Live blog as genre in pursuit of credibility

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CHAPTER 2

A Discourse Community of Live Bloggers? Routines, Conventions, and the Pursuit of Credibility in Dutch Live Blogs

2.1 ABSTRACT

Live blogs are very popular with the public and journalists alike. The problem, though, is their credibility, given the uncertainty of the covered events and the immediacy of their production. Little is known about how journalists routinize the unexpected—to paraphrase Tuchman (1978)— when journalists report about an event that is still unfolding. This paper is about makers of live blogs, live-bloggers, so to speak, and the routines and conventions they follow. To better understand the relationship between those who do the "live-blogging" and how the "live-blogging" is done, we interviewed a selection of nine experienced live-bloggers who cover breaking news, sports, and politics for the three most-visited news platforms in the Netherlands. Based on our results, we conclude that journalists working at different platforms follow similar routines and conventions for claiming, acquiring, and justifying knowledge. Journalists covering news in live blogs must have expert knowledge, as well as technical and organizational skills. Liveblogging—in contrast to regular, online reporting—is best summarized as a social process instead of an autonomous production. These findings are important for three reasons: first, to understand how journalists cope with uncertainty covering events under immediate circumstances using live blogs; second, to understand the workings of this popular format; and third, to contribute to literature about journalistic genres, discourse communities and, more specifically, generic requirements of live blogs for effects of credibility to take place.

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2.2 INTRODUCTION

Political debates, sports games, terrorist attacks, and pandemics are events characterized by a combination of fast progression of new facts, insights, immediacy, and uncertainty. To cover these fast-progressing and sometimes complex news events, journalists do not constantly update articles, but use live blogs (Thurman & Waters, 2013; Thurman & Newman, 2014). A live blog is a stable URL with short updates, structured chronologically with timestamped posts. Each post presents a new development, fact, or changed circumstance of the reported event, thereby expressing a sense of urgency (Thurman & Walters, 2013; Thurman & Newman, 2014; Bennett, 2016; Thorsen & Jackson, 2018).

Live blogs have become a popular format for journalists to cover breaking news events and to keep the public updated on specific events or topics while they unfold (Thorsen & Jackson, 2018; Thurman & Shapals, 2016; Thurman & Walters, 2013). This format differs from other journalistic formats in several ways. First, the format is temporal, and "involve[s] a temporal coincidence between addresser, event and addressee, which is lacking in other genres of written journalism" (Lopez, 2022: 2). Second, it is fragmented and immediate (Matheson & Wahl-Jorgenson, 2020); live blogs are made up of a sequence of posts and do not provide a coherent story or narrative. Thirdly, live blogs are quite playful and informal in their tone of voice. Fourthly, the nature of the format allows the journalists to insert different media such as tweets and other socials in the storyline. Consequently, live blogs provide features of interactivity with journalists reaching out to the public for more information during breaking news events. Finally, live blogs built on a range of more and different media formats, and other inserted documents that represent a diversity of more and different voices (Thorsen & Jackson, 2018).

While this format has been established in practically every news organization, little is known about how journalists produce these live blogs. One way to fill this void in knowledge about the production and credibility of live blogs is by following the theory of journalism as a performative discourse (Broersma, 2010). Journalistic discursive performance is an ongoing effort of textual quality and the persuasion of the public that the journalist's version of reality is true. To do so, journalists follow routines and conventions "to ensure the effect of authenticity and truthfulness" and "to guarantee that this process of construction or representation is as accurate (…) as possible" (Broersma, 2010: 17). So, it is not the facts that journalists represent (descriptive discourse), but it is the routines and conventions journalists use to convince the public of their best version of reality (performative discourse). Both routines and conventions of news production have a long research tradition in journalism studies (Westlund & Ekström, 2019).

One specific way to look at these routines and conventions is from a social view on writing. Then, routines and conventions not only produce discourse, but also contribute to a shared communicative goal, and thereby form so-called discourse communities (Herzberg, 1986; Swales, 1990). Bizell (in: Swales, 1990: 29) remarks that "(…) what is most significant about members of a discourse community is not

their personal preferences, prejudices, and so on, but rather the expectations they share by virtue of belonging to that particular community." This "belonging to that particular community," Bizell remarks, is embodied in routines and conventions, "(…) [w]hich are in turn conditioned by the community's work" (Idem). Based on this social view of writing, we want to know, to what extent is there a discourse community of live-bloggers? To answer this question, we first must understand routines and conventions in producing live blogs, hence our first research question: what routines and conventions do live-bloggers adhere to? Following this is our second research question: who are the live-bloggers who keep to these routines and conventions?

2.3 ROUTINES AND CONVENTIONS

Central to our argument are two concepts: routines and conventions. Here, we will first theorize how we define routines and conventions that prescribe a performative discourse. Then, we will theorize how routines and conventions form discourse communities, and vice versa. In essence, both journalistic routines and conventions answer the questions of how the work of producing news is done. The difference between the two is a matter of scale and quality: routines are repeated practices and actions that order and organize work on an individual level, while conventions are repeated routines that prescribe how work must be done on a collective level, despite alternative ways to do so, but which are not chosen (Marmor, 2009). The study of routines and conventions in journalism studies is widespread (Becker & Vlad, 2009; Broersma, 2019; Gans, 2004; Lecheler & Kruikemeier, 2016; Tandoc & Duffy, 2019; Tuchman, 1973). All share, in essence, that routines and conventions block alternatives, and thereby constrain and order work.

Routines and conventions are at the core of "making news by doing work", to cite Tuchman (1973). Tuchman (1973) explains that journalists are confronted with unexpected events on a routine basis and transform this unexpectedness in news by matching the sometimes highly uncertain input (events) with a highly structured organization (the news floor). Tuchman (1978) concluded that journalists routinize this unexpectedness as a strategic ritual to ensure not only a steady and credible flow of information and sources, but to also make sure journalists are protected against critique or claims. Important in this analysis of news work is the concept of "rhythm" (Tuchman, 1978: 41-45); reporters are "temporally concentrated" and planned to project and control work in time and space. Only so, can they "routiniz the unexpected" every day.

Gans (2004) concluded that news work was constrained and ordered by a combination of socialization, professionalization, the need for predictable content, source relationships, and economic factors. Both authors characterize routines and conventions on a practical level— for delivering texts, selecting sources, and choosing words.

More recently, scholars also named routines and conventions on an organizational level; for instance, how journalists deal with advertisements, communicate with staff members, or find their place in the hierarchy of the organization (Westlund

& Ekström, 2019). To summarize this long tradition of research: routines and conventions are important for organizing and ordering regular journalism, and validating how truth is constructed. Routines and conventions strengthen and justify the credibility of journalism.

However, due to technological developments, "creating news in a digital world requires adjusting to rapid flows of information in a networked information environment" (Usher, 2014: 23). Routines and conventions leading to journalistic stories are being challenged; there must be continuous concentration, with an important downside: journalists must deal with epistemic challenges because their need for speed leads to uncertainties and increased risk of incorrect information. This might have negative consequences for the credibility of journalists, their organizations, or even the professional field at large (Rom & Reich, 2020). To cope with this trident of speed, uncertainty, and epistemic challenges, journalists rely on routines and conventions to break news.

Ekström, Ramsälv & Westlund (2021) conclude that, for example, a convention in breaking news is to rely on authoritative and pre-justified sources. Therefore, journalists fulfill claims of accuracy, and can cope with epistemic challenges due to the speed of, for instance, the production of live blogs. The authors suggest an analytical framework to analyze "how news journalism knows what is claimed to be known and how these knowledge claims are articulated and justified" (Ekström and Westlund, 2019a). To do so, they distinguish between claiming knowledge, acquiring information, and justifying knowledge. Claiming, acquiring, and justifying construct credibility, which can be seen as a journalist's attempt to persuade the public to accept their representation of reality (performative discourse) and, thereby, fulfill its communicative goal. We will explain them shortly.

The authority (or ethos) of journalists, news organizations, and even journalism as a profession, is based on the fulfillment of claiming knowledge, which is valuable for a wider audience. Journalism is about representing reality and fact construction (Potter, 1996). In the case of breaking news, the epistemic claims made by journalists are immediate, fact-based information and continuous updates on a specific event. Often, editors working on breaking news get the information from agencies or emergency services.

In addition, these claims must be acquired. Information must be gathered to produce news. Therefore, journalists are constantly searching for and updating information by following competitors, interviewing sources for research or publications, or checking and validating information and sources. In breaking news, it can be difficult for journalists to know exactly what is going on. Therefore, their fact formulations might be cautious, or they will attribute their knowledge to specific sources (Rom & Reich, 2020).

Knowledge, finally, must be justified, which is, according to the authors, a practice of "achieving acceptable reasons to believe and claim knowledge" (Ekström, Ramsälv & Westlund, 2021: 177). Note that justification of knowledge has strong similarities with Broersma's performative discourse (2010). According to the authors, justifying

knowledge can be done in different ways: verification of information and sources or choosing the right wording. Wording using attribution or modals expresses measures of doubt and uncertainty about presented information.

These routines and conventions are "socially conditioned and variable" (Ekström, Ramsälv & Westlund, 2021: 175). "Variable" means that various formats and genres have different routines and conventions. For instance, live-bloggers routinize and conventionalize differently than interviewers, broadcasters, or investigative reporters do (Ettema & Glasser, 1984). "Socially conditioned" means that routines are not individual inventions, but are instead norms held by a group, of which an individual journalist is a member. With this analytical framework in mind, our first research question is this: what are the routines and conventions of journalists producing live blogs?

2.4 THE ACTORS OF A DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

Despite numerous studies analyzing live blogs' style and content (Bennett, 2016; Thorsen & Jackson, 2018; Thurman, 2014; Thurman & Newman, 2014; Thurman & Shapals, 2016; Thurman & Walters, 2013), typology (Matheson and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020), impact (Flower & Ahlefeldt, 2021), the public (Lee, 2021; Pantic, 2020; Pantic & Pjesivac, 2009; Pantic, Whiteside & Cvetkovic, 2017), and even the question of when media platforms started live blogs (Wilczek & Blangetti, 2018), little research has been done about the producers of the format. Theoretical and empirical research about live-bloggers doing live-blogging are absent in journalism studies. This omission might be reflective of the relative newness of the format. Due to this lack of research (Evans (2015) is an exemption; see below), it is unclear who follows which routines and conventions to produce live blogs and how these producers relate to each other.

McEnnis (2015) studied the professional ideology of sports journalists producing live blogs. He thereby characterized a possible discourse community of sports bloggers that shared three distinctive characteristics. First, there was a gender imbalance, which was reflective of sports journalism in general, a profession dominated by male reporters. Second, not all respondents were employed (some were freelancers), which was, according to McEnnis, reflective of contingent employment practices. Third, all respondents were identified as online journalists. McEnnis only studies sports journalists: studies of journalists live blogging in other disciplines (breaking news or politics) are absent.

More evidence for a possible community of live-bloggers comes from journalists themselves. So, for instance, Matthew Weaver (2020), writing for the British newspaper *The Guardian*, explains the evolution of live blogs and gives some more details about live-blogging-as-a-group. Starting as a *minute-by-minute* in the nineties for covering football, but not for hard news, the format was "initially frowned on by some senior figures in *the Guardian*" (Idem). The popularity of football live blogs, and an important development in online news production changed that. "(…) [W]hen the website and print reporters integrated into one team, live blogs became central to the way the site covered major breaking stories" (Idem).

So, the proliferation of live-blogging started with some initial online experiments that were "frowned on," and was only accepted after proven popularity and the convergence of online and print journalists in new live blog teams. Better software and the involvement of correspondents all over the world popularized the format, which won more respect from colleagues and the public alike (Weaver, 2020). As a result, the format proliferated in news organizations and on the internet. To understand how live blogs are produced, not only do we need to know what the routines and conventions are, but also who works according to these routines and conventions. Therefore, our second research question is this: who are the live-bloggers that keep to specific routines and conventions leading to a live blog?

2.5 THE WORKINGS OF A DISCOURSE COMMUNITY

Similarities between live blogs imply a community of journalists following similar routines and conventions when immediately covering events. To form a community, though, individuals must follow the same or very similar routines and conventions, and thereby contribute to a common communicative goal (Herzberg, 1986; Swales, 1990). So, routines and conventions are not only constitutive for discourse, but also for discourse communities.

According to Beaufort (1997: 487), these discourse communities can be found in the "mid-space, beyond the level of immediate rhetorical context but not as broad as entire cultures (…)". Situated between discourse (too specific) and culture (too broad), discourse communities can be implicit or explicit, and are used in specific or general settings. Sometimes, they are institutionalized or codified, with clear organizational boundaries; other times, they are informal (Beaufort, 1997). Killingsworth (1992) makes a further distinction between local and global discourse communities where routines and conventions prescribe discourse within or between organizations. Discourse communities determine routines and conventions for people who do the work and are groups that produce for the public, with three constitutive characteristics.

First, a discourse community is a group of individuals with a common communicative goal. This goal, or communicative purpose, can be explicit or tacit; it can be specified or more general (Swales, 1990; Askehave & Swales, 2001). Matheson & Wahl-Jorgensen (2020: 300) suggest that the communicative purpose of live blogs is to reflect "particular moments in time" and to "gain coherence from (...) often informal authorial voice or voices" to "generate claims to knowledge of events which are simultaneously dynamic and fragile." This communicative goal defines a possible community of live-bloggers.

Second, to be a discourse community, members must know what routines and conventions to follow; a discourse community is, therefore, characterized by channels of communication. These channels not only facilitate communication between members, but socialize them as well, "shaping (…) their character within that discourse community" (Porter, 1986: 40). Membership of a discourse community is not accidental; members are recruited by persuasion, training, or relevant

qualifications (Swales, 1990: 24). For instance, scientists undergo a "normalization-through-discourse" when starting their careers, which not only requires the proper qualifications and understanding of the ways scientists communicate (on conferences, or journals like this one), but it also calls for a scientific attitude, all of which are necessary to participate within this community. Discourse communities not only shape texts, but also character. Another example of shared conventions and routines that form the fundamentals of a specific discourse community is the characterization of investigative journalism by Ettema & Glasser (1984). They contrasted daily reporters with investigative journalists, naming differences between both traits (or, following our theoretical approach: communities) based on their routines and conventions. For example, news produced by daily reporters "tends to be more time-bound than the hard news produced by the investigative reporter" (idem: 186); daily reporters are not able "to utilize as many organizational resources as his or her investigative counterpart" (idem). A daily reporter, organized in beats, accepts empirical beliefs or propositions at face value; the investigative reporter, in contrast, "not only shoulder[s] the burden of justification, but also creates a method for doing so" (Ettema & Glasser, 1984: 190).

Third, having a communicative purpose and being able to communicate, members of a discourse community share assumptions on which objects or events are appropriated for examination, how this examination is done, what counts as evidence, how this evidence is presented (form, style, timing, place), and which routines and conventions are followed to do so. Translated to our main question, this means that journalists producing live blogs form a discourse community when they share criteria for the use, production, subject, and episteme of live blogs. "A text," writes Porter (1986: 39), "is "acceptable" within a (...) [discourse community] only so far as it reflects the community episteme," meaning that knowledge is accepted as it is presented, following certain formatting conventions that follow the standards of the community. So, our main question is this: to what extent is there a discourse community of live-bloggers?

2.6 METHOD

To discover if and which routines and conventions are used by journalists producing live blogs, and to what extent these journalists are forming a discourse community, we held semi-structured interviews with a sample of experienced live-bloggers working at three national news platforms in the Netherlands to answer our empirical research questions.

2.6.1 Respondents

We chose these three platforms for their (highest) number of unique monthly visitors, and their diversity (newspaper, radio & television, and online), resulting in *Algemeen Dagblad* (Dutch newspaper), *NOS* (Dutch public radio & television), and *NU.nl* (Dutch online news platform). From these, we selected live-bloggers (see Table 1) who covered breaking news, politics, and sports for over five years. These are the most experienced

journalists in these organizations covering events in live blogs. We chose experienced live-bloggers for two reasons: first, they had the professional ability to reflect on their own practices, and second, they were often part of the first live blogs in the organization. So, they formally (and informally) initiated routines and conventions. Four respondents liveblogged at the newspaper, three at RTV, and two at the online news organization. All nine respondents were male (reflecting the gender bias of the format, as mentioned by McEnnis, 2016). Their average experience is 8.8 years at the platform, 6.6 years online, and 5.6 years with live blogs. We chose live-bloggers covering sports, politics, and breaking news, and so maximized the differences between respondents, looking for similarities that point to a community of live-bloggers.

Table 1. Respondents, experience, and organization they worked at during the interview

	Experience At Platform (Years)	Experience Online (Years)	Experience Live blog (Years)	Organization
R1	6	6	5	AD
R2	16	13	10	AD
R3	10	5	5	AD
R4	3.5	3.5	3.5	NOS
R5	17	7	<1	NOS
R6	13	11	11	NOS
R7	4.5	4.5	4.5	AD
R8	5	5	5	NU.nl
R9	5	5	5	NU.nl

2.6.2 Interview protocol

Based on our theoretical framework of discourse community, we designed an interview protocol. We started each interview by asking which live blog the respondents produced last. We did so to make the conversation as concrete and practical as possible. We were primarily interested in experiences with the production of live blogs, approaching the interviewees as practitioners. Therefore, we gave the respondents the possibility to constantly refer to their most recently published live blog, asked questions about the prerequisites for starting a live blog (who decides, what topics, technical aspects, etc.), and inquired about specific routines and conventions for working on live blogs. This included questions about the editorial choices for posting, sourcing, and attribution practices, the evaluation of source credibility, the issue of the event's proximity, the collaboration between colleagues, and the correction and evaluation of mistakes. Finally, questions were asked about the overall purpose and communicative goal of live blogs.

The interview protocol was first debated between the researchers and then tested with two respondents. Each interview took between an hour and an hour and a half,

and was, due to COVID-19 restrictions, held online (Teams, Microsoft). Respondents were used to extensive conversations online—most of them were working at home because of the same pandemic restrictions. We recorded the audio of the interviews, transcribed the interview using software, and corrected the text manually.

2.6.3 Coding

We coded the transcribed interviews in three rounds (following hereafter) in Atlas.ti (Friese, 2019). We first open coded our data, based on our interview protocol. We coded it following the questions concerning editorial choices for posting, sourcing and attribution practices, evaluation of the credibility of sources, issue of the event's proximity, collaboration between colleagues, correction and evaluation of mistakes, and, finally, questions concerning the overall purpose and communicative goal of live blogs (Saldaña, 2016). The results of this first round of coding were discussed among the researchers.

We then axially recoded our material following the analytical framework proposed by Ekström, Ramsälv & Wetslund (2021), distinguishing between claiming, acquiring, and justifying knowledge. We followed Freeman's (2017) suggestions for a categorical model of qualitative data analysis, by relating the items of our first open coding round with the classification of Ekström, Ramsälv & Westlund. As stated in our theoretical framework concerning routines and conventions, claiming, acquiring, and justifying construct credibility, and this construction of credibility can be seen as a journalist's attempt to persuade the public to accept their representation of reality, and, thereby, the performance of discourse (Broersma 2010). The results of this second axial round of coding were discussed among the researchers, which led to a new coding frame, containing codes of individual practices (like sourcing, attribution, proximity, and organization of live-blogging) in relation to their epistemic challenges (claiming, acquiring, and justifying knowledge) (Saldaña, 2016). This led to the results presented.

2.7 RESULTS

The results show clear routines and conventions followed by journalists producing live blogs. Moreover, journalists covering news events in live blogs also share recurring characteristics. This section answers two research questions: first, who are the live-bloggers that keep routines and conventions leading to a live blog, and second, what are the routines and conventions of journalists producing live blogs? Our main question, to what extent is there a discourse community of live-bloggers, will be answered in our conclusion.

2.7.1 Who are the live-bloggers?

As stated in our theoretical framework, the proliferation of live-bloggers started with some initial online experiments that were "frowned on," and they were only accepted after the convergence of online and print journalists in new live blog teams (Weaver, 2020). Livebloggers for radio and television, newspapers, or online news

platforms are most of the time also situated in online news departments. Being a part of the online news team makes sense: this is the place where all news comes in (telex, social media, correspondents), and where all content goes out. Livebloggers are the "spider in the news web." When journalists do not cover an event with a live blog, they provide content for the regular website. Data showed three more recurring characteristics shared by all respondents who produce live blogs: they have technical skills, expertise, and organizational skills.

Journalists producing live blogs must know the content management system (CMS), where posts are composed, and information is published in a live blog. Writing and publishing posts, with embedded tweets of interest, illustrative photos, or explanatory videos, requires technical skills. All journalists must know how to embed tweets, Instagram and Facebook posts, pictures, videos, or infographics.

CMSs also have more and more possibilities for linking within live blogs (so-called anchors), between posts and summaries at the top of the live blog or linking between posts and articles elsewhere on the site. One respondent thought that everybody knows how the system works, but when there is a breaking news situation, "we look for the most senior journalist who is the steadiest [live-blogger]". To cover live events, one must be capable of using the CMS under pressure, and not only know which button to press, but also to press the right buttons immediately, as an effortless and automatic practice. This amount of automatic casualness requires a certain level of experience not all journalists have at that high level.

Liveblogging is also about expertise. Knowing the technicalities is not enough; knowing what to blog about specific events (breaking news, political debates, or sports) is just as important. Expertise is a necessary condition to report under pressure and punctually. It is an important quality to "understand a situation", especially because events develop fast: "The speed with which you cover the events is determined by the knowledge and experiences you have" (idem).

> *"I am not a specialist for Formula 1. I once covered a race, won by Max Verstappen, I do not dare to reread it anymore. I reported what happened, but to cover the sport well, you must know the sport … You must know about changing tires or race strategy."*

Another example of expertise to win time is the importance of an early or late tire change during a Formula 1 race: this requires knowledge about the sport, and the tire-changing tactics that can be immediately used in live blogs.

> *"(…) he [the F1 specialist] is our Formula 1 reporter. (…) As editors, we let him do as many Formula 1 live blogs as possible. Because we know that is widely read and he has the most expertise in that. I've done it a few times too. A live blog does not immediately become dramatic. But all those kind of tems like cubstones, I dont understand them. I have to google them a few times beforehand."*

To establish urgency, have the right timing, and assess a development's impact, journalists rely on the knowledge they have about these events: they do not have to ask or search—they know. For instance, to cover the siege of The Capitol in Washington by Trump supporters (January 6th, 2021), one respondent asked a journalist who had an affinity with American politics and access to American sources to cover the events. "You choose this colleague because of the speed with which sources are found". Knowledge about the American political system and history was an important quality for the reporter who covered the story with the necessary speed.

Liveblogging also has an organizational or managerial dimension. Covering sports, politics, and breaking events requires good contact with colleagues:

> *"You are a spider in a web, digitally connected to everyone in the organization. But you need people to check and to discuss with, especially when you receive important information. So, when a shooter [Utrecht tram attack] yelled 'Allahuh akbar!', you need to discuss with others: 'Do we bring this? What should you do? Check this out!' You must discuss this with your chief and even your chief editor."*

To live blog breaking news requires clout in the organization; respondents explained that more experienced journalists are in the lead when covering these events. Respondents explain that during breaking news, they ask for expertise from colleagues or correspondents, asking them to check information or find reliable sources, and follow up on previously asked questions. Pressing colleagues to deliver on time—especially during the follow-up process—requires some organizational and managerial skills.

> *"We are not going to let someone [live blog] who has only been with us for a few months. You must know the organization, how communication [between colleagues] works, with whom you must keep in touch."*

2.7.2 What are the routines and conventions of journalists producing live blogs?

Covering breaking news (terrorist attacks, natural disasters), politics, or sports demands high-speed news production and presentation, and inevitably leads to uncertainty about the knowledge that is published. Covering news events immediately is, according to respondents, a constant tradeoff between (un)certainty and (ir)relevance, and thereby fulfills an important communicative goal of live blogs: the direct and immediate report of an event. Respondents explained that they cope with these tradeoffs by wording and attribution of knowledge claims regarding the news event.

> *"You must tell the reader very well that you are presenting information that is known at that time. So (...) don't say: there are five dead, but 'according to the reports', or 'according to the police'. You should not put it so firmly that you present*

it as fact, unless it is a fact. If someone is under a tram with a sheet, and you know from the police that someone has died, then it is a fact"

When uncertain, respondents' claim to knowledge is based on the authority of the (formal) source. To balance the importance of the information ("five deaths") with its questionable factuality, the ethos of the police's spokesperson legitimizes the claim. Therefore, the possibility of being wrong and the possible fallout that might follow is transferred to the source: "... when a police spokesperson says something, you can assume that that person is trained to think about it in what he says and that the information he says is also correct." This finding confirms findings that go as far back as Ettema & Glasser's (1984) concept of pre-justified claims of what is. But respondents also explained that these pre-justified claims sometimes are not as pre-justified as they seem.

Sometimes, even authorities are uncertain about developments, for instance, during terrorist attacks. Uncertainty is high (as is the relevance) regarding the number of terrorists and their exact whereabouts. Some live blogs use eyewitness accounts to deal with this uncertainty. However, the demand for eyewitness claims to be published were higher than for formal or official sources because eyewitnesses have less authority (ethos) than formal or official sources. Therefore, not much authority can be transferred from an eyewitness to claimed knowledge in the live blog, due to a lack of confidence live-bloggers have in the unknown eyewitness. To deal with their lack of authority, live-bloggers must check eyewitness claims.

Respondents indicate that they check the coherence of the eyewitness's stories, meaning they want more of them to tell the same story before they use the information in their live blog, or they want to know the development of the situation to make checking the eyewitness accounts possible. Consequently, eyewitnesses are used at the very beginning of an event or much later, when more is known about the event, as a retrospective.

"But if only an eyewitness reports X was shot in place Y' you can't load it in yet, unless you already have [a lot more] people there who have the same kind of image. Then you might be able to switch a bit there too."

Sometimes, eyewitness reports are the only information at hand. Their information or knowledge is unique, so to speak. Then respondents still claim the knowledge, but "(...) then you can choose to keep it more general, such [as with an] eyewitness story – not very detailed, because those details may not be quite right". In these situations, the level of detail is an indication of the strength of the knowledge claim.

Respondents explained that there is a constant tradeoff between the level of uncertainty of claims and their relevance for the public. One respondent tried to signal this tradeoff between a high degree of uncertainty and a high-level relevance by using quotation marks around claimed knowledge, not to indicate that it was said by someone else (attribution), but to indicate the status of the claim. This convention

failed, though, "because we've noticed that many visitors to our site do not know what those quotes actually stand for; so, it was not as productive to do it that way anymore."

The characterization of the event has an influence on acquiring knowledge. There exists a distinction between planned and unplanned events in relation to acquiring knowledge. Breaking news, such as terrorist attacks or natural disasters, are unplanned events or a what-a-story (Berkowitz, 1992), while political debates or sports games are planned events. Covering politics or sports is what journalists see and hear, sometimes even ad verbatim.

> *"A report or a live blog of a [political] debate will run more on text and some videos of certain moments, but there is much more text in it than [in the live blog covering] Beirut [the explosion of munition in the Lebanese capital of Beirut, August 4th, 2020]."*

Live blogs covering sports and politics (planned events) are also characterized by a high degree of editorial autonomy (MacEnnis, 2016). Journalists covering a match, game, or debate are often direct witnesses of the event. "For (...) live blogs [covering politics], the game is about 90 percent (...) just the debate itself in the arena, and colleagues making additions." This remark implies that journalists are embedded in a network of expertise. For sports, this expertise resides in the individual live-blogger covering a game, match, or race. Sports journalists covering football often use services to embed facts (yellow and red cards, fouls, goals, but also (historical) statistics about players, trainers, managers, and clubs) on the go, constantly including knowledge from commercial parties. So, live-bloggers covering football matches do not have to keep track of essential statistics. Consequently, journalists covering sports can concentrate on the game.

For politics, journalists covering debates with a live blog have expertise that resides within a network of colleagues. Journalists acquire knowledge to deepen their live blogs by contacting expert colleagues on the spot. So, acquiring knowledge for planned events (sports and politics) is part expertise (knowing about the game and politics), and part technical dexterity (embedding statistics delivered by third parties and colleagues) done by individuals with a high degree of editorial autonomy.

> *"I'm busy typing. [I ask colleagues that] if [they] hear something interesting or something that [they] know from [their] own expertise, that's just not right, send a tweet about it, and I'll add it in. At the same time, I sometimes also ask them to also include a central point in a tweet if I was just a bit behind."*

Acquiring knowledge for live blogs covering unplanned events is, in contrast with live blogs covering planned events, a social instead of an individual process. First, live blogs covering breaking news are produced by at least two journalists. To do their work, they have a gatekeeping role in the production of live blogs: they are in

constant and continuous contact with other journalists in the organization, using apps like Slack (a communication platform for organizations), or at one of the three platforms, a dedicated e-mail address.

These channels are used to ask colleagues for specific information regarding an event that is covered by live blogs (input), to check information before it is published, or to deliver trusted sources. So, in contrast to planned events, journalists covering unplanned events have a lower degree of editorial autonomy. They are managing channels of communication and information.

> *"You really are a spider in the web. You are the one, you have all the tabs open. (...) you are fed by the people around you."*

This social process of producing live blogs covering breaking news is also indicated by the start of such live blogs. When it is decided to cover breaking news with a live blog, all colleagues are expected to collaborate. This collaboration has two pillars: access to trusted and credible sources, and access to trusted and credible knowledge or expertise.

In contrast to politics and sports, breaking news is covered in a team with distinct roles that actively acquire knowledge, indicating not only a lesser editorial autonomy of live-blogging journalists, but also of their direct colleagues, who now must share their knowledge and give access to (exclusive) contacts needed to acquire more knowledge.

> *"So, there's a live-blogger, there's an editor who writes the post, there's an editor who checks it and publishes it. In the past we have had the live blogger publish autonomously, but (...) nowadays everything publishes so quickly that (...) [an editor can look at it]. Look, if you just paste a tweet somewhere from our own reporter once, then it doesn't have to be checked. (...) Then you can quickly continue, but if text is included, then it just must be read of course."*

Respondents explained that they constantly struggled to balance (un)certainty of information with the (ir)relevance of it. Both terms—(un)certainty and (ir)relevance—were arguments to present information, or not. So, when information was regarded as uncertain and irrelevant, it was ignored completely. When information was certain and relevant, it was published immediately. In between, when information was either uncertain but relevant or certain but irrelevant, journalists justified their choices. Two examples clarify this wish for justification.

Covering the sudden death of football player Maradona (20th November 2020), one respondent appealed to the format of live-blogging to justify the publication of information that was highly uncertain but regarded by respondents covering the story as highly relevant as well. Very shortly after the news of Maradona's death, rumors spread across the internet that his doctor might be responsible. Despite the uncertainty, the knowledge was published due to its relevance.

"That [responsibility of the doctor for Maradona's death] will become important news; it doesn't always have to be factual (...), you can do that [in live blogs]."

A second example is live blogs covering the transfer period of players, which is characterized by an unprecedentedly high degree of rumors. Still, the live blogs covering these events are very popular and justified by checking the points for (1) relevance for the fans; (2) attribution and modality in the wording; (3) popularity with the public.

"We very much quote, using words like 'would', 'either', 'allegedly' or 'probably'. So, you indicate there that it is not true yet, but it does play. (...) it is very well read."

2.8 CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

Despite their fragmented narratives and uncertainty due to their immediate character, live blogs are as popular for media organizations as for the public. But this popularity is not without epistemic challenges, and we did not know how journalists covering news events in live blogs addressed these challenges. Previous research mainly focused on the content of live blogs, and little is known about the makers of live blogs—the live-bloggers, so to speak. Who are they and which routines and conventions do they follow when producing live blogs? And, finally, to what extent are journalists who live blog a discourse community of live-bloggers? We found indications in our data that respondents followed similar routines and conventions, despite the diverse events they covered, live blog production on various platforms (newspaper, radio & television, and online), and different production times. The data not only suggested similar characteristics of journalists covering news events with live blogs. We also found indications for a discourse community of live-bloggers that collectively found routines and conventions to cope with the epistemic challenges (claiming, acquiring, and justifying knowledge) posed by highly uncertain information that must be transformed under the high pressure of immediacy in credible news. Respondents shared in their answers the conceptualization of communicative goals, channels for communication concerning routines and conventions, and assumptions about subject and episteme concerning the use of the format. These theoretical starting points resonated with the results we found. Consequently, we had three arguments to assume there is a discourse community of live-bloggers who shared routines and conventions to cope with epistemic challenges posed by uncertainty, speed, and the urge to deliver news immediately.

First, the results suggest that live blogs are indeed the result of a social process of text production with a shared communicative goal. According to respondents, journalists with a high degree of editorial autonomy are still dependent on colleagues for ideas, suggestions, sources, or knowledge. When journalists cover breaking news, their dependence on other colleagues is even bigger and the process of writing is even more social. Respondents covering these breaking news events explained that they assume a role as a gatekeeper of knowledge, not only within their own

organization, but also outwards; respondents explained that while covering an event in a live blog, they are following live blogs by other media about the same subject. To cope with epistemic challenges, live blogging journalists are embedded in their own organization and are constantly looking out (on other media) for knowledge, underlining a social process of text production, determined by the communicative goal to cover events immediately.

Second, results also showed that live-bloggers have routines and conventions they follow concerning the claiming, acquisition, and justification of knowledge. These routines and conventions are communicated between journalists within the organization, but not outside of it. Still, we think that these findings are coherent with the theory about discourse communities (Killingsworth, 1992). These communities can either be local (within organizations) or global (between organizations). Although our results show there are only indications of a local discourse community based on the communication of routines and conventions, respondents follow the production of live blogs outside of their organizations (by other media organizations) meticulously.

In addition to this, when covering an event in a live blog, journalists monitor their colleagues working elsewhere, and by doing so, not only learn new information and check other information, but also, on a more meta level, see and learn (new) routines for covering events in live blogs. During our interviews, in terms of learning and knowledge, respondents continually named other live blogs from other news platforms covering the same events. Consequently, they do not share routines in a direct way (conferences, journals, personal communication), but in an indirect way, by following the live blogs of others.

Third, and finally, this social process of writing, following routines and conventions to cope with their epistemic challenges, is also expressed in three shared characteristics of journalists who cover events in live blogs: expertise, technical skills, and organizational skills. First, expertise is necessary to cover an event with knowledge, authority, and immediacy. Knowing things speeds up claiming, acquiring, and justifying knowledge, and thereby, the production process of news in live blogs.

Second, journalists covering events in live blogs need technical skills to post content in live blogs, due to the pluriform content, like text, photos, videos, infographics, or embedded social media posts. Constantly embedding socials might also point toward a transition phase among journalists and in newsrooms. Or, as Paulussen, Harder & Johnson (2016) conclude, "journalists grow accustomed to and more intensely consider new dialogic tasks as important in prospective newsrooms" (p. 233). The possible effects of embedding socials in live blogs go further than just their use in this format. Because live blogs are so popular among journalists, news organizations, and the public alike, constantly integrating social media in news work might possibly have the effect "that legacy news media change profoundly in their communicative orientation and refresh their journalism-audience relationship in light of new media use" (Idem).

Finally, journalists covering events in live blogs need organizational skills to organize flows of information from inside and outside the organization. Therefore,

they must manage the organization, people, and knowledge to produce live blogs. So, we therefore conclude that live blogs are social events, and their producers need social qualities to manage this process. To do so, they must manage information given about the subject they are live-blogging about, and also manage the epistemic challenges they face given the immediacy of the news production and uncertainty of the event. To paraphrase a respondent, they need to be a "spider in the web". Liveblogging, therefore, is not a trade for those who have just arrived in journalism.

Based on these results, we conclude that to produce live blogs, the journalists must manage colleagues (social process) to cover planned and unplanned events immediately, using routines and conventions to follow the same communicative goal—namely, to persuade the public of a credible reality, despite the uncertainties due to the immediacy of its discursive performance. One important point of discussion remains, though. Can we assume, based on these results, that there is indeed a discourse community of live-bloggers? To answer this question, we must first establish to what extent these respondents are a discourse community of live-bloggers specifically: why are these journalists not just online journalists who sometimes live blog?

Theory shows striking similarities between online journalists and journalists covering events with live blogs (who are all online journalists as well); they both constantly refresh information (Usher, 2014) and must cope with the epistemic challenges resulting from the speed with which they produce and publish news (Ekström, Ramsälv & Westlund, 2019). So, following these similarities, we can also interpret our results as indications for a discourse community of online journalists who happen to produce live blogs when they are needed. Consequently, a live blog is not a format with a specific performative discourse by a specific discourse community, but just a tool for a discourse community of online journalists. However, we think this argument will not hold.

A vital difference between writing an online article and producing a live blog is the social character of the latter. An online article is predominantly an individual product; a live blog, in contrast, is a networked or gatekept process that requires social skills to obtain a communicative goal together. This social setting of live blog production—its discourse community—requires expertise, and above all, managerial skills to organize this process of performing discourse. Liveblogging is an ongoing effort of textual quality and the persuasion of the public that the journalist's version of reality is true.

This brings us to one more point of discussion: is a live blog a journalistic format or a genre? The social character of live blogs requires routines and conventions for the performance of their discourse. These are shared by a group of online journalists and followed in similar ways when they are confronted with events they must cover immediately. By following these "rules of engagement," journalists form a discourse community: live-bloggers. Being a live-blogger means covering events immediately and with a high dose of uncertainty, performing discourse to persuade the public that their expectations are met: a credible version of reality. That is, according to

one respondent, a tough job, and not for those who just arrived in journalism. “I think everybody in this organization knows how to live blog, but not everybody is a live-blogger.” To qualify this effort as a genre requires a reception study: how are live blogs evaluated and accepted by the public? This question is our main suggestion for further research.

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