Live blog as genre in pursuit of credibility

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CHAPTER 5

Evaluating Credibility in Dutch Live Blogs. A Focus Group Study on Immediate News, Covering Crisis, Politics, and Sports

5.1 ABSTRACT

Live blog is an online news format, covering events immediately with a high degree of uncertainty, often in a fragmentary narrative, presenting a diverse range of multimodal sources. The format is popular among users, based on statistics of diverse mediaorganizations. The absence of alternatives for following events immediately might explain the popularity of live blogs. However, in a high choice media landscape, why do people turn to live blogs for credible news? While much research has been done on perceived credibility of online sources, online messages, and online media, no studies look specifically at how users of live blogs evaluate the credibility in and of this format. This paper presents results of six focus groups discussing elements of credibility as well as technical affordances (multimodality, interactivity, and hyper textuality) in six Dutch live blogs. Results led us to conclude that using a live blog is an active way to relate to an unfolding world, where uncertainties and fragmentation are not an obstruction, but motivations to look, read, and listen further, like in a detective or an adventure game. Doing so, [1]respondents seem confident enough to assess the credibility of live blogs by repairing what goes wrong, contextualizing what is in their eyes seen as a too narrow interpretation of events and embracing the complexities of an unfolding reality.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

Live blogs have become a usual format for many news sites around the world, bringing news as it unfolds (Matheson & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020; Thorsen & Jackson, 2018; Thurman & Walters, 2013). While live blogs started as a format for covering sports events or breaking news, the format is used for a variety of events like politics, breaking news events, or even criminal trials (Flower & Ahlefeldt, 2021). These events can last for a few hours or days, and sometimes even months or years, as happened with live blogs covering COVID-19 and the current crisis in the Ukraine.

Live blogs are often free content, guaranteeing a proliferation of the format and news. Previous studies showed that live blogs kept readers longer engaged on news sites than commonly used inverted pyramid stories (Thurman & Walters, 2013), and that users spend on average between 12 and 24 minutes reading live blogs, three times more than reading other stories (Thurman & Newman, 2014). Nevertheless, the format brings about uncertainties as the narrative is fragmentary, the information is presented by a diverse range of multimodal sources, while the editor is often not present at the place of the event (Matheson & Wahl-Jorgenson, 2020; Thorsen & Jackson, 2018; Thurman & Walters, 2013).

Despite this fragmentary format and uncertainties, the question is why this news format is popular and how this popularity is related to the credibility of live blogs? Already in 2003, Tsfati and Capella pointed out that people can consume media, but at the same time does not trust it. One argumentation back then was the absence of alternatives. However, in a high choice media landscape, why do people turn to live blogs for credible news? While much research has been done on perceived credibility of online sources, online messages, and online media, no studies look specifically at how users of live blogs evaluate the credibility in and of this format. Credibility in journalism is related to credibility of the used sources, the message and the medium. Credibility of the sources concerns the use of useful and accurate information. Messages are assessed for their credibility based on the topic of the message; the internal validity; plausibility of arguments; supportive data, or ordering among other criteria (Wathen & Burkell, 2002: 136). Or, as Appelman & Sundar (2016: 63) define message credibility, "an individual's judgment of the veracity of the content of communication."

Medium credibility has shifted over the past century with the advent of new media platforms. Attention to medium credibility dates to the 1930s when radio was introduced and newspapers were concerned what this new technological innovation might do with their audience, and, again, in the 1950s with the introduction of television (Metzger et al., 2003: 306). Research then focused on medium credibility, focusing on organization, usability, presentation, or vividness (Wathen & Burkell, 2002: 136).

Over the past three decades online news has developed quite rapidly, enriched with online characteristics such as interactivity, hyper textuality and multimodality (Bardoel & Deuze, 2001; Cassidy, 2007; Deuze, 2003; Oblak, 2005; Paulussen, 2004). Live blogs are a subset of online news, because apart from multimodality, hyper-textuality, and interactivity, the format brings news while it folds, pushing the

latest developments first in a reversed chronological order, written by journalists often not present at the site of the covered events in a fragmented manner, and foremost: immediately.

The question is how readers of live blogs evaluate the credibility of live blogs, regarding the sources, the message and the media. Research on online information shows that the speed at which online information is brought does not necessarily affect news credibility. Taking account the specific characteristics of the live blogs format, this study focuses on how news users evaluate the credibility of the live blogs. To do so, we first focus on the specific elements of credibility (sources, messages, medium) after which we can answer the question how news users perceive the credibility of live blogs as a news format? To answer this question, we conducted six focus groups of in total thirty-six frequent users of live blogs.

5.3 CREDIBILITY

In previous research concerning credibility, credibility and trust are often used interchangeable (Flanagin & Metzger, 2007; Kohring & Matthes, 2007). However, there are are important differences between both concepts. For example, Van Dalen (2020) understands credibility as "perceived believability" (6) because credibility is a feature attributed to individuals or organizations by someone regarding events, narratives, facts, et cetera (Van Dalen, 2020).

Seen as such, credibility is a narrower concept than trust because credibility refers to the perceived truth-fullness of individuals, institutions, or information, while trust refers to the media task to provide information that is truthful. Between the two is also a difference in the dimension of time: credibility is an evaluation once a receiver is exposed to it, while trust is a "predictive judgement, referring to the future" (Van Dalen, 2020: 5). Central to this study is the concept of credibility, not of trust, and therein we distinguish between source, message and medium credibility.

5.3.1 Source credibility

According to Hovland & Weiss (1953) there was a clear scientific relevance to study the influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness (the title of their seminal paper): "There are few studies in which an identical communication is presented by different communicators and the relative effects on opinion subsequently measured without explicit reference to the position taken by the communicator" (635). Consequently, they defined credibility in terms of expertise and trustworthiness of a speaker; the first expressing the qualifications to know; the second as perception of the motivation to tell the truth (Metzger, 2003: 6). Some scholars found expertise a more objective dimension, and therefore easier for audiences to assess (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993), others found trustworthiness a more dominant dimension for credibility (Lui & Standing, 1989). This approach to credibility as source credibility dominated for long studies of credibility assessment. Interest in persuasion during the 1950s led to a growth of research concerning source and message credibility. For example, Tseng and Fogg (1999) identified different types of source credibility (in: Wathen & Burkell,

1999: 135). Sources can be perceived as credible due to presumptions of the receiver and stereotypes of persons or objects. The presumption that "all politicians lie" leads to a negative assessment of their credibility and, by absence of other cues, leads to the rejection of their messages. Second, perceivers can assess credibility based on labels like 'doctor', or 'professor'. This reputed credibility is based on source labels. Or, third, credibility can be perceived based on personal experience with a source.

Next to these types of source credibility, other factors play a role as well. Expertise, trustworthiness, credentials, attractiveness, similarities between source and receiver of information, or likeability are important factors in assessing a source as credible (Wathen & Burkell, 2002: 136). Pornpitakpan (2004) adds, next to credibility and attractiveness, also power as an important factor in source credibility. In an extensive literature review, Pornpitakpan (2004) summarizes context and circumstances for sources to be credible and, therewith, persuasive, and concludes: "Almost all of the main effect findings suggest that a high-credibility source is more persuasive than is a low-credibility source in both changing attitudes and gaining behavioural compliance" (Pornpitakpan, 2004: 266).

The past two decades scholars analyse the shift from offline to online sources credibility. Metzger & Flanagin (2003), for instance, claim "that in some respect (…) websites may be considered to be analogous to individual organizations (idem: 300)". Seen as such, expertise might be reflected by the site's informativeness, credentials, reputation; and trustworthiness may be communicated through policy statements, lack of advertisements or commercial content. However, both authors threaten to cross the border with medium credibility, and therewith not reducing complexity in credibility assessment of online sources but adding some. Keshavarz (2020) found more discriminating components in literature covering credibility of online sources: user profile and authority. The first concerned the user's profile itself, but also the frequency and regularity of posts, the age of accounts, endorsements and administrating profiles among others. Authority was, according to Keshavar (2020) conceptualized by affiliation, contact information, education background, interest, credentials, experience and competence.

5.3.2 Message credibility

In addition to Hovland & Weiss's findings that sources are an important factor in perceiving credibility of information, Rosenthal (1971) found that people also assessed credibility based on message. Message credibility "examines how message characteristics impact perceptions of believability" (Metzger et al., 2003: 11). Appelman & Sundar (2016) found that message credibility can be measured by asking participants "to rate how well certain adjectives describe content: accurate, authentic, and believable" (73), defining and validating an exclusive scale and comprising message credibility in its core, and "elements of writing quality, fairness, and professional expertise inform message credibility" help (Idem: 74).

Metzger and colleagues(2003) distinguish three factors that contribute to the assessment of online message credibility: message structure; message content; and

message delivery or presentation (11). Kiousis (2001) found that message variables can shape source credibility, indicating the independent factor of message credibility. For instance, the style of writing (complicated versus simplistic) can affect credibility. "The message should be internally consistent", concluded Wathen & Burkell, 2002: 140). Message credibility online, acording to Metzger et al. (2003: 305) is often determined by the message structure, content and delivery. For example, amateurism of web-messages and inconsistencies in page design decrease credibility of online messages (Alexander & Tate, 1999): the better the navigability, the better the credibility of the messages. Sundar (1988) found that quotations in online news benefit its perceived credibility and quality. Fogg et al. (2001) found that the presentation and design of a web page influence the credibility of the message, as did typos and dead links. So, next to sources, credibility is also perceived in relation to the messages of online news. In relation to live blogs, these messages are the individual posts that are published.

5.3.3 Medium credibility

Further research showed a third focus for credibility assessment: next to source, and message, medium also play a part in the credibility assessment of people. Pornpitakpan (2004) pointed in his extensive literature review concerning source credibility on the significant interaction between source trustworthiness and media: "Trustworthy sources were more persuasive than were untrustworthy ones when the message was delivered through the television rather than the radio or the print medium" (Pornpitakpan, 2004: 225). Kiousis (2001) concluded that "survey respondents (…) give higher credence to newspaper stories before online news and online news before television news" (Kiousis, 2001: 396). In short, media can affect the persuasiveness of source credibility: people seem to evaluate credibility of different media in different ways. Newhagen and Ness (1989) demonstrated, for example, that newspapers were judged according to their credibility as an institution, while the credibility of television news was judged by the presenting newscasters.

5.3.4 Technological affordances

Comparing offline with online news, Chung et al. (2012) concluded that trustworthiness and expertise are, for both, central factors for assessing credibility, and participants in their study rated online, independent news media lowest (in their study Drudge Report and Axis of Logic). Only the online specific affordance hypertexuality (next to multimodality and interactivity) significantly impacted the perceived credibility of news.google.com and news.yahoo.com – two online news index platforms. "This is probably because index type news sources offer links to diverse news sites that enhance users' information seeking opportunities and provide them with easier ways to navigate through large amounts of information or specific news items in depth" (Chung et al., 2012: 181).

Metzger and colleagues (2003) found additional, online-specific factors impacting perceived credibility: "the ease of publishing professionally appearing content, the

vast amount of information and information producers online, the convergence of genres, and the malleability of digital information" (Metzger et al., 2003: 311). Like TV, Metzger and colleagues (2003) concludes, websites offer minute-to-minute coverage of issues and events. However, these reports are predominantly text-driven, making websites more like newspapers than TV. Therefore, the expectation was that websites were perceived as credible as newspapers, but Ang & Nadarajan (1999) "point out that the chance for error in news is magnified on the Web due to unlimited capacity, high speed, and use of hyperlinking from source to source" (in: Metzger et al., 2003: 311). So, due to the pressure to publish immediately, little time was left for verification, endangering the perceived credibility of online media. "This result", explain Metzger et al. (2003: 311), "may be due to the fact that people use the same criteria to judge the credibility of news across both print and online formats".

This review of literature concerning perceived credibility of sources, messages, and media both off and online, and technical affordances of online information and news as factors in perceiving credibility brings us to two interrelated questions concerning the perceived credibility of Dutch live blogs. First, we would like to know how, and which elements (sources, message, or media) are perceived as credible by avid users of live blogs. Second, we would like to know how avid users of live blogs perceive the credibility of the format. In our method section we explain how we are answering these research questions.

5.4 METHOD

To answer our two research questions, we conducted six focus groups with thirty-six respondents in total. Previous research about online perceived credibility is mostly done by surveys or experiments (Hsieh & Li, 2020; Naab et al., 2020; Shariff, 2020; Thomas et al., 2019; Willemsen et al., 2012; Wölker & Powell, 2021). In contrast, we wanted to ask avid users of live blogs to reflect on their evaluation of credibility, which elements are perceived as credible and how these perceptions are formed when confronted with a live blog. Therefore, we choose focus groups as a qualitative research method.

5.4.1 Respondents

We selected avid users (all over 18 years old) of live blogs who, at least, followed live blogs once a week or when a live blog of their interest starts. We prefer avid users here, because to reflect on credibility it requires knowledge of and experience with the format. Our second criterium for selection concerned specific preferences for (and therewith experience with and knowledge of) breaking news, politics, or sports live blogs. Previous research concerning content and makers of live blogs also distinguished between these three themes. We did so to maximize differences (in event, theme and therewith content and motivations) in search for similar patterns between sources, language use, routines, and conventions and, in this paper, perception of credibility.

In total we conducted six focus groups, two with respondents who read breaking news blogs, two with people who regularly read sports blogs and two with people who keep

track of blogs covering political events (see Appendix for the live blogs we discussed with respondents). To answer our research questions, we choose to maximize the differences between users and live blogs to find similarities concerning the perceived credibility of live blogs. The focus groups were held between February 24th and October 14th, 2022. The focus groups took one and a half to two hours each. Most of the focus groups took place by one or more respondents at home; two took place at a university (classroom) and one in the office of a brewery. All locations were quiet places with a large table where everyone could sit comfortably and conduct several assignments.

5.4.2 Assignment

To conduct the focus groups, we constructed a discussion guide with three assignments for the respondents. First, we asked the respondents to note what stands out in the live blog that we selected for them. The focus groups concentrated on six different live blogs, two concerning a breaking news event, two a sports event and two a political event. Table 1 (Appendix) provides details of these blogs.

After welcoming the respondents, we explained them the goal and procedure of the focus group and asked them to sign an informed consent form. Participants brought their preferred device to be able to read a live blog, some respondents brought their iPad, others read the live blogs on their iPhone or laptop. We asked them to fill in the URL of a previous selected live blog covering crisis, or politics, or sport to start the first assignment. Then, we asked them to read the live blog as they are used to do (individually) while taking notes on post-its on things that stood out for them and writing down what they thought was good and what was not good about the live blog. This first round had three interrelating goals. First, we wanted to let respondents get used with the live blog they had not read before and find their way around in the live blog. Second, we wanted to let respondents get acquainted with the setting of a focus group. Respondents usually read live blogs on their own, not in groups, with a discussion afterwards. Third, we wanted to let respondents get used to taking notes when reading the live blog. After taking notes, we asked respondents to, first, read out loud what points they had written down. Then we asked them to react to each other's points. This first round also made it easier for respondents to discuss positive and negative evaluations with others, making sure individuals felt safe and secure enough to take minority views.

After discussing what stood out, we then asked respondents to read the same live blog again, but then focusing on the evaluation of different elements of credibility. Therefore, we asked specifically to reflect on sources, messages, and channels as well as interactivity, hyper textuality, and multimodality as factors for the assessment of credibility, following our theoretical findings concerning perceived credibility. We asked respondents to take notes again while reading the live blog. We did so because evaluating is complex, and discussing these evaluations might lead to forgetting observations respondents made when they were reading the live blog. We then asked respondents to elaborate on their findings, pointing in the live blog where they found elements (in)credible and how they perceived credibility concerning these elements.

After discussing remarks concerning the perceived credibility of the live blogs, we asked respondents for an overall assessment of the format's credibility. How did they, despite or perhaps because what they noted in previous rounds, evaluate the credibility of the live blogs? This final question had two interrelating goals. First, suggestions for bettering live blogs are also an implicit critique on current live blogs. To know how to improve them is only possible after a critical analysis of the current blogs. Second, asking respondents about the overall credibility of live blogs, respondents had the chance to relate elements which were discussed during the second assignment.

We developed a code frame for both research questions based on our literature review concerning perceived credibility. For RQ 1 we determined defining; message credibility; online credibility; receiver variables; source credibility; trust as most important subjects to analyse our transcribed focus groups. For RQ2 we established assessing online credibility; importance of (online) credibility; live blogging and credibility; and speed of production in relation to credibility for the analysis of our focus groups. The authors discussed the results of this first round and based on the findings and discussion, added new codes (Freeman, 2017; Saldaña, 2021). These additional codes were chosen to cover extensive debate between respondents and concerned amongst others the references to other media; selection and relevance of information in live blogs; (lack of) authorship; and user experiences as subjects discussed but not before mentioned in previous research as factors to perceive credibility. After this second round, authors discussed this code frame again and a final, third round of coding was conducted to coherently code with the established codes, based on our literature review and the codes we added based on our first round. All coding was done in Atlas.ti.

5.5 RESULTS

We asked respondents to reflect on the perceived credibility of live blogs asking them first to note what they thought was noteworthy (for any reason thinkable) and then asked them which elements contributed to (or detrimental to) the perceived credibility of live blogs. Four themes were central, already known in the literature regarding credibility: sources, messages, media and technical affordances (of this online format). Previous research indicates that these themes are important for the perception of credibility. Our data suggests that within these themes respondents further nuanced our understanding. We structured our results according to our theoretical approach into source credibility, message credibility, medium credibility, and technical affordances.

5.5.1 Source credibility

Foremost, respondents explained that sources, either experts, formal or both, contributed to the credibility of the post. Particularly when these expert sources are presented as primary sources without intervention of the journalist, by for example, re-posting a tweet in a live blog. One respondent, disentangling a political live blog covering the crisis in Ukraine and the possible disastrous consequences

for the nuclear powerplant in Chernobyl, very much trusted tweets used from the International Atomic Energy Agency monitoring the power plant:

"What I noticed and what I found was that sometimes a tweet was used where I understood the relevance very well. Like the first one from the head of the agency, who then says, 'How are we doing now?' That comes directly from the source it's about."

An important factor in the perception of credibility were perceived stakes and interests of sources that were selected for the live blogs. So, in a direct confrontation of two respondents, Zelensky's claims were both perceived as credible and not credible. Zelensky was a credible source for some respondents because he is the president of the Ukraine and 'in the position to know' what happens in his country. For others, his position made him not credible, due to the interests he had.

Speaker 1: "Because the news report says Zelenski, and then it's up to me to determine whether I find Zelenski's opinion reliable or not. Well, in that case, I do find Zelenski himself reliable ... So, I would look at it differently, but it's up to the reader themselves to assign value to that. (…)."
Speaker 2: "It's not an unclear source, Zelenski is not an unclear source, but an unreliable one! He is a player in the field, yes, he may be considered sacred here, not by me, certainly not, but that doesn't mean what he says is true."

Some respondents even made a more nuanced remark within this evaluation: they stated that some sources, even if they were not credible, had to be selected in a live blog to prevent a very negative evaluation for the journalist's credibility. These sources could not simply be left out by journalists, and consequently, these 'problematic sources' had to be part of the report, because of their contribution to the event.

Discussing a live blog covering a political debate, a respondent had great difficulty with the credibility assessment of politicians of the right-wing party Forum voor Democratie (Forum for Democracy). According to the respondents, opinions about this party are deeply polarized in Dutch society, and the representation of them (and their views) in a blog covering a political debate raise questions among the respondents how to assess the credibility of their statements: should they be incorporated as part of the covered event, or should these statements be banned from reporting because of their quality? A consensus was reached that journalist had to cover these sources, but adding quotation marks to signal the information was not of the journalist, but the member of parliament.

"Yeah, and like Forum for Democracy, well, [journalists] do it well. They do indeed mention them [and] their opinion, and that's allowed in a democratic country […]. They just put it out there. But if he doesn't... Those quotation marks are important. In some way. They could also omit them, that's possible ... I find it very difficult. I really find it difficult. How should I read the blog [without them]?"

Because the journalists had, according to the respondents such an important role in evaluating the credibility of sources and selecting these sources (and their views) in or out of the live blog, authorship was extensively debated among respondents. They recognized the importance of the journalist-as-source and not only as an invisible source selector, or the so -called gatekeeper. One respondent recognized the grey area between gatekeeper and source as an important trait of the craft:

"Well, not to pass judgment, but indeed, always saying that this politician thinks this and that, also tried to handle it well with quotation marks... all the time. Because that, I think, is a point of criticism you can receive if you start writing things like "member of parliament asked the wrong question", [because] that implies a value judgment. So, [they are] trying to be very neutral and I do find that impressive."

Respondents then further deepened the discussion about credibility by pointing towards authorship of the live blog. Respondents, analyzing different live blogs, wondered who made the texts. Not knowing who wrote posts in live blogs, made them critical towards their credibility. Analyzing the credibility of a live blog covering the crisis in Ukraine, one respondent remarked:

"Who writes this? Is it someone who is there on the spot? Or do we see this from satellite images or... because the last part also states, "intense fighting was taking place around the former nuclear power plant this afternoon." That seems like an observation, but who made that observation? And that's what's missing. In these kinds of pieces."

This remark shows the complexity of assessing source's credibility by avid users of live blogs. The assessment of source credibility seems to be multi-layered and followed in different focus groups a similar sequence: first, the source and presentation of the source is important in the assessment of credibility. Then the source's views are considered. This consideration of views lead to assessing the motivations of the journalists to present some views, and not others, leading up to the question of authorship and the transformation of the journalists-as-gatekeeper of sources to the journalist-as-source.

5.5.2 Message credibility
Credibility is not only based on sources, but also on messages. The first and foremost characteristic of a message is its language. Respondents evaluated certain wording or complexity in language-use (like jargon) as negative for the credibility of that message.

"I'm watching and what strikes me is the bureaucratic and military language used in the explanation."

Assessing the credibility of a live blog covering a political debate, one respondent assessed a post as not credible due to its heading 'Slechtste jongetje van de klas' (The black sheep of the class), mentioned during the debate by a politician. The message of the political debate was, according to the respondent, more complex and not only the summary that the Netherlands were internationally not doing right. This message was too short sighted:

> *"... that writer, they pick that out. And yeah, do I want that? Don't I just want to read it myself and decide for myself what should grab my attention or what I find important?"*

Second, all respondents in all focus groups covering breaking news, politics and sports found the absence of emotion evidence for its factuality. Even when this led to simplification or reduction of information in the message covering an event:

> *"Well, I like to receive a report that is told in an emotionless manner. That people simply state the facts they observe and translate them into a piece of text. And I already know that when they do that, a portion of the actual information is always lost because it's something complex. But as they add more interpretation to that factual event, you see... You state a fact and then you can interpret something, but if they already include an emotional explanation in the factual first sentence, or at least that's what I expect, then I find it less reliable."*

An important indicator for factuality were statistics. Although all live blogs had some statistics that were highly regarded as factual, statistics were especially seen as very important indicators for assessments of credibility in sport blogs. This is understandable, because matches, games or races are highly structured events with clear rules, starts, middles and endings. At the same time, they are very emotional events full of fandom and passion. Consequently, sport events generate a lot of statistics (fastest, best, most, et cetera) and emotions alike, and message credibility was assessed as an optimum (and debatable) balance between (statistical) factuality and passions – or, in rhetorical terms: an optimal balance between logos and pathos. Third, respondents stated that the time between messages (or posts) in relation to the information in these posts is an important factor in the assessment of their credibility. Consequently, specifically for this format, there seems to be a continuum between a lot of information in a short time (which is assessed as problematic because, according to respondents, journalists are summarizing too much) and a long time without (a lot of) information (suggesting nothing important happens and therefore raising questions about live blogging the event in the first place).

> *"If I purely look at the information about the teams in the match, Volendam didn't get much exposure. I mentioned gaps in the timeline, and I don't find the clutter surrounding it relevant to this match... Oh, and the posts about the preparation*

only focus on Emmen. So, only Lukine [manager of Emmen, authors] is interviewed, not Wim de Jong [manager of Volendam, authors]. I think he was there too."

Finally, an important indicator for message credibility is the use of quotation marks. Respondents mentioned these as important indicators for the assessment of message credibility. At the same time, respondents also made a distinction between the message and its content. Quotation marks indicates that someone said something, and this act of speaking was, when indicated by quotation marks, seen as very credible. The content of the speech act – the message between the quotation marks – was still highly scrutinized by the respondents. So, respondents accepted the fact that someone said something, then discussed the motivation for the journalist to quote what was said and finally assessed the credibility of the message between the quotation marks.

"For example, when the NOS [public broadcaster] quotes the British Ministry of Defence, it is presented as a fact. However, what the British Ministry of Defence says is not necessarily a fact. They are just another interested government entity that has historically lied, so why should we assume they are telling the truth now? In my opinion, that's precisely what they're doing: "Here, this is what they say, take a look and decide for yourself what you think of it"."

Consequently, as with source credibility, the assessment of message credibility seems to be multi-layered. The (right) choices of language are important indicators for credibility. Then, the balance between factuality and emotion, between logos and pathos, is seen as an important quality of the message. Finally, reported speech and the use of quotation marks to indicate speech acts were important indicators for the assessment of message credibility as well. Still, respondents scrutinized the message between the quotation marks, weighing their factuality and the motives of journalists to report direct speech.

5.5.3 Medium credibility

Then, respondents evaluate credibility not only through sources and messages, but also by medium. Respondents stick to their favorite platform and directly mentioned the comparison of the live blog they were asked to analyze with live blogs they are used to read themselves. Doing this comparison, some respondents explicitly named public news organizations more credible than commercial platforms for covering breaking news and politics. They found that these public platforms were more neutral than commercial platforms, although they could not name specific examples in the platform as evidence. Others found commercial platforms for sports better suited to cover events than public platforms, because commercial platforms understood the importance of fandom better than (more) neutral public platforms. Here again, respondents could not point to evidence in these blogs to underpin their 'feelings'.

Respondents constantly compared the media platform of the live blog that they were asked to evaluate with other media platforms in general. They did so by comparing brands, or more specific, by comparing content from one platform with the other. In this comparison, Dutch live blogs constantly 'competed' with foreign media platforms, like the *BBC*, New York Times, statistical football-apps, or with one specific Dutch platform: *NOS* Teletekst. This constant comparison of media was an integral strategy to evaluate credibility. One respondent compared the Dutch public broadcaster *NOS* with the *BBC* regarding a live blog covering the crisis in Ukraine.

> *"So yeah, you rely on NOS [Dutch public radio & television], and yeah, then I think, well, one plus one is two, because NOS is obviously just very cautious in that regard, I think, and more factual, et cetera, than [...] any other blog."*

Even though the *NOS* is seen as credible, the *BBC* is seen as more credible due to the presence of a correspondent on the spot.

> *"At the BBC, our journalists in Kharkiv are also present every morning, and ... And then you think, yeah, they know what they're talking about. Nowhere in these blogs [by the NOS] do I find anything like "it's from John, Peter, or Tom."*

Less than source or message credibility, medium credibility is not multi-layered. Respondents have strong preferences for media to follow 'their' live blogs. Interesting, though, is the result that respondents constantly compare live blogs (of their preference) with other media. Live blogs are not consumed in isolation but are actively compared with other brands.

5.5.4 Technolgical affordances

Live blogs are online news platforms. Following Chung et al. (2012) and Metzger et al. (2003), hypertextuality, interactivity and multimodality can contribute to the perceived credibility of online news. For instance, respondents mentioned that video or videos from twitter accounts (multimodality) increased the credibility of live blogs. Videos show what happens and are regarded as credible reports of an event. At the same time, videos and tweets led to extensive discussion why a journalists embedded certain tweets, referring to the motivation for and selection of sources, as discussed above. So, for instance, one respondent analysed a video from a live blog covering the crisis in Ukraine.

> *"Yeah, you know, I assume they'll be addressed and arrested by the police, because you often see that in the video as well. Yeah, and there's another video like that indeed, where someone (...) shows a tank driving over a car. Well, you want to show those, but usually they're very blurry videos. Yeah, and first, you need to see the whole context properly, like where the tank is and where the car is. And then you'll roughly see what was already mentioned in one or two sentences, and then you go, yeah."*

Links in live blogs can be used for backgrounding stories and are evaluated as valuable and credible as well. For some respondents, these links are indications for the quality of the report and their absence an indication for a negative evaluation of credibility. For them, reports without links, mean there is nothing important there to report or contextualize, which attenuates claims made by journalists.

> *"I see that quite often when [journalists] referenced [to] an article. They would then provide a link saying, "This happened yesterday, and there's a report on it." If they don't have [such a link], then you kind of start wondering if it's true or not?"*

Embedding material from social media led to positive perception of credibility (see above by the section about source credibility). However, embedding material could also backfire because respondents were distracted from the live blog and had hard times not only finding the live blog back, but, when they did, finding back the position in the live blog where they left.

> *"What I find annoying in live blogs, and what they also do, is including tweets from other parties in between. Because then, if you really want to watch that video, you must go to another page, and I find that really irritating. While I often want to see it, I just want it to play right on that page."*

Finally, to our surprise, during the focus group, respondents found out that the responsiveness of their live blog was highly correlating with their platform of choice (mobile phone, tables, laptop) and the operating system (iOS, Android, Windows), leading to different user experiences. Learning how to optimize their user experience from other respondents during the focus group, led for some respondents to a better user experience and, consequently, a positive evaluation of a live blog's credibility. To summarize, technical affordances can have a positive effect on the perception of credibility. However, at the same time they form a risk. Dead or wrong links, the complexity of using a live blog (UX) or the lack of backgrounding by links have led to negative perceptions of credibility for the live blogs.

5.6 CONCLUSION

This study looks in the issue of credibility of live blogs according to the users. First, how do avid live blog users perceive the credibility of elements of live blogs? And second, how do they perceive the credibility of live blogs as a news format? Our data suggests that the answer for both questions is that user are quite critical towards live blogs. The ease with which respondents scrutinize source credibility, message credibility and medium credibility as well as technological affordances of live blogs as an online format, suggests active use and not passive consumption of news in live blogs. Respondents are constantly reflecting on the content of the format based on their extensive body of knowledge about events of their interest, previous experience with live blogs as a news format, and their heavy news use in general.

Respondents signal imbalances in reported views due to the selection of sources and they miss criteria for the choices made. Consequently, they question the expertise of journalists as many respondents also discussed which sources were left out by journalists, broadening the discussion about the representation of views in live blogs. What often followed when discussing the credibility of sources was a discussion about journalist's choices for certain sources. From there, respondents wondered who the author of (parts of the) live blog was. Authorship, some explained, contains important cues for expertise and trustworthiness, and therewith credibility. So, not knowing who the author was, led to a negative evaluation of sources, messages, and the format. One focus group even concluded that a live blog covering the crisis in Ukraine must been written by the trainee, just fooling around in a corner of the editorial room. This made them conclude that lot of information was not credible, because it was not produced by experienced journalists.

This constant discussion of sources, views and authorship was somewhat balanced by the perceived credibility of messages (or posts, as in live blogs). The use of quotation marks was seen as contributing to the credibility of these messages, though respondents were still ritical about the credibility of what was reported directly. As Tuchman (1978: 97) remarks, quotation marks are technical devices that "makes the story factual" without the necessity to check and verify what is said. Still, this tension between quoting and quoting what is right, was not only felt by the respondents, but also discussed.

Finally, some technical affordances (hypertextuality, interactivity and multimodality) of live blogs were positively contributing to the credibility of live blogs but had some risks as well. So, videos were regarded as credible content, because of their 'what you see is what you get'-quality, as were links to background articles. However, respondents found it troublesome to leave the live blog and watch a video or read article and find their way back to where they were. Some suggested a 'fold out'-option: when clicking on a video, a layer appears over the live blog with the video. After finishing, this layer can be closed again to return at the same point as respondents were before leaving the live blog.

Concluding, as mentioned in the introduction, Tsfati and Capella (2003) rightly pointed out that people consume media, but at the same time do not trust them. In 2003, the argument to solve this paradox was the absence of alternatives. The proliferation of live blogs makes it possible to tune in and to not drop out. Respondents who need their daily fix of news can follow live blogs, maybe despite the critical remarks they have regarding the perceived credibility of live blogs.

Our six focus groups had all one thing in common – respondents effortlessly discussed, analysed, and contextualized complex concepts regarding source, message, medium credibility, and technological affordances given the uncertainties, as the narrative is fragmented, the information is presented by a diverse range of multimodal sources, while the editor is often not present at the place of the event. Users of live blogs are dedicated news followers with an impressive body of knowledge regarding their events of interest. Respondents seem to enjoy scrutinizing the news,

live blogs feed them with the content they need to do so. Using a live blog is, more than consuming news, it is an active way to relate to an unfolding world, where uncertainties and fragmentation are not obstruction, but motivations to look, read, and listen further, like in a detective or an adventure game. Doing so, respondents seem confident enough to assess the credibility of live blogs by 'repairing' what goes wrong, contextualizing what is in their eyes seen as a too narrow interpretation of events, and embrace the complexities of an unfolding reality.

Still, the results of this paper must be dealt with some caution. First, because we choose avid live blog users, the richness and complexity of the arguments given for the perception of source, message and medium credibility, and technical affordances must be somewhat nuanced. We choose avid users to debate the perceived credibility of live blogs. We did so, because we did not want that our respondents first had to get acquainted with a relatively new journalistic format. We wanted to be sure that the format itself was not an issue of conversation or debate, but the perceived credibility of the live blogs covering their favourite theme (breaking news, politics, or sport) was the issue.

Second, previous research concerning public of live blogs conducted experiments or surveys with more respondents than in our focus groups (Hsieh & Li, 2020; Naab et al., 2020; Shariff, 2020; Thomas et al., 2019; Willemsen et al., 2012; Wölker & Powell, 2021). These studies concerned, for example, the uses and gratifications (Pantic, 2020), or, only partially, credibility of live blogs (Lee, 2022). In Pantic's study, respondents were predominantly undergraduate students without discriminating between themes of live blogs (breaking news, politics, or sports), while Lee (2020) had 220 participants conduct an experiment with identical news stories, presented in a form of a live blog or pyramid style. The result (no effect) is very valuable but leaves unanswered the question which elements in live blogs respondents perceived as credible. Consequently, our focus was on the subjectivity of (avid) live blog users and found focus groups more fit to answer that question.

Finally, to our surprise we found respondents evaluating live blogs seemingly effortless comparing sources, and messages between live blogs and live blogs of different media by heart. This observation is a valuable clue for live blog makers – they have a very expert public that not only understands that selection in information must be made, but often also knows which information is selected out of these live blogs. Consequently, they compare their 'private' expertise with the published expertise of media organizations and, sometimes, they conclude they are more expert. Then, all respondents explained, live blogs lost their credibility. But only for a while, because immediacy gives journalists with every new post a new chance to come up with credible news again.

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86-103.

APPENDIX 1

Corpus live blogs discussed with respondents

Theme	Date of publication	Header (EN/NL)
Breaking News	February 24th 2022	Russians continue to advance • Airport near Kiev and Chernobyl nuclear power plant captured (Russen rukken verder op • Vliegveld bij Kiev en kerncentrale Tsjernobyl ingenomen)
Breaking News	September 12th 2022	LIVE | Kiev: 'About 500 km² reclaimed in the south'; Calls for Putin's resignation in Moscow and St. Petersburg (LIVE | Kiev: 'Zo'n 500 km² heroverd in zuiden'; Roep om aftreden Poetin in Moskou en St. Petersburg)
Politics	May 19th 2022	Rutte 'is not lying', but he still needs to review his text message archive (Rutte 'liegt niet', maar hij moet toch nog eens zijn sms-archief in)
Politics	June 24th 2022	Parliament disappointed with Minister Staghouwer's farming plan • 'big fail' (Kamer teleurgesteld in boerenplan minister Staghouwer • 'dikke onvoldoende')
Sport	July 18th 2022	Dutch Lionesses narrowly miss out on group stage victory in goal-filled final minutes, France awaits in quarterfinals (Oranje Leeuwinnen na doelpuntrijke slotfase nét geen groepswinnaar, Frankrijk wacht in kwartfinale)
Sport	October 14th 2022	Emmen and Volendam draw • Vitesse now bottom of the Eredivisie. (Emmen en Volendam spelen gelijk • Vitesse nu hekkensluiter eredivisie)