Supplementary Information File

Appendix A – Brief Interview Guide

Public Affairs

Part 1: Media Strategies in Public Affairs

- Could you describe on a broader level what communication strategies you employ to communicate about the organization you work for?
    - Reconstruction: You communicate about Big Tech corporations often, for example in the case you brought today. Could you tell me a bit how this process, that results in such a public discourse about your organization, look like?
    - Reconstruction: Could you describe the topic/issue that we asked you to think about and the communication strategy you employed?
    - Reconstruction: Did you have personal contact with journalists in the process, and how did this contact look like?
- How would you describe the role of news media coverage in that process?
- (How) do you strategically use media coverage or visibility in the news, by using a case at hand?
- How did you strategically try to attract news media attention?

Part 2: Role Perceptions

- How do you perceive your role when communicating about your organization?
- What role do relationships with stakeholders play in your work, and why?
- What do you think are your responsibilities towards journalists and society?

Part 3: Interaction with Journalists

- How do you describe your relationship to the media, and to journalists in particular?
- How would you describe the power balance or imbalance between you and journalists?

Journalists

Part 1: The journalistic process when covering Big Tech

- Reconstruction: Could you tell me a bit how this journalistic process, that results in such stories, look like?
    - Reconstruction: Which sources were you in contact with, and how did your interaction with sources looked like?
        - Did you have contact with one or more corporations you were covering, and with whom of that corporation?
    - Reconstruction: How did your relationship to the story look like (is the story of investigative nature, how long did you work on it, etc.)?

- What makes writing about Big Tech corporations special or different from covering other topics?
- Has the importance/style/way of reporting about it changed over the years?

Part 2: Journalistic Role Perceptions

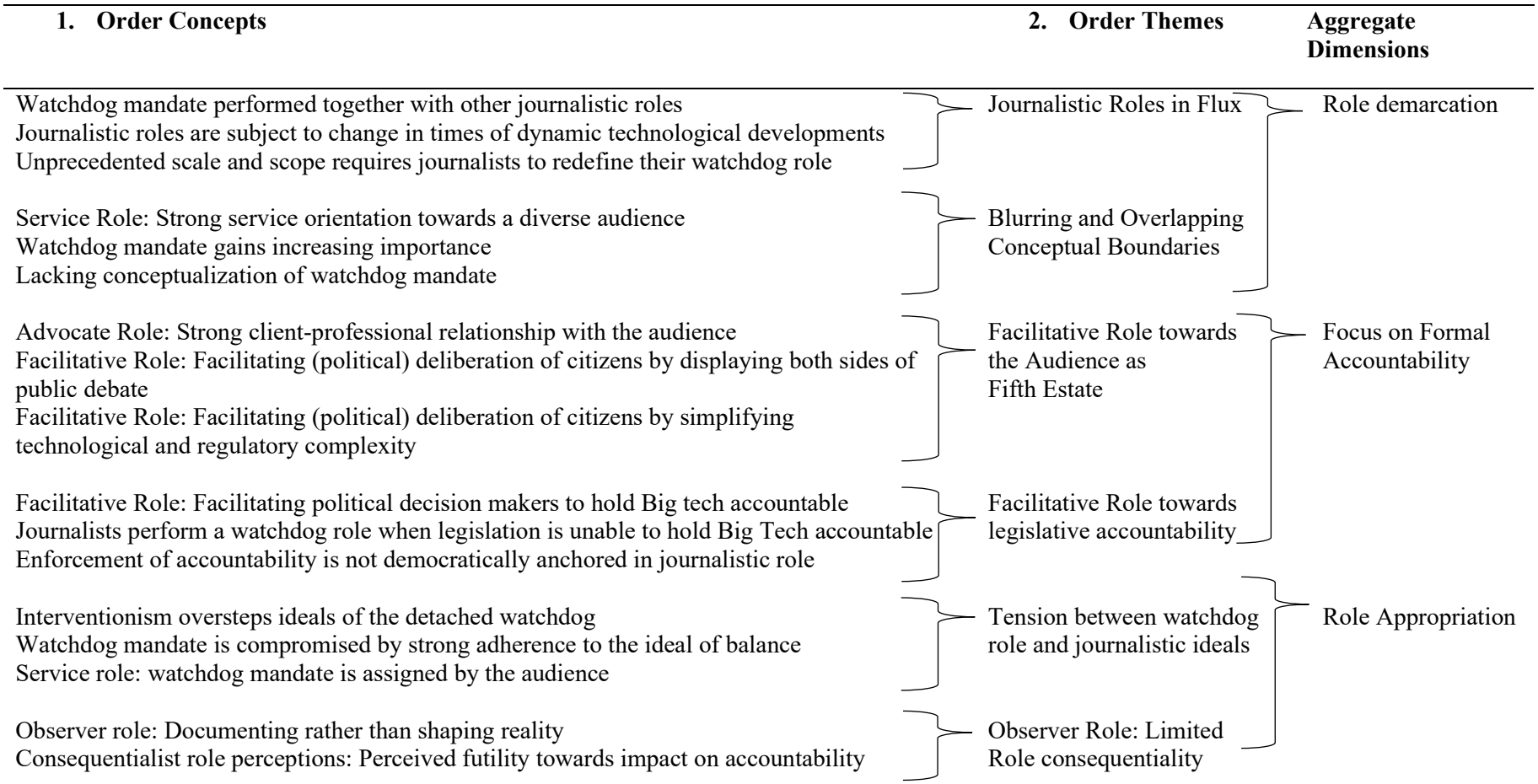
- How do you perceive your role as a journalist when writing about Big Tech?
- What are responsibilities of journalists towards Big Tech corporations and society?

Part 3: Relationship to Technology Corporations

- How do you describe your relationship with the corporations you are covering?
- In your daily work, who in the corporations do you have direct contact with and what role do these representatives play in the news production process?
- What do you believe the power balances or imbalances between journalists/journalism and the corporations to be

Appendix B – Full Data Structure

Figure 1. Data structure of journalists' role perceptions (RQ1).



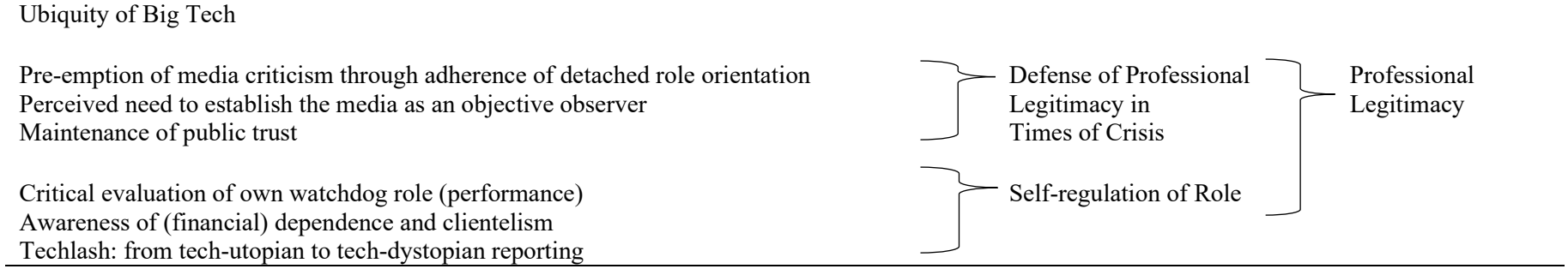
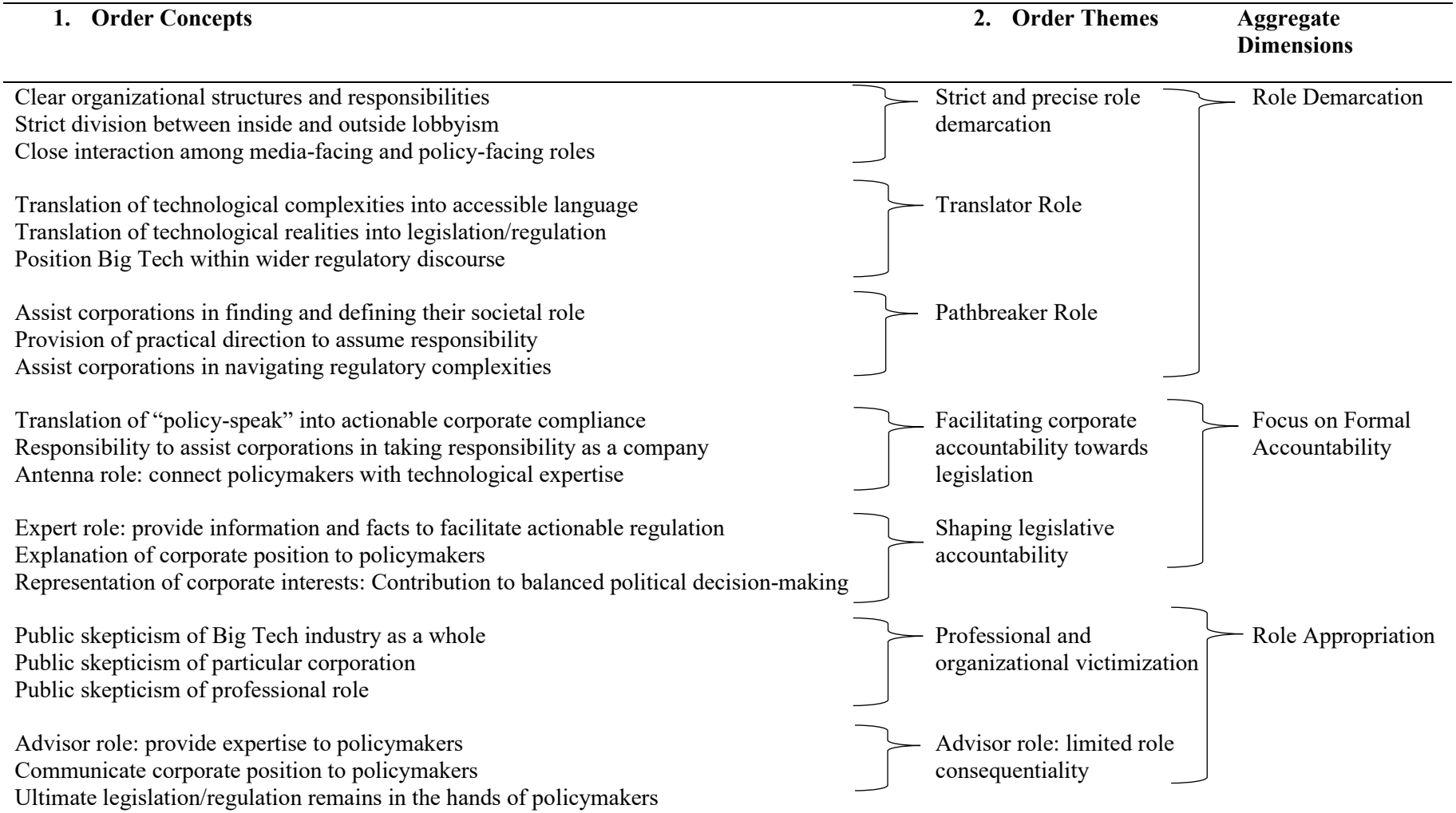
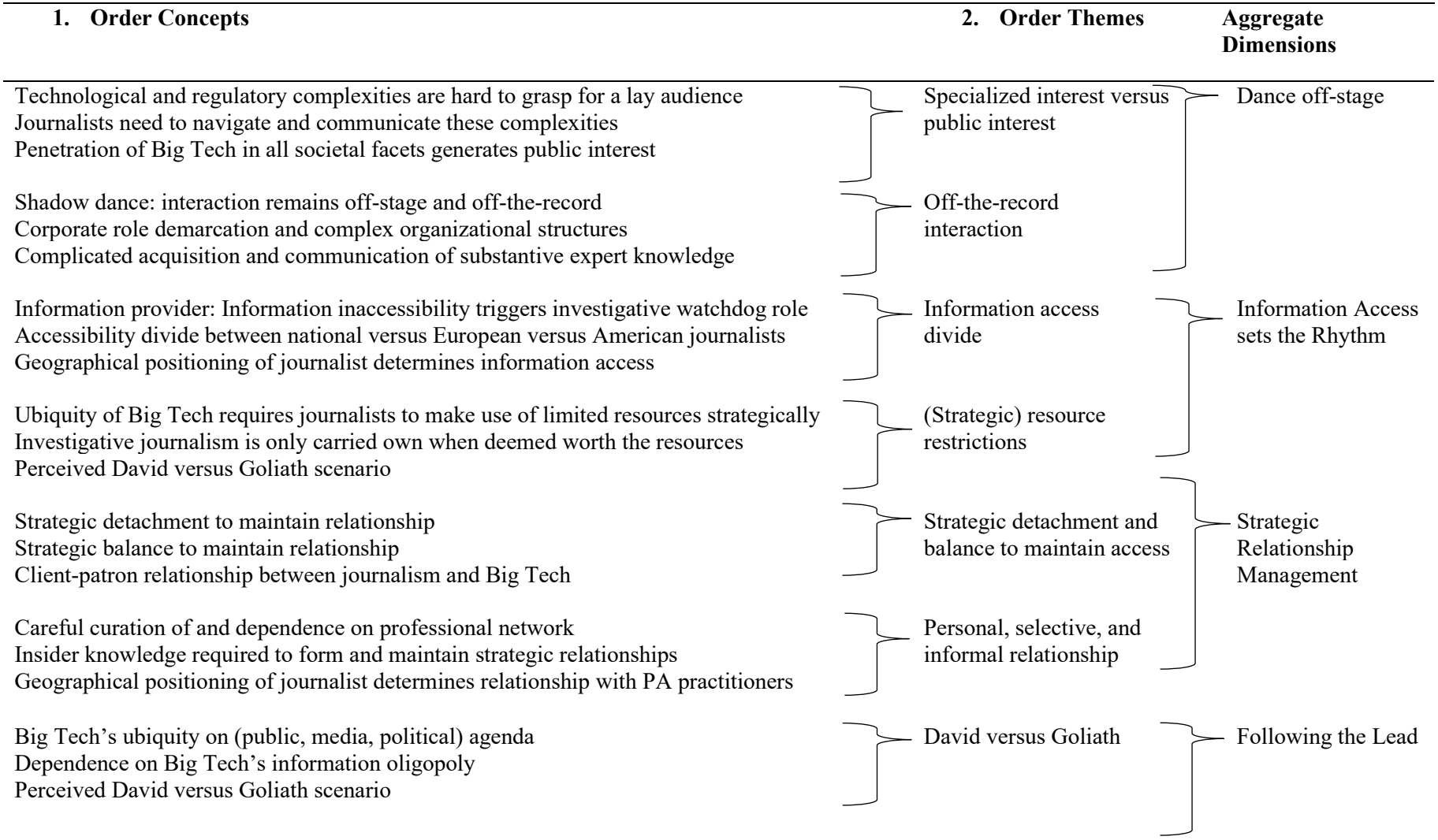

Ubiquity of Big Tech
Pre-emption of media criticism through adherence of detached role orientation
Perceived need to establish the media as an objective observer
Maintenance of public trust
Critical evaluation of own watchdog role (performance)
Awareness of (financial) dependence and clientelism
Techlash: from tech-utopian to tech-dystopian reporting
Defense of Professional Legitimacy in Times of Crisis
Self-regulation of Role
Professional Legitimacy

Figure 2. Data structure of PA practitioners' role perceptions (RQ1).



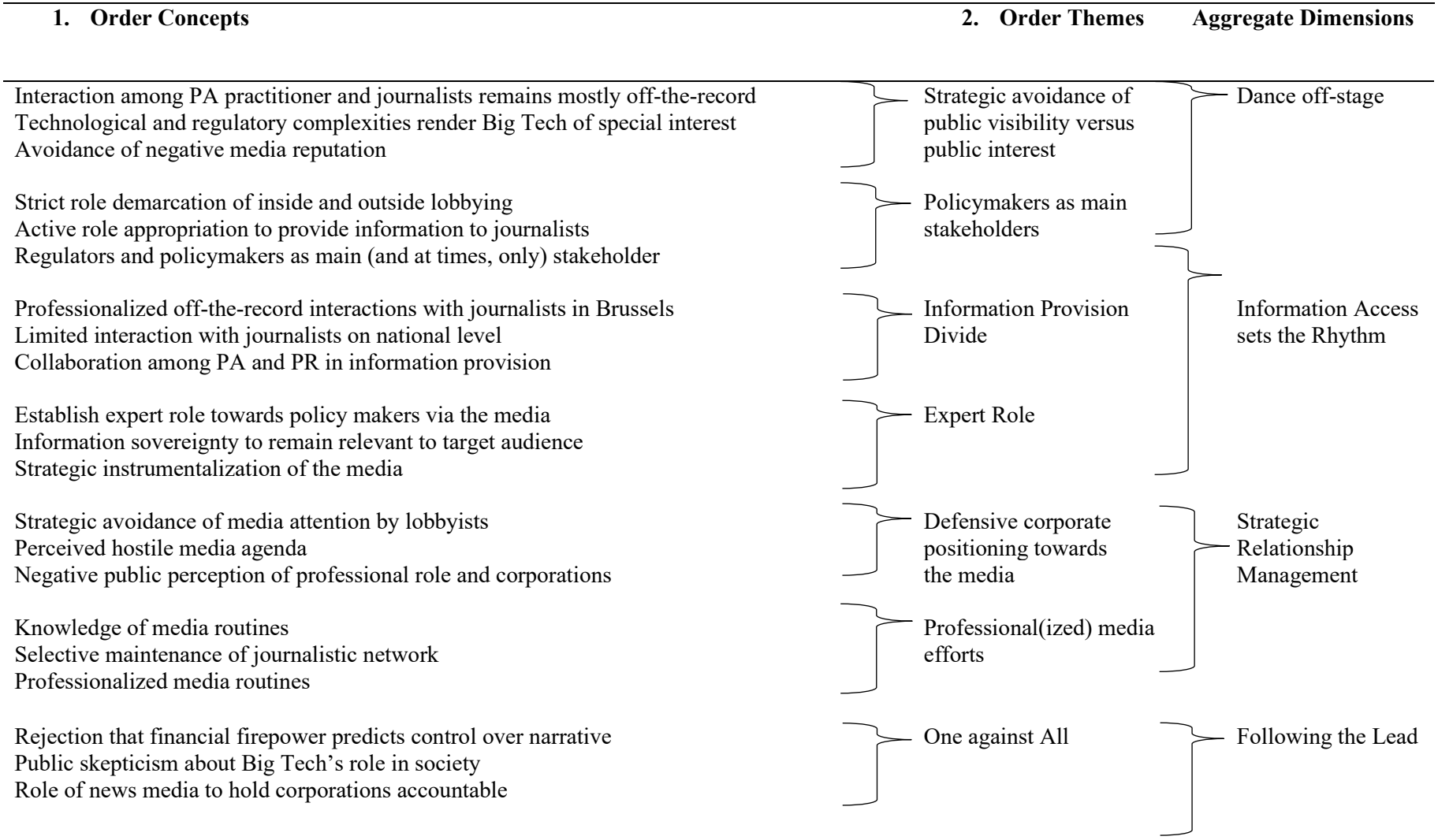
Interest representation as a cornerstone of democracy	Defense of professional legitimacy	Professional Legitimacy
Adherence to professional principles		
Tension of professional and personal identity		
Lack of public knowledge of profession		
Moral legitimacy: Public interest in Big Tech	Defense of corporate legitimacy	
Lawyer role: Providing corporations the right to defense		
Pragmatic legitimacy: Corporate ubiquity in different facets of society		

Figure 3. Data structure of journalists' role perceptions of their relationship with PA practitioners (RQ2).



Perceived power in public opinion formation	Taking or Sharing the Lead
Journalistic independence from Big Tech in shaping the narrative	
Perceived power balance	

Figure 4. Data structure of PA practitioners' perceptions of their relationship with journalists (RQ2).




Expert knowledge to navigate technological and regulatory complexities
Ubiquity of Big Tech in society
Leading through Big Tech's complexity and Ubiquity

Appendix C – Quotes that build the foundation of the data structure

Table 1. Quotes extracted from interviews with journalists (RQ1).

Role demarcation	Journalistic roles in flux	1. Watchdog mandate performed together with other journalistic roles	So in an ideal world, we're all watchdogs all day. We're just watching and holding everybody accountable. And but you also have other roles. I don't think they [the audience] also want a newspaper filled with much darkness, but it's more reviews of movies. It's also very diverse. (JO15)
		2. Journalistic roles are subject to change in times of dynamic technological developments	And yes, there is now a new generation of journalists at work who have to deal with these legacy issues and at the same time find their role in the future. (JO04)
			we need to hold them to higher standards than I think than some other companies. (JO14)
		3. Unprecedented scale and scope requires journalists to rethink and redefine their watchdog role	And well, I think that's very important, especially for companies, because I think the state is bound by laws somewhere. So the state is or let's say more directly bound by laws, because of course companies are also bound by laws, but especially transnational companies, i.e. those that work in all kinds of countries, well, on the one hand they can somehow shift revenues across the globe and they can also do something somewhere else. Which is where it's not forbidden, but which somehow also has an impact here. So I would almost say that companies are very important actors on the one hand, that is, they are very powerful actors, and that's why they have to be watched more closely, almost more closely than state organizations, and of course there's no question about that. (JO12)
			proper watchdog journalism (JO13)
	Blurring conceptual boundaries	1. Service Role: Strong service orientation towards a diverse audience (as citizens; as news audience; as clients; as tech consumer)	I don't know if I write about the new privacy rules of TikTok, for example. Is that watchdog journalism or is that just helping parents to know your daughter or your son is on TikTok? You should know that the Chinese government knows that it can read or watch everything that your son shares. Is that watchdog journalism or is just helping to inform people? (JO15)
		2. Watchdog mandate gains increasing importance	I think it's an upcoming topic that is now gaining greater importance because these big tech companies are just so powerful, when you think about the influence they have on us socially but also economically (JO01)

		3. Lacking conceptualization of watchdog mandate	I see myself as a public watchdog. I'm an advocate for the public interest. I'm trying to find out stuff based on the idea that it would be interesting to a broad group of readers. (JO02)
Focus on Formal Accountability	Facilitative Role towards the Audience as the Fifth Estate	1. Advocate Role: Strong client-professional relationship between journalist and the audience 2. Facilitative Role: Facilitating (political) deliberation of citizens by displaying both sides of public debate 3. Facilitative Role: Facilitating (political) deliberation of citizens by simplifying technological and regulatory complexity	I guess it's also not for me to decide. Sometimes I just have to reflect on what the arguments of both sides are and then the reader can make his or her own mind up. (JO01) We need the responsible citizen, we need the responsible reader, who sees that a) it is important that the media report well on this, but b) must of course also create the conditions for this to be the case. Everything stands and falls with that. And the media, of course, have to make their contribution. If they are given this task, they must also fulfill it really well. [translated] (JO04) What's your role as a watchdog if nobody cares about you if you bark? (JO15) I'm in the privileged position of being able to try things out beforehand and also to ask people questions, which the normal consumer can't do. But I see myself as a bit of an advocate for the consumer. So that's a certain responsibility that you bear. I'm in this role because people want that, because they would like someone to ask questions. (JO04) And I think that's one of the tasks of journalists, too, to clear up this thicket of complexity and to make it clear, in other words, to present the whole thing in such a simple way that the reader, when he or she deals with it, is able to form his or her own opinion. Whether that now good or bad. (JO12) Technology is a completely different profession anyway, or a very specialized profession. And because technology is becoming more and more professional, they always face the challenge that, because it affects all sections of the population, they have to ensure that, on the one hand, they are comprehensible to those who know little about it and, at the same time, they also have something to offer and appear expert to those who know a lot about it. (JO04)
	Facilitative Role towards legislative accountability	1. Facilitative Role: Facilitating political decision makers to hold Big tech accountable 2. Journalists perform a watchdog role when	I think it is one of the roles that journalism can have, but it can't preach the ways in which this company needs to be accountable or what they should do in order to be accountable. It can help to elevate the level of public consciousness and concern around an issue. And then it's up to the other kind of pillars of society, predominantly the legal system, to respond. […] And journalists are not elected officials and editors and not elected officials. So I think it's a supporting role. (JO06) Because by informing and I, by exposing how they're, they're acting and they're trying to influence legislation. We're making sure that the debate is being fair, is not being hijacked. And I think more largely just exposing even when it's a story that doesn't have to do with big

		legislation/regulation is unable to hold Big Tech accountable 3. Enforcement of accountability is not democratically anchored in journalistic role	tech, even if it has to do with, for example, what something that European Commission is doing by writing about this knowledge. We we're enabling other actors to have a bigger say and to try to counterbalance the outsized roles that these players have. (JO14) So in that sense, you have a lot of power because what you write will be widely read by the very people that could potentially in a way end their businesses because depending on the rules, you know, that could seriously impede their profits or their operations. (JO14) I would argue that that was probably a watchdog journalist series of articles because the regulator here was not doing its job, in my opinion. And so we stepped in and we shed light on things. And that is a common thing among journalism in [country] anyway, that generally speaking, when the year ends, the best journalistic activity is usually considered to have shed light on something where officials are regulators weren't doing their jobs. That is proper watchdog journalism, and I would not consider myself to be a regular watchdog journalist. No. (JO13) So, yeah, holding the unchecked, largely unchecked power of these tech companies to account. (JO02) I can't hold them accountable. And if journalism can't hold them accountable, their shareholders will have to, state supervisory authorities will have to, and if the worst comes to the worst, the public prosecutor's office will have to. But we can at least point out responsibilities. We can uncover responsibilities. We can make things transparent through good journalistic work. Which is perhaps also what goes wrong with large technology groups. That's true. (JO07) For me, I just need one to focus really like after this thing to give you information that you didn't know about what's going on. Then what happens after, it's not my role. (JO10)
Role Appropriation	Tension/equilibrium between watchdog role and journalistic ideals	1. Interventionism oversteps ideals of the detached watchdog 2. Watchdog mandate is compromised by strong adherence to the ideal of balance 3. Service role: watchdog mandate is assigned by the audience	I think it's important to be scrupulous and diligent to be as transparent with sources as possible. I think it's good to lay out the reporting in a way that even people who disagree with my interpretation of things may not disagree with my presentation of the facts. And I think we should try to see this as part of an ongoing debate. Some particular notions we have about the Internet are very young about how this kind of information communication technology is used, what the impact of society is. There was no net neutrality debate 30 years ago. Data protection wasn't a big issue in the public eye 30 years ago. But with the ubiquitous use of data, it becomes a very relevant debate. So in a way, I would say it's important to have a sufficiently open mind about things and be transparent about angles taking, underreporting. (JO02) I am a journalist, not an activist. (JO12) balance game “between do I want people to understand or do I want it to be precise?” (JO01)

			If in a personal capacity, I think crypto currencies, crypto assets, I think they're terrible. I think ethically, socially, economically, politically, very, very dangerous and bad thing. For a whole host of reasons that it's not like it wouldn't be that interesting to get into. But I've spent most of this year talking to programmers and entrepreneurs and analysts and people from the Bank of England and Central Finance and things about crypto. And I've reached the conclusion that I really wish it would stop. But as a journalist. I don't project that attitude into the writing, I don't project it. What I am prepared to do is is foreground the evidence that has made me feel that way. (JO06) But then I guess it's also not for me to decide. Sometimes I just have to reflect on what the arguments of both sides are and then the reader can make his or her own mind up, I guess. (JO01) So I feel like even though I have a personal opinion, it's not good practice to force that into the reporting. I'd rather, you know, let show people rather than tell them.(JO06) You need a comment from the commission and Google, but then you also need comment from people that are sort of like on the sidelines and in this case, Google's competitors, which are more or less in line with the commission. (JO10) What's your role as a watchdog if nobody cares about you if you bark? (JO15)
	Observer role: Limited role consequentiality	1. Observer role: Documenting rather than shaping reality 2. Consequentialist role perceptions: Perceived futility towards impact on accountability 3. Ubiquity of Big Tech	So, yes, I'm trying to make them accountable. But yes, that's also probably limited to ten questions (JO13) And in terms of watchdog of these companies, yeah, we try to do it with the means we have. (JO14) To be honest, I would leave that to the regulators. That's not my job, so it's a bit beyond my capabilities. So to really think that I could now hold Google responsible seems a bit daring to me. (JO11) And that's also kind of the crazy thing about these companies, the perception of society as a whole is now not necessarily that they're all so insanely likeable. But of course that's how I google. So I would like to do it differently, but honestly, that's already the best search engine. And yes, I also have an iPhone. And that's not just the case for me as a journalist, but also for many citizens, i.e. for people in the public sphere, this feeling of "actually, I don't really like it, but I use it anyway. (JO05) I think an imbalance comes from the fact that companies are actually transnational, that is, they operate all over the world. Whereas journalists usually only work in one country. (JO12)

			So ultimately, it doesn't matter to them whether we discuss the keynote or not. Yes, it will be in the PR booklet and then they can say that here. But actually, no iPhone is sold more or less. And I think that was actually different in the past. At the same time, I would say that we also have an influence on our readers and that we have to take this really seriously and also on these companies. They're not infallible either, I'd say, and I don't think that's the best way to do it. So if we now make the big scoop, there will now not tomorrow 100 people with torches go to Amazon or will also certainly not cancel Prime subscription. But the detour via legislation, I do believe that we have more of an influence on this than and certainly on the public debate. (JO05)
Professional Legitimacy	Defense of professional legitimacy in times of crisis	1. Pre-emption of media criticism through adherence of detached role orientation 2. Perceived need to establish the media as an objective observer 3. Maintenance of public trust	Show not tell (JO06) In a personal capacity, I think crypto currencies, crypto assets, I think they're terrible. […] But as a journalist, I don't project that attitude into the writing. What I am prepared to do is foreground the evidence that has made me feel that way. (JO06) Of course, there is always the discussion about whether the influence of the press, i.e. press offices and marketing, has an influence on journalists, especially in the area of product reporting. In particular, this is the case in the automotive sector, where you read about test drives and nice press appointments on beautiful islands, where journalists are invited. And this question naturally arises in the same way with regard to big tech, because these are multi-billion corporations, they exert influence, they are highly professional. And yes, you can only counter this or do something about it if you score points with credibility among consumers. That's why you can't offer a surface for people to attack you and say, "Yes, you can't trust them, because they don't meet the lowest journalistic standards. (JO04) You can't report on a company without giving them the opportunity to comment. So that means you are, I would say, at least ethically obligated in some way to take their position, if they give one. (JO12)
	Self-regulation of role	1. Critical evaluation of own watchdog role (performance) 2. Awareness of (financial) dependence and clientelism 3. Techlash: from tech-utopian to tech-dystopian reporting	So yeah, in the sense they have so much power in Brussels and so yeah, sometimes you just feel that you're always one step behind them and that's why talking about being watchdog, that's why sometimes I feel like I'm conscious of my limitations. (JO14) So I think fairness to the tech companies is ignoring or tweeting with caution, even widely held beliefs about them that are largely unsubstantiated or hard to substantiate. (JO02) But I do think that, you know, clientelism is a constant threat and a risk in the tech industry. You will find criticism of tech journalists to say that that as a body, as a corpus of the journalists, they're not critical enough of the industry. They sometimes they parish the industry line too much. Now, that's at criticism. It can be their arguments against that criticism

			because most of the really in-depth analysis and critical analysis and criticism of big tech actually comes from the tech press. So if you actually break it down and look at the for and against. I think it's fairly evenly matched, but I'm aware that is out there and that's a thing that is constantly in the back of my mind. Am I being duped by these guys? Am I being wined and dined? (JO13) But the reality is that they are extremely powerful platforms and journalism is dependent on them when in an ideal world, it shouldn't be. (JO06) We are a watchdog, already. Yes, but maybe not the best, I will say. (JO09) So it's journalists a little embarrassed, I think, about that era that we didn't see. Also, the bad size of big tech, the privacy scandals and Cambridge Analytica. And we missed a lot and we did a lot of applauding and not too much coverage. And now sometimes I think it's a little too negative. It's all shit. Everything is bad. It's all bad. And they don't do anything right. But I think it's a response to what happened in the beginning. And maybe it's good. I think it's slowly maybe shifting a little back. (JO15) I've made like a deal with myself that I write ten stories a year like that. That's my goal. (JO15) So I think the tonality between let's say 2008 and 2022 has been a complete shift from a presumption of innocence and part of the tech companies to a presumption of guilt. (JO02)

Table 2. Quotes extracted from interviews with journalists (RQ2).

Dance off-stage	Specialized interest versus public interest	1. Technological and regulatory complexities are hard to grasp for a lay audience 2. Journalists need to navigate and communicate these technological and regulatory complexities	it's a really difficult topic. (JO01) there are often a lot of new terms that journalists also have to understand. (JO07) it often leads to front page stories because it's the battle of giants, right? Or David and Goliath, because you have big tech, right? These are becoming like the biggest ever money profiting, generating companies in the history of corporations. And then you have the EU regulators that are a bit scruffy and like really not sophisticated at all trying to go after these sharks. (JO10)

		3. Penetration of Big Tech in all societal facets generates public interest	And I think if you did a survey around Europe about who knows that this big content moderation law is coming up, comes into force actually in five days, I think people wouldn't even know what the DSA is when that's been all the talk in Brussels when you cover Tech here. (JO14)
	Off-the-record interaction	1. Shadow dance: interaction remains off-stage and off-the-record 2. Corporate role demarcation and complex organizational structures 3. Complicated acquisition and communication of substantive expert knowledge	So more often than not they can really only at least on record, but even often also off record, they can only give you the company line, which is something that somebody in Silicon Valley sends over, and then they just translate it into German and they don't even have that much leeway in how they translated it. (JO02) often it's just very good for background. (JO01) Almost all the reporting about tech companies that I do is off stage. There is no great lighting, no cameras. (JO02) I would say for this story it would probably be difficult to get a quote on records, but they're quite good at providing also background information that can be used. (JO03) That is often what is lacking in my stories, that what makes them a bit boring is that once in a while you would want to have something funny or amusing, something that shows that the people acting in the story, that, first of all, that there is actually people acting in the story, not, you know, unnamed lobbyist whose name was redacted from the documents interacting with unnamed EU official whose name was redacted from the documents. So more often than not, I would love to give my stories a human face in a way that I can't or haven't figured out a way of storytelling yet to do it. So that is frustrating. And I would like the reporting to be a bit funnier. I still haven't figured out the way to do that. (JO02) Well, you know, it's all about having the right sources, the right phone numbers. And you need to know the people that work on files at the technical level. So in the Parliament, that would be the assistance to the MEPs in the or the policy advisers to the groups in the council, that would be the attachés that sit in the relevant working party. (JO08) But actually getting a conversation going with Tim Cook is difficult. (JO05) That is then so more the problem that one simply does not even know to whom one should actually turn. (JO11)

Information Access sets the Rhythm	Information access divide	1. Information provider: Information inaccessibility triggers investigative watchdog role 2. Accessibility divide between national versus European versus American journalists 3. Geographical positioning of journalist determines information access	it's not their home turf, in a way. I feel they're keeping Europe at an arm's distance and they're not really engaging with the European media to a level to the level that they do with the US media. So when Facebook wants to tell the world that they're doing something about election security, they have an election security newsroom where they allow American journalists to tour. And that level of access doesn't exist for European journalists. (JO02) So it's quite limited and then a lot rarer I feel I have been in touch with lobbyists or policy people who have a lot of actual substance knowledge and also who might divulge interesting information that is not in the public domain or is not widely known. (JO02) What is a lot less common I feel is that with these corporations, the big tech companies, especially the US big tech companies, is that you get to speak to any high level person. (JO02) it's very hard to get information from the companies. They would just not comment at all. And I guess, yeah, there they would not have any interest in sharing that information with us, although they know, of course, that everybody would really like to know. So we are more dependent on the data protection authorities themselves or maybe lawyers involved. (JO03) So it's a lot about chasing documents and knowing when, you know, when is the next step, when you can ask for the documents at the right time to the right person. (JO08) journalism is finding out something that somebody somewhere doesn't want you to know. And I think with these tech companies, there's a lot they don't want us to know. […]the finding out something that someone somewhere doesn't want you to know is maybe a bigger factor with reporting on big tech than, say, sport. (JO06) So as you can imagine, it's like knocking on doors and most people saying, no, I don't want to talk to you unless you find somebody that does want to talk to you. And then with these people, you have to build a relationship in the same way that you would build a relationship with any other person in your family life or anywhere. (JO14) I think it's reporters with large American media companies. So you have reporters from The New York Times of Bloomberg writing books about the inside workings of Facebook or Google. (JO02)
	(Strategic) resource restrictions	1. ubiquity of Big Tech requires journalists to make use of limited resources strategically 2. Investigative journalism is only carried own when deemed worth the resources	The real reason, of course, is the funding base. Companies, on the one hand, have disproportionately more funds at their disposal and are also increasingly deciding to invest more and more funds in order to spread their own narrative. And at the same time, the funds on the other side, namely the side that has to carry out critical journalism, have of course been declining for years. (JO07) we have a lot of ground to cover and resources are always scarce. (JO08)

		3. Perceived David versus Goliath scenario	I think an imbalance comes from the fact that companies are actually transnational, that is, they operate all over the world. Whereas journalists usually only work in one country. (JO12) And in terms of watchdog of these companies, yeah, we try to do it with the means we have. So I also don't want to be naive that I think we've missed out on some things. And sometimes we also don't know or don't have the ability, don't have the staffing, the time and so on. (JO14) Now, if you run into a brick wall and you're getting no, you then might track down if it's an important enough story, but you won't waste that move on a fairly small story or a minor thing. You won't waste it because by wasting it 'll be more much more difficult for you to access them in future, you know? (JO13) Of course, these companies themselves have a great interest in us covering it. On the other hand, if we don't do it, 300 others will. So no one will forget Apple just because [news outlet] doesn't write about it. (JO05)
Strategic relationship management	Strategic detachment and balance to maintain access	1. Strategic detachment to maintain relationship 2. Strategic balance to maintain relationship 3. Client-patron relationship between journalism and Big Tech	But the reality is that they are extremely powerful platforms and journalism is dependent on them when in an ideal world, it shouldn't be. (JO06) The other element of corporate access is, of course, the possible quid pro quo that you're having in terms of how you approach something, of what you write, how the tone that you use, how you cover something. Is there a fear that you might not get an interview in future? And if your position in your media organization depends on you delivering big interviews with big figures. Does that then involve a compromise with you in how you cover a company and how you cover executive? That's a real fear as well. (JO13) Even if that source has something about them that's off or wrong or they're involved in something, they may the journalists may choose not to cover that negative thing about the source, because overall, you know, in balance, it's better for their relationship, it's better for your career. (JO13) And so there's kind of a client patron relationship between journalism and big tech that is necessary. (JO06)
	Personal, selective, and informal relationship	1. Careful curation of and dependence on professional network 2. Insider knowledge required to form and maintain strategic relationships	That is already in a way a partnership. (JO12) lobbyists and the companies involved themselves, because usually lobbyists are quite good at procuring documents, including from official sources. And it is known that documents have been leaked on from lobbyists for strategic purposes as well. (JO02) I also have met a lot of tech lobbyists and their PR people in Brussels where you just exchange trade a bit on and rumors and public information. (JO02)

		3. Geographical positioning of journalist determines relationship with PA practitioners	So it's a lot about chasing documents and knowing when, you know, when is the next step, when you can ask for the documents at the right time to the right person. (JO08) I've been in contact with the press department for many years. (JO11) I find this a totally professional relationship. (JO11) So it's like gardening. You have to constantly keep and have your patch of green, plants die, new grow, wheat comes. (JO10)
Following the Lead	David versus Goliath	1. Big Tech's ubiquity on (public, media, political) agenda 2. Dependence on Big Tech's information oligopoly 3. Perceived David versus Goliath scenario	it's still quite telling how much reporting goes into things like product presentations or interviews on the home turf of the tech companies where they get to talk about what they're doing about disinformation rather than critical investigative reporting about what they are actually doing and what the impact of their work is. (JO02) But you always get kind of the narrative that "what does it mean for big tech?" Well, if you come up with platform legislation or AI Act or whatever, it's not only big tech, same with GDPR. There's a lot of other companies also being hit. But I think there's still the perception that it's very important to see what's maybe also more like a US versus EU approach. How they would be impacted by it. So I think I wouldn't really say too much, but there's too much of an emphasis maybe on them rather than like all other companies or European companies that are also dealing with this. (JO03) it boils down to the question of what is news? And I can tell you that as a journalist, most of the time, the coverage that we have on these companies is negative. Because it's about, oh, Meta didn't do enough to fight disinformation or Google was sanctioned for an antitrust breach or these sorts of things. If you look at the coverage, the amount of negative coverage is much higher than the positive one. But that's just how the news work. What I can tell you, though, is that it's not limited to the media, but it's the fact that when you think about the tech sector, most of the I mean, everyone just thinks about the GAFA and that includes policy makers. But in fact, I mean, there is there are a lot of SMEs in this sector that are not so considered. You can see that a lot of the rules that are meant to target [Big Tech] often end up actually penalizing the SMEs because they have less money to comply with the regulation, whereas the government are like, okay, we just throw some more money to this and we'll be fine. (JO08) Of course, these companies themselves have a great interest in us covering it. On the other hand, if we don't do it, 300 others will. So no one will forget Apple just because [news outlet] doesn't write about it. (JO05) It's a mixed. You can say that we have no say or you can say that we have all the say. So like, what I mean by this is that there is an asymmetry of information because I am not an insider. I don't have access to the internal information that a Google or an Amazon employee has. So in

			this regard, they are winning. You can say the same in the European Union, right? I mean, I don't know how they are thinking what they are saying. It is my job to figure it out, but I'm trying to like scoop it with the spoon, you know, just get a little bit of the bigger pie. Throw that on that. In that sense, the sources are the winners because they hold 100% of the information. And I'm kind of like begging to get some of it. On the other hand, I think like the way that we write about these companies, not just [media outlet], but media in general has a huge impact on the way that shareholders would perceive these companies or the way the general public would perceive these companies. But at the same time, which is that's why it is a mixed picture, right? I mean, sometimes you see headlines about damning things that these companies do. But, you know, Apple is selling every quarter. All the previous ones. So it's not really having an impact on consumer sentiment. In fact, no matter what regulators do, ultimately external things like inflation may have more of a direct impact as to whether I buy the new phone or not. (JO10) it's very hard to get information from the companies. They would just not comment at all. And I guess, yeah, there they would not have any interest in sharing that information with us, although they know, of course, that everybody would really like to know. So we are more dependent on the data protection authorities themselves or maybe lawyers involved. (JO03) The real reason, of course, is the funding base. Companies, on the one hand, have disproportionately more funds at their disposal and are also increasingly deciding to invest more and more funds in order to spread their own narrative. And at the same time, the funds on the other side, namely the side that has to carry out critical journalism, have of course been declining for years. (JO07) we have a lot of ground to cover and resources are always scarce. (JO08) But the reality is that they are extremely powerful platforms and journalism is dependent on them when in an ideal world, it shouldn't be. (JO06) So I think Google, Apple, all these big ones, so the really these GAFA, the huge companies for them we are just too small to be a real problem, so reflect the criticism that we publish to these companies. (JO09) I was going to say, I think we have the power, but when I think it through, I think they really do because we have the power to publicize things about them and the smallest thing can have an impact and they know it, on rules that are extremely important for them. (JO14) sometimes you just feel that you're always one step behind them and that's why talking about being watchdog, that's why sometimes I feel like I'm conscious of my limitations (JO14)
	Taking or Sharing the Lead	1. Perceived power in public opinion formation 2. Journalistic independence from Big Tech in shaping the narrative	the reporting that these journalists do are important drivers of our perception of the companies. (JO02)

		3. Perceived power balance	So in a fundamentally free country like [country] or [country] or [country], it's the case that journalists have a certain amount of power, so they probably have the upper hand. (JO12) So I honestly don't perceive a power imbalance there. (JO11) I think we have a lot of influence and we don't really see that. I underestimate that a lot. (JO15) Then public events like the congressional hearings in the wake of Cambridge Analytica 2018 that was a pivotal moment because these people were for one of the very first times in their in their business careers, they had to answer questions that were not pre-scripted and that were not to their liking. (JO02)

Table 3. Quotes extracted from interviews with PA practitioners (RQ1).

Role demarcation	Strict and precise role demarcation	1. clear organizational structures and responsibilities 2. strict division between inside and outside lobbyism 3. close interaction among media-facing and policy-facing roles	we have a pretty strict division of labor. (PA03) Oftentimes the comms colleagues are really good at speaking and saying nothing, which is why oftentimes we do have the media sometimes coming to us as policy people because they know we're the ones who kind of have our hands in the law or whatever or whatever the policy is that's going on. But we have some really strict rules in terms of when we can or cannot talk to the media as a policy person. (PA03) our role here in Brussels is to really do classic PA work, so create a network with the institutions, with journalists, with other associations in the Brussels bubble as you know it, and organize events, sort of draft our outreach strategy. (PA06) primarily the Public Policy people actually talk to politicians and decision makers and usually the media is left for our PR department, so communications, corporate communications, and public policy is usually limited and separate but of course we work a little with them and are well aware of what they are doing in policy debates too. (PA01) just stakeholders slash public and goal engagement for [tech company] and mostly directed at regulatory work, advocacy, the political engagement. (PA09)
	Translator Role	1. Translation of technological complexities into accessible language	You can't take it for granted that your business model will be understood. (PA05) how can I explain our position in like three lines. (PA05)

		2. Translation of technological realities into legislation/regulation 3. Position Big Tech within wider regulatory discourse	we don't lobby. We just try to explain how the Internet works. (PA04) [jokingly] I want to position [big tech company]. (PA07) we are the antenna to the outside world, outside in, but also inside out. (PA07) we work with a very new industry there a lot of people don't know about, don't understand. (PA10) they're [politicians are] looking to industry or stakeholders in general to help them understand how them craft amendments. (PA09) how do you translate how the business works and what is needed from a regulatory and policy perspective to policymakers who are career politicians. (PA09) our role is literally to externalize all the policy speak and jargon to an outside world, […] to translate all the technicalities and the legalistic language to a more understandable and accessible language (PA14)
	Pathbreaker Role	1. Assist corporations in finding and defining their societal role 2. Provision of practical direction to assume responsibility 3. Assist corporations in navigating regulatory complexities	we need to find a role in society as well. […] Companies are organizations who do something back for society. (PA07) I also I'm also responsible for how we give practical direction to a responsibility taking in the Netherlands. (PA04) So you're providing a view on something that is part of the public debate. And I think the beauty of the job is to try and convince people on the basis of your day to day practice of how it works in reality and the implications of future legislation and how that could affect industry or company or players definitely on the market. (PA09) it's a super relevant role. If we don't know, we don't understand where policy or regulation goes, we can't develop. (PA13) We need to redefine our role towards the broader public. (PA13) I choose to believe that it's not a black and white world […]my job is to dig deep into those grey zones. (PA14) But of course we do it responsible and want to contribute, but we do it to demonstrate the willingness to engage to the wider public space. (PA08)
Focus on Formal Accountability	Facilitating corporate	1. Translation of "policy-speak" into actionable corporate compliance	my role is to sort of translate these things into what the political narrative is these days. (PA06)

	accountability towards legislation	2. Responsibility to assist corporations in taking responsibility as a company 3. Antenna role: connect policymakers with technological expertise	Getting from an abstract rule and turning that into implementation into compliance by the companies and the effects of that is little bit difficult exercise even for us internally. I think that's why it's very important that companies communicate about this. (PA01) So pretty much every regulation relates to us, so that's why you have to do somewhat of preconceived lobbying work in order to map out what's going to come and how likely it is. (PA02) I try to explain how we take our responsibility currently and try to listen what specific concerns are and then address them in that conversation or actually within the company saying, okay, we need to change stuff. (PA04) I'm responsible how we locally take responsibility as a company. (PA04) how do I translate politics and policy back into the business and explain to management who are just focused on building a business and operating at a profitable level? (PA09)
	Shaping legislative accountability	1. expert role: provide information and facts to facilitate actionable regulation 2. Explanation of corporate position to policymakers 3. Representation of corporate interests: Contribution to balanced political decision-making	I do think that I feel that my role has a relatively important position to play because your job is to provide information and facts and potential risks and consequences of decisions to people who have power. And those people are the politicians. And I think that a somebody in power making decisions is not a good politician in they making those decisions, unless they have all the facts in front of them. (PA03) I have to synthesize a lot of our company's positions and interests with mostly new laws that are coming out or revisions of laws that are being worked on at European level or possible amendments to ongoing discussions. All of this and I have to go in and explain our company's position either in trade associations or with members of European Parliament or Council attachés or to the European Commission itself to basically go to them and say the law that you're working on right now with the revisions that you have in mind will affect our business and therefore our sector in this way. (PA05) So the democratic role of what we do is to make sure government politicians have this information. (PA07) So if I engage with policymakers and parliamentarians, I always say, I give you this information because I feel you this can add to your role in balanced decision making. So I see the information I give as a jigsaw piece in their role. (PA13)
Role Appropriation	Professional and organizational victimization	1. Public skepticism of Big Tech industry as a whole 2. Public skepticism of particular corporation	I mean in a way, there is skepticism nowadays that even the fact that you were approaching the media or trying to change the public discourse, the attempt itself is already worthwhile a story. (PA01) I think society views my role rather negatively. (PA03)

		3. Public skepticism of professional role	We also know that we're just under constant pressure, anything that we say that is a bit juicy gets into press. That's why we need to be so careful. (PA01) [public understanding as a] bad lobbyist. (PA02) it would be great if the whole population would see the great work we're doing, but then it's pulling on a dead horse. (PA04) we also did it in concert with trade associations because we feel that if it's us, it might not be that trustworthy because it will be like, okay, well, of course [big tech company] thinks that their business model is the best. (PA13) I do believe that lobbyists also, unfortunately, has got a very negative connotation, but is nothing negative. (PA08)
	Advisor role: limited role consequentiality	1. Advisor role: provide expertise to policymakers 2. Communicate corporate position to policymakers 3. Ultimate legislation/regulation remains in the hands of policymakers	So there's a discrepancy about what the regulator thinks is going to happen and what's actually going to happen. Our obligation is to tell them that's what's going to happen. (PA02) I do think that I feel that my role has a relatively important position to play because your job is to provide information and facts and potential risks and consequences of decisions to people who have power. And those people are the politicians. And I think that a somebody in power making decisions is not a good politician in they making those decisions, unless they have all the facts in front of them. (PA03) We want to really just highlight particular concerns that we have and then the lawmakers can do with it whatever they want. (PA06) to a certain extent, we can trigger change. (PA02) at the end of the day, it's not our decision to make. […]Companies and specially PA officials from companies, they don't make the law. They provide the information. (PA02) Sometimes I think people think that companies have more power than they do. We have people that try and get meetings with people that hold the pen. (PA12) my role is to engage with public policy makers (PA13)
Professional Legitimacy	Defense of professional legitimacy	1. Interest representation as a cornerstone of democracy 2. Adherence to professional principles 3. Tension of professional and personal identity	It is a cornerstone of democracy, the ability of individuals and organisations representing different sectors of society to be able to have a say and weigh in in decisions and roles that will impact civil society as a role or a specific sector. So on that, I have absolutely no doubt the one thing that is fundamental, as I said, is transparency. To the extent that you have transparency and that you can be held accountable for what you do. Then this is how the process should be, because democracy is about participation. (PA15)

		4. Lack of public knowledge of profession	if your job is to try to convince people of providing facts, you have to provide them accurate facts. Your job is to not mislead either society because for me, when I talk to a politician, sometimes they can be sleazy, sometimes they can be arrogant, sometimes they can just be downright rude. But at the end of the day, I view them as the people's representatives. So for me, I'm talking to the user base, essentially to people who are using this, my employer as platforms. And the same thing with journalists. (PA03) in Brussels there's a lot of bad perception of big tech lobbying. (PA06) I'll try to get the best out of the company for the company, you know, not for the necessarily for the greater good, if such thing that does exist indeed. (PA02) the normal person has no idea what we do. (PA11) I help businesses communicate their policy and political priorities to political stakeholders. That's the gist of what I do, and that is legitimate. That is legitimate as an activity that not only does it play a role in the democratic system, but it's also regulated, which is the one thing that is fundamental. (PA15) is a fundamental and necessary companion to a liberal democracy. (PA08) I would choose some principle in what I do, because, you know, during all of this, you also have to believe in what you're saying. So because it's not your own conviction, it's what the data that you get from inside the company. (PA11)
	Defense of corporate legitimacy	1. Moral legitimacy: Public interest in Big Tech 2. Lawyer role: Providing corporations the right to defense 3. Pragmatic legitimacy: Corporate ubiquity in different facets of society	I don't work for the land mine association, you know, like, I'm not pouring oil into the oceans or polluting the skies with CO2 or clubbing baby seals. I work for a social media company, a cloud based social media company. Yes, the actions of my company has consequences. But let's be realistic here about where this lies on the scale of bad. (PA03) I also do try to take a step back and be like, All right, the hysteria that goes on around some of these companies, like people should just try to do a little bit of their homework first and look at the bigger picture rather than just come in with pre assumed biases about stuff. (PA03) in Brussels there's a lot of bad perception of big tech lobbying. (PA06) our philosophy at [Big Tech company] is that we have to be very factual with everything that we put forward. So everything that we have, we back up by data and we make sure that it's as transparent as possible and we try and put the information out there anyhow. (PA05) The main way we are able to do that is by opening up and being transparent about how our systems work so that the assumptions that are often held can be at least removed. (PA05)

			I saw myself as a bit of a lawyer. Everybody has the right to a defense. What you're just doing is basically saying this is that side of the story. It's not the only truth, but this is that side of the story so that the policymaker who's a judge can decide to hear both sides. (PA12)

Table 4. Quotes extracted from interviews with PA practitioners (RQ2).

Dance off-stage	Strategic avoidance of public visibility versus public interest	1. Interaction among PA practitioner and journalists remains mostly off-the-record 2. Technological and regulatory complexities render Big Tech of special interest 3. Avoidance of negative media reputation	We don't meet journalists that often, I think maybe once a month roughly. And it's either a quick video call half an hour to touch base on a few files, or it is like an in-person meeting over a coffee. (PA06) So sometimes it's better to try to do these things and have someone else say that or have an industry association say it so that stakeholders understand it's not just you as one company saying it, but it's a bunch of companies saying it. (PA03) normally it's it makes more sense to reach the specialized public of people that work daily on these issues than know what we're talking about. (PA15) I think it's mostly topics that people can relate to, right? I mean, like most of the time, probably most citizens are law abiding citizens, right? So an issue like law enforcement access to data, you know, it's not like you are getting notified by the company that your data has been accessed for a criminal investigation about you. So like one of the things we've been fighting or discussing for a long time with the authorities is whether we would have the right to inform users that we had shared their data with law enforcement. So this is an issue that the average citizen doesn't really... it's not sexy because it doesn't really apply to them. They can't relate to it. They're not out there committing crimes. (PA03) if your job is to try to convince people of providing facts, you have to provide them accurate facts. Your job is to not mislead either society because for me, when I talk to a politician, sometimes they can be sleazy, sometimes they can be arrogant, sometimes they can just be downright rude. But at the end of the day, I view them as the people's representatives. So for me, I'm talking to the user base, essentially to people who are using this, my employer as platforms. And the same thing with journalists. (PA03) But it also means that an association like [trade association] has to sort of enable those people to use them [technology] with trust. (PA06)

			Most of the times they are not the target audience, people don't - I know my mom does not think about the rules that will apply to [Big Tech company] in two or three years from now. That's usually too abstract, too legalistic too far away from the actual customer day-to-day experience. (PA01) everything that's in the regulation around packaging, that's so detailed and nobody cares about this. (PA02) It made more sense for the NGO and digital trade to do so [to communicate to the public] because they also they have a bigger likeability. (PA04) We have an entire new stakeholder [the public], a new stakeholder that we need to discuss with. (PA13) And from time to time, journalists may ask me questions, obviously, off the record. (PA08)
	Policymakers as main stakeholders	1. Strict role demarcation of inside and outside lobbying 2. Active role appropriation to provide information to journalists 3. Regulators and policymakers as main (and at times, only) stakeholder	we have a pretty strict division of labor. (PA03) we do have the media sometimes coming to us as policy people because they know we're the ones who kind of have our hands in the law or whatever or whatever the policy is that's going on. But we have some really strict rules in terms of when we can or cannot talk to the media as a policy person. (PA03) Like if I were to go out and talk to a journalist and whatever I said, I mean, God forbid my name would be linked to a quote. I mean, this can be a borderline fireable offense. (PA03) The public is not my stakeholder, my stakeholders are regulators. (PA02) it's not my domain. (PA05) I don't necessarily communicate to the general public. I communicate to very specific audiences such as policymakers and decision makers within Europe, EU, but also outside the EMEA region. (PA12)
Information Access sets the Rhythm	Information Provision Divide	1. Professionalized off-the-record interactions with journalists in Brussels 2. Limited interaction with journalists on national level 3. Collaboration among PA and PR in information provision	We don't meet journalists that often, I think maybe once a month roughly. And it's either a quick video call half an hour to touch base on a few files, or it is like an in-person meeting over a coffee. (PA06) So no one outside of the euro bubble wants to read that unless they're studying it or working on it from another capital. (PA05) through the network, you can find the people you want to work with. (PA07) So nobody's allowed to reach out to journalists in Brussels apart from me. (PA12)

			I'd say, informal bubble where you do try to keep in touch with people on an informal basis so your connections and your network is half of the job. (PA11) normally it's it makes more sense to reach the specialized public of people that work daily on these issues than know what we're talking about. (PA15) The simple reason of it being is that at the end of the day, we're a bit of a community of people that are working on the same topic. (PA15)
	Expert Role	1. Establish expert role towards policy makers via the media 2. Information sovereignty to remain relevant to target audience 3. Strategic instrumentalization of the media	the main audience that we're talking about here are policy makers, right? And I view the media as part of the people that they are responding to because the media essentially is in many times the voice of the people, give or take. So the politicians, if they hear the media sort of like pushing a certain position, they're more responsive to this because if they don't address whatever concern is being lifted by the media, they're going to get killed in their next elections or their electorate is going to be pissed at them. (PA03) But for me, I really view this as a role of facilitating and providing the people who by definition, should need to absorb as much stuff as possible before choosing a path. And they can't do that without essentially me being in place. (PA03) So the media is already talking about the law, so we want to at least make sure that they have the background. (PA01) The government is talking about tech. We want to be the party to talk to. (PA07) We try to position the company because that's where we have more power, of course. And most times we have facts. But it's our choice to share facts. If you share a fact, it is a fact. (PA07) It's really about educating people and giving them access to understanding of what is being done. (PA10) And also what made it more complex is that normally the policy makers are very experts on this topic. But we now see that that that this is so new that they're not expert on it. (PA13) lack of expertise [of policymakers]. (PA08) Communication is a big part of everything we do. It doesn't have to be with media. It's just, that's that's your job, basically, to make your point seen and heard and understood. (PA11)
Strategic relationship management	Defensive corporate	1. Strategic avoidance of media attention by lobbyists 2. Perceived hostile media agenda 3. Negative public perception of professional role and corporations	I would be honest in saying that oftentimes we're trying not to attract media attention. Oftentimes, like right now, for instance, I think the company is quite thankful that Elon Musk is constantly discussing Twitter and like Twitter is constantly in the news and in the headlines because they're talking about this company instead of ours. (PA03) Like if I were to go out and talk to a journalist and whatever I said, I mean, God forbid my name would be linked to a quote. I mean, this can be a borderline fireable offense. (PA03)

	positioning towards the media		The perception that others have of me, and it kind of facilitates my work a little bit when I go out and engage with people because I don't get as much pushback or negative perception from the get go. (PA09) It's a rather controlled environment because despite our best intentions, the media sometimes takes certain spin on things. So it's a very much of a cost benefit analysis of like, what can we win by engaging from a communications point of view, looking at like a worst case, like least impactful outcome versus what's the worst case outcome in terms of how they behave. And if those things don't even out, we decide against engaging in the comm sphere and instead work a bit more based on the facts and from a legal perspective instead. (PA03) So if the media is writing constantly about a company oftentimes in a negative light because people like reading negative stories or whatever it is, and then the people start talking negatively about that. The politicians feel like they need to...I mean, it's very easy to win points for them, right? I mean, to say like, oh, I'm going to really reign in this big tech company, which basically has been developing a narrative of being a evil, bad company. (PA03) It's often actually just for background and so that we would do but given the whole big tech, tech lash and so on, there is already a certain negative stance usually, the default stance is usually negative. (PA01) I do feel that there's more willingness from journalists to listen [to SMEs] (PA10).
	Professional(ized) media efforts	1. Knowledge of media routines 2. Selective maintenance of journalistic network 3. Professionalized media routines	our approach sometimes is like no comment. Like don't have anything to say, like let this story kind of die a small, short, quick death or whatever that expression is, because the media environment is so quick, right? (PA03) I know some of these journalists from over the years of doing this. (PA03) So we have like five six journalists that contact us probably every two or three weeks or so and with them we have a decent relationship. (PA01) I need to know these people. (PA12) So [they] ha[ve] [their] network because in media you also need your own network. Who knows which journalists to contact for which topic with whom to talk more openly and with whom not so much. (PA11) really know how the news cycle works. (PA14)

			I think we need the media, so we need to work with the media and our role is to provide them. (PA14) Because you want to more people to read what you're saying, because by having the media coverage, you're also reaching policymakers. (PA11)
Following the Lead	One against All	1. Rejection that financial firepower predicts control over narrative 2. Public skepticism about Big Tech's role in society 3. Role of news media to hold corporations accountable	I think there's no public perception of my role. (PA12) So if the media is writing constantly about a company oftentimes in a negative light because people like reading negative stories or whatever it is, and then the people start talking negatively about that. The politicians feel like they need to...I mean, it's very easy to win points for them, right? I mean, to say like, oh, I'm going to really reign in this big tech company, which basically has been developing a narrative of being a evil, bad company. (PA03) I mean in a way, there is skepticism nowadays that even the fact that you were approaching the media or trying to change the public discourse, the attempt itself is already worthwhile a story. (PA01) It's a rather controlled environment because despite our best intentions, the media sometimes takes certain spin on things. So it's a very much of a cost benefit analysis of like, what can we win by engaging from a communications point of view, looking at like a worst case, like least impactful outcome versus what's the worst case outcome in terms of how they behave. And if those things don't even out, we decide against engaging in the comm sphere and instead work a bit more based on the facts and from a legal perspective instead. (PA03) It's often actually just for background and so that we would do but given the whole big tech, tech lash and so on, there is already a certain negative stance usually, the default stance is usually negative. (PA01) I am even wondering, do the companies have any power? I mean it's not that we can do a lot. If they want to write something that we don't like, there is relatively little we can do. We live in a democratic open society. (PA01) I do feel that there's more willingness from journalists to listen [to SMEs] (PA10). A big problem there is indeed, that the other side often has less money to have equal voice. That is somewhat mitigated by the fact that nobody really wants to hear from the big guys. (PA12) There's a really important role for them to play because like when companies step out of bounds, if the regulator hasn't sort of caught them, like there's a role for the media to hold companies accountable, just like there is a role for the media to hold politicians who are or whatever abusing their positions of power accountable. (PA03)

			journalism is a crucial part of our democracy, and that's why we engage with them. That's why policymakers engage with them. (PA05)
	Leading through Big Tech's complexity and Ubiquity	1. Expert knowledge to navigate technological and regulatory complexities 2. Ubiquity of Big Tech in society	I mean, I think at the end of the day, like [Big Tech company] as a topic and a company for whatever reason generates a lot of interest and a lot of clicks. And again, it goes back to this view that everybody uses [Big Tech company]. (PA03) you contribute by showing the industry side in principle because, you know, the policymakers, they don't have degrees in tech. (PA11) But Internet is now an entire spaghetti of hardware/software infrastructure, which is only explainable by very experts, normal people don't understand it. (PA13) everything that's in the regulation around packaging, that's so detailed and nobody cares about this. (PA02) And sometimes in the beginning it's more generic questions. Often for them it's really hard to understand too. You are a journalist and you are covering many different laws at the EU level, it's not easy for you to dig deep into one specific topic and actually even for our PR department, it's not that easy either. Usually the ones that know most about this is public policy and the legal department who have analyzed it. (PA01)