Reconsidering churnalism: How news factors in corporate press releases influence how journalists treat these press releases after initial selection

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Abstract: This study examines how news factors in press releases influence journalists' decisions and the journalistic treatment of press release information after its initial selection for the news agenda: These journalists can transform press releases into a news story, which involves little journalistic capital investment, or use these releases for a unique news production, which requires significant journalistic capital investment. The data elicited from the content analysis show that the more profound the presence of certain news factors in press releases, the higher the chance that journalists will choose to invest their journalistic capital in these press releases. This result means that journalists will only invest journalistic capital in press releases that contain specific news factors.

Keywords: journalistic capital, press releases, churnalism, gatekeeping, news values, news factors, content analysis

Introduction

Journalism is currently facing the challenge that journalists have less time to spend on writing articles (Lewis, Williams, and Franklin 2008a). Moreover, studies show that the news agenda significantly depends on the input of public relations (PR) information subsidies (Hijmans, Schafraad, Buijs, and d'Haenens, 2011; Lewis, Williams, and Franklin, 2008b; Reich, 2010; Schafraad, Van Zoonen, and Verhoeven, 2016) and provide evidence of increasing dependency on PR (Lewis et al., 2008a). This situation has led to the introduction of *copy and paste*

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journalism or *churnalism* (Buijs, 2014; Davies, 2008; Jackson and Moloney, 2016; Johnston and Forde, 2017; Kroon and Schafraad, 2013; Lewis et al., 2008b).

In the past decade, concerns about the increasing influence of PR on journalism have been raised. Within journalism, an industry faced with tough conditions, there is now a growing corps of PR professionals (Prenger, Van der Valk, Van Vree, and Van der Wal, 2011), a decline in editorial staff and resources (Lewis et al., 2008a), and an increasing diversity of publication platforms, each with specific demands (García-Avilés, Kaltenbrunner, and Meier, 2014; Witschge and Nygren, 2009). These developments have led to copy and paste journalism becoming a common coping strategy (Lewis et al., 2008a). From the perspective of journalism's watchdog function, which requires independent newsgathering, this copy-and-paste phenomenon is particularly worrisome. In fact, between 20 to 70 % of domestic news has been found to either partly or entirely draw upon what Gandy (1982) calls "information subsidies", such as press releases (Hijmans et al., 2011; Kroon and Schafraad, 2013; Lewis et al., 2008b). Lewis et al. (2008b) bluntly stated: "News, especially in print, is routinely recycled from elsewhere [...]. Such practices would, elsewhere, be regarded as straightforward plagiarism" (p. 18).

Here, we echo their disclaimer that not all PR (or other information subsidies) are, by definition, problematic. There are arguably two main reasons why adopting information subsidies from press releases does not always carry quality risks. First, only a minority of press releases is fully adopted into news articles; most press releases are only used partially or are completed with additional information or commentary from other sources (Hijmans et al., 2011). Second, journalists are professionals working in a professional culture and organization (Deuze, 2005; Reese, 2001), hence, we assume that journalists, who are facing these challenging conditions, do not simply let go of their professional values, as the churnalism thesis might implicitly suggest (Davies, 2009). Instead, journalists negotiate where and when to invest their time and skills. Studies in which journalists were asked when they do or do not check facts show that journalists make informed decisions. Based on their experience and estimated trustworthiness, journalists prioritize certain sources for fact-checking (Elliott, 1994; Van der Wurff and Schönbach, 2011). Drawing on these conclusions, the central assumption in this study is that a similarly informed choice determines how press releases are used in the journalistic production process. In their gatekeeping role, journalists choose from the supply of press releases based on journalistic selection criteria or news factors such as reach, controversy, surprise and elite actors (Kroon and Schafraad, 2013), timeliness and immediacy (Zoch and Supa, 2014, p. 18), and elite organizations positive and negative impacts (Schafraad, Van Zoonen, and Verhoeven, 2016).

In this study, we investigate whether news factors also influence how much of their own scarce time and resources (or 'legwork'; Reich and Godler, 2017) journalists invest in reworking press releases that have already been chosen for inclusion in the news agenda before a final news story is published. Hence, we focus on the question: *How do news factors in corporate press releases influence the way journalists treat these press releases?* As journalists' time is limited, they can only invest their resources in a limited amount of newsworthy press releases. The findings of this study will elicit new insights into how journalists prioritize which corporate press releases will receive elaborate journalistic treatment in the news production process, thereby adding nuances to the churnalism thesis.

Due to the explorative nature of this study, this paper analyzes corporate press releases from 30 of the largest Dutch corporations. We selected these corporations for two reasons. First, while these corporations are an important force in society, the media coverage of their field is understudied (Verhoeven, 2009). Second, we expect these corporations to have relatively large and professional PR budgets (Davis, 2000).

Theoretical framework

Deliberate choices in the investment of scarce journalistic capital

The journalistic process is viewed as a series of selection decisions (see Figure 1), which means that for each stage in the journalistic production process, events, topics, information subsidies and, in later phases of the process, news stories are selected for treatment. The first stage concerns whether an event will become part of the news agenda, reflecting the so-called gatekeeping function of journalism (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001; Shoemaker and Vos, 2009; White, 1950). In the second stage, journalists write the actual story. Decisions on size, placement and layout are the third stage in the journalistic process (Staab, 1990).

We assume that, after selecting the news agenda, journalists consider whether to invest more or less time, skills and other resources in the transformation of a press release. In this second stage, journalists write the news story and make decisions on what to take from the press releases and whether to add additional information and check other sources (see Buijs, 2014; Hijmans et al., 2011; Reich and Godler, 2017; Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Baden, 2018). These journalistic contributions are not free; they require certain resources, which we have labeled *journalistic capital*. Journalistic capital refers to the various resources
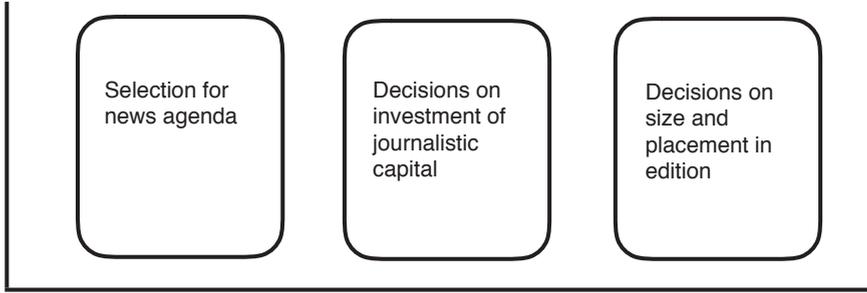
Figure 1: Stage in journalistic processing of press releases.

journalists possess which they can invest in solving a problem; in other words, journalistic capital enables the journalist to transfer bits of information to a journalistic product (Benson, 1998; Benson and Neveu, 2005; Schultz, 2007). We distinguish between four different types of journalistic capital (resources): time, expertise (e. g., topical knowledge), skills (e. g., writing, interviewing, research, fact-checking, and social media), and network (e. g., information sources and expert sources) (Drok, 2013; Opgenhaffen, d'Haenens, and Corter, 2013; Schultz, 2007; Willnat, Weaver, and Choi, 2013). As the use of expertise, skills and network all require time (Lewis et al., 2008a, p. 38), time is considered central to the concept of journalistic capital (see Figure 2). These forms of journalistic capital are scarce or unique and can either be used (i. e., invested) or cumulated for later use. From a Bourdieuian perspective, journalistic capital can best be viewed as a specific kind of cultural capital that is relevant in the field of journalism (Benson,

Figure 2: The elements of journalistic capital.

1998; Benson and Neveu, 2005). Due to its scarcity, journalists have to consider whether to invest journalistic capital in press releases.

The outcome of this selection is that some press releases will become part of (often larger) unique journalistic productions that distinctively carry and blend information from various sources. Those press releases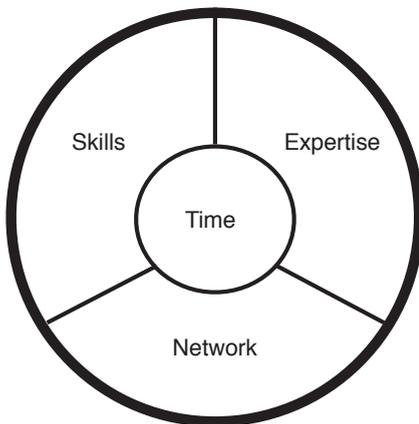 that receive little journalistic capital investment will be the sole source for the news article, which will contain little or no additional information on top of the press release's content and, thus, become what Davies (2008) labeled 'churnalism'. Decisions on the investment of journalistic capital take place after the selection for the news agenda and before editorial decisions on the size, placement, and layout (see Figure 1).

Possible influences on the decision to invest journalistic capital

Decisions to invest journalistic capital are informed by the same set of factors as selection decisions in the other phases, though possibly not in the same way. Research on news selection and gatekeeping has made it clear that there is a range of factors that might be involved, some of which are structural, whereas others are not (Reese, 2001). These factors can be divided into three groups. First, there are *situational* factors, such as news supply and time (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009; Staab, 1990). Second, there are *institutional and professional* factors. These factors have been theorized in the Hierarchy of Influences model (Reese, 2001), and consist of personal preferences and the journalist's background, the news organization's editorial policy and culture, the medium identity and ownership (Reese, 2001; Reich, 2011; Staab, 1990). Third, there are characteristics of the *information subsidy* (e. g., a press release), including the cultural capital of the sender (Davis, 2000) and news factors present in the press release text (Eilders, 2006; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001; Kroon and Schafraad, 2013). In this study, we focus on the third category, the information subsidy characteristics, as these are unique to each press release regardless of the situational and institutional factors that may differ depending on the newsroom that receives the press release at any given moment. Primarily focusing on the characteristics of the information subsidies thus provides us with an understanding of the mechanisms that transcend individual editors, specific situations or a single medium.

News factor theory

News selection is fundamental in the journalistic process (Reese, 2001; Tuchman, 1973). Although journalists themselves (Schultz, 2007) and early studies on the selection process suggest that its result depends highly on the individual characters of the journalists (White, 1950; Henningham, 1997), a currently well-established research tradition suggests that there is a stable pattern that can be identified in all of these individual news selection decisions (Caple and Bednarek, 2013; Eilders, 2006; Galtung and Ruge, 1995; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001, 2017; Joye, Heinrich, and Wohlert, 2016). This tradition is based on the news factor theory, which was introduced by Galtung and Ruge (1965) and combines individual perspectives with professional and organizational routines and cultural influences (Eilders, 2006; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001; Schwarz, 2006). The core proposition of the theory is that events and issues possess certain characteristics (i.e., news factors) that determine their newsworthiness, whereby newsworthiness is a journalistic judgement of the relevance of these characteristics (Eilders, 2006; Shoemaker, 2006). The news factor theory assumes that there is a consistent and stable relationship that can be observed between the characteristics of events and issues (or, news *factors*) and the news *value* allocated to them by journalists (Kepplinger and Ehmig, 2006). These allocated news values consequently reflect the selection and prominence ascribed to the event or issue by the news media (Eilders, 2006; Staab, 1990; Kepplinger and Ehmig, 2006). The news factor theory thus implies the collective assignment of relevance which results from shared socialization (Donsbach, 2004; Eilders, 2006). In this sense, news factors function as a cognitive catalogue that aids journalists in *selecting* from the immense supply of news events and issues (Eilders, 2006; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001; Kepplinger and Ehmig, 2006; Maier and Ruhrmann, 2008; Staab, 1990). Although this theory expects news factors to affect journalists' judgements, it must be stressed that news factors may influence individual journalists differently depending on, for example, the type of news medium from which the information derives, their newsroom's culture or their news medium's type of audience (Boukes and Vliegenthart, 2017; Eilders, 2006; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001). The distinction between news factors (i.e., event or issue characteristic) and news values (i.e., judgement), which was theorized and extensively tested by Kepplinger and Ehmig (2006), remains relevant despite suggestions it should be abandoned altogether (Caple and Bednarek, 2013, p. 3). This distinction enables us to investigate variations in the relationship between the characteristics of an event or issue (or information subsidy) and how journalists across different types of media ascribe news value to these events, issues, or information subsidies (Kepplinger and Ehmig, 2006).

To establish whether news factors, as characteristics of an event or issue, influence journalists' selection decisions, Rosengren (1970) argued that, to do so, one requires extra-media data. For many studies, such data was not available (Hjarvard, 2002; Joye et al., 2016, p. 12). Also, because news factors would need to be acknowledged by journalists as such, it is often argued that news factors are constructions (Staab, 1990) and should consequently be considered as dependent rather than independent variables (Boukes and Vliegenthart, 2017, p. 4; Caple and Bednarek, 2013). In this study, however, extra-medial material is available in the form of press releases, which should be considered as the point of reference for journalists when they make selection decisions. Overall, press releases enable us to analyze how characteristics of an event (as reconstructed in the press releases) may influence the journalist's selection decisions.

Various catalogues of news factors have been applied in research (see Appendix 1). As the original taxonomy by Galtung and Ruge (1965) was developed in the context of international news and is over half a century old, researchers have altered and elaborated on this classification to be able to apply it to other types of news (Harcup and O'Neill, 2001; Maier and Ruhrmann, 2008) and changing news production and consumption contexts (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017; Joye et al., 2016). In response to critique that the news factor theory neglects external factors, others have added these factors (Caple and Bednarek, 2013). To distinguish these external factors from event characteristics (i. e., content of the press release), we have labeled them situational, institutional and professional factors. Although some researchers seem to strive for an absolute taxonomy, we agree with Harcup and O'Neill (2006), who contend that "no taxonomy can explain everything" (p. 1), and we focus on news factors that are (possibly) present in press releases. In a review article, Eilders (2006) reported that a number of news factors are repeatedly found to be effective (p. 11). Here, we build on that validated catalogue, which we consider applicable in the Dutch context due to the similarity in media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). The specific news factors included in this catalogue are surprise, controversy, scope, positive and negative consequences, elite and prominent persons and dynamics (Boukes and Vliegenthart, 2017; Eilders, 2006; Kroon and Schafraad, 2013; Maier and Ruhrmann, 2008; Maier and Strömback, 2006).

The role of news factors in selecting press releases for investing journalistic capital

Due to the scarcity of journalistic capital, journalists will likely be forced to choose between the news reports in which they will invest this capital, and we

expect them to use the same professional logic for that decision as when they select press releases for inclusion in the news agenda. In addition to impacting the initial story selection, news factors can explain news story selection decisions vis-à-vis their size and placement in newspapers (Staab, 1990) and the selection of news stories in news reception studies (Eilders and Wirth, 1999; Ruhrmann, Woelke, Maier, and Diehlmann, 2003), which implies a sameness in logic between these particular selection stages and the initial story selection. Similar to how the presence of, for example, a controversy in a press release prompts a journalist to select that press release to report on the topic, in the next phase, controversy may lead the journalist to invest their journalistic capital in the press release. So, in the first phase, controversy triggers the journalist to ascribe to a critical level of news value. In the second phase, the same news factor triggers the journalist to balance the story by including the voice of the other parties involved in the controversy and to check the facts. The negative impact news factor may similarly prompt the journalist to add context to the story to be able to show or explain this impact.

Although literature suggests that the effects of individual news factors might differ from context to context (Eilders, 2006; Joye et al., 2016), so far, specific expectations for corporate news contexts are absent. Following the logic of the news factor theory, we expect the presence and intensity of news factors to lead to a higher allocation of news value. Consequently, these factors increase the likeliness that journalists will invest their journalistic capital in a certain press release, for which we have two indicators: journalistic treatment and the use of additional sources (see Methods for the exact operationalization). Hence, we expect that:

> H1: The stronger the presence of each of the news factors in press releases, a) the more intensive the journalistic treatment of the press release, and (b) the more additional sources are used.

News factors in a press release spur journalists to attribute news values to the press release's message; consequently, the more news factors present, the higher the news value will be, and the higher the chance of media attention (Kepplinger and Ehmig, 2006; Kroon and Schafraad, 2013; Schulz, 1976; Schwarz, 2006). Again, we build on these assumptions and apply the same line of reasoning to the second selection moment (i.e., the investment of journalistic capital) in the journalistic processing of press releases. After all, each of the news factors may add urgency for similar or additional reasons to the other news factors present. If a press release not only contains controversy but also a high level of scope, the controversy may specifically prompt journalists to ask other sources for their side of the story, while the scope spurs the journalist to add context and find

sources that can explain the impact of the event. Each additional news factor is consequently expected to add more reasons to invest journalistic capital. Thus, we reach our second hypothesis.

> H2: The higher the number of news factors present in press releases, a) the more intensive the journalistic treatment of the press release, and (b) the more additional sources are used.

Differences between online and offline news

In the past two decades, digital journalism has become a prevalent subfield of journalism. Researchers have tried to understand the consequences of the rapid development of online platform technologies and the implementation of these technologies (Deuze, 2007). One consequence is the 24/7 news flow and corresponding increased speed of journalistic work (Klinenberg, 2005; Rosentiel, 2005) as well as the increased dependence of online journalism on information subsidies (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, 2009; Quandt, 2008, p. 89; Wheatly and O'Sullivan, 2017). Despite the contemporary convergence between media types, which may potentially temper the differences between online and offline news, a recent study by Reich (2016) conducted in Israel found that online journalism is still more source-dependent than offline journalism. This greater dependency on sources, including information subsidies, can be explained by the speed of the news flow online, which is also (but not exclusively) reflected in the role of online journalists, whose primary professional value is immediacy (Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002; Reich, 2016; Wheatly and O'Sullivan, 2017). Online journalists, like radio journalists, cherish this value significantly more than television and print journalists (Reich, 2016; see also Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002). Moreover, the relationship between immediacy and online news seems to be reflected in the 'digital first' adage of many (traditional) media that produce offline and online news in the same news room, whereby a reporter first produces a short text for the news site before writing a full report for the newspaper (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017). Consequently, online journalists are most similar to the contemporary journalist archetype as described by Davies (2009), that is, journalists at their desks waiting for news to come in through e-mail, fax and social media (see also Lewis et al., 2008b). In reality, this practice means that journalists writing for online outlets depend on information subsidies rather than taking the initiative to gather news. Because investing journalistic capital takes time, which conflicts with immediacy, we expect journalists to invest less capital in covering corporate press releases online than in offline news media. This assumption led us to the following hypothesis:

H3: Relative to the offline coverage of press releases, in the online coverage of corporate press releases, (a) there is less intensive journalistic treatment, and (b) there are fewer external sources used in the news article.

Methods

Sampling method

This study aims to provide insights into journalists' decisions on how to handle information subsidies and how much of their journalistic capital they should invest in these corporate press releases. We analyzed all press releases issued by 30 large Netherlands-based corporations in 2012 (n = 820) and 784 successive new reports.

The press releases were gathered from the corporations' online archives. We used stratified sampling to select these corporations from a list of the 500 largest Dutch corporations (i. e., with more than 100 employees, based on annual turnover).[1] We distinguished between ten different sectors and randomly sampled three corporations within each of them.

The news articles were sampled from eight different news media on the LexisNexis database. We sampled news articles from three Dutch newspapers: *De Telegraaf*, the largest newspaper in the Netherlands; *De Volkskrant*, which originally had a Catholic background and now has a more left-leaning, quality signature; and *Het Financieele Dagblad*, a specialist newspaper which focuses on economics and business (Bakker and Scholten, 2003).

The news articles were obtained by searching for the company name in each medium in the six days following the press release. The same procedure was used to search the online archives of these outlets. Furthermore, we analyzed news articles published on the two largest Dutch news websites, *NU.nl* (online only) and *NOS.nl* (a public broadcast news website). The online news websites were coded, as they have a significant and growing readership. Finally, given its prominence in Dutch news procurement, news published by the press agency *ANP* was included in the sample (Scholten and Ruigrok, 2009).

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1 Elsvier top 500 http://nssp.nl/top-500-bedrijven-elsevier/

Coding instrument

Following the empirical studies of Eilders and Wirth (1999) and Maier and Ström-back (2006), a coding schedule was developed for the recording of news factors. We derived those news factors that were especially relevant for business news. News factors that are not event characteristics were excluded. Proximity factors were excluded since the senders of all of the press releases in the dataset are Dutch. Overall, this process resulted in the following news factors being coded on a five-point scale, anchored at 0 = not present to 4 = highly present: 1) surprise, 2) controversy, 3) scope, 4) positive consequences, 5) negative consequences, 6) reference to elite people, 7) reference to prominent people, and 8) dynamics. The codebook and operationalization of the news factors were based on the work of Eilders (1997) and Maier and Strömback (2008).

Table 1: News factors used in this study.

News factor	Description	Based on/ derived from
Surprise	An event is unexpected when it is unannounced or when it counters expectations.	Maier & Strömbäck, 2006
Controversy	Explicit presentation of opposing opinions or positions.	Maier & Strömbäck, 2006
Scope	Describes how many people are directly involved, feel the consequences of, or are influenced by, the event. See: reach, impact.	Eilders, 1997; Maier & Ruhr-mann, 2008
Positive consequences	(Also success.) The consequences for one or more of the involved actors are positive and explicitly present in the text. They may be economic, political, physical, psychological or social consequences.	Eilders, 1997; Maier & Ruhr-mann, 2008
Negative consequences	The consequences for one or more of the involved actors are negative and explicitly present in the text. They may be economic, political, physical, psychologi-cal or social consequences.	Eilders, 1997; Maier & Ruhr-mann, 2008
References to elite people	The text mentions or quotes individuals, groups, insti-tutions or their representatives that have significant social, political or economic power.	Maier & Strömbäck, 2006
References to prominent people	The text mentions or quotes individuals who are well-known in society or in a certain domain. (Also celebrity.)	Maier & Strömbäck, 2006
Dynamics	The distinction between the presentation of mere infor-mation and reports of movement and activity.	Eilders, 1997

Next, this study models the time lag between the date the press release was published and the date the news article was published. Furthermore, this study distinguishes between online and offline news.

The dependent variable, which is the investment of journalistic capital, can be measured through the level of difference between the news article and the press release and by the number of additional sources mentioned in the article. In this study, journalistic capital is operationalized as journalistic treatment and the use of additional sources. Journalistic treatment was measured using a binary variable, whereby 0 = no journalistic treatment (i. e., verbatim to the press release or edited or rewritten but does not contain new information, analyses or other additional content) and 1 = journalistic treatment (i. e., may include added information, quotes, commentary or be completely integrated in a broader story on a related topic). The use of additional sources was measured using the following categorization: 1) zero additional sources, 2) one additional source, and 3) more than one additional source. These two variables were considered proxies for journalistic capital investment.

Coder training and reliability

The four coders received extensive training during eight training sessions and were familiarized with the codebook before the actual coding started. To calculate coder reliability, all coders coded a random subsample of press releases and media messages. Krippendorff's alpha was calculated, and all variables were reliably coded, exhibiting a KALPHA of 0.77 or higher (Krippendorf, 2004). All variables and corresponding KALPHA are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptives, correlations and coder reliability coefficients.

	Mean (sd)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Journalistic investment	0.84 (0.36)	**.81**												
2. Additional sources	0.81 (0.87)	.34	**.89**											
3. Dynamics	1.82 (0.81)	.13	.07	**.77**										
4. Prominence	0.81 (0.85)	–.02	.00	.23	**.90**									
5. Elite	2.57 (0.92)	.03	.01	.10	.22	**.99**								
6. Scope	2.13 (1.32)	.14	.12	.46	.16	.21	**.97**							
7. Negative consequences	0.60 (1.15)	.07	.07	.25	–.04	–.03	.08	**.97**						
8. Positive consequences	1.82 (1.28)	.05	.07	.42	.22	.21	.51	.10	**.90**					
9. Controversy	0.28 (0.80)	.12	.17	.34	–.09	.01	.07	.50	.04	**1.00**				
10. Surprise	1.69 (0.86)	.08	.04	.64	.28	.18	.51	.25	.51	.15	**.85**			
11. Sum of NV	5.27 (1.65)	.17	.16	.67	.42	.28	.63	.40	–.66	.22	.74	**-**		
12. Online/offline	1.38 (0.49)	–.23	–.22	–.17	–.09	–.14	–.15	–.03	–.13	–.02	–.21	–.22	–	
13. Time lag	1.08 (1.50)	.19	.20	.10	.10	.06	–.01	.00	.07	.07	.04	.09	–.37	–

[a] Coder reliability coefficients (KALPHA) are reported on the diagonal.
[b] Correlations .07 or higher are significant at p < .05.

Analysis

Regression analyses were used to test our hypotheses. For all the 'a' hypotheses concerning journalistic treatment, ordinal regressions were used. For all 'b' hypotheses concerning the use of additional sources, multinomial ordinal regressions were estimated. In all regression models, the independent variables included the news factors, the number of news factors, topics, time lag, and outlet (e. g., online or offline).

For the ordinal regression model, a chi-square test was used to assess the null hypothesis, whereby the coefficients for all of the terms in the model except the constant would equal zero. This procedure mimics the F-test used for the overall regression analysis. An exponential b = 1 indicated the same probability of journalistic treatment of the press release between two units on X. An exponential b > 1 indicated the probability of increased succession of a press release with a unit increase on the IV. In contrast, an exponential b < 1 indicated the probability of decreased succession with a unit increase on X.

Results

From a total of 823 corporate press releases, 220 were picked up by news media, leading to a total of 784 news articles. An ordinal regression model with journalistic treatment as the dependent variable and news factors and topics as the independent variables was estimated to assess the 'a' hypotheses. This model explained 20.5 % (pseudo-R^2 = 0.21) of the variance in journalistic treatment of the press release by news media. The model's chi-square for journalistic treatment was 75.77(11) p < .001, indicating the main effect in this model was significant. Table 3 reports both regression weights and odds ratios.

The first hypothesis suggested that the stronger the presence of a news factor, the more intensive the journalistic treatment would be. The results indicated that this rule applies to all but three news factors, namely dynamics (exp b = 0.904, p = .649), elite persons (exp b = 0.943, p = .185), and negative consequences (exp b = 0.879, p = .415). The odds of a press release receiving journalistic treatment increased when the press release emphasized scope (exp b = 1.298, p = .057) and controversy (exp b = 1.815, p = .044). In other words, the presence of the scope news factor increased the odds of the press release receiving journalistic treatment by 29.8 %, whereas controversy increased these odds by 81.5 %. In contrast, the odds of a press release receiving journalistic treatment decreased when the press release emphasized positive consequences (exp b = 0.669, p = .012), surprise

(exp b = 0.585, p = .024), and references to prominent people (exp b = 0.696, p = .010). Overall, the findings suggested that references to scope, controversy, positive consequences, surprise and prominent people in press releases influenced the odds of a press release receiving journalistic treatment.

Table 3: Ordinal regression model with journalistic treatment as the dependent variable.

Variable	b	se	p	Wald statistic	Exp. b
News factors					
Dynamics	−.101	.221	.649	0.208	0.904
Prominence	−.363	.141	.010	6.623	0.696
Elite	−.059	.137	.667	0.185	0.943
Scope	.261	.137	.057	3.619	1.298
Negative consequences	−.129	.158	.415	0.664	0.879
Positive consequences	−.358	.143	.012	6.280	0.669
Controversy	.596	.296	.044	4.049	1.815
Surprise	−.536	.237	.024	5.125	0.585
NF count	.529	.174	.002	9.282	1.697
Online vs offline	−.897	.285	.002	9.875	0.408
Time lag	.418	.141	.003	8.844	1.519
Nagelkerke R^2		.205			
−2 log-likelihood		430.40			
X^2		75.77			

Note: The dependent variable was measured as a binary variable: 0) no journalistic treatment (verbatim from press release), 1) journalistic treatment (added information, quotes, commentary or completely integrated in broader story on related topic).

Hypothesis 1b posited that these news factors influence the number of additional sources that are consulted. To test the 'b' hypotheses, a multinomial logistic regression model with news factors, topics and the number of news factors present as independent variables and the number of additional sources as dependent variables was estimated. The model explained 17 % (pseudo-R^2 = .17) of the variance in the inclusion of additional sources in news media. The chi-square for the additional sources model was 101.66(11) p < .001), which indicated that the main effect in this model was significant. Table 4 reports the parameter estimates. In this case, we found that dynamics ($b\star$ = −0.345, se = 0.137, p = .013) negatively affected the number of additional sources consulted. Similarly,

references to negative consequences ($b^\star = -0.230$, $se = 0.091$, $p = .011$), surprising events ($b^\star = -0.548$, $se = 0.140$, $p < .001$), and elite people ($b^\star = -0.202$, $se = 0.092$, $p = .028$) were negatively related to the inclusion of additional sources. Similar results were found for references to prominent people ($b^\star = -0.356$, $se = 0.133$, $p = .007$) and positive consequences ($b^\star = -0.166$, $se = 0.086$, $p = .054$), which indicated that the presence of these news factors in articles was less likely to result in additional sources being mentioned in subsequent news articles. In turn, controversy yielded a positive effect on the inclusion of additional sources ($b^\star = 0.387$, $se = 0.111$, $p = .001$). Hence, controversial themes receive more journalistic capital investment in terms of consulting more sources. Notably, scope ($b^\star = 0.070$, $se = 0.080$, $p = .384$) did not significantly influence the number of additional sources consulted (see Table 3).

Table 4: Multinomial ordinal regression model with use of additional sources as the dependent variable.

Variable	b	se	p	Wald statistic
News factors				
Dynamics	−.345	.139	.013	6.186
Prominence	−.356	.133	.007	7.187
Elite	−.202	.092	.028	4.819
Scope	.070	.080	.384	0.758
Negative consequences	−.230	.091	.011	6.404
Positive consequences	−.166	.086	.054	3.720
Controversy	.387	.111	.001	12.111
Surprise	−.548	.140	.000	15.311
NF Count	.673	.124	.000	29.312
Online vs offline	−.721	.181	.000	15.796
Time lag	.171	.056	.002	9.306
Nagelkerke R^2		.170		
−2 log-likelihood		885.47		
χ^2		101.66		

Note: The dependent variable was measured using three categories: 1) zero additional sources, 2) one additional source, and 3) more than one additional source.

Hence, the findings partially support hypothesis 1a, with several news factors that significantly and positively affected journalistic treatment. Notably, limited support was found for hypothesis 1b; only controversy led to additional sources in subsequent media productions.

Hypothesis 2 reflected the assumption that, when more news factors are present in the initial press release, journalistic treatment will increase. For both outcome variables of journalistic capital investment, we found a significant positive effect in the number of news factors, meaning that, when more news factors were present in the press release, the odds of the press release receiving journalistic treatment increased (exp b = 1.697, p = .002); also, more sources were added to the news article ($b^\star$ = 0.673, se = 0.124, p < .001). Hence, we found strong support for hypothesis 2.

Finally, the technological advancements that are changing society have certainly found their way into the field of journalism. The final hypothesis assumed that, in the online context, journalistic capital investment would be lower than in the offline context. The results showed that journalists writing online news were less likely to devote journalistic capital to press releases than those writing offline news (exp b = 0.408, p = .002). This result supported the reasoning in hypothesis 3a. Similarly, journalists writing online news were less likely to consult additional sources than those writing offline news ($b^\star$ = −0.721, se = 0.181, p < .001), supporting hypothesis 3b.

Since the reasoning behind hypotheses 3a and 3b was the greater importance of immediacy for online news reports, we examined the effects stemming from the time between when the actual press release was published and when the subsequent media production occurred. When more time passed between the publication of the press release and the subsequent news article, journalistic capital investment increased. The analyses showed that, in addition to the results presented above, the odds of a press release receiving journalistic treatment increased when more time passed between the press release and the publication of the news article (exp b = 1.519, p = .003). Furthermore, journalists seemed to consult additional sources during that time ($b^\star$ = 0.171, se = 0.056, p = .002).

Conclusion and discussion

We find mixed results when addressing our research question: *Do news factors in corporate press releases influence the way journalists treat these press releases?* First, we find the news factors have different effects on the journalistic treatment variable (H1a). The news factors scope and controversy have moderate to strong

positive effects on how journalists treat press releases. However, other news factors such as surprise, positive consequences and presence of prominent actors have a moderately negative effect on how journalists treat these press releases. For the effects on additional source use (H1b), we find that only controversy has a positive effect, whereas the dynamic content, negative consequences, presence of elite people and surprise news factors have a negative effect on additional source use.

Although the support for hypothesis 1 is only partial, the findings confirm our assumption that news factors in corporate press releases do influence the journalist's decision on whether to invest journalistic capital. However, there is no across-the-board effect: This influence varies between news factors. Rather, the findings illustrate two clear patterns regarding when journalists select the press releases in which they will invest their journalistic capital: Specific news factors (e. g., scope and controversy) led to increased chances that journalists would invest their journalistic capital, while others (e. g., surprise and, to some extent, presence of prominent actors, positive and negative consequences, and dynamic content) led to decreased chances of this investment occurring.

Despite the differences in the effects of the news factors on the journalistic capital variables, an increase in the number of news factors present in a press release increases the chance that a journalist will invest journalistic capital (H2).

Three different types of consideration by journalists might explain these varied effects. The first consideration is *frequency*. For instance, the findings suggest that the greater the number of news factors present, the higher the news value ascribed to the information in the press release. Essentially, the the greater the number of news factors present in the press release, the greater the likelihood a journalist will invest in treatment and in the addition of more sources. The explanation for this effect is that the number of news factors directly present affects the news value of the press release: The content of the press release is deemed more relevant with more news factors and, hence, prone to serious journalistic capital investment. As such, this study elaborates on the findings by Schwarz (2006) and Kroon and Schafraad (2013) regarding cumulating news factors. Not only does this accumulation influence what is selected for the news agenda, it also impacts the likeliness that a journalist will invest multiple forms of journalistic capital.

A second consideration is that *particular characteristics* of news factors seem to increase the likelihood that journalists will invest one or more specific type of journalistic capital. Scope is one of the most generally recognized news factors (Eilders, 2006); it refers to the number of people or groups of people who might be affected in any way. Hence, its presence spurs journalists to devote their limited time and skills to these press releases. For controversy, there is the additional push to include both sides of a story, based on the journalistic values of objectiv-

ity and balance (Deuze, 2005). In the same line, we can also explain some of the negative effects of certain news factors. For example, the negative effects that the presence of elite people has on the use of additional sources might be because these elite people (often top management) are considered to be reliable sources. In other words, the journalists assume there is less need to check information from these elite people in a press release because they are viewed as trustworthy. In that situation, similar to the argument made by Van der Wurff and Schönbach (2011), journalists might be more likely to rely on the factuality of press release information and feel less urged to provide an alternative (i. e., more affirmative) source.

A third explanation revolves around the journalistic value of *immediacy* (Deuze, 2005). Surprise is a news factor that erodes quickly, as the longer it takes for a story to be published, the more likely it is that other media have already published it, which means the surprise factor is gone. Therefore, these stories qualify for immediate publication since their news value will otherwise dissolve. Therefore, the results indicate that press releases that contain the surprise news factor are less likely to receive any kind of journalistic capital investment.

With these three considerations, we are able to provide possible explanations for the previously emphasized variation in the effects of the news factors, differences across medium types and divergences in journalistic cultures and target audiences (Eilders, 2006; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001), albeit only within the domain of corporate news. Nevertheless, these findings and possible explanations offer a promising road for further investigation.

Differences between online and offline news

Regarding the differences in journalistic capital investment between offline and online news outlets, we confirmed both dependent variables (H3a, H3b), meaning that, when writing for online outlets, journalists are less likely to invest journalistic capital when they use corporate press releases. Consequently, their news production is highly dependent on these press releases and their senders. These findings also confirm the limited effects of newsroom conversion on the editorial process (Reich, 2015), which means that, even though most traditional news organizations have converted their previously separate online and offline newsrooms, there exists a difference in the production process of news reports. Regardless of the news room organization, immediacy remains to be seen as a leading professional value, influencing journalists to invest less journalistic capital.

Lastly, the results show a positive relation between the investment of journalistic capital, on the one hand, and the time lag between the publication date of

the corporate press release and the news article, on the other hand. This finding confirms the results of the effects of news factors on journalistic capital investment, as these investments take time. Further, it also suggests that some press releases have a sustainably high level of news value in the sense that a time lag of multiple days does not erode the effects of the news factors. A small majority of stories published more than one day after the publication of the press release were follow-up stories, meaning the same news outlet published an article based on the same previously addressed press release. Future research, by means of ethnographic observations or reconstructive interviews (see Reich, 2011, 2016), should shed light on the situational and institutional factors that may explain this pattern in greater detail.

Limitations and future research

Although several authors have identified significant levels of what has become known as churnalism, our study shows that news factors in press releases have different effects on the amount and type of journalistic capital invested, meaning that journalists might significantly depend on press releases but have not become passive processors of PR materials (Davies, 2008); instead, journalists make informed choices regarding where to invest their scarce journalistic capital. These findings also show how news factor theory can be applied in the various stages of the news production process after the initial selection of stories or press releases. However, our results are specific for news factors in press releases written by large Dutch organizations for both online and offline national news media.

While we were able to explain several differences in the effects of news factors on a journalist's treatment of a press release and decision to add sources, the unexpected negative effect of the negative news factor needs further investigation. In particular, the absence of a positive effect on the investment of journalistic capital was unexpected, as negative news is generally seen as a key interest of news media. Hence, it would suggest a relatively high level of attributed news value that ultimately provides ground for journalistic capital investment.

Our findings on the differences between online and offline media, as also seen in other studies (see Boukes and Vliegenthart, 2017; Eilders, 2006; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001, 2017), suggest that the relationship between news factors and, in this case, the investment of journalistic capital may differ across social fields, news media types, media systems, and cultures. An additional development that might affect journalists' decisions to invest journalistic capital or not is the rise of automated journalism. Research shows that this increase has allowed journalists to re-examine their human skills, because when routine tasks are automated,

they have more time for in-depth reporting (Carlson, 2018; Van Dalen, 2012). This observation parallels our conclusion that journalists use professional arguments when they make decisions about the press releases in which they will invest their scarce journalistic capital. Future research into the possible differences between all of these contexts is, therefore, greatly needed.

We also recommend that future researchers use a more detailed measurement of the different types of journalistic capital, because our study already suggests that there might be highly specific relationships between news factors and the various types of journalistic capital investment. Lastly, the method of content analysis used in this study did not allow us to test and further elaborate on the three types of explanations for the patterns in the diverse effects of news factors on journalistic capital indicators. Further investigation into these patterns and indicators requires a multi-method design.

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Appendix 1: Overview of news factor taxonomies

Galtung & Ruge (1965)	Schultz (1976)	Staab (1990)	Harcup & O'Neill (2001)	Eilders (1997, 2006)	Maier & Strömback (2006)	Maier & Ruhrmann (2008)	Harcup & O'Neill (2017)	Boukes & Vliegenthart (2017)
Frequency	Elite nation/region	Elite nation	Power elite	Elite location	Influence	Status of the event nations	Exclusivity	Dynamics
Threshold	Geographical proximity	Elite region	Celebrity	Continuity	Prominence	Geographic proximity	Bad news	Prominence
Unambiguity	Political proximity	Geographic proximity	Entertainment	Influence	Personalization	Political proximity	Conflict	Elite
Meaningfulness	Cultural proximity	Political proximity	Surprise	Prominence	Concreteness of action	Economic proximity	Surprise	Scope
Unexpectedness	Ethnocentricity	Economic proximity	Bad news	Personification	Range	Cultural proximity	Audio-visuals	Negative consequences
Consonance	Frequency/continuity	Continuity	Good news	Facticity	Surprise	Status of location	Shareability	Positive consequences
Continuity	Personal influence	Reference to issue	Magnitude	Reach	Success	German involvement	Entertainment	Controversy
Composition	Prominence	Institutional influence	Relevance	Unexpectedness	Damage/failure	Establishment of topics	Drama	Surprise
Elite nations	Personification	Personal influence	Follow-up	Success	Controversy	Influence	Follow-up	
Elite people	Relevance	Prominence	Newspaper agenda	Damage	Aggression	Prominence	Relevance	

Galtung & Ruge (1965)	Schultz (1976)	Staab (1990)	Harcup & O'Neill (2001)	Eilders (1997, 2006)	Maier & Strömback (2006)	Maier & Ruhrmann (2008)	Harcup & O'Neill (2017)	Boukes & Vliegenhart (2017)
Reference to persons	Unexpectedness	Facticity		Controversy	Threat or risk	Personalization	Magnitude	
Reference to something negative	Success	Reach		Emotion	Demonstration	Concreteness of activity	Celebrity	
		Unexpectedness		Sexuality/eroticism		Range	Good news	
		Actual or potential benefit/success				Surprise	News organizations' agenda	
		Actual or potential damage/failure				Usefulness/success		
		Controversy				Damage/controversy		
		Aggression				Aggression		
		Demonstration				Demonstration		
						Emotion		
						Sexuality/eroticism		
						Visualization		