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Between Professional Autonomy and Public Responsibility

Accountability and Responsiveness in Dutch Media and Journalism

Yael de Haan

Between Professional Autonomy and Public Responsibility:

accountability and responsiveness in Dutch media and journalism

Between Professional Autonomy and Public Responsibility:
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Debate on media performance

The debate on media responsibility and accountability in the Netherlands seems to have gained attention in recent years. Not only within the academic discourse (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004a, 2004b; Brants & Bardoel, 2008; McQuail, 2003), but particularly so in the political and public debate (Broertjes, 2006; Jansen & Drok, 2005; RMO, 2003; ROB, 2003). Politicians and public bodies complain about an apparently increasing power of the media. Politicians are dissatisfied with the kind of attention they get, dislike what they see as the media's cynicism and focus on scandal, sound-bites and hypes, and blame them for telling half truths and whole lies (Brants, 2000; Brants & Bardoel, 2008; Brants & Van Praag, 2005; Vasterman, 2004). Research by Van Aelst et al. (2008) showed that 62 percent of the members of Parliament in the Netherlands believe that the media have too much power and that the media and not the government set the political agenda. The representation of politics is said to be negative, personalised and often framed in terms of strategy and conflict (Brants & Van Praag, 2006). And according to politicians, this negative view of politics in the media has a negative effect on the public. At least, politicians blame the media for the distancing relationship between politics and the public. It seems as if media institutions, entrusted with a public service to democracy, are losing the trust of the political institutions (Van Vree et al., 2003).

Among members of the public trust in the media is also not self-evident anymore, at least voiced in public opinion polls (Eurobarometer, 2006, 2010; SCP, 2009) with a growing debate on the role and increasing power of the media (Bardoel, 2003). In the public debate media have been placed under the scrutiniser's magnifying glass, especially after specific incidents hit public opinion. Two cases stand out. First, the Srebrenica massacres during the Balkan war (1995) and the way journalists reported them led to an intense internal media debate. Seven years later the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation (NIOD [Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie],

2002) concluded that next to political and military mistakes, the performance of the media had to be questioned. Research showed their coverage was biased, portraying the Serbians as the 'bad guys' and siding with the Bosnians, and all of it laden with emotions (Wieten, 2002).

Second, Dutch media were again under fire in 2002, accused of demonizing Dutch populist politician Pim Fortuyn. In his criticism of the political establishment Fortuyn had included the media, which, he claimed, failed to see the ills of society, particularly the effects of immigration. When he was murdered in 2002 by a Dutch environmental activist, his followers blamed the 'left-wing' political and media elite for having created an atmosphere, which ultimately lead to his death. Fortuyn's successor and others claimed, 'the bullet came from the left', triggering a debate about the responsibility of the media (Brants & Bardoel, 2008).

It is not only specific incidents like these, however, that indicate a growing discontent of the media; politicians of established parties also blamed them for their poor performance. During a speech on the Day of Press Freedom in 2004, Christian Democratic Minister of Justice Piet Hein Donner stated angrily:

> *Press freedom is eroding. The press serves as a watchdog for democracy, but a watchdog that barks too often is useless. An information channel that distorts the information fulfils no function. In any other sector where the product is so vital for society and the risk of a loss of quality so great, the government would have intervened. The principle of press freedom makes this impossible. Consequently this is a task for the press itself, given the potential danger and social harm of media that behave as a political actor without showing accountability (Donner, 2004; translation in Brants & Bardoel 2008: 472).*

More recently, Green Left politician Femke Halsema, was milder during the 50th anniversary of the Dutch Council for Journalism, but still quite critical of the role of the media and their preparedness to reflect on their performance and be accountable.

> *While recognizing that the current economic conditions for journalists are troublesome, this does not relieve them of their duty to conduct an open debate on*

> *the quality of their work. Self-reflection, internal criticism and evaluations are not, in my careful estimation, actions pursued willingly by most journalists (Halsema, 2010[1]).*

At election time this criticism of the media is not surprising, since politicians and journalists often have different and maybe opposite ideas of what can and should be reported on and how (Brants & Van Praag, 2005). There might even be something wrong if they were completely happy with each other. Yet, the critical tone seems louder and the diversity of voices greater.

The issue of media performance landed on the political agenda in 2003 when two government advisory commissions, the Council for Social Development (RMO [Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling]) and the Council for Public Administration (ROB [Raad voor het Openbaar Bestuur]), explicitly questioned the media's role and power. RMO saw the public domain and the political process to be increasingly subject to media logic, where these signifying institutions construct reality and frame issues and people (Brants & Van Praag, 2006; RMO, 2003). The Commission proposed strategies to counterbalance the negative consequences of media logic, including the suggestion that media more actively show their accountability to the public.

The advice of ROB focused specifically on the increasingly intertwining relationship between media and politics, which it described as a LAT-relationship too close for comfort. Blaming the media for setting the political agenda and dominating the public debate, it proposed that media and politics should take a more distant and independent position to serve their public role. The Minister responsible for the media at the time sympathised with these suggestions, but for fear of interfering in press freedom emphasised the facilitating role of government, putting the responsibility of being accountable on the media, including stimulating public and professional debate (Ministerie OCW [Ministry Education, Culture and Science], 2004, 2008a).

The key question that this dissertation addresses is how media are responding to these criticisms on their performance. The sense of urgency that surrounds this issue is, however, not only instigated by these negative voices. The backdrop for this increased attention for media responsibility and accountability is

1 All translations are mine (YdH) except when indicated otherwise.

formed by a number of, often interrelated, structural changes in both society and the media (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004b; Brants, 2003; Brants & De Haan, 2010).

1.2 Societal and media developments

To understand the context in which the public and political debate on media responsibility and accountability has developed, a number of significant societal and media changes in the past decades need to be considered, particularly the processes of individualisation, secularisation and depillarization, the changing relationship between media and politics, the professionalisation of journalism, commercialization of media and, lastly, the advent of the Internet. These changes form the context in which the question of media discontent and their subsequent response should be analysed. An analytical review of these factors is therefore a prerequisite for addressing the primary research topic.

In the report 'A quarter of a century of social changes in the Netherlands' of the Netherlands Institute of Social Research (SCP [Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau]), individualisation is characterised as "one of the major changes of the social dynamics in the past twenty-five years" (SCP, 1998: 3). This process is characterised by a declining interest in traditional norms and values and an increasing number of single households. Whereas in the past, people lived primarily in collective entities, individualisation has created more room and autonomy for different values and life styles and, according to Brants (2007) an increasing orientation on consuming for individual desires.

Individualisation is often seen as a consequence or explanation of the second trend: secularisation and de-pillarization (Boutelier, De Beer & Van Praag, 2004). The process of secularisation has contributed to more individual values, no longer bound to the collective norms of the church. Where once quite a religious country, the Netherlands is now even the most secularized in Western Europe (Becker & De Hart, 2006; Becker & Vinck, 1994; Knippenberg, 1998). More than two-thirds of the Dutch population does 'not believe' any longer and among those who do, the proportion that goes to church regularly has diminished from 67 percent in 1970 to 38 percent in 2004 (Becker & De Hart, 2006). But this has not always been the case.

In contrast, the first half of the twentieth century, the Netherlands is characterised by religious and socio-political cleavages, with people more or less compartmentalized in Roman-Catholic, Protestant, socialist and liberal 'pillars'. Belonging to a *zuil* or pillar meant that you lived up to the norms and values of the denomination and 'lived in' the organisations that came with it: from sports club to labour union, from school to undertaking business, and from political party to newspaper or broadcasting organisation, the pillar was the leading light and provided the organisational structure. In the 1960s this started to break down and, once the self-evidence of choosing the medium of your pillar disappeared, the political parallelism between parties and media began to be dismantled. As a result, the equally self-evident trust relationship between media and their public started to fade. Viewers did not only watch programmes of their pillar, but with in the beginning only one television channel "everyone saw everything" (De Goede, 1999: 139). Moreover, when the illegal foreign or 'offshore' commercial channels (such as Radio Veronica) started to find their way to the Dutch television, offering new, international preferences, they were favoured by a large number of viewers (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004b).

The third major trend affecting the relationship between media, politics and public and addressing the issue of media responsibility is the changing relationship between media and politics. Brants and Van Praag (2006) refer to the period of pillarization as partisan logic, in which the media functioned as a platform for the political elite. Journalists generally performed as 'lapdogs' of the leaders of the pillars, obediently following the agenda and the interpretation of reality set in the political arena. At the end of the 1960s journalism emancipated to 'watchdogs', while political parties were not only confronted with independent journalists, but also with floating voters. From the turn of the century political parties entered a phase of serious uncertainty: membership and loyalty declined sharply and the volatility of the voters at election time (now the highest in Europe) prompted also political parties to develop strategies to (re)connect with their voters (Brants, 2002; Van Praag & Adriaansen, 2011). Both political parties and media had to regain trust and loyalty of the floating voter and switching public. This has created a new 'political-publicity complex', in which media and politics are caught in a symbiotic relationship, both fighting to get the attention of the same public (ROB, 2003; Van Vree et al., 2003).

At the same time, media independence meant a more critical and professional journalistic approach of politics, strengthened by the introduction of the first School of Journalism in 1966 and formalised in the first official editorial statute in 1974. This statute guaranteed editorial independence from any external influences, including the media's owner or management. For many journalists this statute was a final confirmation of their autonomy, be it that broadcasting organisations were very hesitant in introducing it (Wijfjes, 2004). Media gradually loosened the ties with political parties and as independent watchdogs critically followed the political process. But to bond with their publics they not only had to perform independently but also provide attractive content. Next to the symbiosis of the new political-publicity complex, the critical and infotainment driven journalism that characterised the shift from partisan to a media driven logic also turned politicians and journalists into mutually distrusting antagonists (Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Jansen & Drok, 2005).

A fourth trend is the increasing commercialization of and the consequent growth in competition between media actors. Already in the 1960s signs were visible in the public broadcasting sector. The new Broadcasting Act of 1967 opened the door for new entrants, next to the traditional pillars. The first one was TROS, which originally started as an illegal commercial enterprise from a former oil-drilling platform in the North Sea. It did not represent any specific denomination in Dutch society, but its breaking with the traditional, paternalistic attitude of the other public broadcasters and their light amusement programmes certainly attracted a large audience. But TROS was still a member of the non-commercial broadcasting 'family'. It took until 1989 – first with RTL and later SBS - before commercial broadcasting established a legal position in the broadcasting market. The introduction of a dual system in the Netherlands did not only impact the broadcasting structure, but also led to shifts in media content and a more market driven and audience focused style with more entertainment and sensationalistic characteristics (Brants, 2003). The change has not gone unnoticed and has resulted not only in appreciation of large segments of the public, but also in outspoken objections. Particularly the more left-leaning socio-political elite were concerned about media's responsibility in an increasing commercial media market (Brants, 1998).

Commercial trends have also been visible in the newspaper market. Increasing press concentration has led to a domination of a small number of large publishing enterprises operating across national and cultural borders. Changes in lay-out and formats are prompted by the primary goal of attracting a larger audience and bringing to a halt the declining circulation figures. Both in press and broadcasting a shift is visible from a supply to a demand media market (Van Cuilenburg, 1998), focusing more on the wants and desires of the public.

Lastly, the emergence of the Internet did not only introduce new media forms, but also had impact on the journalism profession and its relationship with its public. Consultation, hypertextuality, multimediality and interactivity are four unique characteristics of the Internet that not only strengthened the position of the media user, but also affected online journalism (Bardoel & Deuze, 2001; Deuze, 2003). It created greater opportunities for journalists to get in closer contact with the public. Offline media have introduced online discussion forums, feedback opportunities and increasingly publish the email addresses of journalists (Hermida, 2010; Paulussen et al., 2007). The use of the Internet has fuelled optimism about democratic participation and active citizenship, now that everyone can contribute to media coverage by offering user-generated content or audience material and be part of the media production process (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2004; Wardle & Williams, 2010). This has led to fading boundaries between producer and consumer and the emergence of the so-called prosumer (Deuze, 2003). The asymmetrical relationship, where the journalist decides what news to provide the public, has turned into a more symmetrical relationship, where the journalist is more responsive to the needs of the public (Pavlik, 2001).

However, the Internet has also created pitfalls for trust in journalism and media performance. There are worries that the increased interaction between media and users and the relative power of the latter might weaken the occupation's professional authority (Lowrey & Anderson, 2005). Most people in countries like the Netherlands now have access to the Internet and can act as journalists, which puts the definition and role of the professional journalist into question. The growing number of amateur journalists also undermines the credibility of media coverage as they are not too keen on keeping to journalistic ethical principles (Schillemans, 2003). Moreover, it has led to new questions of performance and regulation. McQuail (2003) holds that

the Internet has provoked a 'moral panic' regarding its unaccountable and unregulated character, challenging the content's credibility.

The combination of these five trends has led to shifts in the triangular relationship between media, politics and the public. On the one hand, it has led to a widening gap. In the past, public life in the Netherlands was organised in pillars with media closely connected to political parties and supported by a loyal public. The process of secularisation and individualisation in society and the professionalisation of journalism have led to a greater distance between media and their public. At the same time, due to these trends, the citizen has distanced his or herself from traditional values and norms, has become better educated, resulting in a more assertive citizen, making ever greater demands on society and the media (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004b; Mitchell & Blumler, 1994; Pritchard, 2000). On the other hand, media trends like concentration, fragmentation and commercialization, show that media are focused more on reaching out to the public, amending the gap. The attention for the role of citizens and consumers is now greater than ever.

1.3 Shifts in governance

Together with, or maybe as a result of, an increasing debate on media performance there is a growing demand for accountability towards the public in Dutch media policy. Successive commissions - Ververs in 1996, the Scientific Council for Social Development (RMO) and the Council for Public Administration (ROB) in 2003, the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR [Wetenschappelijke Raad voor Regeringsbeleid]) in 2005 and the Council of Culture (Raad voor Cultuur) in 2008 – have suggested better safeguards for media's socially responsible role and more attention for accountability in a rapidly changing media environment. In 2008, the Minister responsible for the media proposed in his press policy plan to invest more in media self-regulation and journalism conduct (Ministerie OCW, 2008a).

Traditionally, broadcasting policy is based on legal mechanisms of accountability. However, more recently the role of government is becoming more distant in this, and there is more on what media and other involved actors could contribute. It looks as if the issue of media accountability is becoming more prominent and shifting from government initiation to a shared responsibility of the involved actors. The role of the state has changed, as a result of liberalizing

policies at the level of the European Union (EU) and most nation-states. Media governance has become the new concept, expressing a more modest role for the state and the growing importance of other actors in the media policy field, including private market partners, but also the journalistic profession, citizens and civil society (Bardoel, 2008).

In this sense, a shift can be noticed from government to governance, from regulation by government and its civil servants to more self-regulation by the media and other involved actors (d'Haenens, 2007; d'Haenens, Mansell & Sarikakis, 2010; Latzer et al., 2003; Puppis, 2007, 2010; Schulz & Held, 2004; Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden, 2004). The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research sees the issue of governance as "one of the most significant developments in modern societies in the past decades" (NWO, 2004: 4). In response to an increasingly general distrust of people in institutions, the White Paper on European Governance (Commission of the European Communities, 2001) emphasised the need for new forms of policy-making processes that involve citizens more actively, emphasizing negotiation, accommodation, and cooperation (Harlow, 2002; Mulgan, 2003). Governance encompasses the regulatory structure as a whole, combining public and private, formal and informal, hierarchical and network forms of coordination (Latzer, 2007; Puppis, 2007). Van Kersbergen and Van Waarden (2004) note that the concept is used in different disciplines with different meanings, but all do have in common that governance emphasises processes of governing in contrast to structures of government. It is "governing with and through networks" (Rhodes, 2007:1246). In this sense the concept refers to a multi-stakeholder approach (Meier & Perrin, 2007). Different stakeholders are asked to take their responsibility in safeguarding the performance of the media. Puppis (2010) distinguishes between vertical and horizontal forms of governance. The former refers to different levels of regulation, either global, regional (such as EU) or national media regulation. A shift in vertical governance from national to European level is visible in public broadcasting, where since 1989 EU policy-making has begun to dominate the national level (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004a). Governance does not only relate to 'governance beyond the state', but also 'governance without government' or horizontal governance. Horizontal extensions of media governance relate to regulation, co-regulation or self-regulation. Moreover, a distinction can be made between governance that is collective (affecting media systems) and governance that is organisational (affecting media organisations).

This shared responsibility of the involved actors in decision-making, policy-making, and organisation and regulation can possibly enhance trust between the involved parties, contrary to enforceable legislation that is often seen as undermining the trust between the involved parties (Bovens, 2007; ROB, 2010)

1.4 Media's response

The discontent on their role has not been left unnoticed by the media themselves. With the Srebrenica report and the Fortuyn incidents, 2002 was a significant year for the media, obliging them to critically look at their own performance. This might indicate some form of shared responsibility between the involved actors. In the words of the chair of the Association of Editors-in-chief (NGH [Nederlands Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren]) in his annual speech of 2003, "How strange it may sound: it has been a beneficial year for the internal journalistic debate" (Broertjes, 2006: 67). Leading Dutch journalists even pointed the finger at themselves. In that same year, the editor-in-chief of the public broadcasting news organisation NOS and his colleague from national newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* reflected on the role of the media during the rise and murder of the politician Fortuyn in a brochure called 'Self-reflection and self-criticism in the media' (Jensma & Laroes, 2003). In 2006, a former newspaper correspondent in the Middle-East, Joris Luyendijk, published a book about his experiences in the Middle-East and his problems with objective journalism. He opted for more transparency in the way journalists work and gather their information. On a media professional website a journalist more or less summarised a general feeling, "Trust in media is not self-evident anymore. Trust is an agreement between two parties that continuously has to be acknowledged. This trust needs to be regained and transparency plays a crucial role" (De Nieuwe Reporter, 2007: 43).

In 2008, the Dutch Ministry responsible for media organised a workshop for academics, media organisations and professionals, and policy designers to evaluate the public accountability suggestions made by the RMO and ROB five years before (Ministerie OCW, 2008b). A general conclusion was that accountability, including journalistic codes and ombudsmen, topped the agenda of media organisations and professionals. Bardoel and d'Haenens (2004b) too observe a slow but growing acknowledgment of the media to initiate accountability measures.

Next but also related to self-criticism of journalistic performance, there is growing recognition of a widening gap between media and the public. Newspapers and television programmes have attempted to revitalize a community feeling and connecting with the public, either through new interactive instruments on the Internet or public debates (Brants & De Haan, 2010; Jansen & Drok, 2005). Policy documents of Dutch public broadcasting have recently emphasised the relationship with the public and the need for more instruments of accountability and responsiveness. The editor-in-chief of the Dutch public broadcasting news organisation NOS admitted, "There is a growing distance between media and media consumers, driving the questions of legitimacy and trust within ourselves" (Laroes, 2003: 34). And to top it all, as of 2010 the Netherlands Press Fund has allocated €3 million to regional and national newspapers, supporting various initiatives to connect with the audience.

1.5 This dissertation

The above structural changes and growing criticism of the media's performance were traditionally an issue for governmental media policy. However, the gradual shift to governance arrangements and the increasing emphasis on a shared responsibility including that of the media leaves me with the question how media themselves are responding and taking initiatives to show their responsibility and accountability, both at institutional and professional level. Besides the societal relevance, this dissertation aims to contribute to the academic debate on the concepts media responsibility and accountability through an analysis of the theoretical notions. These concepts are often used in daily practice, but the meaning of them is often confusing and sometimes overlapping. Moreover, academic literature on this subject often remains at a theoretical or policy level with little empirical research (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004a, 2004b; McQuail, 2003; Plaisance, 2000) or only tackles a specific instrument of accountability (e.g. De Haan & Bardoel, 2009; Evers, Groenhart & Groesen, 2009; Mentink, 2006; Nemeth, 2003; Van Dalen & Deuze, 2006). My aim is to take a look in media practice and understand how media organisations and the journalism profession are coping with the subject and taking and possibly embracing measures.

The following research question is addressed:

> *How are Dutch news media and journalists responding to criticism of their performance and to what extent have any measures been adopted?*

To answer this research question, I took several research steps with an empirical focus on the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the findings of this research might well resonate in other Western European countries that cope with similar challenges (e.g. Baldi & Hasebrink, 2007; Eberwein et al., 2011; Von Krogh, 2008). This introduction shows that there is a general feeling that criticism of media performance has increased or at least there is a growing attention for the subject. 'It's the media that did it' is commonly used in both public and political debate. To go beyond the common sense, in Chapter 2 I conducted a longitudinal analysis on the media performance debate and the response of the media. Firstly, I analysed how the performance debate has developed over the years, what issues were raised, to what extent media criticism has increased and what factors triggered it. The following sub-question is answered:

> *Which issues have been prominent in the debate on media performance and what criticism of media and journalism has been voiced over the last 20 years?*

Covering a period of 20 years, from 1987 till 2007, I conducted a content analysis of the media professional debate by analysing the articles of the biweekly professional trade magazine *De Journalist* (now *Villamedia*), which reflects the internal discussion of journalists. Following that, an analysis was conducted of the public debate, as represented in the Dutch quality newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*. While the first content analysis aimed to obtain an overall view of the salient issues in the media professional debate, the analysis of the public debate was important to get a more thorough understanding of the specific debate on media criticism.

These analyses of the media debate were primarily aimed at fully understanding how media are responding to structural and performance challenges. Both content analyses did shed some light on the media's responses. In addition, I applied two other methods to see how media responded over time. First, I carried out document analysis of the annual reports and transcripts of official speeches of media 'umbrella' organisations over a period of 20 years. Second, I

conducted expert interviews with representatives of these same organisations. Through these methods the following second sub-question could be answered:

> *How have the institutions and actors concerned responded to, coped with, and accommodated to these pressures?*

This longitudinal analysis did not only offer me a more thorough understanding of the debate over time, but it also revealed that in the debate on media performance not two but four concepts are prominent. There is not only a growing attention for responsibility and accountability, but also the concepts trust and responsiveness are central in the media debate. It looks like *trust* in the media for taking their *responsible* role is questioned. This has triggered a demand for media to be more transparent and *accountable*. However, media prefer to respond to be *responsive* to the public. In Chapter 3, the definitions of these concepts and their intertwined relationship are reviewed, which also form the theoretical basis for the following phase. This chapter concludes with answering the third sub-question:

> *What are the concepts that steer and interpret the debate about the performance of the media, and how are they challenged?*

The longitudinal and conceptual study provided me with a comprehensive analysis of the shifts in the media performance debate and the growing demand for accountability and responsiveness. In the last research phase I wanted to explore how the media at both the institutional and professional level are *currently* coping with the criticism of their performance and the subsequent loss of trust and how they have translated this into specific instruments of accountability and responsiveness. Rather than simply listing and describing the types of instruments, I wanted to understand the reasoning behind these introduced instruments and to what extent accountability and responsiveness are adopted in daily journalistic practice. The following sub-question is addressed:

> *How are responses to criticism translated into the daily practice of media institutions and to what extent are they part of the organisation structure and editorial culture?*

The answer is based on case studies of a newspaper, a public broadcaster and a commercial broadcaster, the design and method of which are elaborated in chapter 4.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the case study of the Dutch national newspaper, *de Volkskrant*, based on three months observation at the editorial office and interviews with journalists at all levels of the organisation. Also three months took a study of the newsroom of *NOS Nieuws* of the public service broadcasting organisation NPO. In Chapter 6 the results of this case are presented. Lastly, Chapter 7 elaborates on a case study of the commercial broadcasting news organisation, *RTL Nieuws*. The final chapter brings all the conceptual considerations and empirical findings together in answering the question of what result the criticism of media performance has had on the structure of media organisations and professional attitude.

Chapter 2

From government to governance:

a longitudinal analysis of the media performance debate

Chapter 2

From government to governance:

a longitudinal analysis of the media performance debate[1]

2.1 Introduction

The introductory chapter showed that the relationship between media, politics and the public is a tensed one. Politicians seem to increasingly voice their discontent on the performance of the media and they blame them for the distancing relationship between politics and the public. The public debate on media performance is fuelled by specific incidents in which their role was questioned. But are these political outcries and general discontent on media performance an incidental upheaval or has this gradually increased over the years or has the relationship always been a difficult one? This chapter aims to answer these questions by analysing how the media performance debate has developed over the years, to what extent media criticism has indeed increased and by what it was triggered. The following research question is addressed:

> *Which issues have been prominent in the debate on media performance and what criticism of media and journalism has been voiced over the last 20 years?*

The period between 1987 and 2007 was selected to cover a period in which the Dutch media landscape underwent significant changes. As mentioned in Chapter 1, changes were primarily brought about by the introduction of commercial broadcasting, press concentration and the advent of new technologies. To analyse how the media's response to this debate has developed over time, a second research question is addressed:

1 A shorter version of this chapter is published. De Haan, Y. & Bardoel, J. (2011). From trust to accountability: negotiating media performance in the Netherlands, 1987-2007. *European Journal of Communication,* 26 (3), 230-246.

How have the institutions and actors concerned responded to, coped with, and accommodated to these pressures over the period of 20 years?

A multi-method approach was used, including content analysis, document analysis and expert interviews. Before presenting the results, I will elaborate on the used methods.

2.2 Methods

2.2.1 Content analysis

A descriptive content analysis was conducted to explore the salient issues in the media debate. This method makes it possible to find trends and developments in communication content, while remaining unobtrusive and nonreactive (Berelson, 1952; Krippendorff, 2004) and without the researcher influencing the material (Wester, 2006; Krippendorff, 2004).

Over the period of 20 years, the biweekly professional trade magazine *De Journalist* (since September 2009 called *Villamedia magazine*) was analysed. It is a publication of the Netherlands Union of Journalists (NVJ) [Nederlandse Vereniging van Journalisten][2] and was chosen as its content reflects the internal professional discussion of journalists and media professionals. To capture the debate over time I used the print version of the magazine and did not include the posts on the website, which has existed in its full form only since 2009. I chose all articles of more than 1 page of editorial text that discussed journalistic issues in the newspaper, broadcasting and online sector, excluding agenda items, short news pieces and articles that covered issues in other countries, as this research focuses on the Dutch case. In total 823 articles were selected for analysis.

To understand the media performance debate more precisely a second content analysis was carried out, focusing on the specific issues raised in the public domain about the performance and the nature of the criticism. For this, the Dutch quality newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* was analysed, as it is known to designate ample space to public debate in forums and columns, allowing various actors to voice their opinions. The paper is comparable to other high quality dailies in Western democracies such as *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, and *The Guardian*. Articles in *NRC Handelsblad* were selected from

2 In Appendix 2 a list of abbreviations is provided.

the digital newspaper database, Lexis-Nexis, using the key words, criticism, problem, responsibility and accountability in combination with journalism, media, press and (public) broadcasting. For this content analysis the year 1990 was used as starting point as preceding years were not available digitally. The used key words correspond to the theoretical concepts and terms used in policy documents. This specific selection was especially important to capture the debate over time as many terms are bound to specific time periods or contexts. By conducting a pilot with articles from 1990 and 2005 I could confirm that these key terms cover the issues in the Dutch media debate over time. A total of 862 articles was selected for analysis.

To verify that I did not only capture the 'elite debate' of one quality newspaper, an issue check using the same key words was performed in the two other national newspapers with the highest national circulation: *de Volkskrant*, a left-leaning quality national newspaper, and *de Telegraaf*, right-leaning and the most popular national newspaper. The search of *de Telegraaf* articles showed that the debate on media performance was not prominent on that newspaper's agenda. An interview with the then editor-in-chief, Johan Olde Kalter, confirms this, "In my time there were hardly any journalistic debates [in de Telegraaf]. I can only remember a debate on Fortuyn, but that was between two columnists" (Van Zijl, 2006). The articles located from *de Volkskrant* indicate its coverage to have been very similar to that of *NRC Handelsblad*. This issue check, demonstrated that the publicized media performance debate was primarily an elite debate rather than one among the general public.

The content analyses of the professional and public debate used a similar approach of analysis following several phases (Pleijter, 2006; Wester, 2006), beginning with a description of the issues. These were not predefined, but rather emerged or were deducted from the main topic of the article. The primary aim of this first descriptive phase was to gain an understanding of the wide range of issues in the media professional and the public debate. Each article was coded on the following items: date, title, author, issue, discussed problem/situation and solution/conclusion. If the article dealt with criticism of the media the criticizing and the criticized actors were also coded. The code 'issue' corresponds to the main subject of the article. The different aspects of the subject were described under 'problem/situation'. In this way the subject or problem was not simplified in one word. Through the process of coding

a list of issues emerged. These were defined more precisely throughout the process of coding and recoding. I kept a code book with the definitions of the issues and adapted or modified them throughout the process. Examples of issues were press mergers, declining circulation figures and the advent of civic journalism.

To not merely name and list the different issues of debate, but also to understand their nature, in the following phase I carried out a qualitative analysis of the same articles (Mayring, 2000, Wester, 2006). The aim was to obtain more knowledge of the content and discussion of the salient, recurring issues and how they developed over time. To conduct this interpretative analysis, it was important to re-read the complete article and not merely use the article fragments and codes (Wester, 2006). The codes ascribed to the issues had an open character, but were gradually (re)defined more specifically throughout the coding process by repeatedly comparing the codes. For example, articles dealing with new media and communication technologies were labelled with the code 'new technologies'. Throughout the coding process I made more specific sub-divisions such as 'policy new technologies', 'privacy issues with Internet' and 'negative/ positive view of new technologies'. The software program Microsoft ACCESS was used to code, structure and analyse the data, since this program offers extensive possibilities to create, manage and make relations in large databases.

For internal reliability, the coding process was marked with set moments of reflection after every 5 years of coding material, at which point issues were added, changed, bundled or eliminated. Moreover for the descriptive part of the content analysis, the inter-coder reliability was measured by having an external coder recode a representative sample of 10 percent. For *De Journalist* the Cohen's Kappa was 0.92 and for *NRC Handelsblad* it was 0.93 which shows that the data are highly reliable (Cohen, 1960; Landis & Koch, 1977). The issue check in *de Volkskrant* and *De Telegraaf* enhanced the validity of this research (see pg. 29). These reliability and validity tests were conducted for the descriptive part of the research. The interpretative nature of the second part required the coding to be performed exclusively by myself as the researcher.

Document analysis of annual reports and of official speeches, and expert interviews with representatives of the main stakeholders complemented the

triangulation of methods and further enhanced the validity of the research (Gerring, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

2.2.2 Document analysis

Document analysis is a suitable method when the goal of the research has an explorative character to discover possible trends (Wester & Pleijter, 2006). This fits the purpose of this research phase: to obtain an overall understanding of how the media have responded to issues within the media debate over a longer period. In Chapters 5, 6 and 7 the case studies of three specific media organisations will yield a more thorough and detailed analysis of the media's response at the present time. However, to understand the current situation comprehensive historical knowledge is essential. Document analysis is often used to gain information for further stages of the research (Wester & Pleijter, 2006). For this reason, I conducted document analysis myself without the help of other coders.

Taking the same period as the content analysis, a total of 80 annual reports or speeches were analysed. The annual reports of the Dutch public service broadcaster, Netherlands Public Broadcasting (NPO [Nederlandse Publieke Omroep], previously NOS, see Appendix 2) and of the Netherlands Newspaper Publishers Organisation (NDP [Nederlandse Dagbladpers]) were used to locate the issues raised at the level of the media institutions. For the issues at the professional level, the annual speeches of the chair of the Netherlands Association of Editors-in-chief (NGH [Nederlands Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren]) and the annual reports of the Netherlands Union of Journalists (NVJ [Nederlandse Vereniging van Journalisten]) were used. In this phase the commercial media sector could not be included in the analysis since commercial media operating in the Netherlands (RTL Nederland and SBS Broadcasting) do not produce public annual reports except for the financial results. The international media groups they are part of publish annual reports, but no specific details are given about their organisations in the Netherlands. RTL Nederland is part of RTL Group, the largest media group in Europe, of which 91 percent is owned by the media conglomerate Bertelsmann (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2011). SBS Broadcasting belongs to the German media group ProSiebenSat.1. Due to the lack of documents the interviews were of paramount importance for this particular media sector. These will be elaborated in following section.

The analysis of the documents was carried out according to the principles of the grounded theory. This approach is based on the idea that the empirical data are systematically classified in order to not only describe but also interpret the constructed reality in a comprehensive way (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I did not follow the classical approach since this obliges the researcher to look into the material with an open mind, allowing the data to speak for themselves. Within qualitative research it is generally accepted that this pure form of induction is almost impossible as the researcher always enters the research with some kind of knowledge and ideas of the subject (Miles & Huberman, 1994; O'Reilly, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Ten Have, 2004). As Miles and Hubeman note, "Any researcher, no matter how unstructured or inductive, comes to fieldwork with some orienting ideas" (1994: 17).

Before the actual analysis could start, I made a selection of the relevant material. While the entire transcript of the speeches of the chair of NGH was used, the annual reports of the other organisations included information not relevant to this research, like human resource related issues, financial planning and detailed information on organisation units. In coding the selected material the qualitative software program MAXQDA was used. This program allows the researcher to code the documents inductively, amounting to a combination of different levels of codes, and for the analysis to easily retrieve specific selections and codes (Hijmans & Wester, 2006; Wester & Peters, 2004). It should be noted that the software merely facilitated ordering the data over time: the analysis and process of coding and re-coding was left to me. Each document was coded inductively by reading the material several times and coding specific fragments. A so-called 'coding tree', a list of codes and sub-codes, was built, expanded and altered along the process of analysis, amounting to more than 30 codes or sub-codes.

Just as in the content analysis, fixed moments of reflection were built in after coding 5 years of annual reports and speeches. After all the material was coded, I entered the phase of constant comparison, comparing the material on different levels (Boeije, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994). First the annual reports of one particular organisation were analysed for each year, after which comparisons were made across periods of time, followed by comparisons between the different organisations.

2.2.3 Expert interviews

Taking into account that both media institutions and media professionals are traditionally quite defensive with respect to criticism, especially from external stakeholders, formal documents can be expected to have a positive bias. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were held with high-ranking representatives of the different organisations, serving as a reality-check to the formal written responses. The selected interviewees were representatives of the organisations for which the documents were analysed, who held (or had held) various positions during the period in question.

On the media institutional level the chair of the publishers' organisation NDP, two former chairs of the Board of Governors of the public service broadcaster NPO and a former Chief Executive Officer of both RTL Nederland and SBS Broadcasting were interviewed. The chair of NDP held this position from 1999 till 2010, the first chair of NPO between 1998 and 2003, and the second chair between 2003 and 2008. The former executive of the commercial broadcasting organisations entered the commercial media sector in the early 1990s and has been active in this sector until 2008. The media professional level was represented by the chair of the editors-in-chief's association NGH, who held his position from 2006 till 2010, the chair and a member of the journalists' union NVJ and an active member of the Council for Journalism. Interviews were also held with the clerk of the Council for Journalism and two ombudsmen, one for *de Volkskrant* and the other for the public broadcasting news organisation *NOS Nieuws*. The interviews were held in the homes or offices of the respondents between December 2008 and January 2009.

The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and were semi-structured, which means that there was no fixed questionnaire but a checklist of topics to be discussed. The interview began with factual questions such as the interviewee's background and current position, followed by questions related to their experience and opinions on specific issues. Topics discussed included: background of interviewee, issues of media performance and criticism, type of criticism voiced by which actors, their definition and applied instruments of accountability, the possible role of government in accountability policy and their vision on future governance structures. The interviews had more of a conversational, be it guided, character, which I very much stimulated so that the interviewees would mention issues spontaneously (Gubrium & Holstein,

2001). When issues were not spontaneously addressed, I used probes to help the interviewees. These extra questions serve the purpose of deepening the response to a question, giving cues to the interviewee about the level of response that is desired and verifying whether answers have been correctly understood (Bergman & Coxon, 2005; Lofland, 1971; Patton, 1990).

Although I made notes during the interviews, all were recorded and fully transcribed by three students. Just as with the documents, the transcriptions were analysed through an inductive approach, starting with open coding and gradually building up a coding tree. After coding five interviews I compared them and, if necessary, rearranged the codes, adding, eliminating and bundling them. The final coding tree amounted to more than 35 different codes, including changes in the media landscape (sub-codes such as press mergers, commercialization, changing media consumption and new technologies), different types of accountability measures (ombudsman, Council for Journalism, codes of conduct, and governmental regulation) and different types of measures to relate to the public (dialogue with the public, public debates, civic journalism).

2.2.4 Ethical considerations

Before presenting the results, I have to mention two ethical issues. Informed consent was one of the first issues that I had to consider when approaching the interviewees. This means that the researcher provides the respondents with the relevant information for them to make the decision whether or not to participate (Silverman, 2001). All interviewees were approached through a comprehensive email that explained the purpose of the research and the reason they had been chosen specifically (Hertz & Imber, 1995). Before the actual interview I allowed for questions or for the interviewee and I to come to specific agreements. The second issue is anonymity. The interviewees are all public figures, representing media organisations, so it was not possible to keep them anonymous. Therefore, it was agreed to get their approval of the text before any form of publication (Hertz & Imber, 1995). Yet I chose not to use any names throughout the dissertation and only to mention the function of a quoted interviewee person, as people's opinions and experiences were important and not their personal point of view.

2.3 Results

Triangulation of methods provided me with a thorough understanding of the issues, characteristics and underlying discourse in the critique of media performance and the media's response to this debate over time. The results are first presented of how the media performance debate developed and then of how the media responded to the discussed issues.

2.3.1 The media debate 1987-2007

The two content analyses reveal that from the 1685 articles (823 in *De Journalist* and 862 in *NRC Handelsblad*) a number of specific issues emerge. In all 37 issues were found in *De Journalist* and 22 in *NRC Handelsblad*, with 13 issues overlapping. These ranged from press mergers, decreasing newspaper circulation, changing newspaper formats, the introduction of new commercial television programs, the issue of media hypes, dilemmas around research and war journalism, to criticisms voiced by politicians on the media's performance. Overall, the professional media and publicized public (elite) debates developed in quite similar ways, with minor differences in the salient issues. *De Journalist* devoted much attention to the press sector, which is not surprising since this magazine is linked to the journalists union NVJ, which originally represented print journalists. *NRC Handelsblad* paid relatively more attention to public service broadcasting.

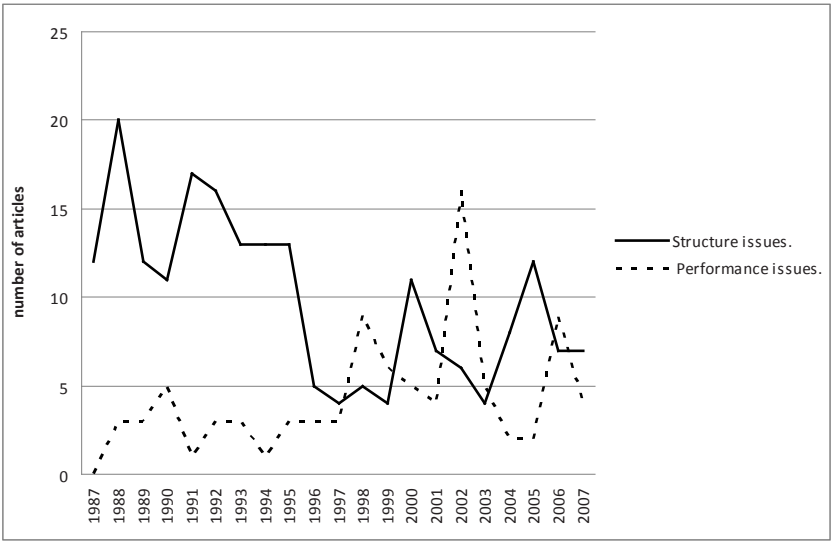
Taking a closer look at the range of issues discussed over a 20 year period, the most prominent issues raised in the 1990s were related to the structure of media organisations and institutions. Criticism voiced either by the public or politics on how media perform became significant from 2000 onwards. The two content analyses show two debates developing in two, somewhat overlapping phases. While the first phase mainly dealt with problems affecting the structure of media institutions, from the end of the 1990s these issues were gradually overtaken by debates regarding media performance. In other words, the issues can be roughly bundled into two overarching themes: structure and performance.

Issues affecting media structure

Out of the 823 articles in *De Journalist* 53 percent covered media structural topics. Four structural issues dominated the debate in the 1990s: press concentration, the legitimation of public service broadcasting, decreasing

newspaper circulation, and the advent of technological innovations. In the period of 20 years 218 articles were labelled with one of these four issues in *De Journalist* of which more than 67 percent in the 1990s. Figure 2.1 illustrates how the saliency of these four structural issues (aggregated in one line) developed.

Figure 2.1: The development of media structure and performance issues in *De Journalist* 1987-2007



My aim was to not only look at which issues stood out in the debate, but also to understand what these issues were about and how the debate developed. Therefore, looking more closely at the most prominent issues, in the 1990s the debate focused primarily on the structural changes, but this was often linked to the effect on performance. The first period was marked particularly by press mergers, with much attention paid to the need for regional newspapers to merge into larger media entities due to financial problems. The discussion dealt primarily with the concern about the decreasing numbers of newspapers and the presumed loss of media diversity and quality of content. Related to media diversity, there was also fear of the loss of identity of the different newspaper titles. This was a particular concern for regional newspapers, whose identity has always been focused on the demands of a specific region. Particularly, *De Journalist*, as part of the journalists' union, devoted much space to the voice of the journalist during several mergers. Many journalists did not only fear decreasing diversity, but also directed their anger towards management

for having neglected the editorial staff in times of organisational change with large number of compulsory redundancies.

By the mid 1990s, the tone surrounding the debate on press mergers became milder with more acknowledgment among newspapers and editorial staff of the need to take action in order to survive. But before that, at the end of the 1980s, concern grew about decreasing newspaper circulation, which in itself had caused the rise of press mergers. This was especially the case for local and regional newspapers, some of which had been obliged to merge to continue to exist. Compared with the problematic situation of regional and local newspapers, the overall circulation of national newspapers was still increasing in the 1990s. Only around the turn of the century, partly due to competition, additionally from online media and free daily newspapers, the circulation of national newspapers started to decrease.

Aside from these two issues in the press sector, the re-organisation of public service broadcasting into a dual system and its further legitimation was a recurring issue. Discussion focused mainly on the ways public service broadcasting tried to redefine its position and remit in the newly emerging commercial and competitive broadcasting market since 1989. Especially in the first few years of the 1990s both *De Journalist* and *NRC Handelsblad* devoted much attention to the introduction of a dual broadcasting system and the related increasing commercial competition. There was much resistance from public service broadcasters, journalists and the journalists' union NVJ to this duality, as they feared a loss of quality content and media diversity and an overload of popular entertainment programmes. In 1988, when the discussions already took place for a new dual broadcasting system, three public broadcasters VARA, KRO and NRCV pleaded against commerciality. "A dual broadcasting system will only lead to financial problems and poor programmes. We have to stop this absurd and redundant discussion of a dual system" (De Journalist, 29 Feb. 1988a).

Not only these performance issues but also the pressure for more collaboration among public service broadcasters to counter the commercial competition, was an issue for the public broadcasters. Partnering with other public broadcasters was felt as a loss of autonomy and their identity. Looking over 20 years of debate regarding public service broadcasting, in some years the subject was

more at the forefront than in others, but the nature of the debate remained quite critical, both within the realm of politics and at the media level.

The use of the Internet was increasingly discussed from the end of the 1990s. Most articles were rather negative, with journalists displaying a fair amount of scepticism towards online journalism. In *De Journalist* the articles' titles already reveal this negative tone: 'Falling Down and Getting Back Up with New Media' [Vallen en opstaan met nieuwe media] (29 Feb. 1988b), 'Toiling on the Internet' [Zwoegen op het internet] (2 Nov. 1995), 'Anxious Times on the Net' [Spannende tijden op het net] (16 Dec. 1994), 'Stumbling over the Digital Highway' [Strompelend over de digitale snelweg] (2 June 1995) and 'The Threat of the New Media' [De dreiging van de nieuwe media] (31 Oct. 1997). Journalists complained about the difficulties of using the Internet, finding the right information and, perhaps most importantly, finding reliable information. Nevertheless, newspapers were forerunners in introducing online websites, with *NRC Handelsblad* being the first national newspaper online in 1995. Even though in the mid-1990s several consultants and researchers had already advised public service broadcasters to start introducing new media, the public broadcasting umbrella organisation NOS only took its first initiative in 2000 with an Internet portal.

By the turn of the century, there was a gradual shift towards a more positive attitude and a growing recognition of the potential advantages of the Internet, primarily for gathering information and checking sources. At the same time, the public debate on regulatory measures intensified. Especially, in the mid-1990s there was growing concern over pornography on the net and the problem of copyright infringement, with policy discussions on how to regulate the web. In 1996, the Minister of Justice pleaded for self-regulation, acknowledging that the Internet cannot be regulated like traditional media.

By the end of the 1990s some issues, such as press mergers, featured less prominently in the debate, while others such as the legitimacy of public service broadcasting and the vulnerable position of print newspapers remained on the agenda. Besides the challenges of media structure, issues such as press mergers, the introduction of commercial broadcasting and the advent of the Internet also seemed to raise questions about the quality and reliability of media content, which created an atmosphere where the performance of the media

was gradually put into question. The content analyses show that even though some structural issues remained an issue of concern, there was a gradual but apparent shift in focus from structural media problems to issues related to the media's performance and growing criticism of their role in society. The media performance debate intensified with politicians publicly voicing their discontent.

Criticism of media performance

Throughout the past 20 years politicians have regularly voiced their dissatisfaction with media performance. Whereas in the 1990s issues related to this were far and few between, by the turn of the century it emerged as a hot topic (72 % of articles in *NRC Handelsblad* labelled with the issue 'criticism from politics' were published from 1998 onwards). Figure 2.1 illustrates the aggregated line of media performance issues within the professional media debate (*De Journalist*). These include the codes 'criticism from politics', 'criticism from public', 'legal criticism', 'general criticism on media coverage' and 'media hypes'.

The interpretative analysis provided a more thorough insight into these criticisms. Both content analyses give an event-driven picture. It appears as if it was Queen Beatrix who signalled the start of a more heated debate. In an informal and confidential discussion in 1999, with a group of editors-in-chief, she complained about the press' coverage of royal affairs, stating that increasingly "the lie rules" in media reporting. In spite of assumed confidentiality this was later published in a national newspaper. Since then several events have further heated the debate on media performance, reaching a climax in 2002, the year of the rise to prominence and subsequent death of Pim Fortuyn. At the beginning of that year, a government-commissioned report (NIOD, 2002) had already concluded that the Dutch media had displayed a significant bias in their coverage of the Balkan war in the 1990s. It revealed that the media had exaggerated events, were driven by sensation and 'drama journalism', and had displayed bias and subjective reporting, urging the Dutch government to take part in the military intervention in the former-Yugoslavia that eventually led to the Srebrenica massacre.

Then Pim Fortuyn was murdered and, next to the elite criticism of journalistic performance, others with a publicized opinion started to blame not only the

established political parties and politicians, but also the media for demonizing the populist politician. Not only the murder, six days prior to the parliamentary elections, but also the remarkable success of his new right-wing party - achieving the second largest amount of votes even though the embodiment of the party had ceased to be - triggered a debate on whether the media had contributed to a climate in which Fortuyn could be killed. Moreover, the question was raised as to how the media could have failed to see and grasp the populist sentiments and the insecurity within society of which Fortuyn had been such an outspoken crusader.

When in 2003, two independent government advisory commissions, the Council for Social Development (RMO [Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling] and the Council for Public Administration (ROB [Raad voor het Openbaar Bestuur]), proposed specific (self)-regulatory measures for the media, after concluding that over the years they had gained more and more power without being accountable (RMO, 2003; ROB, 2003), the debate concerning the media's performance came even more prominent to the fore. The suggestions of RMO were: to strengthen the position of the Council for Journalism, to introduce a public debate platform for media issues and to create a 'media watch monitor', that would evaluate media coverage of controversial and other political themes (RMO, 2003). With two elections in the same period (2002 and 2003), both politically and journalistically critical events, the professional and public debate increasingly focused on the complex relationship between politics and media. Politicians complained about journalists' need to 'score' and 'scoop', as a consequence of a more and more competitive media market. From the mid-1990s, the content analyses indicate that they increasingly began to criticize the media for creating more hypes rather than covering the substance of politics, for not verifying the facts, for acting like parrots copying each other, for taking incidents out of their context, for emphasizing the dramatic, and for turning factual reporting into infotainment. Demanding the media to be more accountable, their criticism was echoed by members of the judiciary and the police.

The debate about media performance was primarily driven by the political elite, with the general public more or less absent (3 % of the articles in *De Journalist* and 4 % of the articles in *NRC Handelsblad*). When the public was involved, the debate also had a different content. Whereas the criticism from

the political elite towards the media dealt with how they themselves were portrayed and how that might affect public opinion, members of the public mainly objected to their voice, complaints and plights being ignored. They seemed most bothered that their issues and concerns were not reflected in the media and that in civic matters they were not sufficiently listened to.

All these events and related criticism show that the discontent on media performance boils down to four issues: biased media coverage, increasing infotainment and sensationalist aspects in news coverage, the media having too much power, and failing to recognize and address the public's concerns. Where the first three concerns are mainly voiced by politicians, the last comes from members of the public.

Summarizing 20 years of media debate

Overlooking the debate, issues regarding the responsibility of the media appear to have been discussed only partly in the 1990s. The structural media organisational problems that dominated the debate in this period were primarily about competition and survival, and more indirectly related to their possible effects on the diversity and quality of media content, and almost never to the consequences for the public. Taking the public into account – beyond considering them as a market category affecting the media's existence – was hardly an issue.

By the turn of the century, the debate about media performance appears to proliferate, partly due to a string of critical events. Mainly politicians displayed mistrust in the media for failing to adhere to their social responsibility, and not serving the public interest vital for a democratic society. Growing criticisms of the media for being biased, too powerful and focused on infotainment and sensationalism have led to an increasing demand from politicians for a wider range of accountability measures. However, accountability was not discussed in terms of regulation; rather the media were asked or suggested by politicians and commissions to initiate self-regulatory measures directed towards the public. The criticism surrounding journalism's role in the rise and murder of Fortuyn implicitly illustrated a public demanding that the media listen more to what issues and popular sentiments are at stake in society and to take them seriously.

2.3.2 The media's response

The content analyses did not only raise a wide range of media issues but also gave a preliminary indication of how the media responded to these matters. In addition, the document analysis and interviews provided a more thorough insight into the media's view of both structure and performance issues, their view on the solutions and their own clarification and possible contributions.

Problems of media structure

Of the four structural issues that dominated the 1990s, the most salient issues documented in the annual reports were the legitimation of public service broadcasting and the increasing concentration of press ownership. Besides the public service broadcaster NPO, the publishers' organisation NDP and the journalists' union NVJ also voiced their concern about the role of public service broadcasting in a changing media landscape. The NDP mainly focused on competition between the newspaper market and the large broadcasting market. The NVJ's attention was on how to safeguard the public service function.

The problem of press concentration and the assumed subsequent decline in media diversity was a recurring issue addressed in the documents of the journalist's union NVJ, the editors-in-chief's organisation NGH and the publisher's organisation NDP. While the NVJ rather sharply emphasised the need to stop this trend, the NGH recognized the difficulties that newspapers were facing and acknowledged that in times of financial problems the discussion of newspaper mergers was understandable. Nonetheless, merely merging for the commercial reason to gain maximum profits was not acceptable to them. "A strong opposition is justified when large profitable concerns want to merge newspapers solely to gain a maximum profit" (NGH, 1990: 2). Throughout the 1990s the chair of the NGH drew attention to what he saw as increasing commercial thinking around mergers. "Our profession has moved too much in the wrong direction, namely a more fierce and brutal attitude in thinking only of cents and guilders" (NGH, 1996: 2).

The interviewees drew attention to two related issues: competition and declining circulation figures. The majority of them believe that the increasing competition is a focal point, affecting the media market structure as well as their performance. Moreover, the growing number of outlets, such as online

media and free newspapers, has led to a fiercer competition for audience ratings as well as news (particularly scoops). Several interviewees indicated that the gradual de-pillarization process had partly created this competitive climate. With the media no longer tied to religious or ideological pillars in society, nor to political parties or social movements, they are compelled to compete for the same public. As the ombudsman of the public service broadcaster NOS asserted, "In the past we had several newspapers per city, but these were bound to their own pillar and therefore not in competition with each other. Now we are all competing for the same general public".

The former director of *SBS Broadcasting* and *RTL Nederland* is convinced that the increasing and fiercer media competition has also led to fading boundaries between media and politics.

> *In the past the gap between politics and the media was large, the media as a neutral outsider. This is no longer the case, partly as a result of increasing competition. Broadcasters often exceed their journalistic boundaries in order to ensure that some minister appears in their program and not in that of the competition (Interview 17 Feb. 2009)*

Closely related to press concentration, the introduction of a dual broadcasting system and the subsequent media competition, both representatives of public service broadcasting and the newspaper sector showed concern for the decreasing readership and declining audiences of the public service broadcasters. The interviewees related this to larger societal trends of de-pillarization and individualisation. Moreover, they added that the increasing worry of not being able to reach the fragmented and less loyal public has grown due to the financial insecurities of many media organisations.

Regulatory measures

In the documents, the umbrella media organisations specifically addressed the role of the government as a facilitator for measures solving the structural problems of media concentration and the legitimation of public service broadcasting. Regarding the latter, the public service broadcasting NOS, the publishers' organisation NDP and the journalists' union NVJ advocated compensation from government to ensure a financial stability against the increasing commercial competition.

Regarding press concentration, the annual reports of the NVJ pleaded for regulatory measures that would counter press monopolization and guarantee a minimum level of media diversity. Where the NVJ supported political measures, they felt the government was leaving this issue to market forces; a critique that led to a tense relationship between the NVJ and government. "We unfortunately have to observe how government is replacing its active press policy with a more *laissez-faire* attitude. Newspapers are completely submitted to the dynamics of the market" (NVJ,1991:7). The editors-in-chief's association NGH was equally discontent but, being each other's competitors too, they were less active towards the government. The newspaper publishers' organisation NDP more plainly stated that government intervention would not solve this problem, as it is "politically a delicate subject, which can lead to a degrading of the principle of freedom of speech" (NDP, 1988: 8). Not only the disagreement between government and the media sector, but also the suspicion among the organisations representing the press sector may also have stimulated an impasse for a solution.

Problems of media performance

Looking at the performance debate, the document analysis of the annual media reports and speeches of key individuals corroborate an increase in the debate of media performance issues, with a peak in 2002, the year in which the media were accused of demonizing Pim Fortuyn. Particularly, the professional organisations (NVJ and NGH) devoted attention to performance issues. The media institutional organisations (NPO and NDP) seem to be more focused on structural issues affecting their sector. Neither the publishers' organisation NDP nor the public broadcasting organisation NPO devoted any real space in their annual reports to media performance or the accusations made against the media. Only at the turn of the century did they mention the implementation of several accountability instruments, without any reference to the underlying reason for initiating them.

With an initial defensive attitude, the documents of the professional media organisations devoted ample space to the complaints on media performance. The editors-in-chief's association NGH intervened in the media performance debate. This was particularly prompted by the then chairman (1999—2006) and editor-in-chief of the national newspaper *de Volkskrant*. After he resigned his annual speeches were bundled in a book with the title *Media under Attack*

[Media onder vuur] (Broertjes, 2006). Criticisms of media performance and the alleged decreasing trust were a primary concern, as he pointed out in 1999, "Maybe the most important theme of our profession over the last few years is the crisis in trust. I see a double crisis, namely between newspapers and readers and between media and authorities" (Broertjes, 2006: 139). In that same year the NGH reacted quite defensively to the criticisms of politicians and the judiciary, asserting that they and their press officers were increasingly making it difficult for the media to perform their watchdog role by not providing them with the necessary information. "It is the task of the media to reveal facts, especially when they should have remained secret. Whoever fumbles with this principle touches upon the basic principles of press freedom" (Broertjes, 2006: 141).

The interviewees were ambivalent on whether the debate on media performance has increased. However, the majority did agree that the increasing number of media players and the advent of the Internet (with the possibility of each individual citizen to voice its opinion) have led to increasing opportunities for more media criticism. The chair of the NDP said, "There are many more actors active in the process, voicing their criticism" (Interview 16 Dec. 2008). At the same time, a few interviewees downplayed the increase in criticism and remarked that the debate about the media's performance and the criticisms voiced by politicians are part of an age-old discussion, intrinsic to the journalistic professional role as critical watchdogs. Nevertheless, the two ombudsmen and the chair of NVJ remarked that the performance debate is increasingly being driven by politicians.

In contrast to the press and public broadcasting sector, the interviewee from the commercial broadcasters believes that criticisms regarding performance of commercial stations has ceased to be an issue. It was only prominent when these stations began operating in the 1990s. Having been accused, mainly by politicians and public broadcasters, of crossing boundaries of decency and not adhering to basic journalistic principles, the interviewee also emphasised that these criticisms had a purifying effect, forcing them to rethink their position and their role in the media market.

Suggested accountability measures

While it appeared that the media gradually became aware of the debate on their performance, they were not as happy with the suggested solutions. When in 2003 two government advisory commissions (RMO and ROB) proposed specific (self-) regulatory measures to make the media more accountable and the Minister responsible for the media followed some of these suggestions, the professional media organisations were critical as it was perceived as government interference. The chair of the journalists' union (NVJ) said, "The concept of self-regulation should be read in the literal sense: measures proposed and implemented by ourselves" (Interview 11 Dec. 2008). This more or less defensive attitude can be traced back to the debate about and fight for autonomy and independence, rooted in the historical development of press freedom and media's traditional role as watchdog. Media professionals are not used to dealing with external criticism: according to the interviewees, they often use press freedom as a defence mechanism. The NVJ chair saw nothing new in this attitude, as "This defensive response of the media is a genetic factor, intrinsic to the journalistic profession" (Interview 11 Dec. 2008).

Gradually, in the documents this self-protective and more cynical attitude seemed to leave room for some acknowledgement, or at least a less defensive attitude. The chair of the NGH in his annual speeches from 1999 onwards, mentioned the need for more self-regulatory measures in the form of an ombudsman, internal self-evaluations and internal debates on the media's performance. While he was aware of journalists' defensive and protective attitude, often being reluctant to self-critique, the chair continued to stimulate public accountability and self-reflection in his annual speeches. The ideas of RMO and ROB were not ignored. On the contrary, NVJ, NOS and NDP collaborated in establishing a media debate organisation, one of the suggestions of RMO. They seemed to realize that something had to be done before they were compelled by others -i.e. the government- to take action. This illustrates the pressure media organisations were feeling to take action, instead of waiting for the government to impose regulatory measures. The content analyses confirm an increased discussion on self-regulatory accountability instruments and measures to take the public into account (see Figures 2.2 and 2.3). A wide range of public accountability instruments were discussed, including an ombudsman, a stronger Council for Journalism and the publication of readers' letters to the editor. Measures to take the public into account include

discussion fora, weblogs and public debates. Nevertheless, a rather critical position to these measures remains according to the interviewees. A former chair of NPO complained, "I believe this whole idea of accountability is overdone. Where is the trust in the media professional?" (Interview 20 Dec. 2008).

Figure 2.2: Debate on measures initiated by the media in *De Journalist* 1987-2007

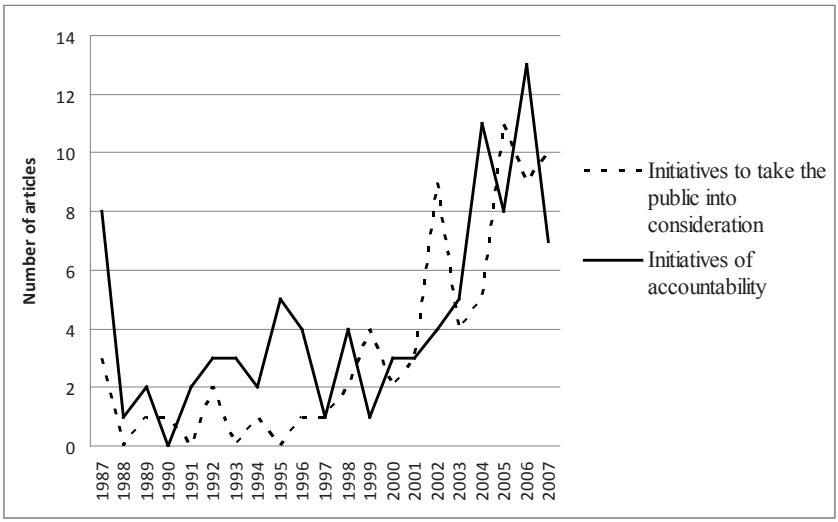
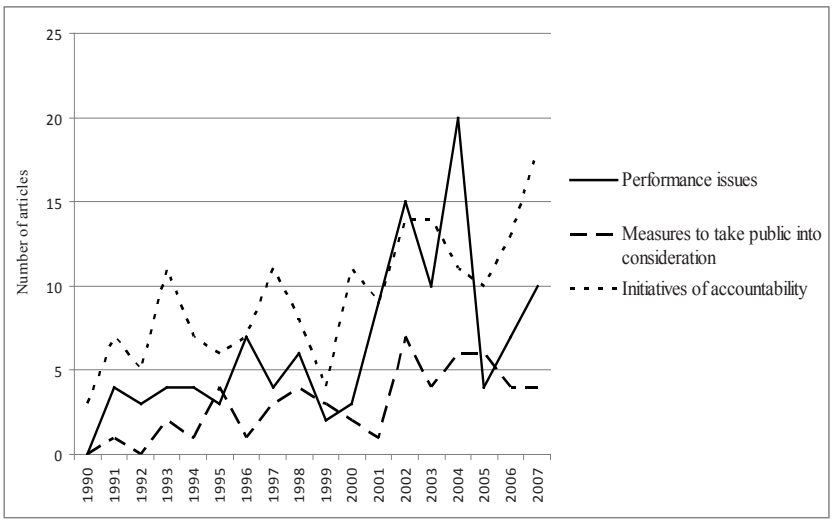


Figure 2.3: Debate on media performance issues and measures initiated by the media in *NRC Handelsblad* 1990-2007



Self-initiated measures

While not able to pinpoint the precise reasons, the interviewees believe accountability and taking the public into account fit the current *Zeitgeist*, also visible in other sectors. According to the NOS-ombudsman "This is a trend we cannot turn our backs on" (Interview 4 Dec. 2008). Most interviewees see the assassination of Fortuyn and the media's alleged demonization of him as a catalyst for intensifying the debate on media responsibility and accountability. However, this should not be seen as a cause on its own. More and larger structural and societal trends are felt to have created an atmosphere in which criticism and a demand for transparency has become the norm. The majority of the interviewees believe, for example, that the introduction of the Internet has created a structure and opportunity for people to voice their discontent.

Over time, however, an attitudinal shift can be noticed from a tendency to blame outside parties to appeals by media professionals for internal discussion of their own mistakes and a plea for self-regulatory measures not proposed or imposed by third parties. There is a shift visible to a less defensive attitude, and a more solution-oriented debate. These solutions appear to be an answer to both structural and performance issues. By the end of the 1990s, the chair of the NGH stressed the importance of initiating their own measures to improve the relationship with the public. In 2003 he pointed out the importance of journalist's tasks, "It is our task to retain and enhance the trust relationship with our readers, viewers and listeners. To them we should be accountable and not to outsiders such as the government" (Broertjes, 2006: 72). This focus on the public was not only a way to deal with the accusations on media performance, but also a way of establishing new relationships with the lost reader, listener and viewer. In his speech of 2003 the chair of NGH said, "In the past, the newspaper was a gentleman at a distance. Now readers prefer more interaction with their newspaper and this might restore trust between the press and the citizen" (Broertjes, 2006: 80). To the interviewees the need to act more in the public's interest and take the public into consideration are seen as an important step. However, they questioned whether accountability measures would bridge the divide between media and public. The chair of NGH, active between 2006 and 2010, said, "While I am not a strong proponent of accountability, I do believe we should improve the journalistic and public discussion" (Interview 24 Dec. 2008).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a varied picture of the debate on media performance and its shift in theme, saliency and tone over the last two decades. In the 1990s, the debate was mainly focused on structural issues affecting media organisations and not so much on the profession or performance of journalists. The role and function of the media in and for society was hardly questioned, *trust* in media performance seemed more or less self-evident. From the turn of the century, particularly in response to a number of critical events, the debate shifted towards a focus on media performance and *accountability*. Structural trends such as the growing competition between old and new media, increasing commercialization and the interactive possibilities of the Internet, appear to have created a basis for the debate on media performance and increasing demands for ways to take the public into account, of being *responsive* to the public, and also to regain the trust of the public. The research showed that the debate on media performance was not only instigated by intensifying media criticism and specific critical events, but appears to also have its foundations in the structural media developments dominant in the first period. The effects media concentration and commercialization might have on diversity and quality provided a basis for an intensifying debate on media performance and demands for accountability in the second period. Where initially my starting point in the media performance debate was based on the concepts media responsibility and accountability, this longitudinal analysis shows that two other concepts play and equal important role: trust and responsiveness.

This shift in the media debate from an emphasis on structure towards a focus on performance coincides with a change in policy orientation from 'government' to 'governance'. Issues such as press concentration and the position of public broadcasting were discussed in terms of government regulation. The performance debate from the turn of the century puts a greater emphasis on the responsibility of the different media institutions and organisations through self-regulatory measures. Also, pro-active initiatives to be more responsive to the public show an attempt for a shared responsibility, where media organisations are encouraged, stimulated and directed not only to be held to account but also to be responsible in their public task for a democratic society.

This research supports the supposition that the debate on media performance has increased. However, this was a gradual process not only triggered by specific incidents but substantiated by long-term structural problems. This shift in debate has led to more attention for accountability, openness, responsiveness and dialogue. Behind these shifts seems to lie the overarching problem of a supposedly declining trust in the media, as voiced by the political elite. There seems to be a trend from the 'old' situation where a culture of public service dominated, to a 'new', commercialised, media landscape where trust does not seem to be as self-evident anymore. Both government and media have responded by introducing new instruments of accountability and measures to take the public's voice more into consideration. Generally speaking, this trend might indicate a gradual shift from a trust society towards an accountability society. Even though only voiced in one interview, a careful assumption can be made that the commercial broadcasting sector appears less bothered by the increase in criticisms and the growing demand for accountability. Yet, it might have the unintended consequence of stimulating the debate on media performance.

The debate has changed its tone from predominantly defensive to much more solution oriented. It remains to be seen whether taking the public into consideration and listening to and connecting with the public (being responsive) is a response to the structural problems of competition and audience decline or an answer to public's discontent on media performance. The content analysis and the interviews suggest that this vulnerable position of newspapers and public service broadcasters might be the main reason that the media have taken responsive measures, being increasingly occupied with accommodating the wishes of the audience.

This chapter has provided an analysis of the media performance debate over a period of 20 years. The results confirm a shift in attitude and in policy, from a defensive to a more pro-active attitude of the media and from a more regulatory culture to greater focus on self-initiated measures to regain the trust of the public. The media performance debate suggests that a correction of the market is required, and with government at a distance reliance on self-regulation seems a good alternative solution. However, the unease between media and politics regarding the arrangement of media governance structures (striking a balance between regulatory and self-regulatory measures) raises

the question of the feasibility, effectiveness and professional internalization of many of the discussed and implemented measures. That is an empirical question, though, that will be addressed in chapter 5, 6 and 7. First, however, in the following chapter I will elaborate on four theoretical notions that appear to be central in the debate on media performance: *trust, responsibility, accountability* and *responsiveness*.

Chapter 3

In media we trust?

New demands on media responsibility, accountability and responsiveness

Chapter 3

In media we trust?

New demands on media responsibility, accountability and responsiveness

3.1 Introduction

Previous chapters showed that media's role as responsible informer is being challenged and a demand for accountability is heard. Initially, the central premise of this research comprised of two concepts: media responsibility and accountability. Taking a closer look at the debate the previous chapter showed that two other concepts are brought to light: trust and responsiveness. Criticism on the media has put doubts on the trust in media performance. In response, media are not only discussing self-regulating accountability measures, but also looking into ways to engaging in dialogue with the public, understanding their view of society and taking these into consideration.

Thus, the media performance debate appears to be centred around four concepts: *trust*, *responsibility, accountability* and *responsiveness*. Although regularly used in everyday parlance, their actual meaning is often ambiguous and their conceptualization puzzling. The aim of this chapter is to pinpoint the meaning of these four, not-easily defined and rather abstract concepts and discuss the challenges and changes to these meanings.

It should be noted that this chapter is the result of a theoretical and conceptual expedition. This process took a cyclic character, meaning that it was not based on a linear process in which the the longitudinal analysis preceded the theoretical literature review. The exploration of these concepts is based on theoretical literature and the empirical results of Chapter 2. The case studies (in Chapters 5, 6, and 7) offered me the possibility to redefine or specify the somewhat vague theoretical notions.

3.2 Trust

The debate around the role of the media in society often alludes to trust or, more specifically, to its disappearance. However, the picture that emerges is confusing. On the one hand, trust in media and their performance has become a pressing issue, indicated by both media scholars (Bakir & Barlow, 2007; Jansen & Drok; 2005; Kiousis, 2001) and the public (Eurobarometer, 2006, 2010; SCP, 2009). Entrusted with the power and responsibility of meaning construction and sense making, the media particularly loose the trust of the political elite, who blame them not only for a distorted portrayal of their trade but also for the public's mistrust of it. On the other hand, the public is still using the media as a reliable source of information (Trouw, 3 Feb. 2005). Also, while overall trust in institutions in the Netherlands is decreasing, media, police and army still rank relatively high in trust, compared to political parties (SCP, 2009).

The term trust in this context is linked to the relationships between the public, media and power-holders (Jones, 2004; Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). More generally, trust is the basis for social order and social cohesion in society (Durkheim, 1964; Luhmann, 1979; Simmel, 1950). Some form of trust is needed for collective behaviour.

A closer look at several academic disciplines, such as sociology, economy, organisational behaviour, communication theory, gives a better understanding of the nature of this concept. In sociological theories trust is seen as a relational term, where the trustor places trust in the trustee (the person being trusted). The former can, of course, often not be certain that the latter will indeed act in his interest. Trust can be based on past experience but, in the absence of that, on expectations or as Baier puts it, "trust is the reliance on others' competence and willingness to look after, rather than harm, things one cares about which are entrusted to their care" (1986: 259).

Putnam (1995) and Uslaner (2002) state that trust is a prerequisite for social capital, which is based on networks, community membership, and norms and values, enabling participants to act more effectively to reach shared goals. Putnam's theory of social capital presumes that the more we connect with other people the more we trust them and *vice versa* (1995: 665). To this

Fukuyama (1996) added that this in turn leads to better performance and higher economic capital in organisations. Giddens (1990), describing the transition from traditional to modern societies, sees a shift from personal trust secured by face-to-face contact with family and community to faceless commitment and to trust in the working of types of knowledge of which the lay-person is largely ignorant.

In theories derived from economics and organisational behaviour, the focus is on risk factors and opportunistic behaviour (Arrow, 1974). Sabel (1993) considers trust to be:

> *…the mutual confidence that no party to an exchange will exploit another's vulnerabilities. When parties to an exchange trust each other, they share a mutual confidence that others will not exploit any adverse selection, moral hazard, hold-up, or any other vulnerabilities that might exist in a particular exchange (1993: 1133).*

Economic transactions are often characterised in principal—agent relationships, where two parties have contractual obligations based on hierarchical relations (Bovens, 2005; Gray et al., 1987; Nooteboom, 2002). The principal takes a risk in trusting the agent to act not only out of self-interest, but also in the interest of the principal as part of a contractual commitment. In this relationship cooperation and trust between the parties are essential for an effective result. This cooperation leads to more trust in others, whether they are familiar or strangers. With the latter, however, more cooperation is needed since there are no past experiences to refer to (La Porta et al., 1997).

In media theory, trust is also based on a relationship between two actors: the media and their public, whether these are information receiving citizens or information providing politicians.

> *The psychological root of media power stems from the relations of credibility and trust that different media organisations have succeeded in developing with members of their audience. This bond is based on the fulfilment of audience expectations and the validation of past trust relationships, which in turn are dependent on legitimized and institutional routines of information presentation evolved over time by the media (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995: 13).*

The assumption is that if media are not trusted, the public might turn away from the media, which can have consequences for the democratic performance and thus social order of society. Whereas economic and sociological scholars emphasise the macro level of trust in society and the micro level of the individual, the role of the media adds another layer because of their mediating role between politics and the public (Bakir & Barlow, 2007). But theirs is not only a mediating role, but also a dominant and steering one, referred to as mediatization. This is the increasing importance of media in the political process and the dependent way politics comes to term with that (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999).

In political communication theory trust, or the lack of it, is discussed in the relationship between media and political actors, and between media and the public. The consumption of specific media content can mobilize public opinion, attitudes towards politics and politicians, and voter choice (e.g. Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; De Vreese, 2007; De Vreese & Elenbaas, 2008; Patterson, 2002). Several US scholars claim that the critical portrayal of politics has a negative effect on media consumers, resulting in increasing political cynicism among the public (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 2002; Valentino, Beckman & Buhr, 2001). Robinson (1976) speaks of a 'media malaise' and Cappella & Jamieson (1997) of a 'spiral of cynicism'. They claim that news media primarily report strategic news, focused on candidate style and language, on winning and losing, and with an emphasis on opinion polls, which not only leads to public distrust of politics and politicians, but also to civic disengagement.

However, in Europe little evidence has been found for this claim (Holtz-Bacha, 1990; Newton, 1999; Norris, 2000 – see also Bennett et al., 1999, for a dissenting voice in the US). Norris (2000) argues for a virtuous circle in which people exposed to news media have more political knowledge and have more trust in government and the political system and are more likely to participate in election campaigns.

Thus, the effect of the mediatization of politics on trust remains ambiguous. This is not only due to conflicting empirical findings and contextual differences, but might also be related to a conceptual confusion. Often the concepts mistrust, scepticism, cynicism and even negativism are used interchangeably.

Tsfati tries to untangle the differences, describing media scepticism as "the subjective feeling of alienation or mistrust toward the mainstream news media" (2003:67). Media cynicism has a negative valence compared with the more neutral media scepticism.

What makes trust, cynicism or scepticism in the media even more difficult to define are the ambiguous consequences for media use. While one would expect distrust in media to put people off, Tsfati and Cappella (2003, 2005) found that people watch news they do not trust. "Seeing is not necessarily believing and believing and trusting are only moderately correlated with seeing" (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003: 518). The British philosopher O'Neill (2002) referred to this and concludes that since people do still consume media, whether they trust them or not, there is no real crisis in trust, but more a "culture of suspicion".

To conclude, in all its abstraction, trust is of crucial importance in contemporary society because of its role as social glue between different actors. With regard to the media in the Netherlands, in the past trust has been more or less self-evident or taken for granted, out of loyalty, experience or expectation: the implicit assumption is that they do serve the public interest. But in these days of individualisation media organisations can no longer automatically rely on the loyalty of their publics; they have to (re-)establish a trust relationship with the individual members of an audience no longer organised in collective groups. The increasing complexity in society, less tangible trust relations in general and the assumed power of the media in particular has put trust in the media as to their role and their performance into question and perhaps even intensified the issue of media trust. Where it is a precondition for order in society, investing in trust might also function as a remedy when social cohesion is at stake. At the same time, the supposedly waning trust in the media should also be seen in a positive light. In a more individualized and de-pillarized society, people have shown themselves to be more critical of how the media perform and take their responsibility. A certain amount of wariness and scepticism might well be needed for media to perform in the interest of the public and thus be good for democracy (Weintraub & Pinkleton, 1999).

3.3 Media responsibility

Where trust is a precondition for a well-functioning society, responsibility of the media is a prerequisite for trust (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004b; Brants & Bardoel, 2008). At an institutional level, however, the media are accused of not adequately serving their democratic functions of informing the public, providing a platform for debate and critically investigating power holders in the public interest. At a professional level journalists are criticized for keeping less to the fundamental journalistic norms of providing reliable, complete and balanced information and appearing to be more interested in scandal, sensation and the personal (RMO, 2003).

The idea of media responsibility has its roots in the liberal thinking about the media. Firstly, the media are responsible for providing citizens with information about political and social life, their information or gatekeeper function. Information should be accurate and objective, and provide the cognitive basis for democratic decision-making. Secondly, they should provide citizens with a platform for dialogue to be able to express their wishes and opinions, their expression or platform function. And finally, the media should serve as a watchdog for the public regarding the conduct of political and other actors and institutions, their critical or watchdog function (Van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 1982; Wildenmann & Kaltefleiter, 1965).

Liberal thinkers such as John Milton in the seventeenth century already believed that freedom of the press implies an obligation to provide reliable information and a platform for dialogue and to be a critical watchdog and does not mean answering to any external claims or being held accountable by other power holders (Bardoel & Van Cuilenburg, 2003; McQuail, 2005). In the nineteenth century John Stuart Mill held that these roles are best guaranteed in a free market, creating a free marketplace of ideas (Bardoel & Van Cuilenburg, 2003; McQuail, 2005). The tradition of freedom of the press was always closely linked to the idea of freedom of the individual, and that of countering censorship and suppression of opinion (McQuail, 2005).

The notion of media responsibility saw a revival just after the Second World War, although less inspired by Mill and more by a concern of commercial media in a free market. The idea that information is not just a commodity,

but also a merit good to which people are entitled as members of society (Musgrave, 1998), also played an important role. In its report *A Free and Responsible Press,* the American Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947) advocated the media's duty to serve society. As the greatest dangers to a responsible press they saw its economic structures, the industrial organisation of modern society and the failures of the press to recognize its responsibility towards the needs of society (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004; Wieten, 1998). The social responsibility theory the report formulated was not only popular in the United States but also in Europe, where, after the Second World War in which the press had often played such a dubious role, it helped to stimulate a new beginning (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004b). The Hutchins Commission made clear that the duty of the press was to provide "a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning" (1947: 21).

Since then, the term social responsibility has been used by politicians, policy makers, journalists and academics alike, albeit with different meanings. In a longitudinal research of media policy papers of the Dutch government, Bardoel and Brants (2003) found three different interpretations. First, it refers to media content, which should be accurate, objective and of high quality. Second, it refers to the media's democratic function for society in providing information and allowing for discussion and debate. Lastly, social responsibility refers to organisational status. Content producers should be independent of governmental and business pressures, and fulfil an obligation to society.

Both in the press and the public service broadcasting sector social responsibility has historically been closely connected with press freedom. However, where the press is usually independent of any regulation, the public service broadcasting sector has historically been assigned a number of tasks that are related to their responsibility. The reasons were twofold: regulation was needed to distribute the scarce number of radio frequencies and to come to terms with the socio-cultural needs neglected by the media market. Moreover, with the introduction of television many were afraid of its intrusive nature and the social impact it might have (Bardoel & Van Cuilenburg, 2003; Hoffmann-Riem, 1996).

In conclusion, traditionally a free press in a free market was seen as a prerequisite for media to perform responsibly, but nowadays most believe that media responsibility and press freedom can go hand in hand (Bertrand, 2003; Hodges, 1986; McQuail, 2003). Hodges states that "it is possible to have a press that is both free and responsible but it is impossible to have a press that is both totally free and completely accountable" (Hodges, 1986, in Plaisance, 2000: 257). Bertrand (2003) holds that freedom is not a goal in itself but an instrument to serve society. It is important that the rights and freedoms of the media are embedded in the acknowledgement of social responsibility as an integral part of a modern social system.

3.4 Media accountability

As with the other concepts, accountability is often referred to in policy and political documents, but equally lacks a precise definition. Concepts such as transparency, involvement, responsibility, responsiveness and governance are often used interchangeably. Moreover, there is little agreement among academics, policy makers, government officials and media professionals themselves as to what this accountability should comprise and how it should be organised (Bovens, 2005; McQuail, 2003; Mulgan, 2000).

Accountability is used here to describe the obligations media have to their stakeholders, and is seen as a dynamic interaction between the parties involved (McQuail, 2005; Plaisance, 2000; Pritchard, 2000). Accountability is a broad concept, not only limited to formal regulation, but also embracing the wider obligations media have to their stakeholders and the way in which they render account for their performance in a dynamic interaction between parties involved (McQuail, 2005; Plaisance, 2000; Pritchard, 2000). The key difference between the main concepts of responsibility and accountability is, as Hodges states, "responsibility has to do with defining proper conduct; accountability with compelling it" (Hodges, 1986:14). Compared with governance, accountability holds media to act on behalf of their stakeholders and does not include the broad range of actors and the dynamic structure of rules between the actors (Donges, 2007). It is part of a wider governance system.

Media accountability is defined by "all the voluntary or involuntary processes by which the media answer directly or indirectly to their society for the

quality and/or consequences of publication" (McQuail, 2005: 207). It consists of the interaction between two parties where one is required to account for one's action to another. This resembles the economic agency theory, which presupposes that relations are asymmetrical, where an accountable party explains or justifies actions to the party to whom the account is owed (Bovens, 2005; Swift, 2001). Swift (2001) and McCandless (2001) make the assumption that due to the perceived lack of trust in public institutions there is a greater need for explicit accountability relations.

Often conveyed as a synonym for accountability, transparency is an element of accountability (Bovens, 2007). It is a prerequisite for an actor to hold the agent to account. When institutions are not willing to be transparent in their performance, they will not likely show their accountability and it will be difficult for agents to hold the actor or institution to account.

In this context, there is a clear shift from general and abstract thinking about media responsibility - defined as the media's obligations to society (McQuail, 2003) - to more practical and concrete mechanisms through which media are held accountable as to the quality of their performance. In line with this, the emphasis has shifted from a negative to a positive approach, from liability to answerability (Christians, 1989; McQuail, 1997, 2005). Liability refers to the "potential harm that media publication might cause", while answerability implies "non-confrontational and emphasises debate and dialogue as the best means to bridge differences that arise between media and their critics or those affected" (McQuail 2005: 209).

Media accountability types

Several scholars (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004a, Christians, 1989; Hodges, 1986; McQuail, 1997, 2003) have translated the concept of media accountability into more practical terms and distinguish different, not always mutually exclusive, types or models of accountability. McQuail (1997, 2003) and Bardoel and d'Haenens (2004a) differentiate four conceptual types of accountability: political, market, public and professional. Political accountability comprises of responsibilities through binding rules and laws in order to guarantee a free communication within society as part of a public good. Moreover it has the purpose to protect the rights of others and the general society against any harm caused by media. These include legal and enforceable regulatory

measures. The public broadcasting model fits this type, as laws and regulations exist to secure interference-free transmission, to safeguard public access and to provide quality, not determined by the market. However, in an increasingly turbulent and moving media landscape many academics believe merely political accountability is not sufficient (Blumler & Hoffman-Riem, 1992; McQuail, 1997; Mitchell & Blumler, 1994). Bertrand (2003) adds that law is slow, expensive and not adaptable to continuous change.

The second type, market accountability, spurs media to react to changing consumption patterns and new media technologies. It is based on the notion of a free market and the principle of supply and demand (Croteau & Hoynes, 2001). Media are held to account and are judged by (the interest of) the consumer. Consumers can cease to use the media or show their loyalty by watching the programme or keeping the newspaper subscription. In terms of Hirschman (1970), one can either exit from the relationship or demonstrate loyalty. McQuail (2003) considers this type of accountability to be quite intangible and not related to specific instruments but more to its own logic. However, specific instruments such as conducting audience and market research can help media organisations understand their market. In addition, when taking a more narrow definition of the market, media organisations and conglomerations can be held accountable by their shareholders and advertisers.

While it is not surprising that commercial media carry out market research, public service broadcasters are also increasingly using tools to understand their consumer market (Brants & Slaa, 1994). Yet, one can question if the motive behind it is to improve the quality of media service and to show accountability to the public or to enhance its saleability and perform in order to please and be responsive to the consumer and thus to be essentially accountable to their shareholders and advertisers. Chapter 2 showed that a point of criticism regarding media performance is that media have become too commercialised and focused on sensation and this increasing commercialization has substantiated the debate on media performance. If this is the case, the market alone and the related instruments are not sufficient to hold the media to account.

The third type, public accountability, refers to media serving the public interest to provide information in a self-regulatory manner. When citizens

or the public believe media are falling short in doing so they can hold the media to account. Public accountability takes the form of media's voluntary obligation to find ways to strengthen the relationship with citizens. The objective behind it is to ensure orientation towards the public and to show social responsibility. The instruments for reaching this objective can vary, but all relate to responding to public criticism and debate with a self-regulatory structure (McQuail, 2003).

Professional accountability, lastly, also has a self-regulatory character. It has the objective for media professionals to be accountable to one's peers with the final goal of enhancing the quality of performance, raising the status of the profession. It is about the media profession itself setting its own standards of good practice. It is related to the professionalisation of journalism to counter the political and market systems (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004a). However, it is not only about professionalisation of the media occupation, but also about being horizontally accountable to the media profession. This can take the form of organisational codes of ethics to set journalistic standards, written guidelines often used within media organisations as a form of internal self-regulation. It serves to ameliorate media's corporate responsibility and more importantly, it serves the purpose to protect media independence from government interference (Christians, 1989). However, this instrument of accountability is not unproblematic, since it is difficult to capture journalists' work in one single code (Christians, 1989; Gordon & Kitross, 1999).

Professional accountability also takes the form of evaluation and self-reflection meetings and informal get-to-gethers for discussion and evaluation purposes and for the journalists to potentially hold each other to account. These instruments are internally managed and directed towards the media professional, while public accountability is directed towards external actors.

Examples of self-regulatory accountability instruments of which much has been written are the council for journalism and the ombudsman. In many countries across the world, some form of council for journalism is used to ensure public accountability. Councils for journalism range in member composition, financing, scope and procedures (Bertrand, 2003), but in general their objective is to handle complaints made by citizens and sometimes to make general judgments about media ethical issues. Yet, many media believe

councils to be implicit political accountability instruments and not accessible to the public (Bertrand, 2003; Koene, 2009; Mentink, 2006). The Council for Journalism in the Netherlands was established in 1960 and has the task of evaluating the journalistic behaviour of both organised and non-organised journalists and, if possible, mediating in pending complaints (Mentink, 2006). The judgments do not have an enforceable character, but the Council highly recommends media organisations to publish a rectification when the verdict is grounded. The role of the Council in the Netherlands has been a recurring subject of debate, since the media themselves do not (always) seem to take it seriously (Koene, 2009; Mentink, 1960). The Council is often referred to as a 'paperless tiger'. Since 2000, several established media organisations have ceased to collaborate with the Council, following complaints about the level of sanctioning, the minimal effect it achieves and the limited opportunities to file complaints. In 2003, the Council for Social Development (RMO [Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling]) proposed to strengthen its position, resulting in several initiatives such as looking into judgments concerning Internet publications, elaborating its mediating tasks, and speeding up its complaints procedures and making them more efficient. Council for Journalism also set up a covenant in which a number of editors-in-chief agreed to collaborate with the procedures and publish the final judgment[1] (Koene, 2009).

The media ombudsman is another instrument of self-regulatory accountability. This is usually someone employed by the newspaper or broadcaster to deal with complaints from the public and thus functions as an intermediary between the medium and its public (Ettema & Glasser, 1987; Nemeth & Sanders, 1999; Van Dalen & Deuze, 2006). However, in different countries the media ombudsman has never really caught on (Newton, Hodges & Keith, 2004) or are under pressure due to financial cutbacks (Evers, Groenhart & Groesen, 2009)

To complicate things, several accountability instruments can have characteristics of both public and professional accountability. The ombudsman is exhibiting public accountability when dealing with public complaints and being

1 The covenant states that media will publish or broadcast the verdicts of the council. However, since the audio-visual sector complained, the Council for Journalism has adapted the covenant and also accepts a publication on the website instead of the concerned program. Moreover, since March 1, 2010 the Council for Journalism only asks to publish when the case is (partly) grounded. Before all verdicts were asked to be published. (www.rvdj.nl)

transparent to the public through a column in the newspaper or website. However, when the ombudsman deals with a public complaint by addressing the issue only within the organisation this is professional accountability. Once he or she answers the complainant or publishes something about the issue it becomes public accountability. Similarly, the council for journalism has the objective to serve the public's interest by looking into public complaints and stimulating a public debate on media ethical issues. However, when media do not publish the verdict for public purposes and the debate centres primarily among media professionals, it takes more the form of professional accountability.

Professional and public accountability mechanisms are considered 'soft' measures and are most preferred by media institutions and professionals, because they supposedly fit the principle of freedom of the press. McQuail believes that 'harder' political accountability measures might have "a chilling effect on media, fearful of economic and political penalties" (1997: 517). Reliance on voluntary cooperation is more likely to have a positive effect on the media professional. Journalists, especially in the press, have functioned relatively independently (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004a). Just like in other corporations the need for dialogue with stakeholders is preferred over penalties or implementing tough restrictions. Moreover, to hold the media to account through legal mechanisms is especially difficult because it is often hard to prove liability for consequences of publication. Solid criteria of good media performance are lacking and the costs of private harm and public benefit from publication are difficult to balance (McQuail, 1997). But, the difficulty of showing accountability to the public is that the public is more of an abstract category (Ang, 1991).

Other distinctions of accountability have been made by Hodges (1986) and Bertrand (2003). Hodges makes a distinction between assigned, contracted and self-imposed accountability. Assigned is associated with liability in that it is not voluntary, but obliged by law. Contracted and self-imposed relate to the public and are not enforceable, but the former implies some kind of agreement or voluntary contract between media and a third party. The latter is a voluntary action of the media to show its moral obligation to society. Bertrand (2003) developed media accountability systems (MAS), embracing more than 60 instruments to improve media service to the public, like evaluation, monitoring, education, feedback and communication.

A refined subdivision of self-regulatory accountability

Chapter 2 showed that due to a shift from government to governance there has been greater claims of public and professional accountability and less of political accountability. Self-regulatory accountability types are not only discussed more frequently, but also put forward more by the media themselves. However, there is potentially a large and, I would argue, conceptually rather confusing set of self-regulatory options. I would opt for a more closely defined subdivision of professional and public accountability. Professional accountability can be subdivided in two types: covert and overt. The first is directed towards the professional journalist within the organisation, the second to the profession as a whole, even outside the actual media organisation. A code of conduct only intended for internal organisational purposes is covert: ethical standards that apply to the whole journalist profession are overt. Similarly, public accountability is overt when the media show their accountability to the public at large, while it is covert when it aims at responding to an individual complaint. When the ombudsman responds to a reader's complaint by personal communication it is covert: when he publishes a column it is overt.

In addition, I prefer a more specified conceptualization of self-regulatory accountability (public and professional). Whereas self-regulatory accountability is essentially voluntary and initiated by the media themselves, there is an increasing involvement of third parties to facilitate it through voluntary covenants or contracts, similar to what Hodges (1986) calls contracted public accountability. However, contracted accountability is a confusing term, as media are not forced to agree (then it would be political or assigned accountability), but are encouraged (in a friendly but serious manner) to collaborate with or adhere to the suggestions. I therefore prefer the term 'suggested' to 'contracted' accountability and 'self-initiated' to 'self-imposed' accountability. The latter shows that they are proposed and initiated by media themselves and not imposed upon them.

In conclusion, media accountability is more practical than media responsibility. As part of a larger governance framework, accountability emphasises the processes of the media's obligations towards a diverse number of actors including politics, the public, the market and the media profession. Governance, however, does not only relate to accountability, but also to negotiation, accommodation and dialogue, which brings in the concept responsiveness.

3.5 Media responsiveness

The debate on media performance and responsibility, and the perceived decrease in trust have not only created greater demands for accountability, but also a need for the media to be more responsive to the public and society. In addition, the continuous structural challenges the media had been coping with, were also a reason for them to be responsive to the wishes and demands of the citizen and consumer. These attempts are mainly brought about by a growing concern for the widening gap between media organisations and their public. Responsiveness is often used in a political and policy context. Politicians are expected to listen and be receptive and capable of feeling the needs and concerns of the electorate (Page & Shapiro, 1983). Especially in times of decreasing voter loyalty and trust, and in response to state bureaucracy, government and public administration should listen to and answer the needs of the citizen (Vigoda, 2002).

Taking this idea to the media context, responsiveness means taking the public's interests and needs into account. Media should "...listen to and provide a platform for the expression of anxieties, wants and opinions, or (…) focus on needs defined more in market terms" (Brants & Bardoel, 2008: 475). Where responsibility is more descriptive and implies proper conduct prior to actual behaviour, responsiveness has a more active and anticipatory character. The difference between responsiveness and public accountability is that the former relates to taking the issues of the public into account by engaging, participating and showing involvement, while the latter means justifying one's performance to the public.

Partly based on the longitudinal analysis (see Chapter 2) Brants and De Haan (2010) see a picture emerging of three types of responsiveness: civic, strategic and empathic. The idea of civic responsiveness is based on taking the public into account, listening to and connecting with them. The starting point is the public's agenda in order to be socially responsible and to bridge the gap with the public. Members of the public are addressed as citizens and the way to connect with the public is through an open, iterative and interactive approach. Civic responsiveness coincides with Schudson's trustee model of media responsibility, where professional journalists provide news that they think is necessary for citizens to participate in a democracy, i.e. show responsibility

(Schudson, 1999). However, while having a similar objective, responsiveness is more active and interactive and starts from a less paternalistic point of view. Instead, the media and the public learn from each other.

The public or civic journalism movement is an example of this civic responsiveness. In the early 1990s regional newspaper in the US started experimenting with involving the public in the news process (Glasser, 1999; Rosen, 1991). While this movement has been much criticized and the practical impact has been questioned both in the US and in Europe (Brants & Siune, 1998; McDevitt, 2003; Schudson, 1998), there are currently various examples of civic responsiveness including newspapers collaborating with readers for input of stories.

The media also connect with the public as a way of binding them as consumers, taking the form of more commercial or strategic responsiveness. This implies a market-driven instead of a social motive: persuasive communication instead of interactive communication with the public. In this sense, strategic responsiveness is closely connected to market accountability in that both are based on supply and demand, and taking account of the interest of the public to guarantee their loyalty. Essentially market accountability only differs in its narrow definition of being accountable to advertisers and shareholders. Strategic responsiveness is not only characteristic of commercial media organisations, but in a competitive environment also public service broadcasting is increasingly obliged to find ways to engage with and relate to the public. For example, public media organisations invest in audience research to find out what interests readers, listeners and viewers to increase audience reach and profit revenue (Brants, 2007; Mitchell & Blumler, 1994; Stanyer, 2007).

In the last type, empathic responsiveness, journalists side with the public as losers of modernity or victims of public and state authorities. Journalists function as a caretaker and bond with the public or victim and speak on behalf of this person or group and actively try to solve their problem. Traditionally, this type of responsiveness was visible in public service broadcasting where consumer and service programmes had the objective of helping the victims of bureaucracy. More recently, in an often excited and angry tone, empathic responsiveness takes a 'louder' form in that it addresses issues against the political, economical and cultural elites that relate to an uprising trend of

populist movements. Journalists combine empathy with participatory styles of action journalism. For example, in the Dutch program *PremTime* the objective is to locate problems within society and to possibly solve them. Journalists take sides with the victims of these problems.

Concluding, responsiveness is a way to bridge the gap with the public, bind or bond with them on a voluntary and less institutionalized basis. It is a way to focus more on citizens' interests, taking them into consideration by listening to, involving and engaging with the public.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the current debate about trust in and social responsibility of the media at a conceptual level. Blaming them for no longer behaving and performing in a socially responsible way, trust in media is put into question, at least by political actors. Requiring measures of accountability and responsiveness seems to be an attempt to reclaim the responsible behaviour of the media and restore the trust. Figure 3.1 illustrates the four concepts and sub-concepts in relation to each other. Where trust and responsibility are the problem of media performance, responsiveness and accountability are possible solutions to improve the responsibility and ultimately trust in the media. The concepts responsiveness and accountability can be subdivided in different forms. Types of accountability are ranged according to *whom* one should be accountable to, while responsiveness relates to *why* media are taking the public into consideration

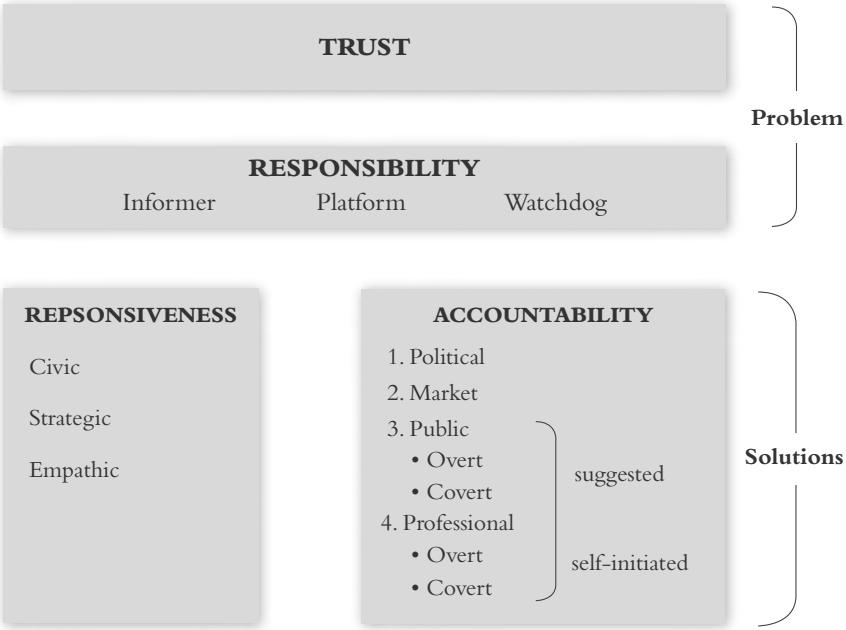
Along with societal changes the relationship between media, government and the public has shifted which in turn has led to shifts in meaning of the four central concepts related to media performance. There is a change to a more active approach of responsibility in terms of accountability and responsiveness. The focus is not only on taking their responsibility but also showing openness, being transparent and engaging in a dialogue with the public.

Responsibility is a prerequisite of trust but since trust is a subjective feeling that one cannot force upon someone, accountability and responsiveness are seen to serve as the medicine to ameliorate this crisis of media responsibility. Where in the past mutual trust guaranteed social cohesion, horizontal governance structures and soft accountability measures might make up for this loss of

trust. Similarly, McQuail (2003, 2005) sees a shift from regulatory focus on the liability of the media, to more attention on self-regulatory governance mechanisms, in line with the idea of answerability. But, accountability is not a substitute for trust, since any type of accountability depends on some level of trust in the actors concerned. However, in spite of these shifts there is as yet no consensus on how the unique democratic characteristics of the media - freedom of press and autonomy of the profession - can live together with more responsive and accountability mechanisms.

The conceptual analysis now leaves us with an important question. Is this shift in emphasis visible in media practice? Are media aware of the self-assertive citizen and the cynically retreating consumer? Are they responding in terms of accountability and responsiveness to regain the trust of the public? How are they coping with the tension between this response and their responsibility? In the following chapters I will analyse how media organisations are *currently* responding to the demands for accountability and responsiveness and to what extent the introduced instruments are adopted. Are they merely an issue of public debate or have they actually received a place in the organisation's structure and culture, influencing daily practice?

Figure 3.1: A conceptual model



Chapter 4

Introducing case studies: design and methods

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4.1 Introduction

Analysis of the media debate over a 20-year period showed that in the 1990s the debate was mainly dominated by structural issues affecting media organisations. By the turn of the century, however, due to criticisms, particularly voiced by politicians, and a number of critical events, the focus of the debate shifted towards media performance and demands for accountability and responsiveness. The analysis provided an overview of the media's response, shifting attitudes and new solutions. This prompts the question how media are *currently* coping with and responding to these demands.

In this next phase I want to find out which instruments of accountability and responsiveness are used among different media organisations. And, perhaps, more importantly, I want to understand the mechanisms that underlie the media's response and find out to what extent the suggested or self-initiated instruments of accountability and responsiveness are visible and adopted in daily journalistic routines. Merely looking at the introduction of instruments within an organisation does not tell the whole story. Instruments can be introduced, used even, but they may not be internalised. As part of my overall research question - *How are news media and journalist responding to criticism of their performance and to what extent have any measures been adopted?* – I therefore need to find an answer to the question:

> *How are responses to criticism translated into the daily practice of media institutions and to what extent are they part of the organisation structure and editorial culture?*

To be able to answer the 'how' question it is necessary to take an in-depth look in media organisations. For this, the qualitative methods of case studies are the most appropriate research design, as they focus on the phenomena in their natural setting (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1989). This chapter aims to elaborate and justify the methods used within this qualitative setting. Often the method section in qualitative research is either vague, short

or implicit (Boeije, 2005; Marshall, 2002; Silverman, 2001). More recently qualitative research has gained popularity with the publication of textbooks and articles that describe the process in detail and delineate systematic step-by-step procedures (see Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wester & Peters, 2004). Even though qualitative research does not follow a linear process with standardized procedures, this does not stop the researcher from working in a systematic, more cyclic or spiral manner. For the reader to obtain a clear understanding of this systematic process and to enhance the credibility of the research, an elaborate method section is required (Bergman & Coxon, 2005; Campbell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stenbacka, 2001). In this chapter I will describe the design of this research, the different types of data collection and the different processes in the data analysis. Additionally, I will address some ethical considerations and the question of how the validity and credibility of this research may be enhanced.

4.2 Design

A case study strategy with three separate cases was chosen, because it provides the possibility of focusing on contemporary situations, taking its complexity into account (Gerring, 2007; Yin, 1989). Case study research investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context in which the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. In other words, all the variables are taken into account in their natural context. Furthermore, case study research uses multiple sources of evidence and a small number of samples (small N) (George & Bennet, 2005; Gerring, 2007; Yin, 1989). While the previous research phase provided a longitudinal view, this research phase requires an in-depth understanding of the media in their current daily context, making the case study the most suitable research strategy.

I am aware that one of the main alleged pitfalls of the case study research is the problem of generalization (Bennet & Elman, 2006; Gerring, 2007; Yin, 1989). However, whereas case studies cannot be used to make general remarks about a larger population, the results can be used to reach conclusions at the theoretical level by comparing the empirical findings with the theoretical concepts. Yin calls this analytical instead of statistical generalization (Yin, 1989). Moreover, by studying three media organisations across different media

sectors I was able to lift the results to a more general level to draw some careful conclusions about the Dutch media's policy with regard to accountability and responsiveness.

4.2.1 Unit of analysis

Three media organisations were selected based on purposive sampling (Mason; 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This means the cases were carefully selected on their relevance to the research question and where the issue and instruments of accountability and responsiveness is most likely to occur. However, due to the differences in media structure and history it is likely that the accountability policy will differ in different media sector. Therefore, I chose a multiple case study design (Gerring, 2007; Yin, 1989) and selected media organisations from the newspaper, public and commercial broadcasting sectors in order to detect possible differences and similarities. I did not specifically choose a case from the Internet sector, since the other three organisations all make use of online media channels. In addition, the online media sector is still quite new and therefore has not been as involved in the media performance debate.

There are various considerations for selecting the cases (Gerring, 2007). Firstly, I chose to select the cases that are representative of the different media sectors in the Netherlands. All three organisations have outlets with high circulation, listening or viewing figures, which potentially shows their influence on public opinion. Actually, the chosen organisations are leading in their sector. Secondly, organisations were chosen that are either a frontrunner in the accountability or responsiveness debate or at least involved. Only in this way could I answer the question *how* media organisations have responded to the performance debate. Lastly, media organisations were chosen that focus on news coverage, because it is their democratic duty of serving the public's interest that was criticized.

For the newspaper sector the Dutch national daily *de Volkskrant* was selected. This morning newspaper has had a print version since 1919 and has been online since 1996. Originally it was affiliated to the Catholic labour movement, but since the 1960s it has gradually de-confessionalized to a more progressive stance, focused at a better educated public with a rather left leaning position (Hemels, 1981; Van Gessel, 1986; Van Vree, 1996). For many years the newspaper was part of a large publisher *PCM Uitgevers*. In the beginning of

2009 it was bought by the Belgian publisher *De Persgroep*. At the moment the newspaper has a circulation of approximately 230.000 (Het Oplage Instituut, 2009) with 230 editorial staff members. This case study was conducted from April till June 2009.

The news organisation *NOS* as part of Netherlands Public Broadcasting (NPO [Nederlandse Publieke Omroep] was chosen since it is the only daily news organisation within this sector. Founded by citizens' initiatives public service broadcasting in the Netherlands started in a decentralized system with numerous broadcasting associations representing distinctive religious and ideological profiles (Bardoel, 2008). NPO now consists of eleven public broadcasters, each representing a specific group in society but also competing for the general public. In addition, there are two-task related public broadcasters that have a task assigned by law. NOS is responsible for the overall news coverage and NTR has the task of focusing on culture, minorities, youth, education and research journalism. NOS has three departments: news, sports and event. *NOS Nieuws* is responsible for the news coverage (www.omroep.nl). In total, the public broadcasters have a market share of 34 percent (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2009). NOS, as one of the task-related public broadcasters, provides news, sports and topical events programmes and its tasks are formulated in the Dutch Media Act. This case focuses on the news department, *NOS Nieuws*, disregarding the sports and events departments. At *NOS Nieuws* approximately 400 editorial staff members are currently responsible for the daily news bulletins. *NOS Nieuws* currently produces hourly television news bulletins on three different channels, starting at 07:00 am and ending with a final bulletin at midnight (*NOS Journaal*); *Jeugdjournaal*, a television news program for children aged between 9 and 12 years old; *NOS Headlines*, for high school students, which is presented on radio, website and teletext; *Journaal op 3*, a television news bulletin for 20–30-yearolds; an up-to-date news website; hourly news bulletins on three radio channels and 24-hour updated news on teletext. This case study was carried out between August and October 2009.

As a representative of the commercial broadcasting sector *RTL Nieuws* was selected. With now approximately 120 employees *RTL Nieuws* provides national and international news on television, teletext and the Internet. Other commercial news programmes (such as SBS Broadcasting's *Hart van Nederland*)

are more focused on national and regional news. *RTL Nieuws* started in October 1989, originally with late-night television news bulletins but soon it was also producing news bulletins for prime time broadcast at 7:30 pm. Over the years it has expanded its broadcasts. Currently, *RTL Nieuws* offers breakfast news starting at 7:00 am, daily bulletins at 4:00 pm, 6:00 pm, 7:30 pm and a late night broadcast. In 2001 it introduced the financial television bulletin *RTLZ* , which airs news every hour during weekdays, and in 2003 the national news bulletin *EditieNL*, which has one daily broadcast at 6:15 pm during weekdays. *RTL Nieuws* is part of the commercial media enterprise *RTL Nederland* that in 2009 had a 24 percent market share in the Dutch broadcasting market (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2009). It is a daughter company of RTL Group, which is active in large number of European countries. Ninety percent of shares of RTL Group are owned by the German company Bertelsmann. The other commercial enterprise active in the Dutch broadcasting market is SBS Broadcasting B.V. which has a market share of 18 percent. This case study was conducted between November 2009 and January 2010.

To successfully conduct a case study, the spatial or temporal boundaries of the case must be identifiable (George & Bennet, 2005; Gerring, 2007). The three cases were thus narrowed down to focus only on the news departments. The following editorial sections were taken into account: national, international, political and economic. In order to obtain an overall view of each organisation I chose to concentrate on these four subunits, but also to collect additional data from other departments. For example, at *de Volkskrant* I concentrated on the selected news units by joining their meetings, observing the daily processes, having informal talks and interviewing the unit heads and journalists. In addition, I spoke to the unit heads of several weekly sections (e.g. the science and opinion units), but did not speak with journalists or join meetings. Moreover, when accountability or responsive measures were located elsewhere, these units were also taken into account. For example, at *de Volkskrant* the readers' letters are dealt with in the opinion editorial unit. This approach helped me to get an overall picture of the whole organisation and at the same time focus on specific units to obtain a more thorough view of the issue. In the following section, I will elaborate on my data collection.

4.3 Data collection

Before actually starting to collect the data an important decision needed to be made: in which phase of my research was I to enter the field? After careful consideration, I chose to start fieldwork in the last phase of my research. After two years of working on the previous research phases I was well acquainted with the theoretical concepts, the historical development and the shifts in the theoretical and policy debate. This knowledge was needed in order to set up a solid qualitative research design (Yin, 1989). Moreover, with this prior knowledge I was well prepared to approach the media organisations, explain my research and convince the editors-in-chief of the importance of their collaboration.

One of the strengths of case studies is that it offers the possibility to use many different sources of evidence (Yin, 1989). The case study itself is thus more a strategy that consists of several different methods (Gerring, 2007). I used different types of data within each case to collect the necessary information including documents, observations and interviews.

4.3.1 External documents

Before approaching the editor-in-chief of each media organisation, I gained as much knowledge of the organisation as possible by reading the annual reports over the past 20 years (see also Chapter 2), as well as prior research and publications on the organisation, and weblogs and commentaries from the editors-in-chief in the public and/or media professional debate. This was necessary to get a good understanding of the media organisation, its history and culture, and to get an initial idea of their view on the accountability issue.

4.3.2 Observation and internal documents

I started the actual fieldwork by being present almost full-time in the newsrooms, observing and collecting internal documentation. This allowed me to better understand the context in which I wanted to answer my research question and to get acquainted with the organisational structure and culture. More importantly, the main goal of the observation period was to detect the formal and informal accountability and responsiveness instruments within each organisation and to understand how they are experienced and evaluated in daily practice. Finally, the observations helped me to gain enough information to be able to set up a topic list for the interviews.

Within each case I was assigned a contact person who guided me through the organisation, introduced me to the employees and helped me to access relevant documents. According to Creswell & Miller (2000) the use of a so-called gatekeeper can enhance the credibility of the research (more on credibility issues in section 4.6). At *de Volkskrant* the ombudsman was my contact person and at *NOS Nieuws* and *RTL Nieuws* deputy editors-in-chief guided me through the organisation. This was a very useful way to get to know the organisational structure and the people and to slowly get acquainted with the culture. Since those in different positions in the organisation may have a different perception, I had to be careful to obtain my information not only through these contacts. I used so-called 'snowball sampling' to get acquainted with other people and obtain information from different sources (Warren, 2001).

During the observation period I joined daily and weekly plenary meetings, joined the meetings of separate editorial units and observed the daily production practices. Besides the observations I also acquired various types of internal documents. At *NOS Nieuws* and *de Volkskrant* I had access to the organisation's intranet, which provided relevant information such as the minutes of the plenary meetings, the organisation structure, internal changes etc. Moreover, my contacts helped me to get hold of documents that were relevant for my research, such as internal policy documents and memoranda on specific journalistic projects. This period also included informal talks with the staff members to get to know the different people and also for them to get to know me. What struck me was that everyone was very open and enthusiastic about my research topic and was eager to talk and assist me in conducting my research. Whereas some qualitative researchers say media organisations are often reluctant to give researchers long-term access (Paterson & Domingo, 2008: Ten Have, 2004), I experienced the contrary and received full cooperation from the three editors-in-chief and their editorial staff. This open attitude facilitated one of the objectives of the observation period: to create a trust relationship with the members of the organisation. Only when people know who you are and are comfortable with your presence will they easily open up to you when interviewed.

During the observation period the role of the researcher can be quite complicated, because as an observer you have the role of both an insider and

an outsider (Boeije, 2005). Walsh (2000) rightly states that that affects how the respondents perceive and approach the researcher. Four different roles can be distinguished in a continuum: complete observer, observer—participant, participant—observer and complete participant (Gold, 1958 in Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). A complete participant carries out the study secretly and participates while others in the field are not aware of the research. A complete observer is someone who only observes but avoids contact and does not participate in the field. The observer—participant focuses on observing, while only participating in the most necessary cases. The participant—observer participates in order to build trust relations with people in the field. I shifted between being an observer—participant and a participant—observer. The latter role was important in order to create some type of trust relationship with the respondents, but it runs the risk of over-identifying with the subject and becoming too much involved in the situation. To avoid this, I kept my distance and never actively joined in during the meetings or gave opinions on issues. When, for example, during a meeting one of the editors asked me whether he should put a certain item in the news bulletin, I explained that I was merely at the meeting to observe and not to participate. However, acting only in the role of observer would not have allowed me to fully understand the implicit processes and culture within the organisations.

All the information was recorded in written field notes during the actual observation. This is paramount in observing (Lofland, 1971; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). As Lofland notes, "Field notes are the most important determinant of later bringing off a qualitative analysis" (1971: 102). The observation notes were chronological facts of the observations and literal citations of people (Lofland, 1971). I also made notes of ideas that came up during the observation that were either related to the theoretical concepts or methodological considerations.

This observation period started quite broadly with reading internal documents, observing the daily journalistic processes, joining meetings and talking with people. That led to new information, allowing me to shift my focus to more specific moments of observation and interesting new data (Lofland, 1971; Silverman, 2001).

4.3.3 Interviews

After spending several weeks at the newsroom I felt sufficiently well informed about the organisation structure and culture to hold interviews. Within the social sciences the interview is the most commonly used method to understand people's opinion and experiences (Fontana & Frey, 2004; Ten Have, 2004). Often, interviewing is seen as an easy method and similar to having a conversation with someone, but it is a conversation with a purpose that should lead to the desired and required information (Emans, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2004; Lofland, 1971).

The first interviews were held with the contact people who had introduced me to the organisation. They served as experts in the field (Fontana & Frey, 2004; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002) and therefore helped me to obtain the necessary factual information, verified facts from my observation period and gave their view on how the organisation was coping with the accountability and responsiveness issue. Since I had daily contact with these people the interviews were quite informal and served as a pilot to test my topic list. Moreover, the experts helped me to approach other people in the organisation I wanted to speak to, facilitating the snowball sampling process (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997).

The number of people I interviewed varied between the case studies, depending on the total number of employees of the organisation (see Appendix 1 for a list of the interviewees). The interviewees represented both management and professionals in the news organisation. At *de Volkskrant* 33 interviews were conducted. At management level I spoke with the three deputy editors-in-chief and the then editor-in-chief. At the professional level I spoke with the heads and journalists of several news editorial units. In addition, I spoke to the publisher director. At *NOS Nieuws* a total of 42 interviews were held. At management level I spoke with the three deputy editors-in-chief and the editor-in-chief. At the professional level I first spoke with heads of the editorial units and program editors and then with coordinators, desk editors, reporters and presenters. In addition, I interviewed the ombudsman, the communication manager and the managing director of NOS. Finally, I spoke with the chair of the Board of Governors and a policy manager of the Netherlands Public Service Broadcasting NPO. At *RTL Nieuws* I carried out 23 interviews. First, interviews were conducted with program editors, unit

heads, the news deputy editor-in-chief and the editor-in-chief. Then, at the professional level I interviewed presenters, editors and reporters from various news units. Lastly, I spoke with the chief executive officer of *RTL Nederland*.

The interviews had a semi-structured character, which means that I did not prepare a fixed questionnaire but merely a list of topics that would guide me through the interview. To break the ice, the first topics were related to the interviewee's function within the organisation. These first questions were intended to obtain factual information and to help the respondent to become at ease with me and the subject (Emans, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2004; Hijmans & Wester, 2006). For example, when interviewing the journalists or editors I first asked them to briefly explain their tasks and the purposes of the different meetings. Afterwards, more complicated issues were discussed relating more to the interviewee's opinion and experiences. In total, the following topics were addressed: their function within the organisation and their responsibilities, internal evaluation moments, criticism and feedback from colleagues, external criticism, their definition of accountability, their views on instruments of accountability and responsiveness and on the changing relationship with the public. While the order of questions was carefully planned, at times I did vary this since I wanted the interviews to have more of a conversational character with a natural flow. In this way the respondents would feel at ease and might generate other information that came to mind. Each interview took on average 1 hour.

Besides preparing the questions or topics to be discussed other issues should be taken into consideration to successfully complete an interview. Firstly, it is very unlikely that interviews can be repeated since one cannot expect respondents to be willing to make an additional appointment. Therefore, I not only carefully prepared the topics/questions but I also thought of probes to get a deeper understanding of the interviewee's answer and to check if I understood the answers correctly (Bergman & Coxon, 2005; Lofland, 1971; Patton, 1990). Secondly, the role of the interviewer is very important. There are many discussions about whether the interviewer should take a neutral and distant approach or show more involvement to enhance trust (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2004). As I had already met most of the respondents during my observation period they were already acquainted with me and my research subject and a certain level of trust had already

been built up. I primarily took a neutral and distant approach, stimulating the respondents to give their opinion and thoughts. For example, before asking what they thought about the accountability policy and the use of specific instruments, I started by asking how they would define this concept, without giving them examples or reminding them of the current debate. At the same time, in order to understand respondents' deeper thoughts on specific issues it is important that the researcher shows empathy (Fontana & Frey, 2004; Hijmans & Wester, 2006). Therefore I made clear to the interviewees that I was conducting independent academic research and not working for the management. This made the professionals feel at ease and sometimes they even used the opportunity to air their concerns about the organisation. A final aspect that should be taken into consideration is the use of journalistic jargon (Fontana & Frey, 2004; Patton, 1990). My observation period helped me not only to understand the organisation and its culture but also to learn the jargon used by journalists. In the interviews I often referred to specific issues that were discussed in the meetings or used specific jargon to make the abstract theoretical terms more concrete and applicable to the respondent's situation.

4.4 Data analysis

The grounded theory approach was used to analyse the data (see also Chapter 2). The basic idea is that the complexity of a large amount of data is reduced into categories and concepts, after which patterns are identified and a framework or theory is constructed (Bryman, 2001; Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to the grounded theory approach four different phases of analysing qualitative data can be distinguished (Hijmans & Wester, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Because this process of analysis is quite complex and does not follow standard guidelines, I will explain how I analysed my material using concrete examples from my analysis. Even though this process may appear to take place in a linear step-by-step manner, the process is often not a smooth one. Rather, it is a continuous spiral process of remodelling and synthesising (Marshall, 2002). In qualitative research the analysis does not simply follow the data-gathering stage, but alternates by a constant reflection on the results in relation to the research question (Lofland, 1971; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I started with the analysis of the documents and field notes, after which the interviews were analysed. The first two analyses were also needed to set up a topic list for the interviews. All the interviews were transcribed by two students. Even though I made notes during the interviews I felt that the full transcripts were necessary to really capture everything that the respondents said without making any prior assumptions or interpretations. As the documents, field notes and transcripts were analysed in a similar way, I will limit myself here to a step-by-step illustration of the interview analysis. Due to the substantial amount of data this analysis was more comprehensive than the first two. I read each interview transcript completely on paper to get an overall overview of the information in its context. Afterwards, I started with open coding on paper (Hijmans & Wester, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Different sections of the interview were labelled with a code that summarized what was said in the text. For example, when respondents gave their definition of accountability the paragraph was labelled with 'definition of accountability'. Once the whole interview was coded on paper, I again coded the interview using the qualitative software program MAXQDA. In this way I obliged myself to code twice and possibly change or add codes. This enhances the reliability of the research. Subsequently, other interviews were coded the same way. I did not follow the pure inductive approach of analysing the data without any prior conception and did take into account my theoretical concepts trust, responsibility, accountability and responsiveness. These concepts started off as sensitizing concepts meaning that the concepts do not have a fixed or definite meaning but function as a guide and provide a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical situations (Blumer, 1954). After coding five interviews I took a so-called 'time-out' (Marshall, 2002) to compare the interviews and rearrange the codes, adding, eliminating and bundling them. For example, in the open coding phase I coded all the paragraphs where the interviewee gave his or her definition of the concept of accountability 'definition of accountability'. In the specification phase I realized this code was too broad and I added sub-codes, such as transparency, responsibility, professionalism and responding to public criticism. In the axial phase I rearranged the codes, possibly combined, split or integrate them (Boeije, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Also the codes were put into dimensions. For example, distinctions could be made between a positive *versus* negative association with accountability, suggested or self-initiated. Whereas

in the open coding phase I stayed close to the data, in the following phase I lifted the codes to a more interpretative and theoretical level.

This systematic analysis helped me to avoid the pitfall of anecdotalism (Bryman, 1988; Mehan, 1979 in Silverman, 2001) where results are reported based on a few exemplary quotes or specific examples of an apparent phenomenon. By conducting a systematic and thorough analysis, I verified whether issues were specific, unique examples or shared by many respondents.

One of the basic ideas of grounded theory is the constant comparison method (Boeije, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tesch, 1990). The analysis comprised a continuous process of comparing the data to discover patterns and underlying concepts within the material. The comparison took place at different levels. First, I compared codes within a specific interview and afterwards among the interviews with those with similar functions (e.g. analysis of all the interviews with the editors in one organisation). Subsequently, the comparison took place across functions. All these steps are part of the analysis within one case. After I had completely finished each case, I started with the next, taking the same steps in both data collection and analysis. I finished with cross-case analysis, comparing across cases (Yin, 1989; Peters, 2006). This last step was done with specific caution since the cases differ in historical background, structure and context. This was also the reason I did not choose to conduct a cross-case analysis at an earlier point in the analysis (Gerring, 2007).

The analysis was an intense process in which I had to deal with an immense amount of data. More than 800 pages of interview transcripts were coded per case, not including the documents and field notes. The qualitative software program MAXQDA helped me in arranging and systematizing the data. Moreover, the use of memos within this qualitative software program allows for continuous reflection on the process of analysis (Hijmans & Wester, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wester & Peters, 2006). However, I did not use the software program for the documents and field notes because these materials were not available digitally, which is necessary in order to use the program. Moreover, these materials were not as extensive which made it easier to do the coding and further analysis by hand.

4.5 Ethical considerations

Throughout my whole research process I took account of several ethical considerations and I have already mentioned some implicitly. First is the issue of informed consent (see also Chapter 2), which means that the researcher provides the respondents with the relevant information for them to make a decision whether or not to participate (Silverman, 2001). During the first meetings with the editors-in-chief I gave a full explanation of my research and the objectives of the case study. When I started the fieldwork the employees were informed of my presence through an e-mail and on my first day I was introduced at the plenary meeting. Each interview started with an explanation of my research. In all, I chose overt observation. However, a concern about overt observation is the validity and reliability of the observations since people might act differently when they know that they are being observed (Patton, 1990). By prolonging my stay in the field, I was able to deal with this problem. In this research, covert observation would not have been possible since it is not the usual practice for outsiders to spend long periods in the newsroom. Not explaining my purpose would have raised questions and resistance to participate.

Another issue is anonymity, which means that the respondents cannot be traced back (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I agreed with the editors-in-chief that all the interviewees would stay anonymous to the reader except for people who hold a specific position such as the editor-in-chief and the ombudsman. To keep it fully confidential, all the respondents are addressed in masculine form. Finally, agreements had to be reached on data access and the purpose of the data. All the interviewees received the manuscript of this dissertation and several provided feedback. The editors-in-chief and the deputy editors-in-chief were also informed where the results would be presented or published.

4.6 Quality of the research

I have given an extensive and detailed description of the methods used to answer my final research question. This elaborate description provides an insight into how I conducted the research and therefore enhances the quality of it (Stenbacka, 2001). My aim is to be transparent and accountable to my fellow researchers, the research participants and the media profession. But this detailed method section alone does not validate the results of my research. In

quantitative research the terms reliability and validity are used when addressing the quality of the research.

Reliability refers to what extent different coders (or the same coder on different occasions) allocate the same codes to the same category (Hammersley, 1992). The reliability of my research was addressed in several ways. First, I coded the interviews twice, on paper and digitally, obliging me to rethink my initial codes. Second, a student, who had also done most of the transcripts, recoded a random sample of the interview codes. Even though the inter-reliability cannot be measured in quantitative terms, the second coding helped me to reflect on my own coding process. Third, all the interviews were recorded and the field notes were written in great detail. Lastly, the elaborate memos helped me to reflect systematically on the process (Hijmans & Wester, 2006).

Validity refers to what extent the research findings correspond with the social phenomena to which it refers (Hammersley, 1992). Both validity and reliability are statistical concepts that many qualitative scholars believe are not suitable or applicable to qualitative research because this research is carried out in a natural setting and almost impossible to replicate (Stenbacka, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Moreover, social facts are problematic to measure (Golafshani, 2003). I agree with a number of contemporary scholars (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Silverman, 2001) that in order to produce high-quality research some kind of quality check or measures are needed. Qualitative scholars have proposed alternative concepts such as adequacy, neutrality, credibility and plausibility (Creswell, 2007; Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Wolcott, 1994). To this end, common procedures have been identified for establishing validity in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2001).

Creswell and Miller (2000) offer nine different procedures to assess validity, using different viewpoints including that of the researcher, the participant and the reader. From the researcher perspective they propose triangulation, disconfirming evidence and researcher reflexivity. Triangulation means that the researcher either uses different types of methods, sources or theories to corroborate the evidence (Denzin, 1978; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). I used documents, observation notes and interviews to understand the issue from different perspectives. This was not only a method to support my

evidence but also a way to see to what extent the data differ (Seale, 1999: 474). For example, by comparing the documents with the interviews and observations I was able to see differences between formal policy and actual practice. Disconfirming evidence means that during the analysis one first builds initial codes and then starts looking through the data to find either more evidence or disconfirmation for these codes. This was done in the open and axial coding phase as described in the data analysis section.

Finally, researcher reflexivity requires researchers to reveal their bias, assumptions and beliefs that may shape the research. I did not explicate this on paper but prior to entering the field I did discuss some issues with my supervisors. This made me more alert and obliged me to prepare myself well before starting in the field. Moreover, I organised moments of reflection. For example, during the fieldwork I took time away from the newsroom to rearrange my field notes and reflect on the collected material in order to take following steps. During the coding phase I also built in reflexive moments because often I was so preoccupied with the coding process that I risked losing track of the overall findings. I found that my maternity leave of four months helped me to take a step back and therefore I was able to better reflect on my results.

From the participant's perspective Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest member checking or in Silverman's (2001) words 'member validation'. My results were given to all the interviewees for them to verify the facts and to give their opinion on my interpretation. Prolonged engagement in the field is another procedure from the participant perspective. This procedure was especially important for me during the first case study since it took time to explore how to conduct the observations. Besides this first case, during each case study the observation period took longer than I had planned beforehand. In the field I realized that it takes time to understand the complex organisational processes and the organisational culture. As Patton says, "In the second stage of the fieldwork the observer begins to really see what is going on instead of just looking around" (1990: 260). Moreover, policies of accountability often have more of an informal character and are therefore not easy to identify. But perhaps most importantly, this prolonged time in the field helped me to build a trust relationship with the respondents. For the first few days people were very curious about what I was doing and writing down and during the meetings people would make explicit remarks about accountability issues

because I was present. After a while people got used to my presence and seemed to forget I was observing.

From the reader's perspective, Creswell and Miller (2000) mention the audit. Throughout the research my supervisors were closely involved and we organised numerous meetings to reflect on the results. Moreover, preliminary results were presented at academic conferences where I received feedback that I incorporated into the final chapters. My results were reviewed numerous times by fellow colleagues doing research in the field of journalism. Moreover, the two students who transcribed all the interviews also provided feedback on the results. A detailed description of the research process and methods used helps the reader trace the research steps or as Yin says, "helps to maintain a chain of evidence" (1989: 102).

4.7 Case studies: applying theory to practice

This chapter has provided an elaborate description of the methods used for the case study research. In the following three chapters I will present the results of the three cases. Besides providing an overview of which instruments of accountability and responsiveness the organisations have introduced, I will elucidate the reasoning behind the instruments. Moreover, I will explore how these instruments are received among the editorial staff. The introduction of these instruments does not mean that they are invariantly adopted and result in the aimed effect. The success of innovation depends on many factors including the organisational innovation climate and how that matches the employees' values (Klein & Sorra, 1996), the level of pressure for change, institutional support and cost and benefits considerations (Berman & McLaughlin, 1974). Based on organisation innovation literature the introduced instrument of accountability and responsiveness can be placed in different phases of the innovation process. Several stages have been proposed by various organisational researchers (see for an overview Wolfe, 1994 and Bouwman et al., 2002), which boil down to four phases.

After a unit or organisation becomes aware of the existence of the innovation and the innovation's costs and benefits have been evaluated it is either *introduced* to the unit or organisation or rejected. Once introduced it is *implemented* in the organisation. This means the instruments have a place (usually formal) in the organisation with support from management. In the following phase

the instruments are *incorporated*. This requires the employees to be familiar with the instrument, agree on the implementation of the instrument and use it regularly. There is some kind of commitment of the employees to make use of the instruments (Tornatsky et al., 1983). Finally, the *internalisation* of the instruments entails everyone to have a consensus on the objectives of the instruments and how to use them without any major logistical and cultural drawbacks. In other words, when an instrument is internalised "it is accepted ... because it is congruent with a worker's value" (Sussman & Vechio, 1991 in Klein and Sorra, 1996: 1061) and the instrument is part of "routinized behaviour" (Berman & McLaughlin, 1974). Wolfe (1994) speaks of 'infusion' instead of internalization, when the innovations "are applied to its fullest potential" (1994: 411). In the following chapters, after a descriptive analysis of the used instruments, I will determine whether the instruments of accountability and responsiveness are introduced, implemented, incorporated or internalised in the organisations that I have studied.

Chapter 5

"In times of insecurity we have to cherish our readers":

A case study of de Volkskrant

Chapter 5

"In times of insecurity we have to cherish our readers":

A case study of de Volkskrant[1]

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will look into the Dutch newspaper sector by taking *de Volkskrant* as the unit of analysis. Both structure and performance issues have challenged Dutch newspapers of today. Historically, newspapers in the Netherlands were affiliated with and served as the mouthpiece of political and social movements. Readers were loyal to their newspapers as they belonged to the same ideology or 'pillar'. The depillarization process, which began in the 1960s, has changed the relationship between newspapers and their loyal readers into a more commercial relationship, where the newspaper sees the reader more as a consumer and the reader no longer chooses based on tradition (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004b). In addition, the increasing number of press mergers in the 1970s and 1990s and the subsequent decreasing number of circulation figures created large media conglomerates that are competing with each other now more than ever (Bakker & Scholten, 2009). There is a focus on getting the attention of large parts of the public. These rather commercial motivations have brought into question the public role of the press and its social responsibility. At the same time, the depillarization process created a climate in which journalism could professionalize and emancipate from its partisan role. This led to the elaboration of professional standards and the introduction of a formal editorial statute. In addition to these structural changes, since the turn of the century political actors and the public have begun to scrutinize the media following several incidents where their performance was at stake (see Chapter 1 and 2).

1 A shorter version of this chapter will be published in: M. Broersma & C. Peters (Eds.) *Retelling journalism: conveying stories in a digital age*. Leuven/Paris: Peeters Academic Press

As a result of these challenges to structure and performance the relation between citizens and the press has become more distant; Bardoel and d'Haenens even claim that the position of the citizen "has become weaker" (2004b: 166). Being accountable and responsive are ways to re-address the media's public role and to invest in the relationship with the public. Yet, in this liberal system freedom of the press does not sit well with accountability (McQuail, 2003). In the Netherlands there has always been quite a defensive attitude towards accountability. Dutch journalists are not too fond of codes of conduct (Evers, 2002) and several media organisations have turned their backs on the Council for Journalism, refusing to go to the hearings or to publish the council's verdict. However, the increasing criticism of media performance and demand for more accountability in combination with a number of structural media changes has resulted in some changes that indicate that media organisations and journalists have begun to invest in the relationship with the public in terms of accountability and responsiveness.

This chapter describes which measures *de Volkskrant* has taken and to what extent these are adopted in the organisational structure and culture. Founded in 1919, *de Volkskrant* is one of the leading quality newspapers in the Netherlands and has undergone the gradual development from a pillarized to a more depillarized and commercial media environment. *De Volkskrant* was also selected because in the past ten years its role and news coverage had been questioned several times during specific incidents, such as the Balkan war in the 1990s and the Iraq war in 2003. At the same time, the editor-in-chief at the time of research, who was also chair of the Netherlands Association of Editors-in-Chief (NGH [Nederlands Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren]) until 2006, has been closely involved in the debate on media performance and accountability.

The results of this case study will be presented, starting with a short outline of the daily journalistic routine to provide the context in which this research took place. Based primarily on document and observation analysis, I will give an overview of the different types of instruments of accountability and responsiveness that the newspaper adheres to or has initiated. Finally, based on a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the observations and interviews, I will evaluate how the instruments have been adopted and used in daily journalistic practice.

5.2 The daily journalistic routine

In contrast to its previous seven-storey concrete home, since 2007 *de Volkskrant* has been situated in a new transparent glass building. The editorial and marketing departments are both located on the same floor, merely separated by glass walls, which was unthinkable in the past, as it was a taboo for journalists and marketeers to even talk to each other. The composition of the board of the directors of the newspaper has also changed since 2008. Currently the editor-in-chief and the publisher director together form the board; where the former is responsible for the content, the latter is responsible for the financial aspects of the newspaper. In the past, these were two separate departments in no way linked to each other. The management of the editorial department consists of an editor-in-chief and three deputy editors-in-chief. Every day one of the deputies or the editor-in-chief coordinates the news production of the day. There are five news units: national, international, economy, reporting and the political unit, with the latter located in The Hague, the country's political centre. There is a separate opinion editorial unit responsible for the opinion and discussion pages in the newspaper. In addition, *de Volkskrant* has a number of weekly sections: Sport, Art and Books, Travel, a section with larger essays [Vervolg], Science, including academic news, [Wetenschap], and Heart & Soul, including lifestyle and psychology [Hart & Ziel]. On Saturday a weekly full-colour magazine is published with the newspaper.

The different news departments usually start the day at 10:00 am with a half-hour editorial meeting to discuss or reflect on the newspaper of the day and to brainstorm and plan articles collectively for the next day, or, as the majority of the heads and journalists said, "to bring us all together on the same page". There is no fixed format for these meetings as it is left to the responsibility of the head of the editorial unit.

After the separate editorial meetings, the so-called 'ten-thirty' meeting starts, intended for the heads of the editorial units and management, yet any of the staff members is welcome to join the meeting. The purpose of this daily meeting is to reflect on the newspaper of the day and discuss the newspaper for the next, with a clear focus on the front page. In the 10:30 am meeting, the first plans or ideas are set for the front page. Each unit is responsible for its contribution to the newspaper with some editorial units having fixed pages to fill.

Throughout the day many informal discussions take place, fine-tuning the different activities. At 5:30 pm the same heads and deputies on duty come together with several editors of the night shift and the night head on duty. This meeting fits the purpose to make the final decisions for the front page, or as one of the heads stated "we are able to offer our pearls for page one". In general, at around 6:30 pm, when the heads and deputies leave, the content and format of the newspaper is decided upon, unless breaking news comes in.

The editor-in-chief at the time of research held his position from 1995 till July 2010, after which his successor, a former correspondent of the newspaper, took the lead.

5.3 Accountability instruments

During my observation period the initial task was to detect the formal and informal mechanisms of accountability and responsiveness, after which I analysed how these instruments are evaluated and to what extent they are used in daily practice. Taking the theoretical definitions of accountability and responsiveness introduced in Chapter 3 as a starting point, I will first take a closer look at the existence of two types of accountability: professional and public. The newspaper does not adhere to political accountability instruments, since the press in the Netherlands has been free from any form of government intervention. Market accountability is visible through the fact that the newspaper operates in a free market. This means that by definition it is held accountable by the principle of supply and demand. It is probably better, however, to describe this as the newspaper being responsive to the consumer or its audience, as strategic responsiveness. As far as there is accountability, *de Volkskrant* at most adheres to or initiates self-regulatory instruments, being either public or professional. I will describe these instruments in the sequence in which they were introduced within the organisation. After that the issue of responsiveness will be dealt with.

5.3.1 Public accountability

To recapitulate from Chapter 3, public accountability means that media are held accountable by the public or show their accountability pro-actively to them. This can take an *overt* form, when addressing the public at large and *covert*, when responding to an individual reader.

Letters to the editor

A long established mechanism to be accountable to the readers is the letters to the editor. Since 1948, *de Volkskrant* has had a special readers' letters section, originally based on letters and phone calls, nowadays more on emails. Out of the 400 letters received on a weekly basis, only a few are selected and published in the daily newspaper and on the website. The letters range from readers giving an opinion on a current theme, offering a compliment, providing more information for the journalist, and pointing out factual mistakes, to complaining about the news angle of the story. A separate letters' editor is responsible for answering or forwarding them to the journalist concerned, indicating that this accountability instrument is both public and covert: individuals receive a personal reply and these responses are not published. Although no sanctions are imposed when journalists do not respond to readers' complaints, the readers' editor strongly encourages a response to the reader. Since the beginning of 2009, he has sent a weekly update of readers' complaints to the editorial staff, informing and keeping them up to date on the readers' concerns and thus implicitly stimulating to take the complaints seriously and respond to them (see Box 5.1 for an example of a weekly email).

Council for Journalism

Another 'old' mechanism of public accountability is the Council for Journalism [Raad voor de Journalistiek]. *De Volkskrant* acknowledges the Council for Journalism, which means that it pays a financial contribution, goes to a hearing when summoned, and publishes a rectification when the Council decides the complaint is legitimate. In its paper version, the newspaper mentions the collaboration with the Council. It uses the Council as an overt public accountability tool by publishing its verdicts. Not all media organisations publish the Council's verdict; some instead come to an agreement with the individual, using the Council in a covert way.

Box 5.1. Example of the weekly email on readers' responses (8-6-2009)
Dear colleagues,
We have a loyal group of followers that express their opinions daily. Their critique of the newspaper is generally not light, but they continue to follow us. Of the 400 letters we receive weekly only a percentage makes it into the newspaper. How our readers experience the paper is not something I will withhold from you. Starting today, every week I will send a message as to what issue is at the forefront.

When Wilders (a Dutch right-wing populist politician-YdH) is in the news it's immediately 'Wilders week' at the letters editorial. With last Thursday's news and the opening headline "Moroccan scores high in Rotterdam crime rate", 35 angry or disappointed readers responded. The gist of these reactions was that we were playing into the hands of Wilders by publishing such a headline on election day. Moreover, the article on page 2 was a lot more nuanced, according to three readers. Was the headline written to attract as many readers as possible? X from Leiden wrote, "There must be a way to make clear to those who make the headlines that the commercial interest of attracting the maximum amount of readers should never come at the expense of a vulnerable sector within our society. They also have a civil responsibility for the political climate in the Netherlands. Such a headline demonstrates irresponsible behaviour. If they are unaware of this, the editorial and/or management should point this out to them."
Journalist X wrote a reply wherein he explains the situation, which was appreciated as shown by the following reaction: "Thanks for the letter, I am very happy with this. I do not agree but that is a different matter. Kind regards, ..."
But there was more this week. X wrote the last 'In the Spirit of…' last week Saturday. Twelve readers who were moved reacted, including X from Utrecht. "My comment does not have to be placed in the newspaper but I would like to compliment *de Volkskrant* with how 'In the Spirit of...' by Martin Bril has been enriched in recent weeks with such diverse contributions by different writers. It was indeed a tribute with which we sometimes got to know Martin Bril even better and realized how unique his manner of telling is. But the closure by X was the most moving and dignified and certainly written in the spirit of her father. No other conclusion would have been more fitting and it made me speechless."

Regarding Thom Meens' (ombudsman de Volkskrant- YdH) reconstruction of the coverage of the death of the wrong Jan Pen, three writers reacted cynically: "The editor-in-chief of the economics editorial unit of de *Volkskrant* calls the reporter on duty about the economist Jan Pen who may have passed away. The reporter does not know who Jan Pen is. I would gladly like to offer myself (college degree, 8 for economics and 9 for accounting) for the position of economics reporter for *de Volkskrant* because I am sure the position must be vacant. Kind regards, X from Almelo.

It is said that our readers must all be fools. Sometimes this does seem to be the case. X has already spent weeks writing about his passionate nights with Princess Maxima. In full detail. Not that he has actually experienced his descriptions but it is something he hopes for. "I will always wait for you, although it may take a long time before I can actually meet you. I NEVER WANT ANOTHER AGAIN."

With kind regards, The letters editor

Ombudsman

In 1997, the editor-in-chief of *de Volkskrant* introduced a new accountability instrument. Inspired by American newspapers and media debate (e.g. *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*), he appointed an ombudsman with the tasks "to give more room for complaints about our coverage. Often journalists do not have time, patience and enough distance to answer the emails and phone calls. The ombudsman should prevent this drawback", as stated in the statute of the ombudsman (De Volkskrant, 2002). The formal tasks of the ombudsman consist of improving the journalistic quality and internal self-reflection. He writes a weekly column in the Saturday newspaper, based on a matter either pointed out by a reader or that he encountered himself. Recurring themes include the mores of online journalism, verification of sources, privacy issues and biased news (Evers, 2009). The columns do not seek to rebuke the involved journalists, but rather to raise awareness internally and to provide transparency and explanation externally. Thus, the ombudsman shifts between being overt and covert and being professionally and publicly accountable, depending on to whom he directs his communication and what the objectives of his actions are. For example, an issue that the ombudsman raises internally does not always have implications for his column and is not always visible to the reader, which means it then functions as a professional accountability instrument. When individually answering a complaint from a reader this is covert public accountability, but when he elaborates on the issue in his weekly column, this is overt. Although appointed by the editor-in-chief, the ombudsman has an independent status within the organisation. While officially the appointment is for two years, the ombudsman at the time of research was active from 2004 till January 2011. Three other ombudsmen preceded him. In May 2011, a new ombudsman was installed. The current editor-in-chief, in function since July 2010, wanted *de Volkskrant* to be the first newspaper to install a female ombudsman.

Author's names

From the end of the 1990s the newspaper has made itself overtly accountable to the reader by publishing the author's name with each article so that the journalists can be tracked and addressed personally. Even though e-mail addresses of journalists are not available to the reader and all the e-mails come to the inbox of the opinion editorial unit and the ombudsman, increasingly letters and e-mails contain the name of the journalist concerned, which

allows the ombudsman and readers' editor to forward the email quickly to the journalist for response.

Correction box

In 2004, the newspaper initiated another instrument to make it more overtly accountable to the public: a correction box called 'Supplements & Improvements' [Aanvullingen & Verbeteringen], for which the ombudsman is responsible. This box lists and improves factual mistakes. Besides mistakes that the ombudsman has encountered himself or has been pointed out by a reader, increasingly journalists provide him with errors that they have noticed themselves. Larger mistakes that need more explanation are corrected through a rectification in the newspaper (see Box 5.2 for an example).

Box 5 2. Rectification Jan Pen (well-known Dutch economist)

Rectification
26/05/09
AMSTERDAM In de Volkskrant of Monday May 25th a notice was wrongly published that Jan Pen had passed away. This item was also placed on vk.nl on Sunday evening. The editorial of de Volkskrant was misled by two obituaries in Het Parool (a Dutch newspaper-YdH) announcing the death of Jan Pen. It turned out the notification concerned another Jan Pen. De Volkskrant has apologized to the economist Jan Pen and hereby does the same to its readers.

Mediadebat

A suggested public accountability instrument the newspaper collaborates with is the media debate organisation, *Mediadebat*. This organisation was founded in 2005 in collaboration with the Netherlands Union of Journalists (NVJ [Nederlandse Vereniging van Journalisten]), the Netherlands Newspaper Publishers Association (NDP [Nederlandse Dagbladpers]) and the public broadcaster news organisation NOS on the recommendation of the Council for Social Development (RMO [Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling) and with financial help from government. Other financial contributors were the commercial broadcasters, RTL Nederland and SBS Broadcasting. Its goal is to stimulate public and media professional debate on the quality, reliability and diversity of journalism. As such the instrument functions both as public and professional accountability. *De Volkskrant* participates in these debates when invited, and representatives of the newspaper attend the debates regularly. Since 2010, however, the organisation stopped organizing debates while looking for collaboration with the Council for Journalism. Financial

reasons seemed to be the major stumbling block. Since government funding had stopped the organisation was uncertain whether the media sector alone was willing to provide the necessary contribution.

Nieuwsmonitor

In 2005, the *Nieuwsmonitor* was set up to provide empirical data on media coverage. Even though it is not an instrument of accountability the idea was that it would form the basis for public debate and media self-reflection and thus as forms of public and professional accountability. It has an independent, academic status and through content analysis of media coverage on political issues and other specific incidents the Monitor aims to give the public an insight into how different media cover a specific topic. Not specifically being an accountability instrument, it can serve as a starting point to generate ideas for public and professional debate. In 2003, as part of a 'triptych' of accountability instruments including the media debate organisation and to strengthen the position of the Council for Journalism, the RMO also advised this news monitor should be created. Since then, it has received financial contribution from the Netherlands Press Fund [Stimuleringsfonds voor de Pers], the journalists' union NVJ and the publishers' organisation NDP. From 2005 till 2009 it also received government funding. However, as of 2012 the Netherlands Press Fund will stop its funding. Even though this instrument does not need the cooperation of the media to monitor their coverage, it is based on media's financial support. Thus its existence faces uncertainties if the media themselves are not willing to contribute financially in coming years. It is not clear what position *de Volkskrant* takes. News articles from *de Volkskrant* are evaluated on a regular basis, but the editor-in-chief, like many other media practitioners, is not fond of making assessments of journalistic performance based only on quantitative data.

Transparency box

Over the past few years, specific editorial units, mainly the weekly sections, have started to demonstrate public accountability in an overt way by including a special section within the article (a transparency box), explaining to the reader that the article is based on objective information without commercial or any other type of influence. As this was initiated informally among separate editorial units, it is not clear exactly when this was first introduced. A transparency box is particularly provided when commercial organisations

occupy a key role in the story, which might give the impression that such articles are sponsored. Providing transparency gives the reader the possibility to judge the liability of the story.

Publication for self-reflection

The last accountability mechanism to show more transparency was the publication of the book *Between the Lines* [Tussen de regels] in 2006, in which the newspaper evaluated a "turbulent period of Dutch society and the newspaper" with the objective of being transparent and creating more internal self-reflection (de Volkskrant, 2006: 7). A number of outsiders, including journalists and academics were asked to reflect on how the newspaper covered specific incidents and issues including the rise and murder of Pim Fortuyn, the changing relationship between politics and the newspaper and how the newspaper covered the controversial debate on climate change. This instrument is another example of overt public accountability with a professional undertone.

5.3.2 Professional accountability

Besides showing accountability to the public, in either an overt or covert way, *de Volkskrant* has professional accountability instruments to set the standards of performance and to be held accountable by peers. These instruments are arranged within the journalistic profession. This can have a covert character when addressing the journalists within the media organisation or overt, when addressing the whole journalistic profession. Professional accountability can be seen as an aspect of professionalism. However, where the latter concerns a wide range of formal and informal activities to improve the performance of the profession, the latter has a more narrow definition: to hold one's colleagues to account when felt necessary.

In the daily routine journalists often come together to discus and plan news issues, either during formal meetings or in an informal setting. Besides these instruments that illustrate the professionalisation of journalism, at *de Volkskrant* there are also instruments that serve the purpose to hold one's peers to account.

Journalistic guideline

Like many media organisations, *de Volkskrant* has a journalistic guideline [Redactie ABC]. Since 1975, this guideline has described how journalists should act and to what journalistic principles and conduct they should keep.

For example, the guideline explains how journalists should protect their sources, the role of the unit head and the goal of the daily meetings. Over the years it has been adapted several times due to changes in the organisation structure. This instrument only serves covert purposes.

Editorial statute

The autonomy of the editorial staff is secured in the editorial statute, also dating from 1975 [Redactiestatuut]. In this statute the identity of the newspaper, the independent role of the editor-in-chief and management board and the tasks of the editorial board are secured. As instruments, the journalistic guideline and the editorial statute are primarily focused on the journalistic quality within the organisation rather than on giving explanations or showing transparency to external actors. The journalistic guideline and editorial statute are not available publicly and are thus only used for covert purposes with the possibility for colleagues to hold each other to account when the guidelines are not followed.

Evaluation moments

The daily plenary meeting at 10:30 am includes a formal moment of evaluation. The meeting starts with planning the newspaper for the next day, after which the newspaper of the day is evaluated. Also, each editorial unit comes together daily at 10:00 am to plan and discuss news stories. However, based on my observations, reflecting and evaluating is only done incidentally. Throughout the day, informal discussions take place, but these often amount to brainstorming and planning for next day's newspaper. Commenting on and providing feedback after publication is done with caution and mainly on a one-to-one basis. In other words, while there are numerous instruments that are part of the professionalisation of journalism, professional accountability in its narrow sense, as being accountable to one's peers, is less visible.

Casual discussion meetings

Professional accountability is often characterised by its informal nature. When a major issue arises and the opinions across the editorial staff are too divergent or simple solutions are not achievable, the editor-in-chief can decide to organise an informal meeting [hangende receptie], discussing, reflecting and evaluating on news coverage, journalism or the newspaper organisation. This gathering is not organised on a regular basis, but only when the editor-in-

chief or editorial staff feel the need to come together to discuss a certain matter. In the past it had a more frequent character.

Self-evaluations

Over the years the editor-in-chief has not only been an advocate of accountability to the public, but has also initiated formal forms of professional accountability. In 2002, the newspaper organised a self-evaluation on how *de Volkskrant* covered the Srebrenica dossier between 1993 and 1995 during the Balkan war. It followed an official research from the Dutch Institute for War Documentation (NIOD [Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie]), that concluded not only that political and military mistakes had been made, but also that the performance of the media had to be questioned (Klaassen & Klein, 2002). The media, including *de Volkskrant*, were accused of biased and emotion-driven reporting of the role of Dutchbat (the Dutch battalion of the United Nation forces) during the Srebrenica massacre. It was decided to commission a self-reflective research from two people from within the organisation, the former ombudsman and the ombudsman who had been in service at that time. To ensure neutrality the draft report was assessed by an external commission. The internal research was concluded with five recommendations for the editorial department: to emphasise facts instead of opinion in news coverage, to improve the expertise in war reporting, to invest in internal debate on the position of the newspaper in important issues, to set up a special team of journalists during long-term and complicated issues and to invest in independent research to prevent from being almost only dependent of government information (Klaassen & Klein, 2002).

Five years later, in 2007, the newspaper again initiated a self-evaluation process, reflecting on its reporting regarding the maltreatment of Iraqis by the Dutch military. On 17 November 2006 the front page opened with the headline "Dutch torture Iraqis". Government and officials objected to this formulation, claiming that it had not been torture but maltreatment. In the following weeks the newspaper reacted several times. The ombudsman devoted a column to the issue, the journalist who had written the original story provided a full-page reconstruction of the case and the editor-in-chief explained but also apologized in a column, when it became clear that the facts were not as reported. In June of that same year the official governmental investigation of the behaviour of the Dutch military was finalized, also concluding that the

newspaper had failed in certain aspects in its report about the so-called 'torture scoop' [martelprimeur]. The editor-in-chief then decided the newspaper should set up its own self-evaluation, conducted by an external journalist and a lawyer. This inquiry, concluding that the newspaper had already rectified and thus already held to account by the readers, was primarily meant for internal self-reflection and "to have lessons learned for the future" (De Volkskrant, 2007). The editor-in-chief did inform his readers about it with a column in the newspaper, ending with the words, "Self-reflection leads to a better newspaper. Also *de Volkskrant* is aware of this responsibility. It has to keep the strong tradition of transparency and self-reflective research" (De Volkskrant, 5 Dec. 2007). The research resulted in a protocol for scoops, written by a specially set-up internal working group.

First and foremost, these two self-evaluations were initiated to reflect internally on the mistakes made and therefore they are a form of covert professional accountability. However, both cases also illustrate how the newspaper gave insight in these self-evaluations to the reader and admitted its mistakes publicly. This then shows that the instruments also have a public accountability component.

5.3.3 Accountability policy

To conclude, in this newspaper public accountability has become more prominent over the years, with the use of a combination of suggested (Council for Journalism, media debate organisation, nieuwsmonitor) and self-initiated public accountability instruments (letters to the editor, ombudsman, author's names, correction box, transparency box, publication of self-evaluations). Moreover, this list of instruments shows that public accountability instruments can be either overt or covert depending on whether they address an individual or the public at large— although, the emphasis is on overt public accountability. Public accountability can also overlap with forms of professional accountability and vice versa as is the case with the ombudsman and the self-evaluations. The professional accountability instruments have both an informal and formal character and are all directed towards the journalists within the newspaper organisation. Overt professional accountability or improving the journalistic debate outside the organisational borders is only visible through the media debate organisation, which currently is not active anymore.

5.4 Instruments of responsiveness

The described accountability instruments differ from each other, depending on the objective at which they are aimed and the stakeholder concerned. The majority are externally oriented, showing accountability to the reader with the purpose of responding to criticism, giving explanation or showing transparency. This attention to the reader is also visible through an increasing number of instruments that aim to understand the concerns and desires of the public and society, to interact with the reader and create a dialogue, and hence show responsiveness to the public. Whether based on journalistic or commercial grounds, several instruments or projects were initiated to (re) connect with the public; some of them also have an accountability function, but here the emphasis is on their function of binding with the reader. In this section, based primarily on observation and document analysis, I describe these initiatives, which I will first attempt to classify into the two different forms of responsiveness detailed in Chapter 3: civic and strategic. Signs of the third type, empathic responsiveness, were not identified. Coming closer to the public does not take any form of siding with the citizens or acting as a moral entrepreneur. The analysis of the interviews and observations in section 5.6 will provide a deeper analysis of the reasons behind these initiatives.

5.4.1 Civic responsiveness

Letters to the editor

Over the past years, *de Volkskrant* has started a number of initiatives to connect with its public and to take the public's agenda into account. However, the idea of putting the reader's concerns at centre stage has a longer history, with letters to the editor and opinion pages providing space for comments by the public since 1948. The opinion editorial unit is responsible for the opinion and discussion pages in the newspaper. Besides complaints, the letters can also address salient issues of concern to the readers, of which a selection is published in the newspaper and online. This shows the newspaper's attempt to be responsive to the reader's agenda. Three formats of contributions are possible: letters sent in by readers, opinion articles on request of the newspaper, and articles sent in by readers or others. As mentioned before, there is a separate editor answering readers' letters, which predominantly takes the form of public accountability. Thus this instrument can take both the form of accountability and responsiveness depending on the objective the newspaper aims to reach.

Public-oriented journalism

The idea of putting the reader more at centre stage followed the appointment of a new editor-in-chief in 1995. He propagated a shift from institutional news to news that affects society, approaching the interest of the reader and the general public, "The newspaper should free itself from institutional journalism, in search for the non-registered reality" (Ybema, 2003: 146). This issue reappeared during and shortly after the Fortuyn period, when media were being criticized for having missed or ignored popular sentiments in society. "*De Volkskrant* was completely unaware of the rising discontent in the country", said an editor when reflecting back on this period (de Volkskrant, 2006: 19). To obtain a better understanding of the problems Fortuyn was addressing correspondents were placed in neighbourhoods deemed problematic and journalists were asked to write articles from inside society. The editor-in-chief stimulated a new style of journalistic practice that aimed to be more responsive to the general public.

Online interactive project

In 2005, *de Volkskrant* has started specific projects to connect with the public and address issues of public concern. It began an online interactive 'social agenda' that focused on pressing issues of and in collaboration with its readers, who could allot priority to specific issues. The focus would not only be on describing the problems and ills of society, but also on the possible range and solutions. The project, initiated by a former deputy editor-in-chief, used several methods to interact with the public. On the website readers were able to rank the subjects they deemed best to be discussed and elaborated on. Public debates were organised across the country and news articles on debate topics were published in the newspaper and on the website. This year-long project was repeated in following years, focusing on spatial and urban planning, and on economic issues. In November 2009 the last agenda was presented: that of the education. Two days after the first announcement, more than 7250 people had ranked the subjects of the agenda (internal minutes of the 10:30 am meeting, 23-11-2009). Currently, with the new editor-in-chief as of July 2010 the 'agenda project' has stopped, although the reason for this is not entirely clear.

Weblogs

De Volkskrant started a weblog in 2005 with the intention to "strengthen the relationship between the reader/ website visitor and the editorial staff" (Bogaerts, 2005). Not only were journalists asked and stimulated to write blog posts, but there was also a special section for readers to start their own weblog under the auspices of *de Volkskrant*. One of the intentions behind this is the possible use of such contributions to provide material for new news stories. However, as of January 2011, the new editor-in-chief decided to cease the reader weblog as he felt it required too much technical support. Moreover, since March 2011 the publisher of the newspaper, de Persgroep, decided to disconnect the website from the print newspaper. Consequently, it is unlikely that citizen contributions generated from the weblogs will be used or shown in the print newspaper.

Public debates

While the Internet has made interactivity with the reader easier, more traditional forms of interaction, through public debates, are also used. Since 2005, the newspaper has organised ten debates per year on a topical issue under the heading *The newspaper on Sunday* [De Krant op Zondag][2]. The editorial department for the science section [Kennis] regularly organises public debates, discussing science-related subjects with a panel of invited experts. In addition, since 2009, the newspaper has been collaborating with the Free University of Amsterdam, organizing debates that question prevailing opinions.

'Reader, tell us'

Prompted by interactive possibilities on the Internet, the project *Reader, Tell us* [Lezer, Zeg het maar] was initiated in 2008 by a head of one of the editorial units. The idea was to anticipate issues of interest or concern to the reader. A notice was put out in the newspaper asking the readers to send in ideas for news articles:

> *Dear reader, every day we decide what we publish in the newspaper and put on the site. We are not bad at doing that. We understand our profession; we combine knowledge and experience and can build on a long tradition. But you, the reader, also has a lot of knowledge and sometimes we overlook things (Nicolasen, 2008).*

2 Since 2009 there is no newspaper published on Sunday in the Netherlands. The title indicates the newspaper's effort to organise something for the readers on the day that there is no newspaper published.

The ten best ideas were to be published in the newspaper. However, a small number of visitors took over the discussion on the website with harsh discriminative comments and the newspaper felt it had to end this project.

5.4.2 Strategic responsiveness

Besides these instruments that have the aim to take the public's agenda into account, and make connections and bridge the gap with the public, the newspaper has taken initiatives to bind with the (potential) reader for more strategic and commercial reasons. While this is not made explicit, the description and the use of the instruments seem to point to a more commercial reasoning.

Weblogs

Besides a civic component, the weblogs show to have a clear commercial motive to try to relate to the (potential) reader to increase their loyalty for the newspaper. From the beginning, the initiator confirmed there is commercial interest for this experiment, "We are not a philanthropic organisation" (Bogaerts, 2005). When the newspaper decided to stop the citizen blogs, Bogaerts, the initiator, who is no longer working for the newspaper, asserted that now the newspaper has to "find alternative ways to relate to its *consumer*" (own italics, Pleijter, 2011).

Social network sites

In June 2010, after my research period at the newspaper, a social networking editor was appointed with the main objective of improving contacts with relevant news sources, enhancing the reach of their journalistic productions and creating new journalistic products through the use of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Whereas social networking sites provide the opportunity for interacting and engaging with the (potential) reader and public to be able to understand issues of their concern, no specific reference to this aspect was made when the appointment was announced (Van Lier, 2010). The focus is on presenting *de Volkskrant* on social networking sites and to introduce new forms of media production rather than using these sites for public interaction and engagement.

5.4.3. Policy of responsiveness

In conclusion, historically *de Volkskrant* has not only emphasised its responsibility by informing, but also by providing a platform for expression. In recent years,

the newspaper has made several new attempts to engage with the public—whether readers, citizens or consumers—and to understand their wishes and concerns. An initial look at the instruments of responsiveness shows that most instruments are prompted by civic reasons with the intention of bridging the gap with the public. Moreover, two online instruments seem to also have a commercial component.

5.5 Practicing accountability: from introduction to incorporation

The overview of the introduced instruments of accountability and responsiveness suggests that the newspaper is investing in the relationship with its reader, with the final goal of improving the quality and appreciation of its performance. While instruments, such as the self-evaluations, are clearly driven by specific incidents, others have gradually been introduced over a longer period of time. However, instruments only accomplish the aimed effect if they are actually acknowledged and supported among the editorial staff and used in the daily journalistic routine. In this section, I will evaluate how the instruments are used and adopted by analysing to what extent they have been implemented, incorporated or internalised at the newspaper (see Chapter 4 for an elaboration of these phases of adoption).

The level of adoption of instruments depends on many factors, such as the acknowledgment of the instrument among the staff, the visibility of the instrument, the number of years since the instrument was introduced and the continuity of the instrument. The appreciation and support for such instruments is also highly dependent on how the staff define and relate to accountability. Among the whole editorial staff of *de Volkskrant* there is a general consensus on the importance of being accountable to the reader and this has increased in recent years. However, the majority of the respondents define accountability, different from the theoretical concept, as a mechanism to explain and being responsible and not to justify its actions to readers or other external actors. Moreover, accountability is seen as something that is done after publication, when asked. Accountability is therefore external, *post factum* and reactive. Accountability is thought of by *de Volkskrant* journalists as a process directed at the public rather than the media professional. More importantly, at all levels of the organisation being responsible is felt to be more salient than being accountable. Their main tasks consist of informing and

serving as "a guardian and provider of critical information on venal practices in society", in the words of one of the deputy editors-in-chief. He emphasised the important tasks of the six research journalists who are exempted from the daily production obligations to invest in in-depth stories and expose critical issues.

Nonetheless, the issue of accountability is something the majority feel they cannot ignore as a result of many changes in both society and the media sector. Many believe that specific incidents where the role of the newspaper was questioned contributed to an increasing demand for accountability. However, the majority consider that other factors —such as individualisation, depillarization and an increasingly assertive and demanding citizen —have had a greater impact. The letters editor said, "We are currently in a culture where people want to give their opinion directly, pour their hearts out. It is a trend visible throughout society". At the same time, many admitted that the Fortuyn incident "was definitely rock bottom in press history". Nonetheless, the journalists who were directly involved reacted in a rather irritated manner, with a defensive attitude. The parliamentary journalists who had been working in The Hague at that time strongly stated that these accusations were demonstrably incorrect. One interviewee protested, "It is not true that we did not write about the working-class issues. We just didn't do it in the same way Pim Fortuyn did. We took a different perspective and afterwards we were called upon to be accountable. That was ridiculous".

While the reasoning behind the instruments might not be clear to everyone, the concept of accountability, in its different facets, and the various instruments are known to everyone in the organisation. However, the level of adoption differs. The following analysis shows that none of the instruments have become internalised as part of the journalists' norms and values, but range between the phases of implementation and incorporation. Table 5.1 provides an overview of the instruments of accountability and their level of adoption.

Table 5.1: Instruments of accountability at de Volkskrant

Year	Instrument	Type of accountability	Suggested/ Self-initiated	Covert/ Overt (O/C)	Level of adopion
1948	Letters to the edior	Public Civic resp.	Self-initiated	O & C	Incorporated
1960	Council for Journalism	Public Professional	Suggested	O & C O	Collaborating
1997	Ombudsman	Public Professional	Self-initiated	O & C C	Incorporated
End 1990s	Publication author's names	Public	Self-initiated	O	Incorporated
2004	Correction box	Public	Self-initiated	O	Incorporated
2005	Mediadebat	Public Professional	Suggested	O O	Collaborating (until 2010)
2005	Nieuwmonitor	Basis for public and professional	Suggested	O O	—
±2006	Transparency box	Public	Self-initiated	O	Incorporated
2006	Publication for self-reflection	Public Professional	Self-initiated	O C	Incorporated
1975	Editorial guideline	Professional	Self-initiated	C	Implemented
1975	Editorial statute	Professional	Self-initiated	C	Implemented
Unknown	Evaluation meetings	Professional	Self-initiated	C	Implemented
Unknown	Casual discussion meetings	Professional	Self-initiated	C	Implemented
2002 & 2007	Self-evaluations	Professional Public	Self-initiated	C O	Implemented

5.5.1 Public accountability incorporated

There is an overall consensus on the importance of demonstrating accountability by responding to the reader. The editor-in-chief is a strong proponent of public accountability and over the years has introduced numerous instruments and stimulated the use of them. When asked what *de Volkskrant* journalists think of the ombudsman as a mechanism of accountability, the great majority started similarly stating that as "an institution" the ombudsman is a very good thing to have. They see it fulfils a role for the reader and enhances the relationship between reader and newspaper. The importance of answering readers' letters was also seen as essential at the present time when readers are volatile and easily distrustful or discontent. Respondents feel it is not compulsory to

answer and no sanctions exist, but "it is just something that is decent and important to do", said one journalist. They feel that taking the public into consideration is something that has to be done these days. Yet, the majority of the interviewees do not feel they have an obligation to respond to the public in general, but more specifically they are committed to those who are a subscriber of the newspaper. This indicates that responding to readers' complaints could be a way for them to safeguard subscribers' loyalty; it is thus also a commercial motive.

Besides, or maybe because of, the importance of responding to readers, the editorial staff actively cooperate in applying the various instruments. For example, even though the journalists and heads of editorial units dread the ombudsman coming to their department, they take him seriously and find his function unassailable for the reader. The ombudsman himself also notices that colleagues collaborate and provide him with information when asked.

The same goes for answering to readers' letter, the majority answer them; not as a matter of agreeing with the reader, but listening to their complaints and taking them seriously. By explaining to the reader how the article came about, much of the initial anger or dissatisfaction the reader might have is expected to diffuse. Box 5.1 shows a weekly email from the readers' editor with the responses of the public and a reader being pleased at receiving a response (see pg. 102).

The correction box has attained a permanent place in the organisation. The corrections are not only based on complaints of readers, but increasingly journalists themselves point out mistakes to be added to the correction box. All these are indications of the need felt to respond to criticisms, not only when forced but also when self-motivated.

The interviews showed that journalists increasingly respond to the reader and cooperate in using the public accountability instruments, which indicates that the instruments are incorporated in the organisational structure and culture. However, there is still quite a defensive attitude underlying their actions. Most journalists believe it is important to answer reader's letters, but they are not always happy about it, "The relation with the reader has become more intense, but not always more pleasant". Some do not want to answer when

the complainant is not a subscriber or when the complaints are not relevant, harsh or discriminatory. Others plainly stated, "If you don't like it, just go to the next page or don't buy the newspaper". This defensive undertone can be explained by the majority feeling that the complaints or requests are often on self-interested issues of the reader, which the journalists cannot take into account. Several journalists told me how they received pages of information material that readers expected them to look into or how they had to engage in an unpleasant e-mail conversation when the reader was not satisfied.

Journalists are also quite hesitant and not always very willing to respond or to engage with the reader when the issue raised touches upon their professional responsibility and autonomy. This is particularly the case with older journalists, who have been practicing the profession quite some time. With much freedom and independence, they are used to working in a certain way, see their role as informers and do not feel the need to engage with the reader. They feel strongly that accountability is embedded in responsibility and should not be explicated in these formal instruments. Most respondents recognize their defensive attitude when forced to admit their mistakes, particularly to outsiders. One of the deputies made the following analogy, "When journalists receive criticism they close their shells like an oyster". This mix of recognizing the need to take the public seriously and defending their autonomy also creates ambivalence: on the one hand they feel the necessity to be open in a competitive media market, on the other they want to retain their professional authority.

To conclude, since the late 1990s many public accountability instruments have been implemented and they appear to have been incorporated in the organisation. Being accountable to the reader is felt to be important and has received a prominent place within the organisation's structure. The fact that public accountability has been incorporated is particularly the result of years of investment and stimulus by the editor-in-chief, but also of the number of years these instruments have been implemented and the external pressure of public opinion. Moreover, journalists see the importance of being accountable to the reader also as a commercial strategy, as a way to maintain or improve the relationship. Yet, even though the need to invest in that relationship is considered important, the instruments of public accountability are not internalised, part of the self-evident journalistic culture, as they are felt to conflict with professional values and responsibilities.

5.5.2 Professional accountability implemented

The self-evaluations, internal evaluation meetings and the casual discussion meetings have been implemented as forms of covert professional accountability through a top-down strategy. Self-evaluations are felt necessary when important issues are at stake and the protocol written during the self-evaluation in 2007 was seen as a step forward in the professionalisation process. Internal evaluation moments occur at fixed times where everyone can air their criticism or discuss mistakes made, when felt necessary. However, in practice being accountable to one's colleagues is primarily done informally on a one-to-one basis. Throughout the day the journalists brainstorm, discuss and collectively make decisions for the newspaper. Even though informal structures do not necessarily prevent instruments or attitudes from being adopted in the organisation, both practical and cultural issues prevent professional accountability from being incorporated. There is an overall hesitant attitude among journalists to provide each other feedback.

There is disagreement between the editor-in-chief and professionals on the objective of the internal evaluation meetings. Where the editor-in-chief believes evaluation is important, the journalists are more focused on planning and making stories for the newspaper of the next day. Officially, the daily plenary meeting and the sub-editorial meetings have both a planning and an evaluation function, but in practice planning exceeds evaluation. The majority of the editorial units prefer to get together to brainstorm collaboratively and make plans for the next day instead of giving feedback since this can be done informally. A unit head said, "By the time everyone is in, everyone has already aired his or her opinion informally on the newspaper of the day". In practice this informal character leads to less investment in taking the time to evaluate one's work. Journalists are quite hesitant to provide colleagues with feedback, whether in a formal or informal setting. While officially there is a place and time at the 10:30 am plenary meeting, where any member of the staff can voice their dissatisfaction, in practice journalists believe that their voices do not matter. A journalist said, "I do not have the impression that my opinion counts at the 10:30 am meeting". The majority of the journalists feel that this is not a real forum for discussion, evaluation or self-reflection. As many said, "It takes courage to dare to say something". In the smaller setting of the 10:00 am editorial meetings the professionals feel more at ease and are able to give their feedback and opinions. A journalist stated, "At our own

daily meeting you can express your viewpoints and everyone listens to your comments. But, at the plenary meeting not much is left of that." However, the unit heads, deputy editors-in-chief and editor-in-chief believe that the possibilities for feedback exist and are of utmost importance for the quality of the newspaper. One deputy and two unit heads even said that, *de Volkskrant* is known for having a critical culture, even "a kind of masochistic culture". The editor-in-chief felt that it was peculiar that journalists did not feel they had the possibility to voice their opinion, stating, "This management is very accessible and approachable. When one is not satisfied about something, one can always enter my room and talk to me about it".

Taking a look at the more formal instruments, there are also several reasons why journalists are hesitant to use them. Firstly, it is not clear when and how the instruments of self-evaluation should be deployed, as there are no clear guidelines. Paradoxically, when specific formal guidelines are written, such as the protocol for scoops, many doubt the use and effect of them in daily practice. A unit head said, "Such a protocol is quite stylish to the outside world, but I really have my doubts on the internal effect. A good journalist knows which principles to keep to and won't consult a protocol." A journalist added, "You can't solve issues by writing on a piece of paper how things should be done". This shows an ambivalent attitude to formalisation of procedures. On the one hand, they need more clarity on how to use the instruments. On the other hand, they do not believe formal procedures will do their performance any good.

A second problem is that the self-evaluations and casual discussion meetings are only organised incidentally, which makes it difficult for journalists to fit it in their daily routine. The incidental character of the self-evaluation and the protocol linked to the last self-evaluation was described by a journalist, "When an incident just happened it is at the top of our minds, but after a few weeks something like a protocol fades away".

A third reason for the journalists' hesitance is that there is no consensus between the editor-in-chief and journalists on the actual purpose of the evaluative instruments. While the management believes the self-evaluations serve the purpose of both public and professional accountability, the journalists believe they merely feed an external purpose. The journalists regard them as

a tool to explain and be accountable to the reader and many believe they merely serve as a damage-control mechanism, as a way to restore the image of the newspaper, which is felt essential in times of financial insecurity and decreasing circulation figures. To them, the instruments do not lead to internal self-reflection or debate.

This hesitance to provide feedback or reflect on one's performance and what one journalist described as a rather "closed debate culture" are due to several factors. One is related to the nature of a newspaper. Once it is published, things cannot be changed. Therefore, many find it futile to make remarks on a daily basis about the newspaper. Another factor is related to the people participating. Mostly, higher-ranking journalists are involved with the evaluations and self-evaluations, which makes it difficult for journalists to speak out. Moreover, while there are several formal instruments, there is preference for informal moments of evaluation. And, in practice evaluation is overshadowed by planning and working on the next day. These issues have not been left unnoticed and, over the years, *de Volkskrant* has experimented with different forms of evaluation, either in formal or informal setting. However, there still remains a hesitance to speak out and provide colleagues with constructive feedback. This might then be related to the conflict between the increasing need of the management for control and professionalisation and the traditional journalistic culture of freedom and autonomy. Newspapers have become big organisations connected to large publishing firms. Over the years, editors-in-chief have taken the position of managing rather than making the newspaper. While more and more the journalistic profession is obliged to adhere to standardized procedures set out by the organisation, journalists prefer to keep to their autonomy. They believe it is first and foremost the responsibility of the individual journalist to perform well and provide output of high quality, which should not be constrained by formal organisational procedures. A unit head said indignantly, "The result is a journalism pleasing organisational demand".

Concluding, there are formal moments when members of the staff can get together to evaluate, provide feedback and reflect on each other's performance. While formally implemented, in practice there is a rather closed debate culture, in which the professional accountability instruments, whether of a formal or informal character, are not incorporated in the organisation. The daily

processes have a dominant focus on the following day and less on looking back, evaluating and providing the opportunity for peers to hold each other to account.

5.6 Responsiveness: a conflicting issue

The structural and performance challenges have given priority not only to accountability, but also to the need to engage with and to be responsive to the public. Everyone agrees that the idea of taking the reader into account and relating to issues within society is necessary these days. Particularly, the 'older' journalists see a shift in attitude, where the reader is put in a more central position. One unit head formulated this shift from a media supply to demand market as follows, "In the past, we would write what *we* thought was interesting, now we think more about what the reader might find interesting". While there is a visible shift and being responsive to the public has become more notable, questions remain as to why this shift has taken place and to what extent this idea has been adopted in the organisation.

5.6.1 A combination of civic and strategic responsiveness

Initiatives to obtain a better understanding of the reader and to increase the dialogue are seen by most interviewees as a positive shift and a less arrogant attitude towards the reader. It offers the possibility of generating more creative ideas, interacting more directly with the reader, learning more about what the reader is interested in and potentially contributing to a feeling of community. These motives fulfil the characteristics of civic responsiveness. Yet, instruments such as the public debates and the online agenda projects seem to be more based on pressing issues of a higher-educated and a rather left-leaning subscribers group than the actual issues of the general public. The involved citizens and the people present during the debates do not represent the average citizen, but characterize a higher-class public. When the average citizen was asked to contribute in the project 'Reader, tell us', the newspaper was forced to end it as a result of a group of people trying to take over the discussion. Although in the past years the editor-in-chief has been a strong proponent of addressing a wider group of (potential) readers, in practice *de Volkskrant* is not so much focused on addressing the perceived demands and wishes of the general public, but has instead focused on its traditional subscribers, which represent a more left-leaning and intellectual sector of society.

While formally most instruments of responsiveness have a clear civic motive, the interview and observation analysis shows that *all* instruments also have strategic motives to try to bind the (potential) reader to the newspaper. The specific distinction between strategic and civic responsiveness does not apply here. Taking the reader into consideration is something the journalists feel they cannot turn their back on since the circulation figures are decreasing, the subscribers are ageing, the younger public is hard to attract and the media market is now more competitive than ever. In the past years, the newspaper has made various attempts to retain its readers, attract new ones and safeguard the economic situation by introducing new formats such as expanding the Saturday edition in 2007 and introducing a tabloid format in 2010. A unit head stated, "We, and all newspapers, are desperately seeking the right recipe to stop decreasing circulation figures". Many found it obvious that these initiatives of responsiveness were commercially motivated, trying to retain or attract new readers. A journalist told me they often make jokes about this situation: "Guys, this is one of our last readers, we have to cherish him". In this context, the majority of the journalists believe their task is also a commercial one: to serve the reader or subscriber and not the general public. Box 5.3 provides an illustration of how a unit head explains that strategic motives determine their intention to be responsive. Beyond its democratic task of providing information in order for the public to make

Box 5.3. Engaging with the public: civic or strategic responsiveness?

A unit head commented:

Do you believe those things were introduced from the conviction that we must get closer to our readers? Yes! But why do we want this? Because we are afraid of losing our readers. And why exactly do we fear this? Well, this would mean a loss of income. These are clearly the motivating factors, although no one will confirm this to you. But it really is so. At a certain moment you see that readers walk away. Jesus, guys. I once saw a publisher, 10 years ago. Actually, also the current publisher. The worse the newspaper is doing, the more the man seems to enjoy his job. Incomprehensible but true.

In the meantime it [the attention for the reader] has become the policy of the editor-in-chief. …It turns out that people or readers have a need for this and that it's actually very gratifying to see 200–300 people having an in-depth discussion on a certain matter in De Rode Hoed [a discussion centre for current events- YdH]. But the question is: is this your role as a newspaper? Do you believe it should be the paper's role? And what added value does it have for the newspaper? Well, according to the editor-in-chief, it leads to loyalty and commitment from our readers. But I wonder, is this our primary task as a journalist?

sense of the world around them, the newspaper is a commercial organisation, which needs to adhere to mechanisms of the market. The recent structural issues have challenged the "delicate combination between private enterprise and public responsibility" (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004a: 15). The publisher director believed a more intense collaboration between the editorial and business department of the newspaper was necessary in times with declining circulation figures and advertising revenues. However, both he and the editor-in-chief assured me that this alliance is only at managerial level and not related to the content.

5.6.2 Responsiveness incorporated

Whether as a result of civic or strategic reasoning, journalists increasingly see the importance of engaging with the public and are familiar with and make use of the instruments of responsiveness. This shows that they are incorporated in the organisation. Table 5.2 provides an overview of the instruments of responsiveness and level of adoption. However, there is still quite some resistance to involving the reader in the journalistic process. They would prefer readers to take the role of end user. If involved, citizens are allowed to contribute to the last stage of the journalistic process: to provide interpretation and comments on the news coverage. While in a few projects such as the reader weblogs, *Reader, tell us*, and the agenda project readers were able to contribute to the primary stage of the journalistic process by generating possible ideas, journalists believe it is their professional task to generate ideas, select, filter and write the story. Among the unit heads and the journalists there is an overall fear of crossing the borders of professional journalism, believing that listening too much to the public devalues the profession. In this context, many journalists sense that the editor-in-chief is too preoccupied with relating to the reader, which causes the newspaper to bend too much under the wishes of the reader. But this internal discussion is not new. When in 1995 the editor-in-chief stimulated this more public oriented approach, the staff were quite sceptical towards this new policy, believing that it "would decrease the quality, comparable to popular newspapers" (Ybema, 2003: 155).

Besides the conflicting relationship between responsibility and responsiveness, the gradual shift to putting the reader more centre stage is a difficult issue. There is a general perception that issues of 'the common man' should be addressed, but it is not clear how this should be done. The management does

not appear to put across any clear overall policy and strategy in this area. In this context, many interviewees said that the newspaper will lose its identity and become too popular if it does not take a clear direction. One of the unit heads was very harsh in tone and believes the newspaper is making the wrong choices: "I am not a proponent of the journalist in an ivory tower but at this point the journalist has sunk low". He was positive about listening to the public and signalling trends, but sees a negative shift to consulting with the reader and not using professional knowledge and experience. Particularly, the rank-and-file journalists were negative and not only feared this development but also thought the newspaper had already gone too far in the direction of populism, with negative consequences for its identity and credibility.

In all, the relationship with the reader has altered substantially over the past 20 years. The newspaper has made a shift from a supply to demand approach, putting the reader more at the forefront. The mechanisms of responsiveness appear to be prompted by strategic and performance concerns. They are not only a response to the accusations that the media failed to report on the issues within society, but perhaps more importantly, they have become essential to the newspaper's survival in today's fiercely competitive market.

Table 5.2: Instruments of responsiveness at de Volkskrant

Year	Instrument	Type of responsiveness	Level of adoption
1948	Letters to the editor	Civic	Incorporated
Mid 1990s	Public-oriented journalism	Civic	Incorporated
2005	Online interactive project	Civic & Strategic	Incorporated (until 2010)
2005	Weblogs	Civic & Strategic	Implemented (reader weblogs until 2011)
2005	Public debates	Civic & Strategic	Incorporated
2008	'Reader, tell us'	Civic & Srategic	Stopped in 2008
2010	Social networking sites	Civic & Strategic	Not to be determined (after my research period)

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an analysis of how *de Volkskrant* is responding to structural and performance challenges in terms of accountability and responsiveness. In 1999 the editor-in-chief perceived a crisis in trust between the media and public and the media and politics. The editor-in-chief at the time of my research believes "the media are still under fire" and trust relationships are waning. By being publicly accountable and responsive this newspaper aims at (re)establishing the trust and loyalty of the public. In Chapter 2, I demonstrated that the media performance debate increased from 2000 onwards, with a peak in 2002. *De Volkskrant* had already perceived or suspected a growing gap with the public in the 1990s as a result of the structural changes. With the appointment of the former editor-in-chief in 1995, the management had determined that in order to cope with changes in the media landscape the newspaper needed to address a broader public. Accountability, openness and being responsive to the general public appear to be part of this shift. Currently, the need to pay attention to the public has gained a prominent place in the organisation. The structural problems of decreasing circulation, an insecure financial situation and growing competition from other media are the most significant factors in this increasing appetite for bridging and binding with the reader. Whereas the responsive measures could be an answer to the criticisms the newspaper and the media in general received during the Fortuyn period, it is more likely that they are strategic, responding to these structural problems. In any case, this attempt to make connections with the public at best succeeds in addressing specific involved higher-educated subscribers of the newspaper. Understanding and covering the life issues of the common man is considered difficult and not favoured, as it might make the newspaper too 'popular'. In addition, journalists in particular believe an undue focus on the interest of the reader can potentially endanger their trustworthy status as gatekeeper and watchdog. Back in 1996 a newspaper journalist revealed this fear that the profession and the industry might buckle under the wishes of the public, while management was increasingly emphasizing the need to focus on a broader public agenda (Van Westerloo, 1996). It seems as if the relationship with the reader is a persistent debate in response to the continuing societal and media changes. With the new editor-in-chief several instruments of responsiveness have stopped including the weblogs and the agenda projects. It is to be seen which focus he will take to cope with the continuous structural challenges.

While journalists are not as preoccupied with the criticism on their performance, the editor-in-chief puts a great emphasis on this criticism and hopes that accountability instruments will provide a solution to restoring and retaining the trust relations with the (potential) reader. At the same time, it is also a way for *de Volkskrant* to distinguish itself from its competitors and profile itself as a quality newspaper, and thus serves a strategic reasoning. The journalists in particular believe strongly that the accountability instruments have an important strategic objective. Responding to criticism and admitting mistakes in an overt manner serves as a damage-control mechanism which they hope will retain or enhance their high-quality image. There is a focus on overt public accountability, but answering directly to the reader in the form of covert accountability might be as important to close the growing gap between journalist and reader. Whether responding to performance or structural problems, in the end journalists prefer to invest in their performance and responsibility instead of showing their accountability and being responsive, as this does not sit so easily with their ideas of autonomy and professional values.

Where public accountability is translated in specific instruments, professional accountability is more informal. The voluntary and unofficial character prevents journalists from investing in evaluating and reflecting on their performance as a group. Most journalists, particularly at newspapers, are used to working independently on their own story in their field of expertise. Moreover, as their work becomes increasingly time-pressured they are less inclined to do so. The editor-in-chief has regularly voiced the need for more self-reflection and initiated instruments such as the self-evaluations and the informal gatherings. He also believes the ombudsman does not only form a bridge between reader and editorial staff, but also helps to promote internal reflection on one's performance. Nevertheless, in practice the editor-in-chief seems to be more preoccupied with responding to external pressures than with the internal debate.

This difference in priority has consequences for the extent to which the instruments are adopted in the organisation. Due to the increasing focus on the public since the mid-1990s, as a result of both performance and structural challenges, the newspaper has continued its aspiration to be more accountable, transparent and responsive to the public, with numerous instruments of public accountability and responsiveness now incorporated in the organisation

structure and culture. However, professional accountability in terms of evaluation is only in the implementation phase, not incorporated, let alone internalised. The greater emphasis for public over professional accountability also coincides with the way the editorial staff defines the concept of accountability: focused on the public. Professional accountability is more associated with professionalism. The professionalisation of journalism is a trend that in the Netherlands has been visible since the 1960s and 1970s. At this time, newspapers started investing in (academically) educated journalists, also offering more internal education and improving the writing skills (Bardoel, 1997; Wijfjes, 2004; Ybema, 2003). This has developed over the years, focusing on improving journalistic performance and media organisations. However, the structural challenges in combination with increasing criticisms and incidents where the newspaper's responsibility was questioned, have emphasised the need to invest in the relationship with the public and the reader rather than to invest in improving a critical analysis within the profession.

In Chapter 3, I argued that accountability is a response to performance problems, while responsiveness has both a strategic and journalistic reasoning. This case study indeed illustrates that accountability instruments such as the ombudsman, the letter to the editor and the self-evaluations are used to respond to external criticism of the media's performance. At the same time, both being accountable and responsive are strategies to cope with structural problems. Showing accountability and being responsive are ways to invest in the newspaper's quality of journalism in order to regain the trust and loyalty of the reader and to distinguish the newspaper from its competitors.

Chapter 6

Opening the gate of the closed fortress:

A case study of NOS Nieuws

Chapter 6

Opening the gate of the closed fortress: A case study of NOS Nieuws[1]

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter evaluated how the newspaper *de Volkskrant* has coped with criticism of its performance and with demands for accountability and responsiveness. Public service broadcasting in the Netherlands, as in many other Western European countries, has also come in for a great deal of criticism recently and has increasingly been pressured to be more accountable to its public. Often public broadcasters are criticized for acting as a fortress and not being open to outsiders, as an executive of Dutch public service broadcasting stated (Van Liempt, 2005). When, in 2002, the populist politician Pim Fortuyn was murdered, Dutch public service broadcasters were accused of demonizing Fortuyn and creating a climate that led to his death. By siding with the socio-political elite, they were blamed for missing or ignoring society's problems, particularly the issue of immigration. The Fortuyn incident was seen more or less as the apotheosis of a longer process of erosion of coherence and consensus within society that had created a general discontent towards the established elite, including the media. The public broadcasters did not ignore these accusations: a few months after Fortuyn was murdered, the editor-in-chief of the Netherlands Public Broadcasting new organisation (NOS [Nederlandse Omroep Stichting]) published a memorandum —*In Attack* [Ten Aanval] in which he urged journalists to rethink their public role in terms of openness, responsiveness and accountability (NOS, 2002). In an historical overview of 50 years of the NOS the historian Van Liempt summarizes this period for the NOS as the "New Openness that the editor-in-chief is preaching" (Van Liempt, 2005: 314).

1 A shorter version of this chapter co-authored with Jo Bardoel will be published in Spanish in Lamuedra Graván, M. (Ed.), El futuro de la Televisión de Servicio Público en España: la necesaria alianza con la ciudadanía [The future of public service broadcasting in Spain: the necessary relationship with its public]. Madrid: Editorial Popular.

Public broadcasting in the Netherlands was originally created in the 1920s out of citizens' initiatives. It resulted in a decentralized system with numerous broadcasting associations with distinctive religious and ideological profiles and financed by voluntary member support. Since the Second World War a license fee was introduced, which lasted until 2000 when this was replaced by indirect taxation (Bardoel, 2008). Following the depillarization process in the 1960s the self-evident loyalty of the members waned, obliging broadcasting organisations to rethink their relationship with the public. The Broadcasting Act of 1969 allowed new entrants into the system that did not specifically represent an ideological or religious pillar (Brants & Slaa, 1994: 11). This created internal competition and a consumerist struggle for listeners and viewers (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004b). The introduction of commercial broadcasting in 1989 reinforced competition. Growing criticism of public broadcasting and the changing relationship with its audience has intensified the debate on and demand for media accountability and responsiveness.

This chapter will describe and analyse how public service broadcasting is responding to this debate, focusing on *NOS Nieuws*, which is part of the NOS and acts as the independent news organisation of Netherlands Public Broadcasting (NPO [Nederlandse Publieke Omroep). As in the previous chapter, the aim is both to describe the organisation's instruments of accountability and responsiveness and to analyse to how (and to what extent) they are adopted and used in the organisational structure and journalistic culture. For a better understanding of the context in which this study took place, I will first give a brief insight in the daily journalistic process.

6.2 The daily journalistic routine

Dutch public broadcasting's news broadcast, *NOS Journaal*, started its first bulletin in 1956 with three a week at 8:00 pm (Van Liempt, 2005). Over the years it has expanded its activities with hourly news casts on television and radio and up-to-date news on the website and teletext. Since the reorganisation in 2006, the organisation has converged, providing news on radio, television, the Internet, teletext and mobile applications. The news service now operates under the name *NOS Nieuws*.

The news organisation is located at the Mediapark in Hilversum in a large concrete building that is often described as a closed fortress (Van Liempt,

2005). Since the reorganisation, the newsroom of *NOS Nieuws* has been changed to an open working space with the 'central desk' at its heart. Here, all incoming news is discussed and coordinated with unit heads of the national, foreign, economic and political news desks, and with coordinators or program editors of the different platforms. At the first meeting at 9:15 am initial ideas for news items are pitched and, as a deputy editor-in-chief put it on his blog, "The NOS machine starts off, reporters and correspondents are sent out, camera teams and satellite feeds are on the way" (Overdiek, 4 March 2009).

Throughout the day there are numerous fixed moments when representatives of the different editorial units and media platforms come together to discuss the potential news items for the different news broadcasts. These meetings are led by the deputy editor-in-chief and the program editor of the 8 pm prime news broadcast. Ideas and news angles are discussed and exchanged. A continuous process takes place of discussing, considering, changing and adapting news items, with representatives of the different editorial units trying to "sell their items to the program editor". Nearing a deadline, the activities shift from the central desk to the "islands" of the different news broadcasts of radio and television. The program editor, together with the news anchor, is responsible for verifying and adapting the texts. The Internet and teletext unit operate differently as their news presentation is ongoing.

The different editorial units have a number of journalists working on possible future news items: the so-called 'planners'. They too get together at fixed times to discuss the range of possibilities and news items for the coming days. In all, there are a large number of meetings to discuss, plan and coordinate the news broadcasts. To break the hectic intensity and time pressure, at 1:15 pm everyone in the newsroom is invited to evaluate the news broadcasts of the past 24 hours, led by a deputy editor-in-chief or the editor-in-chief. Other evaluation moments usually take place right after the broadcast, but with a more informal character. The deputy editor-in-chief on duty is responsible for guarding the overall processes. Other deputy editors-in-chief and the editor-in-chief have a more distant role, being more involved with overall policy issues.

The current editor-in-chief has been in charge since 2002 and has resigned in July 2011. During my research period (August—October 2010) there

were three, rather new, deputy editors-in-chief. One came in 2003 from the commercial news organisation *RTL Nieuws* and has replaced the current editor-in-chief in July 2011. The second was a former NOS correspondent, who was appointed in 2008 for his multimedia skills (and resigned in 2010). The third, also appointed in 2008, came from a financial newspaper.

6.3 Accountability instruments

In the following sections I will describe the different accountability instruments that have either been implemented within *NOS Nieuws* or to which it adheres. These are divided into three types: political, public and professional. Market accountability is not applicable to a public organisation.

6.3.1 Political accountability

Traditionally, political accountability had been part and parcel of public broadcasting's philosophy (McQuail, 2003; Wessberg, 2005). It is the only media institution that, by law, is assigned a number of tasks for society to meet the needs that may be neglected by the private media market. Public broadcasting's television programmes are expected to offer a balanced range of information, culture, education and entertainment, and in that represent the diversity of opinions in society. Moreover, due to a scarcity of frequencies in the early days of radio and television transmission and the assumed social impact of the medium, regulation was already in place in the Netherlands in the 1930s (Bardoel & Van Cuilenburg, 2003). It is generally felt, however, that the government should keep its distance from editorial policies.

Media Act

The responsibilities and tasks of the NPO are clearly stipulated in the 1988 Media Act (which followed the Broadcasting Act of 1969). With the development of new transmission technologies and the opportunities this created for private broadcasters to enter the market the government introduced the Media Act to secure the current public broadcasting system in a changing market (Bardoel & Brants, 2003). When the dual broadcasting system was introduced in the following year, the government had to restructure and in a way to 'reinvent' its broadcasting policy. They did not automatically guarantee a secure position for public broadcasting anymore. The general move towards liberalization and deregulation, spurred by the European Union since the end of the 1980s, meant less government interference (Bardoel, 2008).

This increasing *laissez-faire* attitude forced public broadcasting to redefine its public role and find ways to address Dutch society as a whole. In 1998, NOS (which at that time served as the umbrella organisation, now known as NPO) published a memorandum about the future of public service broadcasting, *Publiek in de Toekomst* [Public in the future]. It suggested that public broadcasting should become more responsive and accountable through mechanisms like public debates and an independent ombudsman. NOS/NPO made clear that in the current competitive media environment it was paramount that public broadcasting explicitly demonstrated its public functions. Whereas in the past the legitimacy of its public service was mainly manifested through the different member-based broadcasting corporations, now it is increasingly measured by performance criteria and more public accountability (Bardoel 2008; Bardoel & Brants, 2003; Van der Haak 2001).

Visitation Commission

The most far-reaching proposal in the 1998 NOS report was an external independent assessment commission to periodically evaluate the performance of public broadcasting. Even though the public broadcaster itself suggested it, the revised Media Act of 2000 used a more regulatory discourse (see also De Haan & Bardoel, 2009). It obliged public service broadcasting to organise an evaluation of its performance every five years. To this end, it was required to install an external assessment 'visitation' commission [Visitatie Commissie] consisting of at least five independent experts, "inasmuch as possible representative" of the viewing and listening audience (Visitatie Landelijke Publieke Omroep, 2004: 343).

Policy plans and performance agreements

Other instruments that NOS is obliged to adhere to are policy plans and performance agreements. Since 2000, NOS has been obliged to be accountable for its performance and finances and to that end provide a policy plan [Tussentijds concessiebeleidsplan] every five years and an annual budget proposal [Meerjarenbegroting]. Also, since 2007, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has demanded from NPO (as successor to NOS) annual performance agreements, which indicate what the NPO and the specific broadcasters promise to do in a variety of genres. NPO is responsible for being accountable to government and does this via formal political accountability instruments. *NOS Nieuws* is only indirectly responsible for this

as it is accountable to the Board of NOS, which in turn is accountable to the umbrella organisation NPO. Although not politically accountable, *NOS Nieuws* is very much pre-occupied with being accountable to the public.

6.3.2 Public accountability

Public accountability had always been more or less self-evident, as it was arranged through the member-based pillar organisations (Brants & Slaa, 1994). Due to the depillarization process, the rapid rise of television and later the entrance of private broadcasters, public broadcasters gradually began to realize they had to invest in their public by being more transparent, open and accountable. *NOS Nieuws* did this through the following instruments.

Council for Journalism

One of the oldest ways for the public to file complaints is through the Council for Journalism [Raad voor de Journalistiek], which we have already come across in *de Volkskrant* case study. The Council has a self-regulatory character with no enforceable power and penalties. *NOS Nieuws* recognizes the Council, but it did not sign the covenant in which it is stated that the media should broadcast/publish all the verdicts and mention the existence of the Council in the credit titles of the news broadcasts. *NOS Nieuws* does, however, publish all the verdicts on its website and it overtly collaborates with the Council in that it goes to hearings when summoned and publishes a rectification when the judgement is grounded.

Public information services

Public service broadcasters in the Netherlands have always received letters from viewers and listeners, but did not generally deal with them in a systematic way (Brants & Slaa, 1994). In 1997, NOS introduced a 'public information service' [publieksvoorlichting] for external contacts, which gradually began to handle public complaints. During an internal reorganisation in 2006 the managing director of NOS proposed a more formalized system for dealing with public complaints as a result of the increasing number they had received since the introduction of email. At the moment, on average, about 100 complaints or reactions arrive each day. They vary from complaints about mistakes in spelling and language to bias in a news story. According to the employees of the complaints desk the tone is often quite rude. As one of them said, "The reactions can be very harsh, racist, sexist and discriminating. The

staff should not be bothered with these emails". Not all emails are forwarded to the editorial staff, yet all correspondents receive at least a standard reply. By centralizing the complaints the workload of the journalists is reduced and no further direct contact with the journalists is stimulated. In practice, however, email addresses are often known to a wide range of sources due to past contacts. This type of accountability is covert, as it responds to individual complaints, but it can also take the form of responsiveness. Since mid-2009, the complaints desk has sent a daily overview of complaints and comments they received that day under the title 'what was noticeable today'. In this way the editorial staff are informed of the opinion of the audience which it can use to take the public's concerns and desires into account.

Mediadebat

A suggested accountability measure is *Mediadebat*. After concluding that over the years the media had gained too much power, in 2003 two independent government advisory commissions, the Council for Social Development (RMO [Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling]) and the Council for Public Administration (ROB [Raad voor het Openbaar Bestuur], proposed specific measures for accountability to the public (RMO, 2003; ROB, 2003). One of the suggestions was the creation of a media debate organisation. Two years later in 2005, NOS was one of the initiators of *Mediadebat*, together with the journalists' union NVJ and the publishers' organisation NDP. This organisation functioned both as an instrument of public and professional accountability, as it aimed to stimulate debate on the performance of journalism. Since 2010, however, *Mediadebat* has ceased to exist (see Chapter 5).

Nieuwsmonitor

The *Nieuwsmonitor* was another RMO suggestion. While it is not an instrument of accountability, the idea was to provide empirical data on news coverage that could potentially form the basis for debate on media performance and news coverage. This independent institute specifically monitors press coverage on political issues and other specific incidents through quantitative content analysis. Since March 2010 the television news coverage of *NOS Nieuws* has been evaluated by the *Nieuwsmonitor* on a project basis. As it was totally new during my research period, it is not clear how this instrument is evaluated within the organisation.

Ombudsman

Recently, *NOS Nieuws* has initiated a number of new measures for public accountability. After years of discussion on how to implement this innovation (for public broadcasting as a whole or for individual organisations), in 2007 an ombudsman was introduced. The editor-in-chief and the managing director of the NOS had decided not to wait and see what NPO would do (NOS, 2006). It appointed its own ombudsman with the objective of making *NOS Nieuws* accountable to the public, improving the quality of the media coverage and enhancing the internal awareness of the opinion climate of the Netherlands (Van Brussel, 2008a). This shows that formally the ombudsman serves both a public and a professional accountability function. An internal memo stated that it is a mechanism to come to terms with criticisms from the public and at the same time a means to be more accessible to the public than the Council for Journalism and the court (Van Brussel, 2008a). It was felt to be a necessity for an independent public organisation financed by public money (NOS, 2007a). The independence of the ombudsman is guaranteed and safeguarded by a specially appointed commission. The ombudsman reports directly to the director of NOS and not to the editor-in-chief of *NOS Nieuws* (NOS, 2007a).

The first ombudsman published a weekly column on a specific issue on the website and had a weekly column on the radio. The second ombudsman, who started in 2009, wanted to put more effort in stimulating debate with the public and more formal external actors. Instead of the weekly columns she introduced an extensive weblog to create more dialogue with the public. The ombudsman now aims at a more overt form of public accountability, showing accountability to the public at large. There are also indications of covert public accountability as the ombudsman also responds individually to personal complaints. Nevertheless, the ombudsman's responses are often also published on the weblog and then have an overt purpose.

After less than a year the second ombudsman resigned, following a "difference in perception concerning the character and fulfilment of the position" according to NOS. (Villamedia, 19 July 2010). With the resignation of two advocates of accountability - the managing director of NOS in May 2010 and the editor-in-chief of *NOS Nieuws* in July 2011 – it is an open question whether the position will be filled again.

Journalistic code

In 2007, following suggestions from the first ombudsman, *NOS Nieuws* launched an official journalistic code which was publicly available on the website and thus served as overt public accountability. It also had the purpose of professional accountability to set performance criteria and ethical standards. The code is based on the mission of NPO, the journalistic guidelines of the International Federation of Journalists (1954/1986), the journalistic guideline of the Netherlands Association of Editors-in-Chief (NGH [Nederlands Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren] (1995) and the Guideline of the Council for Journalism (2007). Besides the primary responsibility to provide reliable, precise and unbiased information, the code states that NOS's accountability extends to "rectifying frankly when necessary" and demonstrating transparency in its journalism (NOS, 2007b). However, since the departure of the ombudsman the journalistic code is not available on the website anymore and it is not clear whether it functions internally as a professional accountability mechanism.

Chat on Friday

Another mechanism of overt accountability is the so-called *Chat on Friday*. Since 2007, every Friday after the 5:00 pm television news broadcast, the presenter interviews a studio guest who has some connection to an issue that has been widely discussed in society. Viewers are invited to ask questions through the chat function on the NOS website. This instrument started as a form of accountability to guests of the management, answering questions about the organisation and performance of *NOS Nieuws*. More recently, it has become more a mechanism of responsiveness meant to allow interaction with the public about a "hot" topic. However, as of end 2010 *NOS Nieuws* ceased applying this weekly instrument since the return on investment was negligible. The time and effort put into organizing the weekly discussion did not yield the desired public dialogue and related input. As stated by an editor, "[those participating] are often the 'usual suspects' and are by no means representative of the different sectors of society". The instrument can now be used when felt necessary.

Weblogs

Many accountability measures could not have been introduced without new technological opportunities. The Internet has created more possibilities for interaction with the public and for the latter to voice its opinion on the NOS, "Lots of people look over our shoulders and can correct us directly after the broadcast. We don't mind, it keeps us on our toes" (NOS, 2006: 17). In 2008, weblogs were introduced to enhance the dialogue with the public. Already in 2003 the NOS had introduced a forerunner of blogs by opening up a forum for discussion. In fact, it was the editor-in-chief himself who spent hours replying and explaining editorial decisions. After two years he closed the forum due to the increasingly harsh tone of contributions. In 2008, a new deputy with considerable multimedia experience was appointed with the primary task of enhancing and professionalizing the online interactive instruments, including weblogs. The blogs fulfil several objectives, offering "extra information, transparency and interaction" (Internal guideline on weblogs; Laroes, 18 Feb. 2008). It is mainly the management that uses it to show transparency, to give explanation and admit mistakes. For example, when *NOS Nieuws* wrongly announced the death of a well-known Dutch economist, a deputy apologised in a weblog (see also Chapter 5):

> *Your report may be factually correct 99 times, it's also about the 100th time, when we're wrong. As a closely scrutinised public organisation, we are aware that what goes well is irrelevant. You are more often judged by that single fault. And then we don't attempt to cover it up. We recognize the slip-up and make our humble apologies. (Overdiek, 25 May 2009).*

The management also uses it to explain the choices they make. In August 2009, for example, there was a court case against Associated Press which had published pictures of the Dutch Royal Family while on a private holiday. On the day of the court case, *NOS Nieuws* published the pictures, even after an urgent request of the Government Information Service not to do so. In the weblog one of the deputy editors-in-chief explained the reason why: *NOS Nieuws* believed it is their journalistic responsibility to publish the pictures as only then can the public judge whether the Associated Press was wrong. Increasingly, weblogs are also being used as a mechanism for interaction, not only creating possibilities for the public to comment on editors, but also explicitly asking them about their experience with or their opinion of a specific issue. This takes the form of responsiveness.

Online correction box

The most recent accountability instrument is the online correction box [Herstelrubriek], which was introduced in August 2009. It is comparable to the correction box in newspapers. The aim is "to correct factual or journalistic mistakes" (Overdiek, 14 Sept 2009). The instrument was initiated by the management of *NOS Nieuws* as a result of dissatisfaction among heads, deputies and the editor-in-chief with not being able to correct mistakes. A rectification within the news broadcast is often felt to be too ponderous (Van Brussel, 2008b). On the home page of the NOS website, a link can be found to this correction page. Mistakes published there come either from the public or the editorial staff. The deputy editors-in-chief and editor-in-chief are in charge and make the final decision on what mistakes will be included. When mistakes are substantial, the NOS also has the possibility of airing corrections in a radio or television news broadcast or including a written rectification on the website or teletext.

6.3.3 Professional accountability

Public accountability has a strong focus on responding to the public's complaints, but remains voluntary. Professional accountability too has a self-regulatory and voluntary character, but it has the primary objective of showing accountability to the professional world of journalism with the ultimate objective of enhancing the quality of the performance. At *NOS Nieuws* many meetings are held daily to brainstorm, plan and coordinate the different news items and platforms. Professional standards are formalized in a journalistic code. But, setting standards and organizing meetings only creates the aimed effect if the performance is evaluated. At *NOS Nieuws* there are several moments of self-reflection and evaluation.

Evaluation and reflection meetings

Such meetings address the internal responsibilities and are also used to identify failings alleged by external parties. At *NOS Nieuws* there are several moments of evaluation. Every day at 1:15 pm, the complete editorial staff is invited to come together to discuss and evaluate the news broadcasts of the past 24 hours, in a discussion led by the deputy on duty. Approximately 25 to 30 people of the 400 join daily, with usually people from the central desk, including the deputy editor-in-chief, the program editor of the 6:00 pm and 8:00 pm television broadcasts and the heads of the different departments.

The editor-in-chief also joins regularly. Others taking part are occasionally editors and reporters, who usually stand passively around the table. The issues discussed generally have to do with a specific item, technical problems and the order or relevancy of items in the broadcast. The meeting has intentionally no organised structure, stimulating an informal talk where everyone can join in. Yet, it appears that only the people sitting around the central desk have a say. However, after my research period, this meeting has become more structurized discussing one theme of concern.

Other evaluation moments have an even more informal character. After the 8:00 pm television news broadcast, the crew and editors still present at that time discuss the broadcast. In the last couple of years, the coordinator of the national news department organises monthly evaluation sessions, where a specific theme or item is discussed or, as insiders say, 'dissected'. Since the beginning of 2009, the program editors also meet once a month for a whole day to discuss certain issues, ethical dilemmas and evaluate specific news stories.

6.3.4 Accountability policy

NOS Nieuws has seen a major shift in its accountability policy. Historically, public broadcasting complied with political accountability instruments, which are still actively used today. At the institutional level NPO is more preoccupied with political accountability.

More recently, self-regulatory measures of public accountability have been launched and progressed in subsequent years from suggested to self-initiated measures. This is mainly the task of the professional news organisation, *NOS Nieuws*.

NOS Nieuws is manly accountable to the public in an overt manner. Direct contact with the public by responding to individual complaints is formally dealt with by the ombudsman or the desk 'public information services' and less frequently by individual journalists. Particularly, the editor-in-chief makes extensive use of weblogs and Twitter to engage with the public as he is a strong proponent of providing transparency to the public. Professional accountability is primarily organised informally through different evaluation moments. These are mostly covert as they are not visible to the public or the journalism profession at large, but only to the employees of the media organisation.

6.4 Instruments of responsiveness

Besides showing accountability to the public, different measures have been initiated to come to terms with the public by understanding their issues of concern: by being responsive. When in 2002 the editor-in-chief published his memorandum *In Attack*, NOS clearly indicated it wanted to invest in the public's concerns, go 'from the state to the street' and be responsive to what preoccupied ordinary citizens. The editor-in-chief clearly wanted to shift from institutional to public-oriented journalism (NOS, 2002). As a public broadcasting organisation, the need to be responsive is usually prompted by civic, not strategic reasons. However, in a competitive media environment the greater importance put on audience research also indicates a more strategic logic.

In the following discussion of the instruments of responsiveness I have tried to make an initial division between two different forms of responsiveness: civic and strategic (see Chapter 3). Empathic responsiveness or taking the victim of bureaucracy into account by siding with them and their worries was less visible, if at all. In the following, we will see that *NOS Nieuws* is making substantial attempts to let the ordinary man speak and trying to connect the 'state with the street'. This might also involve highlighting the plight of victims of bureaucracy and trying to understand their problems. Yet, as a news organisation the *NOS Nieuws* takes a neutral position and does not side with individual citizens and their problems. The evaluation of the instruments in section 6.6 based on the interviews and observations will give a more thorough clarification of the reasoning behind the instruments and public-oriented policy.

6.4.1 Civic responsiveness

Public-oriented journalism

In his memorandum *In Attack* (NOS, 2002) the editor-in-chief admits that the media failed to see the discontent in society, the main point of criticism towards the media after the death of Fortuyn. The interviewees at different levels and units of the organisation also mentioned the Fortuyn period as a crucial period for NOS history. The common perception is that the incident led the public to question their faith in political parties, politicians and the media. The editor-in-chief wanted to increase the knowledge and awareness

of feelings in society beyond merely asking for comments on the street and vox pop interviews. Moreover, he urged for the news to be accessible to all citizens, creating a closer bond with the public and an understanding of their perception of society— a measure that has the potential to link the news "of the state with the street" (NOS, 2002). In his memorandum he made a number of practical suggestions including sending more city correspondents across the country, giving specific city problems higher priority, and using fewer institutional spokespeople and more people who are part of the story, from the learned expert to the experience expert (NOS, 2002). Moreover, in 2006, *NOS Nieuws* appointed six specialists and two researchers to the national news unit to specialize in or follow specific issues that needed special attention. The specialists are responsible for issues like education, health, mobility, integration and justice. The researchers are journalists who work on large research projects and are exempted from the daily journalistic routine.

The editor-in-chief acknowledged the difficulty of covering issues from within society and of connecting with the public. Nevertheless, he believed improvement was visible in terms of "understanding the world of the viewer", as opposed to adhering to the "will of the viewer" (NOS, 2006: 21). This issue has been a focal point in the organisation policy with new memorandums written in 2006 [Hooggeeerd Publiek] and 2009 [Publiek in de Toekomst].

Guests

NOS Nieuws also tries to interact with the public and engage with relevant experts by regularly inviting guests to the newsroom. In the past, journalists of *NOS Nieuws* were more reserved to accepting or inviting outsiders. When, in 2003, a journalist from a national newspaper spent time at the newsroom trying to understand the processes behind the news, he was not always received with open arms (Van Westerloo, 2003). However, this attitude has changed and guests are now invited on a regular basis. The national news department aims to invite a guest every month to obtain a better understanding of how the public debate on a certain issue unfolds, to learn how *NOS Nieuws* is perceived and to give explanations on their news choices. The last objective refers more to public accountability. Groups of students are also regularly invited for guided tours of the newsroom and debates are organised at school. In this way *NOS Nieuws* can obtain a better understanding of the wishes and concerns among young people, learn more on how they use media and receive feedback on

their performance. At the same time, they can be publicly accountable.

Online interaction

The online opportunities for interaction have created more possibilities for *NOS Nieuws* to be responsive to its public. We have already seen that weblogs and the *Chat on Friday* are instruments that aim to interact with the public or at least give the public the opportunity to have a voice. A recently implemented tool for interaction is the social networking and micro-blogging service Twitter. For journalists and reporters Twitter is a good, quick way to get in contact with sources. A few journalists, in particular reporters, actively use Twitter as a way to get in contact with relevant people, to hear what goes on in society and to notify the public in an informal way about the processes of news gathering prior to the actual broadcast.

In March 2010, after my research period, a further digital interactive mechanism was introduced, *NOS Net*. Based on the idea of the aggregated weblog *The Huffington Post* in the US, specific people within society, such as local politicians, policemen and tenants, are asked to inform the news organisation on issues and concerns within their working and living environment. Particularly, social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and the Dutch equivalent Hyves are used to contact the public. According to the editor-in-chief this is a way to "find out what people know, and not so much what people think". Six months after the start, *NOS Net* consisted of a network of 1000 people across the country, which provided *NOS Nieuws* with new insights from within society. At the same time, the head of *NOS Net* acknowledges that even though online participatory instruments are an asset to the organisation, this should not prevent journalists from finding their information in the street. This is especially the case when trying to contact specific groups that are not active online.

6.4.2 Strategic responsiveness

Besides these instruments that aim to get a better understanding of the public's agenda, *NOS Nieuws* also wants to understand the audience's behaviour. The Dutch public broadcasting service already conducts audience research since 1965 through the Viewing and Listening Survey (KLO [Kijk- en Luisteronderzoek]). For a long time little attention was paid to such statistics as it was seen as interfering with their public task (Brants & Slaa, 1994). With

the advent of the commercial broadcasters and subsequent competition, the awareness of audience reach and share has grown, as part of strategic reasoning. Currently, *NOS Nieuws* conducts regular audience research to find out what interests viewers and listeners. When ideas are set for format changes, qualitative panel research is conducted to see if the pilot version attracts the audience and to make adaptations, if necessary.

6.4.3 Policy of responsiveness

Over the last decade the issue of responsiveness has gained much more attention, initially prompted by the editor-in-chief in his memorandum of 2002 (NOS, 2002). More recently, the interactive online possibilities have created the opportunity for *NOS Nieuws* to introduce new instruments to interact and engage with public. This shows NOS's efforts to take ordinary life issues into consideration and to connect governmental policy issues with the daily concerns of ordinary citizens. However, in an increasingly competitive environment where the position of public service broadcasting is not secure, viewing figures and understanding the audience's viewing behaviour have grown in importance.

6.5 Practicing accountability: a management issue

Looking at the number of recently introduced instruments of accountability and responsiveness one can observe a near explosion. However, initiated and often formally introduced primarily by the editor-in-chief and his deputies, the question remains to what extent the instruments are acknowledged, supported and used at all levels of the organisation.

In practice, the introduction of 'accountability' often meets with ambivalence. This begins with how it is defined. The majority of the interviewees consider accountability to refer to accounting for one's mistakes and responding to external complaints or questions. In this context many associate it with something negative. As an editor said, "It feels as if you are called to account for a mistake you made". Several higher-ranking interviewees, including unit heads, program editors and deputy editors-in-chief added that accountability is not merely reactive (to complaints), but also has a pro-active component of explaining and showing transparency. In this context, many mentioned the weblogs. Moreover, for several, accountability means being responsible and acting responsibly or just doing journalistic work properly, "It is about

doing your work well, working precisely, using more than one source and realizing that our work can have a high impact". Not many, except for the management, referred to politics when discussing the issue of accountability, but associated it with the public. This is probably due to the fact that political accountability is mainly an issue at the institutional level (NPO) and not the journalistic level (*NOS Nieuws*).

The different views of accountability, whether reactive or pro-active or part of their social responsibility, also relate to how professionals perceive and actually use the different accountability instruments. In the following section, based primarily on the interviews, informal talks and observations, I will evaluate whether the instruments of accountability and responsiveness have merely been implemented or have also been incorporated and internalised within the organisation, using the stages of introduction of innovations as detailed in Chapter 4. Table 6.1 provides an overview of the accountability instruments and the level of adoption.

6.5.1 Reactive public accountability implemented

The interviewees at different levels of the organisation believe that being accountable by responding to complaints and providing explanation is a must for a public organisation, and that this has increased in importance today, coinciding with current trends in which transparency and accountability have gained prominence. This attitude has clearly developed over the years. As a unit head said, "In the past we would push those things aside and we were also inaccessible, so the public's concerns didn't reach us". Box 6.1 offers an illustration of this changing attitude to responding to public complaints. Particularly, journalists relatively new to the organisation or with previous experience in regional media emphasise the importance of openness and relating to the public. Public accountability instruments such as the ombudsman, the online correction box, weblogs and the renewed public complaints desk are felt to be a way for "the NOS to come out of the ivory tower".

Table 6.1: Instruments of accountability at NOS Nieuws

Year	Instrument	Type of accountability	Suggested/ Self-initiated	Overt/ Covert (O /C)	Level of adoption
1988	Media Act	Political	—	—	Adhering to
2000	Visitation Commission	Political	—	—	Adhering to
2007	Policy plans & performance agreements	Political	—	—	Adhering to
1960	Council for Journalism	Public Professional	Suggested	O O	Collaborating
1997	Public information services	Public	Self-initiated	C	Implemented
2005	Mediadebat	Public Professional	Suggested	O O	Collaborating (until 2010)
2005	Nieuwsmonitor	Basis for public and professional	Suggested	O	—
2007	Ombudsman	Public Professional	Self-initiated	O & C C	Implemented (until 2010)
2007	Journalistic code	Public	Self-initiated	O	Implemented
2007	Chat on Friday	Public Civic & strategic resp.	Self-initiated	O	Incorporated (until end 2010)
2008	Weblogs	Public Civic & strategic resp.	Self-initiated	O	Incorporated
2009	Online correction box	Public	Self-initiated	O	Implemented
Unknown	Evaluation & self-reflection moments	Professional	Self-initiated	C	Implemented

Box 6.1: Responding to criticism

A unit head clarifies:

Generally we take criticisms very seriously. Although it's often very repetitive. There are of course certain issues which always provoke more reactions than others: criticisms that we do not cover the Middle East conflict properly, but also environmental issues and the debate about integration. But regarding the Middle East, on this subject we are approached by the most radical interest groups. We try to focus on certain points and provide counter arguments in defence of the manner we choose to cover the story. In any case, we always seek dialogue and discussion. This is certainly a new development; in the past we didn't pay attention to such allegations or they simply didn't reach us. This is because we used to be very inaccessible. I am of course referring to the pre-Internet era: the time when people would need to call a phone number of the broadcasting station and be put in an endless queue or were never put through at all. This would of course lead to additional complaints by people saying they did not have a platform where they could convey their objections about the news or NOS.

While the majority of the editorial staff are proponents of accountability, the actual use of the instruments seems to be a different matter. Journalists are not eager to respond to public complaints due to the sort of criticisms they receive. According to a unit head, "there are a number of people who always complain about language use. We don't really take them seriously." Moreover, a recurring complaint is left-wing bias in news coverage. To many this is felt to be a never-ending debate and one in which it is impossible to give a satisfactory response. While there is no empirical justification for a possible leftward leaning slant, this overall perception might be a remnant of the public logic period in the 1970s in which Dutch journalism tried to detach itself from the political parties they were linked with in a partisan logic (Brants & Van Praag, 2006). The increasing autonomous and critical journalistic attitude was by many critised as having a left-wing bias. Many unit heads, deputy editors-in-chief and the employees of the public information services also mentioned the harsh and impolite tone of complaints, to which they would rather not respond. Paradoxically, many journalists do not have the chance to respond directly to complainants as the ombudsman and public complaints desk serve an intermediary role.

A second reason that the public accountability instruments are not used much is their visibility for the editorial staff. To many employees at a professional level (editors and reporters) instruments such as the online correction box, the ombudsman and the complaints desk are not very visible in the newsroom. Many did not know where the complaints desk is located, had little awareness of the ombudsman and were not clear about the tasks and procedures of the ombudsman, the complaints desk or the online correction box.

A third reason is that many instruments are introduced top-down without much involvement of the editorial staff, which consequently does not create a basis for editorial support. At the professional level many made similar remarks to this editor: "The ombudsman merely introduced herself to the management and unit heads. She was only once officially announced during a plenary meeting, at which I was not present. I do not know much about this function". Similarly with regard to the online correction box one editor said, "It was a management idea and announced during a plenary meeting. However, I was not present. I quickly scanned through the email announcement before deleting it. We just get so many emails and we have so little time for these kinds of things."

Lastly, many interviewees doubt the public effect of these instruments, since they are not only barely visible or known to them but also not to the public at large. Many wonder if the general public is acquainted with the ombudsman and how he or she can be used and reached. This also goes for the complaints desk.

Therefore, most of these accountability instruments are introduced by the editor-in-chief, but merely implemented and not incorporated in the organisation.

6.5.2 Pro-active public accountability incorporated

There are two public accountability instruments— weblogs and *Chat on Friday*— that do appear to be incorporated in the organisation. These instruments have a permanent place in the organisation and the staff are familiar with them and use them on a regular basis.

All the interviewees are satisfied with the comprehensive weblogs, serving multiple purposes. Many heads and program editors believe it to be a good instrument to elaborate on discussions and news items, showing a more open and accessible NOS. Even though this instrument is rather new, many make use of it and have incorporated it in their daily tasks. Journalists from the national and international news departments, including editors, reporters and correspondents, write weblogs in order to offer a backstage glimpse into how they operate. A department head said, "This way we can provide the public with more insight into how we work and what we experience as a reporter

or correspondent. It is a place where one can give background information. In the past we would never do that. We were a closed fortress." The deputy editor-in-chief responsible for 'multimedia' has put a lot of effort to convince both management and professionals to make use of weblogs.

The same goes for the *Chat on Friday*, in which journalists cooperate as a matter of fact using. Providing more information or transparency is recognized as useful, but should be done cautiously. A program editor explained, "You shouldn't go overboard in justifying every move you make and accounting for your actions in a weblog. We do not have to be accountable for every decision we make at the newsroom. That would be absurd".

The fact that these two instruments are incorporated might come from their pro-active character. Journalists are the ones initiating a discussion on a weblog or *Chat on Friday*. Instruments such as the ombudsman, correction box and public information services are reactive, based on responses from the public. While the pro-active instruments are incorporated, they are not internalised into journalistic culture and attitude. These instruments are introduced for accountability purposes, but in practice the journalists prefer to use them as a platform for public engagement or for additional information and less so for the objective of accountability. Moreover, there is a general hesitance to use them due to their time-consuming character and the doubt about the aimed effect. This is also one of the main reasons they stopped with the *Chat on Friday* end 2010.

6.5.3 Professional accountability implemented

Throughout the day journalists meet many times a day to discuss the progress of news bulletins. Some even believe the amount of meetings is overdone, taking time away from working on journalistic productions. "There is just too much talking going on". Nevertheless, the respondents value the professional accountability measures— the formal and informal evaluation meetings— as moments of self-reflection and quality control. Particularly the plenary 1:15 pm meeting is seen as important because it is the only moment of the day where the entire editorial staff can get together to evaluate. A deputy said: "It's very important to give certain issues a moment of thought and ask ourselves why we do these things."

In practice, however, this evaluation session and other evaluation moments have pitfalls. The final result of a news broadcast is based not only on journalistic choices, but also on technical and logistic considerations. Journalists, coordinators and technical people work together in shifts with a specific news bulletin as the end result. Evaluating a news broadcast seems to often boil down to discussing technical or logistical errors.

There are practical problems too. Not all editorial units send delegates to the 1:15 pm plenary meeting. The meeting is dominated by people who work in television and/or are of higher rank. A radio program editor admitted, "It is a dilemma. We are so busy and focused on preparing the next broadcast that we hardly take time to reflect and evaluate our work among the radio editorial staff. Radio items are hardly discussed at the plenary meeting so we do not have the urge to be present. But we should also initiate a more active role". Practical drawbacks such as time constraints and questions of scheduling hinder the incorporation of organised moments of evaluation. Moreover, in the newsroom, at both the formal meetings and informal gathering, there is a focus on planning and organizing the next programme instead of looking back and taking the time to evaluate. Box 6.2 offers an illustration of this dilemma.

There also appears to be a cultural motive underlying this hesitance to internal self-reflection and evaluation. At the professional level, many editors and coordinators find it difficult to voice their opinion during plenary meetings. A coordinator admitted, "One must be confident and secure to express oneself". Several heads and program editors, working for many years at NOS described what they call the 'soft' culture at *NOS Nieuws*: everyone is friendly to each other, and they do not dare to be critical or give feedback. I also experienced that there is a pleasant and forthcoming atmosphere, where everyone is polite to each other —maybe even too polite as also observed by a press journalist (Van Westerloo, 2003). However, this seems to be an outer layer. When people are unhappy with an item this is often not discussed in a formal setting, but informally and often without the person involved present. It seems to be difficult to provide constructive feedback. Particularly the reporters and correspondents feel unhappy from the minimal responses of the editorial staff.

While the journalistic culture at NOS does not provide much room for feedback and evaluation, the younger generation in particular mentioned the importance of constructive feedback, which they would have liked to have seen more of in their work. This seems to refer to a changing journalistic culture in a continuously dynamic media landscape, with new journalistic demands making journalists less secure about their work and strengthening their need to reflect. At the same time, they do not see this as a solution in a time-pressured environment. There appears, therefore, to be a discrepancy between the stated aspiration for increased self-reflection and evaluation, and its actual practice. These professional accountability instruments are recognized and valued, but rarely used as such, which restrains them from being incorporated in the organisation.

Box 6.2: A focus on looking ahead

An editor explains:

There are not many moments we look back. Part of the job is to plan and look forward. Moments of retrospection are mainly informal, like in the broadcasting reports. The editor-in-chief writes broadcasting reports to let us know what he thought. We do have the plenary meetings at 1:15 pm, but that's more focused on television broadcasts. Further evaluations take place informally between colleagues or with reporters over the phone. But our tendency to look back is definitely small. Hindsight is less developed than looking forward. This is because what's been done is in the past and tomorrow offers new ideas and opportunities. The future is something that needs to be made and our organisation is naturally inclined to focus on what is to come.

6.6 Responsiveness: a continuous struggle

Being responsive or taking the public's concerns into consideration has gained priority at *NOS Nieuws* since 2002. These changes were initially prompted by civic motives, but increasingly strategic considerations have become important. Yet, adoption seems to be a struggle. Table 6.2 provides an overview of the instruments of responsiveness and the level of adoption.

Table 6.2: Instruments of responsiveness at NOS Nieuws

Year	Instrument	Type of responsiveness	Level of adoption
2000	Audience research	Strategic	Collaborating
2005	Public-oriented journalism	Civic & strategic	Implemented
Unknown	Guests	Civic Public accountability	Implemented
2005	Chat on Friday	Civic & strategic Public accountability	Incorporated
2008	Weblogs	Civic & strategic Public accountability	Incorporated
2008	Twitter	Civic & strategic	Implemented
2010	NOS Net	Civic	Implemented

6.6.1 A combination of civic and strategic motives

Like the idea of accountability, there is a general consensus that public-oriented journalism is of great importance. Many said, "It is old-fashioned to present institutional news". The unit heads and program editors all felt that public-oriented journalism had been introduced to the organisation in response to the Fortuyn period, in answer to the accusations that the media had failed to see the problems of a large part of society. "We have come out of our ivory tower. In the past NOS was not accessible. Now we are much more open". Besides a response to the Fortuyn period that the editor-in-chief addressed in his memorandum (NOS, 2002), a majority of the interviewees attributed the increasing interaction with the public to a rise in technological opportunities and the subsequent possibilities for the public to give its opinion. The interviews revealed that in *all* measures of civic responsiveness there is also a strategic element to relate to the public. Even though public service broadcasting is publicly funded, strategies to increase viewing figures are becoming more salient as a result of increasing competition and government budget cuts. The interactive instruments and the provision of more public-oriented news are attempts to attract a large viewing audience, especially the young who are difficult to bond with.

6.6.2 Responsiveness implemented

Being responsive is embraced and many see a shift to more openness and connecting with the public. A program editor said, "We used to make news items for our colleagues and not for the people who needed to be informed". Several interviewees explicitly stated, "we are now thinking more in their terms or 'what's in it for me?'". However, even though the instruments have been implemented and are used frequently by the journalists, there is still a struggle to incorporate responsiveness in the daily production process. This relates to the fact that NOS journalists have difficulties connecting with 'the public' as by law they have the task of addressing *all* citizens. Those who work for specific news programmes such as *Journaal op 3*, which is aimed at viewers aged 30 years and under, and *Jeugdjournaal*, for children, have an easier task as they can focus on specific target groups, cater to their needs and connect with them.

Practical reasons such as time constraints and scheduling can hinder the journalists from having time to really take into account the opinion climate in society, collect personal accounts and search beyond statements of institutional speakers. A radio editor admitted, "There is a permanent discussion about making news less institutional, but in practice this is very difficult to do. There are just so many broadcasts we need to prepare, so there is a tendency to take the easy way out and approach an institutional speaker". Moreover, many journalists agree that it is not always possible to make the item less institutionalized and more personal since it is usually the institutions that have the facts first. The majority of the interviewees acknowledged that this issue of coming closer to the public, or in NOS's terms 'connecting the state with the street' is still a daily struggle and remains a continuous debate.

Neither is there any agreement on the actual effectiveness of trying to reach the public. Many interviewees at different levels of the organisation are sometimes unhappy with the input they receive from the public and reported an imbalance between the energy they invest and the response they receive. An economy editor told me, "We put a call out on a weblog asking people what they think of the financial and economic crisis. But we did not receive any responses that would be suitable as material for a radio or television item". With the new experiment *NOS Net*, they hope to overcome this problem by focusing on the knowledge of people and not so much on their opinion: what they know, not what they think.

Box 6.3: Daily struggle to bring news for 'the man in the street'.

The day after the annual Budget Day, the focus of the first meeting at the central desk at 09:15 am is how to make a news item 'the day after'. Usually this meeting is led by the deputy on duty, but on this occasion the editor-in-chief joins the meeting and explains,

"We want to relate the current debate in The Hague with the sentiments in the street by having the reporter converse with and question the public with an open mind. His task is to inquire about the pertinent issues and not hold back from discussing controversial issues. Reporter X from the political unit will cover the story from the perspective in The Hague. The main question is: politics transforms society but how does the public respond to this?"

After the meeting the deputy on duty tells me that for this item the editor-in-chief and he are much more involved because they want to succeed in making a news item that links the political with the public agenda.
While the management has a clear idea of how they want to present this news item, there is much discussion amongst the department heads, coordinators, deputy and reporters on how this should be done. The deputy editor says, "We don't want cheap opinions and we also don't want to base the story on public opinion polls. We have now decided to dispatch a reporter to a city in the middle of the country to talk to people about the outcomes of the Budget Day. Instead of merely asking what they think, the reporter will have to ask why people think that way".

A unit head tells me between meetings, "We do have experience with this type of journalism and going out onto the street, but it remains a struggle. But we are doing it more and more". Finally, the reporter is sent off with one of his acting deputies to assist him. Compared with other days, there is a tense atmosphere with much steering from the management. In an interview a week later the reporter told me: "Usually I work quite independently without anyone checking me. I am responsible and at the end accountable because my name appears with the item. But for this item the editor-in-chief and deputy were quite involved and I was not able provide my input as to how to make this news item. In my view the opinions were too random, but making use of public opinion polls is not an option, according to the editor–in-chief.
The next day, when the item was evaluated in the plenary 1:15 pm meeting, questions were raised and doubts were voiced as to whether this item successfully linked the political with the public agenda. A program editor told me later that the item was not a success, "It was an interesting and good idea but this example shows that people find it difficult to make such a concept tangible. It's not enough to just show what people think, but I prefer to make a news item so that people can understand the issue better".

Finally, at all levels of the organisation there was also some resistance to being responsive to the public, since this can conflict with their professional autonomy and journalistic responsibility of providing factual and trustworthy news items. A program editor for the radio said, "I do not think people should decide what the news should be. We also have a mission to inform people about items they are not immediately aware of and we should not only bring

stories that people are already informed about". Many thus agreed with the statement 'it is the world of the viewer not the will of the viewer' we aim for (NOS, 2006: 21). Box 6.3 illustrates this continuous struggle to relate to the public.

Overall, while there is acknowledgment for public-oriented journalism and willingness to adopt this in the journalistic process, bringing news from an institutional perspective appears still to be rooted within the structure and culture of the news organisation. As a unit head put it, "Apparently it's difficult for us to change patterns of behaviour, to deviate from the way we are used to doing things".

6.7 Conclusion

This case study of the Dutch public news organisation *NOS Nieuws* illustrates a predominantly pro-active attempt in terms of self-regulatory public accountability and increasing transparency and interaction with the public. This is in line with the conclusions of Baldi & Hasebrink (2007), who, in a comparative study, classify the Netherlands as one of the 'most advanced countries' with regard to the accountability policy of public service broadcasting. Traditionally, public broadcasters have been reluctant to be open to outsiders and embrace participatory possibilities (Born, 2003; Enli, 2008; Hermida, 2010). Instigated by a changing society, pressured by public opinion and apparent waning trust of both politics and the public in them, *NOS Nieuws* only recently introduced a plethora of instruments of responsiveness and accountability. Attempts have been made to come closer to the public and to open the gates of the 'closed fortress'. Whereas in the past accountability was predominantly political, nowadays there is a distinction between the institutional umbrella organisation NPO and the professional news organisation *NOS Nieuws*. NPO is responsible for the accountability processes and instruments that are directed towards government, and, as a journalistic organisation, *NOS Nieuws* is more preoccupied with showing accountability and being responsive to the public.

NOS Nieuws focuses on trying to bridge the gap with the public by being responsive and accountable. This has not only been prompted by external factors. Internal organisational factors have also played a crucial role in moving towards a more public-oriented organisation in very recent years.

The appointment of a new and more public-oriented editor-in-chief of *NOS Nieuws* in 2002 and a deputy editor-in-chief with extensive multimedia experience in 2006 prompted the organisation to introduce new instruments to be transparent and to engage with the public. The fact that one of the other deputies was recruited in 2003 from commercial *RTL Nieuws*, known for being less institutionalized than NOS news organisation, will also have boosted the increasing focus on public-oriented journalism.

Among the editorial staff and management, being responsive has increasingly become an issue of priority and is discussed on a daily basis. Yet, over the years this has not only been an answer to performance challenges, but also to structural problems such as increasing competition, a decreasing (and ageing) audience and changing media consumption. Whereas in the past public service broadcasting had a monopoly and its public was quite stable, the dual broadcasting system and the subsequent competition and fragmented audience has obliged broadcasting in general and NOS in particular to seek survival strategies in a highly competitive market. In this sense, even though market accountability does not fit the public system, market considerations are becoming more salient, with *NOS Nieuws* using responsive strategies for strategic reasons.

This focus on the public is also visible in the attention for public, often overt, accountability instruments. Yet, it is primarily the editor-in-chief and deputy editors-in-chief who advocate being accountable and transparent. Most instruments have been implemented top-down without much investment at the professional level, which may explain limited support and lack of internalization. While there is a growing acknowledgment that NOS should be more accountable to the public, the majority of the journalists do not see the need to formalize or explicate it. Journalists are first and foremost preoccupied with their work and not with responding to comments. Moreover, connecting with the public —whether responding, justifying or bridging —is difficult when they are not a clearly defined group. Regional media, news programmes targeting a specific group or newspapers with subscribers have a better idea of their end user and how to relate to them.

Journalists are quite defensive, or at least reserved towards the actual use of the instruments. This can be explained by their linking of responsibility with autonomy. Accountability does not live easily with media freedom (Brants & Bardoel, 2008; McQuail, 2003). Similarly, responsiveness creates a tension with the journalistic authority: the journalist has the task of informing the public and not the other way around. The instruments are not incorporated in the organisational structure and culture which explains the relative success of this policy. At the moment it seems more a symbolic policy aimed at the outside world.

Throughout the day meetings at *NOS Nieuws* take place to brainstorm, plan, coordinate and make news items. However, looking back and being accountable to one's peers for the work done with the final aim of improving journalistic performance seems to be less of a priority. While there are formal moments of evaluation, in practice journalists are working faster than ever in this competitive climate, which allows them little time to reflect on their work. Nevertheless, the new and younger journalists long for more moments of reflection on their performance. This is not suprising as they might still be involved in a learning process in which evaluation offers insights in improving journalistic skills and performance. The management acknowledges the practical and cultural dilemmas of evaluation and is looking into ways to improve it. Yet, in this current competitive and time-pressured environment coming together to discuss the items for the following broadcast is given more priority than looking back.

In line with the conceptual analysis (Chapter 3) this case study research has shown that Dutch public broadcasting has moved forward in terms of accountability and responsiveness. *NOS Nieuws* has attempted to improve trust by "coming out of the ivory tower" and relating to the public. Nevertheless, while there is agreement on the importance of legitimacy *vis-à-vis* the public, the autonomy of journalists is the recurrent theme. This need for autonomy within journalism, the top-down approach and the difficulties of connecting with the public prevents the instruments from being adopted in the organisation's structure and culture.

Chapter 7

Serving both the consumer and the public:

A case study of RTL Nieuws

Chapter 7

Serving both the consumer and the public: A case study of RTL Nieuws

7.1 Introduction

The content analysis, discussed in Chapter 2, indicated that commercial broadcasters in the Netherlands (RTL Nederland and SBS) played a minor role in the debate on media performance. Only during their pioneer phase in the early 1990s, critique was heard from other media and politicians. As RTL was the first commercial station, it had to deal with a general discontent or resistance for being commercially oriented. When in 1995 SBS started it was blamed for crossing the boundaries of decency in its programs. This was admitted by a former director of RTL and SBS, "In the pioneering phase these programs had limited resources and professionals were ambiguous about what was acceptable and what not" (Interview, 17 Feb. 2009). Commercial broadcasters only played a peripheral role in the media performance debate of the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st, but their entry into the television landscape in 1989 and 1995 respectively and subsequent consequence of commercialization and competition did substantiate it.

The fact that commercial broadcasters are less bound to regulatory measures than their public counterparts and that Dutch media policy is mainly focused on the latter might also explain the limited considerations given to the commercial broadcasting sector. Certainly, European Commission legislation can be enforced, but this mostly regards issues of advertising and sponsorship. Being market-oriented, commercial broadcasters are inclined to take more account of the consumers' wishes and be more strategically responsive. But they are not oblivious to the critique of the socio-political elite. Referring to the accountability debate, the editor-in-chief of *RTL Nieuws* recognized this, "There is pressure from politics, but they prefer to institutionalize everything, and I am against that. Nevertheless, I cannot turn my back on this debate". This raises the question how commercial broadcasters view and respond to

the performance debate in terms of accountability and responsiveness. Does the market principle dominate or do other forms of accountability and responsiveness also enter the scene? Do they feel pressured and by whom?

Little is known about the Dutch commercial media sector's sense of responsibility and accountability (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2003). To widen the picture beyond public broadcasting, commercial broadcasting's position in and response to the performance debate needs to be included. *RTL Nieuws* was chosen as a study case, as it is the largest commercial broadcasting news organisation and the main rival of the public service *NOS Nieuws*. In this final case study, I will discuss how *RTL Nieuws* has responded to the debate on media accountability, to what extent this has been translated into concrete accountability and responsiveness instruments and how much these measures have become part and parcel of the organisation's culture. First, I will give a brief description of the daily journalistic routine and a very concise historical context.

7.2 The daily journalistic routine

In October 1989, the first commercial broadcaster, RTL-Veronique, launched its news service *RTL Nieuws*. With initially little resources and low budgets, 20 years later *RTL Nieuws* is currently located in the building of *RTL Nederland* (the new name of its parent company), at the same Mediapark in Hilversum where the public *NOS Nieuws* resides. Approximately 120 employees work for *RTL Nieuws*. All the media outlets, including television, Internet, the economic—financial programme *RTL Z* and the daily programme *Editie NL* are located in one open newsroom, separated by 'desk islands'. Like the other news organisations, it has its political editorial unit in The Hague. The first news bulletin, at 7:00 am, is created by a set group of editors who start at 4:00 am. The preparations for the first afternoon and evening bulletins start at 9:00 am, with a plenary meeting led by the program editor of the prime-time 7:30 pm bulletin. As well as the deputy editor-in-chief, the coordinators and representatives of the different editorial units—national, international and economic news and the Internet — are present. Throughout the day, formal meetings and many more informal moments take place to plan, discuss and coordinate the evening bulletins. Every day at 1:30 pm there is a plenary evaluation where everyone is invited to reflect on the 7:30 pm

bulletin of the night before. In practice, however, no more than 10–15 out of 120 are present. After this plenary meeting, no official meetings take place, but decisions are made informally, primarily at the '7:30 pm news island'. Since 2008, the Internet unit has become more prominent in the newsroom with a growing number of employees. The deputy editor-in-chief is first and foremost responsible for guarding the overall daily processes, but the editor-in-chief is also regularly present during meetings and involved in daily issues. The current editor-in-chief has been part of this news organisation since the start and has held his current position since 1999.

7.3 Accountability instruments

In the following section I will describe *RTL Nieuws'* political, public and professional accountability instruments. Being a commercial organisation, *RTL Nieuws* operates in a market of supply and demand, but being accountable to shareholders and advertisers is taken care of at the institutional level of *RTL Nederland*. As a journalistic news organisation, the objectives of *RTL Nieuws* are not market-oriented, but based on professional principles. The chief executive officer of RTL Nederland confirmed this, "Formally there is an editorial statute that decides the independence of *RTL Nieuws*". At the same time, at *RTL Nieuws* there is a clear awareness that without a substantial audience the future of the news programme will be at stake. That is reflected in audience-targeted policies and measures of (strategic) responsiveness that will be discussed in 7.4.

7.3.1 Political accountability

Commercial broadcasters in the Netherlands have never been bound by extensive regulatory measures except for the minimal requirements in the EC directive *Television Without Frontiers*, dating from 1989 and adapted and expanded to become the *Audiovisual Media Services Directive* in 2007. Nevertheless, it should be noted that before 1989 political accountability prevented commercial broadcasting to even operate in the Dutch market. The European directive has established rules for commercial broadcasters on sponsorship, maximum advertising time, youth protection and programme production (there are quotas for European productions). Being a Luxembourg broadcaster, RTL falls under the rules of that country and of the EU. The other commercial broadcaster SBS has to comply to the Dutch Media Act, which

has stricter local rules than the EU directives (mainly on advertising time and sponsorship). Although the Dutch Media Authority has continually (but unsuccessfully) tried to change this situation, *RTL Nederland* is exempted from Dutch jurisdiction because the company is formally located in Luxembourg (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2006). This means that *RTL Nieuws* does not have any formal political accountability directed towards Dutch political institutions.

7.3.2. Public accountability

RTL Nieuws tries to be accountable to the public in various ways, either overt or covert. The instruments are presented in chronological order, based on the sequence of their introduction.

Responding to complaints

A fundamental way to be accountable to the public is by responding to their complaints. Viewers of *RTL Nieuws* can file a complaint by post, telephone or email, with the latter most commonly used. Emails can be sent through an online form available on the website. These complaints are received in a general email inbox together with tips, information, practical questions. Also other source material, such as formal press releases are received in this inbox. Viewers can also contact the general public service desk of *RTL Nederland*. Specific email addresses of journalists or of the newsroom cannot be found on the website or screen during the broadcast. Because of past contacts, however, in practice many organisations do have access to the email addresses of individual journalists. The overall email inbox can be viewed by the editorial staff of the Internet and the national news unit. It is their responsibility to take account of these emails and answer them. In practice, this means journalists filter emails based on urgency, factuality and actuality. Complaints are dealt with on an individual, informal and personal basis, which makes this instrument a form of covert public accountability.

Code of conduct

The primary shareholder of RTL Nederland, Bertelsmann, has a published code of conduct for all its companies. Besides the interpersonal conduct of employees at work, and financial and technological privacy, the code guarantees editorial independence of the news reporting (Bertelsmann AG, 2008: 39). This code can be found on the website of Bertelsmann, but not

on that of *RTL Nieuws*. Next to this code of conduct *RTL Nieuws* also keeps to an editorial statute, set up in 1998. In this statute the independence of the editorial unit is guaranteed. As it is not publicly available, this statute is more a form of professional accountability.

Council for Journalism

For a long time, *RTL Nederland* and *RTL Nieuws* complied and collaborated with the Council for Journalism, being members of the board, paying financial contributions, going to hearings when summoned and publishing a rectification when a complaint was found to be legitimate. However, in 2000 *RTL Nieuws* decided to no longer adhere to the Council's conventions, because it believes that it increasingly takes the role of judge and jury. *RTL Nieuws* believes the court is a more effective instrument. Nonetheless, *RTL Nederland* still supports the Council financially.

Mediadebat

As we have seen in the previous chapters, in 2005, NOS, the journalists' union NVJ and the Dutch newspaper publishers' association NDP introduced a media debate organisation, *Mediadebat*. Representatives of *RTL Nieuws* have regularly collaborated by actively joining these debates. *RTL Nederland* also paid financial contribution to the organisation. As of 2010, Mediadebat has stopped organizing debates (see Chapter 5). This instrument aims at stimulating public and professional debate on journalism issues and as an overt instrument of accountability it can thus be public and professional. Moreover, it can provide transparency to the public on journalistic processes and decision-making issues.

Nieuwsmonitor

Also in 2005, the *Nieuwsmonitor* was introduced to provide independent empirical data to substantiate a qualitative debate on journalism issues. Thus, this instrument can potentially form the basis for public and professional accountability. It is mainly focused on analysing newspaper coverage through quantitative content analysis on particular incidents. Since 2010 television broadcasts have also been analysed when specific 'hot' issues arise in which the role of the media is debated. For example, after the elections in May 2010 *Nieuwsmonitor* analysed items from newspapers and from *NOS Nieuws* and *RTL Nieuws* television news to determine to what extent these media

organisations had provided a platform to the right-wing politician Geert Wilders. As this instrument was new during my research period, it is not clear how this instrument is evaluated by the news organisation

Transparency on source material

Besides responding to viewer's complaints, *RTL Nieuws* increasingly indicates its responsibility pro-actively by being transparent on how its news is selected and constructed. Since 2008, one of the strategies used has been to offer greater transparency on source material by publishing the complete material on the website along with the news item. According to the deputy editor-in-chief, this allows the viewer to verify the reliability of the item by tracing back to its source. For example, in December 2009 *RTL Nieuws* published confidential documents online from De Nederlandsche Bank that related to a bankrupt Dutch bank. They believed these documents were important in and for the public interest and it was a way "to be accountable and verifiable" (Klein, 2009). Transparency being a prerequisite for public accountability, this instrument is primarily aimed at showing transparency to the public in an overt manner: it can be used by the public to hold *RTL Nieuws* to account.

Weblogs

Since 2009, *RTL Nieuws* has made use of weblogs, intended to provide more transparency or insight into certain topics. The first blog post was written by the correspondent in the Middle-East. Since then, correspondents in Germany and United States have occasionally written blog posts on their experiences. Additionally, the political unit in The Hague has its own weblog under the name 'monthly diary'. The editor-in-chief and the deputy editors-in-chief do not have a permanent blog space, but use it when they feel the need. For example, when De Nederlandsche Bank (DNB) took them to court over the online publication of the confidential documents relating to the bankrupt bank, *RTL Nieuws'* deputy explained in a blog post why he had decided to publish. However, weblogs are not written on a regular basis and, in contrast to those of *NOS Nieuws*, do not have a fixed place on the website.

7.3.3 Professional accountability

Public accountability can sometimes also have a professional character as is the case with the code of conduct and *Mediadebat*. In addition, similar to the other two news organisations, *RTL Nieuws* focuses on professional accountability

in the form of evaluation meetings. These are covert, as they are directed to colleagues within the organisation. Overt professional accountability was only facilitated when *Mediadebat* was still active.

Evaluation moments

Every day at 1:30 pm the department heads, program editor, deputy editor-in-chief, Internet coordinator, and several individual editors and reporters come together to evaluate the broadcasts of the previous day. Issues discussed often amount to whether the item was understandable to the general public —"Did we get our message across?" – and how *RTL Nieuws* fared compared with *NOS Nieuws*. Other formal evaluation moments are organised more infrequently. The heads of the foreign news department and political department indicated that monthly meetings are organised to discuss and evaluate specific news items. On a weekly basis, the coordinators of the Internet department come together. Once a year the whole editorial staff meet at a self-reflective day to discuss a variety of journalistic and organisational topics. In practice, evaluations and self-reflective discussions predominantly occur in an informal setting when an issue arises and people feel the need to get together.

7.3.4 Accountability policy

To conclude, *RTL Nieuws* is a commercial journalistic organisation that is not really bound by political accountability measures. Informally it is accountable to the public and internally to the colleagues. Public accountability predominantly has a covert character as *RTL Nieuws* responds to individual complaints, when deemed relevant. Rather than feeling the need to be accountable to the public, *RTL Nieuws* feels the need to be responsive.

7.4 Instruments of responsiveness

Being part of a commercial media organisation aimed at as large a public as possible, it is to be expected that *RTL Nieuws'* responsiveness— taking the public into consideration and seriously —has a strategic motive.

7.4.1. Strategic responsiveness

Since the introduction of commercial television and the start of RTL in 1989 and SBS in 1995, Dutch commercial broadcasting organisations have operated in a highly competitive market (Commissariaat voor de Media, 2006). From the start, commercial broadcasters felt the need to produce news broadcasts, on

the one hand as a way of attracting the news-hungry viewer used to watching *NOS Nieuws,* on the other as a way to distinguish themselves from the public broadcaster's news service, their successful competitor. In its pioneer years *RTL Nieuws* had to struggle with minimal (financial) resources and did not differ much in its policy from the NOS service. As the editor-in-chief put it, "We only distinguished ourselves by budget that we did not have" (De Journalist, 29 July 2009; De Journalist, 23 Sept. 1994). Over the years it developed into a news organisation "with a distinctive news style", as the editor-in-chief said on the twentieth anniversary of RTL (De Journalist, 29 July 2009).

Public-oriented journalism

Just as *de Volkskrant* and *NOS Nieuws*, *RTL Nieuws* has the intention to bring stories with a public-oriented approach. Where the former two news organisations started with this type of journalism from a civic departure point, *RTL Nieuws* has from the start been taking the public or consumer into account, be it for more strategic reasons. One of the main characteristics of *RTL Nieuws* is that it makes news for 'the man in the street'. The selection and angle of news is always approached from a consideration of what might be of interest to the ordinary citizen, rather than from the institutional perspective with which *NOS Nieuws* has often been associated. In 2005, *RTL Nederland* decided to develop a clear and targeted profile of the *RTL viewer* as aged between 20 and 49[1]. This was prompted by increasing commercial competition from SBS, the subsequent decline in audience ratings for RTL 4 (which in previous years had been a leading channel) and the launch of the popular 'newsy' talk show *De Wereld Draait Door* by the public broadcasters. The latter is broadcasted at the same time as the *RTL* evening news and targets the same young audience. Since then all programmes of *RTL Nederland,* including *RTL Nieuws,* have been tailored to the needs and wishes of the target group.

Online interaction

In recent years, *RTL Nieuws* increasingly uses online instruments to bond with the consumer. The Internet unit builds on the public's question 'what's in it for me?' by offering the viewer additional practical or close-to-home information on news items. When, for example, an item had been broadcast on the issue of road pricing, the site offered a tool for the viewer to calculate

1 In 2003 a profile was developed of the RTL viewer: Esther and Peter are end thirties and have a secondary vocational education level. He works full time and she part-time. They have two children and live in a suburb area (Nieman, 2007, Code RTL of RTL Nederland).

what cost implications this had for him or her. This way the news was not only oriented at the viewer but it also generated more viewers/consumers. For *RTL Nieuws*, relating to the viewer has a strategic purpose in distinguishing itself from *NOS Nieuws* and other competitors, and also helping it strengthen its link with its target group.

Since November 2009 *RTL Nieuws* has collaborated with the Dutch social networking site Hyves. Every day *RTL Nieuws* and Hyves put a poll question on line about a current news issue. The results are broadcast in the breakfast news bulletin. The editor-in-chief noted, "We want to understand how the general public experiences the news items with which we occupy ourselves daily" (Mediacourant, 26 Nov. 2009). Apart from the polls, presenters of the breakfast news bulletins actively communicate with the members of the *RTL Nieuws* Hyves page as a way to better understand their audience, to bond with their (potential) public and to strengthen the *RTL Nieuws* brand. Within approximately 3 months of the start of this collaboration more than 100,000 people had joined the Hyves *RTL Nieuws* page and every day 3,000–6,000 people respond to the poll.

Since mid-2009, *RTL Nieuws* has been on the social networking and microblogging service Twitter. Reporters mainly use this medium to offer the public up-to-date information while a news item is developing. The possibility to respond to so-called 'followers' or engage in a dialogue with them has not been used widely.

The economic editorial unit has created its own interactive instruments for its bulletin *RTL Z*. The Friday afternoon bulletin incorporates viewers' questions on a specific topic addressed by the unit. In addition, some reporters make use of the 'Cover-It-Live' utility, to report instantly from location and at the same time offer the possibility of responding to viewer's questions on the spot.

7.4.2 Civic responsiveness

For *RTL Nieuws*, relating to the viewer has clear strategic reasoning as it can help the broadcast to distinguish itself from its public broadcaster equivalent and other competitors to relate to its target group. However, being responsive to the public has also civic elements.

To the editor-in-chief a basic assumption of journalism is to provide the citizen with relevant and *understandable* news, and this can only be done when being responsive to the public. Only then can the media fulfil a democratic role. In other words, bridging the gap with the public is felt to be a social responsibility. My observations indicate that the phrases 'why should I care?' and 'what's in it for me?' are central when deciding on and preparing a news item. According to the interviewees, news is only relevant to the viewer if he or she understands the issue and understands the relevance and the possible effects for him or her in daily life.

Box 7.1: 'What's in it for me?'

An editor said:

I think we are giving institutional speakers, such as ministries, local councils and mayors abundant opportunities to speak. Research has also shown that the public wants to hear these people's opinions. But they should be countered by the opinions of ordinary citizens, who should be held in equal regard.

So often I produce an item directly involving the person who experienced it and the public's engagement is also an objective: what does it contribute to the viewer? And at this stage the legislators, local councils and ministries are also involved because after all, they are the ones determining the underlying policy. But it really does concern the ordinary citizen, the person who is directly affected. I truly believe this is a strong asset we possess and it also distinguishes us. To put it very plainly, we are good at producing examples. I know that no one is interested in an abstract report. We strive to make the story more personal by producing a suitable example with someone who is directly involved.

Different forms are used to relate to the public. One way is to portray real-life stories to illustrate a large news item (see Box 7.1 for an illustration). *Vox pops* are also used regularly to provide the viewer a possibility of hearing the opinions of others. To get a better understanding of important issues in society, specific groups or contacts are invited to the newsroom to get a better understanding of how television and journalistic processes work. However, for *RTL Nieuws* being responsive to the public means not so much following or bridging with the public's agenda, but stems from a more traditional journalistic trustee model (see also Schudson, 1999). It is its journalistic responsibility to provide the public with information that concerns them in an understandable and accessible manner.

7.4.3 Empathic responsiveness

In contrast to the cases of *de Volkskrant* and *NOS Nieuw,* there are indications of empathic responsiveness at *RTL Nieuws*. Over the years *RTL Nieuws* has

expanded its research unit with since 2008 six full-time research journalists. Besides the task of investigating specific issues and being a watchdog for established power holders, the work of this unit shows elements of bonding and siding with the public against the established institutions. Without being open anti-establishment, there are frequent instances where *RTL Nieuws* sides with the ordinary citizen in challenging the authorities and the institutions that represent them. At the same time, the autonomy of the journalistic process is still prime. One example is *RTL Nieuws'* increasing use of the *Wet Openbaarheid van Bestuur* (literally 'Law for transparency in governance', the equivalent of the Freedom of Information Act) as a tool to expose information regarding the performance of political actors. Many interviewees used the words 'bold', 'rebellious' and 'outspoken' to describe their investigative task and the experience of holding power holders to account.

7.4.4 Policy of responsiveness

In conclusion, being responsive to the public has a definite commercial aim, as *RTL Nieuws* is part of a commercial media enterprise. Generating a large audience is a precondition for its existence. But, in this commercial context, the independent journalistic news organisation considers being responsive to the public, focusing on their agenda of urgency, to be one of its core journalistic values. The importance of the relationship with the public is demonstrated through a journalistic style that tailors itself to the needs of the viewers, sides with the normal citizens and understands issues of the ordinary person. However, it is less about entering in a dialogue with the public.

7.5 Practicing accountability: an informal tradition

At *RTL Nieuws,* accountability and responsiveness are primarily arranged informally without many formalized instruments being initiated by the editor-in-chief. This is quite a contrast to the large number of formal instruments that have been introduced at both *de Volkskrant* and *NOS Nieuws*. Does this informal policy indicate that accountability and responsiveness are barely implemented, let alone incorporated or internalised in the organisation?

In the following section, based primarily on the interviews and observation analyses, I will describe the attitudes to accountability I found at *RTL Nieuws* and use the four phases of adoption (introduction, implementation, incorporation and internalisation) as defined in Chapter 4 to help assess to

what extent the ideas and related instruments can be considered to have become part of the organisation's structure and culture. Table 7.1 provides an overview of the accountability instruments including the level of adoption.

The level of adoption of accountability is firstly related to how journalists from *RTL Nieuws* view the concept of accountability. The majority of the interviewees do not relate much to the issue of accountability and give priority to their journalistic responsibilities of informing and controlling those with power, with an increasing attention for the latter. The deputy editor-in-chief noted, "We do not only have the task to register the news but also to set the agenda.

Table 7.1: Instruments of accountability at RTL Nieuws

Year	Instruments	Type of accountability	Suggested/ Self-initiated	Overt/ Covert (O/C)	Level of adoption
1989	**Audiovisual Media Service Directive**	Political	—	—	Adhering to
1960	**Council for Journalism**	Public Professional	Suggested	O O	Only collaborating financially
Unknown	**Responding to complaints**	Public	Self-initiated	C	Implemented
1998	**Editorial statute**	Public	Self-initiated	O	Implemented
2005	**Mediadebat**	Public Professional	Suggested	O O	Collaborating (until 2010)
2005	**Nieuwsmonitor**	Basis for public and professional	Suggested	—	—
2008	**Transparency source material**	Public	Self-initiated	O	Implemented
2009	**Weblogs**	Public	Self-initiated	O	Implemented
Unknown	**Evaluation & reflection moments**	Professional	Self-initiated	C	Implemented

One of the core values of journalism is having the curiosity to investigate and that also means trying to expose or unmask things." Investing in their performance and responsibility does not only have a journalistic component,

but also a clear strategic component of trying to attract a larger audience than their competitors.

Accountability is believed to be intrinsic within the responsibilities of the journalist. Trust should be maintained by acting according to journalistic principles and can be enhanced by relating to the public and by being open about the journalistic processes. The editor-in-chief saw my research period as a form of accountability, "We let you in to show you how things actually work here, to give full transparency of the processes and to show you that we have nothing to hide."

7.5.1 Public accountability implemented

Judging by their perceived definition of accountability, the employees of *RTL Nieuws* tend to focus on their responsibilities as informer and watchdog. They are also not very keen on collaborating with suggested forms of accountability such as the Council for Journalism. When a complainant remains dissatisfied and no mutual consensus is found, the editor-in-chief, deputy editor-in-chief and the majority of the interviewees at professional level (editors, reporters and presenters) are in favour of bringing the case to court. They prefer the court to the Council for Journalism because the court offers the option for parties to appeal. Moreover, the editor-in-chief does not believe that the Council is sufficiently professional to handle complicated issues.

In terms of self-initiated accountability, preference is given to arranging it in an informal way. The deputy editor-in-chief and editor-in-chief believe that responding to mistakes and making corrections when necessary is fundamental to the journalistic process and self-evident for a commercial organisation. According to the editor-in-chief, "You have to serve the customer".

In practice, however, responding to the viewer is not done regularly. The possibility for the viewer to comment or complain is available, but most interviewees do not perceive that there is a substantial amount of response from the public. Hence, among the employees the urgency to respond seems to be minimal. Even though the editor-in-chief and deputy editor-in-chief believe that the trend of increasing assertiveness among citizens has contributed to a critical approach to the media neither management nor professionals have experienced a rise in discontent regarding their journalistic performance.

Moreover, when complaints are made, editors or unit heads are hesitant to answer because they believe the complaints are frequently based on the self-interest of the complainant or that the comments are inappropriate or too harsh. A presenter said, "I don't receive much feedback from the audience. And the few mails I do receive are often too harsh or not constructive. I would rather listen to the feedback I get from family and friends". A unit head added that, "I always have to first read the email carefully to distinguish whether the complaint is justifiable or merely based on self-interest, the latter often being the case. If so, I do not feel the urge to answer". A third reason that the journalists are not too keen on responding is that the system of response is not well coordinated among the staff. While the Internet and national news units are responsible for replying to complaints, in practice the division of tasks remains unclear and there is no agreement on how the different types of emails should be dealt with, answered or forwarded to the appropriate person. The editor-in-chief is aware of this problem and admits that the best solution would be to formalize this by having one person responsible for dealing with the incoming emails. However, with tight budgets he would prefer to invest in a journalistic position instead of employing someone like an ombudsman.

Responding to the viewer is primarily done in an informal way, without many formal instruments. This informal policy fits the editor-in-chief's view of managing an organisation based on an individual's own responsibility. As he says, "I believe in organisations that have the discipline to understand what needs to be done every day". In line with this, formal instruments such as the ombudsman do not appeal to him. Not only the editor-in-chief, but also several editors, reporters and unit heads prefer not to introduce or adhere to formal instruments, but to act upon journalistic principles and responsibilities. This seems to fit the informal and horizontal organisational culture, with few official policies or written guidelines. When attempts are made to formalize or create guidelines or rules many of the editorial staff draw attention to their journalistic responsibilities, which are practiced best when free and autonomous. Box 7.2 gives an illustration of the conflict between the informal culture and an attempt to centralize or formalize policy. Besides the influence of the editor-in-chief, who would "rather fight against institutions than conform to them", the historical background fits this informal culture. A reporter described the news organisation in the early days as "an underdog and a rebellious club". This 'rebellious' character seems to still be visible today,

fighting against formal institutions and choosing to organise things themselves based upon their own morality and responsibilities and not put upon them. At the same time, it seems to fit the traditional journalistic culture of being autonomous of any external influence.

To conclude, public accountability does not form a central premise in the daily journalistic routine. It is at most implemented in the organisation but not incorporated let alone internalised. It is felt by members of the staff to be embedded within their professional responsibilities. The informal structure of

Box 7.2: Conflict between informal culture and structure and attempts for formal policy

Around the middle of 2009 several reporters and editors from RTL Nieuws started to use Twitter for both personal and professional purposes. Some were more active than others and some only mentioned work-related issues while others added more personal anecdotes. At the end of December the editor-in-chief and deputies wrote an email stipulating the specific guidelines for using Twitter. Moreover, they emphasised the importance of clearly distinguishing between private and professional use.

This email created quite some discussion in the newsroom, with a majority of journalists reacting rather defensively and becoming agitated about the manner in which the management approached this issue. One specific discussion amongst reporters characterised the general mood:

"So now I receive all these rules I have to keep to. And what am I supposed to do with that?"

"I think they just want us to be aware of certain issues; that we shouldn't just give our personal opinions about news issues on Twitter."

"Yes, but obviously I consider what to put on Twitter. I don't need such an email to remind me of that."

"If it has to go this way, I will stop using Twitter."

Therefore, a few weeks after this email and the commotion at the newsroom, it was decided to organise a meeting to elaborate on the use and objectives of Twitter. During a talk with the deputy editor, he referred to it as "quite an internal struggle. We are used to and prefer to arrange things informally. But on this issue of Twitter we wanted everyone to follow the same lead in the organisation. At this point, many journalists, mainly reporters make extensive use of Twitter to update their followers on how a certain news item is being generated". A few months later in an article on the use of Twitter in the professional magazine De Journalist a deputy editor of RTL Nieuws said:

"We organised a tweet-meet to reflect on the use of Twitter. We don't have any policy documents with rules on the use of social media, like NOS does. A lot of their rules are formalized which all amount to our only unwritten rule: use your common knowledge and be aware that you are a public figure" (Nab, 2010).

the organisation has the advantage that the management is open to bottom-up initiatives. In 2009, several journalists expressed support for the setting up new initiatives to provide the public with more transparency including writing weekly columns to give more insight into the journalistic processes, organizing online chats with journalists and inviting guests on a regular basis. However, a downside is that in practice the majority of the journalists are preoccupied with making news programmes and do not feel the urge to invest in accountability to the public.

7.5.2 Professional accountability implemented

Besides the daily planning meetings, the use of evaluation and self-reflective moments as covert forms of professional accountability is applauded by everyone in the organisation as they are means of enhancing journalistic quality. As at *de Volkskrant* and *NOS Nieuws*, there are many moments when the journalists come together to discuss and plan items before transmission and there is a fixed time for evaluation and reflection. The editors and reporters added that the atmosphere during evaluation moments, either formal or informal, is usually constructive, evaluating the work and not pointing out faults or blaming a specific person. Moreover, the short communication channels between the different departments and different levels of the organisation allow staff members to get together and discuss matters when the need is felt, without having to wait for a formal meeting. Based on my observations, the editor-in-chief plays a significant role in stimulating a critical and constructive debate. This was confirmed during the interviews. An editor said, "During the 1:15 pm meeting the editor-in-chief is good at provoking a discussion and evoking objections, which helps us to be more critical". The members of the staff agree that the editor-in-chief can create a critical discussion, which stimulates the members of the staff to take an equally critical approach. An editor said: "We don't need a formal instrument like an ombudsman to tell us what we do wrong. We are clever and responsible enough to see when we failed. We might not always correct it publicly, but internally we certainly learn from it". Overall, this informal policy is felt to be a positive aspect of the organisational structure and culture.

Yet, in this time-pressured environment, evaluating and reflecting on one's work is not given first priority, as it can be a time-consuming matter. The editorial staff are preoccupied with planning and making the next programme. On a

daily basis there is a formal moment of evaluation, but only a select group of involved people join this meeting. Moments of evaluation and self-reflection are never documented, which means that people absent from the meeting are not informed of the discussions or of any decisions made. Therefore, some professionals expressed their wish to have the proceedings of certain meetings recorded. Paradoxically, all the interviewees agreed that formalizing processes does not fit their organisational culture and would not improve the quality of their internal processes.

To conclude, there is a rather constructive internal feedback culture at *RTL Nieuws*. This can be ascribed to the relatively small and informal nature of the organisation, which makes it easier to speak to someone. Also the role of the editor-in-chief during the evaluation meetings seems to trigger more debate and self-reflection. However, as in the other two media organisations, journalists of *RTL Nieuws* are so caught up with bringing out reliable news as fast as possible, that this hinders them from taking the time to build in more constructive moments of evaluations with their peers or to incorporate it in their daily journalistic culture.

7.6 Responsiveness internalised

Being responsive to the public is not new to this news organisation. In fact, from the beginning it has been used as a strategy to distinguish itself from the public competition. Responsiveness at *RTL Nieuws* is not only a result of an *increasing* awareness of or uncertainty over the public. It is felt to always have been one of their core principles of journalism. It is part of its editorial philosophy and internalised in the journalistic processes. While one would assume that at *RTL Nieuws* mainly strategic responsiveness would be visible, the interviews and observation analysis confirm that their journalistic approach is based on a mix of strategic and civic reasoning with elements of empathic responsiveness. Table 7.2 provides an overview of the instruments of responsiveness and level of adoption.

Table 7.2 Instruments of responsiveness at RTL Nieuws

Year	Instrument	Type of responsiveness	Level of adoption
1989	Public-oriented journalism	Strategic & Civic	Internalised
Unknown	Guests	Strategic & Civic	Implemented
2009	Polls	Strategic & Civic	Implemented
2009	Hyves (SNS)	Strategic & Civic	Implemented
2009	Twitter	Strategic & Civic	Implemented
Unknown	Research journalism	Components of empathic	—

7.6.1 A mix of strategic of civic responsiveness

To the editorial staff being responsive to the public is part of their daily journalistic practice. All the interviewees used the same key terms to describe the style of *RTL Nieuws*: public-focused, accessible, informal, taking the target group into account and bringing the news from a less institutional news perspective. They also felt that news should be both engaging and relevant, referring to the need to attract as well as inform the audience. Everyone agreed that from the beginning *RTL Nieuws* wanted to distinguish itself from the public service broadcaster, mainly by bringing the news in a more accessible and understandable manner. There is an overall agreement to convey the news from the perspective of 'the man in the street' by explaining what the news is about and how it can affect the viewer. Also since 2002, partly as result of the Fortuyn incident, the interviewees said they have become more sensitive to the discontent within society and have attempted to empathize with the feelings of the public. A reporter said, "That's when the realization came that we had been working in an ivory tower and there was a genuine motivation to come down from it". A unit head summarized, "One tries to give news a human character". Box 7.3 provides an illustration of this public-oriented approach. This shows that coming to terms with the public and serving the public in their understanding of society has both a strategic and a civic motive.

Among the editorial staff the strategic commercial motive is not perceived as something negative, but rather as being essential in an increasingly competitive environment. There is also a general perception that this focus on audience

ratings allows the aspiration of *RTL Nieuws* to continuously invest in making quality news programmes to manifest itself. There is an overall consensus that the basic journalistic principles of unbiased and objective news-making in the interest of the public still dominate over making news the consumer is interested in. However, according to several journalists this increasing focus on the public should be applied with caution, since it is tempting in an increasingly competitive climate and difficult economic times to give priority to commercial instead of the journalistic objectives. In relation to this issue, one might suspect internal pressure from the commercial media enterprise, *RTL Nederland*, to which the professional news organisation belongs. However, the interviews with the journalists do not show any signs of this. Many journalists believe it to be a demand that they put on themselves and which is not put on them by the management. One presenter of *RTL Nieuws* said about this:

> *In over ten years of working for RTL, no one from management has ever bothered me with news ratings. Despite what many outsiders think, it's not the RTL management that breathes down journalists' necks about audience ratings. Instead it's the news department itself that carefully keeps an eye on ratings (Nieman, 2007: 78).*

Box 7.3: Solving the citizen-consumer divide

In December 2009 all children under 4 were called up to receive vaccinations against swine flu (H1N1), an event that was covered extensively on all the major news broadcasts. The large sport complexes and town halls where the vaccinations were being administered were shown with images of crying children being comforted by their parents. During the second round of vaccinations, RTL Nieuws also felt the need to cover this issue, since it was one affecting many citizens that day, including a sizable portion of their target group, as parents of small children were likely to be in the 20–49 age category.

However, instead of having an institutional speaker such as a doctor or vaccine expert lead the item, it was decided to give this issue a more "human touch", as stated by the presenter involved. Since he has a child who also had to be vaccinated, the item revolved around him, following the process from preparing at home, taking his daughter for the injection to consoling the inevitable tears with a gift. "Many of the presenters of RTL Nieuws are part of our target group and in this way we could distinguish ourselves from others and at the same time tell the story from a human perspective that many can relate to. At the newsroom this style of presentation was discussed and even though the opinions diverged, the majority agreed that it is important to bring the news in such a way that it relates to the viewer".

The independence of the news organisation from the commercial enterprise is guaranteed in the editorial statute and the editorial staff agree that in practice this is also secured. However, many interviewees perceive that there is a general feeling among large segments of public that commercial and sensational elements within the news programme are intrinsic to a commercial organisation which brings into question the credibility of their bulletins. A presenter said, "During an interview with a local radio they asked me if I am sponsored by specific brands. I couldn't believe they asked me that". Nevertheless, according to the majority of the editors and reporters they have built up a trustworthy image among their sources and politicians over the years. The editor-in-chief and deputies are very much attentive to the fact that an organisation's image, in particular that of a commercial enterprises, is very fragile, obliging them to work continuously to maintain and improve the quality of their products and to build trust relations. Increasingly, they have not only used strategies to bridge and bind with the public to gain or retain the public trust, but also empathic forms of responsiveness to bond with the public. By siding with the public and watching over the performance of institutions, *RTL Nieuws* sometimes takes the role of caretaker of the public against the established elite. However, this is only done implicitly as the RTL's main objective is the bring news in a neutral and objective manner.

7.6.2 Interactive instruments implemented

Responsiveness is part of the culture of *RTL Nieuws* and internalised in the daily journalistic processes. The majority of the interviewees do not believe that they need specific instruments to interact with or relate to the citizen/consumer in order to understand the public's agenda. They are the professionals who should be able to make institutional information understandable to the public. Many also said that the youthful composition of the editorial staff contributes to a better understanding of their rather young target group. Moreover, while there is not much ethnic diversity, an internal poll at the time of the 2006 election showed that their political interests were quite diverse and did not reflect the traditional assumption that news journalists tend to have a left-leaning political orientation (Nieman, 2007). This is viewed in relation to the continuous media debate in the Netherlands, in which the public broadcasters are criticized for being left-oriented and acting as an extension of the established elite, and therefore incapable of addressing a broad public. To many at *RTL Nieuws* this diversity among the editorial staff is a necessity if they are to provide diverse and broad news coverage.

In recent years, online interactive instruments have been implemented, but among the editorial staff these instruments have not always been received with open arms and sometimes even been contested. This can be attributed to different factors. Firstly, the interactive mechanisms are relatively new and are still at an experimental phase. Secondly, while many see the added value of getting a better understanding of and relating to the public, a majority of the interviewees doubt the actual positive effect of it since the responses they receive do not represent society as a whole. This was particularly mentioned in regard to the daily poll on the social medium Hyves. Thirdly, several interviewees said that one should be aware of not automatically taking these responses into account. An editor provided me with an illustration. She had planned an item on swine flu vaccination and why a large part of the population was against it. Based on the responses on the website she believed that a large number of people thought the vaccination programme was some kind of government conspiracy. It turned out that these opinions and the number of negative remarks on the website did not correspond to the general view of Dutch citizens.

Many fear that overuse of the instruments can lead to a news organisation being overly responsive, conceding to the public and thereby not taking journalistic responsibilities. Whether in relation to the collaboration with the social networking site or the possibility for the public to react to the items featured on the website, a few believed there was a potential tendency to overemphasise the interest and desires of the public with a clear commercial objective. One presenter said, "I think it is very good that we always think in terms 'what's in it for me?', but at this point the website might be taking this too literally and focusing too much on what the public wants. It is becoming too populist". A reporter said, "It is important to listen to the public, but there is a difference between listening to the public to understand their issues and accepting their issues as the truth. It is therefore very important to find the right balance." A more practical problem that employees faced is the amount of time it takes to respond to the input of the public or use it for follow-up stories. The editor-in-chief and deputy editor-in-chief also emphasised this. "This is growing problem because interactivity leads to more interaction and reaction, but we do not have the capacity to reply to or make use of all these responses. I cannot afford to have a journalist work full time to handle all the responses." In practice, the website is primarily used for informing and less for interacting.

In conclusion, at *RTL Nieuws* there are several motives for being responsive to the public. However, they do not seem to conflict with each other. Taking the public into consideration is felt to be the organisation's core value, a fundamental task for a news organisation and an essential part of their attempts to try to relate to their target group. However, when it comes to actually engaging in a dialogue, the editorial staff remain hesitant as it undermines their professional responsibilities.

7.7 Conclusion

By taking a case study of the Dutch news organisation *RTL Nieuws*, this chapter has described how an organisation of the commercial media sector is responding to structural and performance challenges as well as their attitude to the contemporary media accountability debate. Rising competition, an increasingly fragmented audience, tight budgets and the emergence of new technologies have prompted the commercial broadcaster to gradually re-address its relation with its public. Criticism of their performance and subsequent declining trust are not felt to have increased over time. On the contrary, many believe that over the years, in particular politicians and other relevant sources are perceiving them more and more as a credible journalistic organisation, comparable to the public broadcaster's news organisation. The issue of trust does not seem to be associated with the discontent over their performance, but is more often linked to their commercial background.

First and foremost, *RTL Nieuws* focuses on the structural challenges of growing competition, an increasingly fragmented audience and coping with tight budgets. It wants to maintain or improve the trust and loyalty of the public and distinguish itself from others by investing in their social responsibility and being responsive to the public. Taking the public into consideration has always been important to *RTL Nieuws*, and has increased in importance with rising competition and a less loyal audience. In addition, understanding the viewer's wishes and concerns to better tailor the news information is felt to be intrinsic to the task of a news organisation and embedded within the principles of journalism.

RTL Nieuws is not greatly bothered about the debate on media performance. It seems as if the limited role it takes in the political debate allows it to

avoid investing in the formalisation of accountability. Moreover, even though implicit, there is an overall attitude that it wants to distinguish itself from the establishment. Introducing formal accountability instruments is considered to be conforming to the desires of the established elite. *RTL Nieuws* staff prefer a looser, more informal policy that is focused on catering to the needs and responding to the complaints of the individual viewer. The overall informal organisational policy has its positive aspects as it leaves much room for the responsibility of the individual journalist, creates possibilities for bottom-up initiatives and contributes to a larger possibility for overall support from the editorial staff. However, in practice this informal policy leads to a counter effect as most journalists are not focused on being accountable to the public. Yet, with regard to professional accountability it is this informal culture, with a relatively small editorial staff that creates opportunities for constructive feedback moments.

This difference in focus has consequences for the adoption of instruments. Where responsiveness is part of daily practice and internalised in the organisation structure and culture, public and professional accountability are only at the implementation phase.

Nevertheless, even though the organisation prefers to maintain and improve trust by investing in its social responsibility and responsiveness, awareness of the issue of accountability has increased as a result of the rise of the issue in the public debate, the technological possibilities and the corresponding wider demand for more openness, transparency and governance. Where the management and majority of professionals opt for McQuail's liability model, focused on causal responsibility and the "potential harm that media publication might cause" (2005: 209), there is a gradual shift to an answerability model, which includes a "willingness to explain, defend and justify actions of publications or omissions" (McQuail, 2003: 204). There is more interest in engaging in a dialogue with the public and providing transparency on the background and construction of a news story. Tsfati and Cappella assert that trust relates to uncertainty, "given that the media deal with the impersonal world, audiences are always at least somewhat uncertain about news media contents in the sense that it is usually hard for them to verify media reports" (2003: 506). By providing transparency, *RTL Nieuws* wants to take away the public's uncertainties and show that its performance is grounded in journalistic

rather than commercial values. As such, it offers the public the possibility to hold it to account.

To conclude, in a changing media landscape with structure and performance pressures, *RTL Nieuws* embraces measures that fit the combination of cultures of a commercial media enterprise and of journalistic professionalism. This commercial news organisation does not feel a strong demand to respond to criticisms of their performance through political accountability instruments or through suggested public accountability instruments. Rather, it prefers to hold on to the traditional journalistic professional values. At the same time, there is an increased awareness both at management and professional level that the structural challenges in combination with the increasing public debate on media performance requires an intensification of the relationship with its target group. However, to take the public into account is deemed more important than being accountable to the public.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

Chapter 8

Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

Over the past decade the role of the media and journalism in the Netherlands seems to have come under increased scrutiny. Political actors blame the media for exaggerating the facts and creating media hypes, for being too focused on strategy and conflict, and for focusing more on entertainment than information. Moreover, politicians feel media are misusing their increasing power in society (Brants, 2000; Brants & Bardoel, 2008; Brants & Van Praag, 2005; Vasterman, 2004). They blame them for the waning public trust in politics. Politicians hold the media responsible for the rising number of indecisive voters and a generally decreasing public trust in politics. The phrase 'it's the media that did it' has often been used to capture this overall discontent with media performance. But not only politicians, also the public seems to be agitated or at least there seems to be a general discontent on the way media perform (Bardoel, 2003). The media have been caught up in a heated debate in the public arena after specific incidents brought their role into question. Particularly, there was criticism on how the media covered the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 and the position they took during the rise and death of politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002. These pressures from politics and the public have created a greater demand for the media to be more accountable.

The growing criticism of media performance and the subsequent pressure for accountability forms the premise of this dissertation. How have the media responded? Traditionally, the state has been a central actor in the formation of media policy through law and regulation in order to safeguard media diversity. However, there has been a shift from a regulatory role of government to a greater responsibility for the involved actors, including the media: from regulation to governance (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004a; d'Haenens, Mansell & Sarikakis, 2010; Donges, 2007; McQuail, 2007; Puppis, 2010; Schulz & Held, 2004). Is the state indeed taking a more distant role and what is the role of the media in possible new governance arrangements? This subject

has gained importance with both the public (Broertjes, 2006; Jansen & Drok, 2005; RMO, 2003; ROB, 2003) and in scholarly debate (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004a, 2004b; Brants & Bardoel, 2008; McQuail, 2003, 2007). Moreover, there have been previous studies on specific accountability instruments such as the ombudsman, the Council for Journalism and codes of ethics (Evers, Groenhart & Groesen, 2009; Mentink, 2006; Koene, 2008; Van Dalen & Deuze, 2006). This research does not look into one specific instrument of accountability, but at the overall response of various media organisations and journalists to the criticism of their performance, and it also provides an insight into, explanation and evaluation of the measures adopted within the organisation's structure and culture.

In this final chapter the theoretical notions, the longitudinal analysis and the case study findings are combined to give an answer to my overall research question:

> *How are Dutch news media and journalists responding to criticism of their performance and to what extent have any measures been adopted?*

I start with a summary of my research in section 8.2. Section 8.3 compares the three case studies of *de Volkskrant, NOS Nieuws* and *RTL Nieuws*, looking at how these organisations have responded to pressures for accountability and responsiveness and explaining the differences and similarities in their responses. Section 8.4 provides overall conclusions and answers to the research question. In section 8.5 I will look at the theoretical and conceptual contribution of this research. Finally, section 8.6 concludes with possible implications for media organisations and the journalism profession.

8.2 Summary of this dissertation

This thesis is built up in several parts: a longitudinal analysis, a conceptual analysis and a multiple-case study research of three media organisations. A summary of the different parts is given.

8.2.1 Longitudinal analysis

In order to understand the media's perspective and responses, it was necessary to elucidate empirically whether the debate on media performance has intensified over recent years, and, if so, what and who generated this increase.

Chapter 2 presents the results of a qualitative content analysis of articles in the journalistic magazine *De Journalist* to focus on the media professional debate. A selection of articles of the quality newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* was analysed to understand the publicized public debate. The following research question was answered:

> *Which issues have been prominent in the debate on media performance and what criticism of media and journalism has been voiced over the last 20 years?*

Taking a period of 20 years, between 1987 and 2007, the media debate in the Netherlands has roughly developed in two phases. The first, in the 1990s, was marked by issues that affected the media's structure. Four large issues dominated the debate: media concentration, the legitimation of public service broadcasting, decreasing circulation figures and the advent of online technologies. In the second phase, from 2000 onwards, the debate shifted to media performance issues, where the role of the media was increasingly questioned. Nevertheless, the structural issues did not fade away, but became less paramount in the discussion. The discontent over media performance amounted to four issues: biased media coverage, increasing infotainment and sensationalist aspects in news coverage, the media having too much power and lastly, the media failing to perceive and address the public's concerns. While the first three criticisms have been voiced mainly by politicians, the last is increasingly heard from members of the public.

The starting premise of this research was an assumed explosion of discontent over media performance. However, this empirical research showed that the debate on media performance had *gradually* become manifest by the turn of the century with a later increase in the debate on media accountability and responsiveness. Criticism was mostly voiced by politicians. The public seems to have been less involved. Even though specific events for which the media were criticized functioned as a catalyst for the rise in the debate, the structural issue in the first phase implicitly raised the question of media performance and therefore created a foundation for the variety of media criticism in the second phase.

Subsequently, to understand how the media's response has developed over time an additional research question was formulated in Chapter 2:

> *How have the institutions and actors concerned responded to, coped with, and accommodated these pressures?*

This question was answered through a document analysis of 20 years of annual reports and speeches of Dutch media umbrella organisations including the union of journalists NVJ [Nederlandse Vereniging van Journalisten], the association of editors-in-chief NGH [Nederlands Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren], the public service broadcaster NPO [Nederlandse Publieke Omroep] and the publishers' organisation NDP [Nederlandse Dagbladpers]. In addition, expert interviews with representatives of these organisations were held.

The document analysis of the annual reports and the interview analysis show that together with the shift from a debate about structure to one about performance, increasingly but slowly there has been more acknowledgment for the idea that media organisations are making attempts to being open, accountable and willing to take the public's issues into consideration. There is a shift from a rather defensive attitude to willingness among journalists to discuss their own performance and initiate measures to come to terms with the public. However, whereas politicians insist that the media take measures to be more accountable to the public, the media rather emphasise measures of responsiveness to improve their relationship with the public or consumer.

This longitudinal analysis has shown that media's responsible role is increasingly a point of discussion, putting trust in the media into question. Where in the past public's trust in media performance and loyalty to specific media outlets were more or less self-evident, the combination of structural and performance issues has challenged this trust, putting more emphasis on being accountable and responsive in the hope of regaining this trust.

8.2.2 Theoretical exposé

In the debate on media performance originally two concepts formed the starting point of the research: media responsibility and accountability. The longitudinal analysis revealed that two other concepts also played a crucial role: trust and responsiveness. The increasing criticism of media *responsibility* is challenging the *trust* in the media. This is the overriding perception of

politicians, who in turn demand more *accountable* media. The media, on the other hand, counter with measures intended to foster responsiveness towards the public. Even though these concepts are often used in the daily discourse on media performance, there is no consensus on the precise meaning of these four concepts in relation to each other. Chapter 3 investigated the definitions of these rather ambivalent concepts.

Trust seems the underlying factor in this debate. There are numerous definitions and descriptions of trust, stemming from different academic disciplines such as sociology, economics and communication theory. Without going into detail, this summary operates from the premise that trust is a prerequisite for a well-functioning society (Durkheim, 1964; Luhmann, 1979; Simmel, 1950). In the media context, the presupposition is that if citizens do not trust the media they might turn away from the media and not be able to make an informed judgement about what happens around them and affects them. A subsequent implication is that they will not be able to participate adequately in a democracy.

Trust in the media therefore depends on the *responsibility* of the media to perform well, i.e. reliably. Media responsibility amounts to three tasks: informing the public, offering the public a space for dialogue and opinion and critically monitoring the performance of political and other actors and institutions in a reliable and independent way (Van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 1982; Wildenmann & Kaltefleiter, 1965).

The concept of *accountability* relates to the extent to which the media answer to criticism or justify their performance (Plaisance, 2000; Pritchard, 2000; McQuail, 2005). This can be directed towards politics, the public, the journalist themselves or the market (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2004a; McQuail, 1997, 2003). Under political accountability media are by law accountable to political institutions. Market accountability means that the media are held accountable and judged by (the interest of) the consumer. Public and professional accountability are self-regulatory, as the initiatives are taken on a voluntary basis. The objective of the former is to be accountable to the public by responding to complaints or reactions; the latter is associated with professionalism and is directed towards the journalist. Professional and public accountability mechanisms are preferred by media institutions and

professionals, because they appear to co-exist best with the principle of freedom of the press (McQuail, 1997).

Based on a combination of my theoretical and longitudinal analysis, I perceived that there was a multitude of self-regulatory measures (public and professional accountability). In public accountability, some are covert, directed towards the individual, others are overt, directed to the public at large. Likewise, covert professional accountability is oriented towards the journalist within the media organisation, whereas in its overt form it is oriented towards the media profession as a whole.

Even though public accountability is voluntary, third parties are increasingly involved. Hodges (1986) distinguishes between contracted and self-imposed accountability, but I use the term 'suggested' rather than 'contracted' since the media are not obliged to join a specific contract with a third party. Also, I use 'self-initiated' instead of 'self-imposed' as this indicates that such measures are the media's voluntary initiative without any (informal) pressure from others.

Closely related to accountability, *responsiveness* is about taking the public and their issues seriously into consideration by engaging and interacting with them (Brants & Bardoel, 2008). This concept seems to have also gained importance in the debate on the public role and performance of the media. Being responsive to the public can have different forms (Brants & De Haan, 2010). It can have a *civic* motive when trying to understand and learn from the public by taking its agenda into consideration; a *strategic* motive when trying to attract consumers by listening to their wishes; and it can have an *empathic* motive when siding with the citizen and their problems against the establishment.

These theoretical concepts form the basis for the case study research.

8.2.3 Three case studies

After the longitudinal and conceptual analysis the question remained as to how media are currently responding to this debate on their performance, to the growing demand for accountability and what measure are taken to come closer to the public.

Three case studies were chosen, each representing a different media sector: the press, public service broadcasting and commercial broadcasting. During a period of three months at each of the three media organisations I was almost full-time present which enabled me to use a triangulation of methods—documents, observation analysis and interviews. This was necessary to verify how the organisations have responded in terms of accountability and responsiveness and to what extent these measures have been adopted in the media structure and the professional culture. Chapter 4 provides an elaboration of the methods used and a description of the phases of adoption (introduction, implementation, incorporation and internalisation).

The case of the newspaper de Volkskrant

In Chapter 5, the first case study, of *de Volkskrant,* is presented. This is one of the leading quality newspapers in the Netherlands. From the mid-1990s, with the appointment of a new editor-in-chief, *de Volkskrant* introduced a range of public accountability instruments including an ombudsman, a correction box, a transparency box, adding names to news articles and the publication of a book in which different outsiders reflected on the performance of the newspaper during specific incidents (see Table 8.1).

In particular, the editor-in-chief strongly supported accountability as a way of regaining the waning trust of both political actors and the public. Specific incidents in which the role of the newspaper was questioned, such as the way Dutch journalists had reported the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 and the murder of the politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002, reinforced this attention for accountability. Over the years, the instruments have gained a prominent place with a focus on overt public accountability, which shows the newspaper's willingness to admit its mistakes to the public at large. At the same time, the increasing importance that the editorial staff place upon responding to individual complaints shows journalist's effort to connect with the reader (covert public accountability).

Connecting with or relating to the reader is also manifested through instruments of responsiveness. Issues of concern to readers are increasingly used as a starting point, both with a civic and increasingly a strategic motive. Taking the reader into account (responsiveness) is felt to be essential in times when readers are turning their back on newspapers and youth are generally

Table 8.1: Instruments of accountability at *de Volkskrant, NOS Nieuws & RTL Nieuws*

Instrument	Type of instrument	Overt/ Covert (O/)	de Volkskrant	NOS Nieuws	RTL Nieuws
Media Act	Political	—	Not obliged	Adhering to	Not obliged
Visitation Commission	Political	—	Not obliged	Adhering to	Not obliged
Policy plans & performance agreements	Political Market	—	Not obliged	Adhering to	Adhering to as market
Council for Journalism	Public Professional	O O	Collaborating	Collaborating	Only collaborating financially
Mediadebat (until 2010)	Public Professional	O O	Collaborating	Collaborating	Collaborating
Nieuwsmonitor	Basis for public and professional	—	—	—	—
Letters to editor/ responding to complaints	Public	O & C	Incorporated	Implemented	Implemented
Ombudsman	Public Professional	O & C C	Incorporated	Implemented	—
Publication author's names	Public	O	Incorporated	—	—
Correction box	Public	O	Incorporated	Implemented	—
Transparency source material	Public	O	—	—	Implemented
Weblogs	Public Civic & strategic resp.	O	Implemented	Incorporated	Implemented
Editorial guideline	Professional Public	C O	Implemented	Implemented	Implemented
Evaluation meetings	Professional	C	Implemented	Implemented	Implemented
Self-evaluations	Professional Public	C O	Implemented	—	—

disinclined to subscribe to a newspaper. While responsiveness seems to be incorporated in the organisation, the measures are more aimed at a better-educated and rather left-leaning public and less to the public at large. The newspaper remains at addressing its subscribers and less so at a broader potential (target) group. Moreover, journalists close ranks when it comes to involving the reader or giving too much insight in selecting and constructing the news. Lastly, an underlying defensive attitude, related to their professional authority and autonomy prevents both responsiveness and public accountability from being internalised.

Being professionally accountable to one's peers is arranged through formal moments of evaluation within the organisation. However, the journalistic mind-set is more focused on reaching tomorrow's deadline than on debating and evaluating performance. The time pressure that journalists are dealing with and the increasing competition of online media leave little room to evaluate their coverage after publication. Moreover, traditionally newspaper journalists work quite individually and autonomously, so giving feedback on colleagues' work is a delicate issue. Preference is given to doing this informally on a one-to-one basis. This rather closed debate culture prevents journalists from giving their peers feedback on the newspaper's performance. These factors prevent professional accountability from being incorporated, let alone internalised.

In all, *de Volkskrant* has been an early-adopter of a range of instruments to improve both the trust and loyalty of the public. However, the culture of journalistic autonomy still dominates in daily practice which does not sit well with accountability and responsiveness. With the departure of the editor-in-chief in July 2010, a fervent advocate of accountability and responsiveness, it remains to be seen whether this policy will be continued.

The case of the public news organisation NOS Nieuws

Chapter 6 describes the second case study, of Dutch public service broadcasting news organisation, *NOS Nieuws*. The year 2002 was significant following the murder of politician Pim Fortuyn. After the media were accused of having contributed to a climate which led to his death, the editor-in-chief came out strongly in favour of 'stepping out of the ivory tower' and he tried to stimulate a journalistic culture of openness, accountability and public dialogue.

Public service broadcasting has historically been bound to forms of political accountability. While at the institutional level (Netherlands Public Service Broadcasting NPO) this is still the case, at the professional level the management of *NOS Nieuws* has attempted to be more directly accountable to the public. The rise and death of Fortuyn was a period that opened the eyes of the news organisation. In subsequent years it introduced a range of instruments for the public to hold *NOS Nieuws* to account, like a public complaints desk, an ombudsman and a correction box. Moreover, weblogs and the *Chat on Friday*, a weekly interactive instrument on a topical issue between the public and an invited speaker, are used pro-actively to explain journalistic choices and errors (see Table 8.1). Public accountability is mainly arranged in an overt manner, with the ombudsman and the public complaints desk playing an intermediary role. Where the editorial staff are proponents of opening up and showing accountability to the public, in practice journalists do not see the added value of these instruments as they feel that accountability is embedded in their responsibility and that many of the complaints are motivated by self-interest or blatantly discriminatory. Moreover, the time-pressured environment in which they work supposedly leaves them little time to invest in accountability.

Performance and structural challenges obliged *NOS Nieuws* not only to show more openness, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to take the concerns of 'the ordinary man' into consideration (see Table 8.2). While responsiveness started off with a civic reasoning, increasingly there is acknowledgement that taking the public into account is essential to deal with its fading viewer's loyalty, particularly with the younger audience. Yet, while there is a strong intention to connect the 'state with the street', in daily practice this is still a linkage that is difficult to achieve. Besides logistical reasons, journalists find it difficult to find a balance between informing and listening.

Planning, discussing and coming together internally with colleagues are part of the daily routine at *NOS Nieuws*. However, being professionally accountable to one's peers and evaluating one's performance or reflecting on journalistic issues seems to be difficult. Besides time-pressure and scheduling problems, the rather soft debate culture restrains journalists from giving each other critical feedback. While the editor-in-chief is aware of this and new attempts have been made for organizing moments of self-reflection, it seems hard to change the autonomous professional culture and structure.

Concluding, the year 2002 marked a turning point at *NOS Nieuws*. Since then, public accountability and responsiveness have become a central premise in the organisational policy through a top-down approach. However, this policy has not landed in the newsroom where the editorial staff struggle to fit it into their daily practice. It is to be seen whether the new editor-in-chief, who started in July 2011 will continue and be more successful in the incorporation of their policy.

The case of the commercial news organisation RTL Nieuws

Chapter 7 describes the final case study, of *RTL Nieuws*. This was the first commercial broadcasting news organisation in the Netherlands and remains the largest rival of the public news organisation *NOS Nieuws*. As a commercial journalistic organisation with its corporate headquarters in Luxembourg, *RTL Nieuws* is not bound by Dutch instruments of political accountability, but it has to conform to European media regulation. Accountability is mainly arranged informally (see Table 8.1). Viewers have the possibility to complain and there is an unwritten rule that these complaints should be responded to as one should serve the customer. It is the responsibility of the individual journalist to take account of the public responses in a covert manner. There is an overall consensus that accountability does not need formal instruments, as it should be part of journalist's professional responsibility. In practice this informal policy leads to journalists not spending much time on responding to complaints. Many are felt to be merely in the self-interest of the complainant or so inconsiderate and insulting that the journalists hardly feel responsible to answer to them. Moreover, the limited number of the complaints and felt pressure from the political arena have not encouraged *RTL Nieuws* to change its policy. Showing more transparency in the journalistic processes and providing details of sources on the website are nevertheless strategies that are increasingly being used to gain the trust of the audience. Using a somewhat anti-establishment approach there is also a strong focus on investigating social abuses in society and challenging the authorities.

The informal character is also visible in the way professional accountability is organised. There are fixed moments when journalists come together to discuss, plan and evaluate their news programmes. Besides these formal moments there is an informal and rather open feedback culture, with the editor-in-chief stimulating the discussion. However, as with *de Volkskrant* and *NOS Nieuws*,

the time-pressured working environment prevents the journalists from taking time to reflect on each others work. Instead they prefer moving on to the following production.

Being responsive to the public has never been an issue at *RTL Nieuws*. Relating to and taking the public seriously is something that is part and parcel of the organisation's identity and as such internalised within the structure and culture, both civic and strategic reasons. Since its start *RTL Nieuws* has aimed at presenting the news in an accessible and comprehensive manner. It clearly wanted to distinguish itself from the established NOS. However, it is not so much about bridging or learning from the public's agenda, but responsiveness is more about bringing the necessary information in an understandable and accessible manner. More recently, *RTL Nieuws* has introduced online instruments such as weblogs and Twitter to engage with the public. These online activities are still in an experimental phase as journalists are seeking a balance between engaging with the public and maintaining their autonomy and professionalism authority.

To conclude, where *RTL Nieuws* hardly has any formal accountability instruments and at most responds to emails and telephone calls, responsiveness is one of its core business values.

Table 8.2 Instruments of responsiveness at *de Volkskrant, NOS Nieuws & RTL Nieuws*

Instrument	Type of instrument	De Volkskrant	NOS Nieuws	RTL Nieuws
Social network sites	Civic & Strategic	Implemented	Implemented	Implemented
Twitter	Civic & Strategic	Implemented	Implemented	Implemented
Public debates/ guests	Civic & Strategic	Incorporated	Implemented	Implemented
Audience research	Civic & Strategic	—	Implemented	Implemented
Public-oriented journalism	Civic & Strategic	Incorporated	Implemented	Internalised

8.3 Comparing the three organisations

The three cases show differences and similarities in the introduced instruments and the level of adoption. Table 8.1 and 8.2 give an overview of that. Even though the cases differ in that they represent different media sectors, comparative analysis can be carried out with caution, taking the difference in organisational structure and background into account. More notably, these can explain the differences and similarities in how three Dutch news organisations have responded to the increasing debate on media performance and the subsequent alleged waning trust in the media.

Similarities

This multiple-case study research has shown that there are many similarities in how the three media organisations have responded to performance and structural issues. All three show an increasing focus on the public. They now view their role as not only informing but also responding, interacting and reflecting. The organisations each provide the reader/listener/ viewer the possibility to hold them to account by filing a complaint or giving comments on the news coverage either through email or by telephone. Moreover, *de Volkskrant* and *NOS Nieuws* both provide more formal instruments of public accountability such as an ombudsman and a correction box. These two organisations also collaborate with the Council for Journalism, where individuals can file their complaints when they feel harmed by media coverage. *RTL Nieuws* only supports the Council financially.

Besides possibilities for the public to hold the media to account, they increasingly offer insight and transparency on how news stories are constructed. Being transparent does not equate to being accountable, but transparency can potentially form the basis for accountability. *NOS Nieuws* does this by having the editor-in-chief and several editors and reporters describe their experiences on a weblog as to how a news story develops. *RTL Nieuws* prefers to give the public more insight by providing the source material of the story on the website. Even though all three organisations have a weblog, *RTL Nieuws* and *de Volkskrant* are rather indecisive as to how these should be used; the subjective or opinionated character of weblogs often stands in contrast to the journalistic principles of objectivity. When looking at the level of adoption in organisation structure and culture, most of the instruments of public accountability remain in the implementation phase. Only at *de Volkskrant* have a few been incorporated, but none internalised.

Looking within the organisations, professional dialogue and discussion are a daily routine in all the media organisations. Also all three have a fixed daily evaluation moment. Nevertheless, being accountable to one's peers or reflecting on one's work is a delicate issue. The constant time pressure on editorial boards forms an obstacle. But also the 'soft debate culture', particularly at *de Volkskrant* and *NOS Nieuws*, whereby critical confrontation and debate among peers is more or less evaded, prevents professional accountability from being incorporated within the three organisations. Another form of covert professional accountability is an editorial guideline or statute. All three organisations have formulated such procedures. At the same time, these organisations do not show any overt forms of professional accountability as all the instruments are used within the organisation and not open to the whole journalism profession.

There are also similarities in measures of responsiveness. The three media organisations have initiated a new type of journalism that is more focused on the concerns and wishes of the public. This involves letting go of a formal-institutionalized approach in favour of adopting the perspective of the 'ordinary man in the street'. New online instruments such as weblogs, Twitter and social networking sites have provided the opportunity for journalists to engage with the public more directly. However, responsiveness is not guided solely by a journalistic and civic motive of relating to the general public.

Rather, at the three organisations the integration of the public's demands also serves a commercial interest to foster consumer loyalty. At the same time, all three are still struggling how to incorporate online interactive measures in an effective and efficient way.

Differences

Even though the three media organisations show a number of significant similarities in how they respond to both structural and performance issues there are also salient differences. The attempts of *de Volkskrant* and *NOS Nieuws* to be responsive and accountable to the public have been much influenced by the Fortuyn incident of 2002 and its related criticism of media performance. In contrast, *RTL Nieuws*, has, since its start in 1989, always taken measures to be responsive to the public. This was instigated for both competitive and commercial reasons. *RTL Nieuws* was aspired to conduct a different type of journalism compared with the other two more established news organisations.

While *RTL Nieuws* focuses on how to be responsive to the public, it has fewer instruments that would allow the public to hold it to account. At most, public accountability is arranged informally by answering individual complainants in a covert way. At *de Volkskrant* and *NOS Nieuws* there are numerous formal instruments for public accountability, mostly overt in nature. But, the platform of publication differs. Most of the instruments of *de Volkskrant* are visible in the printed newspaper, while *NOS Nieuws* prefers to use the website as a platform instead of their news broadcasts. The adoption of the instrument also differs. While at *de Volkskrant* these instruments are recognized and used by the editorial staff (incorporated), at *NOS Nieuws* these are implemented by the editor-in-chief with little acknowledgement from the editorial staff. Political accountability is only found at *NOS Nieuws* and then indirectly via the NPO (Netherlands Public Broadcasting).

At the professional accountability level all three media organisations arrange daily evaluation meetings, which are attended by a varying number of people of the editorial staff. The role of the editor-in-chief seems to be crucial during these meetings. At *de Volkskrant* and *NOS Nieuws* journalists are hesitant to give feedback or voice their opinion during formal meetings where the editor-in-chief is present. At *RTL Nieuws* this is not the case. On the contrary, many journalists believe he stimulates a critical debate when present. Next to

evaluation and self-reflection, professional accountability is present through an editorial code or guideline. *RTL Nieuws* and *de Volkskrant* have an editorial statute in which they underline their editorial independence. *NOS Nieuws* only specificies its journalistic tasks in a guideline, but does not need to explicate its editorial independence from commercial parties.

In all three media organisations civic and strategic elements of responsiveness are visible, but the emphasis differs. Whereas *RTL Nieuws* has had an initial strategic argumentation, *NOS Nieuws* has felt the pressure of the public opinion to take the public's issues more seriously and be more responsive. The instruments of responsiveness at *de Volkskrant* show an initial civic reasoning to relate to and come closer to the public, but the organisation is increasingly focused on strategic motives in response to the difficult financial situation and declining readership.

The level of adoption of responsiveness also differs. Only at *RTL Nieuws* is responsiveness part of daily practice and internalised within the organisational structure and culture. *NOS Nieuws* has only in recent years made these attempts, but is still struggling to incorporate them in their organisational process. *De Volkskrant* has successfully implemented and incorporated specific measures to relate to the public. However, these are mainly aimed at a higher-educated reader and less at the 'ordinary man in the street'.

Explanations for the differences and similarities

The differences and similarities among the organisations can be explained by distinctive features of the different cases, including the media system, media type, the historical background, a changing society and the role of the editor-in-chief.

Firstly, differences in accountability policy can result from different *media systems*. Where the public broadcaster is bound by legal measures laid down in the Media Act, the commercial broadcaster *RTL Nieuws* does not have to follow Dutch legislation. Historically, the press has a light regulatory regime. It has to adhere to the law, but under the principle of freedom of expression it knows fewer restrictions than public service broadcasters and they also have no formal political accountability.

The media system can also serve as an explanation for the way the public is addressed. Where the public broadcaster is obliged by law to address the public at large, the commercial broadcaster and the newspaper can define their own target group. This explains why the public service broadcaster feels the obligation to choose more overt forms of public accountability, while the commercial broadcaster favours covert forms. The newspaper seems to be somewhat undecided as to how it must profile itself. Over the years it has attempted to address more than a higher educated, rather left-leaning public and to target a more varied group. Yet, in practice the instruments of responsiveness continue to be directed towards a rather elite group of readers.

Secondly, the difference between covert and overt accountability can be explained by the nature of the *type of media*. Newspaper journalists are more directly accountable to their reader as they are often individually responsible for the output. A television news item is usually the result of collaboration between a number of people with both a journalistic and technical background, which makes it more difficult to address a specific person responsible for the output. Moreover, as newspapers allow more space compared with a news broadcast, it is more likely that forms of overt accountability are visible in the newspaper. The broadcasting organisations tend to use the website as a platform to explain their mistakes or provide transparency on the journalistic processes.

Thirdly, the *historical context* can provide an explanation for a difference in response between, on the one hand, *de Volkskrant* and *NOS Nieuws,* and on the other, *RTL Nieuws*. *De Volkskrant* and, up to a point, *NOS Nieuws* have a pillarized origin, in which media served as a platform for the political elite of a specific denomination or movement within society or, as in the case of NOS, were forced to be neutral. Following depillarization in the 1960s, media became more independent of politics and built a more critical stance, but this was also the start of them being criticized for a left-wing bias in their coverage. The rise and murder of populist politician Fortuyn led to a more critical position towards the media. *RTL Nieuws* was only established in 1989, with no historical connections to the pillarization period and subsequent depillarization. Its preoccupation with the audience is more instigated by strategic reasoning and competition. These differences might partly explain why *NOS Nieuws* and *de Volkskrant* perceive a higher level of discontent about

their performance and are taking measures to regain both the trust and loyalty of the public through instruments of accountability and responsiveness, while the *RTL Nieuws* is more focused on the commercial position in the market and on responsiveness.

The accountability policy is not only related to criticism of the performance, but also a reaction to a *changing society* in which openness, transparency and dialogue are increasingly becoming key principles. In the past, accountability in Dutch public broadcasting was organised at an institutional level, predominantly through political measures of accountability and its membership structure. In the 1990s, the issue of public accountability became more prominent with commercial competition and a more fragmented audience, but at the institutional level forms of public accountability never caught on. Only in recent years, has the journalistic organisation *NOS Nieuws* made substantial attempts to relate to the public. What we witness is a shift from institutional to professional policy and from political to public accountability.

De Volkskrant also has responded to changes in society. However, coming from a predominantly journalistic background with a traditionally public service mission, the newspaper organisation is feeling more and more the tension between its nature as a private, commercial enterprise and its journalistic public role. In an increasingly commercial and competitive climate *de Volkskrant* is shifting from a purely journalistic to a more commercial policy and from public to market accountability and strategic responsiveness. *RTL Nieuws* is another example of a combined commercial and journalistic enterprise. However, its policy does not seem to have changed drastically and it still practices a journalistic approach embedded in a commercial setting. From the beginning *RTL Nieuws* has had to ensure its journalistic autonomy in a commercial setting. *RTL Nieuws* (and *de Volkskrant* to an increasing extent) are struggling with the apparent discrepancy of simultaneously having the public interest at heart and securing its commercial-business objectives.

Finally, the *role of the editors-in-chief* is significant for the chosen policy and the level of adoption. The editors-in-chief of the three organisations have been high profile figures in Dutch journalism. From the start of their appointment, the editors-in-chief of *de Volkskrant* and *NOS Nieuws* responded to societal changes and were advocates of coming closer to the public. Moreover, they

made their policy explicit to the outside world with the publication of policy documents. Both responded to a changing society by setting up measures of accountability and responsiveness. The editor-in-chief of *RTL Nieuws* has positioned and marketed his broadcasting organisation as one that distinguishes itself from the established *NOS Nieuws.* This somewhat rebellious and anti-establishment character is still visible within the organisation today. The editor-in-chief is against any form of government interference through co-regulation or policy suggestions. *RTL Nieuws* has a stated mission of trying to fight institutions by exposing social abuses in a rather bold and daring manner. This type of informal and rather anti-establishment culture might explain the minimal number of formalized accountability instruments, as these are perceived to be government impositions.

8.4 Accountability and responsiveness in Dutch media organisations: overall conclusions

What, now, are the overall conclusions of this dissertation? The point of departure of this research was the focus on media responsibility and the demand for accountability from a rather institutional media policy perspective. Both the longitudinal analysis and case study research indicate that the criticism of media performance has, however, mainly been answered at media *professional* level through different forms of accountability and responsiveness. Only the umbrella public broadcasting organisation NPO shows its accountability to politics from a media *institutional* perspective.

Taking a closer look at the professional level, media organisations are not only answering to criticism voiced by political actors and the public by implementing various accountability instruments. In fact, they are more preoccupied with structural problems such as an increasingly fragmented public, a difficult financial situation and a general trend towards commercialization. Being both accountable and responsive to the public are seen as possible solutions to these structural issues and as ways of regaining and retaining the loyalty of the consumer to not only generate social, but also economical capital.

Yet, within media organisations accountability instruments have not been easily adopted. Where the editors-in-chief have initiated new instruments and stimulated a new type of policy directed towards the public, the journalists are more hesitant and at most take a reactive approach. Thus, while the instruments

have been introduced and implemented by the editors-in-chief, the majority are not incorporated and far from internalised in the organisation. This then raises questions as to what extent the aimed objectives can be achieved. The instruments have a place in the structure of the organisations but within the professional attitude they seem to be a bridge too far. Even though journalists participate in these innovations, if it were up to them, investing in and improving public trust and loyalty would be achieved by allowing them to work on their performance and elaborate on their responsibilities. Their perception is that creating a quality product for public consumption already compels them to display accountability and, thus formalized tools are redundant. This attitude has been commonplace in media organisations and embedded in the structure and culture. In this implementation phase, the accountability instruments seem to be more a form of window dressing than a true attempt to restore trust in their performance.

The three public accountability instruments (Mediadebat, Council for Journalism, Mediamonitor) that were suggested by the advisory commission RMO, stimulated by the Minister responsible for the media and organised by the media umbrella organisations have not been enthusiastically welcomed by the media organisations. They do not feel the urge to provide financial assistance and have doubts about the effects and effectiveness of these instruments. Also, the possible involvement of or interference from government restrains them from embracing these suggested public accountability measures. Thus, governance in its fullest sense of a shared responsibility of all the involved actors (political institutions, umbrella media organisations, media and the public) is still not valid. Media organisations prefer to arrange it themselves without involvement or collaboration of other actors —so, we might better speak of self-governance.

Since responsiveness is not so much a formal policy, there appears to be a preference for responsiveness over accountability as an attempt to regain both the trust and loyalty of the public. Responsiveness is more of an attitude towards new forms of journalism, which fits better the traditional journalistic principles of autonomy and freedom than accountability, which is often formalised in concrete instruments.

Yet, responsiveness also has its difficulties. Journalists have shown a willingness to reach out to the public and obtain a better understanding of the issues that concern them. This is not to say that the public is actively involved in either selecting or determining the content of news stories. On the contrary, this would be perceived as undermining journalists' professional reliability and expertise. "…Without the involvement of professionals, content lacks meaning" (Bakker, 2008: 9).

An additional problem of responsiveness is the quantity and quality of public responses. Journalists generally see a limited response and this is often a small group of 'usual suspects' providing minimal input and public representation for journalists (see Bakker et. al (2011) for similar results based on audience-focused research). Moreover, connecting with the public —whether responding, justifying or bridging —is difficult when they are not a clearly defined group. This is especially difficult for *NOS Nieuws* that needs to address the whole society. These difficulties have shown that even though new technologies have provided possibilities for relating and interacting with the public, at this point the public predominantly continues to assume the role of receiver.

These conclusions reveal that the culture of the journalistic profession form an overarching factor as to why most instruments and measures are implemented and some incorporated but hardly any internalised. Journalism is characterised as an open profession in which its practitioners work relatively autonomous. In this research autonomy of the journalist is a recurring theme. There is acknowledgement of the need for more openness to and connection with the public, and for many journalists this is now even considered a necessity. However, when it comes to applying it in daily routine, there is a general resistance. Journalists are used to being independent and free from external pressures and to them this is one of the most important values of journalism. Those who work in the news media believe they should be free to initiate and arrange instruments by themselves, and not have them imposed by third parties. This autonomy is desired because in this way journalists believe they can best serve the public's interest (Singer, 2003).

Not only in relation to the public, but also among colleagues, autonomy is an issue. In the daily work, journalists of different levels of the organisation come together several times a day to brainstorm, discuss and plan the news stories.

Yet, in all three organisations journalists have difficulty in openly providing constructive feedback in an organised setting, be it less so at *RTL Nieuws*. This attitude can be ascribed to a traditional journalistic culture in which journalists work quite independently of each other.

Nevertheless, this research also shows that journalism is in transition. While the older generation still takes a rather paternalistic perspective with little attention for the voice of the public and a strong focus on journalist's autonomy, being responsive to the public, both for civic and strategic reasons, and providing more transparency on journalistic processes and choices is becoming more commonplace among the younger generation. They are aware that as a result of the online technologies, commercialization and societal changes such as individualisation, the media's relationship with the public is changing permanently, which obliges them to find a new way to relate to and engage with the public. It seems as if this period was needed to distance themselves from old ideological principles. But, for everyone, whether young or old, the basic journalistic responsibilities remain and are not expected to change fundamentally.

Looking at a period of the past 20 years, there has been a gradual increase in the attention paid to openness, transparency, accountability and interaction. Before this, the media were not so susceptible to the voice of the public. Both structural developments and specific incidents have triggered the media to take action. It seems as if this combination of circumstances was needed for media organisations and journalists to make a switch in their mind-set and attitude towards the public. In the past, Dutch journalism fitted the advocacy model (Schudson, 1999) in which the media serve the public by being the voice of political parties or specific ideologies. Depillarization and professionalisation of journalism created a more independent and educational journalism, which reported from a sense what was best for the public in order to make rational decisions in a democracy, fitting more the trustee model (Schudson, 1999). But, the consequence of this increasing autonomy is not only a more distant relationship with politics and interest groups, but also towards the public (Broersma, 2009). Therefore, this trustee model seems now given way to a greater focus on what the public is concerned about. It is not only about the media's role in the public's interest, but also about how the media can contribute to the interests of the public. This however creates a

new dilemma of how finding a balance between the media's responsible role of informing and listening to the public without buckling under the wishes of the consumer or moving too far towards the market model of Schudson (1999), providing only what the consumer is interested in.

8.5 Theoretical contribution of this research

What are the implications of these conclusions for the theoretical concepts? This dissertation not only had the aim of researching the theoretical concepts in the empirical reality, but also of further conceptualizing the rather ambivalent notions of trust, responsibility, accountability and responsiveness. The four concepts, particularly in relation to each other, have been subject to limited empirical research. This research shows that there are four interrelated and maybe even mutually reinforcing shifts with and in between the four concepts. As a result, these shifts have led to new conceptual tensions or difficulties.

Firstly, this research started off with the idea that there is a problem with media responsibility, with consequently lowering media trust and a greater demand for accountability. Due to developments towards a more open discussion and dialogue between the media and the public there has been a shift to a more active approach of responsibility in terms of both accountability and responsiveness, which aim at strengthening the relationship with the public.

Looking at accountability, a second shift is the increasing focus on public and professional accountability compared with political accountability. However, this research has shown that in practice the distinction between public and professional accountability is difficult as many instruments include components of both. A more narrow subdivision of these two types of accountability provides a better conceptualization. Public accountability can be classified into being accountable to an individual complainant (covert) or the public at large (overt). Similarly, professional accountability can be directed at the journalists within the media organisation (covert) or the whole journalism profession (overt).

Thirdly, even though this research has shown a growing attention for accountability through self-regulatory instruments, media show a preference for responding to both performance and structural issues through measures of responsiveness. Therefore a more specific classification of the concept is

needed. Responsiveness or taking the public seriously and taking its issues into consideration can have different reasonings: civic, strategic and empathic. However, while this division initially helped to clarify the complex reality, it is more of a normative distinction since in practice the three types of responsiveness overlap with empathy being virtually absent.

A last, but maybe the most significant shift is a greater emphasis on strategic ways to relate to the public that is inclined to exchange loyalty for exit as a result of media competition and commercialization. At a conceptual level this means that there is a growing attention for strategic instead of civic responsiveness. In addition, strategic components can also be found in the concepts responsibility and accountability. The watchdog function of responsibility does not only have a journalistic motive, but revealing social abuses and investing in research journalism also is a way to distinguish from other media and attract a larger or new target group. Similarly, being (overtly) accountable to the public can be perceived and used as a unique selling position compared with other media.

These four shifts in focus have also created tensions in the interrelationship between the concepts. Firstly, the shift from responsibility to more emphasis on the concept of accountability has created a tension with the limits of media freedom. While traditional liberal thinking on media responsibility supported a free press, independent of power holders, accountability measures are viewed by the media as a constraint to their freedom and thus to providing accurate, balanced information. Secondly, being accountable to the public and being too open about one's mistakes can lead to a counter reaction where the public might loose the trust in media taking a responsible role. Thirdly, being too responsive can run the risk of loosing the journalistic authority and autonomy, one of the preconditions for media responsibility.

A fourth tension is that civic responsiveness and public accountability are similar as they aim to relate and come closer to the public. But with a different meaning and purpose, these two concepts are a precondition for each other. One cannot exist without the other and both can even strengthen each other. Being accountable to the public can only work successfully if media are willing to relate to and engage with the public. And the same goes for having a dialogue with the public: the public will only participate if the media are willing to show their vulnerability and open up to the public.

A fifth tension is that strategic responsiveness is related to market accountability. In fact, responding to the market is more being responsive to the consumer or audience and less being accountable to the market. It is taking the wishes and concerns of the audience into account and not —a small but important nuance— being held to account by the audience. At best, market accountability means being held to account by the shareholders and advertisers.

Lastly, empathic responsiveness is related to the watchdog function, one of media's responsibilities. Both try to control and fight power holder when necessary. However, empathic responsiveness takes the public as starting point and even takes sides with the public. The watchdog function takes a more neutral position.

Concluding, this research has presented four conceptual shifts with a growing emphasis on the active role of the media in terms of responsiveness and accountability which in turn have led to six new conceptual tensions.

8.6 Implications for media organisations and the journalism profession

This research has shed light on the current position of media and journalism in an increasingly pressured environment. My aim was to provide more transparency on how media organisations are coping with these challenges and to untangle not always clear theoretical concepts commonly used in the professional, public and academic debate. I want to end with possible implications for new media governance structures with the hope of providing the media organisations and the journalistic profession with a few careful suggestions or at least some food for thought for a more structural policy and strategy.

This research has shown that specific incidents in which the role of the media was questioned boosted the Dutch debate on media performance. But, the combination with the structural changes in the media landscape and in society shows that it was not purely an incidental upheaval, which will fade away. Media organisations have created a permanent awareness and acknowledgment of the importance of accountability and responsiveness. The opportunities new online technologies can offer have also played an important role. However, awareness alone is not enough to successfully counter the lack

of trust or cynicism of the public and the politicians and boost the loyalty of the consumer. Does this mean the media need continuous external pressure to consider a permanent policy? Or is the current policy primarily technology-driven? Or does the role of a particular editor-in-chief play a significant role for a specific type of policy? After my research period several instruments have stopped to exist while others have been introduced. There have been recent management changes at two out of the three media organisations. Will the new top continue in the line of current policy or will they take a new direction? In the following paragraphs I provide a number of suggestions for a more stable, permanent and coherent policy in terms of accountability and responsiveness.

Firstly, up untill now accountability has mainly been introduced through a top-down policy. To create a more permanent acknowledgment and have the instruments internalised in the organisation more support for it needs to be created among the editorial staff. This starts with how people define and perceive accountability. Bovens, Schillemans and 't Hart (2008: 225), academics of public administration, claim that accountability "is one of those golden concepts that no one can be against". However, to those who have to be accountable, such as journalists, it is also felt to be threatening, related to mistakes made and with a controlling function. A more positive view of accountability can be established if it is made to encompass not only reactive elements, but also pro-active ones in the form of transparency or dialogue. Although not equal to accountability, they can provide a basis for it.

Secondly, the investigated organisations appear to have implemented a range of instruments to relate to the public, but many instruments have overlapping objectives and features, without an overall policy. If the instruments are more linked to each other in an overall policy and with a main goal, there is a greater chance of more overall support from the editorial staff. In other words, it is not so much about the quantity, but the quality and economy of the instruments.

Thirdly, for a permanent and successful policy, the media system, the organisational structure and the culture should all be taken into account. There is not one single policy or 'one size that fits all'. Where one organisation might need a more formal policy, another might suit a more informal bottom-up

approach. However, a certain level of formalisation in standards provides the journalism professionals with basic support for quality improvement. While the older journalists are not too keen on formalized standards, in this transition to more openness and dialogue with the public, it is important that internally the journalists are on the same page.

Fourthly, media need to be aware that new, interactive, technologies create both expectation and pressure. This research has shown that new online technologies have offered opportunities for responsiveness and accountability. They invite the public to participate but at this point they put a constraint on the social system of the organisation with unforeseen activities and costs. I witnessed that the problem with the interactive instruments is that, in the words of Hermida and Thurman, "the burden increases as the participation of the user rises" (2008: 351). Media organisations should be aware of this burden and take this into account when setting up new strategies. This means that media organisations should organise their structures and processes to allow for more flexibility which can provide room for the introduction and adoption of new technological instruments. This can start with creating small project units to experiment and assess new opportunities. More concretely, creating new possibilities for dialogue should also mean that journalists get more time to look into public reactions, to respond and potentially to use the public's contributions. However, online public engagement should not replace the 'old-fashioned' way of getting the story out on the street. This demands a flexible organisation that judges which and how new technologies should be used.

Fifthly, while the investigated media organisations are almost all fixated on how to relate to the public, less is invested in internal forms of accountability. The instruments that serve both a professional and public purpose tend to emphasise the latter. Chris Argyris rightly commented that organisational change should come from the development of an "internal capacity for self-examination and self-renewal" (in Nemeth, 2003: 148). From this perspective, only when an organisation dares to look critically at its own performance internally, can it take a critical stance externally. A greater investment in the quality of the internal feedback culture is therefore necessary. Often the interviewees told me how they enjoyed an hour of internal reflection when being interviewed by me. There might be signs of willingness among the

journalists, but the organisational structure should also allow the possibility for more self-reflection opportunities.

For further effective governance structures I would advocate more shared responsibility and debate across journalistic profession and not only at the organisational level. In the past 20 years there has been a gradual development from government to governance. But, can we rely on the initiatives of the media themselves without any form of control? While co-regulation is said to be a possible alternative for self-regulation, I argue that this will only lead to more resistance from the media as it implies some kind of collaboration with the state. Collaboration between media organisations is a delicate issue as news organisations are now competing with each other more than ever. Over the years many attempts have been made to organise professional debates, also open to the public. A solution may lie in organizing smaller get-to-gethers with journalists of different media organisations (overt professional accountability) in the form of working groups to discuss ethical issues which concern the journalistic profession as a whole. The umbrella media organisations could play a facilitating role in this to create more overall support and a better basis for new and effective horizontal governance structures.

A last suggestion is related to the autonomy of journalism. This is one of the cornerstones of journalism and should also be protected. At the same time, emphasizing autonomy prevents instruments of accountability and responsiveness from being adopted in the organisation. Küng (2011: 54) describes this dilemma, "A media organisation needs to master the paradoxical demands of being able to reap the benefits of economies of scale and scope and cross-platform synergies and also provide small-scale autonomy to those tasked with creative projects". The difficulty of operating in both a journalistic and commercial market is an issue that should be discussed internally. Providing transparency should not only be done towards the public, but also internally in order to connect the individual with the organisation.

The starting premise of this research was a quite negative perception of media performance in society. There was supposedly a crisis in trust in established institutions and the media were to blame. While journalists have been known for closing ranks, this research has shown that in recent years they have actually made significant steps towards creating more open, transparent, accountable

and responsive media. It is now the challenge to hold on to this progress and move on from plans and instruments to practice and internalisation.

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Appendix 1: List of interviewees

Expert interviews

Arendo Joustra, chair Association of Netherlands Association of Editors-in-chief NGH 2006-2010
Huub Elzerman, chair Netherlands Union of Journalists NVJ
Agnes Koerts, member Netherlands Union of Journalists NVJ
Kees Spaan, chair Netherlands Newspaper Publisher Organisation NDP 1999-2010
Gerrit-Jan Wolffensperger, chair Netherlands Public Broadcasting NPO 1998-2003
Harm Bruins Slot, chair Netherlands Public Broadcasting NPO 2003-2008
Fons van Westerloo, former chief executive officer of SBS6 (1995-2003) and RTL Nederland (2003-2008)
Daphne Koene, clerk of the Council for Journalism since 2001
Toon Schmeink, member of the Council for Journalism 2000-2008
Ton van Brussel, ombudsman NOS 2007-2009
Thom Meens, ombudsman de Volkskrant 2004-2011

De Volkskrant (February-April 2009)

Rob Haans (publisher director)

Pieter Broertjes (editor-in-chief)
Arie Elshout (deputy editor-in-chief)
Corinne de Vries (deputy editor-in-chief)
Jan 't Hart (deputy editor-in-chief)

Raoul du Pré (unit head daily news)
Michiel Kruijt (unit head national news)
Fokke Obbema (unit head economic news)
Martin Sommer (unit head political news)
Paul Brill (unit head foreign news)
Remco Meijer (former unit head opinion)
Lidy Nicolasen (unit head opinion opinie)

Marie-Louise Schipper (readers'editor)
Nicoline Baartman (head of weekly editions)
Wilma de Rek (head of Vervolg, weekly largers essays)
Martijn van Calmthout (head of Science)

Frank van Zijl (unit head night)
Jaap Stam (unit head night)
Carlijne Vos (journalist economic news)

Elsbeth Stoker (journalist economic news)
Michael Persson (journalist economic news)
Pieter Klok (journalist economic news)
Robert Giebels (journalist economic news)
Xander van Uffelen (journalist economic news)
Marcel van Lieshout (journalist national news)
Gerard Reijn (journalist national news)

Ellen de Vissser (journalist national news)
Jeroen Trommelen (research journalist)
Jan Hoedeman (journalist national news)

Noël van Bemmel (journalist national news)
Ron Meerhof (journalist political news)
Hans Wansink (political comentator)

Thom Meens (ombudsman)

NOS Nieuws (August-October 2009)

Henk Hagoort (chair Board of Governors NPO)
Anne-Lieke Mol (head media and financial policy NPO)

Gerard Dielessen (managing director NOS)
Youssef Eddini (head communication & marketing NOS)
Hans Laroes (editor-in-chief)
Tim Overdiek (deputy editor-in-chief)
Marcel Gelauff (deputy editor-in-chief)
Giselle van Cann (deputy editor-in-chief)

René Went (program editor television)
Arno Vermeulen (program editor television)
Jaap Daalmeijer (program editor television)
Rob Maas (program editor television)

Wolter Blom (program editor radio)
Bas Gemmink (program editor radio)
Lambert Teuwissen (final editor online)

Bart Leferink (deputy unit head national news)
Dick Jansen (deputy unit head national news)
Jan van Friesland (unit head national news)
Gerard van den Broek (unit head foreign news)
Michiel Hartzuiker (deputy unit head foreign news)

Stef Hehemann (deputy unit head foreign news)
Jens Kraan (deputy unit head online)
Bas de Vries (unit head political news)
Marten Wiegman (unit head economic news)
Erik Wijnholds (unit head teletext)
Ronald Bartlema (unit head Jeugdjournaal)

Floris Harm (editor foreign news)
Marc Biennemann (editor foreign news)
Joop Kraan (editor/coordinator national news)
Martine van de Vrede (editor national news)
Babette Hanhof (editor national news)
Rachel de Meijer (editor national news)
Judith Smids (editor national news)
Josephine Truijman (specialist)
Jikke Zijlstra (specialist)

Bart Kamphuis (reporter economic news)
Ron Fresen (reporter political news)
Jeroen Wollaars (reporter national news)
Peter ter Velde (correspondent Afghanistan/reporter)

Sacha de Boer (presenter)
Jeroen Overbeek (presenter)

Tanja Jadnanansing (coordinator NOS Headlines)

Guikje Roethof (ombudsman)

RTL Nieuws (November 2009- January 2010)

Bert Habets (Chief Executive Officer RTL Nederland)
Harm Taselaar (editor-in-chief)
Pieter Klein (deputy editor-in-chief)

Jeroen Windt (unit head economic news)
Brechtje van de Moosdijk (unit head foreign news)
Suzanne de Waal (deputy unit head national news)
André Tak (coordinator research unit)
Kees Berghuis (unit head political news)

Ilse Openneer (program editor)
Marc van Vlijmen (program editor)

Servaas Hilgers (editor national news)
Suzanne Aalders (editor national news)
Martin van Norel (editor national news)
Peper Hofstede (editor foreign news)
René Lukassen (editor economic news)
Roel Geeraerdts (editor research unit)
Sjors Molenaar (editor online unit)
Marianne Lucieer (editor online unit)

Antoine Peeters (reporter/presenter)
Betty Glas (reporter)

Rick Nieman (presenter)
Roelof Hemmen (presenter)

Corinne Pommerel (program editor Editie NL)

Appendix 2: Abbreviations

NDP: Nederlandse Dagbladpers, Dutch Newspaper Publishers Organisation
NGH: Nederlands Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren, Netherlands Association of Editors-in-Chief
NIOD: Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, Dutch Institute for War Documentation
RMO: Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, Council for Social Development
ROB: Raad voor het Openbaar Bestuur, Council for Public Administration
NOS: Nederlandse Omroep Stichting, Netherlands Public Broadcasting Corporation (until 2002)
NPO: Nederlandse Publieke Omroep, Netherlands Public Broadcasting Corporation (from 2006)
NVJ: Nederlandse Vereniging van Journalisten, Dutch Union of Journalists

Nederlandse samenvatting

Samenvatting

De afgelopen decennia lijkt de kritiek op de media en de journalistiek in Nederland toe te nemen. Politieke actoren verwijten hen de feiten te overdrijven en mediahypes te creëren. Ze zouden te veel nadruk leggen op strategie en conflict, meer oog hebben voor amusement dan voor informatie en hun toegenomen macht misbruiken. Politici geven de media de schuld van het dalende publieke vertrouwen in de politiek. Maar niet alleen politici, ook het publiek lijkt geïrriteerd of tenminste ontevreden over hoe de media functioneren. Journalisten en media worden bekritiseerd dat ze de werkelijke problemen in de samenleving niet aan de orde stellen, met als gevolg een toenemende kloof tussen politiek en burgers. De kritiek op het functioneren van de media heeft geleid tot een permanent debat over de verantwoordelijkheid van de media en hoe ze ter verantwoording zouden moeten worden geroepen. Die kritiek en de druk om verantwoording af te leggen, is het uitgangspunt van deze dissertatie. Hoe hebben de media hierop gereageerd?

De centrale vraag van het onderzoek luidt: *Hoe hebben Nederlandse media en journalisten gereageerd op de kritiek op hun functioneren en in hoeverre zijn er maatregelen genomen?*

Lange-termijnanalyse

Om te begrijpen hoe media en journalisten hebben gereageerd, was het eerst nodig om empirisch te onderzoeken of de omvang van de discussie over het functioneren van de media de afgelopen jaren inderdaad is toegenomen en zo ja, welke thema's naar voren kwamen en wie de kritiek uitte (hoofdstuk 2). Een kwalitatieve analyse van het mediadebat tussen 1987 en 2007, zoals die bleek in het vakblad De Journalist en NRC Handelsblad, laat twee overlappende fasen zien. In de jaren negentig ging het vooral over de structurele problemen in de mediasector en hoe en of overheidsbeleid daar een oplossing voor kon zijn. Thema's die de boventoon voerden, waren de introductie van een duaal omroepbestel, persconcentratie, teruglopende oplagecijfers en de opkomst van online-technologieën. In de tweede fase, vanaf 2000, verschoof de discussie langzaam maar zeker naar een debat over het functioneren van de media en

de kritiek daarop, waarbij oplossingen eerder vanuit de media zelf moesten komen. Hoewel specifieke gebeurtenissen, zoals de vermeende journalistieke demonisering van Pim Fortuyn, de discussie verhevigden, vloeiden de twijfels over het functioneren van de media vooral voort uit de structurele veranderingen die in de eerste fase waren ingezet.

De reactie van de media tijdens die periode van twintig jaar toont aan dat langzaamaan werd onderkend dat mediaorganisaties zich opener moesten opstellen, bereid zijn verantwoording af te leggen voor hun journalistieke keuzes en werkwijze, en het publiek en hun problemen serieus dienden te nemen. Terwijl politici er voor pleitten dat de media maatregelen nemen om meer rekenschap af te leggen, blijkt uit de reacties van media en journalisten in die jaren dat zij zich verzetten tegen een mogelijke institutionalisering daarvan. Zij stelden zich liever responsiever op en namen maatregelen om rekening te houden met het publiek of de consument en zo de relatie met hen te verbeteren.

Theoretisch raamwerk

De lange-termijnanalyse laat zien dat vier theoretische noties centraal staan in het debat over het functioneren van media en journalisten: vertrouwen, verantwoordelijkheid, verantwoording en responsiviteit. In hoofdstuk 3 wordt de betekenis van deze vier concepten en hun onderlinge samenhang onderzocht. Vertrouwen lijkt de onderliggende factor in de discussie. De toenemende kritiek rond de verantwoordelijkheid van de media tast het vertrouwen in de media aan. Dit is de heersende visie van veel politici, die daarom eisen dat media meer verantwoording afleggen over hun functioneren. De vorm die dat zou moeten krijgen, daarover verschillen zij van mening met de journalisten. Verantwoording kan in theorie worden afgelegd aan die politici, maar ook aan het publiek, de journalisten zelf of de markt.

Responsiviteit is nauw verwant aan verantwoording. Waar het laatste betekent dat de media rekenschap afleggen over hun functioneren is responsiviteit eerder een houding, een bereidheid of gevoelde noodzaak om rekening te houden met het publiek, hun problemen en interesses serieus te nemen. Responsiviteit lijkt inmiddels ook een grotere rol te spelen in de discussie over de publieke functie en het feitelijke functioneren van de media.

Case studies

Na de lange-termijnanalyse van het debat over de media en de conceptuele inkadering daarvan is de vraag of en hoe de media hun antwoord op de geformuleerde kritiek daadwerkelijk vorm hebben gegeven. Hebben zij instrumenten van verantwoording ontwikkeld en in hoeverre zijn die geïnternaliseerd in de journalistieke praktijk? Zijn maatregelen genomen om de afstand tot het publiek te verkleinen en in welke mate zijn die onderdeel geworden van de bedrijfscultuur? In de hoofdstukken 5, 6 en 7 wordt op deze vragen een antwoord gegeven, op basis van een meervoudig *case study*-onderzoek van drie belangrijke Nederlandse nieuwsorganisaties: de Volkskrant, NOS Nieuws en RTL Nieuws.

De Volkskrant

In hoofdstuk 5 worden de resultaten van de Volkskrant gepresenteerd. Nadat halverwege de jaren negentig een nieuwe hoofdredacteur was aangesteld, introduceerde dit dagblad een veelheid aan instrumenten om verantwoording af te leggen aan het publiek, zoals een ombudsman, een correctierubriek en naamsvermelding van de journalisten bij artikelen. In de loop der jaren zijn deze instrumenten een prominente plaats gaan innemen, wat aantoont dat de krant bereid is om uitleg te geven over de keuzes die zij maken in de nieuwsselectie en -presentatie en om fouten publiekelijk toe te geven. Onder meer de verslaggeving over Srebrenica, Pim Fortuyn en de Irak-oorlog hebben de Volkskrant ertoe gezet om zelfevaluaties te organiseren, zowel voor interne reflectie als om externe verantwoording af te leggen aan haar lezerspubliek.

Naast publieksverantwoording organiseerde de Volkskrant ook intern professionele verantwoording naar collega's, in de vorm van formele evaluatiebijeenkomsten. Toch is het journalistieke denken meer gericht op het halen van deadlines dan op discussie en evaluatie. De tijdsdruk waaronder journalisten werken en de toenemende concurrentie van online-media laten weinig ruimte voor evaluatie van reeds gepubliceerde artikelen. Bovendien zorgt de, wat geïnterviewden noemden, vrij gesloten discussiecultuur dat journalisten nauwelijks feedback geven over elkaars functioneren. Politieke verantwoording in de vorm van wetten of regels is niet van toepassing aangezien kranten onafhankelijk van de politiek opereren. Verantwoording aan de (kritische) politiek wordt eerder als een bedreiging gezien van de professionele autonomie.

Bovenop deze instrumenten van verantwoording zijn verschillende maatregelen genomen om het contact met het publiek te verbeteren. Publieke debatten en online interactiemogelijkheden zijn manieren waarop de krant responsief probeert te zijn naar haar lezers. Vormen van responsiviteit worden gedragen door de organisatie, maar in de praktijk zijn ze eerder gericht op de abonnees (hoger opgeleid en vooral linksgeoriënteerd) dan op het grote publiek.

Al met al was de Volkskrant een van de eerste media die een uitgebreid instrumentarium introduceerde, bedoeld om zowel het vertrouwen als de loyaliteit van het publiek te versterken of te herstellen. In het dagelijks werk overheerst echter nog steeds een cultuur van journalistieke autonomie en professionele autoriteit, wat niet altijd goed samengaat met het afleggen van verantwoording of responsief zijn aan het publiek. De vooral van bovenaf geïnitieerde verantwoordingsinstrumenten zijn dan ook niet geïnternaliseerd.

NOS Nieuws

Met de moord op politicus Pim Fortuyn was 2002 een keerpunt voor NOS Nieuws. Toen de media beschuldigd werden te hebben bijgedragen aan een klimaat dat tot Fortuyn's dood leidde, sprak de hoofdredacteur zich krachtig uit voor het 'verlaten van de ivoren toren' en trachtte hij een journalistieke cultuur van openheid, verantwoording en dialoog met het publiek tot stand te brengen. In de afgelopen jaren heeft NOS Nieuws, vooral op initiatief van de hoofdredacteur, een hele reeks van verantwoordingsinstrumenten geïntroduceerd, inclusief een ombudsman, een correctierubriek, weblogs en een wekelijkse chat met lezers. Maar hoewel journalisten van NOS Nieuws zeker voorstander zijn van meer openheid, zien ze weinig in formele instrumenten voor het afleggen van verantwoording en maken ze er ook weinig gebruik van. Tijdgebrek en de soms harde, beledigende toon van de klachten spelen hierbij een rol. Als publieke omroep is NOS Nieuws ook verplicht om zich te verantwoorden aan de politiek, maar dit wordt voornamelijk op institutioneel niveau door de Nederlandse Publieke Omroep (NPO) geregeld. NOS Nieuws richt zich meer op publieke en professionele verantwoording.

Professionele verantwoording heeft het karakter van afleggen van verantwoording aan collega's en het evalueren van het eigen functioneren door formele en informele evaluatiemomenten. In de praktijk ontbreekt echter

de tijd en is de planning lastig. Ook geven journalisten elkaar nauwelijks feedback als gevolg van de, in de woorden van de geïnterviewden, nogal softe discussiecultuur, waarin men het moeilijk vindt elkaar kritiek te geven.

Op het gebied van de responsiviteit is er een duidelijke wil om 'de staat met de straat' te verbinden, blijkend uit verschillende initiatieven zoals het verzorgen van online discussies en de interactie aan te gaan met het publiek. Echter in de praktijk blijkt dit moeilijk te verwezenlijken. Naast de logistieke problemen vinden journalisten het lastig om de juiste balans te vinden tussen informeren en luisteren.

Concluderend kunnen we stellen dat sinds het kanteljaar 2002 het afleggen van publieke verantwoording en responsiviteit via een 'top-down'-benadering uitgegroeid is tot centrale thema's in het organisatiebeleid. Dit beleid is echter nog weinig zichtbaar op de redactie, waar men het nog moeilijk weet te integreren in de dagelijkse werkzaamheden.

RTL Nieuws

Bij RTL Nieuws is het afleggen van verantwoording aan het publiek relatief beperkt en overwegend informeel geregeld. Kijkers kunnen klachten indienen en er bestaat een ongeschreven regel dat op deze klachten moet worden gereageerd, als een vorm van dienstverlening aan de klant. In de praktijk zorgt dit informele beleid ervoor dat journalisten weinig tijd besteden aan het reageren. Vaak vindt men dat een klacht uitsluitend het eigenbelang van de klager dient, of worden de klachten zo grof en beledigend gevonden dat journalisten zich nauwelijks geroepen voelen om te reageren. Bovendien vormt de tijdsdruk een belemmering om te antwoorden. Toch worden impliciet andere vormen van verantwoording ingezet om het vertrouwen van het publiek te winnen, zoals het transparanter maken van de journalistieke procedures en bronvermeldingen op de website.

Politieke verantwoording komt eigenlijk niet voor in het woordenboek van RTL Nieuws. Wat professionele verantwoording betreft, komen de journalisten op vaste tijdstippen samen om hun nieuwsprogramma's te bespreken, plannen en evalueren. Naast deze formele momenten is er, mede door een kleinere redactie, een informele en vrij open feedbackcultuur, waarbij de discussie wordt gestimuleerd door de hoofdredacteur. Net als bij de Volkskrant en NOS

Nieuws zorgt de tijdsdruk er echter voor dat journalisten niet snel de tijd zullen nemen om het werk van hun collega's kritisch te beschouwen. Liever gaan ze aan het werk voor hun volgende productie.

Responsief zijn naar het publiek is inherent aan de identiteit van de organisatie en zit daardoor ingebakken in structuur en cultuur. Rekening houden met het publiek heeft zowel een commercieel als een journalistiek motief. Onlangs nam RTL Nieuws bovendien online-instrumenten in gebruik om de betrokkenheid van het publiek te vergroten. Deze activiteiten bevinden zich echter nog in een experimentele fase. Journalisten zoeken daarbij naar een balans tussen interactie met het publiek en behoud van onafhankelijkheid en professionele autoriteit.

Concluderend ligt de nadruk bij RTL Nieuws meer op het responsief zijn naar het publiek en minder op het actief verantwoording afleggen. Als enige van de drie onderzochte media is bij RTL Nieuws die responsiviteit ook behoorlijk geïnternaliseerd. De online mogelijkheden om het contact met het publiek te verbeteren worden echter nog niet optimaal benut.

Algemene conclusies

Wat kan hier nu uit geconcludeerd worden? Het onderzoek laat zien dat, in tegenstelling tot de verwachting, mediaorganisaties maar ten dele ingaan op kritiek van politieke actoren en het publiek op hun functioneren. Zij beperken zich tot publieke en professionele verantwoording en zetten vooral in op responsiviteit, vooral ook als mogelijke oplossingen voor economisch structurele problemen en als methoden om de loyaliteit van de consument te herwinnen en te behouden.

Mediaorganisaties hebben moeite met het toepassen van verantwoordingsinstrumenten. Terwijl de hoofdredacteuren nieuwe instrumenten hebben geïntroduceerd en publiekgericht beleid stimuleren als een reactie op druk van buitenaf, zijn de journalisten meer terughoudend en handelen ze hooguit reactief. In deze implementatiefase lijken de instrumenten voor het afleggen van verantwoording meer een symbool naar buiten toe dan een serieuze poging om het vertrouwen in hun functioneren te herstellen. Aangezien responsiviteit meer een attitude is dan een formeel beleid en eerder pro-actief plaats vindt, lijkt dit beter aan te sluiten bij journalistieke

autonomie en autoriteit. Toch is de praktijk vaak weerbarstig. Journalisten betrekken uiteindelijk het publiek liever niet bij de selectie of inhoudsbepaling van nieuwsverhalen. Bovendien twijfelen journalisten soms aan de kwaliteit en de bedoeling van publieke reacties.

De cultuur binnen de journalistiek blijkt en blijft een bepalende factor bij het implementeren van de meeste instrumenten en maatregelen. Sommige vinden wel ingang, maar ze worden vrijwel nooit echt geïntegreerd in de organisatie. De behoefte aan meer openheid en een betere dialoog met het publiek wordt zeker onderkend en veel journalisten beschouwen dit inmiddels zelfs als noodzaak, maar journalisten zijn gewend om zonder invloed van buitenaf en vanuit hun eigen professionaliteit te werken. Rekenschap afleggen en rekening houden met het publiek worden ervaren als een aantasting van hun autonomie en professionele autoriteit.

Desalniettemin toont dit onderzoek aan dat de journalistiek aan het veranderen is. De oudere generatie neemt nog steeds een vrij paternalistische houding aan, met weinig aandacht voor de mening van het publiek en een sterke hang naar de eigen onafhankelijkheid. Maar de huidige generatie journalisten zijn zich ervan bewust dat de relatie met het publiek noodzakelijk is en blijvend veranderd als gevolg van online-technologieën, commercialisering en maatschappelijke veranderingen. Journalisten voelen zich genoodzaakt te zoeken naar nieuwe manieren om de relatie met het publiek te behouden en te verbeteren. Uit de drie case studies blijkt dat de afgelopen jaren stappen zijn ondernomen om open, transparante en responsieve media te creëren. Het is nu de uitdaging om de plannen en instrumenten in de praktijk toe te passen en te internaliseren in de dagelijkse journalistieke praktijk.

Dankwoord

Een wetenschappelijk onderzoek over de journalistiek.

Als wetenschapper heb ik mij begeven in de wereld van de journalistiek. De wetenschap en de journalistiek; twee ogenschijnlijk andere werelden, maar in wezen vertonen ze veel overeenkomsten. Wetenschappers en journalisten zijn nieuwsgierig, nemen nooit genoegen met het behaalde resultaat, willen altijd het antwoord achter het antwoord achterhalen en zijn op zoek naar de werkelijkheid en waarheid.

Met dit wetenschappelijk proefschrift wil ik een bijdrage leveren aan het vormen van een brug tussen wetenschappelijk onderzoek en de journalistieke praktijk. Dit zou echter nooit mogelijk zijn geweest zonder de hulp en samenwerking van een aantal bijzondere wetenschappers en journalisten.

Ten eerste wil ik de promotiecommissie dankzeggen voor de aandacht die zij aan mijn dissertatie heeft gegeven en voor het vertrouwen dat zij in mij als wetenschapper heeft gesteld.

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Zonder de hulp van vier leidende figuren in de journalistiek had dit onderzoek nooit tot stand kunnen komen: Pieter Broertjes, Thom Meens, Hans Laroes en Harm Taselaar. Het feit dat ik een kijkje in de keuken mocht nemen en zij alle mogelijkheden boden om mijn onderzoek uit te voeren, was al een eerste resultaat wat mediaverantwoording en transparantie betreft. En natuurlijk dank voor de volledige medewerking van alle geïnterviewden.

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Tot slot mijn allernaasten.

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Pressures from politicians and the public have led to greater demands for media accountability. Moreover, the growing structural changes in the media landscape have also challenged existing notions of how media should relate to and be responsive to the public. These changes include media concentration, commercialization, fiercer competition, an increasing fragmented public, and the advent of new media. By means of an in-depth, multiple case-study focused on three leading news organizations, this dissertation looks into how the Dutch media are responding to these increasing pressures in terms of accountability and responsiveness.