central aspect of the hybridity concept is the supposed cross-medial nature of news. To what extent is this realised in practice? Second, if older and newer practices become increasingly synthesised, what does this mean for the origins of news stories? Our research questions, then, are:

**RQ1:** How are news stories distributed across the hybrid cross-media news environment?

**RQ2:** How are news stories created within the hybrid cross-media news environment?

To specify the second question, we divide it into two sub-questions that address different aspects of the derivation of news. First, we study news stories' platform origins. Do platforms matter less in this respect, do we find that traditional media are leading, or has the balance shifted to social media? Second, we have to acknowledge the hybrid nature of Twitter itself. Different publics, including citizens, journalists and politicians, assemble in a networked sphere. Therefore, researching how often the platform breaks a news story does not suffice here – in contrast to traditional media, for which news is produced only by professionals. Instead, we should look more in-depth and ask who exactly is first. Are 'older' logics, in which news is created by elite actors dominant, or do we witness the ascendance of 'newer' logics, in which citizens and other publics are also able to influence the news agenda?

**RQ2a:** Where do news stories originate?

**RQ2b:** Which Twitter actors are the sources of news stories?


## Methodology[1]

*Data Collection*

Using the hybridity concept strongly implies using a holistic approach, a requirement that we try to meet by taking a wide range of media outlets into account. Data from these media were collected in the run-up to the 2014 national elections in Belgium. An election campaign provides a framework of reference for journalists, in which certain kinds of stories are favoured over others. This provided us with the opportunity to

retrieve many interwoven news stories within a relatively short time-span. For three levels of government (regional, federal and European), elections were held on May 25. We started our data collection on 1 May (Labour Day, when left parties traditionally present their concerns for the coming period), and ended on 24 May (the last campaign day, we excluded Election Day itself to avoid biases).

We opted to include only Flemish (northern, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium with a population of around 6.2 million) media and Twitter accounts. Specifically, we included five newspapers (*De Standaard*, *De Morgen*, *De Tijd*, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, *Het Nieuwsblad*), three news websites (*destandaard.be*, *demorgen.be*, *deredactie.be*), the two daily 19:00 television newscasts (*Het Journaal* from the public broadcaster and its commercial *VTM Nieuws* counterpart), six daily radio newscasts (the 7:00, 8:00, 12:00, 13:00, 18:00 and 19:00 public Radio 1 bulletins), the regular current affairs television programmes (*De Zevende Dag*, *Reyers Laat*, *Terzake*), and election-specific shows (*Het Beloofde Land*, *Het Nationale Debat*, *Jambers Politiek*, *Zijn er Nog Vragen?*) in our sample. Since the news websites in this sample are directly associated with newspapers, radio and television outlets, we consider them part of traditional media. For Twitter, we were inspired by Axel Bruns' Twitter News Index approach (mappingonlinepublics.net, also see Bruns and Burgess 2012, Bruns and Stieglitz 2014) and constructed a sample of relevant accounts, encompassing 678 professional Flemish journalists (virtually all retrievable journalists who had a Twitter account); 44 accounts affiliated with the principal traditional media; 467 politicians (the top-three candidates per constituency, plus a selection of lower-listed candidates); and 19 accounts of civil society organisations. In addition, we included a selection of 109 'influentials' (experts, business representatives, celebrities and active citizens), whom we identified using the 'top Twitter influencer' list of twitto.be. This website provides a ranking of Belgium-based twitterers based on their *Klout*-score, which is an algorithm that estimates one's online influence. In sum, we had a sample of 1,317 accounts of which we retrieved all (re) tweets. Furthermore, we saved the tweets in which any of these 1,317 accounts was mentioned by people outside our sample. Also, tweets mentioning the election hashtags #vk14 or #vk2014 were retrieved. With this sample, our aim was to provide an adequate overview of the discourse in the Flemish 'Twittersphere'. The rationale was that even when we did not follow a particular

Twitter user, when his or her tweet had considerable impact, it would be retweeted by at least one user in our sample (and thereby be included in our data-set). To ensure that all tweets in the data-set have had at least some impact, a threshold of two favourites and two retweets per tweet was set. The underlying assumption is that 'impact' can be regarded as having gained some traction in terms of diffusion and appraisal. We consider retweets and favourites, respectively, approximations hereof. Respecting this threshold, 23,134 items were captured across all platforms. Of those, 9,749 (42 per cent) could be categorised as politically relevant – meaning it featured a political topic, a domestic political actor and/or an election-specific term.

*Coding*

These politically relevant items were then coded on the news story level (Thesen 2013). Here, 'news story' refers to the collection of news items, across different media, that deal with something that happened at a given location and point in time. A general example of a news story could be the bankruptcy of a large enterprise. In this conceptualisation, all coverage, whether it be newspaper articles, television news or Twitter posts, about this bankruptcy is considered part of this news story.

We found that in the election campaign, the bulk of the news stories is less about what happened than about what was said (often by politicians). For example, one often-covered news story was about a top politician who claimed that everyone with a good résumé is able to find a job in Belgium. Another major story was about a politician who contradicted his own party's viewpoints regarding welfare benefits in an interview. Not each and every utterance by a politician does fit the news story concept, however. Only the main statements, meaning those that were highlighted in the title or introduction of the article, or those that were mentioned in other articles (even those bits that appeared in other media after the initial publication of an interview) were coded as news stories. In the inter-media agenda-setting tradition, a framework that is often used to analyse how content transfers between different media, studies have often relied on rather broad issue categories, like 'foreign policy' or 'public welfare' (McCombs and Shaw 1972). These are valuable for tracking issue attention over a longer period of time, making large-scale statistical analyses (correlations and time series) possible. However, this level of analysis does not enable one to track the origins

and dissemination of chains of directly related news items – which is eventually our aim in the present study. A news story-level approach (Thesen 2013), then, is more suitable for these purposes. A codebook was constructed to provide guidelines for identifying and labelling news stories, which were applied to traditional news media items (i.e. items from newspapers, newspaper websites, radio bulletins and television newscasts) only. Items judged to belong to a previously identified news story were coded as such. The remaining items in the sample (i.e. tweets and current affairs television shows) were not used to identify any extra news stories, but only assigned to the ones we previously found in traditional media. About a third of the 9,749 items (3,395, including 3,145 tweets) were not found to be related to any news story. In the other 6,354 items, we were able to identify 869 news stories. Since some news items were judged to belong to more than one news story, thus counted more than once, the news stories ultimately encompassed 6,497 items.

**Table 1.** Number of items assigned to single- or multiplatform news stories

| Platform | All items, assigned to 869 news stories (*N*=6,497) | | Assigned to 413 single platform news stories (*N*=502) | | Assigned to 456 multi-platform news stories (*N*=5,995) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *N* | % | *N* | % | *N* | % |
| Newspapers | 1,440 | 22.2 | 245 | 48.8 | 1,195 | 19.9 |
| Television | 433 | 6.7 | 17 | 3.4 | 416 | 6.9 |
| Radio | 248 | 3.8 | 45 | 9.0 | 203 | 3.4 |
| News websites | 1,015 | 15.6 | 195 | 38.8 | 820 | 13.7 |
| Twitter | 3,361 | 51.7 | -* | -* | 3,361 | 56.1 |

* = As tweets were not used to identify news stories, they are not in the single platform column

Table 1 shows, per media platform, how often news items were assigned. Here, we distinguish between stories that did not spread beyond their initial platform of publication (single-platform news stories) and those that did (multiplatform news stories). Our analysis is focused on the latter group. At first glance, only using the traditional news media to find news stories may seem to limit the inferences we can make. However, we consider this a more sensible approach than it would be to start from tweets as well. There were 3,145 tweets (of the 6,506) that could not be associated with an existing news story in the data set, each of which we might have

considered an additional news story on its own. Yet, an inspection of these Twitter messages suggests that they predominantly concerned meta-comments, jokes, general criticism of politics (pub talk, in other words) and self-promotional tweets. It can hardly be argued, then, that they genuinely merit the name 'news', while using that label to classify newscasts and newspaper items is by definition correct. Ultimately, 3,361 tweets were considered. In a final coding step, the original authors of all tweets included in the analysis were coded in one of ten categories: politicians, political parties, citizens, journalists, media outlets, experts/professionals, business representatives, celebrities, civil society actors, and other.

## Findings

### *The Distribution of News Stories*

To answer the first research question, regarding the distribution of news stories across platforms, we analyse their size, lifespan and number of platforms reached. As discussed before, we distinguish between single- and multiplatform news stories. Of the total number of 869 news stories, 413, or less than half, did not spread beyond their initial platform of publication. The other 456 featured on at least two platforms. We ignore the single-platform stories for the remainder of this chapter, as we are only interested in the stories that actually spread across platforms. Therefore, the smallest news stories encompassed two individual items, while the largest story (about the death of former Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene) consisted of 450 items. The median number of platforms that a news story reached (i.e. radio, television, newspaper, website, Twitter), was two, with a range of two to five. We also calculated the difference between a news story's first and last occurrence in the election campaign. By this measure, the lifespan of the shortest news story, concerning a liberal politician's statement that "Belgium is a good country to live in" was just 0.05 hours (or 3 minutes). The lifespan of the longest news story, which is about proposals to adapt the automatic inflation correction of wages, was 558.74 hours (or 23 days, 6 hours and 44 minutes). A median lifespan of 28.7 hours was calculated. Table 2 (on page 27) shows the statistics regarding lifespan and size of stories, split up by the number of platforms reached. Here, too, we use the median as the central tendency. Perhaps unsurprisingly, we find that the more platforms a news story reaches, the

longer its lifespan is, and the more items that news story encompasses. It also becomes clear that the number of news stories that reaches all platforms is limited, as only 22 did so. Next, we analysed what proportion of the 456 news stories each media platform featured. In this respect, Twitter is leading, covering 80.9 per cent of the news stories. That is, few stories were not covered here. News websites and newspapers cover 70 and 63.6 per cent, respectively. Numerically, television (33.3 per cent) and radio (17.8 per cent) are underperformers. Thus, we may say that Twitter is the most comprehensive of all media platforms, at least in touching upon news stories.

**Table 2.** Median lifespan and size of multiplatform news stories, by reach

| Platforms reached | N | Lifespan (in hours) | Size (items in story) |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| 2-5 | 456 | 28.7 | 5.0 |
| 3-5 | 201 | 60.8 | 10.0 |
| 4-5 | 77 | 123.6 | 23.5 |
| 5 | 22 | 183.5 | 44.0 |

*The Origins of News Stories*

Our second research question, on the creation of news stories, is divided into two sub-questions that will be addressed separately. Concerning sub-question 2a, about where news stories originate, Table 3 (on page 28) shows how often news stories appear first on that particular media platform, how long these stories last and how many items they encompass. Starting 18 per cent of all news stories, newspapers are far from obsolete in setting the news agenda. Moreover, the comparatively long median lifespan (62.8 hours) indicates that these stories also tend to be the more important ones. Online news websites account for 28.9 per cent, which suggests that traditional media follow a digital-first strategy (as these three websites were associated with newspapers, radio and television). At the same time, editors seem to save some stories for their newspaper's print edition. The role of television and radio in bringing new news stories is modest, both accounting for 6 per cent each. Reporting stories that were already covered by other media, then, seems to be the predominant role of television and radio. A last and remarkable observation is that Twitter starts the biggest share, 41.7 per cent, of news stories, something that we explore further in the next sub-question.

**Table 3.** Median lifespan and size of multiplatform news stories, by starting point

| Started on | | N | % | Lifespan (hours) | Size (items in story) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Newspaper | | 82 | 18.0 | 62.8 | 6.0 |
| Television | | 26 | 5.7 | 84.0 | 7.0 |
| Radio | | 26 | 5.7 | 7.0 | 7.0 |
| Website | | 132 | 28.9 | 14.1 | 4.0 |
| Twitter | | 190 | 41.7 | 34.4 | 8.0 |
| | Total | 456 | 100 | 28.7 | 5.0 |

In the second sub-question, we asked about the exact origins of news stories on Twitter. To answer this last question, we analyse the original senders of all first tweets of the 190 news stories that were Twitter-instigated. Table 4 shows an overview of these actors. The 'other' category includes experts/professionals, civil society actors, celebrities and business representatives. What stands out is the dominance of institutional actors, particularly political parties and politicians, who account for almost half of the news stories that started on Twitter. This finding confirms the strategic use of Twitter by politicians and parties alike to influence the news agenda (Enli and Skogerbø 2013).

**Table 4.** Actor-type frequencies in tweets

| | Frequency overall ($N$=3,361) | | Frequency of starting a news story ($N$=190) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % |
| Politician or political party | 1,334 | 39.7 | 88 | 46.3 |
| Journalist or media outlet | 1,144 | 34.0 | 70 | 36.8 |
| Citizen | 421 | 12.5 | 15 | 7.9 |
| Other | 462 | 13.7 | 17 | 9.0 |

More important for our present purposes is that over a third of these stories originate from either individual journalists or accounts associated with media outlets. By contrast, the contribution of citizens and other actors is relatively small. It should be conceded, nonetheless, that it might be less likely that citizens are the origin of a news story in traditional mass media. Yet, the main pattern that emerges from this

quantitative analysis is a focus on elites, paired with a dominant presence of journalists and media outlets in the discourse on the platform. This also shows when we look at the nature of the stories that started on Twitter.

An exploration of these stories shows that even when not brought up by journalists or media-associated accounts, their topics are closely aligned to those initiated by mass media. Indeed, in some cases there is a direct link, as Twitter users are live-tweeting about what they see in other media. For example, when viewing a television documentary, one citizen was first to note that two politicians did not wear their seat belts when driving their car. In other cases, we find that the logic of news reporting, particularly that of breaking or unfolding news, is incorporated on Twitter (cf. Marchetti and Ceccobelli 2016). The news that one candidate's campaign vehicle burnt down, for example, was announced first on Twitter. In addition, people attending (political) conferences are sometimes first to mention these gatherings. These findings suggest that Twitter's role in election campaign news should not be sought in providing alternative types of stories that are picked up later by traditional media. Indeed, Twitter is more likely to behave exactly like traditional media or discuss their news coverage (cf. D'heer and Verdegem 2014). We can point to only one instance, namely the grassroots campaign to tunnel the highway around Antwerp, in which an alternative story (driven by citizens, not urgent) spread from Twitter to traditional mass media. Yet even for this case, traditional news media mainly seemed interested when established actors commented on the issue.

## Conclusion and Discussion

This study has aimed to provide an insight in the distribution, as well as the origins, of news stories in the contemporary news ecology. These issues link back to Chadwick's (2013) hybridity concept. Concerning the question of how news stories are distributed across and within the hybrid cross-media news environment, we can conclude that the majority indeed spread across media platforms. We also see that the more platforms a story reaches, the more items it encompasses, and the longer its lifespan is. Although Twitter and news websites cover the highest proportion of news stories, newspapers have not yet had their day, as nearly two-thirds of the stories can still be found there.

By contrast, television and radio only cover one-third and less than one-fifth of all stories, respectively. We should be aware, however, that this does not say anything about the quality of the coverage. Obviously, a tweet of 140 characters is unlikely to challenge a newspaper article in terms of information value. Nor does this say much about the stories' importance – television and radio channels may deliberately dedicate their limited airtime to fewer, but more important news stories. From an electoral perspective, it may well be that following traditional media still provides the best information to make an informed political judgement, even though these media tap into fewer news stories. Presently, our data do not allow for making this assessment. Furthermore, we should bear in mind that our sampling method plays a role here as well. While we made an effort to capture the debate on Twitter comprehensively, it seems unpractical for individuals to attend to this wide array of voices while the election campaign unfolds. Regarding the question on the origins of news stories, our conclusion is that Twitter is the fastest medium overall, being the first medium to feature over 40 per cent of the news stories. News websites are second, with about 29 per cent. Since these websites are associated with traditional media (radio, television and newspapers), the inference is that an online-first strategy prevails in today's news industry. Here, too, we find that newspapers are not at all obsolete, since nearly one-fifth of the stories appear here before spreading to other platforms. Television and radio, however, are far less important in this respect. We find that there tends to be an establishment bias in the stories that appear first on Twitter, for the vast majority derive from accounts of political actors, journalists or media outlets. Citizens account for less than 8 per cent of the news stories that break on Twitter. Hence, we should not equate 'social media' with 'the public', but rather regard social media as a mediated social space where the 'public of citizens' interacts and blends with the political and media fields (D'heer and Verdegem 2014). Our research provides some first indicative figures on the scope and degree of hybridity in the contemporary news ecology. We have tried to give the hybridity concept more empirical ground. The blurring of categories, as well as the interaction between 'newer' and 'older' logics, are crucial to this concept (Chadwick 2013). Indeed, while we find that novel elements like Twitter firmly establish their position, this does not

imply a complete overhaul of the pre-existing news ecology. Core elements are still key to understanding the news ecology, particularly platforms and actors.

First, our study shows that differences between media platforms remain relevant, as they clearly occupy different positions in the news ecology. Some platforms (television, radio) are far less important in starting news stories, but are probably crucial for a news story to reach the public at large. Although most stories are multiplatform in nature, few reach all platforms. Further research is needed to explain to what extent the diffusion of news stories can be explained by differing criteria of newsworthiness per platform. Second, though the theoretical difference between producer and audience can be questioned, we find that the interaction from which news stories arise is still centred around established actors. Journalists and political actors have a vastly more important role than ordinary citizens do. This is partly due to our focus on the election campaign in which journalists and especially politicians are more active than usual in reaching out to the electorate (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). Potentially, in political 'routine' periods, other actors have more opportunities to influence and initiate news stories. It would therefore be useful to replicate this study in other contexts to see whether social media and traditional media become more distinct platforms outside election time. We hope our study can be a helpful starting point for this.

## Note

1.  After publication of this article, a re-check of the data set showed that a number of items that did belong to news stories were erroneously left out of the analysis. This included 43 radio items, 125 website articles, and 4 tweets. All of the analyses were re-done, which showed that the exclusion of these 172 items (on a total of 6,669) resulted only in minor differences, none of which affected any of the conclusions. The corrected numbers are available from the author upon request. For chapter II and III, this error was corrected.

# Chapter II

# Inter-media Agenda Setting in the Social Media Age

How Traditional Players Dominate the News Agenda

in Election Times

Inter-media agenda setting is a widely used theory to explain how content transfers between news media. The recent digitalization wave challenges some of its basic presuppositions, however. We discuss three assumptions that cannot be applied to online and social media unconditionally: one, that media agendas should be measured on an issue level; two, that fixed time lags suffice to understand overlap in media content; and three, that media can be considered homogeneous entities. To address these challenges, we propose a 'news story' approach as an alternative way of mapping how news spreads through the media. We compare this with a 'traditional' analysis of time-series data. In addition, we differentiate between three groups of actors that use Twitter. For these purposes, we study online and offline media alike, applying both measurement methods to the 2014 Belgium election campaign. Overall, we find that online media outlets strongly affect other media that publish less often. Yet, our news story analysis emphasizes the need to look beyond publication schemes. 'Slow' newspapers, for example, often precede other media's coverage. Underlining the necessity to distinguish between Twitter users, we find that media actors on Twitter have vastly more agenda-setting influence than other actors do.

# Introduction

Almost three decades of inter-media agenda-setting research have yielded valuable insights into the dynamics of news and the importance of different media outlets and platforms in disseminating news through the news atmosphere. The research tradition started out from traditional news media, often with the goal of identifying the 'opinion leaders' – the outlet that all other media seem to look to for guidance. In this respect, high-profile newspapers have often found to be leading, influencing radio, television, magazines, and other newspapers (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008). Over time, technological innovations led to the availability of online news media, specifically websites, blogs, and social media. Scholars have gradually introduced those in the existing inter-media agenda-setting framework. The image they sketch is far less unidimensional, leaving room for nonmainstream media outlets to affect other media's agendas (Meraz 2009, 2011). Two-way agenda-setting effects between traditional and newer media forms have been demonstrated in a number of studies (Messner and Distaso 2008, Russell Neuman et al. 2014). Nevertheless, legacy media organizations remain important players. Both in their traditional form (Conway, Kenski, and Wang 2015, Groshek and Groshek 2013, Lee, Lancendorfer, and Lee 2005, Rogstad 2016) and via their online channels (Ceron, Curini, and Iacus 2016, Vonbun, Kleinen-von Königslöw, and Schoenbach 2016), established media titles still shape the news discourse. It is important to note, however, that even though these studies acknowledge the distinct nature of online and social media, this observation has not been taken to its logical conclusion, namely, these media are not mere novelties, but should make us re-examine the groundwork on which inter-media agenda-setting theory is built. We argue that there are (at least) three core assertions that cannot be applied unconditionally to online and social media in this day and age. The first of these is that media have an 'agenda' that can be measured on the issue level; second, that fixed time lags are appropriate to measure correlations between media content; and third, that media should be treated as homogeneous entities. We address the first two aspects methodologically by measuring agendas on the news story level, rather than on the issue level, allowing us to assess how specific news event reporting develops over time. The third assumption is tackled by differentiating between the authors of social media content. To demonstrate how the conceptualization affects the findings,

we compare the results of our alternative method – which we call the 'news story approach' – with those of a 'traditional' analysis of time-series data. We take a comprehensive view and consider online and offline media alike, applying the measurement methods to the 2014 Belgium election campaign. We find that media's agenda-setting power, in terms of 'traditional' analysis, is mostly aligned with their publication cycles. This means that news websites and Twitter have a massive impact over other media that publish less often but more extensively. Underlining the necessity of considering 'Twitter' as a collection of separate publics with their own dynamics, we find that agendas are set by media and journalists' accounts, not by other actors on Twitter. The news story analysis emphasizes the need to look beyond publication schemes, however, as factors other than time remain vital to explain media platforms' agenda-setting capacity and their role in the news landscape.

## Theory

Inter-media agenda-setting research is concerned with measuring the extent to which news content transfers between different media (Atwater, Fico, and Pizante 1987). The assertion is that journalists tend to let their reporting decisions be guided by the coverage of their peers at other news outlets (Breed 1955). Especially highly regarded media such as the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* in the United States are assumed to influence the content of other media. This 'co-orientation' between different news outlets has economical, as well as socio-psychological origins. Obviously, following up on, or simply replicating others' content ('churnalism') requires less resources and is therefore more cost-effective than seeking one's own leads. Alongside this blunt economic reason, the occurrence of co-orientation has socio-psychological origins, too. From a social-constructionist viewpoint, no single event is inherently more worthy of coverage than the next one. Hence, journalists have to deal with the question of noteworthiness on a daily basis, often implicitly. Professional training and socialization in the newsroom equips them with 'news values' (Galtung and Ruge 1965, Harcup and O'Neill 2001, Harcup and O'Neill 2016) as one set of criteria for these judgments, but these still leave room for doubt as the decisions remain in the hands of a single journalist or journalists within one news organization. Looking to other media outlets' coverage, then, can be a valuable source of guidance

about which topics are of importance on this day or in this period of time. Obviously, the Internet as we know it today was yet to be developed when the theory of inter-media agenda setting was put forward. Gaining ever more territory in the latest decades, its influence on the news industry is profound. Not only has the business side of news been affected, also the ways in which news is made, presented, and circulated have dramatically changed as a result of the introduction of news websites, social media, and mobile Internet. The resulting contemporary news environment has been characterised as 'hybrid,' 'ambient,' and 'liminal' (Chadwick 2013, Hermida 2014, Papacharissi 2014) – terms that refer to the diminished possibility of assigning fixed properties to different media platforms and their content. Properties that were originally typical of one medium are now also featured by others. Video clips, for example, originally typical of television, are embedded in news website articles. In similar fashion, journalists nowadays have to share their role as information gatekeepers with people "formerly known as the audience" (Rosen 2006), who are able to produce and share their own content via blogs or social media. Their content may, in turn, be used in journalists' reports, making citizens co-producers of news (Bruns and Highfield 2012). Journalists anticipate audience feedback on the news they cover and incorporate it in their follow-up reports (Anstead and O'Loughlin 2015, Beckers and Harder 2016). Also, the breaking news genre is not exclusively a matter for television or radio any longer, nor is news always reported first by journalists (Bruns and Weller 2016). Being largely preoccupied with 'the now,' social media have keenly adopted this style of reporting and made it one of their core news genres (Kwak et al. 2010). Thus, we see that media become more fluid, their different "technologies, genres, norms, behaviours, and organizational forms" (Chadwick 2013, 4) blending together to form the contemporary news media landscape.

In this setting, the notion of time has obtained a different connotation. With news websites, liveblogs, and social media, the publication of news depends much less on fixed schedules (Karlsson and Strömbäck 2010). Nor does news need to be communicated as a 'finished' product. Journalists can float snippets of news via social media channels as events unfold, only to follow them up later with a full article on their medium's website. Even when news workers are not physically present on the location of an event, they may cover it by embedding audience-constructed material supplied

in real time, be it in text, image, or video (Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith 2014). These developments imply a vast reduction of infrastructural requirements for news reporting compared with television and radio. Thereby a 24/7 news cycle is enabled not only technically, but also in practice. To a lesser extent, a 24/7 news cycle has already been introduced via cable news networks in some larger markets, like the United States and the United Kingdom (e.g., CNN, BBC News), but such initiatives have remained absent or unsuccessful in most western democracies with smaller media markets (Cushion 2010). Because of the new digital affordances, however, immediacy has become a production norm for journalists and news organizations around the world (Buhl, Günther, and Quandt 2016), as well as an expectation of consumers (Thurman and Walters 2013). This increased emphasis on immediacy means that the gap between a newsworthy event happening and it being communicated to a wider audience is narrower than ever before.

*Challenges*

Given this sketch of the current news media landscape, the basic assumptions of inter-media agenda setting should be re-examined critically. This chapter elaborates on three interwoven assumptions that are problematic in this day and age. The first assumption is the postulation of an 'agenda' that can be measured. This agenda is usually operationalised as an index of the content of one particular news outlet or platform, reconstructed by measuring the saliency of issues (like 'taxes,' 'immigration,' or 'foreign policy'). One medium's amount of attention to these issues is then compared with that of another medium at a later point in time. By grouping content into issue categories stable over time, this method makes the study of large longitudinal datasets feasible. The downside, however, is that this level of analysis allows only general conclusions regarding inter-media agenda setting, such as the most important issues of a particular election campaign (Welbers 2016). It does not allow us to zoom in on the underlying news stories – which seems to be a mismatch if we consider inter-media agenda-setting theory to be describing what happens when journalists look to other media for story ideas. Although this has always been the case for this type of research, it is arguably more problematic nowadays. In the more rigid news structures of the twentieth century, in which publication schedules were fixed and the bandwidth to carry news was relatively narrow, the likelihood that an

'economic' news item of today pertained to the same news event as the 'economic' news of yesterday was much higher than it is now. This is especially true when researchers included more specific subtopics. However, a 24/7 news environment, combined with the fact that news sources might be brought up by virtually anyone, makes issue categories too broad to draw conclusions about journalists' work practices. Two, it is assumed that the flow of news media coverage can adequately be captured by aggregating the saliency of issues on discrete intervals, or 'blocks' of time. Depending on theoretical or statistical considerations, these blocks may comprise hours, days, or weeks (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008) – the interval of choice being called the time lag. Time lags best capture dynamics of a media landscape in which news is reported on relatively fixed schedules, exemplified by morning newspapers and evening television news broadcasts. With social media and news websites that report news virtually instantly, time lags as small as a few hours are insufficient to adequately describe how news spreads across media nowadays (Buhl, Günther, and Quandt 2016, Weimann and Brosius 2016). However, the time lag can only be shrunk down to a point, before no statistically meaningful results can be detected any longer. In addition, the interval at which media influence one another may have become more variable. Although some news stories spread instantaneously, others may stay under the radar, only to gain traction at a later point in time (Conway, Kenski, and Wang 2015)

Three, past inter-media agenda-setting research has started from the implicit assertion that the content found in one outlet or platform is the product of deliberate choices of one specific actor group – namely, journalists. This is shown by the fact that aggregated content, irrespective of its authorship, is taken as 'the' agenda of the respective medium. Indeed, this is an appropriate assertion for traditional forms of media, for which journalists and editors act as the sole gatekeepers. Only they have the power to select or exclude content. However, this conceptualization is not in line with the nature of social media. After all, these platforms are a meeting place for various actors – citizens, journalists, and politicians alike (D'heer and Verdegem 2014) – who are not overseen by any editorial board. The literature on social media discourse (D'heer and Verdegem 2014) and social media sourcing (Broersma and Graham 2013, Hladík and Štětka 2015, Paulussen and Harder 2014) suggests that these actors differ

in the extent to which they are able to affect the discourse. Yet, the available inter-media agenda-setting literature that deals with social media outlets generally treats them as single homogeneous entities (e.g., Ceron, Curini, and Iacus 2016, Rogstad 2016, Russell Neuman et al. 2014, but see Conway, Kenski, and Wang 2015)

*News or Information?*

This diversity of publics goes hand in hand with a multitude of functions that social media perform. They are neither solely nor even primarily *news* media. If we are to embed social media (and by extension all online media) within the inter-media agenda setting framework, we are required to differentiate between content that can properly be named 'news' and content that is 'just' information. Although the line may not all that clear, at least a "vague definition" (Loosen 2014, 12) is required. For this, we draw on the sociological approach of Michael Schudson (2003), who argues that news is "the product of the journalistic activity of publicizing' (12). Moreover, news is about *telling* something about the world. All else is not news:

> [T]he reporter's job is to make meaning. A list of facts, even a chronologically ordered list, is not . . . a news story. From a list or chronicle, the writer must construct a tale, one whose understanding requires a reader or viewer to recognise not the sum of facts but the relationships among them. (Schudson 2003, 177)

This implies that livestreams, liveblogs, and real-time tweets are not news per se. If journalism is a 'first draft of history', live descriptions of events can perhaps best be regarded as a "first draft of the present" (Bruns and Highfield 2012, 25, Bruns and Weller 2016). Bearing in mind the focus on news as the outcome of a certain journalistic *practice* in Schudson's definition, live content can only be associated with news *post hoc*, when journalists have actually covered its subject. The same is true for other 'raw' published information like interviews, op-eds, and background programs. They may relate to news, but are not news in themselves.

*Contemporary Media Dynamics*

In addressing the aforementioned theoretical and methodological challenges, we aim to answer the empirical question of the roles that different media play in the contemporary news media landscape. We approach this broadly, considering older media forms, news websites, and social media. Hence, our central query is: *How are*

*different media platforms in the contemporary media landscape temporally interrelated?*

As an exemplar of social media, we choose to study Twitter. Although Twitter is not the most popular social media platform in general, it is widely used among (political) journalists (Broersma and Graham 2016). Moreover, its characteristics seem to make it the ideal outlet to influence the news process. For journalists, Twitter allows to post short raw news facts or footage that is not (yet) 'fit to print' but still deemed newsworthy. For politicians, Twitter is useful to bypass the journalistic gatekeepers, strategically launching scoops to generate social media 'buzz'. Meanwhile, (organised) citizens may use Twitter as an outlet for their eyewitness reports or citizen journalism. Nevertheless, the majority of the available literature suggests that the social medium's agenda-setting power is either lacking or overshadowed by more traditional news outlets. This is the case for mutual influence between Twitter and news websites (Ceron, Curini, and Iacus 2016), as well as for the dynamics between Twitter and newspapers or television news (Conway, Kenski, and Wang 2015, Groshek and Groshek 2013, Rogstad 2016). These studies, however, have only looked at a subsection of news platforms. A more comprehensive study suggests that social and traditional media *both* set the agenda, sometimes reinforcing one another (Russell Neuman et al. 2014).

## Data and Methods

*Sample*

To answer our research question, we captured newspaper, television, radio, news website, and Twitter content in the Belgian 2014 election campaign. We are aware that political news during an election campaign is a rather specific setting, in which media are very much concentrated on an upcoming event. Exactly this focus, however, gives us the opportunity to capture a vast array of interconnected news items. Although the volume of communication between journalists, politicians, and citizens is higher, these interactions reflect processes that are embedded within the day-to-day work routines – albeit at a higher pace. We assume that underlying inter-media agenda setting mechanisms are similar across contexts (Vonbun, Kleinen-von Königslöw, and Schoenbach 2016)

Regional, federal, and European elections were simultaneously held on May 25. Accordingly, we collected media content between May 1 (Labour Day, when left parties traditionally present their concerns for the coming period) and May 24 (the last campaign day). Our sample comprised Flemish (Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, population approximately 6.2 million) media and Twitter accounts only. Specifically, we included five print newspapers (*De Standaard*, *De Morgen*, *De Tijd*, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, *Het Nieuwsblad*), three news websites (*destandaard.be*, *demorgen.be*, and *deredactie.be*), the two daily 19:00 television newscasts (*Het Journaal* of the public broadcaster VRT and its commercial *VTM Nieuws* counterpart), six daily radio newscasts (VRT's 7:00, 8:00, 12:00, 13:00, 18:00, and 19:00 Radio 1 bulletins), current affairs television programs (VRT's *De Zevende Dag*, *Reyers Laat*, *Terzake*), and election-specific television shows (VRT's Het Beloofde Land, Zijn er Nog Vragen? and VTM's *Het Nationale Debat* and *Jambers Politiek*). It should be noted that the news websites in this sample are affiliated with either print newspapers (*demorgen.be* with *De Morgen* and *destandaard.be* with *De Standaard*), or radio and television outlets (*deredactie.be* is VRT's news website), which routinely share their content. For Twitter, we were inspired by Axel Bruns' Twitter News Index approach (see Burgess and Bruns 2012) to construct a sample of relevant accounts. This sample encompasses 678 professional Flemish journalists, 44 accounts affiliated with legacy media organizations (the aforementioned media, complemented by magazines, local newspapers, and program-specific accounts), 467 politicians (the top-three candidates per constituency, plus a selection of lower listed candidates), and 19 civil society organizations. In addition, we included a selection of 109 'influentials' (experts, businesspeople, celebrities and citizens), identified using twitto.be's 'top Twitter influencer' index. This list ranks Belgian users based on their *Klout* score, an algorithmic estimation of one's online influence. In sum, we had a sample of 1,317 accounts of which we retrieved both their own (re)tweets and tweets in which they were mentioned by other Twitter accounts. Last, all tweets mentioning the election hashtags #vk14 or #vk2014 were saved. The aim of this sample was to sketch the Flemish 'Twittersphere' that journalists might have tapped into while covering the election campaign. The underlying rationale is that even had we not included a particular Twitter user, if their tweets were relevant enough within the election campaign context, these would have been retweeted by at

least one of the accounts in our sample – thereby making them part of our dataset. Tweets that remained relatively unnoticed (receiving fewer than two favourites and two retweets) were excluded.

Respecting this threshold, we captured 23,134 items across all platforms. Of those, 9,935 (43 per cent) were categorised as politically relevant – meaning it featured a political topic, a domestic political actor, or an election-specific term. We proceeded with these 9,935 items.

*Coding*

Metadata, like publication date and time, were automatically registered for these news items. The issue of each item was manually coded following the Comparative Agendas Project codebook (www.comparativeagendas.net, see Baumgartner and Jones 1993) that contains 28 broad issues (such as 'macro economy,' 'health care,' and 'education'). Coders could attribute up to three issue codes to each item, but only the first (most important) is used here. Another manually coded variable indicates whether the original sender of a tweet (not the retweeter) was (1) a political actor, (2) a media actor, or (3) another actor. The latter variable was included to deal with the heterogeneity of actors on social media and the respective roles they have. Inter-coder reliability was sufficient for both variables.[1] After coding these general properties, news items were categorised into news stories, which requires a bit more explanation. A news story comprises all of the news items that deal with the same time- and place-specific event (for a similar approach, see Welbers 2016). A general example of this could be the bankruptcy of a large business. Here, all coverage about this specific bankruptcy, whether it be newspaper articles, television news, or tweets, is considered part of this news story. News stories had to be identified first to code on this level. Following a book of guidelines, we did this by examining all news items from legacy media organizations (newspapers, news websites, radio, and television). Every newly encountered time- and place-specific news event was added as a news story, which was given an easily recognizable name, consisting of the subject, a predicate, and an object. For example, the most-often covered news story in the current dataset was named "[Top politician] claims that everyone with a good resume is able to find a job in Belgium." When an item related to an already encountered news story, it was

categorised as such. To check this, the coding form included a search box in which keywords could be put in and looked up in the news story database.

After coding all news items from traditional media outlets, the non-news items (background pieces, op-eds, interviews, live debates), as well as the retrieved tweets[2], were assigned to the already-identified news stories. Thus, in line with our theoretical elaboration on the difference between raw 'information' and 'news,' these items were not used to detect any extra news stories. They were assigned to news stories only if they dealt with 'regular' news items that were published earlier or later – if not, they were ignored. Although an item might contain cues of different news stories, in the present analysis we only use the primary news story that appeared per news item. Filtering out the items that were not considered part of a news story, the sample size on the level of the news item is 6,024, embedded within 864 news stories. As we are specifically interested in the *dynamics* of news, we ignored the stories that did not spread beyond one news platform. As a result, our final sample contains 5,260 individual items, grouped into 414 multiplatform news stories.

## Analyses

Our analysis consists of two parts. First, we aggregate our data into a 'traditional' time-series structure to connect our study to the existing literature. However, as argued, this standard approach has its limitations. That is why we include a second analysis on the level of news stories. We show media platforms' respective roles by tracking how each news story transfers between them. By comparing the results of the two approaches, we learn about their respective strengths and limitations.


# Results

## Analysis of Time-Series Data

The full dataset of 9,935 items is aggregated by time and issue.[3] We use a six-hour time lag during the day (three time lags per day: 06:00–12:00; 12:00–18:00; 18:00–24:00). News published during the night (24:00-06:00) – which hardly ever occurred here – is included in the morning time lag. The resulting dataset contains the proportion of attention dedicated to each issue by each news platform during each six-hour period. For instance, when 'news websites' has a value of .08 for the issue 'immigration' at the

evening lag of May 5, this means that 8 per cent of all website news, published on May 5 between 18:00 and 24:00 concerned immigration. We compute these data for the four traditional platforms (newspapers, news websites, television, and radio), as well as for Twitter, the latter split up according to tweets' original senders: media actors (Twitter media), political actors (Twitter political), and other actors (Twitter other). We opt for a six-hour time lag as a middle ground between daily or weekly time lags on one hand, and even shorter time lags on the other. The former two are used often in agenda-setting research, yet do not allow capturing the pace of online platforms. The latter makes sense theoretically, but would be practically meaningless, as too many 'zeros' (time lags without any items) would occur. For each news platform, attention to the various issues is explained by the other platforms' lagged attention for these issues. The pooled time-series structure of our dataset requires careful consideration of the used method of analysis. We opt for cross-lagged ordinary least squares models with fixed effects on the issue level. Four modelling decisions deserve attention. First, issue dummies control for the differences *between* issues, that is, for the fact that some issues systematically get more attention across different platforms than other issues (heterogeneity). The issue 'labour,' for instance, received significantly more attention during the campaign than 'defence.' As a result, the independent variables in our analyses account for the variation over time *within* issues, offering a conservative test for inter-media agenda-setting effects. Second, a media agenda is first and foremost determined by its own past: if news websites paid much attention to a certain issue six hours ago, they are likely still doing so right now. To control for this temporal dependency (autocorrelation), every model includes a lagged dependent variable. Third, all other independent variables in the models (the other news platforms) are lagged as well, so that our models test whether or not a platform's attention for issues *precedes* the explained platform's attention for these issues (temporal causality). Fourth, the models with newspapers and television as dependent variables use a daily instead of a six-hour time lag, in alignment with their publication schemes. The missing six-hour lag data are imputed based on previous values. Newspapers, for instance, are published in the morning, so the respective values stay constant over the rest of the day.

**Table 5.** Analysis of time series data

| | Twitter Media | Twitter Political | Twitter Other | Television | News websites | Radio | Newspapers |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Twitter Media (n-1) | .14*** (.03) | .07** (.03) | .05 (.03) | .07 (.09) | .05 (.03) | .21* (.08) | .13* (.06) |
| Twitter Political (n-1) | .11** (.03) | .15*** (.03) | .17*** (.03) | -.14 (.10) | .14*** (.04) | .16 (.09) | -.02 (.06) |
| Twitter Other (n-1) | .00 (.03) | .09** (.03) | .09** (.03) | -.17 (.10) | .03 (.04) | .02 (.09) | .10 (.06) |
| Television (n-1) | -.10*** (.02) | -.01 (.02) | -.01 (.02) | -.03 (.04) | .03 (.03) | -.02 (.07) | .05 (.03) |
| News websites (n-1) | .07** (.02) | .08*** (.02) | .02 (.02) | .44*** (.07) | .21*** (.03) | .34*** (.07) | .27*** (.04) |
| Radio (n-1) | .03** (.01) | .00 (.01) | .02 (.01) | .22*** (.03) | .05*** (.01) | .25*** (.03) | .08*** (.02) |
| Newspapers (n-1) | .08* (.03) | .01 (.03) | .06 (.03) | -.03 (.07) | .04 (.04) | .03 (.10) | .11** (.04) |
| Constant | .01*** (.00) | .02*** (.00) | .01*** (.00) | .02*** (.00) | .01*** (.00) | .01* (.01) | .01*** (.00) |
| N (obs) | 1,360 | 1,360 | 1,360 | 460 | 1,360 | 1,360 | 440 |
| N (issues) | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 |
| R² | .24 | .36 | .35 | .27 | .23 | .23 | .57 |

Notes. Fixed effects models, issue dummies included in the analysis but not reported in table. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** , p < .001.

Table 5 (on page 45) shows that almost all series are autocorrelated, demonstrated by the positive and significant coefficients of the lagged dependent variables in (area shaded dark grey). Furthermore, the content of many platforms is influenced by that of one or several other platforms (area of significant effects shaded light grey). Considering the daily-published media (newspapers and television), we see that they are typical 'followers', not agenda setters. Although they are affected by other agendas like news websites, radio, and Twitter, they themselves barely have any impact on other platforms. Newspapers influence Twitter media slightly, probably because news organizations tweet about recently published articles. Television does not affect other platforms. More frequently updated traditional platforms (radio and news websites) are found to be relatively strong agenda setters. They influence newspapers and television, and one another. Their attention for issues also precedes attention patterns on Twitter: news websites have an effect on both political and media twitterers; radio only affects Twitter media. On their turn, news websites are also affected by Twitter political, whereas radio news is influenced by Twitter media. With regard to Twitter, it stands out that Twitter other is not so much related to any of the other platforms, except for Twitter political. Apparently, the idea that citizens and civil society can co-determine the agenda of traditional media via Twitter is not true, at least not on a detectable scale. Inversely, other Twitter users' agenda does not appear to be set by traditional media either. Twitter media and Twitter political, in contrast, are more closely related to other media platforms, for there is mutual influence between them and some of the traditional media. Wrapping up, the analyses demonstrate that the 'slower' platforms, newspapers and TV, are mainly followers, whereas the 'quick' platforms, news websites, radio, Twitter media, and Twitter political, both follow and set other platforms' agendas. Twitter other is least dependent on other platforms, as it does not follow, nor set other agendas. We will now compare these findings with results from a news story perspective.

*News Story Analyses*
Instead of aggregating data on time lag and issue, for our second analysis we use the 414 news stories that comprise 5,260 individual items. The points in time at which each specific news story appeared first on each media platform serve as points of comparison here. For each dyad of platforms, we calculated how often both respective

media platforms were first, and the median time difference with which the other medium followed. Table 6 (on page 48) displays the results of this analysis. From this table we can read, for example, that 47 (25 + 22) news stories were covered by both newspaper and radio. A small majority (53 per cent) of these stories were covered by radio first, with a median advantage of 12 hours over newspapers. In the other cases (47 per cent), radio lagged a median number of 14.5 hours behind newspapers. The N differs per dyad, as not all news stories were featured on each media platform (in fact, only 15 of the 414 stories were covered by every platform). As this analysis does not provide indicators of statistical significance, we shaded cells light grey (>60 per cent) or dark grey (>70 per cent) to highlight stronger temporal dynamics.

These comparisons tell us about the role of each media platform vis-à-vis other platforms regarding the development of news stories. Like in the analysis of time series data, publication schedules heavily affect a platform's agenda-setting capacity. Infrequently publishing media platforms, here television and newspapers, are quite slow compared with other media. Both are slower than virtually all others in the majority of the cases, as their respective columns in Table 6 demonstrate. This pattern is most pronounced for television. Newspapers precede other media platforms in 36 to 52 per cent of the cases, suggesting that they have a substantial influence on certain topics.

Of particular interest is newspapers' temporal relationship to news websites, which is comparatively short. Interpreting this time difference, we should take into account that newspapers are printed only once a day, just after midnight, whereas news sites start publishing in the morning.[4] From this small time difference, we can infer that news websites start the day by providing a round-up of news stories covered in the newspapers. Remarkably, this pattern is not found when comparing radio and newspapers.

**Table 6.** News story analysis (median time differences in hours).

| Platform... | | Precedes... | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Twitter Media** | **Twitter Political** | **Twitter Other** | **Television** | **News websites** | **Radio** | **Newspapers** |
| Twitter Media | - | n=79 (62%) 6.2h | n=79 (68%) 3.5h | n=61 (73%) 21.1h | n=63 (40%) 5.5h | n=25 (62%) 10.3h | n=78 (64%) 10.4h |
| Twitter Political | n=48 (38%) 5.4h | - | n=72 (60%) 3.2h | n=65 (71%) 10.6h | n=78 (55%) 5.3h | n=28 (66%) 3.8h | n=71 (56%) 14.2h |
| Twitter Other | n=39 (32%) 5.1h | n=49 (40%) 6.3h | - | n=48 (69%) 11.4h | n=51 (42%) 4.3h | n=22 (61%) 4.9h | n=64 (58%) 12.8h |
| Television | n=23 (27%) 1.9h | n=27 (29%) 3.3h | n=22 (31%) 1.8h | - | n=18 (19%) 1.7h | n=9 (19%) 17.0h | n=42 (48%) 6.0h |
| News websites | n=95 (60%) 0.7h | n=64 (45%) 5.1h | n=70 (58%) 4.6h | n=76 (81%) 11.6h | - | n=44 (73%) 6.8h | n=101 (63%) 11.2h |
| Radio | n=15 (38%) 2.5h | n=14 (34%) 2.0h | n=14 (39%) 1.7h | n=39 (81%) 7.0h | n=16 (27%) 1.3h | - | n=25 (53%) 12.0h |
| Newspapers | n=43 (36%) 20.9h | n=56 (44%) 15.4h | n=46 (42%) 19.1h | n=46 (52%) 18.5h | n=60 (37%) 8.1h | n=22 (47%) 14.5h | - |

Although the results of both types of analysis are similar, the news story approach provides a more nuanced picture. It is clear that *all* media types set and follow each other, at least to some extent. For instance, though the analysis of time-series data did not show any significant correlation between political or 'other' Twitter actors, and newspapers, the dyadic comparisons show that there *is* a relationship, with newspapers lagging behind in most cases (14.2 and 12.8 hours, respectively). For the other two media platforms that publish more often than daily, radio and news websites, the news story confirms the results of the analysis of time-series data only partially. It reaffirms the capacity of news websites to set other media's agendas, but it downplays the influence that radio has. Still, the low median time differences demonstrate that when online outlets follow radio news, they do so swiftly (1.3–2.5 hours).

Another noteworthy finding is the close relation between the three groups of Twitter actors, and their interaction with news websites. The six dyads between Twitter actors are characterised by low median time differences, indicating their vast interconnectedness. Within this Twittersphere, actors that represent a media organization generally set the agenda for both political and other actors on Twitter. Remarkably, though politicians and parties on Twitter do not seem to set the agenda of Twitter media users that often (38 per cent), their discussions of particular news stories precede websites' news coverage in a (small) majority of cases (55 per cent). This pattern suggests that political Twitter accounts may function as inspiration or source material for website news more often than that they directly influence 'other' actors' tweets. By contrast, Twitter media accounts' agenda seems to be influenced by news websites: 60 per cent of the news stories they discuss were already published on websites. The median time difference here (0.7 hour) is lower than any other dyad, suggesting that this often concerns tweets linking to the very same news report on the website.

## Conclusion and Discussion

Starting from a traditional inter-media agenda-setting perspective, we analysed how different media platforms in the contemporary media landscape are temporally

interrelated. From both of our analyses, we conclude that news dissemination processes are mainly aligned with media platforms' (lack of) publication schemes. Having no fixed schedule, news websites and Twitter are both comparatively fast to carry news stories, attesting their prominent agenda-setting role. Television news and newspapers, in contrast, have fewer occasions to publish and are consequently relatively slow to cover news. Their ability to set other media platforms' agenda is therefore limited. Radio takes an intermediate position. It is bound by a fixed broadcast scheme, but does air multiple bulletins per day. Its agenda-setting capacity is in line with this – setting the agenda for most other media platforms, yet not to the extent that media platforms without fixed schedules do. From these findings, we conclude that speed (or immediacy) is a key factor to estimate media platforms' agenda-setting capacities. This does not mean that slower news media can be discarded altogether, however. The news story approach offers refinement to the negligible agenda-setting role for newspapers and television that we find in the analysis of time-series data. Indeed, newspapers and television not seldom *do* cover a news story before it is published by media platforms that are typically faster, such as news websites or Twitter. We should also note that even when the former two platforms are late to cover a news story, their subsequent impact may be larger. After all, one television news item or front-page feature normally reaches far more people than a single tweet. News websites and social media, in turn, may respond with more coverage on the story, further amplifying the impact. The role of offline media platforms in agenda setting nowadays may thus be more of a reinforcing or legitimizing one.

Furthermore, though speed undoubtedly matters for media platforms' agenda-setting capacity, our findings indicate that it is not its sole determinant. Radio news, broadcasted multiple times during the day, does not affect the agenda as much as newspapers do, even though the latter only publish once a day. One explanation is that this could be due to role perceptions of a given media platform. In this case, radio journalists themselves may deem that the value of their platform lies more in providing regular news round-ups, rather than broadcasting every bit of news as fast as possible. In turn, this means that other media platforms' journalists are inclined to look elsewhere for inspiration for their own work.

In contrast with most existing studies on inter-media agenda setting, we disentangle different Twitter publics. Our analyses demonstrate that this is required to interpret inter-media agenda-setting dynamics correctly. The role of 'other' actors' tweets (including experts, civil society, and citizens) is overshadowed by that of media and political accounts. The analysis of time-series data shows that they seldom set platforms' issue agenda, and likewise tend to trail, rather than lead, journalists and politicians on Twitter in discussing news stories. Twitter is thus mostly influential via tweets by journalists or news organizations, indicating processes of monitoring, imitation, and co-orientation between different media outlets (Atwater, Fico, and Pizante 1987, Buhl, Günther, and Quandt 2016). Also, institutionally powerful actors – politicians and parties – exert relatively much influence on the media coverage, which is in line with the universal 'power elite' news value (Harcup and O'Neill 2016)

*The Way Forward: Suggestions for Future IMAS Studies*

As always, this study has obvious limitations and only provides a partial answer to the questions and challenges that we put forward. Building on our findings, we suggest three research paths future studies should prioritize. First, we cannot detach our conclusions from the context in which they were found. The campaign setting is at least partly responsible, and in particular, the role of non-institutional actors may be much more outspoken in the case of an unexpected event. After all, elections are well-announced, "highly structured and ritualized" (Jungherr 2014, 254) events, of which the coverage can be roughly planned beforehand by media outlets (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008). This leaves little room for non-elite actors to influence the flows of communication. In contrast, unexpected events may offer opportunities for outsiders to challenge the traditional dominance of elite actors in the news, for journalists can count less on traditional news routines like relying on institutional sources (Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith 2014, Lawrence 2000). We expect that the information flows in both types of events be structurally different, leading to different dynamics. Future research should assess the extent to which inter-media agenda-setting capacity is contingent on this context, in order to update our knowledge from the pre-social media era (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008).

Second, more research regarding the 'new' role of the traditional media outlets in the creation and distribution of news stories is needed. It is clear that they are losing the battle in terms of speed, but as our results suggest, their added value might be more in legitimizing and broadening stories than in initiating them. Echoing the classical idea on opinion leadership in inter-media agenda setting, we assume that some media outlets are still regarded more highly than others (Breed 1955). Journalists are more inclined to follow up the coverage of media with a high stature. In this respect, the print version of a newspaper may be deemed more noteworthy than more ephemeral forms of news media. To assess how the influence of the platform compares with that of the media outlet, future research should supplement the current platform-level analysis with an inquiry that traces the influence of individual newsrooms across platforms. For example, how do the combined efforts of the *New York Times* staff on print, website, and social media stack up against those of other newsrooms? An interaction effect between platform and newsroom may exist. Third, and most fundamentally, we believe that future inter-media agenda-setting studies need to have more fine-grained methods to study 'who follows whom'. This study suggests a news story–based approach. By embedding individual news items within larger narrative, this method ensures the existence of a substantive (though not necessarily causal) link between the items, that is, all grouped news items deal with the same news event – something that cannot be established with issue categories. Although this requires intensive coding, and may not be suited to do long-term analyses, it allows to track precisely how specific news stories transfer between platforms (Welbers 2016). Besides, a news story approach is not reliant on time lags. Instead of forcing data into these predetermined time intervals, this enables the study of news platforms' temporal dynamics in a more inductive way, irrespective of whether different media affect one another within weeks, hours, or even minutes.

Comparing the methods we used, our conclusion is that though both are helpful, the news story approach provides a more nuanced picture of how news travels between agendas. This should be the preferred method for in-depth analyses, especially on the short term. However, we should acknowledge that, like with 'traditional' analyses of time-series data, using this method does not 'prove' the assertion that temporal precedence signifies causality – in this case meaning that if one medium features the

same news after another medium, journalists of the former were inspired by those of the latter. We can simply not be sure that one platform or medium 'caused' the other medium to cover a certain news fact, perhaps unless we would interview journalists or Twitter users, or do an ethnographic newsroom study – methods that come with their own drawbacks. On a conceptual level, moreover, a recent line of thinking in journalism studies argues that we cannot think in terms of media outlets providing cues to other media for specific news stories any longer. Rather, the amalgamation of news coverage should be regarded as an on-and-off awareness system ('ambient journalism', see Hermida 2014), that affects the topics that are considered relevant at a certain moment (the 'zeitgeist') and influences news coverage more subtly. To research this, future studies will need to devise alternative models and methodologies that do not consider inter-media agenda setting to be a strictly linear process. In this study, we used the news stories analyses only to determine on which platform a study appeared first. However, the method allows more detailed analyses that track and follow the most relevant stories through time. Such an in-depth approach would allow much more accurate insights into how and when media outlets influence each other. In short, we believe the news story approach, though needing further refinement, could be one pathway for inter-media agenda-setting research in the digital era.

## Notes

1. Krippendorff's alpha is .70 for major issue code and .86 for sender of tweet (based on gold standard; double coding of 174 items).

2. Krippendorff's alpha is .76 for assigning news story to tweet (based on gold standard; double coding of 174 items).

3. The issue 'functioning of democracy and public government' is excluded, as almost all non-substantive items about the campaign in general are categorised as such. In addition, non-political issues like 'fires and accidents' or 'natural disasters', which were barely covered, are omitted.

4. We set newspapers' publication time at 1:00 at night, so assuming that news Web sites start publishing around 7:00, the 'actual' median time difference is about 2.1 hours.

# Chapter III

# News stories and news flows

## Networked storytelling and temporality in the election campaign

Today's news landscape is defined by its interconnectedness. Fuelled by the internet and catalysed by social media, news stories seem to spread quicker than ever before. In telling and re-telling the news, journalists are now joined via social media by experts, politicians, and citizens alike. The question to what extent the contributions of these groups on different media platforms endures, remains unexplored. To study this, a qualitative content analysis of the 40 biggest news stories of the Flemish election campaign of 2014 is conducted. This chapter retraces how each story was covered and discussed on five different media platforms. It concludes that news telling generally proceeds in two stages. The first stage is a quest for last-minute facts, focused on the present and the recent past. The second features the interpretation and analysis of these facts, drawing on past events and possible future developments. I conclude that there is a 'division of labour' between media. Twitter and news websites are essential platforms to communicate fresh news and updates to ongoing news stories. Print newspapers, meanwhile, are vital to make sense of the facts later on. The roles of radio and television lie somewhere in between. To explain the contributions that different media platforms make, their 'temporal affordances' are a useful framework.

# Introduction

The previous chapters of this dissertation focused on the temporal patterns in the contemporary news landscape. The first study argues that while the 'hybrid' state of affairs in the media poses difficulties for existing methodologies, we are still able to measure the dissemination of news – provided we use an approach that is adapted to the changed circumstances. The second chapter shows how this alternative methodology stacks up against traditional measurement models.

Our empirical data are indeed reason to think that the introduction of newer media forms have led to a change in the dynamics of news making and news storytelling. The importance that is attached to swiftness in media today is underscored by the finding from Chapter I that 41 per cent of the news stories begin their life on Twitter, with an additional 29 per cent starting on news websites. The notion of a 'news story', here, refers to all of the coverage about a time- and place-specific event, including its aftermath. On median, the lifespan of such a news story is just over a day (28.7 hours). Additionally, in Chapter II, we consistently find that these quick media platforms set the agenda for others, if we take the traditional measurement model as our lead. At the same time, we have stressed that old patterns do not necessarily die. On the one hand, we should not overestimate the impact of speed, given that a 'slow' platform like the newspaper breaks news in 1/5$^{th}$ of the cases, with these stories having a median lifespan that exceeds all except for television. Moreover, it routinely precedes other media platforms' coverage, which suggests that the newspaper platform retains an authoritative role. On the other hand, the importance of Twitter as a media platform (as indicated by its speed) may suggest a drastic change in the balance of power, but a closer look reveals that this is mainly fuelled by the 'usual suspects': politicians, political parties, media outlets, and journalists. These findings, in sum, display a core of 'older media' practices (Chadwick 2013), supplemented by the dynamics that are typical for newer forms of media.

While we can draw several inferences from these quantitative findings from Chapters I and II, the 'who follows whom' question does not tell us much about the development of news stories over time in terms of content. It is apparent that the news coverage is

affected by the interplay between time, media platform, and actors, but how these three exactly interact cannot be inferred from the numbers alone.

Here, I revisit the news story approach, for this is a useful level of analysis to examine how news is brought into existence and changes throughout time. The goal of this chapter is to find out what each of the media platforms contributes to the way in which the news stories are narrated, as well as the role that temporality plays in telling these stories. This issue is contextualised within the literature about the role of time as an enabling and limiting factor in different media platforms, the networked nature of the current media landscape, and the way in which time is referenced in the news. A qualitative analysis is then applied to see how the interactions between time, media platforms, and actors relate to the content of the news. Last, the findings of this analysis and their implications are discussed.

## Theory

*Journalism and temporal affordances*

The notion of *temporal affordances* (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2017) offers a useful framework to highlight how the production of news is affected by (changing) material conditions and technological aspects. Its premise is simple. Journalists produce work for different media platforms that each have their own properties, which determine their 'temporal constraints and possibilities' (i.e. 'affordances', Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2014, 1062). These are defined as "the potential ways in which the time-related possibilities and constraints associated with the material conditions and technological aspects of news production and dissemination are manifested in the temporal characteristics of news narratives" (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2017, 3). Reviewing the literature, Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger (2017) put forward six of these properties, of which four are relevant for the present study: *preparation time*, *immediacy*, *transience*, and *fixation in time*. These affordances, which are described below, help explain how the role of time in different media platforms shapes the content that is published on these platforms.

The other two, which are left out here, are *extended retrievability* and *liveness*, the former of which does not apply here because it is about the potential use of large

amounts of data and texts from different points in time (cf. data journalism), which did not feature in any of the coverage we encountered. The latter is ignored here because I do not consider live coverage as 'news' in itself, but I rather see it as pure 'information'. Analogous to Michael Schudson's definition, live coverage is comparable to 'a chronologically list of facts' (Schudson 2003, 177). This means it lacks an essential quality of news, being that it makes sense of the facts by placing them in a coherent narrative. By contrast, live coverage is 'merely' information that is passed on, without a narrative.

The first of the relevant temporal affordances, the afforded *preparation time*, the time that journalists are able to work on their content before submitting it, varies between different media platforms. Journalists work against deadlines, which is the last moment at which copy can be submitted for the next edition of the medium in question. Yet, while a single 'edition' of a newspaper, television broadcast, or radio bulletin is clearly demarcated, and its deadline as well, this is not true for news websites or Twitter. For the latter two, deadlines are *de facto* continuous. Here, the ability to publish content at any time, rather than having to await the production of a news item or the printing process, is paired with expectations of the public and the journalistic mores that fetishize the importance of immediacy and scoops (Boczkowski 2010, Karlsson and Strömbäck 2010, Thurman and Walters 2013, Schudson 1986). In support of these assertions, journalists in Israel report that in 84 per cent of the cases, work on a website news article lasted for only three hours or fewer – compared to 30 per cent for television items and 57 per cent for newspaper articles. Radio, with clear but very frequent deadlines (an hourly bulletin), even outpaces this with 88 per cent of the items created in 3 hours or less (Reich and Godler 2014). Added to this, Buhl, Günther, and Quandt (2016) find that in Germany, from the first time a news story is reported on a news website, it often spreads in one short burst, taking only 90 minutes to reach a point of saturation (i.e. the moment at which the number of media covering the same event does not increase significantly any longer). The media platform seems to heavily affect the afforded preparation time.

A second affordance, *immediacy*, refers to the capability that a media platform provides to report about events shortly after they happen. From this perspective, it is

easy to explain our finding that over 60 per cent of the news stories that we identified in the coverage of the election campaign of 2014 (see Chapter I) begin on either Twitter or news websites. They both do not have any periodical edition, for content can be posted at any time. In addition, the production process is relatively lean – it does not require recording equipment, a printing press, and layout, unlike radio, television and print newspapers.

In addition to this, a third affordance, *transience* (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2017) is more outspoken for Twitter and news websites than for television, print newspapers, and radio (to some extent). Transience refers to the ability to update and build on earlier coverage by adding new information when it becomes available, or provide new analyses and context to previous coverage (Bødker 2016). In the online realm, news narratives can be incremental, comprising of layers of information that are held together with hyperlinks. It is easy to post a short 'breaking news' message on a news website, that will be updated with more detailed information later on – which is impossible for a newspaper to do. For Twitter, this phenomenon is even more profound, as it is amplified by its 140/280 character limit. Because of this limit, it is well understood that it does not require the narrative form that is used on news websites. Concise statements, perhaps supplemented with hashtags, @-mentions, hyperlinks, and/or follow-up tweets, suffice (Bruns and Burgess 2012). Journalists can post these statements on-the-go via mobile devices on their own account, without having to use the interface of their outlet's website and/or run it by their editors first (Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton 2012). The ephemeral nature of Twitter makes that there is some more leeway for journalists to speculate about what happened, instead of double-checking the facts, like print media outlets demand (Usher 2014). Given these affordances, our finding that 41.7 per cent of the stories start on Twitter, of which 83.1 per cent initiated by journalists' or media outlets' accounts (see Chapter I), should not come as a surprise. Radio occupies an in-between position in this respect. It broadcasts bulletins every hour, allowing it to be relatively up-to-date compared to print newspapers and television news. Yet, unless there is a very urgent breaking news story, radio remains bound to this schedule of discrete bulletins which, furthermore, requires a rounded narrative – whereas Twitter does not.

It is tempting to focus solely on the swiftness of reporting that different media forms enable. However, our previous research (Chapter II) demonstrates that it is necessary to go beyond characteristics of 'speed', (also see the critical assessment of the notion of 'speed' in journalism studies of Zelizer 2017). If we would only focus on speed, the conclusion would be that 'slow' media like newspapers and television occupy only a marginal position in today's media environment. By making a number of methodological choices that reflect the specifics of today's media landscape better, it becomes clear that this is not the case at all. Not only *are* newspapers important generators of news stories, the stories that are broken via this platform tend to have a longer lifespan than those that start on other platforms (see Chapter II). One explanation for this goes beyond 'speed', but is still based on the temporal affordances viewpoint. This reasoning is that while online media make it possible to change and update the content that is posted (transience), newspapers and other static/print media provide *fixation in time*, the fourth temporal affordance (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2017). The material, tangible nature of print makes that the article is final, definitive. The inability to change or add to it makes it likely that an article contains a well-rounded and clear narrative about events that happened, highlighting different stages of the news event – including assertions about 'what will happen next' (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2014). This placement in time and the contextualization of the news is obviously also done to distinguish the paid print newspaper content from information that is freely available online, on television, or on the radio.

Contrary to what may be assumed given the material character of print publications, they are well-fit to serve as "vehicles of collective memory" (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2017, 7). They are less up-to-date and are required to be much more selective, as attested by the fact that they cover a narrower spectrum of news stories than more ephemeral online media (see Chapter II). Exactly this property gives them an authoritative role to act as gatekeepers of collective knowledge. The afforded fixation *in* time of the content implies a fixation *of* time to the pages of the newspaper. Each day, these pages reflect the things that will be collectively remembered from that day. In other words, one could say that newspapers are the 'first draft of history', with

Twitter and other more ephemeral media writing the 'first draft of the present' (Bruns and Highfield 2012).

We should not regard the temporal affordances as deterministic features of the media (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2017, 2). The affordances enable and limit, not impose and forbid. Newspapers still break stories, a website article may be authoritative and offer much context, and people on Twitter can be completely ignoring some news story. By following and deconstructing news stories throughout their lifespan, the present chapter examines to what extent the news content reflects the temporal affordances of the respective media platform via which it is told.

*Networked news storytelling*

The temporal affordance perspective has so far been used only to look at tendencies at the platform-aggregated level (Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2016, Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2014, 2017). Yet, the news has never been told on one platform alone – as a body of inter-media agenda setting studies shows, news does spread between and across different media outlets and platforms (e.g., Atwater, Fico, and Pizante 1987, Danielian and Reese 1989, Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008). This cross-medial nature must be acknowledged if we are to draw inferences about the current media landscape. Another essential property of this landscape is the networked nature of news storytelling (Chadwick 2013). Social media platforms connect the traditional producers (media organizations) to the traditional audience, and facilitate two-way interactions between them. This means that during the news story dissemination process, news can take on different meanings and forms as a result of these connected voices that shape the discourse together in real-time (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013, Wells et al. 2016).

Much like a children's game in which a chain of people tries to convey a story as accurately as possible as the original narrative by whispering it into one another's ear, after the first report news stories continue to be told and re-told across media, taking a different shape along the way than it originally had. In contrast to the children's game, however, the news is publicly accessible via open media channels. Therefore, we are able to witness and trace how the meaning of the stories in the news evolves in real-time. An off-handed remark buried within a longer interview, otherwise

unnoticed, may become a full-fledged gaffe when media highlight it from the original article. The power to highlight, select, and re-frame certain aspects of a news story in a structural way (not just in an exceptional case) was formerly limited to either elites with good connections to the media, or the people working in the media themselves. With the introduction of Web 2.0 (e.g., personal blogs and social media), this power is not exclusively with them any longer (Heinrich 2011). Social media allow virtually anyone to participate in (re)telling the news and affect the discourse (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012). The power to influence the conversation is much more fluid than in traditional mass media, as this is "assigned and reassigned through interactions on social media. Social media functions as a contested space, where the dynamics of interaction can result in a crowdsourced elite that may challenge and neutralise traditional elites" (Hermida 2015, 2). The voices that get the centre-stage can vary from moment to moment.

These dynamics are not confined to the social media realm. Journalists are very much part of these networks and use them to both push and pull information to and from social media (Heinrich 2011). Social media thereby form a playing field on which different groups of actors, ranging from politicians to citizens, businesses, and journalists meet on a continuous basis (D'heer and Verdegem 2014). They are intricately connected within an 'ambient' media system, in which information (be it in visual, textual or audio form) is always present on the background (Hermida 2010). After all, the 'news' is only one gaze at our smartphones away. The value of social media as an information source for journalists, then, is not so much in the individual post, but in the whole body of messages that is collectively selected, shaped, framed, and re-mixed (Bruns 2003, Hermida 2010, Meraz and Papacharissi 2013). The "shifts in tone and topical focus of incoming tweets may cause [a] user to pay attention to the story" (Bruns and Burgess 2012, 802). That is, while a single post can easily be missed or ignored, a recurring issue may well inform a journalist about the 'zeitgeist' and provide them with new ideas for stories.

At the same time, legacy media organizations still play a key role in shaping the content within this tightly knit media system. Users of social media will tweet their instant responses to television shows or televised political events, for instance (Hawthorne,

Houston, and McKinney 2013, Kalsnes et al. 2014). In other cases, media and journalists directly post their content on social media, which is then discussed there (Broersma and Graham 2016). There is ample empirical evidence for a mutual agenda setting effect between social media and traditional mass media (see the literature review and findings in Chapter II). Besides, logics that are characteristic for mass media (a focus on elites/celebrities and conflict, the question 'who is winning', and personalization) tend to be replicated in the social media sphere and shape the discourse there (Jungherr 2014). Yet again, social media have distinct features in terms of content, practices and style forms, which are reshaping the coverage on older media platforms as well. The distinctive use of ironic commentary/humour and the contestation of political actors' utterances are examples thereof (Jungherr 2014). In part, these are borrowed by the traditional media's newsmakers. The term 'assemblage' (Chadwick 2013) captures the result of this give-and-take between different media forms. Chadwick posits that assemblages "are composed of multiple, loosely coupled individuals, groups, sites, and temporal instances of interaction involving diverse yet highly interdependent news creators and media technologies that plug and unplug themselves from the news-making process, often in real time" (63). This conceptualization underscores the need to study these media entities together and look at the interactions taking place between them.

*News in time, time in the news*

News storytelling is not just shaped by time – it also guides the audience in their perception of time. In (re)telling the news, journalists (and, as we have seen, other actors as well) provide us with a lens through which we can learn about the meaning and role of time in society (Schudson 1986). The stories told in the morning news show on the radio, for example, mark the beginning of a new day. They summarise the newspaper headlines and the events that have happened in other time zones during the night. It prepares listeners for the day by providing them with the latest 'essential' information. By contrast, the late-night current affairs show on television is more serene and delves deeper into only a handful of selected topics. Likewise, the print weekend newspapers feature special sections with longer human-interest interviews, art reviews, and literature criticism. These characteristics ask us to "look backward and forward, to remember, to evaluate, to plan. [The] time horizon [of the weekend paper]

(...) is much less closely connected to the previous twenty-four hours than the daily paper" (Schudson 1986, 102). In other words, the narration of news stories also tells us about the 'now' in our own life.

News storytelling is paradoxical in nature. The very fact that a story is passed on as 'news' hints at a break from day-to-day life. By its literal meaning, the story makes us aware of 'something new', it is an event that is different from the regular state of affairs (Reich and Godler 2014). At the same time, there is a continuous aspect to news as well. As Luhmann (2000, as summarised in Grusin 2010) argues, having 'the news' as an institution, with periodical journals and broadcasts that need to be filled with content, means that there is also an expectancy of breaks, or *irritations*, to the rhythm of daily life. In the age of the internet and social media, there may be a constant (and instant) succession of such breaks (Schrape 2017).

Journalism has been a driving force to maintain continuity between 'the regular' and 'the odd'. This can be inferred from a line of research into commemoration in journalism, which originated in the last decade (Neiger, Meyers, and Zandberg 2011, Zelizer 2008, Zelizer and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2014). News media outlets anchor current affairs in time by referring to past events, which establishes a certain flow between the now and the past. This flow is created in two ways that are relevant for this chapter (Edy 1999, Schudson 2014). The first is that the past is brought to mind to emphasise how the current events are novel – and therefore noteworthy. For instance, the importance of a democratic election in one country may be underscored by reminding readers that that country has hitherto been autocratically governed. The second is that using the past can contextualise current affairs to help readers make sense of the news. Without historical context, news about a clash in parliament today over the effects of a decision made years ago can be confusing. Journalists, by including this background, make sure that any reader who has not followed this particular story in the past will be able to understand it anyway. As they cannot give all of the details of past events, they have to select the relevant facts, making them contribute to the construction of the collective social memory (Schudson 2014).

News stories, thus, do not exist in a temporal vacuum. The narration of ongoing events is closely linked to the past – but also to the future. Journalists tend to look forward

and speculate about developments that may or may not happen (Grusin 2010, Oddo 2013). Journalists cover the full scope of temporalities, from the 'deep past' to the 'distant future', in order to anchor the current news events in time (Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2016).

Media platforms differ from one another in the use of time in their storytelling, as one study that compares online news sites and print newspapers demonstrates (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2014). This study shows that print newspaper articles are more likely to have a future-centred orientation than online news websites, which tend to orientate themselves on the recent past. The variation can be explained by highlighting their respective temporal affordances. Whereas websites have high degrees of immediacy (they can report on events close to their occurrence) and transience (they are easily updateable), print newspapers are constrained by their fixation in time (as they are printed once a day). The rise of quicker media like television and the internet seems to have forced print newspapers to re-position themselves in the media landscape (Barnhurst and Mutz 1997, Tanikawa 2017). As they lost their edge in being up-to-date, their editors have chosen to report in a fundamentally different way – by analysing how current events are likely to proceed in the future. They are now "deploy[ing] their rich existing resources (reporters) to conduct more analytical and background reporting that makes use of their physical spaces in print, while receding from the areas in which the online news outlets surpass the print in their temporal and technological strengths (i.e. relaying timely, bare-bone news)", as can be inferred from longitudinal content analysis of one international and two American newspapers (Tanikawa 2017, 3535-3536). This conclusion is supported by the observed uptick in context-providing articles at the expense of 'conventional' pieces (Esser and Umbricht 2014, Fink and Schudson 2014). It seems logical to assume that the re-alignment of media platforms has continued, especially following the rise of social media, for which the temporal differences differ from the already-existing media platforms.

*Research questions*

Building on the temporal affordances perspective (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2017), which describes how characteristics of media platforms affect the

(im)possibilities of news storytelling on these platforms, this chapter addresses two research questions.

The first one is about the dynamics of the news storytelling process over time. As I have argued above, the contemporary media landscape can be characterised by its networked nature, exemplified by social media but present in the whole range of media platforms. This makes the news dissemination process a two-way street in which the news is re-told and re-shaped without any central oversight. Media platforms feature their own temporal affordances that enable or limit the way in which they can cover a news story. The question, then, is what the respective contributions of the media platforms are to the news storytelling process, given these affordances. In other words:

> **RQ1:** How do different media platforms, each with its own specific temporal affordances, contribute to the networked news storytelling process?

The openness of the output that these processes generate – the (social) media content – allows us to track how the content has developed from moment to moment. This enables us to make an inductive reconstruction of how the news stories have been played out in the media.

The second question addressed in the present chapter is about the use of temporal references in this news storytelling process. In light of the introduction of new technologies and media types, existing news media platforms have repositioned themselves to focus on the types of coverage that they can do better than other media, given their temporal affordances. As Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger (2014) show, where news websites focus on the present and past, telling the audience about what has just happened or what is happening right now, newspapers tend to emphasise the future, by analysing how the news story may proceed. We know that there may be shifts in temporal orientation on the aggregate level, but it remains unclear *how* temporal references are employed by media platforms to tell the news. What is their function in the story, and what type of references are used at what point in the narrative? In short:

**RQ2:** What role do temporal references play in the networked news storytelling process?

## Methodology

Because I am interested in a deeper exploration of a relatively untapped field, I rely on a qualitative content analysis of a sample of 'news stories' that is limited in number, but thematically varied. A news story, as I define it, is the collection of news items that are related to the same time- and place-specific event (also see the previous two chapters). For instance, a news story may tell about a politician's gaffe and comprise all of the news items (be it tweets, televised content, or news website articles) that deal with the aftermath (responses by adversaries, analyses, opinion pieces, rebuttals, et cetera) of that incident.

The selected sample of news stories that is used for analysis in the present chapter consists of the top-forty largest stories (in terms of items), drawn from my earlier research (see chapters I and II). All of the content was collected in the Belgian election campaign of 2014, which is a specific but apt setting to study processes of news dissemination. As the news media are largely focused on a single event (the upcoming elections), this context provided an opportunity to capture a vast array of interconnected news items. Although the volume of communication between journalists, politicians, and citizens is higher than in 'regular' settings, these interactions still reflect processes that are embedded within the day-to-day work routines – albeit at a higher pace. The full list of news items and some descriptive information is presented in Appendix A.

In order to answer the research questions, I conducted my analysis at the level of the news story. I considered each item within the news story in chronological order (by date and time of publication) and in this way, I tracked how the story developed over time. In particular, I looked at two dimensions:

1. Story telling dynamics: What 'reading' is given to the story in this item, and how does it relate to, differ from, the previous item(s) in the story? Has the

presentation of the events in the story changed? What is the item trying to convey in terms of how the audience should interpret this story?

Indicators of this are whether the writer of the item in question, or one of the actors mentioned, casts doubt on the facts/description of the event; if different facts are provided; or if the information is contextualised in a different way, compared to previous coverage.

2. Temporality: if the item references temporality, what kind of reference is it? How is the news being anchored in time?

Indicators of the placements in time are drawn from the typology of Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger (2014), who found five temporal clusters in news coverage. In chronological order, these are: the deep past (more than 48 hours ago); the recent past (the last 48 hours); the present (the last few hours – the coming few hours; the middle future (after the coming few hours), and the distant future (more than ten years from now).

I specifically looked at the relationship between these storytelling dynamics and uses of time on the one hand, and the media platform-specific affordances on the other. That is, I looked at whether the content of the news item in question was a reflection of the possibilities that different media platforms offer to their respective producers or users. Do they show patterns typical for the temporal affordances that are ascribed to them (as discussed in the previous section), or do they deviate from these dynamics.

I annotated each individual item for each of the dimensions, insofar as its content did show anything about them. After reading, watching, or listening and annotating all of the items within a news story, I summarised my findings and wrote a note about the general patterns that were observable in the story. The analysis that follows is based on these story-level notes. It draws on examples derived from the item-level annotations to clarify the general tendencies for this chapter. The translations of the examples and quotes from Dutch to English are mine.

Whenever a specific news story is referred to, its number (see Appendix A) is included for reference. As I am not writing about the role of specific actors (politicians or otherwise), I have chosen not to use names, instead I use more abstract identifiers.

Similarly, I have chosen to substitute party names with more generic names referring to their ideology.[1]

## Analysis

This section is structured around one conclusion from the present analysis, which is that the lifecycle of news stories consists of two stages. There is an *initial stage*, which deals with the question 'what happened?' and includes different actors' first responses to the news. It is about the discovery of the facts that go on to define the story, and is focused both on reporting what happened, as well as updating the audience on the latest developments as new information becomes available. The second, *making sense stage* is not about bringing the audience up to date any longer – it is about giving analysis and opinion of the facts that have become 'news'. The main purpose is to help the audience understand the stakes, or try to convince them of a certain assessment of the recent events. This stage can be summarised with the question 'what does it mean?'. Here, the recent events are used as the point of departure, from which it is explained where the story came from, why this is newsworthy (i.e. what is the *value* of the news), how we should make sense of it, and also in what direction the story is likely to be heading.

The chronological boundary between these two stages is not absolute, as there may be some overlap when transitioning from the first to the second phase. Yet, the distinction between the two is clear, and the development in the news story is always linear – once the first phase has been 'finalised', the story does not revert to a phase of discovery again. Per phase, I discuss two aspects: one, patterns of news storytelling; and two, the use of time in the respective phase. With concrete examples, drawn from the news items, I illustrate the general patterns that I observed in the data. Indeed, it should be stressed that not all aspects I discuss here are present in each and every story, but I repeatedly encountered these phenomena in the 40 stories that I studied. A typical news story would contain most, if not all, of these elements.

**The initial stage – 'what happened?'**

*Storytelling patterns in the initial stage*

The initial stage of the narration of a typical news story happens in three steps. First, the relevant facts are 'discovered' and reported, usually by a legacy media organization. Then, fairly quickly, parties with an interest – political adversaries, pundits, journalists, and citizens alike, either vent their opinions via Twitter, or are contacted by journalists for their take on the ongoing event. After the first burst of reactions, their comments are bundled in 'anthologies' on news websites. Because of the fact that I study an election campaign, the stories are mostly not event-based but initiated by 'what someone has said'. The cascade of comments about these utterances, then, form the bulk of the initial stage of the story.

It is clear that legacy media organizations are responsible for breaking the bulk of the news stories. Twenty-eight of the stories in this sample derive directly from any of the legacy media organizations' outlets – via either their Twitter accounts, their news websites, their print newspapers, or the radio bulletins (see Appendix A). As with the complete sample of news stories, discussed in Chapter I, it is not impossible for a non-elite source to have the scoop on a news story. Yet, this is rather exceptional, with only three stories in the current sample starting from citizens' Twitter accounts.

The first message in the news story is mostly a factual description of something that happened – it does not provide any 'reading' of these facts. The news of the death of a former Belgian prime minister (#1) is a typical example of this, with the public broadcaster posting "BREAKING: [former prime minister] Luc Dehaene has passed away" (Twitter, May 15). Indeed, this is an example of straightforward and non-politicised news, but this is true for potentially more contentious subjects as well. One story was about the chairman of the Flemish nationalist party, who was followed behind the scenes for a television show (#35). In the documentary, he was seen receiving a text message from an informant at the liberal party, containing the abysmal results of a secret poll that that party apparently held. Newspaper *De Tijd* had the opportunity to see this documentary in advance and coolly described: "[In the documentary,] one can see how (…) the liberal party's internal polling results are

received by [Flemish nationalist party chairman] on his smartphone. 'Ah, the espionage service', he says, smiling at the camera. (…) [I] had to send four people to get my hands on this poll." (*De Tijd*, May 15). Despite the intriguing nature of this scene, this was all that the newspaper wrote about it at that time. There was no clarification, nor was the liberal party contacted for a reply. This is typical for the way in which stories start – focused on a factual description, and including a minimal number of voices. The adversarial principle comes later in the story lifecycle.

Despite the factual tone, it is all too obvious that this is a very juicy story. Though the article maintains a restrained and neutral tone, it is clear that the conspiracy-like collection of inside information from a political adversary has *news value*. We often see this pattern when news media outlets break a story. Without an air of sensation, it can still very deliberately point out why something is remarkable. For example, the gaffe of one politician in a large interview in the Saturday edition of newspaper *Het Nieuwsblad* (#4), for example, was featured on the front page of *De Standaard* on that very same day. Apparently, the editors of the former newspaper had spotted the saliency of this one statement and passed it along to their colleagues at the latter, even before their own newspaper went to print.[2] This one utterance, and not any of the dozens of other things in that interview, then became the story during the weekend in which both newspapers were published. Another example is when newspaper *De Tijd* apparently received word in advance that the leader of the Flemish nationalist party was about to post a video clip of himself addressing the Walloon population in French on Twitter (#10). Until then, he had refrained from using Twitter at all. Despite publishing the news in their 'slow' print edition, *De Tijd* still had the scoop, in which it was highlighted that he asked the Walloon population to "give him a chance" – which became a recurring theme in the subsequent coverage by other media outlets. In a different news story, *demorgen.be* reported on a statement from an interview with a politician, one day before the interview was actually published in the newspaper *Het Laatste Nieuws* (#6). Their source was a press agency (not in the present sample) that had sent a release around that highlighted the statement that said that "everyone with a good resume is able to find a job in Belgium". In contrast to the examples before, the tone was somewhat provocative here. Sensing that that proposition might not be true,

the article on *demorgen.be* explicitly invited the readers to e-mail them their experiences that contradict that statement.

These 'juicy' elements that are emphasised in the first item of a news story usually go on to define the nature of the story. However, what a media outlet deems most newsworthy will not always become the story. There was one case (#14) in which the media outlet (*deredactie.be*, May 6) plainly misjudged what the main takeaway would be. Two Walloon top candidates (a social democrat and a liberal) had a debate on the radio station of francophone public broadcaster *RTBF* (not in the present sample), a conversation that was summarised on *deredactie*.be – the first item in the news story. This article's headline was that the liberal candidate had said that he would be contending for prime minister. A much more charged statement of his, that "without liberals in the government, children were kidnapped" [3], was largely overlooked and only included as a side note. Nonetheless, other news websites, the radio news, and Twitter users (mainly journalists and politicians) were quick to highlight this. It turned out that this would be the main debate in the days after, drawing criticism from all political sides – including his own party chairman. The sought-after position of prime minister was history.

Yet, this is the exception. The focus and highlights of the first item in a news story normally tend to stick. This means that even when politicians or other actors do not agree with the reported facts or the core message of that item, it requires them to position themselves in opposition to it.

As may be expected, there was no lack in supply of voices that wanted to do so in this election campaign. Especially in the first hours after the initial publication, political actors seem to want to push their opinions, media outlets scramble for reactions, and Twitter users drop swift responses. This can be illustrated with the previously mentioned story of the leader of the Flemish nationalist party who posted a video addressing the French-speaking population (#10). Within fifteen minutes after the video was posted, the leaving prime minister (a Walloon social democrat) replied on Twitter with "a drowning man will clutch at a straw". Alluding to the fact that a nationalist politician reached out to the other part of the country, a journalist wrote that "[party leader] is in his royal communication mode", whereas an anti-immigrant

party politician rebuked that "apparently, he now reveals himself the saviour of the nation. Proponents of Flemish independency now know what he stands for" (Twitter, May 21). These three tweets were initiated without any interference of journalists, but media outlets also actively probe for responses. This was the case when the Flemish nationalist party leader announced that contrary to earlier statements, he might take up the office of prime minister under certain circumstances (#17). The announcement came in a special election television show in the evening, after which it was covered in the newspapers of the next day. Consequently, both the Walloon *RTBF* and the Flemish *VRT* radio stations invited two other party leaders to give their reaction – replies that were, in turn, published in written form on news websites *deredactie.be* and *demorgen.be* (May 22).

Anthologies of these reactions are a recurring instrument in the news supply. This is a typical feature of the 'breaking' or 'developing' news story. For example, after a terrorist attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels on the day before the elections (#25), politicians of all different sides went to Twitter to condemn the assault and send their condolences. These were then bundled in anthologies on a news website ("Politicians horrified by shooting in Brussels", *demorgen.be*, May 24). These bundles of replies tend to be used in cases in which a news event happens during daytime, but there are no new developments to report on (also present in stories #1 and #14). Compiling already-existing material into a new article is a way of bridging this interim. Perhaps unsurprisingly, since the focus here is on a political case, these summaries mainly feature elites – candidates, parties, journalists and pundits.

*The use of time in the initial stage*

Given the nature of the initial stage, which is focused on providing new facts and updating the audience on current affairs, it is logical that the news items are about what has just happened, and what is happening right now. In the typology of Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2016), it links to the 'present' and the 'recent past', encompassing a time span that ranges from the past 48 hours to the next coming hours.

Even if the news is covered afterward, the choice of temporality puts the event in the present. For example, a radio bulletin mentioned "[social democratic party chairman] says it is not the intention of the educational reforms to abolish [certain programmes]" (#27, *Radio 1*, May 1). While the use of the present tense ('says') implies that the event is happening right now, it had already been stated earlier on that particular day. As new bits of information become available, these are added to the story by referring to the earlier developments. In this way, it is incrementally building a narrative:

> [Christian democrat candidate] rejects the proposal that [Flemish nationalist chairman] launched yesterday evening in VTM NIEUWS to first form a Flemish government first, after which that coalition would negotiate with the French-speaking coalition to form a federal government. (#21, destandaard.be, May 10)

**The making sense stage – 'what does it mean?'**

*Storytelling patterns in the making sense stage*

The stage discussed before is about a focus on the facts, incrementally building a story as new information pours in. It follows a linear pattern, in the sense that the coverage builds on previous information and there are no radically different interpretations that force a re-examination of earlier items, or make one story grow into multiple incompatible storylines. As mentioned before, the meaning that the first item(s) give to the story is not drastically affected during the dissemination process. At some point in these news stories the question of 'what happened?', which is typical for news, naturally evolves into a second question, which is 'what does it mean?'.

For legacy media organizations (in all forms that are studied in the present chapter), there is a clear distinction between these two different stages. The one flows naturally from the other, as the factual story is told first, and the interpretation follows suit. These stages are separated in two ways – a time gap, and/or a difference in format. The former occurs for example when on the day after a 'breaking news' event, the print newspaper publishes a background story describing developments that lead up to it. The latter is done by deliberately dedicating a different section to punditry and analysis (in newspapers), or having different people for providing either the factual account, or the analysis (on television news). Newspapers, in particular, are inclined to

report the factual news (and the reactions of politicians) on their website first, and save the analysis and punditry for their next print edition.

Indeed, legacy media organizations operate the same way on Twitter. Their accounts tend to post only breaking news facts and hyperlinks to their own website's content. Nevertheless, for other accounts, this is not at all the case. There, discussing factual information about the news is only second to giving opinions about the news, the analysis shows. To illustrate the difference between the other Twitter accounts and legacy news organizations, I return to the gaffe of the Walloon liberal candidate who remarked, "without liberals in the government, children were kidnapped" (#14). Newspaper *De Morgen* explained on their website (*demorgen.be*) that he was referring to the spell between 1988 and 1999, during which the liberals were not part of the governing coalition and a number of kidnappings took place in Belgium. The website added that the comment was received with fury on Twitter, and in the course of the day, a few more articles were published on their website about politicians' reactions to the quote, but the medium refrained from providing a more elaborate interpretation or assessment of the facts. Next day's print edition, in contrast, contained two in-depth articles that provided context regarding the possible strategy laying behind the remark, the character of this particular politician, and the rivalry between him and a socialist politician that has been going on since the 1990s.

If we compare this to the reception of the comment on Twitter (those accounts that are not affiliated with legacy media organizations, anyway), we see a major difference. Even as the interview was aired early in the morning, within 90 minutes there were condemnations ("his remarks are ignoble, this is beyond shameful"), tactical analyses ("he is trying to reinforce the right wing of his party"), jokes (a picture of a volcanic eruption with the hashtag #withoutliberals), and speculations about how this incident will develop ("he's got a long day ahead of him") on Twitter (all four examples from May 6). Essentially, there is no barrier between reception and evaluation and interpretation of the news here. Twitter is a true instantaneous medium in this respect.

Another clue that hints at a difference in separating fact and interpretation on Twitter is that tweets often do not contain anything more than the opinion or assessment

itself. Without any context, these tweets are hard to interpret, as the following statements show:

> A journalist, quoting a party leader on television: "Beautiful words from [party leader]: 'Our guide has started his last journey' [@commercial broadcaster]" (May 15)

> A journalist: "Walloon people, we ask you to respect the political choice of the Flemish people. We respect your choice as well – unless you vote for the social democrats, of course." (May 21)

> A journalist: "When we were not in the government, it rained significantly more often." (May 6)

Taken out of context, as I have done here, the reader is left wondering what these tweets might possibly be about, as they are somewhat detached from any factual information.[4] Their respective writers must have assumed that their intended audience is knowledgeable. After all, these tweets' meanings can only be known via circumstantial information, for example via other tweets, other sources of news, or Twitter's 'trending topics' of that moment.[5] This suggests that in many cases, the medium functions as a channel for (meta-) commentary on the news, rather than as an information channel in its own right. Tweets generally do not affect the direction in which the news stories head in a tangible way, they mainly stand on their own. This property – which, undoubtedly, has to do with the character limitation as well – is unique to Twitter. By contrast, on other news media platforms, editorial or analytical pieces are always introduced with some background information for reference.

There do not seem to be many differences among between media platforms other than Twitter in the making sense stage. When radio, television, news websites, or print newspapers give interpretations (although the radio bulletins generally do not), they distinguish between fact and interpretation by drawing formal or substantive boundaries. In television news, this is achieved by having the news facts read by the anchor, and getting an interpretation from their politics reporter. The latter's role is diffuse – part journalist, part expert – but it is clear that the reporter has more leeway to go beyond the facts and provide an analysis. For example, after the news anchor told about a gaffe that happened that day, a reporter took a seat at the news desk and explained:

> Maybe this gaffe has a political side to it (…) he wanted to convince the Walloon voters who are more inclined to vote for [right-wing parties]. Whether or not this error will continue to haunt him, is something that we will have to await (…) he has the reputation of [being like] a duck, on which no criticism sticks. (#14, *VRT Journaal*, May 6)

For news websites and newspapers, the pattern is similar to the one I described before with regard to *De Morgen*'s coverage: the websites tend to stick to covering the facts only. Commentary, analysis and interpretation are saved for the print version of the newspaper. Whenever a background article did appear on the website, it was either a piece from the print version of the day before, or an item that would be printed in the next edition of the newspaper. Two of the three news websites in this sample (*demorgen.be* and *destandaard*.*be*) have an economic incentive to reserve the more in-depth content for their paid edition, and not to give their original reporting away for free. Yet, remarkably, the Flemish public broadcaster VRT (*deredactie.be*), which offers no paid content and thus has no economic incentive to withhold such content, showed the same tendencies. They tend to answer the question 'what happened?' in their television programs – the daily news bulletin and current affairs shows. When a background article, or 'explainer', was posted, it was usually a short clip (with some introduction) of their televised content. We can conclude, here, that websites are apparently seen primarily as a channel to *update* the audience about ongoing events and the debates, re-using content from their other outlets. Providing a context to interpret these affairs is a task left to other outlets.

*The use of time in the making sense stage*

Temporality plays a key role in providing context to, or an analysis of, current affairs. References to both past and future points in time serve to emphasise the novelty of the news and make them more comprehensible (Schudson 2014). The types of reference that I find in this analysis correspond to the 'deeper past' and the 'near future' in the typology of Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2016). This covers the past before the last 48 hours, as well as the period after the next coming hours up to ten years after the present moment. Notably, references beyond ten years, which Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2016) found to 'shape the collective vision', were largely absent in the election campaign coverage. This can be explained by the fact that

Election Day seems to function as the horizon in this setting, with the after-election negotiations as an aftermath.

*The future*. The horizon of the elections is omnipresent, especially in legacy media outlet's coverage. As Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2016) claim, journalists make use of the future to "[analyse] possible implications of current events" (18). This is a pattern that is very clear from the data. In the campaign, the actions of political actors are not just evaluated on their inherent merit, they are predominantly linked to the question of how they will affect the future election outcome. For example, when the Flemish nationalist party chairman announced his willingness to become prime minister (#20), one newspaper analysed that:

> Being prime minister cannot be combined with being mayor. This means that [Flemish nationalist party chairman] takes a huge risk. (...) The fact that he wants to trade in City Hall for the Parliament could cost him votes in his hometown. (De Tijd, 22 May)

Similarly, when the environmentalist party announced that they would make the waiting lists in health care a top priority (#18), one newspaper evaluated their chances to win over new groups of voters:

> They themselves do not have any star candidates who score high in the election polls. At first sight, that is not an issue, for the idea-minded environmentalist constituency is not very keen on the idolization of individual candidates. (...) However, name recognition does, of course, help to win new voters, which is what the [environmental party] definitely wants as well. (*De Standaard*, 6 May)

In this way, journalists tie current events to possible election outcome scenarios. Typical for this particular election is that one scenario, in which the Flemish nationalist party will win the most seats is inevitable, according to the news coverage:

> There can be little doubt about which parties will be ordered first [the Flemish nationalists, RH], second [the Christian democrats, RH] and third [the liberal party, RH] in the coming Flemish elections. (#21, *De Standaard*, May 15)

> The certain winner is struggling in the last mile. (…) VERDICT: The [Flemish nationalists] will, as expected, win the elections. The question is just whether they will succeed in reaching their target of gaining 30 per cent of the votes. (#4, *De Morgen*, May 23)

Furthermore, since these elections were about two levels (federal and regional) that require an agreement between multiple parties to form a government, current events were also analysed for their possible effects on the negotiations. In this campaign, the

very procedure by which the regional and federal governments are supposed to be formed was called into question (#21) – should there be two independent negotiations, as is the common practice, or should the regional government be formed first, after which the federal government negotiations will take place between the two regional blocs? Apart from this more fundamental debate, we find speculation about who the prime minister is (not) going to be.

Despite being the clear leader in the polls throughout the campaign, the Flemish nationalist party refrained from indicating who of their candidates would be their pick for prime minister. In the last days of the campaign, their chairman replied in an interview that he "could think of a scenario in which [he] would need to accept the position" (#20).

> Who will be prime minister of Belgium? (…) In any case, [Flemish nationalist chairman] will only have a chance of becoming prime minister if there will not be a [government of social democrats, Christian democrats and liberals, RH]. But even in that case, nothing is yet decided. It is not unlikely that [the office of prime minister] will be used as currency to enable a centre-right recovery government without social democrats. (*De Tijd*, May 23)

Besides the process leading to the formation of a government, and the people taking office, speculation about post-electoral negotiation extended to the topics as well. Early on in the campaign, a debate around flight routes escalated into a crisis on the federal level (#8), which was halted because the Flemish region called in a specific procedure that would put the federal decision on hold for at least thirty days. However, the matter was not settled yet:

> A commentator in the newspaper: "The matter is temporarily disarmed, but will re-appear inevitably after the elections." (*De Morgen*, May 9).

> A top social democrat candidate: "The issue will be raised during the government negotiations. This will make it possible to talk about it in a calm manner, with a perspective – contrary to now, in the middle of the election campaign. (*demorgen.be*, May 9).

In this way, the press is premediating possible scenarios for the future – making sure that whatever the eventual outcome will be, it has already been predicted (Grusin 2010). It seems that journalists perceive this as a major role for the media, while politicians and citizens alike are not nearly as much occupied with these questions.

*The past*. The use of the past (before the last 48 hours), Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2016) argue, can be associated with the contextualizing function of the news media. (Schudson 2014) makes a similar point: journalists refer to the past to make the present more comprehensible. To some extent, the present analysis corroborates this thesis. For example, when a former prime minister passed away (#1), there was an abundance of obituaries and analyses about the impact of his policies on Belgian politics of today:

> News anchor: "He is the one who enabled Belgium to enter the Eurozone; he is the one who initiated the big governmental reform (…)". Other ex-prime minister: "Without [former prime minister] Jean-Luc Dehaene, we can say that in all honesty, we wouldn't have had a federal state, and no autonomous Flanders, and without him we wouldn't have had the Euro in Belgium. It is as simple as that." (*VRT Journaal*, May 15)

In this case, the past is used to help explain why today's news matters. Referring back to the past emphasises the important of current events. It also creates a sense of continuity, as the case of the debate regarding flight routes and noise pollution (#7) demonstrates. This was a question that came up relatively early in the election campaign and pertained to a decision by the state secretary of transport. It caused a crisis in the federal government, and journalists did not fail to notice that a very similar situation had already occurred before. In newspaper articles, the reader was reminded of these events of ten years ago:

> Flashback: firing of [then-minister] (…) A déjà-vu feeling is present in the [Wetstraat]. In 2003, [the then-minister] stepped down shortly before the elections, after commotion about night flights. (*De Tijd*, May 8).

A similar case was the debate around the highway around Antwerp (#2) in which "the debate [was] quietly following a route that looks an awful lot like the lead up to the referendum in 2009" (De Tijd, May 15). This pattern serves to show that while 'news' is the occurrence of what is odd and unexpected, the news events do not imply a break with history at large. They are positioned within a continuous development throughout time.

Another way that the past is used has a clear link with the election campaign setting, as it is about giving blame (and praise, but mainly blame) for past events. Twitter, it seems, is an apt media platform to do so. For example, when the Flemish nationalist

party chairman stated that "everyone with a good resume should be able to get a job in Belgium", implying that there are enough vacancies and the responsibility for joblessness was mainly with the unemployed, people recalled that the Flemish nationalists had been involved in the government for some time:

> An environmentalist party official: "After 10 years of governing, the [Flemish nationalist party] is now simply blaming unemployed people for not having a job" (#6, Twitter, 19 May)

Likewise, debates about reforming high school educational system (#27) were met with scepticism. While the previous legislation had recently reached an agreement about this, one of the governing parties proposed an entirely different reform in their election programme. Opposition politicians and experts called them out on this inconsistency:

> Expert: "[@environmentalist politician] is right: this farce, the Flemish government's educational reforms, is a big stain #debatDS" (Twitter, May 7)

This blame (and praise) mechanism for previous legislations was not found in the mass media for the current sample. However, legacy news media do use judge the candidates and parties' behaviour – even though their critique is more covert – guised as 'analysis'. Every so often, a background article is written to wrap up the campaign and evaluate the parties' strategies and the performance of individual candidates:

> Two weeks before the elections, the campaign has reached a state of a mud fight. Live on television, hear ye, hear ye! Everything started with [Flemish nationalist candidate] who blundered. His leader forced him to personally take the blame, but their opponents still used it to damage the image of the party as a whole. [Flemish nationalist leader] took over the attack and crushed his opponent [in a televised debate, RH]. (…) That gaffe (…) was the party leader's worst fear. (#4, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, May 12)

> The [Flemish nationalists] have deliberately put themselves [in the previous weeks of the campaign, RH] in the spotlights with their socio-economic programme. (#4, *De Morgen*, May 23)

> Most importantly, [Flemish nationalist chairman] framed the election campaign in the setting he likes most: their model versus the Walloon social-democratic model. (…) For the other parties, it was now a huge challenge to make a comeback in the campaign. (…) The Christian democrats were pushed back into defensive mode about pensions. Five minutes into the debate, the [Christian democrat top candidate] lost his halo of someone who stands above political quarrels. (# 10, *De Tijd*, May 22)

The underlying purpose, for the journalists, seems to be to assess whether a candidate is fit for office – meaning, among other things, they are honest, consistent, and do not mess up their public performances – and, based on this, to guesstimate their eventual success on Election Day.

## Conclusion and Discussion

The intention of this chapter was to explore the dynamics of the networked news storytelling processes, drawing on the temporal affordances approach that Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger (2017) have put forward. Making use of a sample of news stories from the Belgian (Flemish) election campaign of 2014, I asked two questions. The first (RQ1) was about the contribution of different media platforms to the networked news storytelling process, the second (RQ2) about the role of temporal references in telling the news.

First of all, I found it useful to distinguish between two stages that news stories typically go through in their lifecycle. The *initial stage* is about a search for facts, reporting on what just happened and keeping the audience up to date on new information that rolls in. The *making sense* stage is more reflective in nature. It takes a step back and analyses, interprets and comments on the facts that became available in the initial stage. The coverage in each of these phases has its own narrative and temporal dynamics, so it is useful to separate the findings about them.

Story telling in the initial stage is shaped by the interplay of different media platforms. The common pattern is that legacy news organizations (in whatever form) publish the bare facts, with little context or framing, as it becomes available. Reactions on Twitter or journalist-solicited reactions are then woven into the narrative, usually through news websites that put the adversarial principle in practice with their coverage. Print newspapers are largely absent from this stage. Even though they do have the scoop on a news story every now and then, their contribution is mostly to depart from the information that is already 'out there', in the making sense stage. It should be noted that the news websites' content in this sample (for *demorgen.be* and *destandaard.be*) is produced by the very same contributors as the print version. Thus, these news websites are not fully independent outlets. In terms of temporality, the focus is on the

present and the recent past, encompassing the timespan from the latest 48 hours to the coming few hours. Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2016) associate this with the common roles of journalism to *report* about news facts, and *update* the public on information as soon as it is published.

The analysis shows that the meaning that is given to a story in this phase usually tends to stick. That is, the angle of the story will not radically change after the facts are 'determined'. This entails that it is crucial for any stakeholder to be heard in this phase, so that they can provide their take on the story. This may explain why politicians and campaign teams feel that it is important to give instant replies – they are not looking so much for electoral gain, but they want to spin the narrative in a direction that is favourable for their purposes (Wells et al. 2016). Journalists and legacy news media organizations still occupy a crucial gatekeeping position in this phase. Indeed, they cannot forbid anyone to give their take via social media, but they are still able to elevate certain voices, while ignoring others. The power to control the message therefore effectively still rests with journalists. Attesting to this is the fact that even though we include a wide sample of Twitter users from all types of backgrounds, citizens do not seem to have a tangible and substantive impact on the news story. This fits the journalistic news values, which favours elite actors over other voices (Harcup and O'Neill 2001) – regardless of what the latter have to say, which may well be more thoughtful.

An additional explanation of the ignorance of citizen voices is that Twitter, as a media platform, does not meet the requirements that make the citizens' information posted on that medium fit to be used in mass media coverage. After all, compared to (political) elites and journalists themselves, citizens usually do not possess unique information that can significantly alter how a given news fact should be interpreted (Nielsen 2017). The only use for Twitter for citizens, then, is to use it as a platform to give their opinions and interpretation of the news. Yet, here they compete with journalists themselves.

After all, the second stage, in which the question 'what does it mean?' is asked, is the go-to field of expertise of legacy media organizations. The present study is not longitudinal in nature, but previous studies have strongly suggested that the print media have made the deliberate choice to focus on explanation and context-giving, as

they lost their edge in publishing the bare facts to other media (Fink and Schudson 2014, Tanikawa 2017). This is what can be inferred from the present study as well. While barely any of these top-forty news stories was published first in the print newspaper, the richness and depth of the articles that come after the 'breaking news' cannot be surpassed by any of the other media included in this sample. Their articles frequently go beyond the last 48 hours to look back on similar events that have happened in the past and regularly wrap up the election campaign so far. Likewise, the current events' impact on the future is often analysed, especially in terms of their effect on the elections and government negotiations. They are the main providers of context and analysis, respectively (Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2016).

The striking role of newspapers in this respect cannot be explained by their limited amount of space, for news websites are largely absent from this stage, despite having virtually limitless bandwidth. Nor is it just for reason of an economic incentive to withhold 'premium' explanatory content for publication in the paid version, for the Flemish public broadcaster (which does not offer paid news content) also tends to shy away from providing this type of content on their news website. The temporal affordances perspective (Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Neiger 2017) suggests that it has to do with both the longer preparation time (as print newspapers are only published daily), as well as fixation in time (for the print nature does not allow any changes afterwards). This both allows reflection, as well as requires a well-rounded news story.

The application of this temporal affordances perspective throughout this chapter has been useful to explain the interaction between different media platforms in contemporary news storytelling dynamics. The framework allows researchers to go beyond the factor of 'speed' in order to show the role of these different media in the process of news storytelling. Meanwhile, it prevents a regression into idiosyncratic explanations of why the given patterns are visible in the data. Clearly, its explanatory power remains confined to the level of the media platform – it cannot account for the influence of different newspaper outlets, or why groups of Twitter users employ the platform like they do.

There are two other caveats to the findings that should be addressed. One is our focus on the election campaign setting, and more specifically, the biggest stories in the

campaign. As argued above, the election campaign is a very dense period in terms of political news, in which virtually every actor (journalist, politician, or interested citizen) is focused on the same race to the day of the elections. While we expect that the tendencies of news stories outside of election campaigns are the same, the coverage is likely to be calmer and more distanced. Some big stories that we found would perhaps remain largely unnoticed if not for this specific context. Yet, the fact that the context shapes the news coverage is not unique to the election campaign. In non-campaign coverage, certain events can also create an environment in which stories become relevant that would otherwise remain ignored. A big train crash may trigger more coverage of other, relatively minor incidents, and provide journalists with a 'hook' to discuss the general issue of transport safety. Therefore, the same mechanisms that affect the news coverage are likely to be stable across contexts, even though the resulting stories may be more disperse and less hectic in a non-campaign setting. Another consequence of this setting is that the spectrum of temporality is more limited than in a 'regular' setting. References to a time beyond ten years from 'now', which Neiger and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2016) retrieved in non-campaign settings, did not show up in this data set. The heavy focus on Election Day (and to the after-election negotiations, to some extent) may well prevent the actors in the sample from taking a long-term perspective.

The second reservation is that we have studied the *public* discourse. This seems to go without saying, but it entails that we can only guess what was going on 'behind the scenes' with the actors that were involved in shaping the stories. The extent to which the origination and twists in the stories were part of a deliberative attempt by politicians to influence the coverage, and to what extent is was serendipitous, is impossible to tell from these data. Likewise, we cannot account for the strategies that journalists may have used in order to gather information for their productions. How much they relied on press agencies, direct colleagues, competitors at other media outlets, and personal contacts with political actors remains unclear. Neither can we measure to what extent the 'public opinion' has steered the selection and angle of the news discourse. Were journalists, politicians, and citizens, when adding their contribution to a news story, affected by their perception of how the broader

community thought about it? This possible indirect influence should be explored further.

## Notes

1.  Based on the typology of Sanders and Devos (2008), the parties represent ideologies of liberalism; socialism (social-democrat party and socialist party); Christian democracy; Flemish nationalism (Flemish nationalist party and anti-immigrant party); and environmentalism.

2.  *Het Nieuwsblad* (popular newspaper) and *De Standaard* (broadsheet) belong to the same media group

3.  A warning that referred to the spell between 1988 and 1999, during which the liberals were not part of the governing coalition and a number of kidnappings took place in Belgium

4.  The first refers to the death of a former prime minister; the second is a cynical remark about the speech that the Flemish nationalist party chairman gave in French; the third is a joke about the Walloon liberal candidate who stated that 'without liberals in the government, there were kidnappings'.

5.  This also has implications for the coding process – since it does not suffice to look at the tweet alone, the coders saw the tweets next to other tweets and news items from the same day to make them more familiar with the topics at the time that the tweet was posted. The coders were asked to look up the tweet if the meaning was not clear (an URL was provided), and both images and hashtags were taken into consideration as well. Thus, the context unit (Krippendorff 1980, 101) extends beyond the tweet.

# Conclusion

## What did we learn, where do we go from here?

The aim of this dissertation is to contribute to the understanding of how news stories are narrated in the contemporary hybrid media landscape. As we have seen, the dynamics of this landscape challenge the common 'news cycle' paradigm from which news media research tends to start. This viewpoint posits a day-based rhythm in which media outlets publish their content on standardized and predictable intervals, in which the news coverage is a "tightly controlled game involving the interactions and interventions of a small number of elites: politicians, officials, communications staff, news workers, and, in a small minority of recent studies, elite bloggers" (Chadwick 2011, 7). News cycles revolve around a small number of elite news media outlets, which are assumed to be 'opinion leaders' who influence the 'lower' media in top-down fashion (Breed 1955, McCombs 2005).

Instead, a 'political information cycle' may be a more appropriate point of departure. These can be regarded as 'episodes' of coverage pertaining to a certain subject, such as a gaffe or an election campaign. In such a cycle, "personnel, practices, genres, technologies, and temporalities of supposedly "new" online media are hybridized with those of supposedly "old" broadcast and press media" (Chadwick 2011, 7). In other words, typical aspects of 'old' media are loosely blended together with typical characteristics of 'new' media, as well as hybridized properties that have come into existence as a result of the collision between older and newer media. Together, these constitute a narrative around current events. This way of looking has two conceptual advantages over the news cycle paradigm. On the one hand, it substitutes the fixation on elite actors and elite media outlets for a more comprehensive vantage point, which is able to take non-elite actors into account, should they be(come) relevant in the respective political information cycle. On the other, it trades in the rigid daily news cycles for an approach that can inductively be up- or downscaled if the specific

information cycle requires this. Whether a cycle takes place in mere hours, or stays dormant for weeks and resurfaces afterwards, the political information cycle viewpoint can account for this.

With this different starting point in mind, I asked the research question: how do the interactions between time, media platforms, and actor types shape the way in which news stories are told?

## Main findings

To answer this research question, three different studies were conducted, making use of a large data set of political news and tweets from an election campaign setting, derived from a wide array of media platforms, including print newspapers, news websites, radio, television, and Twitter. These data were analysed on a news story level, a perspective that adheres to Chadwick's political information cycles.

The results of the study in Chapter I showed that Twitter and news websites are not just quick media platforms in theory, but that they are indeed the places where the life of the majority of the news stories begins. Despite their relative novelty compared to the other media, over 41 per cent of the stories start on Twitter, and about 29 per cent originate from news websites. The analysis of time-series data in Chapter II confirmed that media platforms on which content is published around the clock exert considerable influence over media that have to deal with stricter deadlines. This means that news websites and radio bulletins, especially, but also media outlets, journalists, and political actors on Twitter, tend to set the agenda for television and newspapers, while the inverse relationship is either lacking (for television) or negligible (for newspapers). Last, Chapter III found that Twitter and online news websites play a vital role in reporting on what happened, as well as updating the audience on the latest developments as new information becomes available.

At first sight, these findings may be interpreted as an indication that pre-existing hierarchies within the media landscape have been turned upside-down. After all, traditional media platforms (print newspapers, television, and radio to some extent) seemingly lag behind in both telling new news stories, as well as affecting the news

agenda of other media platforms. However, the methodological novelties put forward in this dissertation, including the use of the news story level analysis and the separation of different Twitter publics, allow us to nuance these findings.

Although the role of Twitter and news websites in the media landscape is undoubtedly important, we should note that mainly the usual suspects are successfully making use of these media to affect the news. The news websites were all associated with legacy news outlets (newspapers and the public broadcaster), meaning that their content is produced by the very same journalists and editors. For Twitter, Chapter I showed that over 80 percent of the stories that were initiated there came from journalists, media outlets, politicians, and political parties – the very same group of elite actors that have always been influential. Other actors (including experts, citizens, civil society, and business representatives) are only incidentally capable of starting a news story. As the analysis in Chapter III shows, they are generally re-active actors, who do not succeed in initiating their own stories. Thus, the power to affect news storytelling has not been redistributed on a large scale.

We should also be wary of assigning too much value to the intrinsic speed of media platforms as a determinant of their influence in the contemporary media landscape. Indeed, there is an outspoken role for 'quick' media like Twitter and news websites, and radio to a lesser extent. Yet, swiftness by itself is insufficient to explain media platform influence. Chapter I showed that print newspapers and television programs, which are the 'slowest' media platforms in the sample, still managed to have the scoop on a news story in a non-negligible proportion of the stories (20 and 5.7 per cent, respectively). Besides, the lifespan of the stories initiated by these two media platforms are longer than any other media (a median of 62.8 and 84.0 hours, respectively; Twitter is next with 34.4 hours). The news story level approach in Chapter II corroborated these results, with print newspapers preceding other media platforms in 36 to 52 per cent of the cases. Last, Chapter III zoomed in on the substantive contributions of the different media platforms (and, for Twitter, different actor groups). This analysis found that the quick, online or 'live' media tend to stick to telling and updating factual information, but have a remarkably less obvious role to play in making sense of these facts. The print newspaper, which is the media platform most

rigidly bound to a scheme in this sample, is employed to a much greater extent for this purpose. These findings strongly suggest that speed is just one side of the story. To explain the variation in media platforms' influence, we have to look at other factors. These factors might include the reputation of the media platform, its material or ephemeral character (in the case of newspapers and Twitter, respectively), and the business model that is used (editors might intentionally push 'better' content to the paid print newspaper, withholding it from their website). Further research should look into this matter.

Despite these caveats, it is clear that online media (both Twitter and news websites) have firmly established their spot in the news landscape. Legacy media outlets and journalists alike now seem to prioritize these media, especially Twitter, when they want to communicate news stories to the public.

Hence, we see that the ways in which news is told and re-told follows the observations and assumptions of Chadwick (2013). That is, the logics (technologies, genres, norms, behaviours, and organizational forms) of old media platforms are blended with those of new media platforms and together shape the contemporary media landscape. The core of these logics is formed by 'older' logics, which give value to factors like elite actors, established media titles and platforms, and a rounded narrative form. This core is supplemented with 'newer' logics, which include live on-the-scene coverage on Twitter, the embedding of replies from social media in news articles, and news website articles that are continuously being updated as information becomes available.

## Contributions

In trying to answer the main research question, this dissertation has provided three tangible contributions that researchers can draw on for future studies:

### 1. The development of an alternative level of measurement and analysis
A literature review (see chapter II) showed how two assumptions are still commonly used in inter-media agenda setting studies, even though their validity can be contested in the current digital age. These assumptions derive from the 'news cycle' paradigm

that originated in an era without any internet-based media (Chadwick 2013), and can therefore no longer be applied unconditionally.

The first assumption is the postulation of an "agenda" that can be measured. This agenda is usually operationalized as an index of the content of one particular news outlet or platform, reconstructed by measuring the saliency of issues (like "taxes," "immigration," or "foreign policy"). One medium's amount of attention to these issues is then compared with that of another medium at a later point in time. However, these aggregate-level codes are not in line with the theory that underpins inter-media agenda setting, as this points to the fact that journalists from one news outlet will look to their peers at different news outlets for ideas for specific stories to cover. Especially in the short term of an election campaign, issues are too general to tap into this mechanism. This becomes even more relevant if we are to include social media in our analysis, as they include an even wider variety of topics than traditional news media, making it more difficult to assert an influence or effect on the basis of these categories.

The second assumption is that the flow of news media coverage can adequately be captured by aggregating the saliency of issues on discrete intervals, or blocks of time. Depending on theoretical or statistical considerations, these blocks may comprise hours, days, or weeks (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008) – the interval of choice being called the time lag. Time lags, again, best capture dynamics of a media landscape in which news is reported on relatively fixed schedules, exemplified by morning newspapers and evening television news broadcasts. With social media and news websites that report news virtually instantly, time lags as small as a few hours are insufficient to adequately describe how news spreads across media nowadays (Buhl, Günther, and Quandt 2016, Weimann and Brosius 2016). Even as we have shrunk down the time lags for the analysis of time-series data to a mere six hours in Chapter II, we still miss out on agenda setting dynamics that happened *within* these six hours. Reducing the length of these lags even further was not possible, however, as this would have prevented finding any statistically meaningful results.

In order to address these issues, this dissertation has proposed to approach these questions using the level of the news story. This level is more in line with both the theoretical underpinnings of inter-media agenda setting, as well as the specifics of

today's media system (Breed 1955, Chadwick 2013). It groups individual news items into coherent news stories that deal with the same time- and place-specific event, which enables us to map and track where news breaks and how it spreads to different media platforms. It occupies a position between case studies and aggregate-level analyses. On the one hand, it is not as specific as a case studies. Case studies can provide rich descriptions of political information cycles, but the amount of data that can be considered is limited. On the other hand, it is more specific than a traditional issue-level analysis, which can account for large data sets but miss out on smaller trends. A news level study can scrutinize a considerable amount of data with a considerable amount of depth, allowing it to generalize beyond cases – with more detail than an issue-level analysis.

Applying this methodology has proven to be fruitful in this dissertation. Chapter I has presented the first attempt at empirically assessing the properties of news stories – where the stories are broken, how long these narratives tend to last, and how wide their reach is, dependent on the media platform that has the scoop on them. Chapter II compared this measurement level to a more traditional way of measuring (time series analysis), and found that the results are more nuanced and account better for subtle but nevertheless important trends. In Chapter III, a qualitative analysis method was used on the news story level, which enabled the in-depth study of the narratives that were told in the election campaign – and their development, being influenced by different media platforms and actors.

## 2. A deeper understanding of the news dissemination processes in the social media age

By making use of the alternative methodology that was developed, this dissertation updates our knowledge and understanding of news dissemination processes. The three studies have attempted to find a middle ground between traditional inter-media agenda setting studies that make use of time series analysis on the one hand, and in-depth case studies on the other. The former type of research is able to describe how media platforms affect one another on aggregated thematic levels, which makes it possible to process a vast amount of data with this method. Yet, the advantage of a bigger data set comes with the drawback of a shallower understanding of how the

dissemination of news actually works – for example, we cannot tell where the news originated and how and when different media dealt with the same news story. The case study method does not have this drawback, as it can perfectly describe the different stages that the news went through and the respective influence that actors, platforms and time have had on the lifecycle of the news story. However, this depth comes at the expense of width.

Using the news story level, the analyses in this dissertation have provided a middle ground between both levels. The origins and dissemination of news is researched on a relatively big scale. Four weeks of data from five different media platforms give an insight in the media landscape as a whole. The three studies provide ample evidence for the proposition that the properties of the news media platforms are heavily affecting to what extent they are able to affect the dissemination of news. That is, quicker media (those with no fixed timeslots for publication, i.e. Twitter and news websites) are both leading in bringing new stories, as well as picking up news stories that have been covered by other media platforms.

At the same time, the news story approach allowed to qualify these findings. Indeed, speed is important, but it is not all that matters. Newspapers and television programs, which are the 'slowest' media platforms in the sample, have the scoop on a news story in a non-negligible proportion of the stories (20 and 5.7 per cent, respectively). Besides, the lifespan of the stories initiated by these two media platforms are longer than any other media (a median of 62.8 and 84.0 hours, respectively, Twitter is next with 34.4 hours). Chapter III, in addition, allowed us to zoom in on the substantive contributions of the different media (and, for Twitter, different actor groups). That analysis demonstrated that media platforms that are not bound by deadlines – and display immediacy to a greater degree – tend to focus on telling and updating factual information about the news story, but have a relatively minor role in making sense of these facts. The print newspaper, which is the media platform most rigidly bound to a scheme in this sample, is employed to a much greater extent for this purpose. These findings strongly suggest that speed is just one side of the story.

*3. A deeper understanding of the power roles within social media*

The influx of literature that has tapped into the effects of the arrival of social media in has largely regarded them as homogenous entities. That is, they have looked at how 'social media' affect 'traditional media', without taking into account the respective backgrounds of the people posting the messages (Ceron, Curini, and Iacus 2016, Rogstad 2016, Russell Neuman et al. 2014). Implicitly, they assert that social media form a 'crowd' of people and organizations that acts independently of more traditional media forms. Indeed, an argument can be made for the proposition that people's roles have become more fluid on social media. Contrary to traditional news media, ordinary citizens can participate in the news making process, while journalists have some space to show a bit of their personal life and voice their private opinions. Actors on social media are intricately connected in a network, which can make it seem as though they behave as one big mass.

Yet, this does not entail that we are now able to drop the age-old classifications altogether. Initial studies into social media source use have pointed out that there are different patterns in the types of sources that traditional media tend to use. There seems to be a shifting power balance, with ordinary citizens and 'crowds' being mentioned more than other types of actors (Paulussen and Harder 2014, Broersma and Graham 2013). This varies according to the theme of the news, however – for political news, for example, politicians still tend to be favoured when traditional media refer to social media content (Hladík and Štětka 2015). It seems, therefore, that we cannot speak of social media as an undivided entity. It is necessary to differentiate between different types of actors *on* those platforms.

This assertion is corroborated if we look at the empirical results that are discussed in chapters I and II. Would we view Twitter as a single entity, we would conclude that as a whole, it is bypassing the more traditional mass media outlets. It is consistently faster in covering news stories, and its agenda setting influence is profound. We cannot conclude from these data, however, that the power balance has now tilted towards 'the public'. On the contrary: social media, too, tend to be dominated by well-established entities. The fields of media (journalists and media outlets) and politics (politicians and parties) have been able to transfer their pre-existing influence to the

'new' platform Twitter. When a tweet is responsible for breaking a news story that spreads to other media platforms, that tweet was sent by a citizen in only eight per cent of the cases – compared to a whopping 83 per cent that originated with political and media actors (see Chapter I). Additionally, as Chapter II points out, the agenda setting power of citizens and other actors via Twitter is rather limited. Their influence is confined within Twitter itself, whereas the data show that political and media actors' tweets *do* affect other outlets (radio, newspapers, and news Web sites). This is why this dissertation, based on the findings of these studies, calls for researchers and practitioners to not equate 'social media' with 'the public'. Instead, social media should be regarded as a mediated social space where the 'public of citizens' interacts and blends with the political and media fields. Measurement instruments in future studies need to take this conceptual reflection into account.

## The way forward

The main conceptual point to take away from this dissertation is that the study of news telling processes, by applying frameworks and methodologies from a pre-internet age is untenable, and that it is feasible to measure these dynamics from an alternative vantage point. It is clear that the conceptualization and application of the news story level shows as much. This is not to say, however, that this is the *only* possible way. Nor does it mean that this approach is fully developed. While we have used different methods of analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, to explore news storytelling dynamics, statistical procedures were not part of the conceptualization. Developing this further would greatly benefit the analysis of news storytelling on this level, for it would draw objective boundaries for determining whether results are 'significant' in a mathematical sense, thereby increasing the comparability of results across different samples. Also, the applicability of this analytical level on samples of extended periods of time should be tested. The manual coding process was labour-intensive, but machine learning could be one way to tackle this issue.

On that note, the sample that is used throughout this dissertation is drawn from a rather specific event (elections) in a specific geographical setting (Flanders). The advantage, as mentioned in chapter I, is that there are a lot of stories generated within

a relatively short time span, which makes them suitable for analysis. Yet, the fact that politicians, citizens, and journalists alike are so focused on the elections means that there is little room for unplanned stories that might reflect more 'regular' coverage and news storytelling patterns.

It also impedes the possibility to find alternative discourses. Within the stories in the current sample, there were two examples that tap into a discourse that significantly differ from the regular news stream. The first was the gaffe of a social-democrat who was on stage and joined in singing with the crowd that chanted 'whoever isn't jumping is with N-VA [conservative-regionalist party]'. At the same event, she also thanked the highly unpopular Walloon prime minister for his efforts in the past legislature. The second was a right-wing politician who made the racist remark that not the ageing of the population, but the 'brownization' of the people is the threat to society. A quick Twitter search shows that these utterances are still being remembered. The former two by a group of loosely connected conservatives, who use it as taunts in a discourse that is hostile against the social-democratic party and its supporters; the latter seems to be have popularized the term among a fringe group of right-wing supporters, who use it relatively often to attack immigration policy. These types of 'stories' usually evade news coverage, and are by consequence also ignored in the research literature. Yet, it is clear that they did have an agenda-setting role. This could be another reason to look at discourses of (news) storytelling in non-election times.

In any case, I expect the bar will be set higher for future studies into news dissemination or inter-media agenda setting dynamics, for the older conceptualizations do not suffice. However convenient, they are too detached from the current media landscape. Instead, alternative measurement methods, like the news story level approach, need to be developed further. We need approaches that find a middle ground between case studies and aggregate-level analyses. In the short term, this will require extra conceptual work, new methodological work, and possibly smaller but more encompassing samples. In the long run, however, the fruits from these efforts can be harvested.

# Coda

# Data and methods

Procedure, measured variables, and rationale for the choices

In this chapter, I elaborate on the procedures that were used to gather the data that were used for the news story analyses. Three different parts will be discussed: first, the collection of the raw media data from five different platforms; second, the automatic extraction of some metadata, and the manual coding of a number of other variables about these items; and third, I dedicate a section on the specific procedure of allocating these items to news stories. This procedure is fully operationalised and developed for the first time in this dissertation, which is why it is vital to provide these specifics. Other researchers are very welcome to use and advance this process for their own purposes. The ways in which these data were analysed can be retrieved in the three chapters in this dissertation.

## Data collection

The Belgian election campaign of 2014 was chosen as the case to collect data from. More specifically, I looked at the Flemish (northern, Dutch-speaking region of the country) discourse about the election campaign. Three elections were simultaneously held on May 25, namely for the regional (Flemish) parliament, the federal Belgian parliament, as well as the European Parliament. As a *de facto* kick-off point for the campaign, Labour Day (May 1) was chosen as the first day of our data collection. Traditionally, Labour Day is an important landmark for left parties, which hold manifestations for their members, their political leaders give speeches, and they present their concerns and agendas for the coming period. Being so close to the actual elections, this day was a natural starting point for the data collection. The collection of data was continued until the day before the elections. The resulting timespan, almost four weeks, is in line with previous studies about election news coverage in European democracies (for example, Albæk et al. 2011, Strömbäck and van Aelst 2009)[1]. The Election Day itself was excluded, as we were more interested in the election campaign itself than in the stories about the election results. In this way, I gathered data from five media platforms: Twitter, radio, television, print newspapers, and news websites. The specifics of the data collection process are discussed below.

*Newspaper data*

For the collection of newspaper articles, I relied on the data from the *Steunpunt Media* initiative[2]. All of the politically relevant[3] articles of the five paid daily print newspapers that are published in Flanders (except for some smaller local newspapers) were captured and included in the sample. These are: *De Standaard* (quality newspaper, circulation[4] of 101,375, 636 articles in sample), *De Morgen* (quality newspaper, circulation of 57,552, 500 articles), *De Tijd* (business newspaper, circulation of 34,752, 512 articles), *Het Laatste Nieuws* (popular newspaper, circulation of 323,925, 411 articles), and *Het Nieuwsblad* (popular newspaper, circulation of 272,202, 419 articles). These newspapers all appear once a day, in the morning, which is why a fictional publication time of 1:00 at night was set, corresponding to the approximate time of the ultimate newspaper deadline, after which the current edition heads for press.

*Television data*

For television content, I relied on the *Steunpunt Media* as well. They recorded the evening (19:00) *Het Journaal* (public broadcaster) and *VTM Nieuws* (commercial counterpart) news broadcasts. While both channels have an afternoon broadcast as well, the evening broadcast is the focus of the news supply for both, drawing viewership of about 1,000,000 and 600,000, respectively[5]. Furthermore, the data set included regular current affairs programs *Terzake* and *De Zevende Dag*, general interest show *Reyers Laat*, as well as the election-specific shows *Het Beloofde Land* (show about politicians' vision for Belgium), *Zijn er Nog Vragen?* (Q&A show with politicians), *Jambers in de Politiek* (documentary series), and *Het Nationale Debat* (debate between Flemish N-VA party leader and Walloon PS party leader). The full programs were split in different items, according to the discussed subjects – based on visual and topical cues in the programs.[6] Table 7 provides an overview of the television programs in the data set.

**Table 7.** Television shows and characteristics

| Show | Network | Air time | # episodes (items) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Het Journaal | Public | Daily at 19:00 | 24 (156) |
| VTM Nieuws | VTM | Daily at 19:00 | 24 (191) |
| Terzake | Public | Weekdays at 20:00 | 16 (131) |
| De Zevende Dag | Public | Sundays at 11:00 | 3 (26) |
| Reyers Laat[7] | Public | Weekdays at 22:30 | 7 (7) |
| Het Beloofde Land | Public | Weekdays, 12-22 May at 21:40 | 9 (102) |
| Zijn Er Nog Vragen? | Public | 23 May at 20:40 | 1 (25) |
| Jambers in de Politiek | VTM | 19-23 May at 21:40 | 5 (45) |
| Het Nationale Debat | VTM | 13 May at 21:50 | 1 (19) |

*Radio data*

Both on weekdays and in the weekend, the Flemish public broadcaster *VRT* broadcasts an hourly news bulletin on the *Radio 1* channel. This is the only Flemish radio channel predominantly dedicated to current affairs, which is why it was picked as the exemplar for the radio platform in this dissertation. I was able to save them as an audio file with the aid of a custom software tool, supplied by one *VRT* employee. Six bulletins were

saved for every day: the 8:00 and 9:00 morning newscasts; the 12:00 and 13:00 noon casts, and the 18:00 and 19:00 evening news. This amounted to 144 bulletins. In this way, there was a balance between completeness (all topics of the day in the sample) and redundancy (there tends to be much overlap between successive newscasts). The radio bulletin was cut into different items, according to the audio cues that indicate that a different topic is about to be discussed. In total, there were 1,236 items were collected for the sample.

### News website data

The selection of news websites was intended to represent the websites of the two most-read broadsheet newspapers (*De Standaard* and *De Morgen*[8]), of the public broadcaster *VRT* (*deredactie.be*), as well as the website of a weekly magazine, for background content (*Knack*[9]). For each of these websites, the aim was to capture ('scrape') the content pertaining to the elections. This was done by scraping the page for domestic news, and if available, the specific election news page (for *De Standaard* and *deredactie.be*). A software tool (*WebHarvey*) was set up to scrape these sites and store the articles in a MySQL-database, along with the headline and the exact time of publication. A trial run before the elections showed some problems, including the fact that some websites changed their layouts on a daily basis. This required some ad hoc solutions to mitigate this problem, like running up to six different scraping scripts for a single news website. In turn, this created a large number of duplicate entries that were later removed from the data set. After filtering these duplicates out, the sample comprised 464 items from *deredactie.be*, 758 items from *De Standaard*'s website, and 1,192 items from the website of *De Morgen*.

### Twitter data

The biggest difficulty of studying Twitter is its vastness, especially compared to the number of tweets that are of theoretical relevance. Hence, though it would have been possible to acquire 'firehose' access (all of the published tweets, based on criteria like geographical area), for my purposes this would have been far too much content to study. In collaboration with colleagues at the MICT and MMLab research groups of Ghent University, I opted for a different approach.

Although there were commonly-used hashtags for the elections (#vk14 and #vk2014), which we included in the sample, these alone do not seem sufficient to capture the whole debate about the subject in question (D'heer et al. 2017). In order to enable doing this, our alternative was to create an 'index' of Twitter accounts, inspired by Axel Bruns' Twitter News Index approach (mappingonlinepublics.net, see also Bruns and Burgess 2012, Bruns and Stieglitz 2014). This index, consisting of a broad range of different Twitter accounts, was designed to reflect the Flemish political discourse on Twitter surrounding the elections. This means that we included 678 professional journalists (drawn from a list of paid and freelance reporters[10]); 467 political candidates for the elections (the top-three candidates per constituency, plus a selection of lower-listed candidates who filled in a survey[11]); 44 accounts affiliated with principal traditional media outlets (paid newspapers, magazines, television channels and programs, and radio channels); and 19 accounts of civil society organisations[12].

In addition, we included a selection of 109 'influentials' (experts, business representatives, celebrities and active citizens), whom we identified using the 'top Twitter influencer' list of twitto.be. This website provides a ranking of Belgium-based twitterers based on their *Klout* score, which is an algorithm that estimates one's online influence. Starting from the number one influencer, we ran through the list to find accounts that could be categorised as 'celebrities', 'business', and 'citizens' – based on the information in their description. We continued adding accounts to these categories until we reached a minimum of 30 representatives for each group.

In sum, the index was a selection of 1,317 accounts. Due to an error, the political parties' main accounts were left out, but this problem was largely mitigated as many candidates tended to retweet the content that their party posts – thereby becoming part of the sample. Of these 1,317 accounts, we retrieved all tweets. 'All' tweets, here, means both the tweets these accounts posted themselves, as well as the ones they retweeted. This choice was made to ensure that tweets that were significant for the election debate on Twitter would be retrieved, even if we did not include the accounts of the writers of these tweets in the sample. The underlying assumption is that in that case, at least one of the accounts in our sample would retweet it. This is consistent with the notion of the 'gatewatching' role that some people or accounts fulfil – they

are concerned with publicising, which means noticing and pointing out (and to) primary sources of news (Bruns 2003, Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith 2014).

Furthermore, the tweets in which any of these 1,317 accounts was mentioned by any account outside of this sample were also stored. Last, tweets mentioning the election hashtags #vk14 or #vk2014 were retrieved. The number of tweets totalled 454,458. To reduce this data set to a workable number of items, we imposed a threshold of two retweets and retweets per tweet to ensure that they each resonated to some extent. After this process and additional data cleaning, the number of tweets amounted to 21,315.

## Coding the data

The data that were collected as described above were put into a database using *Microsoft Access* software. This database initially included the following variables:

*ID.* Every individual article, tweet, or item from the television show or radio bulletin was automatically assigned an identification number. This is a technical necessity to enable the database to identify single articles.

*Content*. The content of all of the tweets, news website articles and print newspaper articles was extracted and put in this variable. For radio and television, this field included a textual summary of the item.

*Headline*. The headlines of the newspaper articles and news websites was extracted. This field was empty for Twitter, radio, and television.

*Medium*. One variable indicated whether the item was taken from the radio, television (plus the respective program, print newspaper (plus the specific publication), news website (plus the specific site), or Twitter.

*Date and time*. The date and time of publication of every single item was automatically retrieved. For newspapers, a fictitious publication time was of 01:00 at night was set. For Twitter, the date and time reflected the time that the tweet appeared in our data set. This means that when an account from the sample of 1,317 posted anything, or when they were mentioned, this coincided with the actual time of publication.

Whenever one of those 1,317 accounts retweeted anything, the extracted point in time pertained to the moment of the retweet – not the moment that the tweet was originally posted.

*Twitter sender and source*. For Twitter, for each tweet the account that posted or retweeted the tweet (one of the 1,317 accounts that we followed) was saved. In case it was a retweet of another Twitter user, the username of the sender of that original tweet was saved as well.

*Favourites and retweets*. For Twitter, the number of favourites and retweets per tweet (fetched six hours after the time of publication) were retrieved.

*Manual coding*

In the next phase, a few basic but vital variables were manually assessed by a small group of coders. In addition to myself, four master level students have worked on assessing these variables. These coders received a codebook in which all the variables were defined, and were extensively trained in a group setting. They were required to work on-campus, so that problems and difficult cases that occurred in the actual coding process could be discussed between the different coders. When consensus could not be reached, I decided on a solution for the problem at hand.

*Political relevance*. The relevancy of the collected items for these studies was assessed by coding whether the item was political in nature or not. This means it either featured a political actor (candidate, politician, or party), a political topic (the topic involves political actors, or involves policy matters), or an election term (words like 'poll', 'Election Day', 'election debate', et cetera).

*Issue*. In addition, each item was coded for up to three topics, following the Comparative Agendas Project codebook (www.comparativeagendas.net; see Baumgartner and Jones 1993) that contains 28 broad issues (such as macro economy, health care, and education). Coders could attribute up to three issue codes to each item. (Krippendorff's α=.70 for major issue code.[13])

*Twitter user type*. Another manually coded variable indicated the type of Twitter user that sent the original tweet (not the retweet). The initial coding comprised ten categories (politicians, political parties, journalists, media outlets, citizens,

experts/professionals, business representatives, celebrities, civil society actors, and other). For Chapter I, these were collapsed in four categories (politicians and parties; journalists and media outlets; citizens; and other). For Chapter II, they were collapsed in three categories (politicians and parties; journalists and media outlets; and other). This was done because of an imbalance between the representation of political and media actors on the one hand (73.7%); and citizens (12.5%) and all other actors (13.7%) on the other hand. Collapsing the categories made them usable for statistical analysis. (Krippendorff's α=.86.[13])

## Identifying and coding news stories

The coding procedure described above is sufficient to do a traditional analysis of time-series data. Yet, for reasons explained in the introduction of this dissertation, it was necessary to go beyond a traditional approach. Therefore, the news items were categorised into news stories. News stories are collections of news items that deal with the same time - and place-specific event. (See Welbers (2016) for a similar approach.) These items, taken together, form a narrative (not necessarily linked or even coherent) about current events – issues that are in the news 'at this point in time'.

The news stories are clearly of a higher measurement level than the news items (newspaper articles, tweets, news website articles, television items, radio bulletin items). The latter are the constituent parts of the former. Hence, one news story can comprise of multiple news items, potentially coming from multiple different media. A generic example of this could be the bankruptcy of a large business. All coverage about this specific bankruptcy, then, whether it be newspaper articles, television news, or tweets, is considered part of this news story.

News stories had to be identified first to code on this level. To do this, a book of guidelines was developed. (The full guidebook that was used in practice can be found in Appendix B, the procedure and main decisions are described here.) To detect news stories, all news items from legacy media organizations (meaning newspapers, news websites, radio, and television) were considered. This means that we went through the news items of these platforms day-by-day to see which news stories occurred then. At this point, we do not consider tweets yet. This way of working implies an institutional

bias, but this is only logical, given that something only becomes 'the news' at the moment that a newspaper, television station, radio station, or news website covers it. Tweets are not news per se; front-page newspaper articles, by definition, are.

Besides, non-news content from legacy media (background articles, interviews, op-eds, live debates, et cetera) were not taken into account at this point either. The reason not to, is that I make a theoretical distinction between 'news' and 'information' (see Chapter II). The non-news items may well be *about* news or they may *contain* news, but they are not news in themselves. Hence, this type of content was assigned to news stories only if they dealt with regular news items that were published earlier or later. If these items did not relate to a previously defined news story, they were ignored – for they did, apparently, not touch upon some actual topic.

**Figure 1.** Coding form with sample article



Every newly encountered time- and place-specific news event was added as a news story, which was given an easily recognizable name, consisting of the subject, a predicate, and an object. For example, the most-often covered news story in the current dataset was named "[Top politician] claims that everyone with a good resume is able to find a job in Belgium." When an item related to an already encountered news

story, it was categorised as such. To enable to check this easily, the coding form included a search box in which keywords could be put in and looked up in the news story database (see Figure 1). In this case, the keyword 'jeugdwerkloosheid' (youth unemployment) is put in the search box, yielding a list of news stories that contained this word, along with the first and the last time an item about this news story appeared in the dataset (so far). When no relevant results showed up, the box on the right could be used to add a new news story.

In this respect, it is important to note that besides this technological aid for the coding process, our practices were also designed to improve the coding accuracy. The creation of new news stories, as well as the assignment of news items to existing stories, was done in the order of items' original appearance. Besides, rather than working on the data every now and then, the coders worked in longer blocks of time. This improved their acquaintance with the news stories that were happening on the respective days/points in time, in turn decreasing the odds of misattributing (or failing to attribute) news items to news stories.

Only after coding all news items from traditional media outlets, non-news items and tweets were considered. Two student coders assigned the non-news items (background pieces, op-eds, interviews, live debates), as well as the retrieved tweets, to the already-identified news stories (Krippendorff's α=.86 for assigning news story to tweet[14]).

**Table 8.** Number of items assigned to news stories, per media platform

|  | Twitter | Newspaper | TV | Radio | Website | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Assigned to 1 | 2,967 | 919 | 411 | 280 | 864 | 5,441 |
| Assigned to 2 | 227 | 112 | 8 | 4 | 90 | 441 |
| Assigned to 3 | 8 | 99 | 2 | 1 | 32 | 142 |
| Not assigned | 3,145 | 418 | 263 | 40 | 45 | 3,911 |
| Total | 6,347 | 1,548 | 684 | 325 | 1,031 | 9,935 |

Each item was assigned to a maximum of three news stories, as a number of items (especially longer articles) discussed multiple news stories at length. For example, an extensive retrospective interview with the exiting prime minister tapped into three of

the news stories. In total, 5,583 items featured only one news story; 441 featured two; 142 items were assigned to three news stories; and 3,911 items were not assigned to any news story at all. Table 8 (on page 106) shows the exact distribution per media platform.

## Notes

1.  Studies about presidential election campaigns in the United States tend to have longer sample periods (see, for example, Meraz 2011, Sweetser, Golan, and Wanta 2008, Tedesco 2005), which reflect the different campaign dynamics.

2.  The *Steunpunt Media* (see www.steunpuntmedia.be) initiative was a institute for researching news and media, funded by the Flemish government, in which researchers of the Flemish universities (Universiteit Antwerpen, KU Leuven, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and Universiteit Gent) participated. It has ceased its activities as of 2016, but the collection of news media content is continued by *Elektronisch Nieuwsarchief* (see www.nieuwsarchief.be).

3.  Meaning the domestic and European affairs news in which the *lead* of the article featured either a Belgian political actor (an institution, party, or candidate/politician), or terms relating to the elections.

4.  All circulation numbers concern the daily number of circulated newspapers in 2014, according to the *Centrum voor Informatie over de Media* (CIM 2018)

5.  These viewership numbers derive from data of the *Centrum voor Informatie over de Media* from the relevant research period, as cited by Anonymous (2014a, b, c, d).

6.  Here, like with the newspaper data, only 'politically relevant' items were considered.

7.  *Reyers Laat* does not feature political topics in every broadcast, which is why only seven episodes were taken into account.

8.  We opted not to include the websites of other newspapers *Het Laatste Nieuws* (hln.be) and *Het Nieuwsblad* (nieuwsblad.be). These outlets belong to the same

media group as *De Morgen*, and *De Standaard*, respectively, which enables them to share their website content routinely. A pilot study showed that their coverage, at least in the area of politics, was very similar, or indeed the same, as that of the other media outlet from the same media group.

9. After the scraping process, the database containing the *Knack* articles was unfortunately corrupted and therefore unusable.

10. From the database of the Flemish association for journalists, see http://www.journalist.be/journalistendatabank

11. This survey can be found in Van Erkel (2017, 229-238). The information I used here was gathered with the aim of making a website (*Kandidaten2014*) that provided information about candidates to citizens, in collaboration with newspaper *De Morgen*.

12. Identified using the research of Fraussen (2014) about civil society organizations. For organizations to be included, they needed to have been mentioned at least 40 times on television news in the period of 2003-2010, they need to participate in at least one strategic commission (a commission that advises a Belgian federal or regional government). Furthermore, we excluded local or regional departments of associations – we only looked at their general Twitter account.

13. Calculated on the variable that was collapsed into three categories (media actor; political actor; and other). Based on gold standard (my coding); tested for the two other coders; double coding of 174 items.

14. Based on gold standard (my coding); tested for the two other coders; double coding of 174 items.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: List of selected news stories

(see next page)

**Table 9.** List of selected news stories

| | Story | Scoop | Items | News-paper | Website | Radio | TV | Media | Politics | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | **Twitter** | | |
| 1 | Former PM Jean-Luc Dehaene dies | Twitter media | 450 | 116 | 27 | 18 | 78 | 53 | 117 | 41 |
| 2 | Proposals for the highway around Antwerp | Website | 299 | 41 | 35 | 15 | 14 | 85 | 59 | 50 |
| 3 | Bart De Wever and Paul Magnette debate on television | Television | 233 | 23 | 15 | 0 | 29 | 48 | 77 | 41 |
| 4 | Jan Jambon states people should sell their house after receiving 3 years of unemployment benefits | Twitter media | 204 | 22 | 17 | 0 | 5 | 73 | 41 | 46 |
| 5 | *Rekening14* assesses the impact of political parties' proposals | Website | 175 | 76 | 18 | 7 | 12 | 34 | 15 | 13 |
| 6 | Bart De Wever says that everyone with a good resume is able to find a job in Belgium | Website | 109 | 24 | 17 | 1 | 3 | 24 | 28 | 12 |
| 7 | Debate between list pullers is held in Antwerp | Twitter other | 93 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 57 | 17 | 16 |
| 8 | Decision to reroute the air traffic around Brussels ('plan-Wathelet') | Newspaper | 93 | 39 | 27 | 14 | 11 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 9 | Bart De Wever and Kris Peeters debate in a television show on *VRT* | Newspaper | 89 | 26 | 9 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 30 | 14 |
| 10 | Bart De Wever posts video clip on the internet to address the Walloon population | Newspaper | 75 | 18 | 11 | 3 | 9 | 6 | 19 | 9 |
| 11 | Proposals to adapt wages' inflation correction | Radio | 67 | 9 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 28 | 5 | 17 |
| 12 | CD&V presents their 3D-plan | Twitter political | 66 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 54 | 3 | 3 |

| | Story | Scoop | Items | News-paper | Website | Radio | TV | Twitter Media | Twitter Politics | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13 | Debate between three list pullers at at student association | Twitter other | 64 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 33 | 4 | 26 |
| 14 | Didier Reynders says that without liberals in the government, children were kidnapped | Website | 61 | 19 | 15 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 10 | 3 |
| 15 | N-VA offers a choice between 'N-VA model' or the 'PS-model' | Twitter political | 59 | 17 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 21 | 12 | 6 |
| 16 | Bart De Wever and Kris Peeters debate in a television show on *VTM* | Twitter media | 56 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 9 | 26 | 11 |
| 17 | Green Party organizes 'days awake' | Website | 54 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 43 | 2 | 6 |
| 18 | *Het Beloofde Land* will air on television | Newspaper | 52 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 25 | 15 | 9 |
| 19 | *Zijn Er Nog Vragen?* will be broadcasted | Twitter political | 52 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 18 | 11 | 14 |
| 20 | Bart De Wever is willing to become PM | Twitter media | 51 | 12 | 10 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 17 | 6 |
| 21 | N-VA wants to form a federal coalition only after forming a Flemish government | Twitter media | 47 | 14 | 13 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 8 |
| 22 | Proposal to tax (profits from) wealth and assets | Twitter political | 47 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 23 | 3 | 8 |
| 23 | Campaign suspended after death of Jean-Luc Dehaene | Newspaper | 45 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 8 | 23 | 5 |
| 24 | Didier Reynders says MR agreed to impose tax because it would not hurt their constituency | Newspaper | 45 | 11 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 12 | 5 | 15 |
| 25 | Homeopathy becomes legally acknowledged | Radio | 45 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 21 | 17 |
| 26 | Terrorist attack on the Jewish museum in Brussels | Twitter media | 43 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 18 | 7 |

| | Story | Scoop | Items | News-paper | Website | Radio | TV | Twitter Media | Twitter Politics | Twitter Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 27 | Proposal to change the educational system | Radio | 43 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 18 | 5 | 9 |
| 28 | Speculation about the government formation | Newspaper | 43 | 17 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 11 | 6 |
| 29 | Open VLD launches its campaign slogan | Twitter political | 41 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 15 | 2 | 10 |
| 30 | Proposal to change child benefits | Twitter media | 39 | 8 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 8 | 4 | 3 |
| 31 | Mayor Dirk Bisschiop dies in car crash | Website | 34 | 5 | 11 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| 32 | N-VA organizes its wrap-up meeting and family day | Twitter political | 32 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 23 | 1 | 1 |
| 33 | N-VA uses Thunderclap to generate attention on social media | Twitter political | 32 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 5 | 6 |
| 34 | Journalist Paul Jambers is going to follow six politicians in a documentary series | Website | 32 | 13 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 5 |
| 35 | Bart De Wever announces the results of an internal Open VLD poll | Newspaper | 31 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 11 | 4 |
| 36 | Gay Pride is held in Brussels | Twitter political | 31 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 21 | 3 | 5 |
| 37 | Freya Van den Bossche sings song directed at N-VA at campaign event | Twitter political | 30 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 22 |
| 38 | Proposals to combat the pay gap | Website | 30 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 17 |
| 39 | Someone took a selfie while filling in the ballot | Twitter other | 30 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 9 |
| 40 | Difficulties with finding citizens to help in the polling places | Website | 28 | 8 | 10 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 0 |

## Appendix B: Coding on the news story level

The issue with identifying new stories is the 'I know it when I see it' problem. To make the identification of news stories, and the assignment of news items to news stories systematic, the following guidelines were developed.

What is a news story? Some properties:

- News stories are about *current* events, issues that are in the news 'at this moment';

- News stories form a higher level of analysis than the individual news item. This means that one news stories can comprise of multiple news items. (In many cases, however, a news story is limited to one news item only.)

- Most of the time, a news story can be traced back to the form: [agens/subject] [predicate] [patiens/object], sometimes with some <modifier>

  For example:

  [Politician] [thinks] [the campaign slogan of the other party] [is the most vile ever] (or, strictly speaking: [Politician] [thinks is the most vile ever] [the campaign slogan of the other party]

  In other cases, the news story relates to a situation or a development. For example:
  [Unemployment] [fell] <in the first quarter of this year>

  Sometimes, but not necessarily, this specific formulation is already provided in a news article. As coder, you will have to extract it from the news item yourself. To do this, there are two practical guidelines:

  (1) When coding an item, always ask yourself 'who's doing what?' or 'what happened?/which development has taken place?'

  (2) Try to formulate the name as clearly as possible, also for yourself, because then you will be able to retrieve it more easily when you encounter more items that are about this news story. A phrase like 'some

people protested today at City Hall' might be more precise, but harder to retrieve than 'Protest at City Hall'. Thus, always make sure to choose a phrase that looks like the latter, in which you leave out adjectives and adverbs to the extent possible. The noun/the actor should be upfront. The possibility to retrieve the story is more important than being specific. (If there were multiple protests, do add the date or the issue that was protested, like 'Protest against police violence at City Hall'.)

Whenever possible, use the name of the person that the item is about. For example, instead of 'the major of Kortrijk', use the full name 'Vincent Van Quickenborne' – provided it is mentioned in the article (do not go and look it up). There are cases in which the angle of the news story differs per medium or even per article – for example, 'The liberals present their plan for health care', or 'Liberal politician presents plans for health care'. When you encounter this news story for the first time, choose the wording that best covers the content of the article – whether it is presented as a plan of the liberal party, or the personal ideas of the politician – and try to remember the wording for the items that are to be coded afterwards.[1]

A news story does not just comprise the items that note the same news event (for example, 'politician trashes the chairman of the other party'). It is also about related developments that follow the initial one (for example, 'the other party's chairman counters criticism'). Also see 4. for more about this.

How do you identify a news story?

1. We take the *legacy news organizations* as our starting point.

   a. This means that we read the news items of television, radio, print newspaper, and news website day-by-day to see which news stories occurred then. It is only after these stories are defined that we consider the tweets from that respective day, and assign them to news stories.

   This way of working implies an institutional bias, but this is only logical, given that something only becomes 'the news' at the moment that a newspaper, television station, radio station, or news website covers it.

Tweets are not news per se; front-page newspaper articles, by definition, are.

i. More specifically, we identify news stories from *news* items. This means that an op-ed, background story, or explanatory piece, does not trigger a new news story. It may link back to something that we found in the 'regular' news, however. In this way, we can analyse how certain types of news resonate, also in the op-ed sections, but we can prevent that the opinions in the op-ed sections become news stories in and of themselves. (After all, it is impossible to defend that one individual's opinion forms a news story, in the way it is operationalised here.)

ii. For television specifically, this means that we begin coding the (19:00) *VRT Journaal* and *VTM Nieuws*, in order to detect the news stories. The political (current affairs) programs are secondary and will only be *assigned* to news stories – not to find *new* news stories.

b. Coding can best be done per day, in the order of items' original appearance. (Most of the time, this means that one day from the sample starts with the newspaper – after all, the publication time of newspapers was set at 01:00.) The advantage is that coders will get acquainted with the news stories that were happening on the respective days/points in time, and so they will be quicker and better at telling to which news story an item belongs.

2. In principle, every news item contains at least one news story.

a. To determine which, the title is the most obvious clue. The headline either contains or hints at the story. If the headline is vague (for example, a quote from an interview), check the introduction and body of the article to clarify the meaning of the headline.

b. After looking at the title, we consider the introduction and body of the article, respectively. These can give rise to assign one or two extra news stories. There is a maximum of three stories in the coding scheme. When coding a (longer) item that is about different issues (an extended

interview, for example), do assign news stories in the order of appearance in the item. To assign a news story, at least **two full sentences** in the item need to be about that story. One small utterance is not enough reason to conclude that a news story appears in the item.

c. One could distinguish between *events* (or the 'stage'), and *what happens at the event*. Sometimes, the focus of the news item is the event itself (for example, the announcement of an election debate), but usually it is about what happened at the event. When coding, the latter should be given priority. In that case, the event at which something happened can be specified in a separate field on the coding form. This guideline is especially important in case more than 3 stories could be assigned.

3. But: not *every* item does contain a news story

a. There are many background articles, explainers, and fact checks in the sample. These can only be counted as part of a news story when they do (explicitly) relate to a recent news event. A report in which one parliamentarian is being followed throughout their working day is not a news story in itself – unless that person is being followed because he/she is in the middle of a controversy (and this is mentioned explicitly).

b. If there does not seem to be a real trigger for the item, or there is nothing in the item that links back to recent events, then it should be coded as 'no news story'.

Be careful! Something that happened a while ago can still be a recent event, for example because new information has surfaced. This *should* then be counted as a news story. It is possible that the nature of the story changes (for example 'train crash occurred' -> 'findings of train crash investigation are published'). Be careful with this when naming a news story.

4. Backtracking

It can sometimes be hard to pinpoint the exact moment that one news story morphs into another. For example, one politician said that 'everyone with a good resume can find a job in Belgium', which caused a big stir in the media. Adding to the controversy, another politician stated that labour unions benefit from there being as many unemployed people as possible. This was presented in two different ways by media outlets – as a statement on its own, or as a statement that should be seen as an addition to the story about the 'everyone with a resume' story. In the former case, we code just the 'labor unions benefit' statement, while if the statement is presented as an addition to the earlier story, we assign both stories to the article.

Since we code in chronological order (the date and time of publication), this can be impractical. In such cases, you will only discover later on that something became a 'real' news story. This is why you will sometimes need to 'backtrack', go back to the items that were already coded, to assign them to the correct news stories. For this reason, it is necessary to do longer coding sessions, by working with bigger blocks of articles that were published on the same day (and around the same time). This way of working is to be preferred above coding smaller groups of items – or items from different/random points in time. After all, if you work with big blocks of articles, you will still remember roughly what you coded earlier, and it will be easier to remember which, and how many, items need to be reconsidered. If you were to do short coding sessions with small groups of articles, you tend to forget what you have done before, and the risk of making a mistake increases.

5. Twitter

After identifying the news stories, based on the items from mass media, we continue by assigning these news stories to tweets. This entails that no new news stories will be detected based on Twitter! The tweets are only coded by using the news stories that we found in an earlier stage.

This continues according to the same process that is described above for the 'regular' news sources, but there are a number of things that we should pay extra attention to.

a. For Twitter, it often helps to look at the author (if it is a politician, chances are high that it has to do with a news event), hashtags, and mentions of other user names (@username) in the tweet. This is information that must be taken into account when coding.

b. On Twitter, we find relatively many items that cannot be linked to a news story. There are many cases of jokes, meta commentary, personal opinions, or random statements that are not really related to current affairs. (For example: 'the Christian Democrats are obviously the best party'; 'the liberals will get my vote'.)

c. But: if you know that these jokes and cynical remarks are related to a news story that was around that day, because you recognise the story that the tweets refers to, you should code them as such. For example, the meaning of a specific hashtag may be clear if you see it in the context of the news of that day, but makes little sense if you encounter it months later. To be able to code this, it is important to have this context available and apply it when coding.

## Note

1. It should be noted, here, that the exact phrasing of the news stories was only a minor problem, thanks to the implementation of a search field in Microsoft Access that automatically compared the input field with the already-existing news stories in the database. Together with the name of the news story, this function showed the first publication time of an item in the news story. In this way, the risk of errors or double coding the same news story under different names was reduced. In any case, it remains important to name the stories carefully, especially the subject and object, so that they can be retrieved easily. (Also, it looks better.)

# Nederlandstalige samenvatting

Nieuwsverhalen in het hybride medialandschap. De rol van mediaplatformen, actoren, en tijd in de constructie van verkiezingsnieuws

Nieuwsmedia zijn de afgelopen twee decennia voor grote technologische veranderingen komen te staan. De volwassenwording van het internet, de opkomst van smartphones, en de introductie van sociale media hebben geleid tot een enorm toegenomen verwevenheid van mediaplatformen. Verschillende nieuwsmedia staan via internet continu met elkaar verbinding, waardoor nieuws zich ogenschijnlijk moeiteloos door het landschap verspreidt. Een controversiële uitspraak van een politicus die vroeger misschien een dag later pas zou zijn opgemerkt door de pers, staat tegenwoordig vaak al binnen enkele minuten op nieuwssites en Twitter te lezen. Bovendien zijn het niet meer slechts journalisten die de nieuwsagenda kunnen bepalen, want met behulp van online media is iedereen in staat om zonder veel moeite informatie te publiceren.

Dit medialandschap van vandaag de dag wordt volgens Andrew Chadwick (2011) gekarakteriseerd door 'hybriditeit', wat wil zeggen dat er elementen van zowel oudere (bv. radio, televisie, krant) als nieuwere vormen van media (bv. nieuwssites, sociale media, apps) in teruggevonden kunnen worden. De werkwijzen, logica's en waarden die eigen zijn aan bepaalde mediaplatformen komen met elkaar in botsing doordat ze via internet continu met elkaar in verbinding gebracht worden. Het resultaat is een situatie waarin deze voorheen unieke eigenschappen samensmelten of juist geconsolideerd worden.

Het staat buiten discussie dat traditionele nieuwsmedia worstelen met het aanpassen en herpositioneren aan dit hybride medialandschap. Maar ook het denken over media zal moeten mee-evolueren met de ontwikkelingen, en de wetenschap moet passende antwoorden zien te formuleren op de analytische problemen die hierbij ontstaan. Wanneer we het concept van een hybride medialandschap verder doordenken, kunnen we niet blijven vasthouden aan de kaders die zijn ontwikkeld in het pre-internet tijdperk. Dat denkkader, die we het 'nieuwscyclus-paradigma' kunnen noemen, is gebaseerd op lineaire cycli die 24 uur omvatten, waarbij de ochtendkrant en het avondjournaal op televisie centraal staan. Er is sprake van duidelijke afbakeningen, waarbij de media hun eigen elementen hebben, die niet (of slechts beperkt) worden overgenomen door andere platformen. Het contrast met de huidige situatie, waarin één nieuwsartikel op een website zowel een citaat uit een krant, een omkaderde tweet, een reactie van iemand op Facebook, alsook een YouTube-video kan bevatten, kan haast niet groter zijn. Daarmee is het zeer de vraag in hoeverre met het nieuwscyclus-paradigma nog relevante en accurate uitspraken te doen zijn.

Chadwick (2011) pleit dan ook voor een andere, minder rechtlijnige manier van denken over mediaberichtgeving, die hij de 'politieke informatiecyclus' noemt. In deze benadering wordt op een meer inductieve wijze gekeken naar media-inhoud op basis van zogenoemde 'episodes'. Bij het onderzoeken van een episode (aflevering) wordt de berichtgeving over een bepaalde gebeurtenis of serie gebeurtenissen gevolgd, ongeacht waar deze episode begint, op welke media die zich begeeft, en hoe lang deze duurt. Terwijl er vanuit een nieuwscyclus-paradigma problemen ontstaan bij het volgen van een verhaal dat zich buiten de 'normale' kaders afspeelt – bijvoorbeeld wanneer er enige tijd tussen de onthulling en de gevolgen zit – kan een analyse op basis van episodes hier rekening mee houden. In zijn boek *The Hybrid Media System* (2013) past Chadwick dit principe zelf toe op de fenomenen Wikileaks, de campagne 'Obama for America', en de Amerikaanse presidentsverkiezingen van 2008.

In dit doctoraat wordt een niveau van analyse uitgewerkt dat rekening houdt met de eigenschappen van het veranderde (en immer veranderende) nieuwslandschap en de consequenties die Chadwick hieraan koppelt. Hierbij wordt een middenweg gezocht tussen de gedetailleerde gevalsstudies zoals die van laatstgenoemde auteur, en de

meer abstracte analyses die gebruikelijk zijn in de literatuur over inter-media agenda setting. De gevalsstudies aan de ene kant zijn namelijk zeer uitgebreid, maar moeilijk schaalbaar naar grotere datasets. Aan de andere kant is een meer gebruikelijke analyse goed toepasbaar op grote datasets, maar door het gebruik van brede thematische categorieën (als 'immigratie', 'belastingen', of 'defensie') bieden deze vooral inzicht in algemene trends, en minder in de onderliggende dynamieken.

Als alternatieve middenweg wordt in dit doctoraat het 'nieuwsverhaal' voorgesteld. Met dit begrip doelen we op de berichtgeving rondom een gebeurtenis (of politieke uitspraak) die op een bepaalde tijd en plaats heeft plaatsgevonden, en de nasleep hiervan. Met behulp van dit analyseniveau werden in deze dissertatie drie onderzoeken uitgevoerd om licht te werpen op verschillende aspecten van de nieuwsstromen vandaag de dag.

Deze onderzoeken gebruikten als steekproef de Belgische verkiezingscampagne van 2014. In de drie weken voor de stembusgang verzamelden we politieke berichtgeving afkomstig van televisiejournaals, radiobulletins, gedrukte kranten, en online nieuwssites. Daarbovenop hebben we in deze periode een selectie van Twitteraccounts van burgers, politici, media, en experts gevolgd. Opgeteld ging het om bijna tienduizend items. Uit deze verzamelde data konden we 414 'nieuwsverhalen' ontwaren die rondgingen over verschillende platforms. Het gebruik van dit niveau als meeteenheid maakte het mogelijk om de ontwikkeling van de verhalen te volgen, van het ontstaan totdat het uitdoofde en er niets meer over gepubliceerd werd.

In hoofdstuk 1 werd een inventarisatie gemaakt van het respectievelijke belang van de mediaplatformen bij het brengen van nieuwsverhalen. Daaruit kwam naar voren dat Twitter over het algemeen het snelste mediaplatform is, waar 41,9 procent van de verhalen begint. Het sociale medium wordt gevolgd door nieuwssites (28,9%), kranten (18%) en televisie en radio (beide 5,7%). Dit moet echter niet leiden tot de conclusie dat sociale media nu het hele speelveld hebben omgekeerd, zo laten bijkomende analyses zien. Wanneer we namelijk inzoomen op *wie* er precies in slaagt om een nieuwsverhaal te starten op Twitter, dan zien we dat dit voornamelijk de oude bekenden zijn. In de eerste plaats politici en partijen (46,3%), in de tweede plaats journalisten en accounts van mediabedrijven en –kanalen (36,8%). De rol van burgers

(7,9%) en anderen (9%) hierin is vrij beperkt. Daarbij zien we ook dat de verhalen die beginnen op offline mediaplatformen het doorgaans langer uitzingen, met een mediaan-levensduur van 84 uur voor televisie en 62,8 uur voor kranten – tegen een levensduur van 14,1 uur voor nieuwssites en 34,4 uur voor verhalen die beginnen op Twitter.

In hoofdstuk 2 werd een vergelijking gemaakt tussen de eerder genoemde 'traditionele' manier van intermedia agenda setting-onderzoek, en de alternatieve meetmethode die in deze dissertatie wordt voorgesteld. De analyses laten zien dat online media, die niet te maken hebben met vastomlijnde deadlines, beduidend sneller zijn in hun verslaggeving dan offline vormen van media. In de meerderheid van de nieuwsverhalen die wij onderzochten bleken Twitter en nieuwssites vooruit te lopen op de andere media, waarbij die anderen een achterstand van tussen de 4 en 21 uur (mediaan) hadden met berichtgeving over dezelfde kwestie. De tijdsseries op thema-niveau laten dezelfde tendens zien. We kunnen dus concluderen dat de online media grote impact hebben op de agenda's van andere nieuwsmedia. Toch moeten we het belang van de intrinsieke snelheid van media niet overdrijven. We zien bijvoorbeeld dat kranten, die uiteraard niet continu geüpdatet kunnen worden, niet zelden sneller zijn dan media die hen in theorie op snelheid altijd zouden moeten verslaan. Zo wordt 37 procent van de verhalen eerder in de krant gemeld dan op een nieuwssite. Blijkbaar maken redacties dus de keuze om bepaalde verhalen eerst in de (betaalde) papieren krant te brengen, en pas daarna in beknoptere vorm online te plaatsen. Ook moeten we opnieuw een belangrijke kanttekening plaatsen bij de rol van Twitter. Als we het over sociale media hebben, zijn we wellicht geneigd om dit gelijk te stellen aan 'the crowd' of 'het publiek'. Wanneer we echter inzoomen op de verschillende groepen actoren op Twitter, dan zien we dat het voornamelijk journalisten, mediabedrijven, en politici zijn die in staat zijn de toon te zetten. Zij zijn immers als eerste op de hoogte (journalisten), proberen hun verhalen aan de man te brengen (mediabedrijven), of lanceren nieuwe ideetjes en onelinerst (politici). De rest van de Twittergebruikers mag wel meepraten, maar hun invloed buiten Twitter is beperkt.

In hoofdstuk 3, tenslotte, werd dieper ingegaan op de 40 grootste nieuwsverhalen die in de steekproef werden aangetroffen. In dit onderdeel van de dissertatie werd een

kwalitatieve inhoudsanalyse uitgevoerd naar twee aspecten van deze nieuwsverhalen: de manier waarop deze binnen het medialandschap worden verteld, en de rol die tijd speelt bij het vertellen. We concluderen dat het vertellen van nieuwsverhalen in twee fases plaats vindt, die elkaar chronologisch opvolgen. Beide fases laten hun eigen dynamiek zien wat betreft de manier van vertellen en de rol van tijd. In de eerste fase gaat het over het verzamelen van en berichten over de laatste informatie, en is gericht op het 'nu' en het nabije verleden. In de tweede fase wordt er een stap terug gezet en worden de feiten die bekend werden geanalyseerd en geïnterpreteerd. Hierbij worden vergelijkingen gemaakt met het verleden, en wordt er gespeculeerd over mogelijke toekomstige ontwikkelingen. We concluderen dat er een 'taakverdeling' bestaat tussen verschillende media. Twitter en nieuwssites zijn essentieel om vers nieuws te brengen, en om updates te brengen over nieuwsverhalen die 'op dit moment' spelen. De gedrukte krant is dan weer belangrijk om het nieuws te duiden. De rol van radio en televisie ligt hier tussenin.

De bijdrage van deze dissertatie tot de wetenschappelijke literatuur is drieledig. In de eerste plaats hebben we een alternatieve manier van meten en analyseren uitgewerkt, die niet uitgaat van de 24-uurs nieuwscyclus, maar rekening houdt met de eigenschappen van het hedendaagse medialandschap. De drie onderzoeken in dit doctoraat laten de bruikbaarheid en de voordelen zien van deze alternatieve aanpak op basis van nieuwsverhalen. Een uitgebreide beschrijving van de werkwijze is toegevoegd, zodat andere onderzoekers hieruit kunnen putten voor toekomstige studies.

In de tweede plaats heeft deze dissertatie onze kennis van het ontstaan en de verspreiding van nieuws in het digitale tijdperk geactualiseerd. Het toepassen van de hiervoor genoemde methodologie maakte het mogelijk om relatief gedetailleerde analyses op brede schaal uit te voeren, daar waar de bevindingen van gangbare tijdsserie-analyses abstract blijven. Hiermee konden we laten zien dat online media weliswaar belangrijke spelers zijn in de nieuwsvoorziening, maar dat de rol van nieuwssites en Twitter tegelijkertijd niet overschat moet worden. Een meer traditionele analyse kan de indruk wekken dat de rol van 'oudere' media is uitgespeeld,

maar we zien dat een mediaplatform als de gedrukte krant nog altijd van belang is voor het brengen en duiden van het nieuws.

De derde bijdrage is dat we een beter inzicht verkrijgen in de machtsrelaties binnen sociale media. Sociale media zijn in de wetenschappelijke literatuur dikwijls behandeld als ware het homogene entiteiten, waarbij miskend werd dat er binnen een platform als Twitter met vele verschillende soorten stemmen wordt gesproken. Deze dissertatie toont aan dat het essentieel is om die typen actoren in onze analyses van elkaar te onderscheiden, want we zien duidelijk dat niet iedere stem even zwaar meeweegt. Ondanks het feit dat burgers via social media in staat zijn hun bijdrage te leveren, zien we dat ook daar het nieuwsdiscours gedomineerd blijft door de 'usual suspects' – politici, politieke partijen, journalisten, en nieuwsmedia.

Toekomstig onderzoek moet deze bevindingen in overweging nemen, zowel bij de conceptuele als bij de praktische opzet van de studies. Daarnaast zou het helpen als de hier ontwikkelde nieuwsverhalen-aanpak verder wordt uitgewerkt, bijvoorbeeld met statistische procedures. Daarbij zou ook machine learning mogelijk een plaats kunnen krijgen in het proces van detecteren en toewijzen van nieuwsverhalen. Verder zouden de empirische bevindingen uit deze studie moeten worden vergeleken met analyses die zijn uitgevoerd in een context anders dan een verkiezingscampagne. Tenslotte is het belangrijk dat onderzoekers aan de slag gaan met verhalen die aan het traditionele nieuwsdiscours ontsnappen, om zo inzicht te krijgen in de onderwerpen die we op dagelijkse basis missen, maar die wel degelijk leven bij bepaalde groepen mensen.