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Heckert, R.; van der Goot, M.J.

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Regular Article

Newsworthiness of Multiple Identity Organizations

Robert Heckert [*], Margot van der Goot

University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR), P.O. Box 15791, 1001 NG, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

Media reputation is an important asset of every organization but might even be more delicate for a multiple identity organization (MIO). MIOs usually have central, distinctive, and enduring characteristics belonging to two antithetical value systems, often the ideological and the utilitarian value system. This qualitative interview study explores journalists' understanding and coverage of MIOs and how both are impacted by journalistic role perceptions and by the nature and behavior of such organizations. The findings of this research provide insight into the journalistic production process and could be instructive for the media management of MIOs. The interviewees recognized the potentially problematic character of an MIO but were divided about the newsworthiness of organizational identity multiplicity. Besides a group of "explainer" journalists, who were neutral towards MIOs, there were "watchdog" journalists who were extra sharp-eyed when an MIO was involved. They observed a lack of transparency about the commercial goals and profits. Controversy in terms of internal and external tensions was found to be a particularly salient news value with respect to an MIO. During the COVID-19 pandemic the journalist's interest in the tension between the organization's identities seemed to disappear. The central conclusion is that organizational identity multiplicity may trigger the critical attention of journalists. MIOs should improve transparency, especially considering their commercial activities.

1. Introduction

Organizations put a lot of effort in their media relations because they realize that a sound media reputation is a valuable asset. We assume that multiple identity organizations encounter more difficulties to get favorable media coverage, because the combination of their, *often antithetical*, identities might foster criticism. A multiple identity organization (MIO) is an organization whose members do not give a consistent answer to the question what the organization's central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics are (Albert & Whetten, 1985). A detailed explanation of the MIO conception and its underlying value systems follows in the Literature Review. As examples of such organizations, modern research universities and rural cooperatives are often mentioned by scholars (e.g., Avila & Amorim, 2020). The current study focuses on the MIO Sanquin, the Dutch blood supply foundation. The legal basis for the public and market activities makes Sanquin an ideal type of an MIO and is appropriate to demonstrate how journalists shape the media reputation of an organization with this dual identity. We will introduce the organization using its own description.

On the basis of the Blood Supply Act, Sanquin is the only organisation in the Netherlands authorised to manage our need for blood and blood products. It is also a not-for-profit organisation and thus has no profit motive. Sanquin employs approximately 3000 workers across the Netherlands. (Sanquin, n. d.)

Sanquin's mandate is received from the Minister of Health. This implies that Sanquin functions as a public utility with limited room for policy formulation beyond daily routines. The blood-derived pharmaceutical products are meant for Dutch patients in the first place but are sold on an international competitive market. The dependency on the voluntary gift of the donor and the not-for-profit blood supply on the one hand and the commercial activities on the pharmaceutical market on the other, imply antithetical organizational characteristics in the ideological and the utilitarian domain respectively.

To better understand the intractability of the media reputation of MIOs, we need to gain insights into the considerations of the producers of media content, the journalists. A qualitative interview study is needed to gather insights about journalists' understanding of an MIO, and of how the news production is impacted by the nature and behavior of such an organization, by their own perceptions and biases and possibly by external factors. This study explores how journalists consider the

* Corresponding author. University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR), P.O. Box 15791, 1001 NG, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

E-mail address: r.heckert@uva.nl (R. Heckert).

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newsworthiness of organizational identity multiplicity, what their motivations are in producing media content regarding such organizations, and if journalists treat an MIO differently from other organizations. Implications of identity multiplicity for internal identification and commitment of employees (e.g., Mostafa et al., 2019) and for external support of stakeholders is scholarly well-founded (e.g., Scott & Lane, 2000), but knowledge of how journalists shape the media reputation of an MIO is lacking. A previous study shed light on how MIOs are portrayed in news articles (Authors 2021) and found that the tension between the identities was salient in this portrayal. This study examines how the nature and behavior of an MIO specifically provide reasons for journalists to report critically on an MIO. In-depth insights in journalists' considerations and daily practice help to understand the background of their thorny portrayal and offers vital information for MIOs' media management.

2. Literature review

We presume that how journalists write about MIOs will be influenced by the special character of such an organization and its behavior, as well as by the journalists' role perceptions and thoughts about newsworthiness. Contextual factors, such as current media storms could also be of influence.

2.1. Multiple identity organizations

An MIO houses two or more identities. This means that the organizational members give miscellaneous answers to the question what the central, distinctive, and enduring characteristics of the organization are. The organizational identity characteristics often belong to two *contrasting* value systems. Albert and Whetten (1985) explain this in their seminal publication on organizational identity. The *normative* or *ideological* system emphasizes traditions and traditional symbols, internalization of an ideology, and altruism, like that of a church or family. It is non-monetary focused. The *utilitarian* system, by contrast, is characterized by economic rationality, maximization of profits, and self-interest, like that of a business (Albert & Whetten, 1985). Many scholars consider non-profits acting at the interface of markets and civil societies as MIOs. Profits can also be MIOs (Jay, 2013).

The notions "hybrids" and "multiple" or "dual" identity organizations are often used interchangeably in academic literature (Jäger & Schröer, 2014). We use the multiple identity notion and follow Jäger and Schröer who propose that MIOs maintain the independence of different identities, in contrast with hybrids that systematically integrate both identities (Jäger & Schröer, 2014). We define the case organization, the Dutch Blood Supply Foundation Sanquin, as an MIO, since the hybridity of this foundation is legally established, and the market and non-market activities are housed in separate divisions. It serves as an *ideal type* of case of an MIO.

Multiple identity can often be problematic. Many scholars have emphasized conflicting external demands and competing internal claims on organizational identity (e.g., Wæraas, 2008). Interesting cases have been documented, like an internal clash of the identities culminating in the strike of an orchestra (Glynn, 2000); or the schisma in the Board of Directors of a non-profit organization (Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997). A potential vulnerability is the critical media portrayal of MIOs (Avila & Amorim, 2020). Journalists might have different expectations for MIOs than they have for non-profit organizations or commercial enterprises with a single identity. In the current study we want to gain more in-depth knowledge of the journalist's thoughts about this kind of organization. Which expectations do they have about the characteristics, values, and vulnerabilities of such an organization? Summarizing:

RQ1 How do journalists comprehend multiple identity organizations, and what are their professional opinions about this type of organization?

2.2. Newsworthiness and news factors

Since we want to gain insights in the motivations of journalists to write about MIOs, we explore the notions newsworthiness and news factors, delving into specific characteristics of MIOs that make them more vulnerable to critical coverage. When journalists consider the newsworthiness of a situation or issue, they consider, consciously or unconsciously, the presence of news factors. The core proposition of the news factor theory is that events and issues possess certain characteristics, news factors, that determine their newsworthiness. Newsworthiness is a journalistic judgement on the relevance of these news factors. There is a consistent relationship between the characteristics of issues, and the news value allocated to them by journalists. In the media portrayal of MIOs, we expect specifically the following news factors to play a role: surprise, controversy, impact, eliteness and negativity (Schafraad et al., 2016). We will elucidate them briefly.

Surprise is something unexpected, used interchangeably with *deviance* (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Commercial activities in a non-profit organization might be unexpected. In this context, *controversy* is expected to be visible in the MIO's struggle about normative and utilitarian values with internal or external stakeholders (e.g., Glynn, 2000). *Impact* is the reach and social significance of an event or issue (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), especially when it is combined with an elite organization. *Eliteness* relates to the importance, uniqueness, or indispensability of an organization, sometimes called a "high-reliability organization" (Belasen, 2008, p. 19). *Negativity*, the tendency to give more weight to negative issues, could be an important news factor for this research since the potential tension between the ideological and the utilitarian identity has often been covered negatively in the media (Avila & Amorim, 2020). Therefore, we want to examine if the journalists' negativity bias, is inextricably bound up with journalistic reporting on MIOs.

Aside from these news factors, the issues "tension between the identities" and "integrity breaches" have been identified as of particular importance to MIOs (Avila & Amorim, 2020).

RQ2 What makes multiple identity organizations newsworthy, in the eyes of journalists?

2.3. Role perception and normative or commercial logic

Journalistic role perception, defined as how journalists understand their work, based on the expectations which they believe to exist in society and among different stakeholders and which they see as normatively acceptable, will influence the journalistic production (Skovsgaard et al., 2013) and news coverage (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Since we expect that professional standards will play a role in journalists' decisions to cover identity multiplicity and in their way of portraying MIOs, we aim to explore the journalists' role perceptions and their perspectives on normative or commercial logic.

Most of the journalistic role perception studies have based their conceptual models inductively on empirical evidence (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017), defining several dimensions, like the watchdog – educator dimension. This dimension, introduced by Fjæstad and Holmlov (cited by Donsbach & Patterson, 2004, p. 264) could provide analytical leverage for our study. Watchdog journalists would be guided by considerations that are grounded in their role for a well-functioning democratic society, maximizing transparency (Norris, 2014) and a rich information source for important social issues (Pickard, 2014). The "watchdog" is opposed to the "educator" notion, defined as a facilitator feeding the public information.

Another classification to position journalists is theoretically grounded in the distinction between a normative or ideological and a commercial media logic as guiding principles of journalists' everyday work. The *normative* logic is grounded in their role for a well-functioning democratic society, informing citizens in a detached and balanced manner (Koehler & Jost, 2019). The notion of a *commercial* or utilitarian logic assumes that journalists' selection of issues and the production and presentation of media content is mainly coined by a commercial calculus and driven by principles of market competitiveness, focusing on consumers' demands (Damstra, 2020). Media, as profit driven organizations, understand consumers can choose from a large oversupply of content (Picard, 2005). Consequently, media produce content that attracts the largest possible audience (Damstra, 2020), for instance about the tension between an organization's ideological roots and its commercial activities. We assume that critical reporting on MIOs could be influenced by the position of a journalist on the watchdog – educator and the normative – utilitarian dimension.

RQ3 What is the relation between journalists' role perceptions and their perceptions of media logic on the one hand and how they write about multiple identity organizations on the other?

2.4. Contextual factors

Decisions about reporting on an MIO are not only based on judgments of newsworthiness and on role perceptions. Contextual factors impact the production process as well. The media agenda is influenced by routines on the job, like imitation (Hardy, 2018) the effects of news deadlines and of supervisors in the organization (Tandoc, Hellmueller & Vos, 2013), the prevailing cultural and ideological environment, and the influence of the media on each other (McCombs et al., 2014). And sometimes a topic is dwarfing all other topics on the news agenda, like the war in Iraq in 2007 (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009) and the terrorist attacks in Brussels and Paris in 2015–16 (Hardy, 2018) for a shorter or longer period. As long as the public stays tuned, the media will keep on covering the storm issue (Hardy, 2018). In the same vein, the 2020-21 pandemic might impact the journalistic coverage of MIOs. This leads to our last research question:

RQ4 How do contextual factors play a role in media reporting about multiple identity organizations according to journalists?

3. Method

Traditional newsroom studies usually rely on *observation* (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2019, pp. 3–20), whereas we conducted a qualitative *interview* study in which we asked individual journalists about their contextualization of MIOs. We wanted to discover the participants' insights about these organizations and their motivations to report on them. For sampling (Saunders et al., 2018), conducting the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013), analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), and validity checks (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), we applied methods common to qualitative research.

3.1. Sampling

To obtain answers to our research questions we needed a sample broad enough to get a sound variety of insights, and at the same time limited to interviewees able to pronounce upon the Sanquin case as an illustration of organizational multiple identity. We applied purposive sampling to compose a sample of journalists that would generate a variety of views on MIOs in the media. Since we use Sanquin as an example, the main sampling criterion was that they had written about Sanquin at least once. Sanquin only served as an illustrative example of an MIO during the conversation, and we ensured ample attention to universal thoughts about the subject. This broad approach assures that conclusions will go beyond the single casus.

We recruited interviewees writing for Dutch newspapers. The sample was varied in terms of age, gender and belonging to different parts of the editorial office, like National News, Economy or Science and writing for either quality, popular national or regional newspapers, allowing for different approaches of the subject. We did not consider all these variables in our interpretation of the findings, but we expected that this variety could contribute to a broad view on the topic under study. The sample includes an editor-in-chief and a journalist of a leading Dutch news agency, since this agency serves for journalists as an important source of news. The interviewees' knowledge about Sanquin varied from superficial to a bit more profound, all equally useful for the current study's purpose.

For the first round of interviews (conducted in 2020) a systematic search was executed in the Nexis Uni database for the hundred most relevant articles about Sanquin in Dutch news media. Based on the availability of contact details and the above-mentioned "stratification", the search yielded a first sample of nine journalists that were willing and able to have a conversation (Appendix 1).

To deepen the insights collected in the first round, a second round of interviews was held (2021). This also gave room to further explore one of the key insights from the first round. We observed that, besides the organizational identity, the current media storm, i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic, influenced the way journalists would contextualize and portray an MIO, especially Sanquin. Based on the articles' headlines we identified which articles were about COVID and which were not. At this point, a Nexis Uni sample was taken of news articles and its authors for the period March 1st to December 7th of 2020. This resulted in a sample, obtained by the same procedure, of five journalists for the second round of interviews (Appendix 1).

The data collection ended when no new answers to the research questions were obtained. To determine in which stage of the research process the appropriate sample size was reached, we assured that *saturation* was accomplished on *all* relevant aspects (Saunders et al., 2018), —in this case with a sample of $N = 14$— as elucidated below. A sample of this size is considered sufficient in providing complete and accurate information when similar questions are asked of the participants of a homogeneous group (Guest et al., 2006), in this case Dutch newspaper journalists. When saturation is reached, the results can be generalized to some degree (Boddy, 2016, p. 428).

3.2. The interviews

The Ethics Review Board of the University approved the research project. Before the interviews, interviewees were informed about the research purpose, the audio recording, and their anonymity. They signed an informed consent form and were provided with the university's Ethics Review Board address. The duration of the interviews varied between 25 and 55 min. The respondents were interviewed by the first author in their work or home environments and in public places. Due to the Corona crisis half of the interviews were held in an online video meeting. The self-selected environment and the fact that the interviewees were asked about their own expertise evidently made them feel "at home", thus improving the ecological validity, the relationship between the real world and the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

For these semi-structured interviews an interview guide was used. This guide functioned as a support to cover all the items, not as a questionnaire. To keep priming at a minimum the conversation for every topic constantly started "open" and generic to become more precise later, maintaining room for elaboration. Between the two interview rounds a question about the impact of the Corona pandemic on media coverage was added to this guide. Every interview started with the question what a journalist's guiding principles in their work were (role perceptions). During the discussion about how a journalist thinks and works and what is news, there was ensured that attention was given to conceptions as commercial logic and negativity bias. The interviewees were asked to word their understanding of the organizational multiple identity notion and were, after their reading, provided with the scholarly definition. Special attention was given to the identity issues of Sanquin. The last topic of the interviews was the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on their reporting.

3.3. Analysis

The interview recordings were transcribed automatically (by *Amberscript. com*) and then corrected. For the process of open coding *Atlas. ti* software was used, applying procedures derived from qualitative methodological literature, especially *thematic analysis* (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The first author thoroughly read the transcripts line-by-line and added 235 codes. Then a process of sifting trivia from significance followed (Patton, 2002) and of clustering the codes in groups. These 24 groups were all associated with the above-mentioned subjects, like "tension between identities", "newsworthiness", "news factors", "commercial logic" and "context". A few of them contained unexpected views on the matter under investigation, like "high expectations of non-profits" and "journalistic herd reflex". Examining the quotes one-by-one enabled listing code group data similarity and variation for every code group. Revealing quotes were marked. 23 of those 24 groups were *not* specific for Sanquin, but covered notions as "role perception", "incompatibility of identities", and "news factors". One group contained the codes concerning the Sanquin case. They will be used as illustrative examples in the result section. After the thematic analysis of all data, the focus shifted to the level of the interview statements per respondent and the interrelatedness of these statements on an individual basis, to determine if there is any relationship between journalists' role perceptions and their attitudes towards an MIO.

In this qualitative study, instead of statistical methods, we took the following five measures to assure internal validity. First, *member validation* (Braun & Clarke, 2013): during the interviews the interviewer gave summaries of what was discussed and offered the opportunity to correct or to add on the information already gathered. One of the interviewees reviewed a draft of the current paper to comment on the validity of the findings, what did not urge any adjustments. Second, the first author was press officer for many years, and in that role had extensive contact with journalists, also with some of the interviewees. This prolonged *engagement* (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) made it possible to create a friendly atmosphere during the interviews and to gain in-depth insights in the dynamics between an MIO and journalistic practice. Third we looked for *rival explanations* (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), an explicit search for plausible alternative interpretations, especially where it concerned how journalists comprehend MIOs, and what are their professional opinions about this type of organization are. Fourth, the first author wrote *memos* (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) during data gathering and analysis to detect biases and objectify the research process. Fifth, in terms of *peer debriefing* (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), a professor in Journalism, affiliated with another university, commented on a draft version of the paper, judging the validity and credibility of the study. This did not result in major adaptations.

4. Results

The results will show that journalists not only recognize what an MIO is (4.1), but also that this duality is often considered problematic (4.2). The newsworthiness of identity multiplicity is explained, both as an immanent characteristic of an MIO (4.3.1) as well as caused by attitude and behavior of the organization (4.3.2). Then, the influence of journalistic role perceptions on how MIOs are portrayed (4.4) and the importance of contextual factors on topic choice (4.5) are discussed.

4.1. Organizational multiple identity recognized

RQ1 asks what journalists' understanding is of a multiple identity organization, and what their view on such an organization comprises. All interviewees understood what an MIO was, with or without a concise explanation by the interviewer of the notion and a clarification of the ideological and the utilitarian identity. They also *recognized* the typical characteristics of an MIO. Although not all interviewees used the same words, their understanding of an MIO was an organization that serves a public goal and acts as a business at the same time: 'It's a company with a profit motive and with a public duty' (Int. 14). The examples of MIOs the interviewees spontaneously mentioned correspond highly with the ones in academic literature (e.g., Pratt, 2016), like universities, hospitals ('Multiple identity is run-of-the-mill in healthcare', Int. 13), and housing corporations.

4.2. The problematic character of multiple identity

The interviewees did not vary in their understanding of the notion, but RQ1 also delves into journalists' opinions about the multiple identity of organizations. They did have different thoughts about how problematic such an identity might be. The insight that emerged from the interviews was that organizational multiple identity was looked upon in two different ways, both based on a common understanding. The *common understanding* was that journalists acknowledged the complex character of an MIO and that there is a potential tension between the ideological and the utilitarian identity. This complexity was substantiated in the next quote: 'It is complicated, because one purpose harmonizes with other words and deeds than the other purpose. It is difficult to bring them together. One will have to formulate elastically and explain the various objectives that one sets at the same time' (Int. 2). The tension between the identities was also recognized in the following quotes: 'Organizations for development aid clearly show this phenomenon. Offering help on one side and on the other side raking in sponsors and money. Both are closely interwoven which makes it difficult to discriminate between the two' (Int. 7), and 'MIOs can hold discordant interests' (Int. 11, 13).

The *difference* between the two ways of viewing the issue was found in the judgment of the problematic character of an MIO and how prominent this problem forces itself upon us. The two categories each have two sub-categories (see Table 1).

4.2.1. MIO is not necessarily problematic

The first view supposes that a multi-identity organization is basically not more problematic than other companies. These journalists would *only* write about the identity multiplicity when the organization clearly oversteps the mark on this issue, for instance when the compensation of the top executives is far beyond expectations. The fundamental attitude toward such an organization was positive or neutral (Table 1, first and second column). If the attitude is positive the portrayal of an MIO could work out positive as well. One of the interviewees stated that her fundamentally positive attitude could even put pressure on the journalistic independence: 'I think that you might consider a multiple identity a bit more favorable, since you share its standards and values deep inside. This is not the case when you write about a company with nothing else than a profit motive' (Int. 7). She also clarified her expectations regarding values and behavior of an MIO: to put the mission first and not the money, to do the utmost for the personnel and to remunerate the executives with a modest salary.

4.2.2. Multi-identity holds inherent tensions

The second view presupposes that an MIO houses an inherent tension that is inclined to cause problems. The fundamental attitude toward such an organization was critical or negative (Table 1, third and fourth

Table 1
Journalists' basic attitudes toward a multiple identity organization.

MIO is not necessarily problematic		MIO implies inherent tensions	
Positive	Neutral	Critical	Negative
An MIO has an attractive moral standard	An MIO is like any other organization	The multi-identity character can be problematic	The ideological and the utilitarian identity are incompatible

column). These journalists recognized the contrasting value systems (see Literature Review) and doubted the compatibility of both identities, as the following quotes suggest: 'I don't find it easy to combine' (Int. 4); 'There is an area of tension' (Int. 8), 'These organizations have inherent conflicts of interest. They counteract each other, they clash' (Int. 13) One journalist regarded the identities as simply 'incompatible' (Int. 3).

4.3. Newsworthiness and news factors

RQ2 explores what makes multiple identity organizations newsworthy. The newsworthiness appeared to be driven by two factors. First, *inherent* newsworthiness comprised by the characteristics of an MIO, and second, triggers urged by the *attitude* or *behavior* of the organization.

4.3.1. MIOs are inherently newsworthy

Multiple identity appeared to be potentially newsworthy. The explanations of the journalists for their interest in MIOs were rather complementary than rival. For some interviewees it was 'bloody obvious: A combination of public and private goals in one organization might easily cause friction. Things come together here that make it interesting. Without doubt!' (Int. 2). 'A journalist looks for the area of tension between the identities, but whether this tension really exists depends on the kind of identities. A combination of a private and a public identity increases the potential conflict of interests' (Int. 11). And for the case at hand: 'The two identities clash, as I feel it, especially at Sanquin. A combination of the benevolence-model, giving your blood to another person, and a clear profit motive' (Int. 3). 'They are difficult to combine. You are in fact transferring something from the one domain to the other, where it doesn't belong' (Int. 4). 'The organization is an easy target' (Int. 8).

In the eyes of journalists, several news factors converged when an MIO was concerned. The news factors that appeared to be important were surprise, controversy, eliteness and negativity. News was, according to the interviewees, the unusual, *surprise*, things that do not meet our expectations or previous experiences. According to some of the interviewees there was a kind of "unexpectedness" in the MI conception. One would not expect commercial motives in a non-profit organization.

The news factor *controversy* that is central in journalistic production got a specific meaning in the context of MIOs. Some interviewees mentioned a kind of internal controversy between the social and commercial goals and a controversy between MIOs and their stakeholders. Controversy was the journalist's favorite. 'Controversy is a kind of umbrella. There must be tension, caused by an integrity breach or by a clash of identities. Controversy is my starting point. Controversy has it all' (Int. 2). 'Issues that are subject to public debate, that's really where you would like to write about' (Int. 1). 'A lot of journalists get a kick out of controversy' (Int. 6). 'It is catchy' (Int. 11, 12).

As we have seen in the MIO examples above, MIOs were often semi-public organizations that played an important role in the lives of people and could be called *elite organizations*. Since journalists considered the eliteness of an organization, (semi-)public organizations received their attention, or as one interviewee would put it: 'Organizations with a public goal are gone over with a fine-tooth comb' (Int. 14). For elite organizations the slightest provocation might suffice to report critically. This tendency was strongest when textbook examples of MIOs were involved, their identities belonging to adverse value systems. A faux pas was dearly counted against them.

There was a lot of support for the tendency to prefer *negative* news over positive news. 'Good news is boring' (Int. 2). This preference for negative news was not shared by all. One interviewee claimed that a positive message that is unexpected is still news: 'Peace between Israel and Palestine would make an appealing headline' (Int. 4). The tendency to prefer negative over positive news might be stronger when reporting on an MIO. The next quote clarifies that the two identities easily pave the way for negative coverage. 'When those identities get mixed up it's easy munition for a journalist, for instance if such a non-profit organization must operate commercially and the remuneration at the top is brought into the open' (Int. 6). It is not only the identity multiplicity itself, but also different, higher expectations that journalists foster of certain organizations that might cause a critical attitude: 'More than a commercial company you will question them about how their deeds comply with their standards and values. That's at the back of a journalist's mind' (Int. 12). 'I expect organizations working for the common good to have another value system than a company quoted on the stock exchange, although in my experience the former doctor the books more than the latter' (Int. 13).

Besides these news factors, the tension between the identities and the integrity being under pressure, were reported to be reasons to write about such an organization, especially if there was an immediate cause for it in the attitude or behavior of the organization, which brings us to the next category.

4.3.2. Attitude and behavior of an MIO incubate criticism

Triggers in the attitude or behavior of an MIO for critical reporting stated by journalists were a discrepancy between mission and performance, a lack of transparency, integrity breaches and administrative irregularities. These triggers might not be unique for MIOs, but they were expected to occur more often and take stronger overtones in MIOs than in other organizations.

4.3.2.1. Discrepancy between mission and performance. Organizations, especially semi-publics, should "walk the talk". 'You should always check if their behavior is corresponding with their purpose of existence. The mission should always come first' (Int. 7).

4.3.2.2. Lack of transparency. A journalist might focus on an MIO when a discrepancy was noticed between the organization's identity and its projected identity, for instance when an organization shed insufficient light on its commercial activities in favor of its public dedication. A few interviewees pointed out the dominant position of the ideological identity in the external communication of the case organization whereas in reality the organization undertook commercial activities and gained profits as well. 'I expect honesty. Showing off that you are here to help patients and at the same time disguising the facts of the enormous profits … I find that incompatible' (Int. 3). The organization was urged 'to be crystal clear about its two identities. People know the social part of Sanquin better than the commercial part so to say. You want to set these two clearly alongside each other' (Int. 2). It was not only the underexposure of the utilitarian identity, but it was also the difficulty or 'impossibility to create a thorough insight, because the financial annual report of the commercial part of a foundation could not be obtained' and also 'the financial household of hospitals is rather complex. Where does the money come from and where does it go to? Nobody has an idea about their governance' (Int. 1). This amplified the rudimentary doubts or suspicion.

4.3.2.3. Integrity breaches. 'Integrity is an undeniable focus of the journalist, especially when it concerns an organization with an important responsibility' (Int. 6). The inclination to doubt the integrity of an organization or its executives was found in both groups of Table 1. Integrity was for instance at stake at universities that offered their curricula in English presumably to cash more tuition fees: 'That's an ordinary commercial motive. It is taking advantage of being perceived as an ideological institution but being a commercial organization instead' (Int. 9). This quote opened up an unexpected view. Organizations that have a public or non-profit image, independent of their factual business-model, use this image as a masquerade for making big money, according to some interviewees: 'For example, the Dutch Consumers' Organization. For many people it is some kind of state enterprise, but in actuality it must be able to pay its way and is quite profit driven. That's fascinating' (Int.13). Overpaying the top of an MIO was also felt as undermining the integrity (Int. 1). Semipublic welfare agencies, trade bodies, privatized public bodies and NGOs follow a not-for-profit policy. In the perception of the interviewees that pronounced upon the subject this position was incompatible with a remuneration at the top that would exceed the Prime Minister's salary. 'It was always about the Board's remuneration. That really caused Sanquin a lot of trouble' (Int.2).

4.3.2.4. Irregularities. When expectations of an MIO are high one might be extra disappointed when administrative irregularities occur, as this journalist stated: 'It surprised me that an ideological anti-cancer foundation, because that was "clever", was disadvantaging society by applying fiscal tricks' (Int. 13).

4.4. Role perception and commercial logic

RQ3 investigates how the journalist's role perceptions and perspective on commercial logic might influence the reporting on MIOs. We will discuss the results as derived from our data relating to both conceptions respectively.

4.4.1. Role perceptions

In line with previous literature (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017), the respondents' role perceptions can be distinguished into two main conceptions. The first category is the "*explainer*". The "explainer" category is grounded in our data and novel in this wording, but it probably resembles most the Fjæstad & Holmlov "educator" notion as they oppose it to the watchdog notion (cited by Donsbach & Patterson, 2004, p. 264). The "explainer" journalists phrased their responsibility as to 'explain and provide context' (Int. 5), 'gather information and translate it for the readership' (Int 9), 'search for facts and inform the audiences' (Int. 14), to supply with new facts and insights, and 'explain complicated matters in a simple manner' (Int. 11). The second category adhered to the "watchdog" role. This "watchdog" category directly stems from academic literature (e.g., Deuze, 2008). The role was not spontaneously mentioned by journalists when asking them about the conception of their profession. After some reflection on the subject, the watch dog role was regarded important for more than half the interviewees, 'Taking up paving stones is the journalist's duty' (Int. 8), as well as other societal functions, like 'giving people grip on their lives' (Int. 4), but sometimes with a sense of perspective: 'I want to be that watchdog, but I realize that my wonderful article will be used as kitty litter next day' (Int. 12). Or the conception was rephrased: 'You might better call it a guardian of trust in society' (Int. 13).

There was a strong relationship on individual level between the role conception "explainer" and a neutral attitude (Table 1) towards MIOs. Likewise, the "watchdog" journalists bore a critical or negative attitude towards MIOs. This makes sense since the critical disposition seems to be an inherent element of the watchdog definition. This finding of congruency between role perception and journalistic attitude and performance is what we could expect according to academic literature (e.g., Skovsgaard et al., 2013). The journalists with a watchdog profile were all, with one exception, employed by national quality papers.

The two dimensions (explainer – watchdog and positive – negative attitude) are, in practice, a continuum, but it was instructive to temporarily regard each dimension as having two discrete categories. If we comprehend the dimensions as opposite ends of a continuum: from 'informing the reader' to 'countervailing power' and from 'favorably disposed' to 'extra critical', in the words of the interviewees, we could plot the interviewees in a diagram based on their interview statements (Fig. 1). The relationship is evident: the more "explainer" one was the more positive the attitude, or the more "watchdog" the more negative. Besides the two "point clouds" of *positive explainers* and *negative watchdogs* there was one "outlier": a watchdog respondent (7) with a positive attitude towards MIOs.

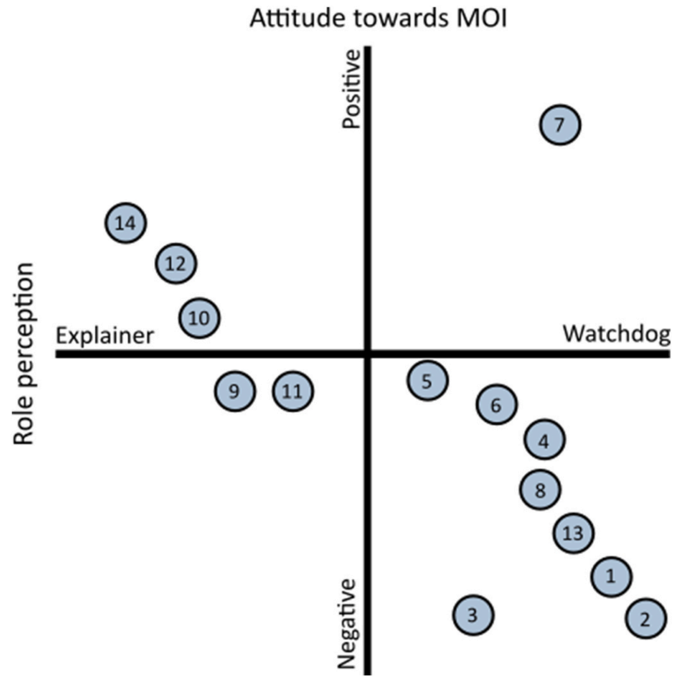

Fig. 1. Journalistic role perceptions and attitude towards multiple identity organizations.
The numbers refer to the respondents (Appendix 1).

4.4.2. Normative versus commercial logic

The interviewees were united in their rejection of applying the commercial logic conception ('That's not our drive', Int. 13), although they differed in the fervor of their denial. The unanimous rejection of a commercial logic in the journalistic production process is divergent from recent findings (Damstra, 2020). A possible explanation for these incongruent results is that in our case a cross section of journalists was made, whereas in the other study the interviewees were economical journalists who might have less focus on semi-public organizations.

We mentioned commercial logic bracketed together with role perception, which might suggest that the journalist's potential inclination to please the reader for commercial purposes could be part of their role perception, or at least at the basis of daily practice. In our sample commercial logic was not salient enough to play a part in the interplay between role perception and journalistic attitude towards MIOs.

4.5. Contextual factors

RQ4 addresses the importance of contextual factors that have an influence on journalistic writing on MIOs. The interviews showed that four factors were important: coincidence, journalistic routines, trends, and media storms. The first two are important for organizations other than MIOs as well. The illustration of the third factor, *trends*, holds a specific meaning for non-profit MIOs. The last factor, media storms, will be illustrated by considering the media coverage of Sanquin during the COVID 19 pandemic.

First, there was the role of *coincidence*. The following quote shows how a critical series of articles about Sanquin started with making an inventory by a journalist: 'When I was investigating the ten most important pharmaceutical enterprises in the Netherlands, I also run up against Sanquin and its FDA Warning Letter. That is not an everyday occurrence and so it got my attention' (Int. 1). The lack of an editorial policy could also be rallied around coincidence: 'It looks like there have been profound considerations taken, but I think we could do better' (Int. 7). We conclude that news selection is not always based on a subtle game of profound considerations.

Second, the following *journalistic routines* were mentioned: Has the subject been *covered recently* (Int. 7), or: Is there a *page to be filled* (Int. 9, 7)? The journalists also recognized that a *media snowball* exists. They reported on an issue because other media already paid attention to it (Int. 6, 10), the herd reflex of journalists (Int. 13).

'Don't underestimate the herd reflex. When one news medium publishes a story about for instance Sanquin, and another, there grows pressure on other news agencies to cover Sanquin. That's a driving force at an editorial office, rather unaimed and by coincidence, but present still, also since the editors-in-chief always start their days reading the other newspapers: "What have *they* got?"' (Int. 2).

Third, an issue can be more in vogue, a *trend*, in one period than it is in another. In the first decade of this century there was something brewing in Dutch society and media around privatized public bodies and semi-public organizations. A considerable political and public dispute took place about their financial household, their pattern of spending and the remuneration of the executives (reflecting a utilitarian identity) and losing out of sight their original mission (which is associated with the ideological identity) (Int. 2).

Fourth, major societal issues or events can pop up and put other topics in the shade. This phenomenon occurs every day, but seldom sustained for several months, like the COVID-19 pandemic (Int. 10) in 2020–21, as we will elucidate below.

4.5.1. The COVID-19 media storm

The data-gathering of our research coincided completely with the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic took possession of the media and of our case organization. There were several angles with which Sanquin was related with this topic: The organization's research institute as a media oracle for the subject, the availability of test capacity of its screening lab, the research project for national group immunity, and the collection of blood plasma of convalescent donors to be used either for transfusion or as raw material for corona medicines. It was probably this multi-angle involvement that resulted in a corona dominated press coverage. Of the 2020 news articles concerning Sanquin, 116 out of 140 articles (83%) were about the novel corona virus. One of the interviewees wrote an article in her local newspaper, analyzing the instant fame of the organization: 'The Sanquin Blood Bank usually plays an important role, away from the spotlights. Now Sanquin suddenly turns into one of the most visible players in the combat against the virus' (anonymous). The pandemic to a considerable extent shove away critical media coverage on Sanquin, as the interviewees confirmed. The pandemic, pervading everyday life, was judged important by journalists. The first two quotes talk about priority, the last about a focus shift from the organization to its performance. 'The entire world is in crisis. Why would we talk about a few tons too many for an executive, or some angry donors?' (Int. 10). 'Especially at the start of the pandemic … it was so far-reaching! That's not the moment you'll go into the selling of a division of a hybrid organization' (Int.13), a hardly covered subject. 'Sanquin has been criticized for wearing two hats in the past. The organization itself was subject of the reporting. This year it was not in the news for the organization itself but because of its performance. That might cause less criticism' (Int. 14). This shifted focus could be a temporary lightning rod: 'I am curious if the voluntary convalescent donors get compensated when Sanquin would gain profits from the medicines. That's the splits and I will write about it then because it's important, according to me' (Int. 11). This view taps into the tension between ideological (voluntary donation) and utilitarian values (profit gained by blood-derived medicine). When the issue is covered once, and the above-described journalistic imitation drive is strong enough, this could herald a new episode of journalistic criticism.

5. Discussion

Building on the extensive literature about organizational identity (e.g., Albert & Whetten, 1985), journalistic practice (e.g., Deuze, 2008) and role perceptions (e.g., Skovsgaard et al., 2013), this qualitative interview study contributes by adding insights on how journalists think about MIOs and what their considerations are when they report on such an organization. This has not been documented before. These insights inform the academic discussion on journalistic role perceptions and their impact on journalistic practice and provide starting points for communication management and press policy of MIOs. Previous studies recognized the intractable character of MIOs, but this study makes scholars as well as practitioners aware of the specific dynamics that impact the media reputation of MIOs. The significance surpasses the interest of corporate communication and journalism researchers since low ambiguity tolerance goes beyond the issue of organizational multiple identity. The study reveals the over-sensitiveness for a lack of transparency of journalists and the general public.

Organizational multiple identity turned out to be a potential source of journalistic criticism, especially when the organization failed in its duties to be transparent about its interests and when expectations were violated. This criticism can grow into a barrage when there is already something brewing in society and journalists can tap into communal values, beliefs, and wisdoms (Snow & Benford, 1992) that fit the then tenor of times (Oliver & Johnston, 2000), especially if there is an immediate cause, but it can die down as well when another topic is dwarfing all other topics on the news agenda. The corona pandemic that started in 2020 was judged of great importance and impact by the media. It dominated the coverage in general and it totally shove away the intractable issue of organizational identities that are difficult to combine for Sanquin.

Exploring the contextualization by journalists of multiple identity revealed a similarity between competing logics in organizations and by journalists. Our starting point was the MIO that houses both an ideological and a utilitarian identity. Media organizations as well can combine normative and commercial goals because they want to play a guiding role of importance in the life of their readership and also have to think commercially by offering their readers what they prefer to consume. Media organizations and MIO's like Sanquin house two toilsome compatible logics *within* one organization. For journalists we found differences *between* journalists rather than "within" individual journalists. Their role perceptions were either tending to the watchdog function, or to the educator or explainer function. Especially the watchdogs were interested in the tension that resulted from contradictory logics. The conclusion is that the multiple identity character of an organization can be an extra trigger for journalists to report critically about such an organization.

5.1. Practical recommendations

This study yields insights to improve the communication management of MIOs. An important trigger for journalists to report critically on an MIO is when they were surprised by commercial activities, especially if the organization lacked transparency about this utilitarian part of the organization, overexposing its ideological identity. Carefully balanced external communication is of paramount importance for an MIO. Improving transparency regarding the business model will be beneficial for positive media coverage and for stakeholders' support. Decision makers could even decide to abandon or "delete" (Pratt & Foreman, 2000) one of the competing identities. Massive journalistic attention for a topic like COVID can be used in favor of a positive media reputation by performing a visible role in the solution of the then current crisis.

5.2. Limitations

Although some qualities of journalists are consistent around the world (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), cultural differences between the Netherlands and other countries (Hanitzsch et al., 2019) might lead to other results. The watch dog function for instance is better developed in the Netherlands than in Anglo-Saxon countries. Another limitation is that the most thoroughly discussed example of an MIO was Sanquin.

Still, the interviewees discussed many other examples as well and reflected on MIOs beyond the level of the particular case of Sanquin. We therefore expect that what is reported here as particularly valid for the case organization could, mutatis mutandis, be transposed to other MIOs.

This transferability of findings will not be completely adequate for all contextual factors. That the COVID-19 pandemic dominated media coverage during a long period of time goes without saying. Still, the situation of Sanquin differed from other MIOs since the pandemic was a public health issue and Sanquin played an important role in healthcare during the pandemic. This implies that the media storm possibly had relatively strong impact on Sanquin's media coverage, which makes it hard to generalize this part of the findings.

5.3. Future research

The journalists in our sample share the insight that there is an important role for journalism in society and most of them acknowledge the influence of a negativity bias in journalists and readers. This observation by itself does not seem to predict their critical reporting on MIOs, but if their role perception is that of a "watchdog" rather than of an "explainer", we observed a critical basic attitude towards MIOs. Since these newspapers hold eminent sway under higher educated and wealthier people (Bakker & Scholten, 2014), the impact might be relatively stronger upon important stakeholders of an organization. This impact of critical media coverage of MIOs on particular audiences could be substantiated in future research.

Also, adding on the qualitative approach, a quantification of the prevalence of the explainer and watchdog role perceptions and the divergent attitudes towards MIOs could add interesting knowledge to our findings. An international survey among journalists would be the appropriate method to determine the relationship between role perception and attitudes towards MIOs.

In our study the focus was on "traditional" MIOs, usually semi-public organizations, but since public pressure on commercial enterprises to adopt normative identities grows (Pratt, 2016), increasingly commercial companies develop a multiple identity. The corporate social advocacy policy of Nike for instance tries to enhance its social engagement by challenging status quo racial and gender norms (Waymer & Logan, 2021). Commercial companies could hold other dynamics than non-profit MIOs. For instance, stakeholders may hold other expectations on ethical behavior of commercial enterprises than of MIOs. Embroidering on the current study, investigating journalists' considerations covering commercial MIOs could yield valuable insights in and recommendations for these companies' identity and media management.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Robert Heckert: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, and its revision. **Margot van der Goot:** Supervision, Methodology, advises, Commenting on drafts.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors of "Newsworthiness of Multiple Identity Organizations" hereby declare that there is no Conflict of Interest for any of them.

Appendix

Appendix 1

Journalists (interviewees).

	Reg/Nat	Pop/Qual	Editorial Office	Gender	Age
a					
1	National	Quality	Biotech	m	35–50
2	National	Quality	Investigation	m	35–50
3	National	Popular	Health	m	>50
4	Regional	Popular	Science	m	>50
5	National	News agency	Management	m	35–50
6	National	Quality	News	m	<35
7	National	Quality	Interior	f	<35
8	National	Quality	Science	f	>50
9	National	Popular	Economy	m	35–50
b					
10	Regional	Popular	Healthcare	f	35–50
11	Regional	Popular	Healthcare	m	35–50
12	Regional	Popular	Freelance	f	35–50
13	National	Quality	Economy	m	>50
14	National	News agency	News	m	<35

Note. The sample varies in terms of age, gender and belonging to different parts of the editorial office. Journalists are included of national and regional, quality, and popular newspapers. Popular news is often, as opposed to quality papers, regarded as being apolitical, trivial, simplified, emotionalized, and sensationalized (Jacobi, Kleinen-von Königslöw, & Ruigrok, 2016, p. 725), while enhancing insights and knowledge of their audience is among the key goals of quality press journalists.

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