Peter Vasterman (ed.)

From Media Hype to Twitter Storm

News Explosions and Their Impact on Issues, Crises and Public Opinion

From Media Hype to Twitter Storm

From Media Hype to Twitter Storm

News Explosions and Their Impact on Issues, Crises, and Public Opinion

Edited by
Peter Vasterman

Amsterdam University Press

Cover illustration: Alain Delorme, MURMURATIONS Ephemeral Plastic Sculptures #2.
www.alaindelorme.com

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN 978 94 6298 217 8
e-ISBN 978 90 4853 210 0
DOI 10.5117/9789462982178
NUR 811

© P. Vasterman / Amsterdam University Press B.V., Amsterdam 2018

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use all copyrighted illustrations reproduced in this book. Nonetheless, whosoever believes to have rights to this material is advised to contact the publisher.

It is not difficult to see the similarities between massive starling flocks, flying as one and creating new shapes – murmurations – and the way media operate during explosive news waves, the main topic in this book.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 11

Preface 13
Hans Mathias Kepplinger

Introduction 17
Peter Vasterman

I. Theory, concepts, and methodology

1. Media hypes, moral panics, and the ambiguous nature of facts 39
Urban security as discursive formation
Marcello Maneri

2. News waves in a changing media landscape 1950-2014 61
Wouter van Atteveldt, Nel Ruigrok, Kasper Welbers, and Carina Jacobi

3. The dynamics of media attention to issues 83
Towards standardizing measures, dimensions, and profiles
Stefan Geiß

4. Hype, argumentation, and scientific dissemination 115
Adam Auch

II. Anatomy of self-reinforcing dynamics: Case studies

5. The mechanisms of media storms 133
Anne Hardy

6. Much ado about nothing 149
Five media hypes in a comparative perspective
Charlotte Wien

7. From media wave to media tsunami 167
The 'Charter of Values' debate in Quebec, 2012-2014
Thierry Giasson, Marie-Michèle Sauvageau, and Colette Brin

8. How a small-scale panic turns into an unstoppable news wave about mass mugging on the beach 187
Gonçalo Pereira Rosa

III. Impact on issues, crises, and public opinion

9. Dynamics of media hype: Interactivity of the media and the public 211
Ik Jae Chung

10. Why and how media storms affect front-line workers 229
Scandalized Danish crèches as an example.
Pernille Carlsson and Christian Elmelund-Præstekær

11. Media hypes and public opinion 249
Human interest frames and hype fatigue
Audun Beyer and Tine Ustad Figenschou

12. News waves generating attentionscapes 267
Opportunity or a waste of public time?
Marianne Paimre and Halliki Harro-Loit

IV. Interactivity: The role of social media

13. Modelling issue-attention dynamics in a hybrid media system 291
Annie Waldherr

14. You won't believe how co-dependent they are 313
Or: Media hype and the interaction of news media, social media, and the user
Vivian Roese

15. From racial hoaxes to media hypes 333
Fake news' real consequences.
Andrea Cerase and Claudia Santoro

16. Reputational damage on Twitter #hijack 355
Factors, dynamics, and response strategies
for crowdsourced campaigns
Augustine Pang, Jeremiah Icanh Lim Limsico, Lishan Phong, Bernadette Joy Lopez Lareza, and Sim Yee Low

List of figures and tables 383

Index of names 385

Index of subjects 393

Acknowledgements

As editor of this book, I am deeply indebted to all the contributing authors and to the reviewers, Prof. Denis McQuail and Prof. David L. Altheide. While writing this book we were standing on the shoulders of these two giants in social and communication science.

A few months after the review procedure we received the sad news that Denis passed away on Sunday, 25 June 2017. We all wish to express our deepest respect for this founding father of mass communication science, a lucid mind and a warm personality who inspired many of us throughout the years.

I also owe many thanks to Jeroen Sondervan, who believed in this project from the start, and to Maryse Elliott, who guided the review and production stages, both Humanities publishers at the Amsterdam University Press.

Peter Vasterman

Preface

Hans Mathias Kepplinger

Why is media hype interesting? It is interesting because hype cannot be entirely explained by the mechanisms of media reporting. Why not? Because media outlets report significantly more intensively about some events than about other, comparable events. Why is this relevant for society? Because media users find it very difficult to distinguish between an increasing number of media reports and an increasing number of reported incidents. One possible consequence of this can be the serious misperception of reality. Why is this politically relevant? Because politicians and other agents are more frequently oriented by media reporting than other reality indicators. Possible consequences of this include misperceptions of reality and incorrect decision-making in situations of crisis, conflict, and scandal. And why is media hype relevant to journalists? Because journalists are charged with representing reality objectively. This also applies to how often an event is reported – over a given time period, the frequency of reports should correspond to the frequency of incidents being reported. In situations of hype, this is not the case.

How can it be proven that media hype is a phenomenon in itself, in need of a special explanation? One must show that a large number of reports in the media is not, in fact, caused by a large number of similar incidents. This is possible by comparing reports to genuine facts – facts that can be counted, irrespective of media reports. For example, earthquakes and other natural disasters; shipping accidents and other large-scale accidents; incidences of cancer and other serious illness among celebrities. By comparing the frequency of each event with the frequency of reports on the event, it can be shown that media hype is a phenomenon in itself. One could criticize the test outlined above by pointing out that it is only possible for a few types of media hype. This criticism is justified, but in this case excessive, as testing special cases is standard practice in all areas of science. The law of gravitation was verified by experiments on bodies in an evacuated chamber, but is used by airplanes that fly through the air. Materials are tested for durability by exposing them to forces they would not normally be exposed to. Medication for humans is tested using the 'animal model'.

How does media hype change the character of the message being communicated? According to traditional theories, this is event driven: events with characteristic qualities (news factors) and established selection criteria

(news values of news factors) are seen as the cause of publication decisions, and the subsequent publication is seen as a consequence of these decisions. In the case of media hype, this causal theory is extended by a teleological model: publication decisions are not (only) due to the causes named above, but due to the intended effect of the story. This changes the character of the news, as the consequences of causes become means to an end. Traditional theories of journalism do not account for this, due to a specific definition of the role of a journalist: journalists do not play an active role in society, but are impartial observers. If journalists, in fact, emphasize or minimize particular stories in order to cause or avoid particular effects in the wider public, they cease to be impartial observers and become active participants. They are themselves a part of the event that they and their colleagues are reporting about. This is in conflict with the expected role of a journalist as well as a journalist's self-perception of their own role. It leads one to ask whether journalists who deliberately fan the flames of hype can be held morally accountable for the negative consequences of their reporting.

What effect can media hype have? Due to the intensity of news coverage, media hype can have both direct and indirect consequences. One example of a direct effect is the impact of intensive coverage of a court case on the verdict of the court. One example of indirect effect is the influence of the verdict on the length of sentence imposed on the guilty party. Other examples of indirect consequences include the influence of political decisions on the population affected by the decision, under the impression of media hype. In theory, indirect effects can also happen when those affected by the decision were not following the story in the media. The generally accepted axiom 'no effects without contact' therefore does not apply to secondary consequences. This is not due to a special characteristic of mass communication. Some well-known examples of indirect consequences in everyday life are so-called domino effects: Nobody would deny that the last domino fell, indirectly, because the first one did. The concept of indirect effects might be a breath of fresh air to enable a fresh and more realistic view of the impact of media on social developments.

How can media hype be best explained? As it is not possible to entirely explain media hype with reference to the events being reported, there must be other factors that play a role between events and reporting. These factors could be primarily within the media or primarily outside the media. Empirical studies of media hype without reference to extra-media data make the (implicit) assumption that the media is a largely autonomous, self-referential system that, under certain conditions, does not react to its environment, but to elements of its own structural constraints. For this reason, external

factors can be ignored. Structural constraints include the interests of publishers, broadcasters, and media employees, both material and immaterial, as well as professional norms and journalist's understanding of their role. Empirical studies of media hype with reference to extra-media data make the (implicit) assumption that the media is an input-output system, and that reports are significantly determined by the input, even in cases of hype. For this reason, external factors must be considered. Here, one can distinguish between two levels: the content of the report (events, themes, etc.) and the actors in the pre-media sphere (protagonists of the news story, politicians, stakeholders, etc.). These factors can intensify, mediate, or halt the formation of media hype. One example of the latter is when a minor accident that created media hype is followed by a major catastrophe. In most cases, the media hype relating to the minor accident will then collapse. One important question, both theoretically and practically, is: What is the relative importance of internal and external factors on the development of media hype? The answer to this question will shed some light on the importance of various causes of the perception of current events by media users: Who decides what we believe to be important? In addition to this, it will show to what extent the protagonists of a scandal, a crisis, a mediated conflict, etc. have an influence on the development of media hype. In both questions, it is a matter of the distribution of power in society.

Because of the reasons given above, research into media hype leads directly to central epistemological, theoretical, and methodological questions of mass communication research. The question of localizing the media within contemporary theories of democracy, with both a theoretical and empirical foundation, is part of this research. This is because it is only possible to explain media hype by viewing all of the actors as people who are guided by their intentions, particularly in extreme situations. This volume contains a large amount of substantial discussion on these topics, for those who are interested in such questions.

About the author

Hans Mathias Kepplinger studied political science, history and communications in Mainz, Munich and Berlin where he gained a PhD in political science (1970). He was full professor at University of Mainz (1982-2011), Research Fellow at University of California, Berkeley (1980) and Harvard University (2005), and Guest Professor at numerous universities. He won the Helen Dinerman Award in 2012 and was Research Fellow ICA 2015. His

research interests are the relationship between reality covered and media coverage about reality. His most recent studies deal with effects of media coverage on protagonists of media coverage (Kepplinger & Zerback, 2012), the effects of media coverage about nuclear energy on public opinion from 1965-2011 (Kepplinger & Lemke 2014), media coverage on Fukushima in Germany, France, UK, and Switzerland (Kepplinger & Lemke, 2015), and journalists' appraisal of important violations of journalistic professional rules (2017).

Introduction

Peter Vasterman

Vasterman, Peter (ed.), *From Media Hype to Twitter Storm. News Explosions and Their Impact on Issues, Crises, and Public Opinion*. Amsterdam University Press, 2018
DOI: 10.5117/9789462982178/INTRO

One of the most inspiring articles when I started studying explosive news waves back in the eighties was one written by Mark Fishman, 'Crime Waves as Ideology', dating back to 1978 and published in *Social Problems*. It continued on the track set out by Stanley Cohen, founder of the Moral Panic school of thought (see: Garland 2008). What struck me was the systematic analysis of the prerequisites and the different stages of a crime wave, which is, in fact, a media-generated wave of crime-related incidents. The number of stories on a particular crime explodes, while the actual number of incidents remains the same or even declines. It takes just one editor looking for news on a slow day to trigger this. Fishman describes how one TV reporter brings three different small stories, which would probably never have made the news together, under one new catchy denominator: the rising number of crimes against the elderly, committed by perpetrators from ethnic minorities. Since news judgements continuously overlap in space and time, it will not take long before reporters have found and published all the stories that seem to fit this new theme. This wave of news reinforces again and again the news values of this crime topic.

'Crimes against the elderly', Fishman writes, 'became a typical crime with typical victims, offenders, and circumstances'. Triggering not only public outrage but also an immediate outcry by authorities, politicians, unions and other stakeholders, reinforcing the focus of media and politics on this new type of crime. Fishman also points out the authorities, as information suppliers on crime, have a strong news-making power that could also be used to neutralize an unwanted crime wave. The concept of a crime wave is not new, a well-known historic example is the one described by the famous American muckraker Lincoln Steffens in 1928: 'How I Made a Crime Wave' (Steffens, 1928). A hilarious story about his competition with another reporter Jacob Riis in a spiralling series of scoops about robberies: 'Many other reporters joined in the uplift of that rising tide of crime, but it

was my creation, that wave, and Theodore Roosevelt (then president of the police board) stopped it'.

Another study, quite similar to that of Fishman, was undertaken by the Dutch criminologist Herman Franke, who published the articles '*Kustgeweld of mediageweld?*' ('Violence by the seaside or in the media?) and 'Rampsferen en paniekstemmingen' ('Moral panic and the fiction of catastrophe') in 1986 (Franke, 1986). In this case, only one fatal fight between young men at a beach led to a presumed 'wave of violence' flooding the Dutch shores. Franke used the theories of both Fishman and Cohen to analyse the step-by-step build-up of the news wave and the growing social concern. Another scholar studying the impact of news themes on the perception and construction of reality by the media was David Altheide, who coined the concept of 'media logic', together with co-author Robert Snow in 1979 (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Altheide, 1985). Media logic refers to the way the media classify, select, and create news and these studies laid the groundwork for the 'mediatization of politics' theoretical framework (see: Mazzoleni & Splendore, 2015).

The main point of Fishman's and others' studies of crime waves is that they actually describe a modus operandi in news-making and the interaction with social actors that can also be observed in all kinds of other areas than crime. The basic point being a self-reinforcing dynamic triggered and powered by this particular modus of creating news. This can be seen in many news waves about varying topics like political conflicts, risk issues to (celebrity) scandals. The news seems to develop a life of its own like a resonating bridge in the wind. And it is not only the news, it also applies to the public arena as a whole, including – in this digital era – internet and social media.

An important pioneer in this field is Hans Mathias Kepplinger, who began publishing about what he terms 'publizistische Konflikte', mediated conflicts, from 1977 onwards (Kepplinger, Frühauf & Hachenberg, 1977). Mediated conflicts are defined as disputes of issues fought in the media, who, as managers of the public arena, play an important role in the way the conflict develops. Two elements in his theory are relevant: feedback loops and instrumental actualization (Kepplinger, Brosius & Staab, 1991).

In mediated conflicts, every action triggers a countermove by an opponent, with a series of sub-conflicts that become news again, creating what Kepplinger calls 'Eigendynamik'. Instrumental actualization refers to the tendency of journalists to frame stories in line with their position in the conflict and to focus on similar events. This corresponds to Fishman's observation of the way the news theme works in creating a wave of incidents

in the news. It structures the hunt for more news about similar incidents, which confirms the news theme again and powers the news wave.

There are also social psychological aspects in the focus on information that fits in the already existing theme or frame. There is a lot of research showing that the heuristics people use to process information leads to selective perception (Festinger, 1957), stereotypes, availability and representativeness bias (see: Kuran & Sunstein, 1999 and Kahneman, 2011). In that respect, journalists are just people; despite being a professional. In later years, Donsbach (2004) defined these psychological aspects in his 'Psychology of news decisions' study. He argues that reporters try to cope with uncertain or indefinite situations by sharing their beliefs with others in order to create a shared reality validating their beliefs. This interaction with others, colleagues, sources, etc., creates a basis for frames that become dominant in news coverage.

Almost ten years before, in 1995, Kepplinger and Habermeier published their groundbreaking study on how so-called key events with a high visibility trigger a wave of news reports due to a temporary change in news values and news selection (Kepplinger & Habermeier, 1995). In terms of Fishman, everything that seems to fit the news theme will become news. The most important point in this study is the choice of events to test this theory. The events used were 'genuine events', completely independent from any media coverage, such as an earthquake in California or a major traffic accident. This is crucial because it enables a comparison between media coverage (number and frequency) and the actual number of genuine events. It shows that, after a key event, the media tend to report on similar events much more than before the key event, and publish much more thematically related news than before (statements from sources and interest groups, debates, and opinions).

However, this kind of test is impossible in cases where media coverage cannot be compared with objective media-external data, because they do not exist. In these cases, the media impact the social construction of the original event and subsequent events. If it is a topic with a social definition, like 'random violence' (see: Best, 1999; Vasterman, 2004), child abuse, or even sexual abuse, this comparison is a pitfall. The definitions of these social issues change over time, particularly in cases with much-publicized key events and a follow-up news wave (see: Egelkamp, 2002). These changing discourses and definitions go hand in hand with an increasing willingness to report incidents by victims, but also by authorities, institutions, and stakeholders like action groups. This reinforces the media hunt for more similar incidents and thematically related news.

In sum, one can observe this systematic build-up of this news wave, but a comparison with 'reality', i.e. the actual objective number of cases, becomes impossible. Media are not just reporters of events; they also create them, or at least influence the chain of events after the key event. This methodological problem – there is no reality check – makes it very tricky to make any claims regarding the disproportionality of the news wave or exaggeration of the social problem at hand. This was the main problem I ran into when I decided to define explosive news waves as media hypes in my dissertation (Vasterman, 2004): On the one hand, hype is a perfect concept for the self-reinforcing process during the news wave; on the other, it carries the implication of a disproportional and overblown media coverage.

Scholars using the concept 'moral panic' have the same problem: Who decides that the response to a perceived threat is a panic? And who decides that the threat is not really important or even non-existent? This made the moral panic theory a slippery slope for many scholars, mainly focusing on debunking the socially perceived threat (drugs, crime, sexting, etc.). Critics also pointed out that moral panic is essentially ideological: it was used to aim at issues defined by the right, defending conservative moral standards, and not at those from the left with liberal standards (see: Critcher, 2008; Garland, 2008). The only way to avoid these problems is to focus on the characteristics of the explosive news wave itself, disregarding the questions of disproportionality and exaggeration.

In my dissertation *Mediahype* (Vasterman, 2004, 2005), I defined a media hype as

> a media-generated, wall-to-wall news wave, triggered by one specific event and enlarged by the self-reinforcing processes within the news production of the media. During a media hype, the sharp rise in news stories is the result of making news, instead of reporting news events, and covering media-triggered social responses, instead of reporting developments that would have taken place without media interference.

The element of making news instead of just reporting it turned out to be quite problematic, because it implies a clear distinction between the 'real' events and those triggered or influenced by the media. It works for independent events like car accidents, but not for suicides, for example, because they may have been triggered by previous media reports on suicides (Stack, 2003). Charlotte Wien and Christian Elmelund-Præstekær addressed this in their study *An Anatomy of Media Hypes* (2009): 'From a theoretical point

of view such a distinction seems clear, for empirical purposes, however, it cannot be made'. Because all actors anticipate how the media work (see Altheides' media logic) a news-reporting story is easily converted into a news-making story and vice versa. This is why they decide to only use the criterion of intensity in coverage of a single issue to define media hypes. Amber Boydstun, Anne Hardy, and Stefaan Walgrave used an inductive approach to find an empirical basis for distinguishing what they call 'media storms' from regular coverage using the amount, the increase, and the duration of media attention to a specific issue (Boydstun et al., 2014).

But using only the intensity of media coverage as the main criterion for media hypes blurs the distinction between media hype and other news waves that follow huge and dramatic events like war, terrorist attacks, economic meltdowns, or natural disasters. Apparently, these events also trigger a self-reinforcing dynamic in media coverage. But calling them media hype is usually met with disbelief and scorn. This implies that a new approach is needed, one that does not try to classify every news wave into the dichotomy of whether or not it is a media hype.

For me, a real eye-opener was the paper written by Stefan Geiß, published in 2010, called 'The Shape of News Waves' (Geiß, 2010). His starting point is not the explosive news wave in particular, but *all* news waves in a specific time frame focusing on the different shapes they have. According to Geiß, the development of news events can be described along three dimensions: the length of total coverage, the dynamics of coverage, and the position of the peak of coverage. There are 'slow burners' escalating at a certain point, but also 'firestorms' of news lasting weeks or even months. The short news waves can be explosive with a long tail, or, conversely, start slow, but explode later (the 'degressive' or 'progressive heating news wave').

It is not difficult to recognize the media hype in the short-term explosive news waves, but, at the same time, this study shows that the self-reinforcing dynamic of media production can be found in the firestorms as well as in the slow burners. Consequently, it may be better to define media hype not as a specific news wave, but as a specific modus operandi that the media switch to under specific circumstances (Vasterman, 2015). Marcello Maneri presented the same option for moral panic studies:

> If we measure disproportionality by discursive dynamics rather than according to external indicators, the drawback of value judgment is avoided and an analysis of the construction of 'the problem' – of the degree, quality and logics of its amplification – may be carried out (Maneri, 2013: 184).

Amplification solely refers to the dynamics of representation, similar to the way media hype only describes a modus operandi in the news production. Recent publications show how this modus operandi may be analysed in the future.

In 2014, Annie Waldherr introduced a completely new line of research using simulation to study the fundamental mechanisms of issue attention cycles in news coverage (Waldherr, 2012, 2014). She developed an agent-based computer model for studying the dynamic interplay of key forces in the media arena, such as news values, attention thresholds, key events, issue sponsors, and intermedia agenda-setting. Her study revealed that the momentum of news waves is mainly driven by the adaptive reporting behaviour of journalists. The key mechanism for generating news waves is the self-reinforcing process of intermedia agenda-setting between (heterogeneous) journalists. Issue sponsors (sources) are not necessary to generate news waves, but do have substantial impact on their dynamics, leading to more frequent, longer, and more volatile news waves. This agent-based model makes it possible to study the dynamics of news waves without any reference to the problematic criteria of disproportionality and exaggeration. As Waldherr states, her model should be extended to include the audience that nowadays has access to the public arena through social media.

This refers to another new branch of research that is closely related to that of the attention cycles and news waves: the studies related to 'information cascades', 'Twitter storms', and 'virals'. The focus is on the explosive diffusion of information among networks caused by users following others, neglecting their own preferences or opinions. Augustine Pang sees similarities with media hype and defines social media hype as 'a netizen-generated hype that causes huge interest that is triggered by a key event and sustained by a self-reinforcing quality in its ability for users to engage in conversation' (Pang, 2013). After a few waves, saturation sets in and, similar to media hype fatigue (see also Beyer & Figenschou, 2014), a downward spiral develops. This kind of herd behaviour can, of course, also be seen in the way journalists follow and refer to each other for fear of missing news or deviating from the rest. This self-referential character is also becoming an important aspect of social media dynamics.

In her recent dissertation *Akzidentielle Medienhypes*, Vivian Roese defined the 'accidental media hype' as the result of a spontaneous interaction between news media and social media (Büttner, 2015). The Twitter storm is another new concept to describe explosive bursts of negative messages on social networks (see: Pfeffer, Zorbach & Carley, 2014). Social media enable citizens, for instance, to launch scandals (Poerksen & Dettel, 2014) by

putting incriminating videos on YouTube, or to get issues on the political agenda by creating a Twitter storm, a strong cascade of supportive tweets that cannot be ignored by the news media and other social actors, including politicians or CEOs under fire (Mandell & Chen, 2016) This makes it relevant to study the specific context in which this spiralling of feedback loops in the news media and social media occurs. Media storms are relevant as power boosts in media scandals (Thompson, 2001), issue attention cycles (Djerf-Pierre, 2012), policy agenda-setting, and the social amplification of risk (Pidgeon et al., 2003).

As Ulrich Beck stated in his ground-breaking publication *Risk Society* (1992/1986): modern risks generally remain invisible and

> thus only exist in terms of the (scientific and anti-scientific) *knowledge* about them. They can thus be changed, magnified, dramatized or minimized within knowledge, and to that extent are particularly *open to social definition or construction*. Hence the mass media and the scientific and legal professions in charge of defining risk, become key social and political positions (1992: 22-23).

Since the eighties, the topic of risk has developed into several new lines of social research: the social amplification of risk, the role of availability cascades in risk regulation, and the culture of fear.

The social amplification of risk framework (SARF) studies the process in which a specific kind of risk becomes a huge social and political issue with all kinds of ramifications, almost regardless of the 'real' risk defined in terms of scientific assessments (Kasperson et al., 1988). This framework uses the metaphor of amplification to analyse the way various social actors perceive, define, and pass on risk signals. These signals go through several amplification stations, which can decrease or increase the volume of information, and which can change interpretations, symbols, and images of the risk. The mass media are among the important stations of amplification, often feeding the growing concern or even outrage among the public, which inevitably creates new political realities. Later research showed that the sender-message-receiver model is much too simple to deal with the complex interaction between citizens, interest groups, public health agencies, politics, media, and science. (Pidgeon et al., 2003; Murdock et al., 2003). Furthermore, the theory was criticized for the same bias as the moral panic literature, i.e. the presumption that society develops an exaggerated view of the potential risk and responds in a disproportional way (Murdock et al., 2003).

A second line of research is centred on the concept of *availability cascades* in relation to risk issues. A key publication in this field is 'Availability Cascades and Risk Regulation' by Kuran and Sunstein. They analyse how availability cascades may eventually lead to unnecessary, ineffective, even counterproductive policies and risk regulations. They define an availability cascade as 'a self-reinforcing process of collective belief formation by which an expressed perception triggers a chain reaction that gives the perception increasing plausibility through its rising availability in public discourse' (Kuran & Sunstein, 1999: 683). This process can lead to mass anxiety ('mass scares') about risk with no scientifically proven hazards. Its basis is psychological, but its elaboration is sociological: how do these cognitive biases develop into a social process creating new policy and regulations?

The third risk-related field of research focused on fear. The social amplification of risk mirrors the amplification of fear, varying from fear of crime, fear of immigrants, to fear of terrorism. Studying the construction of fear – or what some scholars typify as a 'culture of fear' (Furedi, 1997; Glassner, 1999) – is part of the media logic approach, developed by David Altheide (Altheide & Michalowski, 1999 and Altheide, 2002). The culture of fear is primarily defined as a discursive formation: mass media and popular culture employ an entertainment oriented media logic, in which the problem frame promotes risk and danger as fear (Altheide, 2002: 188). While there is often a gap between the widespread fear and the stable and declining trends in, for example, crime and violence, media increasingly make fear a central topic. At the same time, claims makers and moral entrepreneurs feed this discourse to promote their interests. According to critics, the culture of fear approach has a tendency to focus on the content of media and popular culture, and less on audiences and how they deal with this flow of fear (Critcher & Pearce, 2013).

New studies focus more on the struggle over framing and the relevant power structures in which some actors have more leverage than others. With the arrival of the social networks online, it became inevitable to acknowledge that the audience – formerly seen as passive receivers of media messages – had become very active and capable of gaining symbolic power through social media (Chung, 2011).

Intensive media attention may create political urgency and even crises, resulting in policy punctuations – radical changes in the political agenda (Wallgrave & Vliegenthart, 2010). A model that tries to explain these sudden turnovers is the punctuated equilibrium theory (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), which states that 'long periods of stability are interspersed with bursts of frenetic activity', leading to new frames and paradigms. 'Media storms

are the media correlates of this pattern', according to Boydstun et al. (2014) in their study about media storms and sudden surges in media attention. Closely related is the concept of 'media tsunami', introduced by Giasson, Brin, and Sauvageau in 2010, to describe how the media amplify the importance of a new issue through successive waves of press coverage that gain in intensity and magnitude over time. In doing so, they can manufacture social 'crises' (Giasson, Brin & Sauvageau, 2010).

Another line of research explores more at meta-level the cultural and rhetorical impact of the use of the word 'hype' in public debate and discourse. Adam Auch explores how 'hyped' is being used as an accusation to dismiss a rival claim or position, often with very little further justification (Auch, 2013). At the same time, hyped claims seem more important, or more worth engaging with, than non-hyped claims. Devon Powers analyses hype at the cultural level: she defines hype as 'a state of anticipation generated through the circulation of promotion, resulting in a crisis of value'. Hype increases the expectations of the audience to such a level that disappointment is inevitable (Powers, 2012): 'The increasing speed and evolving avenues of media technology [...] intensify hype's essential character and accentuate the fundamental problems of publicity that hype pinpoints' (Powers, 2012: 867).

This overview of new developments would not be complete without a reference to interdisciplinary economics. Swiss researcher Bartosz Wilczek recently published a study (Wilczek, 2016) that establishes a new framework for integrating economic theories on herd behaviour with results from journalism and communication studies. 'It discusses how journalists' scoops based on whistleblowing trigger herd behaviour among their peers and how social media users and PR experts engage in these cascades by shaping journalists news agendas'. Wilczek rightly calls for more interdisciplinary research strategies, applying methods from journalism and mass communication research as well as from behavioural economics, to explore the social phenomena resulting from aggregated outcomes of individual decision-making.

Preview of the book

As this brief academic history on media hype shows, there has been a steady and growing flow of research on self-reinforcing news dynamics and the impact of news waves on politics, social problems, and public opinion. The aim of this book is to bring together many of the above-mentioned scholars

together in one book. It presents a varied collection of current and new studies, covering different theoretical perspectives and methodologies as well as detailed case studies. With thirty-one authors from eleven different countries, this book has a truly international scope. Chapters are not only about international hypes and online storms, but also about specific national events, crises, and media. The book is organized into four thematic parts, although strict lines are hard to draw with authors touching upon the central topics.

Part I. *Theory, concepts, and methodology* addresses the fundamental theoretical questions regarding the definition of media hype and social amplification and the problem of disproportionality and exaggeration.

The Italian sociologist Marcello Maneri analyses in Chapter 1 (*Media hypes, moral panics and the ambiguous nature of facts. Urban security as discursive formation*) the problematic relationship between media hypes and the question of whether or not there is a real problem 'out there'. Using a rape panic in Rome as an example, Maneri shows how public concern about security is created by claims makers, media, and politics. and how this rhetoric creates new realities. Consequently, any claim of disproportionality becomes extremely difficult. The external indicators –normally used to confront public concern or media coverage – not only reflect the changes in definitions, but also create and reinforce them as well.

Chapter 2 (*News waves in a changing media landscape 1950-2014*) details how a Dutch group of researchers related to the Dutch News Monitor, Wouter van Atteveldt, Nel Ruigrok, Kasper Welbers, and Carina Jacobi, took on the phenomenal task of studying news waves over an extensive period of sixty-five years, from 1950 through 2014, in one particular Dutch newspaper, *De Telegraaf*, the newspaper with the largest circulation throughout those years. By using topic modelling methods, they were able to analyse about four million newspaper articles from these sixty-five years, measuring the amount, duration, and size of media hypes. Did news production routines change under the influence of the professionalization and commercialization of the press, as predicted by mediatization theories? And is there a shift from hard to soft news? The results are surprisingly counterintuitive: there is no increase in news waves and its shapes also turn out to be different. The authors justly point out the lack of a gold standard definition as a problem for validating the method used.

Chapter 3 (*The dynamics of media attention to issues. Towards standardizing measures, dimensions, and profiles*), written by the German researcher Stefan Geiß, explores in-depth the methodological questions that arise

when the pivotal aspects of issue dynamics have to be translated into a set of measurable variables, dimensions, or types. This chapter is a follow-up of his earlier mentioned paper on the shape of news waves. On the basis of criteria like spike momentum, issue baseline, spike frequency, and spike oscillation, he is able to profile types of issues: routine issues, flatline issues, struggling issues, launching issues, and bursting issues. This is a fruitful framework for studying explosive news waves and their impact on issue careers in the public domain.

Chapter 4 (*Hype, argumentation and scientific dissemination*) has a more philosophical approach. The Canadian philosopher Adam Auch focuses on what he describes as science hype, the sometimes alarmist, exaggerated, and hyperbolic media coverage of stunning discoveries or so-called revolutionary breakthroughs in science. Hyping science in this way may undermine trust in science and scientist, because it triggers false hope, which is inevitably followed by disappointment. Auch also addresses the problem of value judgements, defining hype more in terms of the way messages are received by audiences. Several recommendations are offered to counter science hype.

Part II. *Anatomy of self-reinforcing dynamics: Case studies* offers four case studies from Belgium, Canada, Denmark, and Portugal respectively.

In Chapter 5 (*The mechanisms of media storms. Uncertainty correlates with imitation*), the Belgian political scholar Anne Hardy, part of a research group that has previously published on media storms (Boydstun et al.), explores what is going on behind the scenes during a media storm. One round of interviews with reporters was conducted immediately after the terrorist attacks on the Brussels airport and subway on 22 March 2016. This chapter analyses the different motivations behind the news decisions, taken under pressure during a calamity. Media storm coverage lowers the thresholds for any related news and reinforces imitation, i.e. following the decisions of other news desks. But uncertainty is the intervening factor here: when uncertainty about what to do is low, so is imitation. The conclusion that uncertainty correlates with imitation is an important specification of media storm theory.

In Chapter 6, (*Much ado about nothing. Five media hypes in a comparative perspective*), the Danish professor in media and communication Charlotte Wien challenges another aspect of the media hype theory, the presumed impact of the media on the political agenda and government polices. Based on a comparative case study of five Danish media hypes on failing care centres for the elderly, she concludes that the media's influence is limited

and that hardly any political actions can be linked directly to the successive news waves. She also specifies the anatomy of the media hype by stressing the important role of sources and experts, who tend to deflate the hype by explaining the complexity of the case. This is comparable with the end of the euphoric stage in the issue attention cycle posited by Downs (1972).

In Chapter 7 (*From media wave to media tsunami. The 'Charter of Values' debate in Quebec, 2012-2014*), Colette Brin, Thierry Giasson, and Marie-Michèle Sauvageau from the Quebec research group on political communication apply their concept of media tsunami to a new study on the 'reasonable accommodations' controversy in Quebec. They show how the media, through successive waves of press coverage, each gaining in intensity and magnitude, amplified the importance of the issue of cultural accommodations for minorities and fuelled issues concerning diversity and integration. In this chapter, they highlight the decisive role of political actors in creating this tsunami. The 'charter of values' intended to end conflicts on accommodations failed and instead stimulated historic fears of cultural endangerment among the French majority in Quebec.

In Chapter 8, Gonçalo Pereira Rosa from the Portuguese Research Centre for Communication and Culture describes in detail in *How a small-scale panic turns into an unstoppable news wave about mass mugging on the beach* how the media, in interaction with political actors, turned a small incident on a Lisbon beach into a mass 'dragnet' attack carried out by black perpetrators. The incident was immediately described as an imitation of the mass muggings on Brazilian beaches, popularly known as 'arrastões'. Once this prototype was activated, any debunking information was ignored. Until saturation sets in, the media only tend to integrate information that is compatible with the dominant frame. This case study reveals the power of information circularity, especially when minority groups are involved associated a priori with deviant behaviour.

Part III. *Impact on issues, crises, and public opinion* explores the impact of intensive news waves on the construction of social issues and public opinion.

The Korean American policy research professor Ik Jae Chung reconstructs in his Chapter (*Dynamics of media hype. Interactivity of the media and the public*) the successive news waves in South Korea amplifying a risk issue: the building of a new tunnel with a high-speed railway. Social actors and hunger strikes played an important role in this process in terms of getting the attention of the media and the public. Online newspapers and the website message boards of social organizations worked as an open

arena for risk communication. The interaction between the media and the public apparently boosts amplification. Media hypes are often seen as solely self-referential, but Chung's conclusion is that, especially in an online communication environment, public attention or reaction to media hype is clearly a critical factor in explaining the beginning and the process of media hype.

Chapter 10 (*Why and how media storms affect front-line workers. Scandalized Danish crèches as an example*), contains a question that is often mentioned in debates on media waves, but is seldom the actual object of empirical research: what is the impact on professionals working in institutions scrutinized and pilloried by the media? Danish scholars Pernille Carlsson and Christian Elmelund-Præstekær set up a case study among pre-school teachers responding to scandalizing publications about day care centres as 'loveless storage' of toddlers. Although the teachers feel hurt professionally, the results also show that the public debate may serve as a positive contribution to reflection and improvement. Remarkably, the parents did not criticize their own pre-school workers, but showed support. However, they were still worried and needed reassurance. This chapter offers new theories on the direct and indirect impact of media storms at street level, still quite uncharted territory.

In Chapter 11 (*Media Hypes and Public Opinion. Human interest frames and hype fatigue*), the Norwegian researchers Audun Beyer and Tine Figenschou focus on the way the public evaluated the media hype following the planned deportation of a young, Russian immigrant. The young woman became the voice of illegal immigrants and, for the media, the personification of an immigration success story. Her arrest triggered a massive news wave lasting two weeks. The media framed these events mainly as a human interest story, focusing on the drama of the inevitable eviction and portraying her personal struggle in a highly emotional manner. Contrary to expectations, the Norwegian public turned out to be very critical of the coverage and, in particular, of the volume of the coverage, which was extensive. Moreover, people criticized the scope of the coverage focusing only on one person and taking sides in favour of the 'victim'. This shows that human interest stories may trigger hype fatigue among a critical public.

The last chapter in this part (*News waves generating attentionscapes. Opportunity or a public waste of time?*), from Estonian scholars Marianne Paimre and Halliki Harro-Loit, evaluates the impact of 'attentionscapes', generated by successive news waves, for the public debate on drugs and drugs trafficking. The long-term discourse on drugs has changed considerably: Estonian drugs smugglers serving long sentences in foreign countries

initially received positive support, but later the negative criminal aspects dominated. The attentionscapes created more awareness on the drug problem and influenced the policy agenda on drugs. Despite this, the subdiscourses that constructed drugs couriers as victims survived for a long time.

In Part IV (*Interactivity: The role of the social media*), the focus is on the new hybrid media landscape in which news media continuously interact with social media and the active audience. The German researcher Annie Waldherr is specialized in using computer simulation models to analyse the dynamics of issue attention and news waves. In her chapter (*Modelling issue attention dynamics in a hybrid media system*), she tries to incorporate the rise of the social media in her earlier developed agent-based model of the media area. By varying aspects such as heterogeneity of agents, attention thresholds, and local or global visions, she is able to analyse the dynamics of issue attention. Steep bursts of attention, for example, require quite homogeneous populations such as Twitter publics dominated by journalists. On the other hand, conditions such as lower diversity and local vision reduce the probability of waves. The agent-based simulation model offers new ways to explore the consequences of the expanding hybrid media system for the issue attention dynamics.

The next chapter (*You won't believe how co-dependent they are. Media hype and the interaction of news media, social media, and the user*), continues the exploration of the new media landscape. German researcher and journalist, Vivian Roese analyses how social media changed the news media and how their co-dependency impacts news flows and hypes. Social media have increased the viral potential of all kinds of news topics, including trivial events that previously would never have reached the thresholds of the prevailing news values. Other aspects such as emotion and *shareability* are often decisive in these accidental media hypes. Social media act as news providers, but, because their output is based on algorithms, the scope is limited and adapted to the previous choices of the users. The information flows in these filter bubbles may strongly deviate from what news media currently report on, fuelling distrust of the mainstream media.

Andrea Cerase and Claudia Santoro give a perfect example of the interaction between media and the social media by analysing the impact of racial hoaxes. In Chapter 15 (*From racial hoaxes to media hypes. Fake news' real consequences*), they show how these online hoaxes, designed to show how immigrants threaten public health, national security, and the state budget, penetrate the media and politics, sometimes triggering media hypes. Their

research is based on a collection of eighty-five hoaxes spanning two years, three of which are studied in detail. In forty-two cases, the hoax triggered the dynamics of media hype, while in others hoaxes intervened at a later stage, to exploit the media hype. Even in cases where the media succeed in debunking fake news, the hoax may still have consequences in public discourse. Part of the success of these hoaxes is the fact that they adopt the style and structure of the regular news report, generating an air of plausibility.

The final chapter (*Reputational damage in Twitter #hijack. Factors, dynamics, and response strategies for crowd sourced campaigns*), written by a Singapore-based research group – comprising Augustine Pang, Jeremiah Icanh Lim Limsico, Lishan Phong, Bernadette Joy Lopez Lareza, and Sim Yee Low – presents five international cases in which Twitter campaigns were hijacked, triggering negative firestorms and resulting in serious reputational damage. This chapter examines the dynamics of these hijacks and their breeding grounds: wrong timing, simmering issues and anger, poor choice of hashtags, and opportunities for activists. Hijacks tended to peak within hours of the launch, aggravated by influential Twitter users, internet activists, and online media interest. The authors discussed response strategies that organizations under fire can employ.

Reflecting on the chapters in this book as a whole, I am convinced that the variety in topics, case studies, and research questions will be useful for scholars, students, and professionals wondering what the drivers are for bursting attention waves, media hypes or Twitter storms in the new hybrid media landscape. While circumstances may differ, the fundamental research questions remain the same, hence the importance of having knowledge of the theoretical history and research into self-reinforcing news dynamics.

References

Altheide, David L. (1985). *Media power.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Altheide, David L. (2002). *Creating fear: News and the construction of crisis*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Altheide, David L. & Robert P. Snow (1979). *Media logic.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Altheide, David L. & Sam Michalowski (1999). 'Fear in the news: A Discourse of Control'. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 40 (3): 475-503.

Auch, Adam (2013). 'Virtuous argumentation and the challenges of hype'. OSSA Conference Archive. Paper 12.

Baumgartner, Frank R. & Bryan D. Jones (1993). *Agendas and instability in American Politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Beck, Ulrich (1992). *Risk society: Toward a new modernity.* London: Sage. Original: *Risikogesellschaft. Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne* (1986). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Best, Joel (1999). *Random violence. How we talk about new crimes and new victims*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Beyer, Audun & Tine Ustad Figenschou (2014). 'Human-interest fatigue: Audience evaluations of a massive emotional story'. *International Journal of Communication*, 8: 1944-1963.

Boydstun, Amber E., Hardy, Anne & Stefaan Walgrave (2014). 'Two faces of media attention: Media storms vs general coverage'. *Political Communication*, 31 (4): 509-531.

Büttner, Vivian (2015). *Akzidentielle Medienhypes. Entstehung, Dynamik und mediale Verbreitung*. Berlin: Springer VS.

Chung, Ik Jae (2011). 'Social amplification of risk in the internet environment'. *Risk Analysis*, 31 (12): 1883-1896.

Critcher, Chas (2008). 'Moral panic analysis: Past, present and future'. *Sociology Compass* 2 (4): 1127-1144.

Critcher, Chas & Julia Pearce (2013). 'A missing dimension: The social psychology of moral panics'. In: *The Ashgate research companion to moral panics*. Charles Krinsky (ed.): 371-387. Abingdon: Routledge.

Djerf-Pierre, Monika (2012). 'When attention drives attention: Issue dynamics in environmental news reporting over five decades'. *European Journal of Communication*, 27 (3): 291-304.

Donsbach, Wolfgang (2004). 'Psychology of news decisions. Factors behind journalists' professional behavior'. *Journalism*, 5 (2): 131-157.

Downs, Anthony (1972). 'Up and down with ecology: The issue-attention cycle'. *Public Interest*, 28 (3): 38-50.

Egelkamp, Margarethe M. (2002). *Inflation von gewalt? Strafrechtliche und kriminologische Analysen von Qualifikationsentscheidungen in den Niederlanden und Deutschland*. Groningen: University of Groningen.

Festinger, Leon (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Fishman, Mark (1978). 'Crime waves as ideology'. *Social Problems*, 25 (5): 531-543.

Franke, Herman (1986). 'Kustgeweld of mediageweld?', *Intermediair*, 24, 13 June and 'Rampsferen en paniekstemmingen', *Intermediair*, 25, 20 June.

Furedi, Frank (1997). *The culture of fear: Risk taking and the morality of low expectations.* London: Cassell.

Garland, David (2008). 'On the concept of moral panic'. *Crime Media Culture* 4 (1): 9-30.

Geiß, Stefan (2010). 'The shape of news waves. How the intensity of coverage of news events develops over time'. Paper for the conference of the Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR) in Chicago. Mainz: Johannes Gutenberg-Universität.

Giasson, Thierry, Brin, Colette & Marie-Michèle Sauvageau (2010). 'Le Bon, la Brute et le Raciste. Analyse de la couverture médiatique de l'opinion publique pendant la 'crise' des accommodements raisonnables au Québec'. *Revue Canadienne de science politique*, 43 (2): 379-406.

Glassner, Barry (1999). *The culture of fear: Why Americans are afraid of the wrong things*. New York: Basic Books.

Kahneman, Daniel (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow.* London/New York: Penguin.

Kasperson, Roger E., Renn, Ortwin, Slovic, Paul, Brown, Halina S., Emel, Jacque, Goble, Robert Kasperson, Jeanne X & Samuel Ratick (1988). 'The social amplification of risk: A conceptual framework'. *Risk Analysis*, 8 (2): 177-187.

Kepplinger, Hans Mathias & Johanna Habermeier (1995). 'The impact of key events on the presentation of reality'. *European Journal of Communication*, 10 (3): 371-390.

Kepplinger, Hans Mathias, Brosius, Hans-Bernd & Joachim F. Staab (1991). 'A theory of mediated conflicts'. *European Journal of Communication*, 6: 263-290

Kepplinger, Hans Mathias, Frühauf, Werner & Michael Hachenberg (1977). 'Struktur und Funktion eines publizistischen Konflikts. Die Auseinandersetzung um Heinrich Bölls Artikel 'Will Ulrike Gnade oder freies Geleit?'' *Publizistik*, 22: 14-34.

Kuran, Timur & Cass R. Sunstein (1999). 'Availability cascades and risk regulation'. *Stanford Law Review*, 51 (4): 683-768.

Mandell, Hinda & Gina M. Chen (eds) (2016). *Scandal in a digital age*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Maneri, Marcello (2013). 'From media hypes to moral panics, theoretical and methodological tools'. In: Julian Petley, Chas Critcher, Jason Hughes (eds), *Moral panics in the contemporary world*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 171-193.

Mazzoleni, Gianpietro & Sergio Splendore (2015). 'Media logic'. In: P. Moy (ed.), *Oxford Bibliographies in Communication*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Murdock, Graham, Petts, Judith & Tom Horlick-Jones (2003). 'After amplification, rethinking the role of the media in risk communication'. In: Nick Pidgeon, Roger E. Kasperson, Paul Slovic (eds), *The social amplification of risk.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 156-179.

Pang, Augustine (2013). 'Social media hype in times of crises: Nature, characteristics and impact on organizations'. *Asia Media Pacific Educator,* 23 (2): 309-336.

Pfeffer, Jürgen, Zorbach, Thomas & Kathleen Carley (2014). 'Understanding online firestorms: Negative word-of-mouth dynamics in social media networks'. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 20 (1-2): 117-128.

Pidgeon, Nick, Kasperson, Roger E. & Paul Slovic (eds) (2003). *The social amplification of risk.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Poerksen, Bernhard & Hanne Detel (2014). *The unleashed scandal: The end of control in the digital age*. Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic.

Powers, Devon (2012). 'Notes on hype'. *International Journal of Communication*, 6: 857-873.

Ruigrok, Nel, Scholten, Otto, Krijt, Martijn & Joep Schaper (2009). 'Fitna en de media. Een brongerichte media-hype'. *Tijdschrift voor Communicatiewetenschap*, 37 (3): 238-253.

Stack, Steven (2003). 'Media coverage as a risk factor in suicide'. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 57 (4): 238-240.

Steffens, Lincoln (1928). 'How I made a crime wave'. *The Bookman*, December 1928: 416-419.

Thompson, John B. (2000). *Political scandal: Power and visibility in the media age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Vasterman, Peter (2004). *Mediahype*. Amsterdam: Aksant.

Vasterman, Peter (2005). 'Media-hype, self-reinforcing news waves, journalistic standards and the construction of social problems'. *European Journal of Communication* 20 (4): 508-530.

Vasterman, Peter (2015). 'Mediahype: de turbo van de nieuwsvoorziening. Kenmerken van zelfversterkende processen in het nieuws'. In: Jo Bardoel & Huub Wijfjes (eds), *Journalistieke cultuur in Nederland*, 183-206. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Waldherr, Annie (2012). *Die Dynamik der Medienaufmerksamkeit: Ein Simulationsmodell*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Waldherr, Annie (2014). 'Emergence of news waves: A social simulation approach'. *Journal of Communication*, 64 (5): 852-873.

Walgrave, Stefaan & Rens Vliegenthart (2010). 'Why are policy agendas punctuated? Friction and cascading in parliament and mass media in Belgium'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 17(8): 1147-1180.

Wien, Charlotte & Christian Elmelund-Præstekær (2009). 'An anatomy of media hypes: Developing a model for the dynamics and structure of intense media coverage of single issues'. *European Journal of Communication*, 24 (2): 183-201.

Wilczek, Bartosz (2016). 'Herd behaviour and path dependence in news markets: Towards an economic theory of scandal formation'. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics* 28 (2): 1-31.

About the author

Peter Vasterman is media sociologist and assistant professor emeritus Media and Journalism at the Department of Media Studies of the University of Amsterdam. Defended his dissertation *Mediahype* in 2004 at the University of Amsterdam. Main research topics: media hypes, risk and media, media scandals, and mediated crises. Published in several Journals on risk topics (disasters; pandemics, UMTS and fine particles); digital scandals; copycat and cry wolf; Facebook riots; child (sexual) abuse and media framing; Journalism studies in the Netherlands, etc. He is a contributor to the Dutch daily, *NRC Handelsblad*.