

# **Newswork in transition: An ethnography of Netwerk24**

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## **Declaration**

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December 2018

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## Abstract

This study explores how journalists at Netwerk24, as Afrikaans news website *and* national newsroom, experience and describe newswork during a time of disruption and transition.

Situated within the field of journalism studies, this newsroom ethnography analyses how newsroom culture is structured by, and structures, the way journalists interact with each other and with non-human actors, such as digital media technologies. A thorough literature review indicates that digital media technologies can, on the one hand, change newswork on a structural level. On the other hand, such technologies can also, often simultaneously, become naturalised parts of existing newsroom practices and routines.

What becomes clear, however, is that a technocentric view of changes to the newsroom is too limited, and that the role of culture and context should also be considered. As such, a novel theoretical framework is used in order to address the historical dispositions that influence journalists' actions, while simultaneously addressing the current associations that develop amongst journalists and between journalists and the so-called material "stuff" they use during newswork.

The study thus relies on a combination of the basic tenets of Bourdieu's field theory, more specifically the professional journalistic habitus, and Latour's actor-network theory. The argument pursued in this study is that journalists who were and are socialised in a specific professional manner into newsroom culture are actors within an unstable news-producing network; a network where digital media technologies also play an active role.

By using an ethnographic research design, this exploration of Netwerk24 adds to existing studies from *within* the newsroom; an approach that allows the researcher to open the so-called "black box" of newswork. More than 250 hours' worth of participant observation field notes from four different geographical newsroom offices, in combination with semi-structured interviews with purposively selected research participants contribute to a better understanding of what happens where news is produced for Netwerk24. More importantly, the analysis of findings – using ATLAS.ti version 7 – provides insight into *why* the cultures, practices and routines at Netwerk24 are structured the way they are.

The research findings reveal that digital media technologies (such as Facebook and WhatsApp), while key to newswork, are not the main drivers of change and disruption within the Netwerk24 newsroom. These technologies enable, or force, the journalists to be multi-skilled and thus add to their workload. Yet the Netwerk24 journalists appear to have accepted and incorporated these non-human actors quite naturally into their newswork.

What is of more concern for the journalists are the culture and communication in the newsroom. A lack of clarity about radical changes, the influence of specific newsroom personalities, an inability to share the vision for Netwerk24 due to a perceived lack of internal communication, and other challenges to newswork seem to cause more uneasiness amongst journalists than technological disruptions.

The study thus concludes that while most journalists are willing to adapt to change and accept the uncertainty of a future in journalism, they often hold on to traditional conceptualisations of journalism and crave to know where they fit into the Netwerk24 newswork network.

## Opsomming

Hierdie studie stel ondersoek in na hoe joernaliste by Netwerk24, 'n Afrikaanse nuuswebwerf *en* nasionale nuuskantoor, nuuswerk ervaar en beskryf gedurende 'n tyd van ontwinging en oorgang.

Hierdie nuuskantoor-etnografie, binne joernalistiekstudies as navorsingsveld, ontleed die strukturering van nuuskantoor-kultuur en hoe dit joernaliste se interaksie met mekaar en digitale mediategnologieë beïnvloed. 'n Literatuuroorsig dui aan dat digitale mediategnologieë nuuswerk enersyds op 'n strukturele vlak kan verander. Sulke tegnologieë kan andersyds ook, dikwels gelyktydig, ingeburger word binne bestaande nuuskantoorpraktyke en -roetines.

Dit is egter duidelik dat 'n tegnologie-gesentreerde uitkyk op veranderinge binne die nuuskantoor té beperkend is. Die rol van kultuur en konteks moet ook oorweeg word. Derhalwe word die historiese ingesteldhede wat joernaliste se aksies beïnvloed asook die huidige verbintenisse tussen joernaliste onderling en tussen joernaliste en dít wat hulle nodig het vir nuuswerk in 'n nuwe teoretiese raamwerk ondersoek.

Die studie maak dus staat op 'n kombinasie van die basiese beginsels van Bourdieu se veldteorie – en spesifiek die professionele joernalistieke habitus – en Latour se agent-netwerk teorie. Die argument wat in dié studie aangevoer word, is dat joernaliste professioneel op 'n spesifieke wyse binne die nuuskantoor-kultuur ingelyf word op 'n manier wat stabiliteit bevorder. Maar terselfdertyd is die joernaliste ook deel van 'n onstabiele nuus-vervaardigingsnetwerk; 'n netwerk waar digitale mediategnologieë ook 'n aktiewe rol speel.

Deur die gebruik van 'n etnografiese navorsingsontwerp, dra hierdie verkenning van Netwerk24 by tot bestaande studies van *binne* die nuuskantoor; 'n benadering wat die navorser in staat stel om die sogenaamde “swart boks” van nuuswerk oop te maak. Die data is onder meer ingesamel deur veldnotas gebaseer op meer as 250 uur se deelnemende waarneming binne vier verskillende geografiese nuuskantore. Voorts is semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met 'n doelgerigte steekproef van navorsingsdeelnemers gevoer. Die bevindinge dra by tot 'n beter begrip van wat gebeur waar en wanneer nuus vir Netwerk24 geskep word. Meer belangrik nóg, verskaf die ontleding van bevindinge – deur middel van ATLAS.ti weergawe 7 – insig oor *hoekom* die kulture, praktyke en roetines by Netwerk24 op 'n sekere manier gestruktureer is.

Die navorsingsbevindinge toon aan dat digitale mediategnologieë (soos Facebook en WhatsApp) van sleutelbelang vir nuuswerk is, maar dat dié tegnologie nie die hoofdryfkragte van verandering en ontwinging binne die Netwerk24-nuuskantoor is nie. Dié tegnologieë stel joernaliste in staat, of dwing hulle, om meer vaardighede te ontwikkel wat gevolglik tot hul werkklas bydra. Desondanks het

die Netwerk24-joernaliste klaarblyklik dié tegnologie relatief gemaklik aanvaar en ingesluit by hul nuuswerk.

Die kultuur en kommunikasie in die nuuskantoor is van groter belang vir die joernaliste as tegnologiese vernuwings en veranderinge. Uitdagings sluit in 'n gebrek aan duidelikheid oor ingrypende strukturele veranderinge, die invloed van spesifieke nuuskantoor-persoonlikhede, en 'n onvermoë om in die visie vir Netwerk24 te deel weens belewenis van 'n gebrek aan interne kommunikasie.

Hierdie studie kom dus tot die gevolgtrekking dat die meerderheid joernaliste bereid is om te verander en dat hulle die onsekerheid van 'n toekoms in joernalistiek aanvaar. Desondanks hou hulle dikwels steeds vas aan tradisionele opvattinge oor joernalistiek en smag hulle daarna om te weet hoe hulle by Netwerk24 se nuuswerk-netwerk inpas.

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*Soli Deo Gloria*

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Every culture has its typical beliefs, norms and values, but these are in constant flux. The culture may transform itself in response to changes in its environment or through interaction with neighbouring cultures. But cultures also undergo transitions due to their own internal dynamics. Even a completely isolated culture in an ecologically stable environment cannot avoid change.

Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Motivation for study

I worked for nearly eight years as journalist at two Afrikaans newspapers in the Media24 group, a subsidiary of the media conglomerate Naspers. When I started my career in 2002 at the daily newspaper *Die Burger*, the newsroom had a very traditional structure. Cell phones, email and computer-based reporting, such as using internet databases to find information, had only recently become part of the daily newsroom routines. Yet, I would agree with Plesner (2009:617), who studied the uptake of email, Google and cell phones by journalists, that these information communication technologies had quickly become “effective, but seamless” parts of newswork.<sup>1</sup>

By the time I left the Sunday newspaper *Rapport*, and with it Media24, at the end of 2009, what could be called a new wave of technologies was making inroads into local newsrooms. Journalists were increasingly using social sharing sites such as Facebook and Twitter – on both a personal and professional level. My first encounter with Twitter was during the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai. Local citizens used Twitter to share information about events as they were unfolding at the different attack sites. These communications were picked up by the traditional media outlets and included in mainstream news reporting. I also incorporated tweets for the first time in my news stories for *Rapport* during this terrorist siege.

My interest in the use of social media was thus sparked by my real-life experiences in the newsroom. I subsequently explored the professional use of Twitter and Facebook by journalists at the national weeklies *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*, specifically in my master’s thesis (Jordaan, 2012).

Since I completed that study, the profession and practice of journalism have increasingly become intertwined with digital media technologies, defined here in brief as “[i]nternet-based communication technologies and information systems” (Boyer, 2013:5). These digital media technologies have become naturalised<sup>2</sup> in local newsrooms and in the lives of their audiences to such an extent that media companies have been urged to rethink and restructure the way they do newswork and present their journalistic products. This has also been the case for the Afrikaans newspapers in the Media24 stable. In August 2014 the company launched Netwerk24 as the digital home for its main Afrikaans

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware of the fact that this term also appears as two separate words in some sources. For the sake of uniformity, this study will define and use “newswork” as one word. Newswork is defined here in brief as “news as work” (Deuze & Marjoribanks, 2009:555), in other words referring to the efforts of professional journalists.

<sup>2</sup> Kunelius and Ruusunoksa (2008:668) explain that similar to economy, “technological development is mostly a taken-for-granted, *naturalised* force” – also in newsrooms [own emphasis].

newspaper titles, *Beeld*, *Die Burger*, *Volksblad* and *Rapport*. The individual websites of these publications were redirected to the combined platform, and the course was set for a gradual overhaul of what could be called a more traditional approach to newswork at Media24's Afrikaans news publications. Since the launch of Netwerk24, this internet-based publication, and the newsrooms that provide content for it, have undergone several changes; some insignificant and others far-reaching.

The introduction and evolution of Netwerk24 raise several questions about how the Afrikaans journalists at Media24 experience and approach newswork in a digital-first, national newsroom. How do these journalists negotiate the tensions between their experience of print-based newswork, and what is expected of them in an online newsroom? How have these expectations been communicated to them? To what extent is their approach to newswork dictated by their use of digital media technologies? How do the journalists experience and describe their roles within the broader news network at Netwerk24? What do they think about the future of Afrikaans journalism? These and other related questions regarding newswork in the 21<sup>st</sup> century inform this study.

I have observed changes in both newswork and news content since Netwerk24 first went live as web-based publication. Formerly print-only journalists are now expected to provide digital content for this website on a daily basis. Journalists tweet about events as they happen or provide content for minute-by-minute live blogs about breaking news.

One example that illustrates this need to be multi-skilled, was produced by Elsabé Brits, science reporter at Netwerk24 (and formerly at *Die Burger*), in February 2017. Brits attended an operation by a urogynecologist at the Chris Barnard Memorial Hospital in Cape Town. The resulting publication included a feature-length online article, photos and a video – all produced by the journalist herself (Brits, 2017a). Another printed version of this article was published a few days later in *By*, a Saturday supplement to *Die Burger* (Brits, 2017b).

My own research (Jordaan, 2012), however, confirmed that not all journalists adapt as easily to the use of digital media technologies and the resulting changes in their newswork. I am interested in finding out whether the way the journalists are professionally socialised into this new newsroom culture influences their perceptions of their own role within the news network, as well as their use of technology as part of their newswork.

I believe that studying the understanding Netwerk24 journalists have of their own role within the broader news network, as well as the expectations created by this network, will shed light on the tensions between traditional and new conceptions of newswork, cultures and practices of Afrikaans journalism at Media24.

## 1.2 Research problem

It has been established that journalism as industry and profession is under pressure from a variety of quarters: from a decline in audience figures and advertising revenue, to the influence of digital media technologies and the shifting boundaries of what constitutes professional newswork (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Finlay, 2017; Mitchell & Holcomb, 2016; Mitchell, 2015; Daniels, 2014). It would be erroneous to ascribe responsibility for the forced changes faced by journalism as industry, and by the journalists themselves, to just one factor. I therefore agree with Paulussen (2016:325) that “it is impossible to single out one factor as the key determinant in shaping innovation processes” within journalism and the newsroom. What is clear is that journalists are facing an uncertain future. Or as Brock (2013:107) so eloquently argues:

Periods of stability are the exception and not the rule... Journalism today can be better described as a living experiment than a ruinous decline. But that rests on a hope that what is of value in journalism can be adapted to new conditions. We can be certain that the future will not resemble the past.

South African journalism and journalists have not been immune to the disruptions faced by the industry world-wide. As argued in the 2015/2016 South African *State of the newsroom* report:

Clearly economic pressures continue to squeeze the lifeblood out of our newsrooms. These are evident in fewer jobs for journalists, rumours of consolidation at the top end of the industry, the selling off of assets, and the continuing decline in print circulation. (Finlay, 2017:1)

Over a period of ten years (2004-2014), for instance, the circulation of *Beeld* (down by 48.78%) and *Die Burger* (down by 45.75%) decreased dramatically (Moodie, 2015). There is no corresponding data available for *Volksblad*. While newspapers are suffering, their digital media counterparts are not filling the financial void (Nevill, 2017). I would concur with the South African researchers Harber and Krüger (2014:xi) who argue that

... [d]isruption in our newsrooms opens up opportunities as it shakes up institutions and leadership which may have become complacent, rigid and defensive. It can also be challenging and punishing, costing jobs, creating fear and uncertainty and sacrificing skills and experience.

As a result of the uncertainty and changes within the industry, journalism studies researchers have been grappling with questions such as: what is journalism becoming, who is a journalist nowadays, how is journalism currently constructed, and what will the future of journalism be (see for instance: Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Ferrucci & Vos, 2017; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Domingo, Masip & Costera Meijer, 2015; Franklin, 2014). Siegelbaum and Thomas (2016:387) say:

Scholars working in the field of journalism studies... have devoted significant energies in the laudable project of making sense of journalism's present condition, at a time when flux seems to be the only certainty.

Siles and Boczkowski (2012:1384) say while most scholars who study changes to the newspaper industry employ secondary data and quantitative methods, “there have been significantly fewer qualitative analyses of this crisis, including those that assess how industry actors perceive and experience it”. According to Siles and Boczkowski (2012:1384), few investigations have employed participant observation or interviews – as is the case with this study.

Usher (2015:1006) also argues that, while there has been significant scholarship about this so-called crisis of journalism, there has been little qualitative, empirical research on the way journalists perceive the changes in their newsrooms. This view is echoed by Hofstetter and Schoenhagen (2017:47) who say research into the “role of journalists’ practices, norms and values in restructuring processes [is] still limited”.

One could, therefore, argue that there are still some lingering questions about journalists’ perceptions of the way their newswork has been disrupted by structural changes to the newsroom and the introduction of digital media technologies. These questions are especially pertinent in the South African context where studies that explore journalists’ views on an empirical level from *within* the newsroom are rare.

As mentioned above, digital media technologies need not be considered the only cause of what some perceive as the imminent death of journalism. Some might argue that digital media technologies, for instance, enable the proliferation of social media platforms and content that challenge the traditional gatekeeping role of journalism (Tandoc & Vos, 2016). On the other hand, it has been argued that “social media serve as filtering tools for news provided by traditional media” (Steensen, 2016:201). I tend to agree with the latter view, and would argue along with Steensen (2016:202):

Social media are in other words not replacing traditional media. Rather, they are avenues to access, make sense of and distribute traditional journalism,

and they are often used not instead of, but in addition to, traditional mainstream media.

The need for journalism as practice and profession thus remains. In a July 2015 speech delivered at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Die Burger* and Naspers, the chief executive officer of Media24, Esmaré Weideman, also emphasised the need for journalists who produce good journalism. While she acknowledged the growth and change within the industry and its “large” investments in new sources of revenue, new technologies and new business, she emphasised that:

... at the core of an ever-expanding business is our commitment to telling the stories that shape the world South Africans live in, whether in print or on digital platforms. We are unceasingly committed to excellent journalism. It is embedded in the DNA of this company, and will be for the next 100 years.

The introduction and evolution of Netwerk24 mark an important turning point in Afrikaans journalism. Netwerk24 has arguably necessitated changes to the Afrikaans journalists’ newswork in order to adapt to a digital-first newsroom, while at the same time changing long-standing routines, structures and cultures at the newspaper titles that still appear in print format.

I would argue that an exploration of the changing nature of newswork at Netwerk24 would not be complete without the journalists’ own views on the matter. How do journalists feel about the way they are now expected to do their work? How have they adapted to changes in newsroom routines and cultures? How do they feel about the role digital media technologies play in facilitating such changes?

The quest to find answers to these and other questions necessitated visits to the newsrooms where content is produced for Netwerk24. The Netwerk24 journalists, while functioning as a national team that produces content for a shared platform, are scattered across the country. The main newsrooms are situated in Johannesburg and Cape Town, with smaller regional offices in Bloemfontein and Pretoria, and some journalists working by themselves in other provinces such as Limpopo and North-West.

The main assumption of this study is that journalists are professionally socialised into becoming actors in a newsroom network in which digital media technologies also play a decisive role. The description of the journalists’ experiences of their interactions with each other and the technologies they use aids in an understanding of the changing nature of newswork at Netwerk24. Such a study adds value to the growing body of literature on the use of digital media technologies and the changing nature of newswork – especially in the South African context.

## 1.3 Background to the study

### 1.3.1 Preliminary literature review

A literature review indicated that at the time of writing no academic research had been done on Netwerk24 and the way its journalists interact with each other and with digital media technologies. Preliminary searches on academic databases such as EBSCOhost and Google Scholar, as well as the catalogue at the J.S. Gericke Library at Stellenbosch University, further indicated that the theoretical framework proposed for this study had not been applied to an in-depth study of newsrooms in South Africa before. The theoretical framework is a combination of habitus and actor-network theory – as discussed in the introduction to the theoretical framework in section 1.5 below.

Over the past few decades explorations of how technological innovations influence journalism have been carried out within a variety of research paradigms, with a wide selection of methodologies and in various socio-economic contexts (see Chapter 2). Similarly, studies on the changing nature of newswork have also been done from a variety of vantage points (see Chapter 2).

In an early study on technology in the newsroom, Garrison (2000) used surveys to explore American journalists' perceptions of the role of computer-assisted reporting in their newswork. According to Garrison (2000:501), "new technologies can add to existing problems or even create new barriers in newsgathering". Yet, at the same time, he argues that technology-based resources "help increase speed and, sometimes, the accuracy of information being reported" (Garrison, 2000:501).

Garrison's findings confirm the argument that the introduction of novel technologies to newswork has always led to divergent views amongst journalists and scholars alike. Arceneaux and Schmitz Weiss (2010:1274), for instance, argue that every "major form of electronic communication, from the telegraph to the internet, has been greeted with ambivalence". Similarly, Hermans, Vergeer and D'Haenens (2009:138) explain:

The influence of the Internet on news reporting is often formulated in terms of threats to existing, traditional journalism, as well as new opportunities for revitalizing journalistic routines.

In an overview of research on online journalism since the turn of the century, Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2009:563) argue that "the phenomenon of online news production and the study of it are at a kind of liminal moment between tradition and change". According to these researchers, at that stage both journalists and academics still viewed online journalism through traditional lenses (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009:563). Yet, they believed that there were already "glimpses of a

different future” where journalists would embrace novel technologies, such as blogging, and where researchers would accept the potential of theoretical renewal (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009:563). Their vision for the future seems to have been realised to a large extent. Steensen and Ahva (2015), in a more recent overview of journalism studies scholarship, found that there was an increasing theoretical awareness amongst researchers as they studied the move towards and evolution of digital news production. It is noteworthy, however, that they also found that “journalism research is characterised by a perspective that constructs its object of study by drawing on empirical findings” (Steensen & Ahva, 2015:12).

It is therefore clear that Garrison’s call (2000:508) for more research on the uses and effects of the internet has been answered by numerous journalism studies researchers. Singer (2004a:838), for instance, refers to the interest researchers had begun to take in the issue of convergence or “some combination of news staffs, technologies, products, and geography from previously distinct print, television, and online media”.

In her own study, Singer (2004a) investigated the role of internet-based technologies on more traditional print and television newsrooms. One of her findings suggests that print journalists especially were more prone to resistance to newsroom convergence, because they were concerned about “fitting new duties into their newsgathering and production routines” (Singer, 2004a:847). She argues that convergence

... is a catalyst for the resocialization of print journalists, who are being asked not only to change the way they do their work but also to re-examine notions about themselves as journalists. (Singer, 2004a:838)

Similarly, Plesner and Raviola (2016:1045) explain:

In studies of news organizations, it has been pointed out that the question of digital technology appropriation is not just important for technical or economic reasons, but also because it affects organizational structures, work practices, and representations.

I agree with these researchers that technological developments necessitate a re-examination of newsroom culture and professional identities. I would further also argue – in line with Siegelbaum and Thomas (2016:388) – that “we need to go beyond technology and its relationship with journalistic routine”. These authors say the majority of research on newsrooms and how they adapt have been “technocentric by design”, focusing in most cases largely on the diffusion of particular technologies (Siegelbaum & Thomas, 2016:387). In their own study, Siegelbaum and Thomas (2016) explored the

way journalists described their normative societal roles amidst disruptions to their newswork. According to these researchers, “the stress and pressure of the changing newsroom *rupture* journalists’ belief” in their ability to execute what they consider the normative functions of the media (Siegelbaum & Thomas, 2016:401) [original emphasis]. I further interrogate some of the findings in the aforementioned study, such as that newsworkers “maintained commitment in the value of their labor as they simultaneously lose what little control they had over it” (Siegelbaum & Thomas, 2016:401). Furthermore, I explore the somewhat more traditional argument that

[n]ews work is highly routinised and follows recognisable patterns from day to day. Even though the news stories that are processed are about different events, and even though events and themes will change over time, the daily structuring of journalistic practice is very much the same from day to day. (Schultz, 2007a:192)

More recent studies have accepted so-called new<sup>3</sup> technologies as inevitable and necessary parts of newswork. Instead of just looking at technology as a driver of forced changes, researchers have started to shift their focus to perceived changes in professional role conceptions, journalists’ perceptions of their newswork and newsroom culture. Dickinson, Matthews and Saltzis (2013:5), for instance, argue that one cannot understand the implications of change in the global news industry without understanding “what journalists do and how they do it”. I agree with these researchers when they say:

... journalists are obvious and frequent sources of data about the changes that have been taking place in their organizations, but they and their practices have not often been the main objects of study. (Dickinson et al., 2013:5)

This view arguably supports the call for renewing newsroom ethnography (as discussed in section 1.7 below) as a key research design to study what happens in newsrooms and amongst journalists. Or as Usher (2014:41) argues in the introduction to her extensive ethnography of the *New York Times*:

We have many, many studies on the content that comes out of newsrooms, but less understanding of the motivations, decision making, and processes

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<sup>3</sup> Flew (2014:3) argues that digital media technologies are so pervasive in every sphere of our lives that they are “ceasing to be *new* in any meaningful sense of the term” [own emphasis].

behind the creation of that content. Ethnography is especially useful for a number of reasons, because it helps elucidate these elements of newswork.

Paterson, Lee, Saha and Zoellner (2016:5) say while “it is important to recognize the significant differences between media production research historically and today, we must also recognize the continuities”. One aim of this study is thus to complement the rich history of newsroom studies with a novel theoretical framework and by looking at an under-researched site.

As illustrated in this brief literature review, I believe that there is still room for empirical studies on how journalists experience and describe changes to their professional networks, how they are socialised into these networks and how they interact with digital media technologies as part of their daily newswork.

## **1.3.2 Working definitions**

### **1.3.2.1 Newswork**

Deuze and Marjoribanks (2009:555) argue that it is crucial to consider the changing contexts of news as work, which they term “newswork”. These authors write about the “intense uncertainty, insecurity and even crisis” that newswork and “the people who carry out this labor” face (Deuze & Marjoribanks, 2009:557). Deuze (2007:142) similarly argues that it is crucially important to understand the “influences of changing labor conditions, professional cultures, and the appropriation of technologies on the nature of work in journalism” – especially since journalism is so “central to society’s sense of self”. Deuze and Witschge (2018:172) add that incorporating the notion of work into journalism studies “allows us to address the diversity in roles, functions, and people’s backgrounds that exists in media work generally and newswork in particular”.

The call for a better understanding of newswork in times of change has recently been answered by studies that, for instance, explain why and how newsworkers respond to job insecurity (Ekdale, Tully, Harmsen & Singer, 2015), how journalists describe the normative ideals of professional newswork (Siegelbaum & Thomas, 2016) and how journalists who have been laid off view the industry and their work (Sherwood & O’Donnell, 2018).

According to Gravengaard (2011:1067), journalism research that wants to study “*actual* practice in the newsroom... has a long tradition of making sense of professional practices from the perspective of the everyday routines of newswork” [original emphasis]. She refers to early and more contemporary studies of newsrooms (or newsroom ethnographies) that explored such practices and routines, as well

as journalists' perceptions of their own newswork (Gravengaard, 2011:1067). This study continues in the tradition of earlier studies that explored the influence of change on the work journalists do. The emphasis is on describing how journalists themselves view their newswork, and to what extent they feel part of a network in which digital media technologies play a significant – albeit not a deterministic – role.

### 1.3.2.2 Digital media technologies

Feenberg (2009:77) argues that despite decades of development, the internet remains in flux as “innovative usages” continue to appear. Similarly, Van Dijck (2011:333) argues that the “new media ecology” sees new tools and applications being launched almost every day – all competing to become the standard for “channelling information, communication and media activities”.

In an article on the influence of Twitter on journalism, Barnard (2016:191) emphasises that the work of journalists has also “changed considerably since the proliferation of digital media technologies”. Boyer (2013:4) uses the term “digital” to refer, in general, to the “transformation of newsmaking” because of computerisation, the popularity of the internet, mobile technology and social media. According to Flew (2014:3), it is important to not only catalogue the technologies themselves, but to focus on the “contexts of their use and the broader social and cultural impacts”.

Flowing from the arguments above, it appears impossible to ignore the relationship between journalistic practices and the technologies used by the actors who produce journalism (Barnard, 2016:191). This study aims to move away from a focus on technology *per se* to an exploration of the interaction between digital media technologies and the journalists who use them. As such the study's working definition for digital media technologies is as follows:

Digital media technologies are formats and platforms that rely on digital connectivity to produce content, while at the same time interacting with both human and non-human actors to influence the contexts in which they function.

This definition therefore includes, amongst other things, social media, internet-based communication between journalists and messaging services such as WhatsApp.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> WhatsApp is a free service and offers “simple, secure, reliable messaging and calling, available on phones all over the world” (WhatsApp, n.d.)

### 1.3.2.3 Network

This brief exposition of the “network” concept – as relevant to this study – serves to distinguish Netwerk24 as research site from the network that will be referred to in the context of actor-network theory (as discussed in section 1.5 and Chapter 3). Since the Afrikaans brand name Netwerk24 can be translated into English as *Network24*, it would perhaps be easy to assume that describing this newsroom as a *network* is only natural and does not need much further elaboration. This is in fact not the case. In the actor-network vocabulary, a network is not just a series of people and things that are linked to each other in some form of a net; it is a network because of the *associations* between the different actors within the network. The network is thus a way of looking at a phenomenon that helps to make sense, during times of disruptions or trial, of all the different elements that you were not aware of before but that is needed to make up the whole (Latour, 2011:799).

This means that for the purposes of this study, the concept of a “network” stretches beyond the obvious confines of Netwerk24 as platform and newsroom. Rather, this network also incorporates the way the actors – both human and non-human – interact with each other while they are being socialised into a specific newsroom culture and during their newswork practices.

### 1.3.2.4 Habitus

Bourdieu (1989:18) summarises the habitus as “the disposition of agents” or “the mental structures through which [agents] apprehend the social world [and which] are essentially the product of the internalization of the structures of that world”. The habitus concept thus explains why and how people’s views of the world and their actions are “framed by their past experience and their current position in the social field” (Collet, 2009:421). In essence, the habitus can therefore be seen as an explanation of why people act in the present based on experiences in the past.

In this study the habitus concept will be employed to explain professional socialisation in the newsroom. The professional journalistic habitus can be summarised in the words of Bunce (2017:3) who explains that there are certain policies, “rarely stated out loud”, in every newsroom:

Through their work and exposure to colleagues, journalists are socialized in these policies. They then alter their practices to comply with them for a number of reasons including the direct authority and sanctions that management can deliver, feelings of obligation or esteem for employers, mobility aspirations and their absorption in the day-to-day tasks of collecting news...

## 1.4 Problem statement and focus

This study explores and describes how journalists, as actors within a professional network in transition, experience and describe newswork at Netwerk24. In the process the cultures and practices at Netwerk24, where digital media technologies have increasingly become normalised while more traditional conceptualisations still remain, are described in detail.

This exploratory project is important for various reasons. In general, and as discussed above, the state of the journalism industry – both locally and in other parts of the world – necessitates a renewed look at the way newsrooms function on a daily basis. The argument pursued in this study is that journalists who were and are socialised in a specific professional manner into newsroom culture, are actors within an unstable news-producing network where digital media technologies also play an active role.

This exploration not only adds value to an understanding of how Netwerk24 functions on a daily basis, but also contributes to the field of journalism studies in South Africa, in which studies involving extended periods of newsroom ethnography are rare.

## 1.5 Theoretical points of departure

Situated in the field of journalism studies, this research explores newswork at Netwerk24 as evident through the actions and experiences of professionally socialised journalists who function as a network in conjunction with the digital media technologies they use.

Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009a:4) argue that the “roots and subsequent growth” of journalism studies as a developing research field are “diverse and complex”. Similarly, Steensen and Ahva (2015:2) explain that journalism studies is not marked by a “specific and shared academic culture”. It draws from a variety of theoretical paradigms originating in other disciplines, ranging from sociology and political science, to language and cultural studies (Steensen & Ahva, 2015:3). In their overview of journalism studies scholarship between 2000 and 2013, Steensen and Ahva (2015:13) argue that the interdisciplinary nature of the field, as well as the “increasingly blurred boundaries of journalism”, call for a widening of the scope of theoretical approaches. I agree with Witschge, Anderson, Domingo and Hermida (2016a:29) that one should “embrace the ambiguity, unease, and uncertainty of the field”. One way to do this is to adopt a novel theoretical framework – based on the combination of existing theories – for the study of journalism in transition.

To address the changing contexts at Netwerk24, I rely on the combination of two distinct theoretical concepts: habitus and actor-network theory. The aim is to explore the professional socialisation of the

Netwerk24 journalists, while at the same time describing their role within a broader news-creating network where digital media technologies play an integral role. A preliminary literature review indicates that such an approach to the study of newswork is a novel one.

Firstly, habitus is employed to explain the way – consciously and unconsciously – Netwerk24 journalists are shaped by and socialised into their professional environment. Bourdieu (1990:56) defines this concept as “embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history”. Simply put, habitus as theoretical concept suggests that a person’s actions are informed and guided by the ways in which his earlier circumstances and environment shaped him. Schultz (2007a:193) explains that using “the concept of habitus in analysing news work, it might be appropriate to speak of a ‘professional habitus’, a mastering of a specific, professional game in a specific professional field”.

At first, Bourdieu used habitus to account for the driving force of “practice in its humblest forms” – such as rituals and “mundane” daily conduct (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:121). He wanted to escape an explanation of actions as deterministically mechanical, on the one hand, and totally deliberate, on the other hand (Bourdieu 1993:76; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:121). Benson and Neveu (2005a:3) say the habitus concept explains an individual’s “predispositions, assumptions, judgments and behaviors” as a process of long-term socialisation – including socialisation into the professional context such as a newsroom. Vos (2016:621) says habitus as “perceptions, appreciations, and actions are gained through ordinary lived experience and daily occupational work”.

Bourdieu says any given reaction of an individual actor to another is “pregnant with the whole history of these persons and of their relationship” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:124). Or as Bourdieu explains: “To speak of the habitus is to assert that the individual, and even the personal, the subjective is social, collective. Habitus is socialized subjectivity” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:126). I would thus argue, along with Burke, Emmerich and Ingram (2013:165) that “an individual’s dispositions are mediated through an institution’s organisational practices and collective forms of cooperation”.

Another way to view and explore the collective nature of social action could arguably be found in some of the basic tenets of actor-network theory – which views both human and non-human actors, such as digital media technologies, as active mediators within a broader network. Mediators, in this sense, “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry” within the network (Latour, 2005:39). According to Blok and Jensen (2011:48), actor-network theory “is interested in any element or any relation that helps to stabilize, or destabilize, a network”.

Where habitus is more concerned with human dispositions, actor-network theory is employed to trace the associations between humans and the so-called material things as they interact to construct a network. The actor-network theory thus enables the researcher to open the separate “black boxes” of

newsroom production to reveal how technology and journalists shape each other concurrently (Domingo, 2015; Primo & Zago, 2015; Micó, Masip & Domingo, 2013). This approach is increasingly necessary, as expressed by De Maeyer (2016:726):

Far from being seamless and immaterial, digital ‘stuff’ seems to make a difference in newsmaking, and as such, tools and technologies become prominent objects of scholarly inquiry.

I would argue that while it is certainly necessary to trace the influence of so-called digital “stuff” on newswork, one cannot negate the way journalists as people with specific dispositions use and interact with these digital media technologies as much as they do with each other. It is for this reason that I propose combining habitus and actor-network theory for a more comprehensive exploration and description of newswork at Netwerk24.

Both habitus and actor-network theory are more than just theoretical concepts. Maton (2008:49) explains that habitus is also “intended to provide a means of analysing the workings of the social world through empirical investigations”. Bourdieu himself did extensive ethnographic investigations in places such as Algeria and his native France. Latour started developing his theories during an ethnographic study of a scientific laboratory. Or as Blok and Jensen (2011:26) explain when referring to the anthropological nature of Latour’s work: “He produces thick descriptions based on field studies...”

The nature of this study is therefore not just theoretically founded in the work of Bourdieu and Latour – as main proponents of habitus and actor-network theory. It is also informed and inspired by the empirical nature of these researchers’ ethnographic work.

## **1.6 Research questions**

The problem statement discussed in section 1.4 will be addressed by answering the general and specific research questions set out below.

General research question:

How do journalists as actors within a network in transition experience newswork at Netwerk24?

Flowing from this the specific research questions are:

- i. How are Netwerk24 journalists socialised into the professional cultures and practices of their newsroom network?
- ii. What is Netwerk24 journalists' understanding of the role digital media technologies play within their newswork and network?
- iii. What strategies do Netwerk24 journalists use to deal with changes to their newswork network?
- iv. How do Netwerk24 journalists view the future of the cultures and practices within the professional network they are a part of?

## 1.7 Research design

This study made use of qualitative research methodologies to address the general and specific research questions. Ethnography was the main research design employed to explore and describe the newswork of Netwerk24 journalists. Mabweazara (2010a:79) explains that newsroom ethnography entails “extensive and intensive” periods of newsroom observations and interviews. According to Mabweazara (2010b:660), the fact that ethnography has roots in a qualitative research tradition makes it more “fluid and open to negotiation” when the circumstances in which the researcher works changes. Møller Hartley (2013:574) arguably captures the essence of why ethnographic research holds so much promise for journalism studies when he says ethnographic observations allow the researcher to access “not only what the journalists *say* they do but also what they *actually* do” [original emphasis].

Netwerk24 was chosen as the research site for a variety of reasons: firstly, because it is a relatively new<sup>5</sup> venture within the Afrikaans media landscape and secondly, because of a series of practical considerations, such as research access and affordability (as discussed in Chapter 4). Ethnographic research was conducted intermittently over a period of around 18 months (from May 2016 to November 2017) at the main newsrooms where content is produced for Netwerk24, namely Johannesburg and Cape Town. Once-off visits to bigger regional offices, in Bloemfontein and Pretoria, were also executed. For the other journalists, who work as individuals in other provinces, email interviews were considered.

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<sup>5</sup> By the time I was finished with my fieldwork at the end of 2017, Netwerk24 (as brand and as news website in its different guises) was just over three years old.

Field notes are key to the observation that takes place during ethnographic research. Such field notes are written in close proximity to the field (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2001:353). These notes are not written according to a “tightly pre-specified plan”, but rather composed on a daily basis, leaving room for changes and new directions (Emerson et al., 2001:355). Field notes thus express the ethnographer’s growing understanding of local knowledge and theoretical insights (Emerson et al., 2001:355).

I would agree with Wolcott’s assertion (2008:46): “One of the unsung features of ethnographic research is its embrace of multiple techniques.” According to Wolcott (2008:46),

[t]he very idea that one might depend solely on one source of data .... is anathema to anyone genuinely committed to the ethnographer’s ‘multi-instrument’ approach.

My aim was therefore to complement the participant observations with semi-structured interviews and the examination of documents gathered during the periods of field research. According to Saldaña (2011:32), interviewing as research method is

... an effective way of soliciting and documenting, in their own words, and individual’s or group’s perspectives, feelings, opinions, values, attitudes, and beliefs about their personal experiences and social world, in addition to factual information about their lives.

This research technique is especially relevant for a study where one of the main aims is to establish and describe the journalists’ own experiences of their newswork and their place within the network created by and at Netwerk24.

The analysis of data in an ethnographic study does not take place *after* this data was gathered (Gobo, 2008:226). According to Gobo (2008:226), data gathering and analysis are “closely intertwined processes” that inform each other in a cyclical fashion. This means the researcher must review and interpret field notes and information gathered from interviews as soon as possible after the data has been gathered. My aim was to let my interview questions be informed by my observations and *vice versa*. I therefore focused on transcribing, analysing and coding data gathered in the field on a regular basis. Since this is also a study about newswork in transition – as necessitated by the incremental changes at Netwerk24 – returning to the newsrooms over a period of time, and after my first round of data analysis and interpretation, was key.

Data analysis for ethnography is about finding patterns and attaching meaning to them (Angrosino, 2007:67). I coded and analysed my data with a computer-based qualitative data analysis tool, specifically ATLAS.ti.

## 1.8 Chapter overview

In Chapter 1 this study of newswork at Netwerk24 was introduced against the backdrop of journalism as an industry in flux. It has been established that there is a need for more empirical studies on the nature of newswork from *within* the newsroom and from the vantage point of the journalists themselves. After providing some background on previous studies of newswork and the role of digital media technologies, this chapter introduced the theoretical foundation of the study as a combination of habitus and actor-network theory. To further serve as introduction to the study, this chapter included a summary of the research problem, as well as the research questions that have been formulated in order to address this specific research problem. The relevance of newsroom ethnography to answer the general and specific research questions was also discussed.

Chapter 2 will critically discuss previous literature on newswork and digital media technologies, as well as provide background to how the evolution of Afrikaans digital media at Media24 led to the establishment of Netwerk24. Chapter 3 will elaborate on the theoretical framework of the study as briefly introduced in this chapter. Chapter 4 will discuss ethnography as research design and its relevance to this specific study. Chapter 5 will present the researcher's reflections on her time spent in the Netwerk24 newsrooms. In Chapters 6, 7 and 8 the findings of the ethnographic research will be presented as a thematic narrative to highlight salient themes. Chapter 9 concludes the study.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

### 2.1 Introduction

As discussed in the introduction to Chapter 1, digital media technologies have to a large extent become naturalised in most mainstream newsrooms – including at Netwerk24. An understanding of the need for digital tools when doing newswork does not, however, necessarily mean that all journalists use these tools with comfort and ease. While these technologies are gaining prominence in newsrooms, traditional conceptualisations of newswork still remain. McConnell (2016:35) summarises these seemingly contradictory positions well:

In theory, new technology opened the way to fundamental changes in which news was generated, processed and consumed. In practice, just because the technological capacity was there did not mean that journalists would use it.

This chapter reviews existing literature on the relationship between journalism and technology, mostly from the perspective of the journalists themselves. The discussion thus also highlights previous research on journalists' changing perceptions of newswork.

The preliminary aim of a literature review is to indicate where the study fits “into the context of the general body of scientific knowledge” (Babbie, 2010:523). By critically engaging with the work of other authors in the field, a researcher can identify gaps in the demarcated research field and indicate how the intended research project could answer some of these lingering questions (Silverman, 2013:343; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011:24; Babbie, 2010:523). A literature review also helps a researcher identify previous theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches employed to study similar research problems (Du Plooy, 2009:64; Mouton, 2001:87). According to Silverman (2013:343), a key characteristic of a literature review is that “it should be read as a *dialogue* with other researchers” [original emphasis]. The researcher should engage with the findings of other academic authors in order to advance knowledge about the chosen research topic (Silverman, 2013:346).

### 2.2 Gaps in the field of research

Studies about the relationship between journalists and the different newsroom tools and technologies they employ during newswork abound. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.1), a

thorough search on the internet, including on databases such as Google Scholar and EBSCOhost, as well as the catalogue of the J.S. Gericke Library at Stellenbosch University, indicates that Netwerk24 has not been the main focal point of an academic study before.

In recent years studies have started to appear that briefly reference Netwerk24 as part of a larger study sample or source. These include a journal article by Feinauer (2016)<sup>6</sup> in the field of linguistics that explores translation strategies between print and online news sources, and from English to Afrikaans. Other references to Netwerk24 can be found in a master's thesis by Steyn (2016) that deals with Afrikaans films and their influences on Afrikanerdom. Neither of these studies, however, approach Netwerk24 from a journalism studies perspective, nor have the researchers talked to the Netwerk24 journalists directly. Bourdieu's conceptualisation of habitus in combination with actor-network theory (as discussed in Chapter 3) have also not been applied before to the study of South African journalism – and as far as could be established, to journalism practices elsewhere.

Furthermore, and as discussed below, newsroom ethnography is not often used as method to study local newswork. This study therefore distinguishes itself on both a theoretical and methodological level, while exploring the inner workings of a newsroom that to many still appears to be a “black box” of news production. Furthermore I agree with Paterson et al. (2016:4) who, in a recent overview of news production research, argue that

... as the internal workings of media institutions change beyond the recognition of an earlier generation of researchers, and challenges to understand those internal functions become ever greater, there is a need to review what new knowledge is emerging from production research, what gaps remain, what challenges to production research persist, and to debate how those might be overcome.

As this literature review shows, there has been a renewed call for studies from within the newsroom based on ethnography as research method to explore the role of technology in newsrooms. This call is increasingly being answered by researchers in the Global North.<sup>7</sup> Amongst others, two volumes of newsroom ethnographies that explore the role of internet journalism, edited by Paterson and Domingo (2008) and Domingo and Paterson (2011) respectively, illustrate this point. I would concur with Paterson (2008:2) that only ethnographic methodologies “can come close to providing an adequate

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<sup>6</sup> This study contains some errors on the origin of Netwerk24, including the official launch date.

<sup>7</sup> The Global North/South division is used in this study instead of terms such as “developed” or “developing” nations. According to Wasserman and De Beer (2009:436), it “makes more sense” to speak of the Global North and Global South in a “post-Cold War geopolitical and geo-economic context”. Odeh (2010:340) argues that this distinction is broadly based on four “indicators”: Politics, technology, wealth and demography.

description of the culture and practice of media production, and the mind-set of media producers”. According to Domingo (2011:xvi), ethnographies of online news share their exploration of

... the tensions between technological innovations and the social context where they are adopted, while always aware of the general cultural framework (journalism at large) and the particularities of the specific settings (media organizations) where decisions are being made.

Issues raised in some of the early newsroom ethnographies that specifically explored the uptake of digital media technologies included the struggle some journalists faced in adopting an “online centric product” (Robinson, 2011:33). One of the key questions the journalists, who had to make this transition from print to online, faced was how to maintain “entrenched print-world norms” while at the same time “catering for the digital cultural expectations” of their audiences (Robinson, 2011:32).

Another important issue raised by researchers who contributed to these two volumes of newsroom ethnographies, relates to the relationship between management and journalists. Paulussen, Geens and Vandenbrande (2011:13), for instance, argue that it is difficult for media leadership to translate their vision into practice, “since there seems to be a discrepancy between ‘how managers see it’ and ‘how employees perceive it’”. Larrondo, Domingo, Erdal, Masip and Van den Bulck (2016:279) argue that it is crucial for managers to engage journalists in sharing the goals of any transformation process, in order for the journalists to see such a process as an opportunity rather than a threat. Similarly, Wallace (2009:698) says differing management strategies to introduce change can have a defining influence on whether journalists are resistant or open to “novel working practices”.

While newsroom studies that explore technology use are increasing in other parts of the world, similar studies in South Africa in particular, and Africa in general, are few and far between. In an overview of African scholarship on mass communication between 2004 and 2014, Wasike (2017:208) found that only four out of 388 articles sampled used ethnography as data collection method. Similarly, Salawu, Oyero, Moyo and Moyo (2016:147) found that only six out of 241 master’s and doctoral theses in the field of media and communication studies at nine South African universities between 2004 and 2013 used ethnography as research method. Atton and Mabweazara (2011:667) argue that contemporary journalism studies in Africa

... have tended to shy away from studies of the routines and practices of journalism (especially in the print media), preferring instead to emphasize issues around the democratization of the media (including new technologies) and its role in political and democratic processes.

In an overview of the history of journalism studies in sub-Saharan Africa, Fair (2015:26) similarly argues that since the 1990s the main themes explored in this region still revolve around the relationship between government and the media and the media's role in democracies. Fair (2015:26) believes that "the largest and in many ways most interesting (if still somewhat amorphous) new theme in African journalism studies is new media and news reporting".

Some notable exceptions that do indeed address the issue of so-called new media and news reporting are compilations of research by Berger (2005a), Atton and Mabweazara (2011), Paterson (2013) and Mabweazara, Mudhai and Whittaker (2014a).

Berger (2005a) supervised a master's research programme at Rhodes University which investigated the use of cell phones and the internet by journalists in nine Southern African countries (Mozambique, Namibia, Botswana, Tanzania, Zambia, Swaziland, Lesotho, Malawi and Zimbabwe). While the focus in this instance was more on building theory, one of the key findings of the study as a whole is that Southern African journalists are not "inert objects waiting on external salvation" (Berger, 2005b:11). According to Berger (2005b:11), interventions regarding the use of information communication technologies in Southern African newsrooms should take into consideration how journalists on the continent are taking initiative when it comes to the internet.

Atton and Mabweazara (2011:667) believe that African journalism studies lack exploration of "how African journalists have forged new ways of practising journalism in the context of technological changes in newsrooms as well as in the wider context of news production". According to Atton and Mabweazara (2011:668), it is not clear how African journalists deal with technological change or how they "have adjusted their professional notions" to see which traditions "survived the impact of new technologies and which have needed rethinking". These authors argue that there has been an overemphasis in local research on technological determinism or the political and democratic impact of technology (Atton & Mabweazara, 2011:669). I concur with Atton and Mabweazara (2011:669) that technology cannot be seen as the only "explanatory variable" of newsroom practices. By further exploring the role of professional socialisation and newsroom culture, my study fills this apparent gap in local research.

In a compilation focused on social media, Paterson (2013:1) argues that research around these platforms in Africa has been largely limited to explorations of how such media contribute to giving "civil society actors" a voice outside of mainstream media. Paterson (2013) explains how he edited this specific compilation with the view that the authors involved, including me (Jordaan, 2013), "share a common interest in how new, participatory, interactive communications technologies are enabling new tellings of Africa's stories". The focus of this special edition of *Ecquid Novi*, now known as *African Journalism Studies*, seems to be less on journalism practices and routines, and more on

journalism's role in democratic societies and its relationship with its audiences as facilitated through social media.

Mabweazara, Mudhai and Whittaker (2014b:1) also highlight the lack of research on the characteristics and practices of online journalism in Africa. This despite the fact that the internet and related digital technologies are no longer just “basic tools” for journalists but have instead become an “integral part” of journalism as profession (Mabweazara et al., 2014b:1). This view is echoed by my own findings on social media use in South African newspaper newsrooms, as discussed in my master's thesis (Jordaan, 2012). In that study, I explored the way journalists perceive their own use and interaction with internet-related technologies, with a focus on the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter (Jordaan, 2012). Among my findings were that journalists at the weekly newspapers *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian* “viewed social media as a supplement to their work, rather than as a threat” (Jordaan, 2012:163).

This study supplements and enriches the current body of research on the appropriation and influence of digital media technologies in the newsroom. It is evident that the need for studies to establish whether and how technology is used in African newsrooms has been supplanted by the need for research on *why* journalists have adapted to these technologies and *how* these technologies affect their daily practices, professional roles and cultures.

In her overview of trends and projections for African journalism studies, Bosch (2015:19) says “African journalism research should reflect African journalistic practice and issues”. Bosch (2015:11) adds, however, that while

... there are opportunities for particular and unique research topics, African journalism research should also tie in to international debates and trends in the field, given the universality of the journalistic experience...

This study also aims to achieve the goal Bosch (2015:19) sets for African journalism studies researchers of capitalising on research about “distinctive questions” in order to make “conceptual and theoretical contributions”.

This chapter firstly looks at how the research agenda for journalism studies has adapted to explore digital media technologies. It then provides a brief background to some of the seminal, or what is often termed “classical”, newsroom studies. The argument is that these studies to a large extent informed what has been coined by Cottle (2000) as the “second wave” of newsroom ethnographies. The first wave of studies focused on newswork as routine. The second wave started to take note of the

role of technology in newswork during the late 1990s and early 2000s. I would argue, along with researchers such as Robinson and Metzler (2016:704), that ethnography of news production

... is experiencing something of a renaissance as scholars (re-)discover the transitioning newsroom and seek to understand how journalistic practice is evolving for the digital age.

An overview of the early, and then more recent, research on journalism and digital media technologies is provided. As discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.2.2), this study does not aim to highlight or focus on a *specific* technology but instead on how journalists interact with and experience digital media technologies as part of their newswork. The discussion therefore rather focuses on studies that explore the changing journalistic roles, role conceptions and newsroom culture amidst technological change and transition. Finally, the chapter addresses salient issues around the structure and nature of Afrikaans news at Media24 as evident in the establishment and evolution of Netwerk24.

## **2.3 Research agendas for journalism and technology studies**

### **2.3.1 The roots of journalism studies**

In reviewing literature for this study, I found further support for the argument by Steensen and Ahva (2015:2) – as raised in Chapter 1 – that journalism studies as research field does not display “a specific and shared academic culture”. Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009a:4-7) discuss four “distinct, but overlapping” phases of research in journalism studies: normative studies that look at the media’s role in society; empirical studies that are interested in how news is constructed and the effect it has on media audiences; sociological studies that are concerned with journalists’ routines and values, as well as media texts themselves; and, finally, comparative studies that explore the similarities and differences in journalism across the globe.

One ongoing global-comparative research project that deserves attention is the Worlds of Journalism (WOJ) Study, currently hosted at the Ludwig-Maximilian’s-Universität in Munich, Germany, with Dr Thomas Hanitzsch as chair. According to the WOJ’s website, the research was initially planned as a pilot study with the “initiators” interviewing 2100 journalists from 413 news organisations in 21 countries between 2007 and 2011 (Worlds of Journalism Study, n.d.). The interview schedule for this study only alludes to “new media technologies” in one question on perceived influences on the journalists’ “day-to-day job” (Worlds of Journalism Study, n.d.). The second phase of the project, fielded between 2012 and 2016, includes a few more questions on digital media technologies. In the

second set of interviews journalists were asked to what extent the influence of issues, such as user-generated content, social media and audience development in news, has changed over the past five years (Worlds of Journalism Study, n.d.).

According to the WOJ's website, various research publications have appeared based on the findings of this study. At the time of writing none of these publications seemed to focus exclusively, or even in main, on the influence of digital media technologies on newswork. Some of the research publications do, however, discuss the growing influence of digital media technologies as part of a broader discussion on changes in journalism cultures and practices. In an article about Australian journalists, for instance, Hanusch (2015:50) says in relation to influences on their work, the 605 journalists surveyed

... experience the strongest increase in audience interaction brought on by technological innovation. Indeed, technical aspects were considered the most important changes in terms of work aspects. The strongest increase in influence was in social media and user-generated content, followed closely by more generic audience feedback and audience involvement in news production.

I would agree with Hanusch (2015:38) that “asking journalists about their experience of change is important in order to comprehend how it impacts on news work”. As the title of my study reflects, journalists at Netwerk24 were specifically asked about their experiences during a time of transition and change.

As is evident from the literature review, this study therefore takes note of current debates and findings in journalism studies across the world. I am also aware of various large scale, ongoing research projects that explore the boundaries of newswork and journalism. These include the “Journalism Elsewhere” project through which thirteen journalism scholars in the Global North want to “break open our understanding of what journalism is”, according to the project's website. In the description of their project, these researchers argue that journalism as an institution “has shown remarkable resilience to change”, adding that “currently journalism is in flux” (Journalism Elsewhere, n.d.)

It falls outside the scope of this study to do a like-for-like comparison with findings from studies in other contexts. However, I would still maintain that probing Netwerk24 for influences on newswork similar to some of the influences that are tested in the WOJ Study yields results that could indeed be used to describe how local journalists' views about their newswork compare with international trends.

This study also certainly takes note of journalism's place in the broader society, but the aim is not to make a case for journalism as a key player in democracies, for instance. To continue with the distinction made by Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009a), what remains, therefore, are the empirical and sociological "turns" in journalism studies.

According to Steensen and Ahva (2015:5-6), journalism studies research is informed by a variety of disciplinary perspectives, of which the cultural, sociological and technological perspectives are relevant to this study. From a cultural perspective, this study looks at issues such as "journalistic self-reflection and identity" (Steensen & Ahva, 2015:5). As influenced by sociology, I explore "relationships, work routines and interactions among those who are involved in news production" (Steensen & Ahva, 2015:5). Finally, the study also touches on technological issues but only in so far as these issues relate to the cultural and sociological factors that influence newswork. These issues are explored using empirical data (by way of ethnography) – as alluded to by Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009a).

Saltzis and Dickinson (2008:219) argue that some journalism studies projects, when looking at the experiences of journalists and their reactions to change, have simplified the "contemporary context of news production". These researchers call for "a revived sociology of journalists" to help make sense of the changes taking place in newswork (Saltzis & Dickinson, 2008:219). In other words, the focus should fall on how journalists themselves experience and explain their newswork. To my mind the relevance of ethnography as research design to test these experiences of digital media technologies and newswork during times of disruption and change cannot be overstated. Therefore, I would argue throughout this study that, in the words of Willig (2012:373),

[n]ewsroom ethnographies have enabled us to go straight to the heart of news organisations and show us how journalists go about their daily routines.

Similarly, Mabweazara (2010a:79) believes that despite the fast-changing nature of news production and newswork, ethnographies remain relevant.

### **2.3.2 Journalism studies on technology**

In a seminal article on the influence of technology on journalism, Pavlik (2000:292) writes that journalism "has always been shaped by technology". This statement can be challenged as being too deterministic, since it does not seem to account for the role of journalists and their views and attitudes

to technology. Siegelbaum and Thomas (2016:388), for instance, warn against the tendency to imagine the advent of any new technology as “leading us to a hitherto inaccessible promised land”. I have also found, in concurrence with Wahl-Jorgensen (2017), that research on digital journalism “often appears to be pervaded by an infatuation with the possibilities of technological change brought about by the convergent media ecology”. According to Siegelbaum and Thomas (2016:387), this type of “technocentrism”

... comes when the obsession with what is new and next disarticulates technology and journalistic routines from both their material and economic contexts and their alignment with journalism’s normative functions.

Similarly, Örnebring (2010:68) argues that technology is adapted according to “already existing value systems” with their roots in the cultural, social and economic landscape. Larrondo et al. (2016:297) also argue that their study of five European public broadcasters “refutes an all too technological and deterministic view” of how journalists react to different platforms being combined into one newsroom. According to these researchers, despite the fact that the combination of platforms is a “technology-related” process, the main drivers behind the adoption of such technologies are “journalistic practices and newsroom floor cultures” (Larrondo et al., 2016:297). Menke, Kinnebrock, Kretzschmar, Aichberger, Broersma, Hummel, Kirchhoff, Prandner, Ribeiro and Salaverría (2018:882) also argue that to study convergence within journalism practice “a shift from a solely technological to a cultural understanding is essential”. In their review of convergent cultures in six European newsrooms, for instance, Menke et al. (2018:895) found that “everyday editorial routines and practices reveal that convergence journalism is no longer understood as the exception, but is an increasingly integrated part of a journalist’s daily work”. As argued in the introduction to Chapter 1, digital media technologies have also seemingly become normalised in South African newsrooms – and specifically at Netwerk24.

Notwithstanding the call for a more cultural approach to journalism studies in the digital age, it is still worthwhile to explore the influence of technology on journalism according to the four broad areas as originally identified by Pavlik (2000): newswork, news content, newsroom structure and news organisations’ relationships with their audiences. Within this categorisation, my study focuses on the interaction between journalists and digital media technologies, as well as the influence of these interactions on newswork. Through the inclusion of professional journalistic habitus as theoretical concept, this study explores to some extent also changes to newsroom structure.

Similar to the journalists who use technology, researchers in the field of journalism studies have in the past adopted either a positive or cautionary approach to the influence of internet-related technologies

on newswork and newsrooms (see for instance: Reich, 2013; Steensen, 2011; Örnebring, 2010; Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009a; Kim & Weaver, 2002). Reich (2013:418-419) summarises these two positions well when he refers to the “transformationists”, who believe new technologies have a radical influence on news reporting, versus the “adaptionists”, who argue that even journalists who are comfortable with technology do not simply switch out older technology with new ones to do their “core news reporting assignments”. Similarly, Ekdale, Singer, Tully and Harmsen (2015:941) believe that:

Research into each successive wave of change over the past two decades has produced similar results: professed acceptance of the technology itself (with varying degrees of enthusiasm), paired with concerns related primarily to perceived complexity of the innovation and its compatibility with established norms and routines.

Not only have researchers found divergent opinions in the newsrooms they studied, they have also debated the relevance of established theories and methodologies to study the changing media environment. Different research strands developed as digital media technologies increasingly became part of everyday newswork. According to Steensen (2011:311), research was initially focused on the technology itself. This technological determinism was followed by studies that used empirical research to discover whether the promise of technology described in the early studies had indeed materialised (Steensen, 2011:311). My contention is that the time has indeed come to look beyond the role of technology as determining factor to a more nuanced approach in which journalists are afforded the opportunity to explain in their own words how they experience changes to their newswork during times of disruption and transition. This study, in its exploration of journalists and their views of newswork, therefore works from the premise that technology is socially shaped. As Larrondo et al. (2016:279) argue: “The human factor acquires a central role in the success or failure of a process usually driven by technological arguments.” Or, as Gynnild (2014:727) proposes, one should remain cognisant of the fact that the future of journalism’s role in society is not dependent on “high-tech tools” but rather on the “professional fostering” of newsworkers in order for them to be motivated to innovate and develop new approaches to journalism. I believe that exploring the professional journalistic habitus in the Netwerk24 newsrooms also helps me to further explain how journalists adapt to changing contexts.

Ashuri (2016:301) argues that some researchers reached “drastic conclusions” about how the media will be replaced with new “collaborative communication models”. In her study of how an Israeli newspaper introduced its online version, Ashuri (2016:302) further argues that

... changes associated with networked technologies are not determined by the technology but rather realized through the adaptation and creation of practices carried out by the producers (and consumers) through their use of these technologies.

Through the use of actor-network theory – and specifically the concepts of associations between mediators within a network – I believe that I can trace some of these changes in newswork at Netwerk24, without falling into the trap of technological determinism.

I am aware of criticism levelled against a return to the newsroom as main method for the study of technological change. For instance, Blumler and Cushion (2014:260) warn against the danger of journalism studies researchers and educators focusing

... more and more on the complex inner workings of journalism at the expense of attention to its external ties, impacts and significance. In other words, journalism studies could become too inward-looking, marginalizing normative concerns that should remain fundamental to the study of journalism.

My contention, however, is that by exploring the attitudes and perceptions of journalists from within the newsroom (through ethnography) it should be possible to also gather useful information on broader industry changes and how journalists view the future of the profession. This study is therefore not focused on the “normative concerns” around journalism – such as framing, rhetoric and the exclusion of diverse voices – as highlighted by Blumler and Cushion (2014). Yet, I would argue, the broad sociological approach to this study and newswork does not exclude contextual factors.

Journalism studies and media researchers have gradually started to shift their focus from the internet and online journalism at large to specifically look at, amongst other things, the influence of social media (Hermida, 2013), data journalism (Gynnild, 2014), and the role of audience metrics (Lee, Lewis & Powers, 2014) on newsrooms and newswork. My literature review shows that the research agenda regarding these newer digital media technologies have and still are following the same broad trends as was the case with earlier research in which computer-mediated communication or the internet itself was the main focus of the explorations. As emphasised throughout this study, I am taking a more holistic look at digital media technologies; viewing them as mediators within the newswork network where journalists interact with and perceive them.

## 2.4 Newswork as routine

### 2.4.1 The “first wave” of newsroom studies

Newsrooms and newswriters have been studied from a variety of disciplinary vantage points since the mid-1950s (Thomsen, 2013:21). One of the earliest seminal newsroom studies was the work of Breed (1955), a journalist turned sociologist, who explored how “newsmen” learnt the policy of their newsrooms. One of the key findings of his study was that journalists are not officially inducted into their newsroom’s culture but that they instead learn what is expected of them “by osmosis” (Breed, 1955:328). It is noteworthy that even then – more than sixty years ago when newsrooms arguably had bigger staff complements – Breed (1955:328) found that there was little time for newsroom mentorship:

Basically, the learning of policy is a process by which the recruit discovers and internalizes the rights and obligations of his status and its norms and values. He learns to anticipate what is expected of him so as to win rewards and avoid punishments.

More recently, Paulussen (2016:328) similarly argues that through socialisation “new entrants to the profession learn and adopt the routines and unwritten rules of newsgathering and production”. Through an exploration and description of the professional journalistic habitus in the Netwerk24 newsroom, I believe I can establish whether the appropriation of newsroom culture does indeed still happen via “osmosis”.

According to Reese and Ballinger (2001:653), the research done by Breed and his contemporaries laid the foundation for the main bulk of newsroom studies that followed from the 1970s. While these early studies might not have been “the most advanced in either theory or method”, in hindsight they continue to influence views of the news media and the large communication field, argue Reese and Ballinger (2001:642). These studies started to call the “news construction process” into question, and brought potential challenges to the “taken for granted” nature of the media (Reese & Ballinger, 2001:642).

The bulk of this so-called first wave of newsroom studies was done in the 1970s and 1980s, mostly by sociologists such as Molotch and Lester (1974), Tuchman (1978), Gans (1979) and Fishman (1980). According to Thomsen (2013:21), these researchers agreed “to a remarkable extent” that news was the result of routine, mostly implicit, rules in the newsroom. Thomsen (2013:35) argues that when these first newsroom ethnographers entered the newsrooms

... an entirely new insight into the everyday work of journalists came to light, and the former ‘black box’ of news production, the cultural milieu and professional domains of news making, was opened up like never before.

Mabweazara (2010a:79) says these early studies represent “a substantive literature” since they contain rich bodies of empirical data that explore the “mechanics and cultures of news production”. Cottle (2007:2) similarly argues that these early studies are “all worth reading to this day” because they

... helped establish the explanatory promise of attending to aspects of the news production process and familiarising oneself with the journalist’s working environment.

It falls outside the scope of this study to discuss the nature and findings of these early newsroom studies in detail. Suffice to say that such studies were done during a time when the potential threat, as well as opportunities, of digital media technologies were still a distant reality. Therefore some of the key arguments of these early newsroom ethnographers have to be re-evaluated and updated through new empirical investigations. For instance, the typification of news Tuchman (1978:41) developed to explain how journalists “impose order upon the raw material of news and so reduce the variability (idiosyncrasy) of the glut of occurrences” is hardly relevant in an era of 24/7 news cycles. When a website is constantly being updated or when a journalist live-tweets a news event, should one talk about hard news, spot news or developing news? Or can one really still distinguish between events that are either accidentally or serendipitously newsworthy – as Molotch and Lester (1974) did? What does remain relevant is the value of newsroom ethnography to open the “black boxes” of newswork and peer inside, while at the same time allowing for the journalists’ own voices and views to be heard.

In the preface to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of his book, Gans (2004:xi) agrees with the prevailing arguments that there have been significant changes in the media industry – from audience fragmentation to a decline in readership – since his ethnographic research was originally published. However, after all this time, for Gans (2004:xvii)

... the processes and considerations that go into deciding what’s news, and the values and assumptions that underlie news judgments, have remained much the same. The events journalists cover are always new, but their stories are less so, and their methods for choosing what to include in the news and how to report it yet less.

Gans's outlook supports the views of his contemporaries in newsroom ethnography who in general made a case for newswork as a routinised activity. It is certainly worth returning to the newsroom to establish to what extent these arguments and similar arguments still hold true.

#### 2.4.2 Why the need for a “second wave” of newsroom ethnographies

Schlesinger (2016:21) argues that it is somewhat superfluous to talk about the need for a second wave of media ethnographies to replace the earlier studies. In other words, it is obvious that a new wave of research is needed. Or as Schlesinger explains in an overview of his own media production research since the 1970s:

It is self-evident that news production has greatly changed in the digital age, when the boundaries of journalism have become increasingly unsettled and contested, as has the institutional form of newspapers and broadcasting. There is now more complexity due to innovations resulting from the introduction of digital technologies, and obvious disruption of established patterns of temporality and the production cycles that went with these. So it goes without saying that a new approach is required to analyse the world as we now find it. (Schlesinger, 2016:21)

However, it cannot be contested that these early newsroom studies were very focused on more routine elements in the newsroom and that they, for the most part, negated the influence of technology on newswork. These studies are often criticised for veering too much towards “organizational functionalism”, thereby giving preference to “bureaucratic needs over journalistic *agency*” [original emphasis] (Cottle, 2000:11). Another criticism levelled against these studies is that they are often too focused on what happens inside the newsroom, thereby ignoring the technologies journalists use to gather, process and distribute news (Domingo, 2004:3; Boczkowski 1999). Furthermore, argues Domingo (2004:3), these early newsroom studies do not “give us any theoretical framework to analyse the process of a new technology entering the communication arena”. Cottle and Ashton (1999:24) also summarise this shortfall well:

Ethnographic studies of news operations and journalists have focused rather, *inter alia*, on bureaucratic routines and processes of professional recruitment and socialisation, newsroom hierarchy and division of labour, the pursuit of organisational goals, journalist immersion within a news culture and

subscription to a shared professional ideology, as well as newsroom dependency on institutional sources, but not news technology.

Notwithstanding, and as mentioned above, these early newsroom studies are often lauded for first opening the “black box” of news production (Stonbely, 2015; Thomsen, 2013). I also believe that studying socialisation and news culture has enduring value within newsrooms that have been disrupted by, among other things, digital media technologies.

Several authors highlight the lack of research that could once again open the so-called “black box” of news production in which digital media technologies play an ever-increasing role. Erdal (2011:215) argues that it is not enough to study texts to find out why “media representations” are constructed as they are. According to Erdal (2011:215), researchers need to take heed of the “production processes and content”. Klinenberg (2005:49) also criticises researchers who study the media for relying too much on anecdotes and speculation for their assessments of how changes in the media, including the advent of digital media technologies, influence newswork.

The criticisms listed above could arguably be considered a distant echo of the call made by Schramm (1957) in an overview of mass media research published more than sixty years ago. In his review of the twenty years of research that preceded his article, Schramm (1957:105) writes that “there was surprisingly little attempt during this period to study the personnel of the mass media”. While inroads have no doubt been made in this regard, I believe there might still be some truth to the statement Schramm (1957:107) makes about gaps in mass media research – certainly within the context of Media24 in general and Netwerk24 specifically:

We have as yet no adequate picture of media personnel, their training, their jobs, their feeling about their jobs, their financial and other rewards, [and] their codes of responsibility.

This view is also supported by Ryfe (2009:198), who argues that

... little is known about how the routines and practices of news production are changing (if at all), how journalists understand these changes, and what all of this means for the production of news or the self-conception of journalists.

Saltzis and Dickinson (2008:216) similarly argue that earlier studies of newswork have provided frameworks for understanding how journalists deal with the “constraints” they encounter, but that the

voices of journalists are “surprisingly seldom heard” in contemporary studies of journalism. Earlier, Cottle and Ashton (1999:26) said that what journalism studies needed was

... to engage in theoretically informed, detailed empirical studies of particular news operations if we are to begin to improve our understanding of the complex interactions between changing news technologies and journalist practices, and their impact on news output.

I am well aware of the fact that more newsroom studies have appeared all across the world since Ryfe, as well as Saltzis and Dickinson formulated their arguments a decade ago. Researchers have also increasingly answered the call by Cottle and Ashton for more studies based on empirical findings. As discussed in the next section, studies have more regularly started to address the perceptions of journalists of the changes to their newswork. Yet, I would still argue that more research is needed to better describe the South African media landscape; research that accounts for the rise of digital media technologies and the experiences journalists have of disruptions to their newswork network.

## **2.5 Newswork digitised**

### **2.5.1 When new technologies were new**

Kim and Weaver (2002:519) rightly say “each advance of new communication technology brings new opportunities for research”. The rise of the global internet in the 1990s, followed by its related interfaces and functionalities, soon inspired a variety of studies on the use of technology in general, and by journalists, specifically (Deuze, 2003:204). Many of these studies took as their starting point the technical possibilities of the internet, specifically in relation to hypertext, multimedia and interactivity (Steensen, 2011; Deuze, 2003). Robinson and Metzler (2016:704) explain that with the advent of the internet the

... capabilities of interactivity and multimedia were added to the reporter’s arsenal of professional tools and the publisher’s options for production changed what had to that point been a fairly enduring status quo. Media studies scholars rushed to begin documenting the new phenomenon and its effects upon journalists, sources, and audiences from all sorts of perspectives... What threw the journalists into turmoil meant wonderful and significant research opportunities for press theorists.

As argued above (section 2.3.2), most researchers agree that any new technology, as was the case with the internet, is usually met with both scepticism and positivity (see for instance: Agarwal & Barthel, 2015; García-Avilés, Kaltenbrunner & Meier, 2014; Steensen, 2011; Wallace, 2009; Domingo, 2004; Deuze, 2003; Garrison, 2001; Singer, 1997). Agarwal and Barthel (2015:376-377) summarise this dichotomy well:

The advent of online media has triggered an existential crisis in traditional journalism. Some think of the internet as a liberating force for news production... Others see the internet as a looming threat to the long-established standards of good journalism... Whether the web is the devil on the media's left shoulder or the angel on its right has been a difficult question to answer.

Singer (1997:4) uses the terms “benevolent revolutionary” and “reluctant traditionalist” when exploring the diverse attitudes of journalists to the introduction of new technologies. On one end of the spectrum is the journalist who is enthusiastic about technology and the opportunities it provides, while at the other extreme is the journalist who fears technology and only sees its drawbacks (Singer, 1997:4). A lot of changes and disruptions have dramatically altered the media landscape since Singer's original findings, including the perceived normalisation of this type of technology in most newsrooms. Yet it could still be argued that the majority of journalists fall somewhere between a “benevolent revolutionary” and “reluctant traditionalist” when it comes to innovation in the newsroom. For example, in her analysis of the use of quantitative data for reporting by news organisations such as the *Guardian*, Gynnild (2014:715) distinguishes between “high tech optimists” and “practice-focused s[c]eptics”. Similar to Singer's findings almost twenty years prior, Gynnild (2014:716) argues that the optimists see the value of using such quantitative data for future journalistic endeavours, while the sceptics feel that the “traditional news industry” does not have the “innovation culture” needed to adapt to this new approach to newswork. Another example can be found in the work of García-Avilés et al. (2014) on media convergence in Austria, Germany and Spain. These researchers explain that advocates of cooperation between different media platforms, as facilitated by the internet, believe that such “cross-media” partnerships have benefits that range from better coverage of news for audiences to the optimisation of human resources in the newsroom (García-Avilés et al., 2014:573). Critics, on the other hand, believe these partnerships are merely cost-saving measures that will negatively impact the quality of the final products (García-Avilés et al., 2014:573).

In general, argues Boczkowski (2005:2), the focus on the “revolutionary effects” of any new development in mass media technology has helped raise awareness of the “potentially radical

consequences” of such technologies for the media and broader society. However, argue Saltzis and Dickinson (2008:217), “at the level of news production” the drive to combine various news platforms at one news organisation “is more a case of evolution than revolution”. My initial observations of Netwerk24 support this argument: the newsroom does not change overnight.

Boczkowski (2005:2) also cautions against technological determinism that focuses more on the technology itself and less on the ways actors use it. Technological determinism is defined by Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006:21) as “the belief that technologies have an overwhelming and inevitable power to drive human actions and social change”. According to these researchers, the opposite approach could be defined as the “social shaping of technology”, which contends that “technologies are continuously remade by the things users do with them” (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006:21). Furthermore, Boczkowski (2005:104) emphasises the value of looking at local contexts instead of “technology-driven” outputs and end points. In his study of the first online editions of newspapers in America, Boczkowski (2005:153) found that new technology did not transform “established journalistic practices” just by itself; the extent and nature of the transformation was dependent on the context in which the technology was introduced.

I would argue that my interpretation of the social shaping of technology could be considered one of the cornerstones of this study’s theoretical approach, namely that the newswork of journalists is shaped by the way they are professionally socialised in conjunction with the digital media technologies they use, instead of viewing technology as the chief determining factor in newsroom changes (see Chapter 3 for further discussion on the theoretical underpinning of this study).

## **2.5.2 Journalists talking about digital disruptions**

In the previous section I argued against a deterministic view of digital media technologies in the newsroom. As Singer (2004b:14) says:

Newsrooms are complex social structures with distinct cultures, routines and norms. More than half a century of research into the sociology of news work details how the newsroom as a social system shapes what journalists do.

However, it would be erroneous to ignore the disruptive effect of such technologies on newsroom cultures and practices. Örnebring (2010:58), for instance, argues that this tendency among journalists to take a deterministic view of technology can to a large extent be explained by their proximity to the technology as it becomes integrated into the “everyday working life” of the journalists.

One should therefore take cognisance of the fact that, in the words of Dean (2016:146), online news today “is driven by a sense of urgency, because of the competition following the same story and the insatiable interest of news consumers who are checking their smartphones for the latest news”. Similarly, Usher (2018:28) found that newspaper journalists’ pursuit in publishing news fast and first online, regardless of whether these “incremental updates actually make any sense”, was in part due to “a fear of being irrelevant”.

As such, I would argue that to capture the full impact of disruptions and transitions, including technology, on newswork it remains crucial to explore the way journalists themselves perceive, approach and engage with these technologies, as well as how they believe newswork has evolved. It is not enough to rely on second-hand sources or anecdotes. What is needed is empirical research to look at the reality of what is happening in the newsroom, and how journalists experience newswork during periods of transition. I admit that “reality” is a contested term. Yet I would argue that even a somewhat subjective reality can best be described by going to the newsroom and talking to journalists.

Research that explores journalists’ views on a variety of digital media technologies, disruption and the resultant changes in the newsroom started to appear in the field of journalism studies at regular intervals since the late 1990s (see for instance: Menke et al., 2018; Ternes, Peterlin & Reinardy, 2018; Usher, 2018; Bunce, 2017; Hofstetter & Schoenhagen, 2017; Olausson, 2017; Saldaña, Higgins Joyce, Schmitz Weiss & Alves, 2017; Blankenship, 2016; Bro, Hansen & Andersson, 2016; Dean, 2016; Johnston, 2016; Lecheler & Kruike-meier, 2016; Ekdale, Singer et al., 2015; Larrondo et al., 2016; Örnebring 2010; Wallace, 2009; Dupagne & Garrison, 2006; Huang, Davison, Shreve, Davis, Bettendorf & Nair, 2006; Garrison, 2000; Singer 2004a&b, Singer, 1997).<sup>8</sup>

In one of the earliest studies on journalists’ perceptions of the internet, Singer (1997) explored the attitude journalists and editors at daily newspapers had to technology. She used a survey to find out how journalists perceived their roles and how they felt these roles and newswork would change because of “imminent or ongoing” technological changes (Singer, 1997:2). As discussed above (section 2.5.1), Singer (1997) found a diversity of views on the potential influence of internet-related technologies on journalists’ roles and values. Her findings that journalists see their roles as sense-makers to ensure credibility and fairness, were echoed in my own findings – almost 15 years later – that journalists want to retain their gatekeeping role (Jordaan, 2012). I would therefore argue that the following argument by Singer (1997:15-16) still rings true in terms of contemporary newswork:

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<sup>8</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, there are numerous studies on digital disruption within journalism. Therefore this is not an exhaustive list. I am confident, however, that my discussion will provide a general overview of trends that have been identified in terms of digital disruption and transition in the newsroom.

As the explosion of information continues, there will be an increasing need for skilled journalists to sort through it, filter out what is important and help put it in perspective.

Paulussen (2016:330) is slightly more critical of this need journalists seem to have to view themselves as guardians of news when he argues that by “maintaining and cherishing their gatekeeping role”, journalists are trying to “retain control over the news process”. Paulussen (2016:330) says:

Although professional norms evolve and journalists are increasingly coming to terms with the digital news ecosystem, it is clear that notions of professional control and autonomy can block innovation.

By exploring the role and experiences of journalists at Netwerk24 amidst disruption, I am able to establish whether these journalists are embracing innovation and/or steadily holding on to traditional conceptualisations of journalism.

In another early study on the adoption of technology in the newsroom, Garrison (2001) explored the use of computers and online tools in American newsrooms over a period of six years (1994-2000). While Garrison (2001:234) discovered clear motivation amongst journalists to use these tools, he also found that there was still some resistance to these tools. Some of the reasons for not adopting these technologies included: reluctance by management to lead the adoption; lack of resources, training and expertise; little or no access to the new technology; fear of not having enough time to learn; or not having enough time in the work schedule (Garrison, 2001:235). Despite these challenges, Garrison (2001:235) argues that his data “forecasts a bright future for the use of interactive information-gathering technologies by news organizations”. This future has arguably been realised since digital media technologies have increasingly become normalised in newsrooms, changing the way journalists do their work. Dean (2016:151), for instance, argues that if a new innovation is accepted in the newsroom, “routines are built around how to best use that new tool”.

Since this study is not focused on specific technological tools, it makes more sense to explore in broader terms how Netwerk24 journalists incorporate digital media technologies into their newswork network, and specifically how they feel these technologies have changed their daily routines and practices.

Notwithstanding the rapid appropriation of so-called new technologies in newsrooms, fears and doubts about them often linger. In a later study by Singer (2004b), similar divisions in the views journalists have of technology are still evident. In the 2004 study she explored the diffusion of convergence in four newsrooms. Convergence is defined here by Singer (2004b:3) as “some

combination of technologies, products, staff and geography among the previously distinct provinces of print, television and online media”. While most journalists in these newsrooms saw the benefits of convergence, there were still clashes between the cultures and values espoused by the journalists who were previously affiliated with different platforms, such as television versus print (Singer, 2004b:10). Several journalists suggested to Singer (2004b:10) that forcing journalists to work in a medium they feel “unsuited” for is a “recipe for mediocrity”. Wallace (2009:687) raises a similar concern: the fear that various new technologies may undermine the standard of journalism, “particularly in the provision of detailed, well-sourced and trustworthy information”. In her study of the need for journalists to become skilled as videographers in addition to their traditional news reporting duties, Wallace (2009:684) found:

New technology is seen to contain the potential to improve as well as diminish [the] quality of journalism and affect interpretations of journalists’ traditional role as watchdogs of society.

These concerns around the perceived drop in quality of the news product when digital technologies enter the newsroom is a recurring theme in similar studies – even of contemporary newswork (see for instance: Bunce, 2017; Hofstetter & Schoenhagen, 2017; Blankenship, 2016; Ekdale, Singer, et al., 2015; García-Avilés et al., 2014).

In their exploration of the diffusion of technological, relational and cultural innovation in the newsroom, Ekdale, Singer et al. (2015:941) found that newsworkers viewed changes favourably if they believed these changes “increase[d] the quality of journalism and [were] consistent with existing norms and values”. On the other hand, newsworkers resist changes they see as “disruptive of journalistic autonomy, damaging to the news product, and communicated poorly by company leadership” (Ekdale, Singer, et al. 2015:941). Or as Usher (2018:32) argues when she writes about the rationale of journalists for choosing and producing breaking news:

Overall, these breaking news production practices can be seen as an underlying attempt to stave off an assault on journalists’ authority; however, the changes journalists are making may ultimately destroy what little claim to authority they may have left. Today’s media environment highlights the conflict between different professional goals: satisfying audiences and beating the competition might be one way for newspaper journalists to remain relevant in a city’s news ecology; on the other hand, pursuing these goals also might undermine their ability to produce the kind of news that made them distinctive and valuable to a community.

Similarly, Hofstetter and Schoenhagen (2017:56) found that the need for journalists to constantly update news for online channels “sets the pace for the entire news production process” – not always with positive results. As these researchers explain:

Thus, online-related norms and standards such as the prioritisation of speed and immediacy, as well as click rates, are becoming a central benchmark for the entire newsroom. This ends up limiting time for journalistic research even though it was intended to strengthen it. (Hofstetter & Schoenhagen 2017:56)

While this study is not focused on measuring the quality of news outputs through, for instance, textual analysis, it takes cognisance of how journalists at Netwerk24 themselves view the nature and quality of their own work.

Another factor that could arguably influence the quality of newswork is the need for journalists to be multi-skilled in order to keep up with evolving technology and the demands of the 24/7 news cycle. Johnston (2016:900) explains that “the skills journalists are expected to possess have changed” in relation to more news organisations moving towards becoming “digital first”. Ternes et al. (2018:500) argue that the shrinking of newsrooms leads to an increase in the “daily job requirements” of journalists:

In an attempt to adapt to the changing landscape of media coverage, newspapers now require many journalists to provide multimedia elements with their stories. Journalists are frequently asked to perform multiple jobs, with some expectations falling outside their expertise. (Ternes et al., 2018:500)

Hofstetter and Schoenhagen (2017:56) further argue that journalists do not attempt to “provide news content across different media channels in a meaningful way” because of the fact that “new tasks have been incorporated into existing working routines and newsroom staff have been reduced at the same time”. As a result most journalists still only produce content “for the media they are familiar with” which leads to them “ignoring or only partially adapting to the intended cross-media news production” (Hofstetter & Schoenhagen, 2017:56).

Journalism studies researchers, then, seem to have been somewhat divided on whether journalists adapt their newswork as a result of digital media technologies, or whether they simply incorporate these technologies into their existing routines and practices without fundamentally changing the way they work. Ryfe (2009:198), for instance, believes that professional culture in the newsroom is

“remarkably resilient and resistant to change”. After doing a survey of journalists in 11 European countries, O’Sullivan and Heinonen (2008:368) also argue that

... the social institution called journalism is hesitant in abandoning its conventions, both at organisational and professional levels, even in the ‘Age of the Net’, when overall communication patterns in society are being re-shaped. There seems to be a prevailing ‘principle of continuity’ in journalism.

On the other hand, Usher (2012:1901) says studies have shown that journalistic authority and identity undergo “considerable reconfiguration” as journalists adopt digital media technologies into their newswork. Similarly, Mare (2014:13) argues that digital media technologies have altered routines in the newsroom and in the field “at the structural level”. In the same vein, but related specifically to social media use, Olausson (2017:63) summarises the different views on the influence of technology on professional journalistic role conceptions when she says:

On the one hand, there are strong indications that social media have not brought about any major identity shifts, but journalists have extended the scope of the traditional journalistic identity, in terms of ideological values and norms, to include their social media practices, thus ‘normalizing’ social media to fit with ordinary journalistic practice. ... On the other hand, there are signs of a partial breaking up of traditional professional identity, for instance, acceptance of the blurring of professional and private identity, an inclination to more freely express opinions, and a positive attitude towards personal branding.

Noteworthy here is the importance of newsroom culture when it comes to the nature and extent of technology adoption by journalists. Huang et al. (2006:92), for instance, found concerns among the journalists they surveyed about the difference in the newsroom cultures of different media platforms. According to these researchers, editors in converged newsrooms “called for flexibility in aptitude and willingness to cooperate across platforms” (Huang et al., 2006:92). Menke et al. (2018:882) argue that to understand “the dynamics of convergence processes” means that one realises that convergence is “not just a specific way of producing and distributing news”. Rather, argue these researchers, “such convergence strategies are highly interrelated with newsroom cultures, which determine the realization of convergence journalism” (Menke et al., 2018:882). Similarly, Larrondo et al. (2016:279) argue that the “detering role of professional cultures in the adoption of convergence projects has been repeatedly established”. According to Larrondo et al. (2016:279),

Only when journalists identify more with the corporation as a whole and not with a specific medium, this conflict can be mitigated, building a strong corporate culture and avoiding a media hierarchy.

By including and exploring the concept of the professional journalistic habitus at the Netwerk24 newsroom, I am able to describe the influence of newsroom culture on the newswork of the journalists who have to produce content on a variety of platforms for this digital-first publication. Furthermore, it is worth exploring the following statement by Creech and Nadler (2018:182) in an article in which they critique the “overriding and celebratory focus on innovation” that they argue prevail in contemporary thinking on journalism:

For advocates of innovation, newsrooms offer a confounding obstacle. On one hand, they are the embodiment of journalistic value and tradition, the legitimacy upon which any interventions in the industry are built. On the other, they resist change and harbor a workforce with outdated skills and little time to master new ones or to think strategically about the threats facing journalism. (Creech & Nadler, 2018:190)

In other word, is the Netwerk24 newsroom a place where traditional journalistic values prevail while still adapting to changes during periods of transition and digital disruptions, or can this newsroom be considered resistant to change?

Closely related to newsroom culture in the promotion of convergence is the role of management in guiding journalists through periods of change and transition. Bunce (2017:12) believes that the disruption of news practices and economic pressures can “prompt news outlets to experiment with their news offerings”. He adds:

Given the volatility and dynamism, how managers attempt to discipline and change journalistic practice, and how journalists respond to these pressures, is a key question for journalism studies. (Bunce, 2017:12)

When journalism studies researchers therefore explore issues such as convergence and the need for journalists to multi-task, there also needs to be a focus on how journalists are rewarded and supported in their newswork during times of disruption. Huang et al. (2006:94) explain:

Media managements also need to think about how news practitioners can benefit from convergence and how their efforts in repurposing stories can be recognized apart from adding their names to bylines in another platform.

In an era of sophisticated audience metrics tools, for instance, it becomes easier for news managers to measure journalists' individual contribution to news outputs. Bunce (2017:5) says the way managers use metrics is not as important as the fact that "the knowledge that this information is collected and monitored may affect the way journalists work". Such surveillance techniques could arguably have a detrimental effect on journalists' newswork and their levels of job satisfaction. In his ethnographic study of the use of audience metrics in a regional Reuters bureau, Bunce (2017:2) found that the managerial team used "a range of strategies" to "incentivize and discipline" the journalists:

Notably, these included the selective use of praise and censure, the dissemination of audience metrics about 'successful' news stories, and the hiring and promotion of 'appropriate' journalists to positions of influence. Cumulatively, these interventions changed who was considered a 'good journalist' in this bureau.

In addition, I would concur with Ternes et al. (2018:498) who believe that journalists' job satisfaction "will be critical for their ability to remain productive and relevant" as they adapt to the "new information marketplace". According to these researchers, some professional journalists "are still trying to adapt to modern news media" in light of the "dramatic changes to the newspaper industry" (Ternes et al., 2018:505). Job cuts and the additional pressure that puts on individual journalists "also tapped resources that diminish job satisfaction" (Ternes et al., 2018:505).

Based on the discussions above, one way to counter low levels of job satisfaction is arguably to foster a culture of support by management and peers. What is also needed, as argued by Huang et al. (2006:94), is for managers to provide training and resources to journalists – especially mid-career ones – to learn and develop multimedia skills. However, Huang et al. (2006:91) also found, in the words of one of their research participants that "strong technical skills and training can help, but it's not just dependent on that; it depends more on the attitude and aptitude of the journalist".

In light of the discussion above, I identified the following broad themes to partly inform my ethnographic study of newswork at Netwerk24: the nature and extent of changes to newswork due to the appropriation of technology; how journalists perceive and aim for quality; journalists' understanding and experience of the need to be multi-skilled; the role of culture in the appropriation

of technology and changes to newswork; the influence of management and newsroom leadership; and, the issue of job satisfaction.

### 2.5.3 Journalism redefined

Since journalism studies researchers first started to take notice of the far-reaching potential of digital disruptions, questions have been raised about the very nature of journalism as practice and profession. Deuze (2003:216) believes that the potential of what online media offers, which includes the functionalities of hyperlinks, multimedia and interactivity, challenges the “perceptions of the roles and functions of journalism *as a whole*” [original emphasis]. Furthermore, argues Josephi (2009:144), it becomes harder than ever before to defend news journalists working at established news organisations as “the only ones deserving the title journalist”. In the same vein, Hartley (2008:49) argues that journalism is essentially a human right, meaning that everyone has the right to not only express an opinion but also to circulate that opinion. According to Hartley (2008:49), this “so-called user-led innovation will reinvent journalism” – even though journalists might be the last to admit it. A decade after Hartley’s prediction, journalism has certainly been reinvented through, among other things, user-generated content and social media.

I believe that the literature reviewed and discussed in the previous sections has shown that both the function and the form of journalism have been heavily influenced by the rise of digital media technologies. Terms such as “liquid journalism” (Kantola, 2016) and “networked journalism” (Russell, 2016) are increasingly being used to make sense of the continued evolution of the industry.

Other authors argue that the main distinction between professional journalists and other news creators is journalism’s commitment to professional ethics; something that lacks in members of the audience who have not been trained “in the organisation culture of newsroom journalism” (Flew, 2014:110). Similarly, Deuze and Witschge (2018:167) explain that journalism is articulated as a “profession with a specific occupational ideology and culture”. In other words, journalists “benchmark their actions and attitudes” using “ideal-typical standards” that include serving the public; being objective, fair and trustworthy; working autonomously; delivering current news speedily; and, having a social responsibility (Deuze & Witschge, 2018:167). Deuze and Witschge (2018:167) say: “This conceptualization is still strong within the field today and seems to endure even in the midst of profound changes and challenges to the profession.”

This brief glimpse of the changing conceptualisations of journalism as practice and profession supports the need for studies that explore the perceptions of journalists of their own place in the

world. Through this ethnography of newswork at Netwerk24, I believe that I also add value to the debate on what constitutes journalism in contemporary society – and specifically in South Africa.

## 2.6 Tracing the roots of Netwerk24

In this final section of the literature review, I provide a brief overview of the history of Afrikaans-language news at Media24. The focus falls on the digital developments that led to the establishment of Netwerk24 in August 2014. Since this study is a snapshot of Netwerk24 (for the period between May 2016 and November 2017) more details about what happened at this publication and in its newsrooms during this time will be part of the analysis and discussion of findings.

### 2.6.1 Naspers and Media24

The international media conglomerate Naspers – as it is nowadays known – was established as Nasionale Pers (translated as “National Press”) in 1915. Its first publication, in Dutch, was known as *De Burger* (Naspers, n.d.). Now called *Die Burger* and published in Afrikaans, this daily newspaper celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary in 2015. Over the next few decades more newspapers followed, including *Volksblad* (bought by Naspers in 1917), *die Oosterlig* (1937), *Beeld* (1965) and *Rapport* (1970) (Media24, n.d.). Naspers founded its first internet service, Mweb, in 1997 (Naspers, n.d.). News24, an English news website (and sister publication to Netwerk24), was launched in 1998, “soon becoming the premium online news source in South Africa” (Media24, n.d.).

It falls outside the scope of this study to discuss and elaborate on the history of Naspers which stretches across more than a century and multiple continents. What is noteworthy, is that over the past few decades the company’s main focus shifted from media products to a variety of digital-based products and services. According to Rabe (n.d.: Introduction)<sup>9</sup>, Naspers has

... decade after decade been at the forefront of the most innovating developments of new markets and new technologies. With its moral and intellectual awakening to separate it from political ideology, it has been positioned for a total transformation from a print media company to a digital

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<sup>9</sup> This citation refers to an unpublished manuscript and therefore there is no publication date, nor specific page numbers.

media platform and e-commerce merchant in the last few decades of its first century.

Media24 was established as a separate entity in 2000 “when Naspers organised and branded its news and print businesses under the Media24 umbrella” (Media24, n.d.). According to the company’s website, Media24 is “South Africa’s leading media company with interests in digital media and services, newspapers, magazines, e-commerce, book publishing, print and distribution” (Media24, n.d.). Esmaré Weideman was appointed as chief executive officer of Media24 in 2011.

## 2.6.2 Digital disruptions at Media24

Despite Naspers’s overall successes, its legacy print titles *Die Burger*, *Volksblad*, *Beeld* and *Rapport* started to suffer about a decade ago – in line with global trends. Tim du Plessis, former head of Media24’s Afrikaans newspaper titles, said in a 2011 interview that these titles were especially affected by “the unrelenting advance of digital media, in conjunction with the global recession” (Rabe, n.d.:Chapter 12). However, in an online presentation of Media24’s 2017 annual results, while referring to the worldwide disruptions in the media industry, Weideman added that:

Fortunately, at Media24, we realised many years ago what transition was going to happen in our industry, and we invested very early on in digital media.

As alluded to in section 2.6.2, News24 was established in the early days of the internet in South Africa. According to Arrie Rossouw (2005:215), first publisher of News24, there were, however, earlier experiments with a web presence at Naspers, such as eBeeld. This website at first hosted English content – mainly from newswires. Later a network of freelancers started to translate reports from *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* into English (Rossouw, 2005:215). According to Rossouw (2005:215), this venture showed up divisions in the newsroom:

The rest of the editorial staff was not interested in what we were doing, but those who did take an interest were easily convinced to supply content for the new online news service.

An Afrikaans version of News24 called Nuus24 was also developed, but closed again in June 2013 (Mybroadband, 2013). According to the industry website Mybroadband (2013), Jannie Momberg, then editor of News24 and Nuus24, said the belief that Afrikaans-speaking consumers “need[ed] and

deserve[d] to get the latest breaking news, information and entertainment on any device” still held. Momberg said the company believed the “digital arms” of *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* would still provide these features and services (Mybroadband, 2013). These titles announced separately that they would adopt “a digital-first method of operation, breaking news online, and charging a fee for accessing their content” (Mybroadband, 2013). These individual newspaper websites paved the way for the establishment of Netwerk24 in 2014.

### 2.6.3 The advent and evolution of Netwerk24

Netwerk24 was at first considered mostly as a substitute for the aforementioned four Afrikaans newspaper titles’ individual websites when these were all shut-down, or rather redirected to their new digital home. A paywall was introduced from the outset. In one of the early articles about the origins of Netwerk24, Weideman was quoted as saying that Netwerk24 made “it easier for users to get the news in one place rather than jumping between the digital platforms of the print titles” (Netwerk24, 2014). According to Weideman (Netwerk24, 2014),

[i]t is more about the news offering than the title. We are creating one digital platform that can proudly take its place alongside our powerful Afrikaans news titles.

Liesl Pretorius, first editor of Netwerk24, said in the same article that Netwerk24 provided “unrestricted access to the best journalism in Afrikaans” as well as a “place of conversation for Afrikaans people across the country” (Netwerk24, 2014). Netwerk24 went live on 22 August 2014. The individual newspapers’ websites remained available until the end of September 2014.

As discussed in the introduction to Chapter 1, Netwerk24 has evolved a lot since its inception.<sup>10</sup> On 27 August 2015 Media24 announced in an internal memo that Adriaan Basson, then editor at *Beeld*, would become full-time editor-in-chief of Netwerk24 on 1 September 2015. According to this announcement, Basson would

... lead a team of 16 news editors, journalists and sub-editors to be appointed to Netwerk24. The team, which includes Media24’s entire parliamentary bureau, will work closely with News24’s newly appointed

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<sup>10</sup> An overview of the evolution of Netwerk24 has been attached as Addendum A.

team of journalists to produce breaking news and cutting-edge analysis and multi-media journalism online.

In the first morning newsletter published on 9 November 2015 by this new Netwerk24, titled “Koffie en beskuit”<sup>11</sup> Basson announced that the new team of journalists were “in full swing”, and that the design of the website had been updated.

In an email to staff on 6 April 2016, Weideman announced that the digital-first strategy for the aforementioned Afrikaans newspaper titles would “step into the fast lane” on 1 May of that year with the “introduction of a 24/7 digital-first Afrikaans news cycle”. By then Netwerk24 had grown to become the biggest pay site in the country. Some of the implications of this transition included that all the “content creators”, including news editors and journalists, who were then working at *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad*, would move to Netwerk24 (and become part of the broader 24.com digital division of Media24) “to create a 24/7 digital news flow”. The legacy print titles would then get their content from Netwerk24. By this time, Jo van Eeden had become editor-in-chief of Netwerk24. In the same email Weideman said:

As the custodians of the strongest and most established Afrikaans media brands we have over 100 years’ experience in providing excellent editorial content to the Afrikaans market. It is our responsibility to continuously innovate to meet the needs of our consumers.

The field work for this study started in May 2016, shortly after the merger of the newspapers’ staff with the first Netwerk24 journalistic team. As is evident from the information above, it was a time of transition and disruption in the newsrooms where content is created for Netwerk24 and the legacy print titles.

During the fieldwork period, Henriëtte Loubser, former editor of the weekly magazine *Huisgenoot*, succeeded Van Eeden as editor of Netwerk24. She started in her new position on 1 June 2017. In a letter to Netwerk24 users, published as an article on the website on her first official day in office, Loubser wrote that the goals of Netwerk24 were “unique and quality journalism” and to create a “real media home” for users.

In a November 2017 interview Weideman told me that she chose the name “Netwerk24” very specifically herself, because

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<sup>11</sup> The title of this early morning newsletter can loosely be translated as “coffee and rusks” and references a morning ritual with which many South Africans start their day.

... I knew it would become a network of Afrikaans people, and probably at some stage of more Media24 products.<sup>12</sup> The network is a community network and a network between all of our publications. So I think that was the right decision.

As of 24 October 2017, Netwerk24 had 22 601 paying subscribers, with 146 843 followers on their Facebook page, and 183 201 followers on Facebook. The website had 61 082 unique browsers per day, with 12 827 unique browsers on the mobile app.<sup>13</sup>

As mentioned at the start of this section, this study covers around 18 months in the life of Netwerk24 and its journalists. This means that more information on this period will be part of the final analysis and findings.

## 2.7 Summary

As this literature review has shown, there is still a need for studies that explore the experiences and perceptions of journalists from within South African newsrooms, and at Netwerk24 specifically. This chapter has highlighted some of the gaps in existing literature, which include a lack of studies that explore the influence of digital media technologies on newswork in the South African context. The need for more ethnographic research to study newsrooms and newswork was also pointed out.

In addition, an overview of the roots of journalism studies was provided in order to situate this study within the broader field of academic enquiry. It is evident from this review that journalism studies has grown to stretch beyond explorations of the individual newsroom or text through the introduction of global-comparative studies, among others. This study, while not doing a like-for-like comparison with other newsrooms or countries, adds value by exploring an under-researched phenomenon on an empirical, methodological and theoretical level. Some references to early journalism studies research on technology use were also included in this part of the review. These early studies have shown that there have always been both journalists and researchers who view technology as positive and

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<sup>12</sup> My interview with Weideman was the culmination of my period of direct enquiry at Netwerk24. It must be noted that by then the paper titles had landing pages on the website again. More importantly, by November 2017 many of Media24's Afrikaans magazine titles were also being incorporated into Netwerk24 – behind the paywall. Since my study is focused on newswork of journalists who produce content for Netwerk24 as *news* website, these changes are not part of my analysis.

<sup>13</sup> These statistics were provided to me by Loubser. While they might appear somewhat dated, it is important to note (as highlighted in the previous footnote) that the make-up of Netwerk24 changed in November 2017 with the inclusion of the magazine titles. Statistics that include the magazine titles would not be reflective of Netwerk24 during the time of my ethnographic fieldwork.

supplementary to their newswork. On the other hand, there have also been detractors who view new technologies and innovations as a threat to journalism as profession, especially with regards to issues of quality.

As precursor to Chapter 4, which discusses ethnography as research design, this literature review also traced some of the history of newsroom ethnographies. Early newsroom ethnographies, which as a rule were focused on routine to explain the nature of newswork, were referenced. While these studies have been criticised for ignoring the role of technology as part of newswork, they are still considered seminal works when it comes to opening the so-called “black box” of news production. The shortcomings of these ground-breaking studies have led to the call for a “second wave” of newsroom studies. Researchers started to return to the newsroom to explore the use and influence of various types of technology on the routines, practices and cultures in the newsroom.

At first, these technologies were so “new” that it led to a somewhat deterministic view of technology in the newsroom. It has been established, however, that the adoption and use of digital media technologies also rely heavily on newsroom culture and individual journalists’ attitudes towards these new entrants into the newsroom. In line with these arguments, my own contention is that technology is shaped by society, and in this case specifically the newsrooms in which such technologies are introduced.

This literature review also paid attention to the way journalists talk about the role of digital media technologies. Some of the themes that emerged from the literature include the basic question of how the appropriation of digital media technologies influence and change newswork. Another important issue raised by journalists in many of the studies reviewed centre on the quality of their newswork and news products. The normalisation of technology in the newsroom has also increasingly required of journalists to be multi-skilled and to work with less resources under more pressure, according to some of the studies referenced. The importance of looking at culture when it comes to changes in newswork was also an issue that warrants further investigation. Similarly, the role of management in addressing changes to newsroom routines, cultures and practices should also be explored and described. Finally, journalists’ perceptions and descriptions of their levels of job satisfaction have also come to the forefront in the literature reviewed.

Another research theme emanating from the introduction of digital media technologies to the newsroom and society at large, has been the question of how contemporary journalism should be defined. The advent of user-generated content and social media, for instance, challenges the role and position of journalists in society. It is therefore worthwhile to explore and describe how Netwerk24 journalists view themselves, especially as digital journalists.

This literature review was concluded by a brief overview of the origins of Afrikaans news at Naspers, which led to the establishment of Media24. Attention was also paid to the way digital disruptions were handled by Media24. The overview of Netwerk24 has shown that, in the less than five years since its inception, this newsroom and digital-first publication has evolved rapidly.

This chapter has provided a solid foundation for the exploration of newswork during a period of transition at Netwerk24. Firstly, however, the theoretical positioning of the study will be described in more detail.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

### 3.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, journalism studies has its origins in a variety of academic disciplines, ranging from the humanities to the social sciences, and from cultural studies to sociology and anthropology. While such diversity contributes to a broader understanding of journalism as practice and profession, it also makes it difficult to narrow down the basic theoretical positions from which this field of study originates. Or as Zelizer (2009:29) argues, “[i]n being everywhere, journalism and its study are in fact nowhere”.

Over the past few decades, however, there has been a proliferation of books and peer-reviewed journals that deal with journalism studies specifically. Some prominent examples include volumes of essays in *The handbook of journalism studies* (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009b) and *The SAGE handbook of digital journalism* (Witschge, Anderson, Domingo & Hermida, 2016b), and journals such as *Journalism Studies*, *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* and *Digital Journalism*. These publications have contributed to establishing journalism studies as an independent and respected field of academic enquiry. Locally journals such as *African Journalism Studies* have also added to the body of knowledge in this field.

This study’s exploration of Netwerk24 could in very broad terms be described as a social anthropology of newswork and journalism. According to Wahl-Jorgensen (2010:22), the ethnography of news production “has always been an interdisciplinary endeavour, situated at the intersection of media and journalism studies, anthropology, and the sociology of work”. As discussed in Chapter 2, newsroom ethnography has enduring value despite, or perhaps because of, continual changes to the news industry.

One of this study’s central goals is to add to the collective body of work on newswork – on both a methodological and theoretical level. A further aim of this research is thus to contribute to the development of theoretical models for the study of newswork, newsroom practice and journalists themselves. This goal is achieved by combining key elements from habitus and actor-network theory as theoretical concepts to study newswork at Netwerk24. The application of this novel theoretical framework to the study of a relatively new phenomenon will contribute to debates on the future of journalism and newswork – especially within the South African context. At the time of writing, Netwerk24 was less than five years old and still under-researched.

In this chapter I describe the central theoretical departure point of the study. To further elaborate on the study's theoretical positioning, the chapter looks at the application of habitus and actor-network theory within journalism studies. The chapter concludes with an overview of how the combination of these two theoretical concepts strengthens my analysis of newswork at Netwerk24.

### 3.2 Some initial cautionary remarks

Two French researchers, Pierre Bourdieu and Bruno Latour, are seen as the main proponents of habitus and actor-network theory (in sociology) respectively. At first glance, these researchers do not seem to have a lot in common. What they do seem to share, however, is a tendency to fiercely protect their own points of view, often because they feel that their views have been misinterpreted or misappropriated. Their work is indeed not easy to read – especially for non-French-speaking researchers. Bourdieu has said that he “explained the meaning and function of the concept of habitus so often” that he does not really want to do it again because he fears he will only repeat himself and “simplify without necessarily clarifying things” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:120). Similarly, Latour (1996:369) has said that actor-network theory has “often been misunderstood and hence much abused”.

In raising these seminal authors' concerns I am not suggesting that I have overcome all apparent hurdles to become an expert on either the work of Bourdieu or Latour. The fact remains that habitus and actor-network theory are just two pieces in research *oeuvres* that stretch across decades and disciplines. It falls outside the scope of this study to analyse and discuss these two authors' thinking in complete detail. Furthermore, neither Bourdieu nor Latour were the only, or even necessarily the first, researcher to come up with the key elements of habitus or actor-network theory. They are arguably only the most prominent and oft-quoted researchers in media studies to have developed these concepts.

Why then raise these authors' concerns about their scientific legacy? I want to show that it is not enough to merely study and philosophise about habitus and actor-network theory as theoretical concepts. One point of agreement between Bourdieu and Latour is their emphasis on ethnographical fieldwork as methodology to develop their theories. As mentioned before, and in Chapter 4, one of the key contributions of my study also lies in the ethnographic nature thereof. I am therefore advocating for following in the footsteps of these two researchers by applying and adapting concepts through the empirical study of phenomena. In other words, theory and practice should continuously inform one another.

In this chapter I also aim to counter potential criticism against the so-called cherry-picking of ideas from Bourdieu and Latour to suit my own research agenda. I would argue, in line with Ryfe (2018), that finding correlations – as well as disagreements – between these researchers' arguments could only serve to enhance and broaden the application of both habitus and actor-network theory to journalism studies. While there are significant differences in the way Bourdieu and Latour viewed the world, sociology and science, this chapter therefore sets out to find common ground between their theoretical concepts for a more holistic view of newswork at Netwerk24.

### 3.3 Central theoretical departure point

The central theoretical departure point of this study is that Netwerk24 journalists share certain professional dispositions that influence, and are influenced by, their roles within the newswork network where they interact and associate with each other and the digital media technologies they use.

In order to describe these dispositions and associations, I rely on a synthesis of two seemingly distinct theoretical constructs. The theory of habitus, or more specifically the professional journalistic habitus, suggests that the actions of Netwerk24 journalists are based on past experiences within newsrooms and amongst other journalists, while at the same time contributing to how the Netwerk24 newsroom is and will be structured (Maton, 2008:50; Crossley, 2001:83; Bourdieu, 1990:56; Bourdieu, 1977:78). Actor-network theory explains how newswork at Netwerk24, or everyone and everything involved in it, can only exist and be described through a study of the ways in which these different role-players interact with each other (Domingo & Wiard, 2016:637; Latour, 2011:797; Couldry, 2008:93).

Habitus and actor-network theory have originated from two divergent research views and traditions. I believe, however, that an exploration of journalists' actions and experiences as informed by their historical sensibilities *and* their everyday interactions with both human and non-human role-players leads to a much richer understanding of how newswork at Netwerk24 is constructed. My argument is further that exploring this novel theoretical framework will add to existing conceptualisations of newswork in times of transition and change. I concur with Reese (2016:817) that the future of journalism

.... requires new thinking, as we try to accommodate the emerging, unsettled, and shifting digital-enabled configurations of newswork with the kind of predictive, generalizable stability sought by social science.

### 3.4 Habitus in the media context

Habitus is a key ingredient of Bourdieu's broader field theory. One of the most accessible descriptions Bourdieu (1977:78) provides for habitus is that it is "history turned into nature". Sterne (2003:375) says Bourdieu uses the notion of a field to describe "groups of interrelated social actors", with capital referring to "specific forms of agency and prestige within a given field". Similarly, Grenfell (2010:21) explains that within the larger field theory "*habitus* shapes individual responses (directs individuals) and defines their position in the *field* in terms of the *capital* they hold" [original emphasis]. The relationship between field, capital and habitus is further summarised by Maton (2008:51):

... one's practice results from relations between one's dispositions (*habitus*) and one's position in a field (*capital*), within the current state of play of that social arena (*field*)... Practices are thus not simply the result of one's habitus but rather of *relations between* one's habitus and one's current circumstances. [original emphasis]

The application of field theory and its related concepts has a rich and varied history in journalism studies (see for instance: Tandoc & Jenkins, 2017; Barnard, 2016; Craft, Vos & Wolfgang, 2016; Vos & Singer, 2016; Møller Hartley, 2013; Botma, 2011; Kunelius & Ruusunoksa, 2008; Schultz, 2007a&b; Filho & Praça, 2006; Benson & Neveu, 2005b). In the sections below I take note of the application of field theory within journalism studies. Attention is paid to the concept of capital as it has some bearing on this study. Section 3.4 concludes with a more detailed discussion of what could be described as the professional journalistic habitus.

#### 3.4.1 Field

Bourdieu (2005:30) describes the field as "the site of actions and reactions performed by social agents endowed with permanent dispositions, partly acquired in their experiences of these social fields". Or as Vos (2016:618) explains: "Actors who function within a particular field are members of the field largely because they have accepted the assumptions of the field." Looking at journalism as a field, argues Schultz (2007b:7), entails

... understanding journalism as a semi-autonomous field with its own logics of practice as an ongoing game of struggle of defining what is journalism, what is good journalism, etc.

As discussed in Chapter 1, journalism studies researchers are increasingly grappling with questions about the nature of journalism and newswork amid the rise of digital media technologies. Viewing journalism as an “ongoing game or struggle”, as Schultz (2007b:7) suggests field theory allows for, could thus help to answer and contextualise questions about the changing nature of journalism as practice and profession. Vos (2016:620) adds that conceptualising journalism as field can also guide a researcher into explaining “something of how news comes to turn out the way that it does”.

Mahar, Harker and Wilkes (1990:8) explain that Bourdieu’s conception of field does not have “a fence around it”, but that it rather is “a field of forces”; dynamic and filled with “various potentialities”. Similarly, Willig (2012:376) argues that fields, albeit “somewhat stable in a historical perspective”, are not static but rather “in constant change as people’s positions change, thus changing the relations within the field”. According to Compton and Benedetti (2010:489), field theory also helps researchers to explore the impact of new entrants, such as digital media technologies, into a social field.

Vos (2016:616), in his recent analysis of how field theory remains relevant to journalism studies in times of digital disruption, says for Bourdieu and like-minded researchers, “mutuality and interdependence” are central to the field concept. In fact, researchers are fond of quoting Bourdieu’s contention that the “real is relational” (see for instance: Slaatta, 2016:100; Schinkel, 2007:712; Benson & Neveu, 2005a:3; Vandenberghe, 1999:32). For Bourdieu this boils down to understanding that the distribution of individuals and groups within a “social space” or “field” is based on both the amount and type of capital they hold. In this instance, capital mostly refers to relative economic, political and sometimes cultural or symbolic power. Netwerk24 journalists can also be considered to possess a type of symbolic “journalistic capital”, as argued in section 3.4.2 below. Another interpretation of the “real is relational” could be linked to the interaction between different fields. Or as Vos (2016:617) says, “to understand a field requires that we understand it relative to other fields”.

Research into journalism as practice and profession usually relates it to the broader field of cultural production, in combination with the political and economic fields. While this study does not negate the influence of other (macro) fields of journalism, it focuses on the micro field where newswork happens, specifically at Netwerk24. I am aware of the criticism this approach could illicit. Slaatta (2016:101) even advocates, albeit provocatively, for the inclusion of a proviso when doing ethnographic research which is mostly interested in the micro level, and which thus ignores the “totality” or the “societal context” in which journalism is produced. This proviso, Slaatta (2016:101) argues, should indicate that the “relational context” in which the ethnographic observations were made “has not been fully analysed according to the principles of field analysis”. Benson and Neveu (2005a:11) similarly argue that field theory differs from the traditional organisational media studies

since it incorporates empirical data on individual journalists, news beats or organisations into “progressively larger systems of power”.

The abovementioned criticisms certainly have value, since what is “real” in the field where journalists do newswork is definitely also “relational” with regards to external forces. I would argue, however, in conjunction with Botma (2011:45), that the main theoretical concepts of field theory can be “fruitfully applied to a single newsroom” – and even to subfields within the same newsroom. Russell (2007:287) argues that while “outside factors” that shape journalistic practices must be considered, it is worthwhile to systematically describe

... emerging forms of news media and participation that shed light on challenges to contemporary understandings and practices of journalism.

Russell’s study (2007:287) on the coverage of the 2005 French riots by professionals and non-professionals is thus focused on “the forces at work within the field”. There is therefore adequate support to substantiate the use of field theory, and more specifically the theoretical concept of habitus, within one newsroom to study newswork and journalistic cultures. Furthermore, as argued by Willig (2012:372), the field perspective is

.... highly suitable as a framework for ethnographic studies, not least because one of the greatest strengths is that it is more than a theory. It is an attempt to develop empirical tools aiming towards a critical mapping of social life and practice, as well as uncovering power relations and social institutions.

In other words, as argued throughout this study, field theory can and should be developed through empirical investigations.

### **3.4.2 Capital**

Various authors draw attention to the direct relationship between habitus and capital in Bourdieu’s writing (see for instance: Moore, 2008; Webb, Shirato & Danaher, 2002; Mahar et al., 1990). While this study will not focus on capital *per se* it remains necessary to briefly explore this relationship – especially as it relates to the journalistic context.

Mahar et al. (1990:13) say Bourdieu’s definition of capital is very wide. It ranges from symbolic capital inherent to material things and “untouchable” attributes (such as status and authority) to

cultural capital, defined as “culturally valued taste and consumption patterns”. Moore (2008:110) says the formation of the habitus as a “coherent and integrated set of principles” that become ingrained in an individual over time can be equated to the “acquisition of symbolic capital”.

Central to the concept of capital in general is its role in establishing positions of power and control, as well as in the advancement of an individual within a field (see for instance: Hellmueller, Vos & Poepse, 2013; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012; Webb et al., 2002; Mahar et al., 1990). According to Robbins (1991:100), anyone who possesses a “high degree of capital” has the ability to change the rules of the game, or field, he or she is part of. Wiik (2009:353), who considers the professional ideals of journalists as symbolic capital, explains that the “actors of a field compete with each other to attain legitimate power within that field”. According to Willig (2012:380), one should assume that there are “many different forms of competing journalistic capital in a field at any given time”. Willig (2012:380) further explains:

Journalistic capital is a form of capital closely connected to the concept of peer recognition. Having a lot of journalistic capital means having a lot of respect from journalist colleagues and having a good position internally in the journalist hierarchy. Journalistic capital can be material as well as immaterial. ...[it] can also be found in the small details of everyday newsroom practice; for instance, when a journalist gets a little extra time to work on his story, or he gets the best photographer award or the most interesting interview.

This study is concerned with journalistic capital as it relates to the position of journalists within the newsroom, but more specifically to how it can be found in the “small details of everyday newsroom practice”, as explained by Willig above.

The habitus then is constituted by the “type and amount of editorial capital of the individual agent and the total distribution of capital in a field” (Willig, 2012:381). In other words, different journalists have different professional roles and positions in the newsroom that help to shape the general newsroom culture and dispositions, as expressed through the professional journalistic habitus. Schultz (2007a:193) uses the example of an editor’s voice and opinion counting as more valid and important than that of a young intern when it comes to discussions of story ideation and newsworthiness.

Handley and Rutigliano (2012:745) argue that habitus and capital influences agents’ positions in the field, as well as their motivation for either supporting or undermining the current structure of the field. In addition, Møller Hartley (2013:575) argues that

... journalists agree on some common set of rules which constitutes the actual field, even though they might disagree on certain ways of doing things which displays the struggle for power inside the field – the struggle to determine the common set of rules.

It would therefore be reasonable to assume that what really happens within the newsroom depends on the interplay between what is generally accepted as good, professional journalism, and the struggle to define and re-define the boundaries of such professional practices.

My argument is that newswork at Netwerk24 can partly be described through an exploration of how the professional journalistic habitus is constructed by, and simultaneously helps to determine, the distribution of journalistic capital in the field, which in this case is the geographically-dispersed Netwerk24 newsroom. The formation of the professional habitus at Netwerk24 will therefore not only be based on shared historical sensibilities and dispositions but also on the way journalists struggle to acquire the capital needed to actively construct this newsroom network and their own place inside it.

### 3.4.3 Professional journalistic habitus

Bourdieu uses habitus as analytical tool to study anything from tribal life in Algeria to the school system in France. It is therefore not always easy to pinpoint exactly what Bourdieu intended when he developed and discussed the habitus. He also defines this concept in a variety of ways: “systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*” [original emphasis] (Bourdieu, 1977:72); “both a system of schemes of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices” (Bourdieu, 1989:19); “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu, 1990:53).

In my view, however, all these definitions capture the need for a researcher to not only look at how people currently act (consciously and unconsciously) but also at the history and social environment that have shaped and are still shaping such actions and practices. Maton (2008:52) further simplifies Bourdieu’s definitions by saying that the habitus

... focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others.

The habitus therefore has its roots in history and influences future behaviour because of choices we make today that are based on what we consider common sense within a specific context (Bourdieu, 1990:54). Or as Sterne (2003:376) says: “Habitus is an especially powerful concept because it is historical – it changes over time – and because it contains both structural and spontaneous aspects.” I would concur with Bourdieu that one of the virtues of the habitus concept, is that it is important

... for recalling that agents have a history and an education associated with a milieu, and that they are also the product of a collective history, and that, in particular, their categories of thinking, categories of understanding, patterns of perception, systems of values, and so on, are the product of the incorporation of social structures. (Bourdieu & Chartier, 2015:52)

Bourdieu (1989:14) thus uses the habitus specifically to overcome what he describes as “two apparently irreconcilable perspectives: objectivism and subjectivism”, otherwise viewed and described as structure versus agency (Vos, 2016; Willig, 2012; Maton, 2008; Webb et al., 2002; Fowler, 1997). Schultz (2007a:193) explains on a very practical level how habitus overcomes this dichotomy:

We can all experience the feeling of being ‘free’, ‘independent’ or ‘autonomous’, but as all social agents are products of a specific social, economic and cultural history, ‘freedom’ is a relative and relational thing – for social practice in general as well as for journalistic practice.

While Bourdieu did not explicitly refer to a journalistic habitus, I would argue – along with researchers such as Barnard (2016), Møller Hartley (2013), Willig (2012), Bock (2011), Schultz (2007a), and Filho and Praça (2006) – that habitus has explanatory value when exploring journalistic practices. I acknowledge the fact that personal habitus can play a decisive role in a journalist’s actions and experiences. As Bunce (2017:4) explains:

Journalists are socialized in the values of the journalistic field, but there can also be important variations between individuals: each journalist has an individual history, career, outlook, way of perceiving and doing things – what Bourdieu calls their habitus.

This study will not negate the value of journalists’ personal habitus. However, it will not explore the personal habitus of each individual journalist in detail. The focus will be on what could be considered the professional habitus, more specifically the professional journalistic habitus. This approach builds

on the work of, among others, Møller Hartley (2013), Schultz (2007a), and Filho and Praça (2006) who speak directly to the concept of a journalistic habitus. Filho and Praça (2006:60) explain that the professional habitus is a “common matrix of practices undertaken by all agents who are living or have lived in the same social conditions of professional existence”. Translated to the newsroom, this means that journalists who have “lived” in the same or similar newsrooms arguably approach newswork in a similar way. Wiik (2010:15) further explains that the “journalistic field is guided by internal norms and rules, generating field-specific habituses, including idiomatic mind-sets and behaviour”. Schultz (2007a:193) adds that habitus can also be understood as “a practical mastering of the news game involving a strong, bodily sense of newsworthiness”.

The way journalists see themselves and their roles, as well as their views of journalism as practice and profession, are therefore not only influenced by the journalists’ personal trajectories (individual habitus); they are also dependent on their shared journalistic habitus. This means journalists become socialised, upon entering and moving through the newsroom, into an understanding of, among other things, what is newsworthy, what good journalism is, how good journalists should act and what can be considered ethical behaviour. Wiik (2009:354) says such professional ideals play an important role in the construction of identity, “giving occupational members a sense of belonging and pride, as well as directing their decisions and behaviour in daily work”. Deuze (2005:446) similarly talks about a “shared occupational ideology among newsworkers which functions to self-legitimize their position in society”. Some of the “concepts, values and elements” tied to this shared understanding of journalism include: the belief that journalists should be watchdogs by providing a public service; that they should strive to be “partial, neutral, objective, fair and (thus) credible”; that journalists should be free from outside influences; that they should “have a sense of immediacy, actuality and speed”; and, that they should live up to some sort of ethical ideal (Deuze, 2005:447).

As argued in Chapter 2, the legitimacy and boundaries of these journalistic professional role conceptualisations are constantly being challenged. It therefore remains necessary to interrogate how contemporary newsworkers, in this case Netwerk24 journalists, experience their socialisation into the newsroom, as well as how they interpret the professional ideals they live by.

It is noteworthy that Bourdieu never meant the habitus to be understood as a rigid concept (Bourdieu & Chartier, 2015; Maton, 2008; Mahar et al., 1990). While it is durable, it is not fixed. Bourdieu emphasises that the habitus is “not a destiny” but rather “a system of open mechanisms that can be constantly subjected to experiences, and by the same token transformed by these experiences” (Bourdieu & Chartier, 2015:57). Papacharissi builds on this apparent flexibility of the habitus to study “processes of continuity and change”, and more specifically the state of “permanent novelty” introduced by new media (Papacharissi, Streeter & Gillespie, 2013:597). This researcher concurs with Papacharissi that the habitus enables one to historicise the new “by drawing attention to the practices

that connect it to the present” (Papacharissi et al., 2013:599). In other words, one can study how, why and to what extent new entrants into a field, such as digital media technologies, become naturalised into newsroom practices, processes and routines, by exploring how they change and are changed by the journalistic habitus.

Based on the discussion above, my contention is that there exists a specific professional journalistic habitus that becomes embodied and inculcated in journalists as they move into and progress through a newsroom, acquiring capital and engaging with other journalists and the digital media technologies all of them use. Such professional socialisation processes then influence both current and future actions of these journalists.

### 3.5 Viewing the media from an actor-network perspective

Since one of the aims of this study is to suggest the usefulness of combining elements of field theory with actor-network theory, I would argue with Willig, Waltoorp and Møller Hartley (2015:2) that

... over the years, it has thus been necessary for scholars working with media practices to develop field theory into a more comprehensive and nuanced media theory, one that permits analysis of media reception, media content, and media production.

This study will incorporate elements of actor-network theory to enrich an exploration of media production specifically. Latour (2011:797) says the notion of a network is in “its simplest but also in its deepest sense” of use “whenever action is to be redistributed”. The actions within such a network are not limited to humans; in other words, the word actor is extended to include non-human entities (Latour, 1996:369).

Actor-network theory has its origins in science and technology studies through, amongst others, the work Latour and his contemporaries have done on the social processes involved in constructing scientific knowledge (Latour, 2011; Latour, 1996; Callon, 1986a; Callon 1986b; Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Law, 1986). Over the past decade or so, researchers within media, communication and journalism studies have increasingly started to adopt the actor-network theory framework and terminology – especially when exploring the influence of digital media technologies (see for instance: Domingo & Wiard, 2016; Domingo et al., 2015; Primo & Zago, 2015; Poell, De Kloet & Zeng, 2014; Micó et al., 2013; Fioravanti & Velho, 2010; Schmitz Weiss & Domingo, 2010; Plesner, 2009; Couldry, 2008; Turner, 2005). Domingo and Wiard (2016:638) explain the allure of actor-network

theory to journalism studies as a way to counter the “techno-deterministic discourses” that dominated this academic field in the 1990s:

Instead of treating the internet as an external force that would influence the work of journalists, studies based on [actor-network theory] and other constructivist approaches understood innovation in newsrooms as a process of negotiation between existing news production practices and the affordances of digital technology

In the sections below, I explain the basic tenets of actor-network theory, specifically as expressed and applied by media and journalism scholars.

### 3.5.1 The actor as mediator

For Latour (1996:373) an actor, otherwise known as an actant, “can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action”. Hemmingway (2005:25) explains that Latour does not see a distinct difference between a technological and human agent: “Both effect continual change and both achieve translation of themselves and their contexts by their relationship to one another.” Plesner (2009:606) says in the case of newswork that means that “people, ideals, symbolic constructions, and material elements” are therefore seen as “equally important elements”, since they all form part of a specific actor-network. Noteworthy is that while material elements such as digital media technologies are brought into the analysis of the network, human interactions and knowledge constructions are not ignored. I would argue, therefore, that an analysis of Netwerk24 as a newswork network would require a thorough understanding of both human and material interactions.

Not all actants, however, are the same: *intermediaries* just transport meaning without changing anything, while *mediators* “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry” (Latour 2005:39). Mol (2010:255) adds that the actor “makes a difference” and if it were to be removed from the network “it would take others a lot of work to replace these actions”. It would follow that mediators have more influence on how the network is formed and transformed.

Primo and Zago (2015:43) say technologies have traditionally been treated as intermediaries in journalism, but that they can also act as mediators, “transforming the news process”. These researchers go as far as saying that journalism as it is known today “would not even exist” without digital media technologies (Primo & Zago, 2015:39). According to them, studies and theories on

journalism therefore also have to regard “those artefacts as important as any other actant in the ongoing process of news production, circulation, and consumption” (Primo & Zago, 2015:39).

I find the argument above somewhat too technocentric in design. Yes, it is true that digital media technologies have severely disrupted the nature of journalism. However, as I have argued in Chapter 2, it still remains key to analyse human-to-human interactions as part of the newswork network. For this reason, and as discussed below, I propose the combination of habitus and actor-network theory as theoretical constructs.

Other researchers have similarly discovered that digital media technologies can actually play a transformative role in newswork – to varying degrees (see for instance: Spyridou, Masiola, Veglis, Kalliris & Dimoulas, 2013; Schmitz Weiss & Domingo, 2010; Plesner, 2009; Hemmingway, 2005). I concur with Sayes (2014:138) who argues that any non-human actor, such as digital media technologies, is not “merely a black box that lines up other actors, nor are they merely placeholders for a human actor”.

Actor-network theory and its methodology are often summarised by the phrase: “follow the actors” (see for instance: Primo & Zago, 2015:43; Garrety, 2014:15; Fioravanti & Velho, 2010:1; Plesner, 2009:617). Garrety (2014:15) explains some of the basic tenets of this phrase:

To investigate how something becomes ‘true’, routine or accepted, the researcher finds a point of origin and traces how networks spread, who or what was enrolled, and how interests were translated. Translation is a sort of exchange whereby actors join networks because it is in their own interests, as well as the interests of the network builder.

Latour (1996:373) makes it clear that his conceptualisation of the actor does not explore the “special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general”. Callon (1999:181) also argues that one of the shortcomings of actor-network theory is “the inadequacy of the analysis which it offers in respect of the actor”. It is noteworthy then that the habitus concept, on the other hand, *does* explore and describe the motivation of human actors, which would seem to indicate that it can indeed complement an actor-network theory-based analysis.

### **3.5.2 A network of associations**

I have argued, when presenting the working definitions for this study in Chapter 1, that the concept of a network here refers to much more than just a translation of the “netwerk” in Netwerk24 to

“network”. Domingo and Wiard (2016:637) further explain that the emphasis of actor-network theory is “on the relationships between actors, how they associate to construct social products like science [or news] and how do they (re)define each other in that process”. According to Latour (2005:28), relating to any sort of group “is an on-going process made up of uncertain, fragile, controversial, and ever-shifting ties”. Michael (2017:24) further explains that actor-network theory

... generally eschews any assumptions about what goes into forging associations between actors. It is by engaging with the empirical specificity of the encounter between actors that we come to an understanding of its character – the elements that comprise it, and the outcome that follows.

It is the task of the researcher to follow and describe these connections and associations. More specifically, the researcher should allow the actors that relate to each other to describe these ties themselves (Latour, 2005:34). One of the aims of this study is then to describe the transformations actors, both human and non-human, undergo in order to become or stay part of the Netwerk24 newswork network. Latour (2005:23) makes it clear that such a description should leave the “defining and ordering” of what happens in the network to the actors, which in this case would for the most part be the journalists themselves.

Latour (1999:15) laments the nature in which the rise of the “World Wide Web” diluted the original meaning he and his fellow actor-network theorists attached to the network concept. On the one hand is their original intention to indicate “a series of *transformations* – translations, transductions...”; on the other hand is the popularised version of the word network to indicate “transport *without* deformation, an instantaneous, unmediated access to every piece of information” (Latour, 1999:15). This view is arguably a bit outdated, since researchers such as Domingo and Wiard (2016), Micó et al. (2013) and Plesner (2009) have successfully studied transformations and interactions within and around the rise of the web and other internet-based media technologies – specifically in media contexts.

Hemmingway (2005:10), for instance, explains how actor-network theory can inform the study of “the news process as a network of actors all negotiating with and for and against one another in a complex network which is the newsroom”. Anderson (2013:1010) further explains that for actor-network theory

... networks are neither the technological apparatuses of the internet, nor the personal networks beloved by social network theorists; rather, they are both material objects and social ties and communicative utterances and technological artefacts, all of which do the work that creates the net of society.

According to Anderson (2013: 1010), one should therefore not consider “journalistic expertise”, or that which distinguishes journalists as professionals in their field, as part of a network just because “its practitioners increasingly operate within digital networks”. Instead, explains Anderson (2013:1010), the focus should fall on “the traceability of action afforded by digital tools”, also described as associations between humans and non-humans. The latter approach “draws our attention to the long-term operation of networks” in the actor-network theory sense (Anderson, 2013:1010).

The discussion above is but a snapshot of what is now often termed “classical” actor-network theory (Michael, 2017). This approach to the analysis of associations between actors has since been criticised – most notably by Latour himself (1999). He has famously said

... there are four things that do not work with actor-network theory; the word actor, the word network, the word theory and the hyphen! Four nails in the coffin. (Latour, 1999:15)

The ever-increasing number of studies that have employed the basic tenets of actor-network theory seems to indicate that this theory is still relevant today. De Maeyer (2016), for instance, discusses the value of using actor-network theory to analyse what she calls “material sensibility” in journalism studies. She further explains that

... we can understand the turn to materiality as an attempt to reinstate a sensibility to things, and particularly to technology, while not discounting the important inheritance of social constructivism and cultural studies. (De Maeyer, 2016:726)

In other words, actor-network theory can be employed to find a balance between technological determinism and an overemphasis on the social shaping of so-called “material stuff” used during newswork.

### **3.6 Reconciling habitus and actor-network theory**

Recent commentaries that directly compare the work of Bourdieu and Latour confirm that these two researchers have divergent views on how to define and approach sociological studies (Michael, 2017; Kale-Lostuvali, 2016; Benson, 2015; Wacquant, 2014; Schinkel, 2007; Buzelin, 2005). While I am not going to dispute the differences between field theory (including habitus) and actor-network theory, I would argue that combining the basic tenets of these two theoretical and conceptual

frameworks can enhance an analysis of Netwerk24 during a period of disruptions and transition. This argument relates to the view that Ryfe (2018:218) espouses on the application of theories by sociologists like Bourdieu, Latour and others, to the study of newswork. According to Ryfe (2018:218), journalism researchers too often “treat the theories in isolation, or worse, as in antagonism to one another”. For Ryfe (2018:218), acknowledging the difference between the theories “does not detract from the underlying view of social activity they share”. Benson (2015) also argues that although Latour has been very critical of Bourdieu’s views on sociology, “some scholars have suggested that only the two models together can provide a complete portrait of the social world”.

I would, for instance, concur with Michael (2017:80) that what Bourdieu’s concepts add to actor-network theory “is what might be called as sense of the ‘outside’ or the ‘behind’”. In other words, where actor-network theory can explain how networks are formed through the associations between actors, it does not pay sufficient attention to where the initial source of an actor’s “capacity” comes from (Michael, 2017:80). Incorporating habitus into the analysis can address this shortcoming, since it is concerned with the history and professional socialisation of actors, in this case journalists specifically. I would therefore contend that despite the clear differences between habitus and actor-network theory, and their varied broader ontological and epistemological foundations, each of these theoretical concept offers something that the other lacks. Furthermore, and as argued throughout this study, one of the most obvious points of agreement between these two theories is the way they were developed through empirical, and especially ethnographic, research.

In the following sections I summarise ways in which these two concepts can be combined to form the theoretical underpinning for this analysis of newswork at Netwerk24. These points of agreement are partly informed by the connections Ryfe (2018) draws in his discussion of the relevance of the theories of Bourdieu, Latour and others to the study of news production. Ryfe (2018) refers to these seminal authors as “practice theorists”.

Ryfe (2018:219) firstly looks at the concept of “social practice”, which can be found in Bourdieu’s habitus, as the explanation of how people know “what it is possible to do and say in particular situations”, on the one hand; and Latour’s view that actors make each other act in certain ways, on the other hand. Secondly, the key role of performance when it comes to social practice is highlighted (Ryfe, 2018:220). In brief, this means that social practice cannot be made “manifest in the world” if nobody does anything, i.e. “without practice there are no practices” (Ryfe, 2018:220). The third element of practice theory that Ryfe (2018:221) emphasises, as an explanation of why actions link together to form social practices, comes in the form of fields (in the case of Bourdieu’s habitus) and networks (in the case of Latour’s actor-network theory):

In each case, actors within these fields share common purposes. These shared purposes serve as social glue that link practices within a field together in relatively consistent ways. It is the logical arrangement of social practices within a field that gives society a veneer of order and stability.

Finally, argues Ryfe (2018:221), “practice theorists have developed the tools above to explain the presence and absence of social order”. In essence this means that researchers such as Bourdieu and Latour are all searching for ways to explain what happens when changes occur in the fields or networks they are exploring. Ryfe (2018:223) explains that

... social fields are always, at least to some extent, in motion. ... Relationships are in flux and positions within social fields are never fixed. Practices are always subject to new ways of doing things, and change is endemic to the process of establishing and re-establishing social order. For practice theorists, social life is best viewed as a process of oscillation between stability and disorder.

My discussion on the way in which habitus and actor-network theory can complement each other is centred on three main themes: what drives people to act within the network they are a part of; how chaos and stability can best be described; and, finally, the importance of opening the “black box” of news production through a combined description of dispositions and associations.

### **3.6.1 Between structure and agency**

As discussed above, Bourdieu employs habitus to bridge what he considers the artificial divide between subjectivism and objectivism (Bourdieu 1990:25). Habitus thus becomes an analytical tool to address the seemingly opposing concepts of agency and structure (Mahar et al., 1990:1). To simplify: habitus helps a researcher to understand actions (agency) based on an analysis of previous experiences and socialisation within a specific field (structure). Latour (1999:16), on the other hand, makes it clear that the original idea of actor-network theory “was not to occupy a position in the agency/structure debate, not even to *overcome* this contradiction”. For him such contradictions should not even be overcome, but instead “simply ignored or bypassed” (Latour 1999:16). Plesner (2009:605) further explains that actor-network theory does not “strive to overcome the divide between humans and nonhumans, but to argue for the simultaneous presence of different kinds of agencies (e.g. humans, symbols, or machines) in heterogeneous actor-networks”.

Arguing that habitus and actor-network theory look at agency and structure in similar ways would therefore be challenging. Yet my contention still remains that, instead of trying to force these concepts into the same ontological and methodological moulds, one should strive to find ways in which habitus and actor-network theory supplement and complement each other during an analysis of empirical explorations. On the one hand is the habitus as the system of “structured, structuring dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1990:52); and on other hand the individual actor that forms part of a heterogeneous network (Latour, 2011:800). I would argue it is reasonable to assume that, since the habitus is not static – but can evolve due to external influences and new entrants into the field – those who possess a certain habitus will also be actors that help to form and transform each other and the network they are a part of. This argument is partially informed by input from researchers such as Domingo and Wiard (2016), Domingo (2015), Hemmingway (2005), Sterne (2003) and Robbins (1991). Robbins (1991:1), for instance, argues that Bourdieu

... has tried to catch the practical mastery which people possess of their situations – to represent the immanent dynamics of the decisions which people actually make within society.

According to Robbins (1991:1), Bourdieu’s main interest has always been “human relations in action”. I believe there are correlations between “human relations in action” and the way actors associate with each other to construct the actor-network. Actor-network theory is also, if not more, concerned with the associations between material elements and humans. Allowing habitus and actor-network theory to supplement each other will thus also shield me from easily falling into the trap of technological determinism by ascribing too much agency to so-called “things”. Domingo (2015:72) says the risk of emphasising the agency of technology is that

... we may foster that journalists give up their *responsibility*, delegate it to the machines, and convince themselves that they can only follow the flow of technological change [original emphasis].

Hemmingway (2005:11) says her ethnographic study of changing technologies at the BBC revealed “the central importance of human agency in the process of technological configuration”. As argued in Chapter 2, this study works from the premise that technology is socially shaped. According to Hemmingway (2005:11), journalists

... are seen to be highly conscious of not only how to alter production practices in order to enhance the utilisation of new technologies, but also

how to seek alternative definitions of news so as to accommodate such technologies.

Based on the discussion above, it would be reasonable to assume that the journalistic habitus, inculcated in journalists through professional socialisation cultures and practices, has a telling influence on the way journalists interact with digital media technologies. Overcoming the agency-structure debate thus seems to be less important than tracing connections between actors, both human and non-human, as they mutually structure each other to reflect or change dispositions. Or as Sterne (2003:377) explains:

Technologies are associated with habits and practices, sometimes crystallizing them and sometimes promoting them. They are structured by human practices so that they may in turn structure human practices. They embody in physical form particular dispositions and tendencies – particular ways of doing things.

Within the newsroom this would mean that the digital media technologies, and other material things, journalists use during their daily newswork are not only influenced by the way the journalists have been professionally socialised; these interactions between journalists and the tools they use also help to shape the newsroom culture and practices.

### **3.6.2 From chaos to order and back**

It has been established that Bourdieu and Latour have differencing views of how society is structured. Wacquant (2014:131) explains that in the actor-network theory world, composed of humans and non-humans, there is an endless flow of things “devoid of social gravity, opacity, and asymmetry”, while the habitus “begs for location in social time and social place”. Slaatta (2016:99) adds that Bourdieu’s research can be said “to look for stability rather than change, or perhaps more precisely, *stability in processes of change*” [original emphasis]. According to Domingo and Wiard (2016:637), on the other hand:

That emphasis on interactions is one of the key characteristics of actor-network theory. It is not interested in stable social structures, but rather in the development of new ideas and technologies, and the breakdowns of institutions that we take for granted.

As discussed above, and paraphrasing Ryfe (2018:223), practice theorists like Bourdieu and Latour are all just trying to make sense of social fields or networks that usually consist somewhere between order and chaos. Translated into a newsroom, one might argue that habitus is a tool to describe how and why journalists repeat routines and practices, while actor-network theory is a way to find and describe instances of instability within the news network.

In Chapter 2 an overview was given of some of the early newsroom studies and how they focused on newswork as routinised. Tuchman (1978:41), for instance, says:

One may generalize that the news media carefully impose a structure upon time and space to enable themselves to accomplish the work of any one day and to plan across days.

From the findings of these early studies one can deduce that the journalistic habitus carries with it a sense of continuity in terms of routines, practices and cultures. Schultz (2007a:192) explains:

In the self-understanding of journalists, the news game begins over and over again with each new day. Journalistic practice is experienced as a daily challenge with very little routine work embedded and every day completely different from the day before. ... For the ethnographer observing news work, however, this is not so. News work is highly routinised and follows recognisable patterns from day to day.

In other words, journalists view their network as unstable and unpredictable like actor-network theorists would. At the same time newsroom ethnographers see the mundane, routinised version of newswork, which could be explained through the professional journalistic habitus. Based on my master's research (Jordaan, 2012) and initial forays into the Netwerk24 newsrooms, I can confidently argue that what really happens in the newsroom lies somewhere between chaos and uncertainty on the one hand, and order and predictability on the other hand. One of the aims of this study is to describe both continuity and change amidst disruption and transition, due, in part, to the appropriation of digital media technologies and the resultant changes in the newswork network.

### **3.6.3 Opening the “black box” of newswork**

The reference to newswork and journalism as a “black box” that needs to be opened is a recurring theme in the work of media and journalism studies scholars (see for instance: Domingo et al., 2015;

Schudson, 2015; Anderson, 2013; Anderson & Kreiss, 2013; Micó et al., 2013; Karlsson, 2011; Schmitz Weiss & Domingo, 2010; Neveu, 2007; Singer, 2005). Primo and Zago (2015:43) capture the general sentiment well:

It is time, then, to open the black box and look inside. Let all the actants be recognized, human and non-humans, their agencies, the associations they engage in, the traces they leave.

In answering these researchers' call to arms, I would add that it is necessary to open this "black box" to trace how and why journalists act as they do, and to establish how their interactions with each other and the digital media technologies they use can best be described.

It must be noted, however, that in actor-network theory terminology, a "black box" often has a somewhat different interpretation. Michael (2017:154) defines a "black box" in an actor-network theory glossary thus:

A black box contains that which no longer needs to be considered. All that is of interest is the input and the output. ... Anything that operates as black-boxed is thus resistant to problematization and can therefore be used for making associations and building networks.

Domingo and Wiard (2016:640) also explain that for journalists a lot of the "inner workings" of the tools they use "are a mystery", and that these journalists "do not need any details" of those specific tools. It is certainly worthwhile, and indeed also necessary, not to problematise each and every actor, human and non-human, in the newsroom. Trying to explain the inner workings of each and every interaction or association between humans and digital media technologies would result in a never-ending loop of analysis. But even in an actor-network perspective it sometimes becomes necessary to open these "black boxes". According to Domingo and Wiard (2016:640), black boxes open up "when things do not work well", creating a "crucial moment" for researchers to trace the "inner networks" of such individual actors and associations.

In order to open the "black box" of newswork, it is also not enough to just trace the associations; one should also study the origin and influence of the journalistic dispositions. An exploration and description of the journalistic habitus should thus enable a researcher to delve deeper into what drives journalists to act as they do while interacting with each other and using digital media technologies. This argument is supported by Sterne (2003:385) who says technologies "do not have an existence independent of social practice", which means that they "cannot be studied in isolation from society or

from one another". For Sterne (2003:385) digital media technologies are "embodied in lived practice through habitus", since technologies "are always implicated in and shaped by social struggles".

Based on the discussion above, one could argue that studying Netwerk24 while, in the words of Papacharissi et al. (2013:597), it is in a state of "permanent novelty", will further enable the researcher to open the "black box" of newswork.

### **3.7 A novel way to study newswork at Netwerk24**

In the previous sections I have taken cognisance of the differences between habitus and actor-network theory as theoretical concepts. However, I have also argued, along with Ryfe (2018), that there are some points of agreement between these two concepts, as well as instances where they can complement each other. What does this mean for a study of newswork at Netwerk24 during a period of transition and disruption?

Firstly, this combination will help to understand how journalists are professionally socialised into the newsroom and how these socialisation processes, which form the journalistic habitus, influence both the journalists themselves, as well as the newsroom structure as a whole. To fully understand these socialisation and structuring processes, one cannot ignore the role of non-human actors, and more specifically, the mediating role of digital media technologies.

Secondly, this framework opens the door for a more detailed exploration of how these human and non-human actors work together, or associate. Based on the discussion above, it would be safe to assume that such interactions and associations will originate from, and lead to, both order and disorder. It is not the aim of this study to try and artificially stabilise the processes and practices in the Netwerk24 newsroom by describing what happens there. My goal is rather to use ethnographic observations, interviews and document analysis (as discussed in Chapter 4) to describe what really happens in the newsroom, specifically from the vantage point of the journalists themselves.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I want to open the proverbial "black box" of newswork at Netwerk24. I believe that exploring and describing the dispositions and associations within the newsroom will enable me to provide a holistic view from *inside* this "black box". This approach is arguably in line with the goal Latour and Woolgar (1986:30) set for themselves to "make the activities of the laboratory [read: newsroom] seem as strange as possible in order to not take too much for granted".

### 3.8 Summary

As argued throughout this study the combination of habitus and actor-network theory is not necessarily viewed as a natural fit to study newswork. This chapter has shown, however, that there are sufficient points of agreement between these theoretical concepts, as well as instances where they can supplement and complement each other. Furthermore, both these theoretical constructs were, and still are, developed through empirical explorations. My contention is that diversifying and enriching the theoretical framework will enhance the analysis and understanding of Netwerk24 during a time of transition.

In this chapter I have discussed the basic tenets of both habitus and actor-network theory. As part of Bourdieu's broader field theory, habitus provides a framework for describing what motivates people to act as they do, while simultaneously structuring the field they are a part of. The professional journalistic habitus is inculcated in journalists as they become socialised into the newsroom and acquire journalistic capital. This habitus then guides their actions on both a conscious and subconscious level.

Actor-network theory, on the other hand, enables the researcher to look beyond the structure/agency debate to study and describe the associations between actors within a network. One of the key contributions of actor-network theory is also the importance it attaches to the role of material objects, which in the case of this study will mostly refer to digital media technologies. According to actor-network theory, it is not enough to study the individual actors – be they human or non-human. One should trace the way they interact (associate) with each other to affect change and to continuously restructure themselves and the network they are a part of.

This chapter also served to explain why and how I combined habitus and actor-network theory to form the theoretical underpinning of this study. Firstly, one can use both habitus and actor-network theory, albeit in different ways, to describe the way journalists act. Habitus is used to overcome the agency/structure debate by explaining that journalists' actions are informed by a rich history of both individual and professional experiences. In the case of actor-network theory the focus is not on the agency/structure debate but rather on how the links between journalists and the digital media technologies develop and can be described. By incorporating actor-network theory into a description of professional journalistic habitus, it becomes possible to look beyond the socialisation of journalists to also explore the way their actions influence one another, as well as how these actions and associations continuously impact on the newsroom network.

Secondly, this combination of theoretical concepts can be used to illustrate how both perceived stability, as well as chaos, are evident in the newsroom. Through the use of habitus journalists' own

perceptions of how their background and professional experiences influence their daily routines and newswork can be described. I would argue that such a description would help to understand how order, stability and continuity are maintained in the newsroom. At the same time, the basic tenets of actor-network theory can be employed to address the instability in the newsroom, as caused by the appropriation of digital media technologies, as well as other disruptions to newswork.

Finally, and to my mind most importantly, both habitus and actor-network theory are needed to analyse what happens when the “black box” of newswork is opened through ethnographic exploration. While it is sometimes necessary to leave the black box closed and not problematise its contents, in the case of Netwerk24 the time is ripe for a thorough description and analysis of the professional dispositions and associations of actors within this newsroom.

Before delving into a description and analysis of the ethnographic fieldwork I conducted during 2016 and 2017 at Netwerk24, it is crucial to give general background for ethnography as research design.

## Chapter 4: Research design

### 4.1 Introduction

This study calls on journalism studies researchers to recognise the continued relevance of ethnography to the study of a newsroom, its cultures, processes, routines and practices. A thorough understanding and exposition of ethnography as a qualitative research design is therefore necessary to further support my motivation for choosing and applying this research design to this study of newswork at Netwerk24.

Creswell (2009:4) defines qualitative research as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”. Denzin and Lincoln (2011:30) further explain that qualitative research involves

... the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artefacts, and cultural texts and productions, along with observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings to individuals’ lives.

According to Silverman (2013:7), qualitative research often highlights how “apparently ‘obvious’ features of the social world” are actually dependent upon “intricate social organization”; and that a good researcher using this paradigm can determine “the extraordinary features of ordinary life”. Similarly, Richards (2015:2) explains that qualitative data are the results of interaction between the researcher and the so-called research subject, and that such data are “complex and contexted”. As explained later in this chapter and in the chapters to follow, these statements are especially relevant when it comes to the nature and extent of ethnographic research.

Proponents of qualitative research are often criticised for being mere “journalists” or “soft” scientists, say Denzin and Lincoln (2011:28): “Their work is termed unscientific, only exploratory, or subjective.” The findings of qualitative research projects do indeed depend to a large extent on the specific research context and the researcher’s own perspectives and individual approach. However, I believe that using a variety of research methods, in conjunction with sophisticated data analysis tools, can significantly increase the validity and reliability of qualitative research findings. I concur with Wolcott (2008:279) who says:

Ethnography offers a thoughtful way to approach the question, ‘What is going on here’, with some idea of how to go about finding an adequate and adequately informed answer.

As discussed in Chapter 2 the use of ethnography as research methodology to study newsrooms has a strong tradition and remains relevant today. Cottle (2007:2) argues that in light of the “fast-changing and complex news ecology”, as well as “intellectual developments in the academic field”, past ethnographic findings need to be updated.

Some of the earlier, and more recent, newsroom ethnographies were discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 – especially those studies that explored the role of digital media technologies. Chapter 3 then served to illustrate how the combination of habitus and actor-network theory as theoretical underpinning of this study contributes to the body of scholarly work on newsroom production. I will thus continue to use ethnography as research design to develop these two theoretical concepts, and apply them to my own study.

In this chapter I give an overview of what ethnography as research design entails. Some criticism towards ethnography, and its application to journalism studies, will also be considered. The foundation will thus be laid for an exposition of how I applied ethnographic research methods to my own study of newswork at Netwerk24.

## **4.2 Ethnography as research design**

### **4.2.1 Definitions**

Ethnographic research has its roots in anthropology and later also in sociology (Gobo, 2008:8). Wolcott (2008:66) explains that “ethno” refers to people and “graph” to a picture, meaning that doing ethnography involves presenting a picture of a group of people. Similarly, Fetterman (2008:288) defines ethnography as “the art and science of describing a group or culture”. Traditionally, this definition of ethnography suggested a “preoccupation with The Other” (Wolcott, 2008:1) or rather a description of a culture or group vastly different from that of the researcher. This is no longer the case, as ethnography is done in various settings and in a variety of disciplines, including journalism studies. Cottle (2007:4-5) explains that “in the context of news study” ethnography

... involves the researcher spending considerable time in the field, observing and talking to journalists as they go about their daily tasks and documenting their professional practices and culture.

The term “participant observation” is often used as a synonym for ethnography. Participant observation is defined by Emerson et al. (2001:352) as “establishing a place in some natural setting on a relatively long-term basis in order to investigate, experience and represent social life and social processes that occur in that setting”. These researchers make it clear that this observation process comprises only “one core activity” of ethnographic research (Emerson et al., 2001:352). Gobo (2008:4) further explains that while observation is key, other sources of information – such as informal conversations, interviews and documentary materials – are also used by ethnographers in the field. In his ethnography of Zimbabwean newsrooms, for instance, Mabweazara (2010a:87) used participant observation in conjunction with focus groups, individual interviews and document analysis. In this study, participant observation is supplemented by in-depth semi-structured interviews and the analysis of documentary materials.

Fetterman (2008:288) says the ethnographer “enters the field with an open mind, not with an empty head”. This means the ethnographer identifies a problem, a theoretical framework, research design, and tools for data collection and analysis *before* asking the first question in the field (Fetterman, 2009:543). Ethnographic research, however, is always an iterative process: it evolves in design as the project progresses (O’Reilly, 2009:3). As this chapter, as well as the presentation and discussion of the data, show, an ethnographic project rarely follows a strict pattern. I have to agree with Fetterman (2009:544) that ethnographic work is not always “orderly”. According to Fetterman (2009:544) it involves “serendipity, creativity, being in the right place at the right or wrong time, a lot of hard work, and old-fashioned luck”.

The serendipitous nature of ethnography does not exempt the ethnographer from properly planning to enter the field or delineating the boundaries of the research project. Various authors highlight different concepts that guide researchers during the fieldwork for ethnographic research projects (see for instance: Fetterman, 2009; O’Reilly, 2009; Gobo, 2008; Wolcott, 2008; Blasco & Wardle, 2007; Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland & Lofland, 2001). These concepts include but are not limited to an understanding of culture, the importance of context and the role and position of the researcher.

For Fetterman (2009:545) culture is the “broadest” ethnographic concept. Wolcott (2008:22) says culture refers to “the various ways different groups go about their lives and the belief systems associated with that behavior”. I am aware of the contested nature of culture as descriptive and explanatory concept. In a seminal essay in which he refers to ethnography as “thick description”, Geertz (1973), for instance, highlights the confusion that can be created by the different ways in which culture has been defined and described. Amongst others Geertz (1973:4-5) cites Kluckhohn, who has defined culture as everything from “the total way of life of a people” to “learned behaviour”. Geertz (1973:11) also refers to Goodenough’s view of culture as “whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members”.

In line with the myriad of definitions and views of this concept, I concede that it will always be difficult to describe exactly what is meant by the “culture” of a group. When Ryfe (2016:45) defines ethnography as “an effort to say something intelligent about a culture” he also adds that culture is a “complicated term”. I am confident that incorporating the theory of habitus into this study of newswork at Netwerk24 aids me in narrowing down the description of how the journalists in this newsroom go about their professional lives. By using habitus as explanatory concept to encapsulate how journalists are socialised and how they know what is acceptable to the rest of the group, I am also able to describe the professional culture in the newsroom. I concur with Singer (2008:158) that the “cultural focus of ethnography is crucial to the study of how journalists perceive and adapt to the changes in the way they make news”. Furthermore, I am in agreement with Ryfe (2016:45) who argues that

... journalists do not confront ‘technology’ or ‘economics’ or any of the other things people identify as disruptive to the industry. Rather, in the first instance, they confront one another.

Ryfe (2016:45) further explains that within this perspective of culture “interaction is more important than action”, meaning that people, or journalists, invoke culture “to justify what they do to others”. I believe that the notion of associations between people and the material things they use during newswork – as based on the basic tenets of actor-network theory – also guides my ethnographic descriptions. I would argue, again in the words of Ryfe (2016:45), that nothing can really compare to observing these interactions and justifications “first-hand, as they happen in real time”.

An ethnographic research project, and the resultant report or product, capture a specific moment in time in the life of the group studied. Wolcott (2008:241) says describing culture amounts to “an account of *particular* social processes as practiced by *particular* people in *particular* settings” [original emphasis]. It is therefore incumbent upon the researcher to contextualise the study on a variety of levels. As Blasco and Wardle (2007:4) explain:

In order to explain actions and meanings that may initially appear inexplicable – either because their foreignness challenges explanation or because they are so familiar that explanation appears superfluous – all writers establish social and cultural contexts for them.

In this study I mainly concern myself with the minute details of Netwerk24 journalists’ work lives as they interact with each other and with the digital media technologies they use professionally within their newswork network. Noteworthy as well is the fact that the fieldwork was conducted,

intermittently over 18 months (May 2016 to November 2017). This means that my description of newswork at Netwerk24 for the most part relates specifically to this time period. As the findings (discussed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8) show, this time period was characterised by a multitude of changes at Netwerk24. While my study therefore presents a snapshot of newswork at Netwerk24, this does not absolve me from situating such detailed descriptions within the broader context of Netwerk24 as Afrikaans media publication and newsroom within the South African landscape.

One of the further distinguishing features of ethnography as research design is the way in which the researcher actually becomes a tool for data gathering and analysis. Gobo (2008:5) encapsulates this distinction well when he talks about the “role of the ‘protagonist’ assigned to observation”. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011:37) say ethnographers are “committed to going out and getting close to the activities and everyday experiences of other people”. Within an ethnographic research design the researcher has to become part of the social setting she is studying, while still maintaining “sufficient cognitive distance” to ensure proper scientific enquiry (Gobo, 2008:6). I dedicate Chapter 5 to discussing and reflecting on my role as researcher within the Netwerk24 newsroom.

There are a variety of research methods and techniques that aid the researcher in doing ethnography. O’Reilly (2009:3) says ethnography draws on a “family” of methods that involve

... direct and sustained contact with human agents, within the contexts of their daily lives (and cultures), watching what happens, listening to what is said, and asking questions.

Wolcott (2008:48) summarises the work of the ethnographer doing fieldwork as “experiencing, enquiring and examining”. This categorisation of methods or techniques for gathering information has also guided my approach.

I do not attempt to further address all the varied ways in which ethnography has been defined or explained. The main aim of this chapter is rather to highlight why I argue that my own exploration of newswork at Netwerk24, as a journalism studies project within a specific theoretical framework, can be considered ethnographic in nature. While I have been guided by other newsroom ethnographies during the preparation and execution of my study, I would agree with Wolcott (2008:107) that every ethnography

... takes on that same uniqueness; no particular one can serve as a model for all, and no particular one can be singled out for having set the standard for those that follow.

Despite the unique nature of ethnographic research projects I am confident that I, as suggested by Fetterman (2008:288), place a “check on the negative influence of bias” by adhering to a series of “quality controls”. I believe that the application of a variety of research techniques, contextualisation and a non-judgmental orientation increase the validity and reliability of my study. The use of a computer-based qualitative content analysis tool also aids in creating a traceable record of my discussion and findings.

#### 4.2.2 Criticism

Throughout his seminal text on ethnography as “a way of seeing” (instead of just “looking”), Wolcott (2008) bemoans the fact that research projects are labelled ethnographies when they only borrow ethnographic research techniques, such as observation or interviews. I acknowledge that my study is not a classic anthropological, or even sociological, ethnography – partly because the study deals with a society or group I used to be a part of myself. I would concur with Gobo (2008:9) that being part of the group you are studying raises some epistemological and practical problems that differ from the challenges faced by the “classical anthropologist” who either went to live in some remote village, or took part in so-called strange and unfamiliar rituals. As former journalist and employee of Media24, I was to a large extent used to the inside of a newsroom and the nature of the diary meetings I attended during my fieldwork. One criticism that could be raised against my research is therefore that I overlooked or took for granted some regular details of newswork at Netwerk24, including news practices, routines and cultures. Such an argument could be countered in the words of Blasco and Wardle (2007:3) who say writers of ethnography

... attempt to make the ways of living and thinking of particular groups of people intelligible to their readers, no matter how foreign or incomprehensible, or how familiar and taken-for-granted, these practices may appear at first.

Furthermore, I believe that the changes invoked by the establishment of Netwerk24, as both newsroom and online publication, are of such a nature that a lot of what happens in this newsroom did indeed appear foreign to me.

The discussion of my findings in the following chapters should serve to indicate that I made a special effort to let the familiar become strange to me. It is also noteworthy that Bourdieu, whose theory of habitus informs this study, first did ethnographic research in a remote setting (the Kabyle region in Algeria), but later also moved his attention back to his native France to study culture, taste and

education (Mahar, 1990). Bourdieu's continual call for reflexivity in ethnography is arguably one way in which he negotiated his position as researcher – abroad and at home. Barnard (1990:74-75) explains that this type of reflexivity

... is not achieved by the use of the first person or by the expedient of constructing a text which situates the observer in the act of observation. Rather it is achieved by subjecting the *position* of the observer to the same critical analysis as that of the constructed object at hand.

It follows that it remains essential for an ethnographer to constantly reflect on her position within the field and her relationships with the participants in the study – something I do in Chapter 5.

Franquet (2014:196) says ethnography can also be criticised as limited when the observation periods are short, or when the presence of the researcher in the environment causes distortion. These criticisms are valid since the time available to researchers to do ethnographic fieldwork is increasingly limited due to the practical considerations discussed in section 4.3. However, I believe that spending a full working day in the newsroom for a week on end over a period of more than a year did indeed grant me sufficient time to observe and interact with the journalists and gather data. I would argue that the majority of the journalists did not feel my presence influenced their behaviour. In fact, by being in the newsroom for extended periods of time, even if intermittently, I managed to gain the trust of the journalists. As a result they were more willing to engage in more formal interviews from which I gathered the bulk of my data.

Ethnography as research methodology in news production studies also garners a fair bit of criticism. Wahl-Jorgensen (2010), for instance, warns against ethnographies that are too newsroom-centric. According to Wahl-Jorgensen (2010:198), newsroom ethnographers need to come to terms with the fact that, amongst other things, “news production is increasingly taking place in and through virtual spaces” and that “news work is becoming increasingly decentralized”. Similarly, Franquet (2014:198) talks about the multiplatform nature of digital news product, and the fact that newswriters are not necessarily all working in the same newsroom. Or as Robinson and Metzler (2016:714) explain:

The article that resulted from a reporter sitting at her desk, making phone calls, typing away on deadline – all of which could be observed by a researcher – exists only as part of a digitally enhanced process that cannot be seen... The journalism ethnographer today enters that physical space newsroom, knowing that place represents only a small part of what needs to be observed.

The characteristics of modern-day journalism certainly make ethnographic research harder – but not impossible. A researcher can still use ethnographic methods to delve deeper into the “negotiation and interaction processes” (Franquet, 2014:198) that accompany changes in newsrooms necessitated by the advent of digital media technologies and other disruptions. Through the use of digital media technologies newswork at Netwerk24 is also often more virtual and geographically dispersed in nature. Yet, as the discussion of findings show, many of the so-called traditional journalism practices, routines and cultures remain. I therefore believe that experiencing and enquiring about newswork at Netwerk24 from *within* the newsroom provide valuable insights into what changes and what stays the same during periods of transition and change.

Another criticism levelled against ethnography is that it has the advantage of explaining and describing what it means to be a journalist, but that these ethnographic methods are “less sensitive to macro level structural forces which also guide everyday journalism” (Willig, 2012:381). The importance of providing context when doing ethnography has already been addressed in this chapter. Cottle (2007:7) highlights the role of news production studies to throw light on external forces, such as the marketplace, “at the very point where they impact most”. In other words, a researcher might be able to use insights from observations and conversations in the newsroom to extrapolate basic, yet key, findings about the industry as a whole. I agree with Wolcott (2008:241), however, that ethnography is “particular” and mostly focused on the study of microculture(s). While I can therefore not ignore the influence of macro forces, such as changes in management or a decline in revenue, on the cultures and practices of newswork at Netwerk24, this study is focused on how journalists acquire and exhibit professional journalistic habitus while engaging with each other and with digital media technologies.

### **4.3 Ethnography at Netwerk24**

I discussed the main motivations for choosing Netwerk24 as research site in Chapter 1. These include my personal interest, as former journalist and employee of Media24, in the inner workings of this company’s newsrooms. Wolcott (2008:30) encourages ethnographers to choose a place or setting that is “of genuine interest” to them, and then develop their focus while conducting the fieldwork. While Netwerk24 is certainly a place of interest to me, I did not enter the newsroom without any focus. As Cottle (2007:5) says, this was not a “fishing expedition”. Immersing myself in existing literature on newsroom ethnography, as well as combining habitus and actor-network theory as conceptual and theoretical framework, helped to guide me in experiencing, enquiring and examining different aspects of newswork at Netwerk24.

Cottle (2007:5) suggests six research stages for what he calls “good” participant observation, which in his case can be equated to ethnography. These stages, which can also overlap, include research design, securing access, negotiating field relationships, collecting and recording data, analysing data and write-up (Cottle, 2007:5). As discussed above, an ethnographic research project seldom follows a set pattern. That does not mean that one’s research could or should not be informed by the work of established researchers. In the following sections, I address the processes, methods and techniques I employed in my effort to answer the central research question: How do journalists as actors within a network in transition experience newswork at Netwerk24?

My own research design is therefore informed by the work of other ethnographers, with a specific focus on the field of journalism studies. In the sections below, I discuss the following salient elements of ethnography as applied to my own study: access, ethics, practical considerations, data gathering and data analysis.

#### **4.3.1 Access**

Gaining access to the research site is usually one of the main challenges of an ethnographic research project (see for instance: Ryfe, 2016; Ilan, 2015; Franquet, 2014; Usher, 2014; Thomsen, 2013; Paterson & Zoellner, 2010; Gobo, 2008). These days it is harder for newsroom ethnographers to gain access to newsrooms than during the early, or classic, newsroom studies. Ryfe (2016:40) explains that “competitive pressures” alone incline news organisations to “secrecy and risk aversion – like the risk of opening their doors to an ethnographer”. Usher (2014), for instance, had to work out an agreement with the lawyers of the *New York Times* before she was allowed to do her doctoral research there, and she also gave certain staff members at the newspaper the opportunity to review her dissertation for factual errors. This approach seems to agree with Franquet’s (2014:200) view that “trust is a fundamental value”. According to Franquet (2014:200), establishing trust with “managers and key informants” will aid the researcher in gaining access to “new places and new subjects”. Gobo (2008:118) emphasises the importance of maintaining trust throughout the research process in order to avoid being met with resistance, which could lead to a “deficient” understanding of the phenomena under observation.

Paterson and Zoellner (2010:98,99) highlight some of the key advantages to previous professional experience when doing newsroom ethnography, including: better understanding of the practices observed; easier access to conduct the research as “insider”; the encouragement for greater disclosure by the journalists; and, more trust in the researcher to not disclose confidential information. As

discussed in the chapters to follow, my professional experience did for the most part count in my favour both in terms of access and disclosure by journalists.

For me gaining access to the newsroom of Netwerk24 was certainly easier than it was for Usher. This can for the most part be ascribed to my former position as journalist at Media24, but also to a bit of serendipity. Firstly, the first editor of Netwerk24, Liesl Pretorius, was a former classmate of mine. While she declined to be a formal participant in this study – something that I will elaborate on in Chapter 5 – she did provide me with information on the initial phase of Netwerk24. Secondly, Jo van Eeden, publisher and former editor-in-chief of Netwerk24, used to be bureau chief of the Sunday newspaper *Rapport* in Pretoria, where I worked as a senior journalist between 2005 and 2009.

The formal approval for my research visit was given by Esmaré Weideman, chief executive officer (CEO) of Media24, parent company of Netwerk24.<sup>14</sup> I approached Weideman in April 2015, when I was still working on the research proposal for this study. In her written response she not only gave me permission to conduct research at this site, she also indicated that the company would be interested in the findings. I followed up on the approval of the CEO by emailing individual editors and news managers before visiting their newsrooms. Getting the nod from management was very helpful. However, I constantly had to make it clear to journalists, in order to gain and maintain their trust, that I was not employed by Media24, nor was I there to “spy” on them on behalf of the bosses.

During my fieldwork phase I was supported on a practical level by managerial and secretarial staff in the various Netwerk24 newsrooms across the country. In Johannesburg and Cape Town I was given an access card to allow me free-moving entry into the building and newsroom. I was also allowed to sit at a desk situated between the news journalists. My physical position in the newsroom increased my ability to observe interactions between journalists and to engage in informal conversations with them. All the diary meetings and teleconferences were also open to me.

I would argue that the nature of the access I had provided me with the opportunity to explore and describe newswork at Netwerk24 in a way that would be difficult to match with other research methods, such as surveys or interviews only.

### **4.3.2 Ethical considerations**

Ethnographic research is fraught with ethical challenges (see for instance: Robinson & Metzler, 2016; O’Reilly, 2009; Gobo, 2008; Murphy & Dingwall, 2001). O’Reilly (2009:57) argues that ethnography

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<sup>14</sup> See communication with Weideman and the editors of Netwerk24 (on email and in Afrikaans) attached as Addendum B.

raises “profound” ethical issues, in part due to its “intimate and long-term nature”. According to Murphy and Dingwall (2001:340), researchers should only continue with a study if they “can show that the anticipated benefits of a study outweigh its potential risks”. Participants in ethnographic research within the social sciences might be less susceptible to harm and risk than people involved in biomedical research. Yet, explains Gobo (2008:136), ethnographic participants may still suffer “anxiety and stress during data collection” or “be treated unfairly or unjustly”. For Fetterman (2009:579) “noninvasive” ethnographic practices

... are not only good ethics but also good science... Basic underlying ethical standards include the securing of permission (to protect individual privacy), honesty, trust (both implicit and explicit), and reciprocity.

In my case the first step in ensuring ethical ethnography was to apply for ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee: Humanities of Stellenbosch University. This process involved submitting a short research proposal, the informed consent form (attached here as Addendum C) and a proposed interview schedule. I was granted permission by the university to do this study from 2015, with the approval period later extended to 2018 (see final ethical clearance letter attached as Addendum D).

When doing fieldwork, the researcher usually first needs to obtain informed consent from the participants in the study. According to O’Reilly (2009:58), participants in ethnography must receive “as much information as possible” to ensure informed consent to any “intrusion” in their lives. Besides the permission granted to me by the management of Netwerk24, I also discussed the aim and nature of my research with every journalist I interacted with – both during formal interviews and informal conversations. I also explained my research to journalists who seemed interested in what I was doing in the newsroom, but who were from departments I did not specifically observe – such as business and arts. All the Netwerk24 journalists I included in the study were asked to sign informed consent forms on which they specifically indicated whether they wanted to remain anonymous or not. Anonymity was only requested in a few cases. In these cases I have used pseudonyms, as suggested by Fetterman (2009:580). However, as evident from the following chapters, most of the journalists were open and eager to talk once I explained the reason for my presence in the newsroom.

Doing ethnography in an ethical way also requires the researcher to gain the trust of study participants. Fetterman (2009:580) explains that in this regard “actions speak louder than words”:

An ethnographer’s behavior in the field is usually his or her most effective means of cementing relationships and building trust. People like to talk, and ethnographers love to listen. As people learn that the ethnographer will

respect and protect their conversations, they open up a little more each day in the belief that the researcher will not betray their trust.

Based on my own experiences in the Netwerk24 newsrooms, I would agree with the view that people often just want someone to listen to them. Therefore, I concur with Fetterman (2009:580) that reciprocity is also part of ethical ethnography. He believes that since ethnographers “use a great deal of people’s time” they “owe something in return” (Fetterman, 2009:580). While I certainly did not offer the journalists any form of payment, nor did I barter anything during my research, I arguably provided a service by “lending a sympathetic ear to troubled individuals” (Fetterman, 2009:580). I further elaborate and reflect on my role as participant observer in Chapter 5.

### **4.3.3 Practical considerations**

On a practical level, ethnographic research requires time, is costly and usually produces vast amounts of data. Seminal newsroom ethnographers, such as Tuchman (1978), spent years, sometimes even decades, doing research at the same field site(s). For most present-day ethnographers this is not a feasible option, due to a large extent to other academic responsibilities. Paterson et al. (2016:5) say other challenges to the use of ethnography for media production research range from “increasingly secretive corporate cultures which see little value in inviting observation of their work, to pressure on scholars to produce more with less”.

Travelling to do fieldwork in the different newsrooms where newswork at Netwerk24 physically takes place was a costly affair. I was fortunate enough to receive grants from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University which helped to fund my fieldwork. Prof Lizette Rabe, chair of the Department of Journalism at the university where I am employed as lecturer, as well as my departmental colleagues were also very accommodating. They allowed me time to work away from our office in Stellenbosch to collect data in the different newsrooms.

Despite this support, it remained a challenge to find a way to match my newsroom visits to my regular academic calendar and duties. I had to juggle my teaching and supervision load with these newsroom visits over more than a year. The fact that I visited the newsrooms intermittently, instead of for an extended period of time without a break, necessitated the re-establishment of some relationships with some of the participants in the research. In addition, and as discussed in the chapters to follow, the staff turnover at Netwerk24 was unusually high during the time period discussed in this study. As a result some of the first participants in my study had left the newsrooms when I returned for second or third visits. While this lack of continuity could be seen as a shortcoming, I would rather argue that

visiting the newsrooms at different stages helped me to gain better insights into the development of the associations and culture in the newsroom over time. I was also better equipped to keep track of the changes in management structures and staff complement.

Some other practical limitations of the study include the limited access I had to the majority of the digital engagements the journalists had with each other on communication and social platforms such as WhatsApp and Slack<sup>15</sup>. I discuss the ways in which I tried to mitigate these challenges when I discuss my findings in the chapters to follow.

#### **4.3.4 Data gathering**

As discussed above, ethnography opens the door for a variety of research methods and techniques. My approach to this ethnography of Netwerk24 was informed by the distinction made by Wolcott (2008) between experiencing, enquiring and examining.

##### **4.3.4.1 Experiencing**

For the purposes of this study experiencing as data gathering technique refers to participant observation. According to Wolcott (2008:49), participant observation “is founded on first-hand experience in naturally occurring events”. Emerson et al. (2011:34) say the ethnographer “participates in the daily routines” of the site she is studying while developing relationships with the people and continuously observing what is going on at this site. These researchers also refer to the “immersion” of a researcher in the lives of the participants, in order to “grasp what they experience as meaningful and important” (Emerson et al., 2011:37). O’Reilly (2009:150) considers participant observation the main method of an ethnographic research design. A participant observer wants to “observe, notice, record, and try to make sense of actions and events” and as such is “increasingly directed in the way she collects observations and ask questions” (O’Reilly, 2009:152). In my own study the direction of observations and questions was to a large extent guided by the chosen theoretical framework. In other words, I was consciously looking for traces of the development of a professional journalistic habitus, as well as occurrences related to the associations between journalists and digital media technologies.

It would serve the ethnographer well to remain cognisant of the “inherent paradox in the role of the participant observer” (Wolcott, 2008:51), meaning one can remain too aloof or become too involved.

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<sup>15</sup> Slack is an example of an “online collaborative software” package that helps to create a “virtual” newsroom, because it has been designed to “echo social media and the informal, collaborative norms of digital culture” (Bunce, Wright & Scott, 2017:2)

Wolcott (2008:51) suggests staying on the “cautious side” and to only become involved when it is really necessary for the process of data gathering:

Operating with that level of restraint allows a researcher to help everyone else to remain conscious of the research *role* as the work progresses, rather than risk having someone later complain about having been misled by a pretence at involvement [original emphasis].

My approach to the periods of observation at Netwerk24 was also informed by a clear decision to err on the side of caution and restraint. I explained my presence clearly to anyone I came in contact with and made notes overtly when attending diary meetings. During return visits to the newsroom I also explained my analysis process to journalists who seemed more interested in the research.

However, as discussed throughout this chapter, an ethnographic research project rarely develops strictly as planned. For instance, journalists sometimes asked my opinion on news events, or addressed me directly during diary meetings. As former journalist it was also sometimes difficult for me *not* to engage when interesting news events were discussed. Notwithstanding such few instances of direct participation, my role as researcher – instead of fellow journalist – was made abundantly clear.

As discussed above, I gained access to the various Netwerk24 news offices to spend a week at a time at each. I used this time to engage informally and formally with journalists and observe their daily news routines. The amount of time needed to do observations in the field for a so-called proper ethnography is not clear-cut. Ryfe (2016) makes an impassioned plea for journalism ethnographers to spend more time in the newsroom, in the tradition of what he refers to as the “golden age” of news production studies during the 1970s. Yet at the same time he highlights some of the challenges of dedicating extended periods of time to ethnography, including the “political economy of academic research” (Ryfe, 2016:42). While South African universities as a rule do not rely on a tenure system, there are certainly similar pressures to be productive and publish. My own reasons for choosing ethnography, besides my genuine interest in newswork at Netwerk24, include the belief, along with Ryfe (2016:49), that there is a reason why ethnography is the “classic approach” to study culture. Ryfe (2016:49) says:

There simply is nothing like immersion to provide a deep understanding of a culture. Immersion requires time.

To address this obvious challenge I chose to adopt what Wolcott (2008:178) recognises as a “matter-of-fact attitude towards time”. Wolcott (2008:178) says one needs to adjust the “purpose and agenda”

of the research by being “appreciative of and realistic about whatever time can be devoted to the research”. I contend that, in light of the practical considerations attached to this project, the time I spent in the newsroom is sufficient to answer the general research question.

Journalism studies researchers motivate their reasons for choosing a specific time period in different ways. Domingo (2008:690), for instance, scattered his observation periods over six months for “logistic and epistemological reasons”. He also says the arrangement of his observations helped to have a “time perspective” and to detect “if the product of the routines were evolving” (Domingo, 2008:690). My reasons for choosing a specific time period are similar to those of Domingo. Firstly, they were driven by logistical considerations, such as my teaching and academic supervision schedule. Secondly, I tried to schedule my newsroom visits to account for certain noteworthy changes at Netwerk24, such as the merger of the newspaper journalists with what became known as the first full staff complement of Netwerk24, as well as the appointment of new editorial managers and later also a new editor. The full fieldwork schedule is set out in Addendum E.

The observation of participants in a study as they go about their daily routines is not effective if the researcher does not capture the details in a “regular, systematic way” (Emerson et al., 2011:35).

According to Emerson et al. (2011:53), field notes need to involve

... *inscriptions* of social life and social discourse. Such inscriptions inevitably *reduce* the welter and confusion of the social world to the written words that can be reviewed, studied, and thought about time and again.

[original emphasis]

Field notes consist of more than just descriptions of what the researcher observes. Gobo (2008:208) distinguishes between four types of field notes: observational notes, theoretical notes, methodological notes and personal or emotional notes. In the first instance, the researcher simply captures as much detail of what she observes – without interpretation (Gobo, 2008:208). Theoretical notes help the researcher to capture and interpret ideas, hypotheses and interpretations as they develop during the time in the field (Gobo, 2008:210). With methodological notes, the researcher usually reflects upon difficulties that hinder or limit the observation process in an attempt to resolve them, or to note them in the final ethnographic product (Gobo, 2008:210). Personal, emotional notes usually remain private, but guide the researcher during self-analysis, or when trying to mitigate bias or stereotypes (Gobo, 2008:212). During my time in the field I focused on direct observation and self-reflection. I also made notes on events, issues or interactions that I felt should be further explored during informal and formal conversations with the journalists. To elaborate on my field notes, I used the memo function in

ATLAS.ti, the qualitative data analysis software I employed in this study, to make notes, comments and observations during the initial coding process.

Deciding what to write down, and what to leave out during periods of observation in the field is not an easy task. Gobo (2008:148) suggests that before you enter the field, you “should decide not only *what* to observe, but also *how* to do so” [original emphasis]. For my own study, I decided to focus on actions and events of journalists in the newsroom, rather than direct descriptions of, for instance, their personal attire and idiosyncrasies. This decision was to a large extent influenced by my theoretical framework: I was especially interested in the newsroom culture and atmosphere, as well as the associations between journalists and their newswork tools.

O’Reilly (2009:151) argues that the “observation” part of participant observation is arguably more “objective”. I concur with Wolcott (2008:49), however, that it is no longer necessary to pretend to be objective, but that ethnographers should rather “recognize and reveal our subjectivity as best we can”. As mentioned above, I dedicate Chapter 5 to reflect on my own role as observer and the potential influence this role could have had on the final description of newswork at Netwerk24.

On a practical level, I relied firstly on handwritten field notes. I carried a notebook with me to diary meetings to jot down details of relevant discussions and interactions. Throughout the day I would add notes and observations about what was happening around me in the newsroom. When I had informal conversations with journalists, for instance when we met each other in the cafeteria, I took mental notes and summarised them once I returned to my desk in the newsroom. All these notes were typed into MS Word documents, either when there was a lull in newsroom activity, or later on the same day. My field notes were saved according to date and location, and later coded and analysed in ATLAS.ti along with the interview transcripts.

#### **4.3.4.2 Enquiring**

During the initial planning stages for this research project I believed that the bulk of my data would be gathered through participant observation. I arrived in the newsroom armed with stacks of notebooks and pens to write up field notes. Upon spending my first few weeks in the newsroom, however, I realised that talking to journalists directly, and more formally, could possibly provide me with more, and often better contextualised, information on newswork at Netwerk24. Furthermore, I concur with Wolcott (2008:54) that one cannot subsume interviewing as part of participant observation, since it is too important not to “warrant a separate category of its own”. I have relied to a large extent on what Heyl (2001:369) describes as “ethnographic interviewing”, or

... projects in which researchers have established respectful, on-going relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds.

According to Heyl (2001:370), during ethnographic interviewing the researcher should “listen well and respectfully”; be aware of her own role in the “co-construction of meaning” during the interview; remain cognisant of how the “ongoing relationship and the broader social context” affect the whole interview process; and, always recognise the fact that “dialogue is discovery” and that one can only attain “partial knowledge”. This description of the interviewing process makes it clear that within an ethnographic setting, interviews are more than just conversations aimed at getting answers to answer the study’s research questions. Rather, it involves the establishment of relationships with the research participants over time in order to gain trust and to encourage them to engage in frank conversation with the researcher. My argument here is that, although enquiring was my main tool for data gathering, these interviews would have been far less successful had I not spent extended periods of time in the newsroom as observer.

Wolcott (2008:55) distinguishes between a variety of strategies or techniques for “enquiring” when doing ethnography, including casual conversations, life histories, key informant interviewing, semi-structured interviews, structured interviews, surveys and questionnaires. While I agree that all these techniques may produce valid results, I am not convinced that they are all relevant to the purposes of my study. I mainly focused on casual conversations, as part of the “everyday nature of fieldwork itself” (Wolcott, 2008:55), as well as more formal, in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

Informal conversations and unstructured interviews can elicit valuable feedback within an ethnographic setting. My contention, however, is that a researcher still needs to view an interview as the proverbial conversation with a purpose. In this case my purpose was to gain insight into the professional habitus and network of associations within the Netwerk24 newsroom. Instead of only striking up general conversations with journalists to see where such conversations might lead, I asked the journalists to set aside time for me during the day to talk around a specific set of themes and topics. These topics, however, constantly evolved – based on my observations in the newsroom and interviews with other journalists over time. As a result I did not necessarily repeat all the questions to different journalists, but rather focused on aspects of their newswork that seemed of more importance to each journalist. For the sake of increasing data reliability I did, however, touch on the same *broad* topics, ranging from their individual career trajectories to their understanding of what makes a good digital journalist.

The sampling procedure for these interviews was informed by both purpose and convenience. Since the study explores the daily newsroom routines, cultures and processes at Netwerk24, I made the decision to focus on journalists who could broadly be termed general news reporters. These were also the journalists who attended the daily diary meetings. In other words, I did not spend time with nor did I interview journalists that only focused on specialised beats such as arts, sports or business. This decision was not only informed by the nature of the journalists' work, but also by practical considerations, such as the physical space assigned to me during my visits to the different newsrooms. It was not possible for me to observe and interact with the sports journalists, for instance, since they sat in a different space and did not attend the same diary meetings.

I aimed to do semi-structured interviews with all the general news reporters in the main newsrooms of Netwerk24 situated in Johannesburg and Cape Town. I also made one visit each to Bloemfontein and Pretoria to speak to journalists based there. All the journalists who worked by themselves in more remote regions received a brief list of open-ended questions. Not all of them, however, responded to this email. Despite my best efforts, it was not always possible to interview all the journalists due, in part, to time constraints on both sides, as well as the high staff turnover at Netwerk24. I supplemented the interviews with news journalists with other key informant interviews, ranging from the editorial managers in the different regions to the dedicated multimedia and social media journalists. I also interviewed the different editors at the helm of Netwerk24 since 2015, as well as the editors of the legacy print titles. My final interview was with Weideman, as CEO of Media24. The full schedule of interviews, which includes some demographic detail of the interviewees, is set out in Addendum F.<sup>16</sup>

Ethnographic interviews produce rich and varied results, but also have their limitations (see for instance: Bruun, 2016; Gobo, 2008; Wolcott, 2008). According to Bruun (2016:137), the objective of media production studies is to “gain insight into what is going on ‘backstage’ and to publish that insight”. However, this type of research can be deemed “dangerous, uncomfortable, or just annoying and time-consuming” by journalists (Bruun, 2016:137). I tried my best to mitigate these and other concerns of journalists by allowing them to dictate the time, place and often also the length of interviews. As mentioned above, I also gave them the opportunity to remain anonymous or to present some of their responses as off-the-record. Only in a few cases did journalists prefer to take part using pseudonyms. What did happen, however, is that some journalists requested to view their transcripts a relatively long period of time after I had left the newsroom, since they were worried that some of the things they had said could be damaging to their careers. Since the agreement the journalists signed with me to indicate their informed consent allowed for them to withdraw from the study at any time, I

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<sup>16</sup> It is necessary at this point to highlight that the decision of when (during the presentation of findings) to include the location and/or date of the interviews, could be considered context-specific. In other words: when it is relevant *where* or *when* the interview took place, those details are included. The full names of interviewees are usually included for clarity (except in the few cases where the use of a pseudonym was requested).

consented to sending them these transcripts for review. I discuss my further handling of these isolated cases in Chapter 5.

Wolcott (2008:57) highlights another concern around interviews when he says there will always be questions about “the nature of the relationship between the fieldworker and informant”. Such questions include: why was a participant willing to talk, how valid are the answers, and how did the researcher and the participant each benefit by the exchange (Wolcott, 2008:57). My contention is that most of these fears can be allayed through constant self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher.

To keep a record of the more formal interviews with journalists, I used my Samsung Galaxy smart phone to record all our conversations. Later I transcribed all the interviews into MS Word documents aided by the Express Scribe transcription software. One of the drawbacks of conducting a study at an Afrikaans news institution but writing the final report in English, became glaringly obvious during this phase of the research, since I had to translate all the interviews. Despite this being a very time-consuming endeavour, I do believe that my choice to do all these transcriptions and translations myself allowed me to become increasingly familiar with the data, which also aided me during the data coding phase.

#### **4.3.4.3 Examining**

The final research method used in this study was the gathering and analysis of documents, ranging from news diaries to email correspondence. It must be emphasised, however, that my approach to data gathering for this study neither produced nor necessitated an extensive analysis of historical documents. I therefore did not include these documents as part of my analysis of data in ATLAS.ti. Wolcott (2008:63) argues that the biggest distinction between the ethnographer and historians or biographers, who rely heavily on historical documents, is the fact that the ethnographer is concerned with the “ordinary and everyday”. In line with this description, I focused my attention on documents that were created or distributed during the period when I did my fieldwork. I also looked at formal notices and announcements about the nature and development of Netwerk24, as well as published interviews with key informants at Netwerk24. These documents contributed to the broader understanding and context of Netwerk24 as part of its parent company, Media24, and as a role-player within the Afrikaans news market in South Africa.

### 4.3.5 Data analysis

The analysis of data in an ethnographic research project cannot be separated from the data gathering process. Gobo (2008:227) explains that data gathering and data analysis are

... closely intertwined processes which proceed circularly in reciprocal interaction because the data analysis drives closely-focused sampling and information collection.

As discussed above, and in the chapters to follow, my interview questions were to a large extent informed by an initial reading of my field notes, as well as interactions with various journalists in the newsroom. I believe that continuously moving between data gathering and analysis – as well as continuously reflecting on the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study – helped me to gain better insight into the transitions at Netwerk24, as well the journalists' reactions to these changes. By the time I returned to the main Netwerk24 newsroom offices for follow-up observation and interviews – almost a year after my first two visits – my data gathering and analysis phases were even more closely intertwined.

Emerson et al. (2011:309) explain, however, that at some point the ethnographer needs to “draw back from the field” and “cease actively writing notes”. The researcher then has to do a close reading of the field notes, followed by different stages of coding (Emerson et al., 2011:310). For the purposes of my study the data gathered through enquiring, or interviews, have equal value.

In the rest of this section, I give a brief overview of how I used ATLAS.ti to analyse my data, as well as my approach to coding. A careful reading and analysis of the data according to the coding structure I developed was used to extract the themes discussed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

I employed qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), specifically ATLAS.ti (version 7), to analyse the data. Maietta (2008:103) describes such qualitative software as

... a basic ‘toolkit’ containing specific tools that help users to organize and record thoughts about and reactions to data as well as tools to access and review the material they organize and record.

As discussed above ethnographic research usually leads to an overwhelming amount of data – depending on the period spent in the field. My final analysis included 135 documents – ranging from field notes and interview transcripts, to photographs and email interviews.

Using CAQDAS assists the researcher in making sense of an overwhelming amount of data in a systematic and reliable manner. Gobo (2008:253) lists some of the advantages of CAQDAS, which includes helping the researcher to sort and code field notes and interview data, as well as increasing the transparency of the ethnographic data and the analysis process. It is noteworthy, however, that ATLAS.ti cannot code or interpret the data for the researcher; the researcher still needs to do the analytical thinking (O'Reilly, 2009:41).

My approach to the use of ATLAS.ti as analytical tool was informed by a model developed by Susanne Friese, an expert in the field of qualitative data analysis using ATLAS.ti. Friese (2014:12) writes about computer-assisted NCT analysis where NCT stands for “Noticing things”; “Collecting things”; and, “Thinking about things”.

Firstly, explains Friese (2014:13), comes the process of “finding interesting things” by going through the material gathered, which in the case of this study includes interview transcripts, field notes and supplementary documents. As discussed above, I transcribed and translated all the interviews myself. During this process I had ample time to notice some “interesting things” in the data. This step of the NCT process can also involve some preliminary coding.

Secondly comes the process of collecting things by noticing “things that are similar to some you may have noticed before” (Friese, 2014:13). At this stage, coding begins in earnest. In qualitative research a code is “a word or short phrase” that explains an attribute for “a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2016:25). My analysis of interview transcripts, field notes and a limited amount of visual materials was mostly guided by Saldaña’s (2016) approach to qualitative data coding. According to Saldaña’s guidelines, qualitative data are coded, divided into categories to find themes that can support certain assertions and theories (Saldaña, 2016:38). He distinguishes between first and second cycle coding. In line with Friese’s NCT model, first cycle coding would be similar to “collecting things”.

The final step in Friese’s model refers to “thinking about things”. While reflecting on the data is especially important at this stage, Friese (2014:1) explains:

We need to use our brains from the very beginning of the analytical process... We need to think when noticing things, when coming up with good names for codes, or when developing subcategories. We need to do some more thinking when it comes to finding patterns and relations in the data.

This step in the NCT process can be distinguished from “thinking” in general, in that it mostly takes part after codes have been developed and assigned. In other words, it is more focused on finding themes and analysing the data using the variety of tools available in CAQDAS software such as ATLAS.ti. Friese (2014:18) explains that one then moves on to “conceptual-level analysis” where the “aim now is to look at the data from the perspective of the research questions”. Software such as ATLAS.ti helps to increase “the validity of research results, especially at the conceptual stage of an analysis” (Friese, 2014:1). At the end of the day, says Friese (2014:18):

The ultimate aim is to integrate all of the findings and to gain a coherent understanding of the phenomenon studied; or, if theory building was your aim, to visualize and to present a theoretical model.

It is important to note from the outset that the NCT analysis is a cyclical process. In the case of this study, for instance, I returned to the main Netwerk24 newsroom offices more than a year after my first visits. By this time I had already finished “thinking about” the first set of data I had gathered. In other words, the NCT process started again at with “noticing things” after I had already come to some conclusions on a conceptual level.

#### **4.3.6 The ethnographic report**

It is never too early to start writing when doing ethnography (Wolcott, 2008:257). According to Wolcott (2008:257), a researcher

... should be recording first impressions, along with your personal reactions and any anxieties you are experiencing about the projected work or the circumstances in which you have placed yourself. ... You may want to quote yourself from those early entries as a way of leading your reader into the setting in much the same way as you initially encountered it.

I concur that one should always keep notes and analyse your data with the final product in mind. One of the ways in which I prepared for writing my description and analysis of newswork at Netwerk24 was to use the memo function in ATLAS.ti. Therefore, besides the field notes that included my personal reflections, I also had notes about my experience of the coding process and the stumbling blocks I encountered, for instance.

As discussed above, research themes emerge on a conceptual level during the coding process. According to Emerson et al. (2011:358), writing an ethnographic text involves organising such themes “into a coherent ‘story’ about life and events in the setting studied”. In the case of this study, therefore, this ‘story’ – in line with the general research questions – will be the tale of how journalists at Netwerk24 experience newswork during a time of transition.

## 4.4 Summary

Ethnographic research does not follow a standard recipe. As this chapter has shown, there are many ways to study the culture, routines and practices of a specific group over an extended period of time. Although there are no set models that can be applied to all ethnographic research, a researcher should not enter the field without any preparation. This chapter has therefore shown how my own research has been informed by the work of other ethnographers, as well as by guidelines set for ethnographic research in general.

Firstly, I set out to define ethnography very broadly as the study of the culture of a specific group, in a specific setting during a specific period of time. In this case, the ethnographic report will discuss the cultures and practices of Netwerk24 journalists within the newsroom where they worked from May 2016 to November 2017. Some criticism against ethnography, especially with regards to newsroom-centric research designs, was also discussed. The lack of time to do, what could be construed as “proper” newsroom ethnography, is one of the key concerns in this regard. I suggested countering these concerns by making sure that the time I spent in the newsrooms of Netwerk24 was sufficient to answer the general and specific research questions.

The bulk of this chapter was dedicated to a discussion on how I approached the study of newswork at Netwerk24 within the framework of an ethnographic research design. Potentially problematic issues, such as the importance of gaining access; the need to act in an ethical way; and, the influence of practical constraints, were discussed. In the case of this study, none of these issues raised serious red flags. Access to the Netwerk24 newsroom was facilitated and made easier by my former employment as journalist at Media24. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university in which my study is housed, in conjunction with informed consent from the individual journalists directly. The practicalities of doing ethnography were a bit more difficult to navigate: I had to juggle the constraints place on me by both my academic duties and the costs involved in visiting the newsroom offices. However, I do believe that I was able to mitigate all these challenges to such an extent that the study was feasible and could answer the general research question.

I also discussed the ways in which I gathered data for the study by doing participant observation (experiencing), conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews (enquiring) and analysing some key documents (examining). For the analysis of my data and to draw conclusions I relied on ATLAS.ti to keep track of my thought process and to increase the validity of my study.

Before I delve deeper into the data I gathered by writing the ethnographic report, I will reflect on my own experiences in the newsroom and how I believe it influenced the process of experiencing, enquiring and examining.

## Chapter 5: A hackademic in the newsroom

### 5.1 Being a ‘hackademic’

In this chapter I discuss my role as researcher in the Netwerk24 newsroom where I did the experiencing (participant observation); enquiring (in-depth, semi-structured interviews); and, examining (supplementary analysis of documents) – as discussed in Chapter 4. I will highlight some issues pertaining to my access to the newsroom, my approach to taking field notes, how I initially coded and further used these field notes, as well as some stumbling blocks I encountered along the way. It must be noted that, while I do reference specific data in this chapter, the intent here is not to analyse the data in-depth. This chapter instead serves as a way to indicate the self-reflective nature of my study.

In describing myself as a “hackademic”, I am relying on the words of Errigo and Franklin (2004:43), who use this term to describe journalists (or “hacks”) who enter the academy as lecturers and researchers:

These hardy hybrids are the hacks and hackettes who have moved from newsroom to classroom, to face a challenging array of new professional demands and to develop new skills in teaching, research and academic publication.

According to Errigo and Franklin (2004:44), the skills that hackademics bring to the workplace are ideally suited to make them “ace researchers”, since “research and publications in the academy isn’t necessarily that far from the newsroom”. Among other things, argue Errigo and Franklin (2004:44), journalists-turned-academics know how to gather information, package it for an audience, and meet deadlines and word counts.

Another reason why it is worthwhile for former newswriters to study the newsroom, and by extension journalism as profession, is to counter the perceived tensions that exist between journalists and journalism studies researchers. Zelizer (2004) raised this issue more than a decade ago in a seminal text critiquing the then state of journalism studies. According to Zelizer (2004:2), it is “bewildering” that, despite the proven importance of journalism in people’s lives, questions about “why journalism matters” still remain in scholarly circles. Furthermore, argues Kunelius (2006:672), an academic who criticises journalism “has the disadvantage of keeping its distance from the actual production processes of journalism”. I concede that it is necessary for an academic who enters the

newsroom to maintain some sort of distance from the research phenomenon and research subjects. However, I would argue that prior knowledge of the routines, cultures and practices of the newsroom and related journalistic activities will stand a researcher in good stead when it comes to exploring and describing what happens during newswork. I thus concur with Niblock (2007:21) who argues that “the once-barricaded boundary lines between journalism practice and journalism theory have been breached by the rise of the practitioner-academic”.

In deciding to enter the field as hackademic, I also found inspiration in this view held by Errigo and Franklin (2004:47):

Practitioners should play to their strengths and develop research-based publications informed by their professional experience: in brief, hackademics should reflect and write about what they know.

As I explained in the introduction to Chapter 1, my choice to study newswork at Netwerk24 was certainly akin to reflecting and writing about what I know. Notwithstanding the far-reaching changes that have occurred in the Afrikaans newsrooms at Media24 during the seven years I had been in the academy before my fieldwork started, this company still feels like my journalistic home. When I ask Jo van Eeden, in her role as editor, in July 2016 whether my being in the newsroom bothers her or inhibits what happens there, she says: “It helps that I know you. It helps that it is not a stranger that walked in here”, adding that “nothing we do here is a secret operation”. Or as Celinda Marais, audience development manager at Netwerk24, says when I ask her during an interview in September 2016 how my presence in the newsroom affects her newswork:

I think the fact that I knew you beforehand, made it much easier. The fact that you sat in all of our offices, and that we had worked together before. It would perhaps have been a bit weird if it was a complete outsider who had not been with the company; who had not been a Media24 or Naspers family member. That would perhaps have been stranger.

My contention is thus that, despite some of the challenges discussed in this chapter, my experience as hackademic was an advantage for both securing access and negotiating relationships in the newsroom offices where I observed Netwerk24 journalists and their newswork.

## 5.2 Entering the newsroom: serendipity and purpose

In Chapter 4 I alluded to the fact that ethnography as research design relies on a bit of luck. In this regard, and as discussed above, it helped a lot that I was familiar *with* and familiar *to* Media24 as media institution. One of the front-desk managers at the Media24 Centre in Cape Town, affectionately known as “Captain”, even remembered me from my time as night news reporter at *Die Burger*. Running into some of my former colleagues, fellow journalism graduates and students on the newsroom floor similarly had its advantages. It also helped a lot – in the planning stages of my research – that I could send quick questions via email to a former classmate and first editor of Netwerk24, Liesl Pretorius. In the first year of its existence Netwerk24, for instance, won a digital-category award at Media24’s TeamSpeak, a yearly company-wide conference and prize-giving ceremony. Pretorius explained to me in an August 2015 email that this award meant that Netwerk24 was recognised for developing “a new and innovative digital product” which boasted “unique functionality and innovative design/user experience”, in conjunction with using “technology in a manner not previously seen at Media24 News [division]”. I also directed some informal enquiries about people and practices at Netwerk24 to Le Roux Schoeman, another former classmate of mine, who was multimedia editor at Netwerk24 when I did my fieldwork.

Other instances where serendipity and luck played a role, include the opportunities I had to engage in informal conversations with some of the journalists and media managers over coffee, or sometimes in hallways. One of the first instances of such an informal conversation was during my initial meeting with Barnard Beukman, editor of *Beeld*, in May 2016 on my first day in the Johannesburg office of Netwerk24, which I captured thus in my field notes:

When I tell Barnard [Beukman] what I am working on, he says that they would ‘pay me’ for that research. Jo [van Eeden] responds that this puts me in a bargaining position.

Naturally, these comments by both the newspaper editor and then editor-in-chief at Netwerk24 could be construed as problematic, since they seem to indicate that the editorial managers have a vested interest in my research. As I argued in Chapter 4 (section 4.3.2), however, I made it very clear to everyone I came across in the newsroom offices, that I was not there on behalf of Media24’s management. I am confident that being transparent about my motives and methods served to mitigate such impressions.

Another instance where an informal conversation yielded fruitful information for further exploration occurred during a coffee break on the same day. After I attended my first country-wide teleconference, I walk down to the office cafeteria with two journalists, Charlea Sieberhagen and

Carryn-Ann Nel (both of whom left the Johannesburg office of Netwerk24 during the period that my field work took place).<sup>17</sup> I knew both journalists beforehand, as Sieberhagen had been a master's student of mine and Nel an intern when I worked at *Die Burger*. I ask them whether they still enjoy working for Netwerk24:

There is a noticeable pause before Charlea responds that culture had changed a lot. ... They believe that Pieter [du Toit, former head of news] focused more on the online aspect and always asked them how they were going to package their stories. ... They also say that I should have come when there were only a few journalists and Pieter.

This conversation led me to carefully question the change of culture that seemingly occurred when, on 1 May 2016, the content creators at the three daily legacy newspaper titles joined the 16 or so initial Netwerk24 journalists (who previously worked under the editorship of Adriaan Basson with Du Toit as head of news) to form one big, national Netwerk24 team.

I was involved in numerous such informal conversations during my time in the newsroom offices. These conversations were coded in ATLAS.ti as informal conversations, as well as according to the specific topics or themes their content related to. The content of such informal conversations thus became part of the broader analysis and identification of themes discussed in the chapters to follow.

Sometimes merely being in the newsroom office at a specific time or when a specific incident occurred led to a deeper understanding of the culture and practices in the newsroom.

For instance, during my second day of observations in the Bloemfontein office of Netwerk24 (on 24 May 2016), a seasoned journalist with a long history in newspapers receives a tip-off that a previously reported-on alleged farm attack was actually a cover-up for a case of vigilantism. At first, Vicus Bürger, at that time head of news at Netwerk24 in Bloemfontein, argues that the story should be held back for the newspapers. During the afternoon meeting of the chief editorial staff of the Bloemfontein-based paper *Volksblad*, Bürger explains that he had sent an email to various people (at Netwerk24) to request that the story only will only be published in the following day's newspaper. He says:

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<sup>17</sup> Sieberhagen left Netwerk24 to join one of Media24's weekly Afrikaans magazines, *Huisgenoot*. Nel moved to the Cape Town office of Netwerk24.

Our traffic is down now. We should rather put it through on a spike.<sup>18</sup> Then the newspapers win and Netwerk24 wins.

However, before the meeting ends Bürger receives a message on his cell phone that the journalist in question should file a story immediately. At first, the journalist refuses as he believes the information needs further confirmation and should only be published in the newspaper the following morning. As a result the editor of *Volksblad*, Gert Coetzee, also becomes involved in the discussion. My observations of this incident are summarised thus in my field notes:

Vicus is upset, and says he tries to do the right thing. It comes from Esmaré [Weideman, CEO of Media24] that they must be digital first. He says he can face disciplinary action if he does not do this. He tells Gert that Pieter [du Toit, head of news] is now upset with him because he did not discuss it with Pieter, and [the journalist] is upset with him because he passed the story on to Netwerk[24].

In the end, the story is indeed published that same afternoon. The following morning, during the morning meeting of *Volksblad* which Bürger still attends, Coetzee thanks him for the handling of the previous night's events. "I think Netwerk[24] won, and we won," says Coetzee.

My exploration of newswork at Netwerk24 was, however, not entirely based on serendipity and luck. To cite Fetterman (2008:288) again, I did not enter the field with an "empty head" but rather with an "open mind". As discussed in Chapter 4, I thus kept the purpose and research questions of my study in mind during my time as participant observer and interviewer. One of my research questions calls for a description of how journalists are socialised into the professional cultures and practices of their newsroom network (see Chapter 1). This question is also directly related to the theoretical concept of a professional journalistic habitus, as applied to this study. A number of broader interview themes were formulated to address journalists' understanding of how they were socialised into the Netwerk24 newsroom. I asked the journalists for instance, what being a good digital journalist meant to them, or something similar.

Another issue related to the professional journalistic habitus centres on how, if and why journalists are encouraged to or identify with the Netwerk24 brand. This issue was not only raised during interviews,

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<sup>18</sup> Journalists use the word "spike" to refer to time periods when user analytics indicate that traffic to the Netwerk24 website is usually at its highest.

but also as part of my observations as evident from this comment I jotted down during my second round of observations in the Cape Town office on 6 September 2016:

Carryn-Ann [Nel] makes it clear that she is from Netwerk24 – not *Die Burger* – even when she picks up the direct telephone line of one of her colleagues in the newsroom.

In terms of the newswork network, and the way actors within this network associate with each other (informed by the use of actor-network theory), it soon became evident that I would have to look not only for journalists' associations with digital media technologies or other material “stuff”, but also specifically at their interactions with each other. For instance, the influence of individual newsroom “personalities” on newsroom culture and workflow seemed to indicate that losing or moving Netwerk24 staff – especially at a more senior level – could have a significant effect on newswork in general. This theme will be explored in more detail in the chapters to follow. As example, see below an extract from my May 2016 interview with Reza van Rooyen, then day editor who had been part of Netwerk24 from early on, but has since left the company:

There has never been stability at Netwerk[24]. Perhaps there will be now. But when I started in September [2015], Liesl Pretorius was our editor. Then she resigned. Then Adriaan [Basson] was our editor. Six months later Jo [van Eeden] became our editor. I have never really been involved in a start-up, so I do not know if this is just the way things are. But in a way one searches for that stability, because you just get used to one way of working, then a new boss arrives. And bosses who say they are not going to come and change everything... I have told Jo many times that stability is needed, because there has never been any.

Further analysis of the themes that emerged from my field work are discussed in more detail in the chapters to follow. I would argue at this stage, however, that the examples I have used here support my contention that the ethnographic nature of this study, through a shot of serendipity and a lot of purposeful planning, has led to worthwhile, valid and reliable results.

### 5.3 Moving through the newsroom: reflections of a participant observer

It has been established that ethnography is not a one-size-fits-all research design. As time goes by, ethnographers need to adapt to what transpires at the research site; reflect on their own position within this community; and, rethink their research questions (as discussed in Chapter 4). In my case (as discussed in section 4.3.4.2) the in-depth, semi-structured interviews in some cases produced richer detail than my field notes. This does not mean that I do not consider these notes to be key to my discussion of findings. In fact: my field notes were often the basis for the questions I asked journalists. My contention here is that my approach to taking field notes guided my research in a way that interviews in isolation would not have been able to.

Early on in the observation process, I decided to categorise my notes according to type – as suggested by Gobo (2008) and discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.3.4.1). Firstly, I made general notes on, for instance, the physical movements of journalists, diary meetings, teleconferences, as well as some instances where I shadowed journalists while they were working at their desks or on assignment. Secondly, and as discussed above, I noticed things that I should follow up. Finally, I included some reflective notes to indicate what my reaction to, or thoughts about, certain incidents or observations were.

In addition to a systematic approach to taking field notes as a way to validate findings, the importance of self-reflection on the ethnographer's part has also been highlighted before. I have already taken cognisance of the criticism against qualitative research, and newsroom ethnography in particular (see Chapter 4; sections 4.1 and 4.2.4). One of the ways to counter this criticism is for qualitative, ethnographic researchers to constantly reflect on their potential biases and how their presence in the newsroom might affect what happens there. Gobo (2008:5), for instance, believes that the ethnographer becomes a lead character (or “protagonist”) in the story she tells about the culture of a group. I found this to be true very early on during my time in the field. Within the first hour of my first newsroom visit to the Johannesburg office in May 2016, I make the following note in my field notes:

Reflection: This immediately makes me think about my role in the newsroom as observer and how I will be perceived. People make a lot of different assumptions about what I am doing here, who I am doing it for, and what I hope to achieve. I would need to counter this by making my position as researcher clear. I need to work on the boundaries I need to set.

During my second round of visits to Johannesburg in July of the same year, I similarly note that it has become difficult not to get involved in what happens in the newsroom:

Reflection: It has become very difficult for me not to be drawn into some of the more personal engagements, and interactions of journalists – especially on a more senior editorial level. It appears as though the journalists/editors are starting to see me as an outlet for some of their ideas and frustrations. The question is how this will be reflected in my research methodology and results.

In discussing the ways in which my access to the newsrooms was facilitated (section 4.3.1) in conjunction with my awareness of the need to act in an ethical manner (section 4.3.2), I explained that I did indeed make it very clear to everyone I came in contact with that I was a researcher with, for want of a better phrase, a specific agenda. For instance, I was open about what I did when I took notes, as well as what my research focus was – during both informal conversations and more formal interviews.

## **5.4 Coding field notes: moving forward, going back**

As discussed above and in Chapter 4, ethnography is an iterative process: the researcher continuously moves between data gathering and data analysis. However, there comes a time when the researcher must draw back from the field for some more focused thinking (Friese, 2014:14). Or as Emerson et al. (2011:234-235) explain:

Developing potential analyses requires writing: The ethnographer turns from mentally noting theoretical insights and connections to putting these ideas into written form. When insights are simply thought or communicated orally, rather than being put on paper, they remain loose and fluid. ... Thus written-down analyses acquire structure, depth, and nuance.

In line with these authors' thinking, I decided to use the memo function in ATLAS.ti to keep track of my thoughts and to begin formulating ideas and themes that required further exploration or analysis. Friese (2014:165) says memos represent “analytic work in progress” that can be used as “building blocks” for the final research report. Similarly, Saldaña (2016:74) says writing analytic memos

... documents reflections on: your coding processes and code choices; how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts in your data – all possibly leading toward theory.

According to Friese (2014:165), learning to write good memos is “experiential”; in other words, you learn by actually writing them. In order to start building my research report, I started writing various memos early in the coding process. These include memos on each of my research questions, the theoretical framework and the coding process itself. I also started keeping a research diary in ATLAS.ti to keep track of my progress.

Of specific relevance for this chapter is the memo I titled “Hackademic reflections”. This memo was the container for ideas, comments and queries directly related to my field notes. In order to focus my own reflections, I developed an initial code list by working through the 90 documents I had gathered for analysis after my five weeks of newsroom visits in 2016. These documents included field notes, interview transcripts and photographs. What is noteworthy is that after this initial round of coding, I used ATLAS.ti’s analytical functions to cross-check where and how the different coding categories were highlighted in and through my field notes. In other words, I was searching to find instances where I had reflected on the coded categories, or deemed them necessary to follow up. As an example of the way my field notes guided me in developing my themes and to adapt my interview approach, I will give a brief overview of the themes and thoughts that emerged during this preliminary analysis of my field notes – as captured in the “Hackademic reflections” analytical memo.

Firstly, I once again saw the need for me to constantly reflect on my own role as researcher in the newsroom. A variety of issues were raised in this regard, including: how to define the boundaries of my research project; how to reflect on my physical presence in the newsroom and the influence that might have had on newsroom interactions; and, what happened when I observed individual journalists directly. My lack of access to observe the digital interactions of journalists both within the newsroom and with sources was also evident.

Secondly, I noticed some broad themes that warranted further exploration – both in terms of existing data, as well as when I returned to the newsrooms for the final round of observations in 2017. The relevant themes are summarised below:

- The relationship between Netwerk24 and the newspapers: there is a significant number of references to the way journalists perceive and interact with the printed newspapers and their remaining staff members.

- The nature and extent of communication in the newsroom: questions are raised about how journalists communicate across regions and beats since Netwerk24 became one virtual, national newsroom. The need to further explore the nature of internal communication – between journalists, their news managers, and management in general – also becomes clear, especially during times of tension and disagreement.
- The nature and extent to which journalists talk specifically about digital newswork: in this instance I wonder about the way in which journalists talk about everything from deadlines and the role of multimedia journalists to their descriptions of digital workflow.
- The difficulty of observing journalists' use of digital media technologies: this theme emerges from the *lack* of observations of how, when and why journalists are using digital media technologies. As discussed throughout this study, my answer to this problem is to ask the journalists directly about their technology use, as well as to take time to observe individual journalists at their workstations or at work on assignment.
- The roles and responsibilities of different journalists and news managers: here I notice the need to clarify the chain of command, so to speak. This is especially relevant since the lines of communication and accountability do not appear to be clear-cut.
- Journalists' descriptions and experience of the newsroom atmosphere and internal culture: I found it interesting that journalists' experience within the newsroom are to a large extent dependent on their interactions with other journalists and news managers. The influence of the physical layout of the office also seems to be telling – especially with regards to the way journalists communicate.
- The role of the photographers: from the outset the retrenchment of photographers<sup>19</sup> seems to be a sore point in the newsroom and among journalists. On my second day in the newsroom, for instance, I observe a journalist saying that there will be a big “fuck-up” when the photographers are gone.
- Journalists' awareness of print outputs: given that my first newsroom visits occur in the same month as when the former print journalists were moved to work digital-first, this is perhaps not so surprising – but still worth exploring further.
- Traditional journalistic role conceptions and values: this is a theme that emerged from my initial coding of the interview transcripts. I found it noteworthy, however, that this is not something that I initially reflect on in detail during my observations; nor do I consider this worth following up

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<sup>19</sup> Upon my arrival in the newsroom in May 2016, I found out that the photographers had recently been put through the so-called “189 process”, which refers to Section 189 of the Amended Labour Relations Act of 2002 that deals with dismissals, or retrenchments, based on the “employer’s operational requirements” (Republic of South Africa, 2002). This process, which is clearly dreaded by newsroom staff, led to a lot of photographers leaving Netwerk24.

on. I would argue that there are two reasons for the *lack* of observations of traditional journalism: firstly, I believe that these values are assumed during journalists' observable interactions and actions; and, secondly, that to me as hackademic the traditional roles and values of journalism also seem to be an obvious part of newswork. The fact that this theme does emerge from the interviews makes it worth exploring – especially to counter my own bias and, to echo the words of Latour and Woolgar (1986:30), to make the newsroom activities “seem as strange as possible in order to not take too much for granted”.

The broader themes I identified during the initial coding of my field notes guided my approach and interview schedule as I moved through the different newsroom offices to further experience and enquire about newswork, as well as my approach to coding the rest of the data. As Saldaña (2016:31) explains: “Coding is a cyclical act.” I would thus contend that the way I continuously reflected and followed up on issues raised during my time as participant observer further supported my decision to use ethnography as research design.

## 5.5 Stumbling blocks along the way

Being a hackademic in the newsroom of Netwerk24 was an enriching and interesting experience for me – which supports the argument that an ethnographer should choose a setting that is “of genuine interest” to her (Wolcott, 2008:30). I would further argue that my interest in the research phenomenon, and my natural curiosity about what happens during newswork, strengthened my study on both an empirical and methodological level. However, this ethnographic journey was not problem-free.

Firstly, the newsroom offices were as a rule very quiet, and I could not follow all the journalists as they left the newsroom (on assignment or to get lunch, for instance). Furthermore, it soon became apparent that those early newsroom ethnographers, who highlighted the routine nature of newswork (as discussed in Chapter 2), certainly had a point: even during times of disruption and transition there is a certain regular rhythm to what happens in the newsroom. I will elaborate on some of these routines in Chapter 6. It is noteworthy then that my field notes and observations contain some repetition. During the latter stages of my newsroom visits in 2016 and again in 2017, I therefore did not jot down every single newswork interaction in detail; rather, I was looking for the extraordinary.

Secondly, I was caught off guard a bit when Liesl Pretorius, as first editor of Netwerk24, told me in September 2016 that she would prefer not being part of this study. At first, she agreed to answer some

questions via email. However, in her response to my email, she said she had been under the impression that I was going to ask only questions about technology use. My questions, however, also contained references to the nature of culture and communication at Netwerk24 during her time as editor and she declined to take further part in the study.

Since I was able to speak to the editors who succeeded her, including Adriaan Basson who had left shortly before my field work started, this hampered my ability to describe the full history of Netwerk24 since its inception in 2014. However, as explained throughout this study, my description of newswork at Netwerk24 is a snapshot of a specific period of time in the history of Netwerk24: the 18 months between May 2016 and November 2017. While it was therefore not ideal that I could not speak to Pretorius directly, I would argue that this did not significantly alter my ability to answer the research questions.

Finally, and as discussed in section 4.3.4.2, I was somewhat concerned when two journalists contacted me in March and April 2017 respectively with requests to view and edit their interview transcripts. I had interviewed them in July and September 2016. Both these research participants were now concerned that they might have said something that could damage their careers or their relationships with other journalists and management. As explained in Chapter 4, the nature of the ethical clearance I acquired – from both the university and the journalists themselves – allows for research participants to withdraw from the study at any time. Rather than ignoring their contributions entirely, I made the decision to allow them to view the transcripts. Both of them indicated that there were some responses that they would either want to be scrapped off the record completely or that I would be allowed to use without attributing these comments to them directly. I agreed to use the edited versions of their transcripts. While this might be seen as invalidating some of my findings, I believe these journalists' request for withdrawing some of their responses is a finding in and of itself. I would argue that their fear of retribution or of being seen as too “emotional” (as one journalist said) is indicative of the uncertainty they faced during a time of disruption and transition at Netwerk24.

## **5.6 The road ahead**

In this chapter I discussed my experiences as hackademic in the newsroom. By exploring the way my background as journalist informed my work as academic, I indicated why I believe this study is interesting and relevant. This chapter also served to explain my approach to taking field notes, and the way I used the memo and analytical functionalities of ATLAS.ti to delve deeper into these initial findings. Some of the stumbling blocks I encountered on my journey through the newsroom were also discussed.

The foundation for my presentation of findings (in the following three chapters) has thus been set through a discussion of the background to the study (Chapter 1); a review of existing literature (Chapter 2); an overview of my theoretical departure points (Chapter 3); an explanation of ethnography as research design (Chapter 4) and a reflection on my own role as researcher (Chapter 5).

## Chapter 6: Everyday newswork in a digital-first newsroom

### 6.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.3.4) I gathered data in three ways: by experiencing what happened in the newsroom; by making specific enquiries with journalists during interviews; and, to a lesser extent, by examining a variety of documents. In total I spent at least 250 hours in the various newsroom offices and interviewed around 60 people<sup>20</sup> ranging from the chief executive officer (CEO) at Media24 to junior journalists. I had access to the majority of the news diaries during my time in the newsroom, and also relied on company memos and news reports about Netwerk24.

The aim of ethnography is to provide a snapshot of what happens to a specific group at a specific point in time – in this case the journalists at Netwerk24 for the period between May 2016 and November 2017. I would argue that presenting the findings of the data gathered through each of these methods separately would not be the most effective way of providing a holistic overview of newswork at Netwerk24. Consequently, my discussion in this chapter, and the two to follow, is an aggregation of the data gathered through all three of these techniques.

The previous five chapters have laid the groundwork for the discussion of this study's findings. As has been argued in Chapter 4 (section 4.3.6), the ethnographic report should tell the "story" of the group and its culture – as explored and described by the researcher. Like most narratives, this tale of "Newswork at Netwerk24" boasts, among other things, a colourful array of characters, an engrossing plot, a specific setting and various instances of conflict before the (temporary) resolution. As hackademic I was tempted to provide a chronological account of my time in the newsroom to show the evolution of newswork at Netwerk24. However, such an approach would to my mind not add sufficient academic value, nor would it have been informed by my literature review and theoretical framework. It is for this reason that I have decided to, in the words of Wolcott (2008:259), "think broad categories for sorting", or "patterns in word and deed" that seem to permeate my observations and conversations.

I have thus organised my findings around three broad focus areas that are presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 respectively. These focus areas are primarily based on my own ethnographic fieldwork in the Netwerk24 newsroom and subsequent analysis of data in ATLAS.ti. However, I have also referred

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<sup>20</sup> Not all the interviews I did were included in my analysis, since I realised after some conversations that these interviewees' roles, and therefore their responses, were not applicable to my study. Examples of such interviewees include an intern who spent a very limited amount of time in the newsroom and a features writer who did not take part in daily newswork routines, such as attending the diary meetings. The decision to exclude these interviewees from the analysis confirms the purposive nature of my sampling process.

back to the themes I identified during my literature review (Chapter 2) and my theoretical framework (Chapter 3).

In brief, the literature review guided me towards paying specific attention to: the nature and extent of changes due to the appropriation of technology; how journalists perceive and aim for quality; journalists' understanding and experience of the need to be multi-skilled; the role of culture in the appropriation of technology and changes to newswork; the influence of management and newsroom leadership; and, the issue of job satisfaction. My distillation of themes was also based on the theoretical underpinning of the study, namely that newswork at Netwerk24 can be explored through a description and analysis of how journalists are professionally socialised into becoming actors in a news-making network where digital media technologies also play a deciding role. In this chapter (and the two to follow) I highlight key areas where the theoretical departure points discussed in Chapter 3 help to illuminate the findings.

The focus areas that emerged from my data analysis are briefly set out below:

#### **Chapter 6: Everyday newswork in a digital-first newsroom**

This chapter introduces the daily newsroom routines and practices as they evolved over the time I spent in the newsroom. My attention was focused on the journalists' daily routines and what role digital media technologies played in their daily newswork. This summary of practical newswork is necessary for the description, in Chapter 7, of how the journalists act and interact with each other while producing content for Netwerk24 as a digital-first news website.

#### **Chapter 7: Journalists as professional actors in an unstable network**

In this chapter I briefly discuss the personal backgrounds of the journalists I interviewed, followed by a discussion on how journalists define the concept of a multi-skilled digital journalist. This is followed by an exposition of the newsroom culture – as observed by myself and described by the journalists. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the traditional conceptualisations of journalism that Netwerk24 journalists still consider relevant.

#### **Chapter 8: Continued disruptions and the future of newswork**

My presentation of findings concludes with an overview of the relationship between the print titles and Netwerk24 during my time in this newsroom. I also discuss how journalists view the future of journalism – in general and at Netwerk24 specifically. This chapter ends with a discussion of journalists' experiences of the continued changes and disruptions to their newswork network.

In the rest of this chapter I present the findings related to the first theme in more detail. Firstly, I give an overview of the different (geographical) newsroom offices that I visited. Thereafter I describe the daily routines of journalists at Netwerk24 and the changes I noticed over time. Finally, I look at the role of some key digital media technologies as newswork tools.

## **6.2 Setting the scene: Netwerk24 as one newsroom across many geographical spaces<sup>21</sup>**

As discussed throughout this dissertation, at the time of writing Netwerk24 was more than just a national news platform or website, it was also a national newsroom in which journalists from all across South Africa worked together to produce content. To “follow the actors” in the Netwerk24 newsroom – as suggested by actor-network theory – thus literally meant travelling around the country. I would argue that an exploration of the way in which the Netwerk24 journalists associate with each other and with non-human actors would be incomplete without a description of how the various geographical spaces might influence the composition of this newswork network. At the same time, the way journalists are inculcated with, and respond to, the professional culture in the newsroom is also arguably related to their physical location in the broader national newsroom.

The different editors of Netwerk24 emphasise that one of Netwerk24’s unique selling points is the fact that it has access to, in the words of Jo van Eeden as editor, “this whole network of reporters”. Or as Henriëtte Loubser, Netwerk24 editor at the time of writing, describes what gives this digital publication the edge above its competitors:

It is definitely that we have the biggest reporting team in the country, and that they do on-the-ground reporting; they go to the scene. It is still old-fashioned journalism. It is not aggregation or telephone journalism. They do on-the-ground reporting in all corners of the country. That is what makes us different from other websites.

The journalists who work for Netwerk24 are indeed scattered across the country: from Polokwane in Limpopo and Potchefstroom in the North-West province, to Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape, George in the Southern Cape and Kimberley in the Northern Cape. Two bigger regional offices can be

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<sup>21</sup> I have included some photographs taken during my time in the various newsroom offices as Addendum G. These photos also illustrate where I positioned myself to observe the comings-and-goings of the journalists.

found in Pretoria and Bloemfontein. These regional journalists report to news managers in Johannesburg and Cape Town where the bulk of the journalists work.

During my first interview with Jo van Eeden (in her capacity as Netwerk24's editor) in July 2016, she acknowledges that each of these places "has its own character". She does believe, however, that "it is easy to pull such diverse people together if you have a shared value system; if something knits us together". The question then arises as to what this shared value system looks like. How is the mission and vision of Netwerk24 communicated to journalists when they are geographically dispersed with some of them having little to no contact with the editors? How do journalists know what is expected of them every day when their direct line managers are often hundreds, or even thousands, of kilometres away? My argument is that an exploration of how the professional habitus is structured by *and* structure the culture in the newsroom, helps answer these questions and aids a broader understanding of newswork at Netwerk24.

In preparation for a later discussion on the vision of Netwerk24 and internal communication in the newsroom, it is worthwhile briefly having a closer look at the individual characters of the offices I visited between May 2016 and November 2017.

### 6.2.1 Johannesburg

The Johannesburg office of Netwerk24 is situated at Media Park, an imposing glass and steel building where the majority of Media24's newspaper publications in Gauteng are housed. My first newsroom visit to Netwerk24 was to this office on Monday 16 May 2016. In my field notes of that morning, I write how difficult it is to find Netwerk24 in the maze of offices that makes up Media Park:

It is not so easy to find the Netwerk24 offices in the building. The security guard directed me there, but I still got a bit lost. There is no clear signage. It is a vast, open-plan office. Around it are other offices, which seemingly do not have anything to do with Netwerk24. ... The office does not seem to have been revamped to fit the new team.

During my first week in this newsroom office I gather that there had been a very recent change in the physical layout of the office. Various journalists tell me that the so-called "first"<sup>22</sup> Netwerk24 team,

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<sup>22</sup> Le Roux Schoeman, then multimedia editor of Netwerk24, refers to such statements as the "origin myth" of Netwerk24: "Everyone will think they are year zero". While it is indeed somewhat difficult to trace the various iterations of Netwerk24, some of the key dates are easier to plot (as discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.6.3 and captured in the time line attached as Addendum A).

with Adriaan Basson at the helm, had moved out of the *Beeld* newsroom around six months earlier. Pieter du Toit, then still national head of news, confirms this in an informal conversation early on Wednesday 17 May 2016:

Pieter [du Toit] points to a space across the hall from the current office and says that when he and Adriaan [Basson] started to put things together and to look for people, they wanted to physically move from the newspaper offices to make that distinction.

In a September 2016 interview, after he had left Netwerk24, Du Toit reiterates his earlier comments, saying that they had to move to a different space, “because it was very important to create a team spirit; to create a sense of cohesion”. This could be seen as an indication of how some journalists value the fostering of a shared newsroom culture, and by implication the “structuring structures” of the professional journalistic habitus. Adriaan Basson confirms Pieter du Toit’s assertion during our interview in June 2017, more than a year after he had left Netwerk24, saying that it was not easy moving out of the newspaper offices: “Naturally we knew it would not be easy, but it was necessary.”

The difficulty and consequences of this move was echoed by Marida Fitzpatrick, editor of features, opinion and analysis, during my second visit to Johannesburg in July 2016:

Look, we’ve been through a tough ordeal. What happened is that when Netwerk[24] broke away completely and went to sit in a different office, some of the relationships soured. It did. It is undeniably so. It caused a feeling of estrangement between digital and the newspaper. It caused estrangement between colleagues who had been working together happily for years, and who had a good relationship. Then there was the move back, and I don’t think those relationships have been completely restored yet.

Fitzpatrick’s words emphasise the dynamic nature of the field through which journalists move and acquire capital. It also highlights the way a network can be transformed, and often destabilised, when key actors – even in the form of physical spaces – are removed or replaced. For the former Netwerk24 journalists being back in the print newsroom office was clearly an adjustment. Reza van Rooyen, then national day editor of Netwerk24 (who left soon after my first visit to the newsroom), similarly says the (then current) physical space is suited better for print than for digital production:

... in a digital office, since it is a much faster medium, people are not supposed to sit so far away from each other; especially people who are part of production, people who write and the people who do the final editing.

When I arrive in the newsroom in May 2016, the few Netwerk24 journalists, who had literally been separated from the newspaper staff for around six months, had thus very recently moved back to the old *Beeld* office. Layout artists, copy editors, journalists and news managers are scattered across the four corners of this vast space. Jo van Eeden, at first editor and later publisher of Netwerk24, has her own office next to Barnard Beukman, editor of *Beeld*.

One of the reasons for moving the Netwerk24 journalists back into the *Beeld* newsroom can arguably be found in the words of Beukman during our interview in August 2017. He also says that the Netwerk24 team had moved out into “their own little spot”:

So when Jo [van Eeden] took over [as editor of Netwerk24] she told me that they needed more space for Netwerk[24], they would like the whole floor, so where do I want *Beeld* to sit. So I said: ‘No, we are going to sit among you, because you are my provider. I cannot give you assignments, but I must influence you.’<sup>23</sup>

Around a year after the newsrooms were combined, Van Eeden tells me that bringing the Netwerk24 journalists back into the *Beeld* newsroom has helped to restore, over time, some of the relationships that (as Marida Fitzpatrick had pointed out) had suffered because of the first move:

Here in Media Park, it helps a lot that it is an integrated team. When you walk in here you cannot see who does what.

Noticeably, during my last visit to the Johannesburg newsroom in August 2017 – more than a year after the merger of the Netwerk24 and newspaper editorial teams – there was still no clear signage for Netwerk24 in the Johannesburg newsroom. As I write in my field notes of Monday 21 August 2017:

On my way to the Netwerk24 office I observe that Huffington Post SA<sup>24</sup> has big branding at its office entrance. But the office of Netwerk24 is still bright red with *Beeld* and *Rapport* signage. I wonder if this influences the impression of people – also from outside – about the brand.

Even more noteworthy is the big *Beeld* sign that now hangs above the news hub in the middle of an office that also purports to house Netwerk24 as digital-first newsroom. *Beeld* editor Barnard Beukman

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<sup>23</sup> I elaborate on the relationship between the print titles and Netwerk24 in Chapter 8.

<sup>24</sup> The South African version of this international news brand was only launched around six months after Netwerk24 become the home for all the Afrikaans editorial staff in May 2016.

explains that a recent staff satisfaction survey showed that his staff felt that “*Beeld* does not have its own identity” and that hanging the sign there was one way in which he wanted to address this. I found this apparent step towards fostering a *Beeld*-specific culture somewhat contradictory to the suggested attempts to integrate the different editorial teams into one newswork network with a shared vision.

Despite Netwerk24, as brand, seemingly still not having a clear physical presence in the Johannesburg newsroom during my last visit, it does appear as though the news journalists who work there feel comfortable in their environment. I would argue, however, that this can to a large extent be ascribed to the fact that by the end of August 2017 there are only a few journalists left who experienced the May 2016 merger between Netwerk24 and the print titles. Most of the journalists are new appointees – with one, Jeanelle Greyling, still fresh from finishing her university studies the previous year. There is also a new news editor, Vicus Bürger<sup>25</sup>, and deputy editor, Jo-Ann Floris, working in this newsroom. During my first two visits to the Johannesburg in May and July 2016 (and for around six months before this) Johannesburg could be considered the head office of Netwerk24, since the editor and national head of news were stationed there. However, by August 2017 the centre of gravity of Netwerk24 had shifted to Cape Town.

## 6.2.2 Cape Town

The current office of Netwerk24 in Cape Town is on the 16<sup>th</sup> floor of the 22-storey Media24 Centre on the foreshore in Cape Town.

I enter this newsroom for the first of three visits at 7:00 on Monday 4 July 2016. To get to the workstations of the Netwerk24 journalists, I turn left in the hallway, just to find I am the first person to arrive. Again, there is no signage for Netwerk24. In comparison, there are clear signs that welcome me on the other side of the hall where staff of *Die Burger* newspaper are sitting. While this might seem like a small detail, it could be argued that the physical layout of the newsroom, and by implication the newswork network as a whole, was still skewed towards the printed product.

The initial Netwerk24 team in Cape Town moved back to join the newspaper journalists in the Media24 Centre after the May 2016 merger. The few journalists who worked for Netwerk24 from September 2015 to April 2016<sup>26</sup> initially shared offices with 24.com, the overarching digital arm of

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<sup>25</sup> Bürger moved from Bloemfontein, where I first interviewed him in May 2016, to Johannesburg in November 2016 – first as night news editor, and later as Johannesburg head of news.

<sup>26</sup> As mentioned before, specific dates around Netwerk24 are not always clear. According to an internal company announcement, Adriaan Basson was appointed as full-time editor of Netwerk24 on 1 September 2015. However, the other journalists only joined the team, of around 16 news editors, journalists and copy editors in the months to follow.

Media24, in a different building a few blocks away. Adriaan Basson, who was editor then, describes these offices as supportive of a “start-up culture”:

I think the fact that it was situated in 24.com, out of the newspaper section, played a big part. When I walked into 24.com’s offices in Adderley Street on the first day, it looked like something out of Google. There were foosball tables and coffee machines and everything was out in the open.

As was the case with the office move in Johannesburg, the move back to the Media24 Centre was seemingly more disruptive for the first Netwerk24 journalists than for the journalists who had remained at *Die Burger*. Carryn-Ann Nel was part of the initial Netwerk24 team in Johannesburg as journalist, but moved down to Cape Town in July 2016 for a brief stint as news editor. Nel reminds me in an interview that the “first Netwerk[24]” in Cape Town and in Johannesburg “physically moved offices” and that she believes “with that physical return some guys felt that, geez, we are now moving backwards”. Alet Janse van Rensburg, another journalist who was part of the first Netwerk24 team in Cape Town, was similarly concerned about the physical newsroom set-up back in the Media24 Centre:

It is very quiet. It is very big and open in comparison with what we had on the other side. I am starting to get used to it again, but at the beginning I found it to be very silly, because you feel that if you talk too loud, everyone can hear you or whatever. ... We sit far away from each other ... I do not know who did that division. I told them from the beginning that it was silly. But now we just sit like that.

I found Janse van Rensburg’s words indicative of the fact that the professional habitus is durable but not fixed. In other words, former newspaper journalists who had applied for jobs at Netwerk24 towards the end of 2015 and subsequently worked in a digital-first (or arguably digital-only) environment for only around six months had already been socialised differently than their counterparts who had remained in the print newsroom.

It seems apparent, however, that the editorial management of Netwerk24 *and* the newspaper titles wants there to be more integration. Jo van Eeden tells me that it is still not ideal for the newspaper staff and the Netwerk24 editorial team to not share the same newsroom – as is the case in Johannesburg:

At least they are on the same floor. It helps that the kitchen is on *Die Burger*’s side, because it means that the Netwerk[24] people have to walk

there. It also helps that the head of news sits on the Netwerk[24] side, because it means that *Die Burger* people have to walk there. That is a good thing.

My field notes for the first two visits to Cape Town (in July and September 2016) are punctuated with references to how quiet this newsroom is. For instance, on my first observation day (Monday 4 July 2016), I write around lunch time:

Almost all the journalists are still in the office. It is very quiet for an open-plan office. Journalists do not even talk to each other a lot. Very few journalists make phone calls and they do not last very long.

When I ask Tasha<sup>27</sup> about this during an interview later that day she also tells me that she thinks “we just brought [this atmosphere] with us from *Die Burger*”. It could thus be argued that what is considered general practice or common sense in the newsroom at this stage can be traced back to the roots of the professional journalistic habitus, as structured by the former print-only newsroom.

My last visit to this newsroom at the beginning of September 2017, however, sees a marked difference in the newsroom atmosphere. For the most part, the journalists are still sitting at the same desks as they did during my previous two visits. However, the presence of Nadia Honiball, as head of news, within the newsroom has seemingly changed the way journalists communicate and interact with each other. From my observations during this week it becomes apparent that Honiball holds a lot of capital in various guises (including journalistic capital) which strengthens her position in the field and makes her a key actor in the developing newswork network.

From where Honiball is sitting at her desk, close to the journalists in the open-plan office, she will often call out to journalists or make phone calls where she speaks loudly to other newsrooms or journalists. On the first day I see this in action, on Monday 4 September I write in my field notes:

Nadia arrives [at 8:15] and says she waited for almost fifteen minutes for a lift. She immediately starts asking about the progress of stories. She calls out to Ilse Schoombee [the morning editor] and the journalists to follow up on what they are doing. Carryn-Ann [Nel] asks about a story, but Nadia says

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<sup>27</sup> Tasha is the pseudonym for a journalist in her 20s.

she cannot go to it: ‘Henriëtte [Loubser] told me that we just do not have enough people to cover everything. And that will not get us clicks’<sup>28</sup>.

Loubser, as editor, sits in a glass office at the back of the newsroom, but regularly engages with Honiball or the journalists – on the newsroom floor or in her office. The introduction of key new actors, such as Honiball and Loubser, has thus arguably made a difference to the way this newsroom operates. The role of individual personalities as actors within the newsroom network is a recurring theme that will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 7.

I also notice that a signpost has been put up at the entrance to this floor to direct visitors to either Netwerk24 or *Die Burger*. As discussed above, the physical layout of the newsroom might seem insignificant, but I would argue that the way the newsroom is structured, by non-human actors as well, can have a telling effect on the way this network functions.

### 6.2.3 Bloemfontein

As was the case with the other newsrooms I visit, there is no visible Netwerk24 signage in the Bloemfontein office of Netwerk24. The only indication of the presence of Netwerk24 in the building is a small sign at the entrance to the parking lot. Walking up the stairs to the editorial office, leads me past an old printing press, which strengthens my impression that this office is still geared towards the newspaper. As I write in my field notes on Monday 23 May 2016:

There is a big map of Bloemfontein on the wall. The rest of the newsroom is also full of pictures, books and other paraphernalia – which seems quite different from the Johannesburg newsroom. Pictures of *Volksblad* through the years, cartoons and photos adorn the walls and hallways.

My impression is confirmed when I speak to the journalists during my week in the newsroom. Alzane Narrain, for instance, tells me that nothing has changed in their newsroom, “the deadlines are just different”. Similarly, Kaydene Davids tells me that the office did not change at all, “everything is still the same”. I also notice that the journalists’ desks have been personalised (with photos of family, news clippings and such). This is arguably another indication that the journalists, unlike those in Johannesburg and Cape Town, did not have to physically move when they joined Netwerk24. Only one journalist from Bloemfontein, Elsje Waldeck, was part of the so-called first Netwerk24 team, and

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<sup>28</sup> The number of clicks is a term journalists use to refer to user engagement with a news story.

she did not move offices either. As discussed in the description of the Johannesburg and Cape Town newsroom offices, my argument is that – at least at first – the majority of journalists’ actions were still motivated by a professional habitus that was structured by a print newsroom culture.

Vicus Bürger, then head of news in Bloemfontein, tells me that not a lot changed when the official move happened, because they had started to adapt earlier:

Look, I mean it does not help you wait until that date and then it is now an enormous change ... We tried to already get everyone into that new rhythm, which was also not such a big thing to adapt to. No, it was not such an enormous thing for us.

It is also clear from my observations and interactions with journalists that there does not seem to be a very big, or clear, distinction between the staff of *Volksblad* and the Netwerk24 journalists. This is evident not only in the physical layout of the newsroom, but also in the way journalists, news managers and the print editor speaks. Gert Coetzee, editor of *Volksblad*, for instance, says:

The change-over a month ago when the *Volksblad* editorial team moved to Netwerk24 actually brought very little disruption to us. We carry on as before.

Jo van Eeden, who had previously worked as editor of *Volksblad*, echoes Coetzee’s words in an April 2017 interview when she says the Bloemfontein office never experienced the same kind of distance – both physically and between journalists – as was evident in Johannesburg and Cape Town, “because that office is so small that everyone sits amongst each other, and work for each other”. Van Eeden’s words support the argument that non-human actors, such as the physical layout and location of an office, as well as the shared habitus of human actors in the newsroom can all contribute to a specific newsroom culture.

On my second day in this newsroom, Coetzee invites me to what he calls the “cross pollination” meeting. As I write in my field notes, I ask him about the nature of this meeting, to which he responds that “technically, there is no distinction between *Volksblad* and Netwerk24”. As news manager for Netwerk24, Vicus Bürger also still attends the *Volksblad* diary meetings and prepares a news diary specifically for *Volksblad*. In an interview later that week, Coetzee calls Netwerk24 his “news agency” and says that the journalists who sit there are in touch with the newspaper’s needs.

I only visit the Bloemfontein office for one week in person, but I email Elsje Waldeck in August 2017 to enquire about the current state of the newsroom. She writes that they still have early morning diary meetings, but then adds:

Our office itself has also changed a lot since you were here the last time. Our whole editorial team (news, sport and arts), the subs and the news managers now sit here together. The advertorial department is now there where the day subs used to be [on the other side of the hallway]. The bottom floor is now open. There is nobody. It is apparently to save money. The walls have also been painted a more blueish colour. That does not say much, but at least it is not that hospital colour anymore.

While apparently taking more time and causing fewer disruptions, some structural changes in this newsroom have, therefore, arguably taken place over time.

#### **6.2.4 Pretoria**

My week observing the comings and goings of journalists in the Pretoria office of Netwerk24 is probably the least productive of all the time I spend observing in the Netwerk24 newsroom. The few journalists who are stationed in this office, are not all in the office when I visit there for a week in August 2017. There are no regular, formal meetings and two of the senior journalists, Hanti Otto and Jeanne-Marié Versluis, are out of the office for the larger part of each day during that week. It is, therefore, near impossible to establish whether or how the professional habitus has been influenced by, and influences, changes to the Pretoria newsroom office. As I reflect in my field notes of Monday 14 August 2017, my first day in this newsroom:

This is quite a big open-plan office, but very few of the desks are filled with journalists or even support staff. There are a few televisions, but they are not switched on. It also becomes abundantly clear to me that staying in this newsroom for a week might not result in a variety of rich observational data. This is a small satellite office where there does not seem to be any direct contact with the head office – not diary meetings or teleconferences. It seems to me as though the journalists just work at their own pace.

Later on the same day, I also reflect on the lack of Netwerk24 identity in this office – despite the fact that it has been more than a year since the *Beeld* and Netwerk24 newsroom teams have been amalgamated:

There is no Netwerk24 signage, and not even any Media24 signage. There are signs with pictures that lead to the rest of the Media24 products, especially *Landbouweekblad* [a weekly farming magazine] on the other side of the office. It gives the impression that this is only a temporary space. I wonder how the fact that there is no indication that this is a Netwerk24 newsroom influences the way journalists feel about identifying themselves.

Despite my initial misgivings I do, however, have a few worthwhile conversations with Sarel van der Walt, a seasoned senior journalist, and Marga Ley, who works as a home page editor at Netwerk24 but has a long history in print news. For instance, on Tuesday 15 August, Ley enters the office around 10:00 and strikes up an informal conversation that I later capture in my field notes:

Marga enters the newsroom and greets everyone very cordially. She comes to me directly and welcomes me to the newsroom and asks whether she can help me with anything. We strike up a conversation that centres on the changes that Netwerk24 has brought to journalism. I explain my research to her after she asks what questions I will ask. Marga calls Netwerk24 a different animal and says that it needs to be fed the whole time. According to Marga, the days are gone where one could talk to each other, get coffee or go out to a café. Now it is all about the stories.

While my week of observation in this office thus leaves me a bit frustrated, at the same time it provides me with some time to further reflect on what happens in each office and what my own role of observer is. For instance, on Tuesday 15 August I write the following:

By 7:30 none of the Netwerk24 journalists have arrived yet. This is worth comparing with the time other journalists from other regions arrive at work – especially in Johannesburg and Cape Town. I wonder if this has to do with the lack of a designated news editor.

My observations, as well as some journalists' comments, on the absence of a regional news editor who manages the journalists and their output, again highlights the important role specific actors can play as mediators within the network.

Another reflection can be found in my field notes of Wednesday 16 August, after I had taken part in a discussion on the general public's understanding of what journalists do, especially during the coverage of traumatic events:

I have written this down quite a few times before, but I want to reiterate how difficult it sometimes is for me not to get involved in everyday newsroom discussions. I am really still a journalist at heart and like being involved and engaged with what happens with the news and in the newsroom.

I manage to secure a more formal interview with Marga Ley later in the week and also speak to Sarel van der Walt and Jeanne-Marié Versluis, as well as one of the more junior journalists, Simvuyele Mageza. These interviews do indeed yield some valuable data that will be discussed according to themes throughout my discussion of findings in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

### **6.3 The routines and practices of digital-first newswork**

Despite the individual nature of each of the four newsroom offices I visit, I also observe a lot of similarities when it comes to the daily practices of the Netwerk24 journalists. Chapter 2 highlighted the work of the early newsroom ethnographers who found newswork to be a routinised activity. However, most journalists still believe that every day is different in the newsroom, or as Johannesburg-based journalist Simon Sonnekus tells me during an interview in August 2017:

The stuff that I do is something new every day. ... I always try to explain to people that there was a week where I spoke to a woman who turned 103 and whom Karlien van Jaarsveld [a famous Afrikaans singer] serenaded; on the second day I was in an airplane over Krugersdorp for a story about farm murder; and later that week I went to Sun City for the Saftas [South African Film and Television Awards]. So my day is always totally unpredictable.

I would argue, however, that what Sonnekus and many of his colleagues see as unpredictability centres on the content and nature of the events they report on rather than the routines and practices needed to produce news reports from these events. In other words, while the journalists view and describe their newswork network as constantly in flux, there is clearly order in the chaos. Journalists might think that the news game they play is new every day, but from the vantage point of a participant observer it is clear that some elements of this newswork network is stable and can, to some extent at least, be “black boxed” (in actor-network terms).

### 6.3.1 Everyday newswork at Netwerk24

#### 6.3.1.1 Basic routines and practices (May – September 2016)

When I first visit the newsroom in May 2016, a regular day for a Netwerk24 journalist officially starts at 8:00 with a diary meeting led by the respective regional news managers. Most journalists arrive from as early as 7:00 onwards to prepare for this meeting. Maxine<sup>29</sup> tells me during an informal conversation that she comes in especially early to look for stories and to see if they will work out, because “if you start early... you can be finished early”. The first thing journalists do when they enter the newsroom is to switch on their computers to start checking email. As more journalists arrive in the newsroom, they enter into casual conversations about a wide variety of topics and issues, as I note in the field notes of my first day in Johannesburg:

I notice that the journalists spend a fair amount of time discussing personal things, ranging from birthdays to parties they are all going to attend. Sometimes discussions are focused more clearly on events in the news and how everyone feels about certain news choices and opinions. There are lively debates later in the day at the news journalists’ desks (where I am sitting).

The early morning diary meetings are attended by all the general<sup>30</sup> news reporters on duty that day. Each news manager has a specific approach to handling these meetings. Alet Janse van Rensburg, who is the acting news editor in Cape Town during my July 2016 visit, for instance, “opens the discussion by highlighting which stories are doing well on the website”. During the same meeting she says the Oscar Pistorius case<sup>31</sup> will “rule” the day, but that this “challenges us to produce something that can compete with it”. When I interview her in September 2016, Janse van Rensburg tells me that approaching these meetings from a digital, instead of a print, perspective is a “mind-set”:

*Die Burger* [editorial team] always had the habit of paging through the newspaper during the morning diary meeting. And when we [journalists from the first Netwerk24 team] came back they were still doing it. ... And we were going crazy. Rozanne [Els], George [Germishuys] and I just sat there every morning looking at each other. Because now we are paging through the newspaper, and we couldn’t care less. Before Carryn-Ann [Nel]

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<sup>29</sup> Maxine is the pseudonym for a journalist in her 20s.

<sup>30</sup> Some of these journalists consider themselves to be specific beat journalists, but they are still expected to write about a variety of general topics.

<sup>31</sup> Pistorius, a former Paralympian star, was sentenced to prison on that day for murdering his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp on 14 February 2013.

came [to be news editor], I was the substitute news editor for two or three weeks. ... And I was like, sorry guys, we are not going to page through the newspaper anymore.

In comparison, Liezel de Lange, who worked as Johannesburg news editor for a few months from May 2016, starts some of the diary meetings with a discussion on the front page of *Beeld*, as I note in my field notes of Wednesday 18 May:

Liezel talks about how great the pictures and layout are. She thinks it is constructive, ‘even though we are digital-first, to look at what the newspaper does; it is after all our stories that appear in it’.

These different approaches to regular newsroom activities, such as the diary meeting, again highlight the influence of journalists’ professional habitus on their current actions and decisions. In other words, journalists who have “lived” in the same newsroom – as was the case with the so-called first Netwerk24 team – tend to similarly structure, or at least *aim* to structure, future newswork networks they become a part of. However, the few journalists from the first team at first apparently did not succeed in visibly transforming Netwerk24 as a combined national newswork network.

The morning diary meetings serve as the space where journalists pitch and discuss their own story ideas, but also as opportunity for the news editors to distribute assignments about other news events. As I write in my field notes in Bloemfontein, for instance, the desk of Vicus Bürger, the news editor, “is full of print-outs that he distributes among the journalists” while in Cape Town Carryn-Ann Nel, the news editor, “hands out newspaper cuttings to journalists to follow up”.

After the diary meeting the journalists scatter to their desks and start to work on their stories for the day. During my observations it becomes clear that the majority of the journalists – across the country – spend most of their time gathering information and producing news at their desks in the newsroom. By 15:00 on my first day in Cape Town, for instance, only one of the six journalists who attended that morning’s diary meeting had left the office for a reporting assignment. As discussed in Chapter 5, it was difficult observing what these journalists were actually doing while sitting at their desks. I have tried to mitigate this challenge by observing and describing specific journalists at work in the newsroom (see section 6.3.2 below).

The next noteworthy, regular activity in the newsroom is the 9:00 teleconference. During my 2016 visits this teleconference is managed from the Johannesburg office since the editor and head of news are stationed there. Where the diary meetings are used to talk about specific journalists’ story ideas and assignments, this meeting serves to give the chief editorial staff an indication of what the main

focus of the day is. Only the Johannesburg and Cape Town offices are part of this teleconference, with section heads – from the sports and business desks, for instance – also calling in, often while still at home. Representatives of the multimedia and social media teams also attend these meetings. The meeting is usually led by the editor but with most of the input coming from the national head of news. I capture some of the key points of one such teleconference, on Wednesday 20 July 2016, thus:

Pieter [du Toit, national head of news] talks about an interview in the afternoon with some senior SABC<sup>32</sup> journalists who were unfairly dismissed. He says there will be tweets, a live blog, video and pictures. Marida [Fitzpatrick, features editor] will do the interview and he will do the news story. Jo [van Eeden, editor] asks if this will not be ‘overkill’. Pieter says it will be too late if they do the interview at 14:00 or 14:30 and only get the story out after 16:00. Jo says she wants a strong news story and not a live blog. She adds that the previous best read story around the same topic was produced by the newspapers who extracted a strong news angle. ... The political editor says they should be careful that there is no overlap between the different stories about the SABC. ‘The best thing is just to keep talking to each other.’ The political editor also says they have a ‘huge photography issue’. Jo says if there are issues they can identify beforehand, they should let her know so that she can look at hiring freelancers. ... Jo thanks all the section heads because in June Netwerk24 published 10 000 stories per month for the first time. That amounts to more than 300 stories per day. She says of course the issue must not be quantity. But it shows that the journalists’ heads are in the right place. ... Pieter repeats his request for a live blog. He says it is a very effective tool. He adds that they can also tweet with a hashtag to get user engagement. He says they will only live blog for an hour.

After the teleconference the section heads and editors also move to their desks to continue with news management. Sometimes they address specific journalists to follow up on conversations and assignments from the teleconference. My observations of news managers and journalists – in all the geographical newsroom offices I visited – show that despite changes to the news diary, the newswork rhythms and routines in the newsroom are more or less routinised.

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<sup>32</sup> The South African Broadcasting Corporation is the public broadcaster in the country.

Some of the other meetings I attend during my time in the newsroom are specifically related to the newspaper titles. These meetings usually follow soon after the Netwerk24 teleconference and are attended by the newspaper editors and any number of deputy editors and other senior staff members of the print titles. My motivation for attending these meetings is to follow the interaction between Netwerk24 and the print titles – especially since the different newsrooms’ news editors are still expected to attend these meetings.

In section 6.2.3 I described how the editor of *Volksblad*, Gert Coetzee, invited me to such a “cross pollination” meeting. Similar meetings take place in Cape Town. On my first day in Cape Town on Monday 4 July 2016, for instance, I attend *Die Burger*’s editorial meeting with Alet Janse van Rensburg who is acting news editor. The meeting is also attended by Barnie Louw, who holds a senior editorial position at *Die Burger*, and the editorial cartoonist, Fred Mouton. Willem Jordaan, editor of *Die Burger*, is not in the office. This meeting starts at 10:00 and lasts for just under an hour. Firstly, there is a long discussion on the editorial cartoon for the next day. A big part of this meeting is dedicated to a discussion on the previous day’s newspaper – what worked, and what did not – before the news diary for the day is presented. I will elaborate in more detail on the relationship between the print titles and Netwerk24 in Chapter 8.

The rest of the day in the newsroom follows a regular pattern: journalists complete their news articles as the information becomes available; news managers follow up on the progress of journalists’ work; new assignments are distributed and journalists come and go on the newsroom floor. As argued throughout this study, the majority of the communication between journalists and news managers, as well as between journalists and their sources takes place online. Most of the journalists leave the newsroom at around 16:00 each day – often depending on the progress they have made with stories or the relative importance of a story they are working on. Usually there is one journalist who comes to the office later than the other journalists to work into the early evening – with the night editor on duty.

The transition to digital-first news production is naturally somewhat disruptive to the newsroom practices, for instance in terms of changes to deadlines. Yet, despite these disruptions I would argue that my observations of newsroom practices, as discussed in this section, is indicative of the apparent durability of the professional journalistic habitus that structure how journalists are socialised into knowing what is expected of a journalist and how the coverage of news events should be approached.

### **6.3.1.2 Changes to basic newswork routines and practices (August – September 2017)**

By the time I return to the main newsroom offices from August 2017 the early morning routine has started to change. The morning diary meeting has made way for individual discussions – often on the

fly – between the news editor and individual journalists. Nadia Honiball, national head of news who is stationed in Cape Town, confirms that before her arrival the journalists used to sit around a little table with the then news editor who asked everyone what they would be doing that day. She tells me in an interview that she decided to follow a different approach:

So what I do is that I get up at six but my alarm goes off at half past five. So before I get out of bed, I go through the sites that I like, obviously News24 and Independent Online and Eyewitness News and TimesLive. I also love the *Daily Mail*, BBC, CNN and such. So I will go through the stuff and send links to the desk journalists. But I will also start to send other journalists links via email. Because what happened is that they used to all put down their pens at half past three in the afternoon and leave. Really, it was like the rapture had taken place. So when I came here I told them that things were going to change. They can all come in at half past eight, but they have to work until half past four, five. But I am going to start communicating with them from early on. And it was as though they all breathed a sigh of relief.

Honiball also says she felt comfortable doing this, because Vicus Bürger, who had earlier moved from Bloemfontein to become news editor in Johannesburg, had by then also eliminated formal diary meetings. Bürger confirms this arrangement when I enter the Johannesburg newsroom in August 2017. He talks about “informal” meetings – with him usually going to a journalist’s desk to discuss a story. This example of a small, yet significant, change to newsroom routines is indicative of the fact that newsroom actors, or personalities, who allow their experiences to transform them – and by implication their journalistic habitus – can have a telling influence on other actors in their newswork network.

Hannes Kruger, a general reporter in the Johannesburg newsroom office, for instance, tells me that not having morning meetings helps the journalists to deliver their stories earlier in the afternoon, because they can start contacting people for comment earlier in the day. Jana Marx, a Johannesburg journalist who has only been at Netwerk24 for a month when I interview her in August 2017, tells me that she was used to the “pattern” of diary meetings based on her previous work experience:

But I do not feel that I am losing something in the process. I have every opportunity to pitch my stories. So if I do not bring stories, it is due to my own stupidity. Then I have to do what I get assigned to do. And we still have the news list [on Google Drive].

Not everyone, however, seems happy about this new arrangement. Marida Fitzpatrick, opinion and features editor, tells me in an informal conversation after a teleconference in August 2017 that she does not think having no meetings is a good idea. Fitzpatrick believes that one needs the pressure of pitching story ideas in front of everyone and refers to this as the “embarrassment factor”. She adds that she still has daily teleconference meetings with the three people who work on her team. Fitzpatrick’s view therefore seems to be in contrast with that of Nadia Honiball who also tells me in an interview that she believes that people sometimes “have more confidence to pitch one-on-one, rather than in front of a group”. According to Honiball, she also encourages journalists to email her in the afternoon what they plan to do the following day.

The lack of diary meetings arguably puts more pressure on individual journalists, since they have to keep the online news diary updated themselves. They are expected to write a brief blurb about the story they are busy with directly on the news diary in the Google Drive document. As the story progresses – from conceptualisation to completion – they also have to keep their diary entry updated.

During my observations in the newsroom offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Pretoria during 2017 it seems apparent that not all journalists follow these guidelines rigorously – especially in the regional offices. I have access to most of these news diaries, and it is clear – at least at the time of writing – that some journalists do not keep their entries updated. In this case a non-human actor, in the form of the news diary on Google Drive, can seemingly sometimes lead to some confusion, and perhaps also a little bit of disorder in the newsroom. It also places more pressure on the news managers.

Carryn-Ann Nel, for instance, tells me that while working a desk shift her entry on the diary was “a bit vague” one day. This meant that while her story was done and uploaded on the website early in the day, the journalist who worked the night shift did the same story all over again. Nel adds:

I also think that when people put a story on the news diary there is an expectation somewhere that that story will be coming, but then it does not pan out and not everyone necessarily knows that it will not be coming.

Simon Sonnekus, a journalist from Johannesburg, says he forgets to update the news diary, because it is “very difficult for me to keep up with that type of admin” and that the system therefore does not work for him. Marga Ley, a home page editor stationed in Pretoria, also has her misgivings about the format of the news diary, as she tells me during an interview in August 2017:

I can honestly tell you that I never look at that news diary. It is a cumbersome, long description through which you have to scroll and stuff.

During the time it would take me to do that, I could sub two stories, enrich something, and upload something. So I would make sure I know what the big stories of the day is. And then I would take stuff as it comes in. In any case, I would not be chasing stories; there are other people who have to chase it. But I have found, from day one, the news diary to be incredibly impractical and cumbersome.

Despite these somewhat negative impressions about the format of the news diary, this daily document had become a key tool in news management. Jo-Ann Floris, deputy editor based in Johannesburg, says she knows

... some news editors might still do that thing of sitting down in the morning. But personally I feel that there is neither the time nor need for that anymore. People should be treated in a professional manner and realise that the pressure is on them to update their news diary before the first meeting.

One obvious change that occurred in the year or so that passed between my second and third sets of field visits, is the fact that the editor (Henriëtte Loubser) and national head of news (Nadia Honiball) are now stationed in Cape Town. While there are still news managers working in Johannesburg and Bloemfontein and what has been called a “senior presence” in Pretoria (in the form of Marga Ley), key decisions are made and communicated from Cape Town. For instance, on my first day back in the Cape Town office (on 4 September 2017), Nadia Honiball, while updating the news diary, makes a call to the Port Elizabeth office. A little later she tells Carryn-Ann Nel that they must remember to “divert stuff” to that office, such as articles that need to be translated: “We do everything here. We forget about that office the whole time.”

Another element of digital-first newswork that seems to garner more attention during my final round of observations in 2017 is the need for constant prioritisation and re-prioritisation by news managers, and consequently the journalists themselves. On my first day back in the Johannesburg office, on Monday 17 August 2017, I observe how Vicus Bürger, as news editor, walks over to journalist Hannes Kruger’s desk and tell him to stop doing research for one story, because a more pressing news event has occurred. Similarly, in Cape Town Nadia Honiball, national head of news, calls out to Nadine Theron<sup>33</sup> a journalist, soon after arriving in the newsroom and says they must talk about which

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<sup>33</sup> As the list of interviews in Addendum F indicates, I interviewed Theron while she was a social media manager for Netwerk24 in Johannesburg. She later moved to Cape Town to work as a general reporter. This is another indication that there were a lot of staff moves both away from and *within* Netwerk24 during this study’s observation period.

of the “stuff” Honiball sent her needed to be prioritised. In a later interview Honiball confirms that her role is to “prioritise news”:

From my perspective the point is that I only have so many journalists across the country, and they can only do so many stories. The other thing is that if we do too many things, it as though the stories disappear from the home page quicker; and then good stories get lost a bit. So I will in any case, if a story is strong and it does well, rather let a journalist go deeper into that specific story. Every day, every minute, is about prioritising.

The rest of the news day and routines of journalists do not appear to show further far-reaching changes. I would thus argue that while there might be staff turnover, which could lead to a change in the approach to news management, as well the introduction of new digital media technologies, the basic routines of newswork seem surprisingly resistant to change. This view is supported by the theoretical assumption of this study which calls for the recognition of both order and chaos in the newsroom (see section 3.6.2). The professional journalistic habitus thus explains why journalists keep on repeating practices of the past, while at the same time the evolving associations between human actors and material things are traced (as suggested by actor-network theory) to look for periods of instability and transformation. In other words, one cannot ignore the past, but one should also not be ignorant of changes to the present, both of which will influence the future.

### **6.3.2 Watching journalists at work**

The challenge of describing what the journalists are actually doing when sitting at their desks was not easy to overcome. As discussed before, I did not have access to their digital communications with each other or with sources. However, I believe that observing journalists and news managers directly, by literally pulling up a chair behind them for up to an hour at a time, enabled me to give a broad overview of how journalists practice journalism without leaving the newsroom. I have picked a few journalists and news managers as examples of the general trends in the newsroom. All the observations are briefly summarised from that specific day’s field notes.

I would argue that these direct observations confirm my conclusion that journalists interact with material, non-human actors – of which digital media technologies are the most prominent – in a very natural way. In other words, they do not problematise the use of these technologies for newswork. Instead, these non-human actors have become so prevalent in the newsroom that journalists view them less as disruptive, and more as complementary to their newswork.

**Hannes Kruger, desk reporter<sup>34</sup> Monday 16 May 2016**

When I visit the Johannesburg newsroom office in May 2016, Hannes Kruger is working as so-called national desk reporter. His shift runs from around 6:00 to 14:00 – although he rarely leaves that early. He seems to be mostly focused on producing short, breaking news stories in the morning.

At around 10:00 on my first day in this newsroom I start observing Kruger at work. He uses the online social media management tool Tweetdeck to look at a variety of accounts and topics on Twitter. He seems to be searching purposively for something, not just browsing. He also watches a video that is embedded on Twitter. Next he checks his email, but does not respond specifically to any of his emails. His attention turns back to Twitter when he puts on headphones to listen to the video's sound. I notice that he does not seem to be focused on one activity at a time, and that he frequently switches between applications.

He opens the newspaper-driven central content management system, Méthode, and creates a file to write a story about weather patterns. To gather information he opens the website of the South African Weather Service and then also makes a landline call to a weather forecaster. While he is talking on the phone, he switches to the Tweetdeck screen again to follow, as he later tells me, hashtags that are trending.

Before he starts writing his story on the weather, Kruger opens YouTube, searches for a classical music video and puts on his headphones to listen to it. While busy writing he searches the Netwerk24 website archive for similar stories to copy from. Not only does he look at his own previous stories, but he also checks the work of other journalists – seemingly to compare style and structure.

Around 10:30 Kruger opens his personal Facebook page briefly, before continuing to write his story. In addition he uses the search term “Gauteng rain” to check both Twitter and Facebook for photos and posts relating to his story. Just before 11:00 he completes the story and releases it for editing by the sub editors on duty. The story is finally published by a day editor, or home page editor, who also enriches stories written by the journalists with multimedia content, such as photographs, videos or embedded tweets.

When I comment to Kruger that he finished that story in less than an hour, he responds that it took too long, and that he is expected to work very quickly.

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<sup>34</sup> Upon my return to the newsroom in 2017, this dedicated desk reporter approach had been changed to a national shift roster in which most of the general news reporters – in all the regions – take turns to work early in the morning, in the evening or over weekends.

**Carryn-Ann Nel, news editor: Tuesday 6 September 2016**

When I arrive in the Cape Town newsroom at 7:00, I see that Carryn-Ann Nel is already working at her desk. I ask to observe what she does before the 8:00 diary meeting. It is soon apparent that this is one of the busiest times of her day. During the half an hour I sit at her desk, she spends a lot of time checking and responding to emails. She tells me that she also has access to the email account that used to belong to the news editor of *Die Burger*, and which is still listed in the newspaper. Nel adds that the editors in Johannesburg check the central Netwerk24 email address inbox, but that it does not get a lot of traffic yet. “Most of the stuff still comes to the newspapers,” she says. Any ideas for news stories or information on news events that she receives via email are filed according to the dates when the news will need to be published.

I also observe that Nel receives a lot of emails from Jo van Eeden (then Netwerk24 editor) directly with assignments and suggestions about stories and events. In my reflective notes on this short observation period, I highlight that the internal messaging system, Slack, is not used very often – despite some of the journalists and editors highlighting its value in other conversations and interviews.

At around 7:40, Nel goes to the office of Barnie Louw, senior editor at *Die Burger*. They discuss the day’s news diary. Louw also gives Nel news clippings from various newspapers to follow up. Nel jots down which journalists she will assign the various stories to.

After this brief conversation Nel returns to her desk and continues updating and managing the news diary. She heads the 8:00 diary meeting which is attended by very few journalists; some are sick, other are on leave, and a few are just late coming into the office. During the meeting Nel talks about the need for more “light-hearted” stories.

I spend some more time with Nel after the diary meeting. She briefly looks at Twitter but clearly spends most of her time updating the news diary on Google Drive. She explains to me that she sends an empty, unpopulated news diary to all the different news editors and section heads. All of these people have editing rights on the Google Drive document, so strictly speaking anyone can delete the news diary document. General reporters, who receive a link to the news diary on Slack and email, can only view the news diary, not edit it. I also attend the regular teleconference with Nel.

**Pieter du Toit, national head of news: Thursday 19 May 2016**

When I ask Pieter du Toit at around 8:00 if I may observe him, he tells me now would be the best time. He came in a bit later than usual, since he had to take part in a radio interview. When he

receives a call soon after I sit down close to his desk, he tells the person on the other line that “in the digital world we work from 6:30 already”.

Du Toit tells me that in the late afternoon he usually already has a sense of what the structure and biggest news events of the next day will be. When he gets to his desk in the morning, the first thing he does is check Facebook and Twitter, emphasising that Facebook is very important: “Facebook is what the people talk about; Twitter is what the media talk about.” He also switches on the radio to 702, a talk radio station based in Gauteng. For Du Toit, an office is not a newsroom without this radio station playing in the background.

Once he is settled in, he shares the news diary on Google Drive with the news editors in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth, Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Cape Town, as well as with the section heads of parliament, business, opinion and features, and sports and the chief photographer. All these individuals, as well as the various home page editors have editing rights for this document. He also shares the news diary with the rest of the editorial team via the internal messaging system Slack. Du Toit adds that he sends the news diary via email to, whom he calls, “luminaries” in the company who want to know what the Netwerk24 team is busy with.

Next he opens Tweetdeck where he has tabs for the Twitter feeds of “Netwerk24berig” (where journalists live-tweet from news events), the general Netwerk24 feed, as well as his own and that of Adriaan Basson, now editor of News24, Netwerk24’s sister publication. Du Toit explains that he started to follow Basson when the latter was editor of Netwerk24, and that Basson remains a “good barometer” of the news. He also briefly checks Facebook again.

The next programme he opens is that of Cxense, a data management programme that shows the performance of Netwerk24 articles on the internet in real time.<sup>35</sup> Du Toit shows me that the tab users have to click in order to subscribe to Netwerk24 is number three on the list of most read articles, which he believes is a very good sign. On the other hand, he notices a drop in website traffic compared to the previous week. He also uses Google Analytics for a broader overview of the website’s user statistics.

Between 8:00 and 9:00 Du Toit is busy gathering information from all the regional offices. He says by 8:40 he needs to have a good sense of what the different regions are busy working on. Then he explains how the layout of the news diary works. His job is to focus on the home page of the website. He also adds entries to the “quick file” section, where the stories done by the desk reporter are listed. The other news and section editors fill in their respective sections.

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<sup>35</sup> I will elaborate on the use of analytics as news management tool in section 6.4.3.

While he is updating the news diary, Claudi Mailovich, a general reporter who focuses on political news, approaches him to talk about a story she did the previous day on a political candidate with an unusual background. Du Toit asks her whether there are pictures and a video to accompany the story. When Mailovich says ‘No’, Du Toit explains that they have very few multimedia journalists available. They also speak about another political story with Du Toit telling Mailovich that “our readers have the need to understand what is going on here”.

During his conversations with journalists Du Toit constantly refers to the deadlines and word count targets for articles. He urges Mailovich to have her first story filed by 12:00 and asks journalist Hannes Kruger how he is coming along with a follow-up story for which Kruger already did a so-called quick file.<sup>36</sup>

### 6.3.3 (Not) following journalists out of the newsroom

There are not a lot of opportunities for me to leave the newsroom to go on assignment with journalists. Not all journalists leave the office on a daily basis, and those who do leave the newsroom are not always keen for me to accompany them. Furthermore, I usually try to position myself in the office so as to observe general trends; I do not try to follow a day-in-the-life of a specific journalist.

One instance when I *do* follow a reporting team (journalist, photographer and videographer) out of the newsroom, comes when I accompany them to the high court in Cape Town for the Henri van Breda murder trial.<sup>37</sup> I would, however, not view this reporting assignment as a “regular” one, since far more coverage is given to the events, including a live blog with minute-by-minute updates, tweets, videos and photographs. This visit does confirm to me, however, how important the role of WhatsApp has become in reporting (as discussed in section 6.4.2). The multimedia team uses WhatsApp groups to share images and videos and the journalist also sends messages to the newsroom via WhatsApp.

I have included some photos of my observation of Jana Breytenbach, court reporter, and Le Roux Schoeman, multimedia editor, during this trial as Addendum H. These images arguably show how naturalised digital media technologies have become during newswork – also outside the newsroom.

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<sup>36</sup> The quick file refers to the first story published about a news event. This type of story is generally very short and only intended to break the news to the audience. It usually ends with a phrase such as: “Keep an eye on Netwerk24 for more.”

<sup>37</sup> Henri van Breda was found guilty (in May 2018) of murdering his family with an axe in a security complex outside Stellenbosch. The so-called “De Zalze murders” took place in January 2015. Both the murders and the subsequent court case garnered wide-spread media attention.

## 6.4 Digital media technologies as newswork tools

From the observation of journalists (as discussed in the previous section) it is clear that digital media technologies have become a regular feature of journalistic routines and practices in the Netwerk24 newsroom. The question, however, remains whether journalists adapt their newswork to account for these technologies, or whether they merely “normalise” these technologies to “fit – and in some ways augment – traditional professional norms and practices”, as argued by Singer (2005:174). My own earlier findings (Jordaan, 2012) suggest that digital media technologies both augment and disrupt traditional journalistic norms – in some instances without journalists realising the full extent of the changes. During my time in the Netwerk24 newsroom it also becomes apparent that digital media technologies can be drivers of changes to newswork, but that they are also just different tools for doing the same, so-called traditional, reporting.

The digital media technologies discussed below are thus examples of non-human actors that have the ability to transform or destabilise the newswork network. However, based on my observations and discussions with journalists, I would contend that the professional journalistic habitus, which to a large extent dictates how journalists approach their newswork, still carries with it traces of more traditional conceptualisations of newswork. Journalists use digital media technologies in order to enhance their newswork *and* they bemoan the fact that such technologies can increase their workload (see section 7.3). Yet they often consider these technologies mere tools (or intermediaries) to enact deeply rooted ideas, or ideals, of what it takes to be a good journalist.

A few key, stand-out trends with regards to digital media technologies as newswork tools emerge during my observations of and conversations with journalists at Netwerk24. Firstly, the importance of the social media platform Facebook is highlighted – also in comparison to Twitter as other dominant social media network. Secondly, the growth of the messaging service WhatsApp as newswork tool is made abundantly clear. Finally, the increasing importance of website analytics as news management tool is also apparent.

### 6.4.1 Facebook is our friend

The majority of the journalists I speak to see Facebook as essential for newsgathering. Journalists use Facebook for story ideation, to keep abreast of what is happening in their communities and to look for and verify information on specific people. Or as Simvuyele Mageza, a journalist in the Pretoria office, tells me during a 2017 interview:

[I use Facebook] to get story ideas; to find out what is happening where, and who is complaining about what. I am always, always, always on Facebook.

Most of the journalists value Facebook higher than Twitter as newswork tool. As Elsje Waldeck, a Bloemfontein-based journalist, tells me in May 2016:

I like Facebook more, because Twitter is too cluttered for me. It is more difficult to find stuff there, because there are so many people and it is so fast. On Facebook things are more structured for me. So I like Facebook more. It is easier to find background information on people on Facebook. It is scary how much you can find about people on Facebook. I am not complaining; it is just scary.

Charné Kemp, a journalist based in Kimberley, similarly tells me in an email interview: “Facebook is wonderful to find information on people and photos. And to spy on who knows whom and such. Twitter is only used to announce news.” George Germishuys, a Cape Town-based journalist agrees that

Twitter is more of a tool for journalists, rather than the public. I think what is very useful – and I am talking from my experience as a crime reporter – are all those community Facebook groups. One gets the most incredible stories there; things that you will get nowhere else.

Germishuys further believes that the journalists should be more focused on Facebook since he believes the majority of traffic to the Netwerk24 website comes from this social media network. This view is confirmed by Christiaan Boonzaier, a former digital media content producer and social media manager, who had worked at Netwerk24 since its inception. In an email interview after his departure from Netwerk24 he writes that the social media network best suited for Netwerk24’s needs is

... the same social media platform that will be the best for any other company or brand in South Africa: Facebook. And that is purely because Facebook is the biggest and most popular social network in South Africa (and the world). Facebook’s net just stretches the widest in South Africa.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> A September 2017 industry report indicates that of the around 56 million people in South Africa around 16 million use Facebook (about 30%), while only 9 million use Twitter (Rawlins, 2017).

Besides the direct conversations I have with journalists, I also observe many instances where journalists talk to each other about what they saw on Facebook with regards to a specific story. Shortly after the teleconference on 6 September 2017, for instance, there is a discussion in the Cape Town newsroom office on a post on Facebook from a mother whose son was involved in an apparent road rage incident. As I write in my field notes: “They are discussing whether they can just use the post, or whether they should talk to the woman.”

This approach to newsgathering using social media, Facebook in particular, is a regular feature in the newsroom. However, the reliance on social media during newswork does not sit well with some of the journalists I speak to. Sarel van der Walt, a senior journalist in the Pretoria office, for instance says it bothers him when stories are written solely based on social media posts:

You have to see whether you cannot speak to those people in person. I realise that it is sometimes not so easy to do, and Facebook makes it easier, but it also sometimes makes people lazy.

Other interviewees stress the importance of not taking everything you find online at face-value. As Arlene Prinsloo, Netwerk24’s web editor, says in September 2017:

You cannot believe everything on Facebook. You cannot just send me a link on Facebook. Especially with digital – with Facebook and Twitter – you should double check. Do not think because it says Arlene Prinsloo that there is just one Arlene. Make sure you have the correct one.

This comment by Prinsloo confirms the argument that so-called traditional journalistic skills are still important – even in a digital-first newsroom. I will elaborate on traditional conceptualisations of journalism as observed and discussed in the Netwerk24 newsroom in more detail in Chapter 7.

#### **6.4.2 Unlocking the potential of WhatsApp**

Another key finding in terms of the use and role of digital media technologies relates to how indispensable the messaging service WhatsApp has become to newswork. One of the features of this application is that it can show the sender of a message when the reader has accessed the message. Head of news Nadia Honiball tells me in an interview in September 2017 that as news manager she does not know what she would do without WhatsApp – “especially if I know that a journalist is busy with an interview. I can WhatsApp them and see when the message is read, and then I know I can

call”. Similarly, Rozanne Els, a Cape Town-based journalist who also since left Netwerk24, tells me that social media like WhatsApp, have “completely changed” the way she works:

I can see when [a source] has read [the message], while at the same time *they* know I can see that they have read it. So that type of avoidance strategy does not work well anymore.

WhatsApp has also become a tool to communicate with a number of journalists and sources simultaneously. This application offers the option to create groups to which the administrator of the group can add anyone who also uses WhatsApp. Charné Kemp, a Kimberley-based journalist says:

WhatsApp is fantastic thanks to the groups. One can talk to more people more easily and get information quickly. I can now also get documents and photos from sources without having to do or take it myself. Luckily a lot of people now have smartphones.

One of the ways in which the Netwerk24 journalists use the group feature of WhatsApp is to share and upload photographs and videos. As Sharlene Roodt, a Johannesburg-based multimedia journalist explains in an interview:

When we shoot video in the field, there are a few people who can see that the video is coming in, and someone can say they are going to work with it. So we will shoot video and send it on the WhatsApp group and then everyone downloads it. Or Ineke [Coetzee, multimedia journalist] will keep an eye on WhatsApp today and download clips to edit and upload it from Cape Town.

WhatsApp groups are also employed by government and other public relations communicators to engage with groups of journalists at the same time. As Kaydene Davids, a journalist in Bloemfontein, tells me:

I am on a Crimebusters WhatsApp group where there are also a lot of policemen, security guards – those quick-response personnel – who give news tips about crime. So it helps a lot.

During my last visit to the Johannesburg office in August 2017, journalist Jeanelle Greyling also shows me a WhatsApp group that is administrated by a government spokesperson. She tells me that

this group has helped her get hold of a lot of contact details for people – especially since she has not been working as a journalist very long.

WhatsApp is also a key tool during the running of a live blog (called “Regstreeks” on the Netwerk24 website). Johannesburg-based journalist Hannes Kruger, who regularly runs these blogs, partly because he is one of a few journalists who can work directly in the digital content management system and has access to the website analytics, invites me to observe how he runs such a blog during my last week in Johannesburg. The blog centres on a speech in parliament by the deputy president of the country. Kruger explains to me that he creates a story on the content management system to which he adds snippets of information directly from WhatsApp messages and tweets by the journalists – from both Netwerk24 and other news organisations – covering the event. A journalist or news manager would create an *ad hoc* WhatsApp group for such a live blog and only add the journalists, photographers and/or multimedia journalists directly involved in the event. After the event, and blog, has run its course all the members of the group leave it and the group becomes redundant.

During my time interacting with and observing the Netwerk24 journalists it thus becomes clear that WhatsApp has become an example of digital media technology without which journalists would struggle to complete their daily newswork.

### 6.4.3 Running on analytics

Tandoc and Ferrucci (2017:149) explain the role of analytics in news management thus:

Web analytics programs, such as Chartbeat and Google Analytics<sup>39</sup>, deliver quantified audience feedback that journalists can use to guide decisions on what topics to cover, what stories to write about, and what issues audiences would be interested in.

This increasingly important role of website (and mobile) analytics is especially apparent during my final round of newsroom visits towards the end of 2017. While news managers are careful to emphasise that clicks cannot be the only measurement of newsworthiness, they are certainly very aware of the importance of such measurement tools to the success – and subscription base – of the Netwerk24 website. As Henriëtte Loubser, as editor, points out in an October 2017 interview:

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<sup>39</sup> The Netwerk24 news managers make use of Google Analytics and a programme similar to Chartbeat, known as Cxense.

Look, I do not want to have analytics hanging over [the journalists'] heads like a sword. But we are busy looking at the [Key Performance Areas] – to build it into their KPAs that people are measured based on quality, and also on the engagement that their stories get. But one should realise that some stories will get more engagement than others. So we also want to look at how productive they are, in order for people to take ownership. You do not have to wonder anymore whether people read your story; you can go and look whether they are reading it, and how long they are reading it. So if you, as journalist, are passionate about your career and your future, it is wonderful to keep an eye on those things, and to go and have a look at what you can do. It does not come down to clickbait, not at all. But, after all, that is the reason why you write: for people to read it.

It is thus evident from both conversations with journalists – and my observations on the newsroom floor and in editorial meetings – that everyone is increasingly aware of the importance of audience engagement and analytics. As head of news, Nadia Honiball is especially keen to use analytics to both manage news *and* manage journalists. She tells me in an interview in September 2017 that she regularly tells journalists how their stories are faring on the website: “Because I want them to feel that their stuff can be measured, and that we keep an eye on it. And I get a lot of positive reaction from them about it.” Vicus Bürger, news editor in Johannesburg, says for him personally

... the important things are the attempted subscriptions and how much time, engagement, people spend on a story. It is a nice measurable to see the unique browsers and views and stuff in real time on the site. But for us as a pay site, those are the things that really matter.

Even the newspaper editors are cognisant of the role analytics plays in news management. When I ask him about the importance of prioritisation when making decisions on news management, Willem Jordaan, editor of *Die Burger*, tells me in a September 2017 interview:

I think the nice thing about Netwerk24 is that you can actually take those types of decisions with far more data available to you. It is not a gut feeling type of thing where you say: ‘Okay, our readers are very interested in education news.’ You know what the statistics look like on Netwerk24. And that helps us to prioritise, and to give our readers what they want given the increasingly limited amount of resources.

It is, however, not just news managers and editors who value the contribution of analytics in the newsroom. Journalist Hannes Kruger, who also joined the Netwerk24 team in Johannesburg before the merger with the newspaper newsrooms in May 2016, for instance, believes that the analytics should always be visible on a screen in the newsroom. When I ask him in an informal conversation on 23 August 2017 if he does not think such a visible representation of people's performance will demotivate people, he says it would instead help him to know when he should be doing better, "and that what I am doing is shit".

Esmaré Weideman, CEO of Media24, tells me in a November 2017 interview she believes one of the ways to encourage journalists to make the shift to digital-first is to "celebrate" their successes. She explains that analytics, for instance, make it possible to measure the performance of journalists' work: "I think if you celebrate your successes, most of the people would surely say: 'I'm in.'"

## 6.5 Summary

As highlighted from the beginning of this dissertation, Netwerk24 should be viewed as both a national news website, as well as a national newsroom. To explain how this national newsroom operated, this chapter described the various geographical offices where content is produced for Netwerk24. From the discussion it was clear that each of the newsroom offices I visited between May 2016 and September 2017 had a unique character. It was also shown that the specific culture in the newsroom offices, at least in Cape Town and Johannesburg, had evolved over time. Overarching changes at Netwerk24 – in terms of workflow, for instance – in combination with changes to the staff complement clearly influenced the way these newsrooms function.

To further dissect newswork at Netwerk24 this chapter also discussed daily routines and practices in the newsroom on a very practical level. I described how the journalists discussed story ideation – on local newsroom and national level (via the teleconference). Furthermore, I observed that changes such as scrapping early morning diary meetings were met with varying results by the journalists. The same could be said for key newswork tools such as the news diary that journalists had to update on Google Drive.

This chapter also served to describe journalists at work – *literally*. I used the example of three journalists with different job descriptions to explain what happened when journalists were working behind their computers. Their use of digital media technologies was thus also described.

The chapter concluded with an overview of the three most salient digital media technologies at play in the Netwerk24 newsroom: Facebook, WhatsApp and analytics. With this discussion I was not

suggesting that journalists did not use other technological tools or applications. As I have made clear, the focus in this dissertation is not on one specific type of technology *per se*, but rather on how journalists are shaped by the use of such digital media technologies. In the case of Netwerk24 I would argue that Facebook, WhatsApp and the use of real-time analytics irrevocably changed how journalists approached their newswork.

In the next chapter I aim to go deeper into the “black box” of newswork at Netwerk24 that was opened in this chapter. The aim of Chapter 7 is to highlight how journalists view themselves and their colleagues and what might motivate them to act as they do.

## Chapter 7: Journalists as professional actors in an unstable network

### 7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I described, in what could be considered very practical terms, the daily newswork of journalists at Netwerk24. With that background in mind, this chapter aims to describe in more detail the perceived motivations behind such actions and how journalists experience their newswork roles.

Firstly, I summarise the personal backgrounds of the participants in the study. Secondly, journalists' understanding of what it means to be a multi-skilled digital journalist is discussed. Thereafter I describe my observations of and enquiries into the newsroom culture and the key factors that influence this culture. This chapter concludes with a discussion on traditional conceptualisations of journalism that remain in this digital-first newsroom – as evident from how Netwerk24 journalists act and talk.

The aim of this chapter is thus to provide an overview of how journalists view their own roles as professional actors within a newswork network that – at least at first glance – appears to be somewhat unstable.

### 7.2 Brief overview of journalists' personal backgrounds<sup>40</sup>

The majority of the 52 interviewees<sup>41</sup> directly involved in Netwerk24 – ranging from the various editors to the audience development manager – have at least a diploma or undergraduate degree, mostly in the field of journalism or media studies. There are a few outliers, such as one journalist who holds a doctorate, and three senior (older) editorial members who only have in-service training at specific newspapers. There are also a few staff members who have no formal education in journalism, including former editor Adriaan Basson, who holds a postgraduate degree in African Politics. Overall, however, one could argue that the journalists, editors and news managers at Netwerk24 have been trained in media, communication and journalism skills. Based on the ages of the journalists, as well as

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<sup>40</sup> The discussion to follow focuses on the journalists who were working at Netwerk24 when I visited the newsroom between May 2016 and November 2017. I acknowledge that there has been a high staff turnover which might have influenced the *current* composition of the newsroom.

<sup>41</sup> The full list of interviewee names, the newsroom offices where they work as well as their ages and highest qualifications is attached as Addendum F. I exclude the CEO of Media24, Esmaré Weideman, and MJ Lourens, editor of the news app NetNuis, from my general discussion on the background of the Netwerk24 journalists and news managers.

the institutions where they obtained their qualifications, I would also argue that this training focused on traditional conceptualisations of journalism – even if skills involving digital media technologies were part of their curricula.

In terms of gender, female journalists seem to dominate the newsroom. Of the 52 individuals I interview during my visits to the newsroom, only 14 are men. That amounts to less than 30% of the newsroom. However, all three the newspaper editors are men who are older than 40 years. The age distribution is more equal: 9 of the interviewees are younger than 25; 12 are between 25 and 30 years old; 14 between 30 and 40 years old; and, 17 of them older than 40 years old.

### 7.3 What it means to be a multi-skilled digital journalist

For most journalists the issue of speed seems to be the most obvious determinant of whether you qualify as a good digital journalist or not. When asked what makes a good digital journalist, the answer is invariably that you have to be able to work “fast” or “quickly”. Not all journalists at Netwerk24 are, however, necessarily inducted into what is a very fast-paced environment. In other words, they are not *taught* to be digital-first journalists, but adapt based on the expectations of the newsroom and the actors, both human and non-human, that are part of this evolving network.

Related abilities like “time management” and “working under pressure” are also regularly mentioned. As Charlea Sieberhagen, a Johannesburg-based journalist, says:

You must be able to write quickly. You must be able to write as cleanly as possible. You have to be able to plan, that is very important. And time management is very important, because time flies by when you have to do a lot of stories. So you must know what you can do when.

Despite the focus on speed, there is still an awareness among journalists that accurate reporting remains paramount. André Damons, a journalist in Bloemfontein, for instance, says he is more concerned with sourcing reliable information:

I am not concerned if they want stories for deadline. If I do not have the information, I cannot file... I try to keep to [the deadlines]; to meet them... but I cannot force my sources to give me the information, because they are busy with other stuff too. They do not work for Netwerk24.

Similarly, sometime news editor Carryn-Ann Nel says speed is important, “but at the same time one cannot compromise on accuracy. Precisely because we are so fast, and precisely because we are in an environment where the competition is fierce.”

Succeeding as digital journalist does not, however, end with the ability to write quickly and accurately. Hannes Kruger, a journalist in Johannesburg, for instance highlights the importance of social media:

It is important to understand that you can use social media to support your story by embedding it; to identify tweets and videos that you can edit quickly to also embed. There are a lot of these types of things that you have to know how to do.

Journalists are therefore often expected to be a “Swiss army knife”, able to do everything, says Le Roux Schoeman, multimedia editor: “It is invaluable if you have someone with the confidence and competence to do stuff with a phone *and* a notebook. And there are those people here.” Schoeman, however, does not believe that this type of versatility is “everybody’s thing”. For him, what is more important is to find “someone who is not overwhelmed by all the options and who is not jaded about the web”.

Rozanne Els, a Cape Town-based journalist, similarly explains that digital journalists have to be “plugged in”:

You have to have a presence on the internet – wide and far and deep – in terms of what you see, what you read; everything. In order for you to learn other ways to look at stories, and to look at your own stories differently.

Despite the expectation to be multi-skilled, news managers and journalists alike are quick to point out how difficult it becomes for journalists to do a bit of everything. Reza van Rooyen, national day editor, believes that it is very difficult for journalists to “shoot video, take pictures and write a good story”. Despite it being easier to get away with “poorer quality”<sup>42</sup> visuals on the web than in newspapers, Van Rooyen still believes that a newsroom needs specialists who concentrate on video or photographs:

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<sup>42</sup> Both Reza van Rooyen and Le Roux Schoeman explain that grainy closed-circuit television (CCTV) videos often get more hits than original videos on Netwerk24. At the time of writing a 30-second CCTV video of a thief being tackled in a shopping mall still holds the record for most hits (more than 630 000) on Netwerk24’s YouTube channel. This in comparison with other popular videos that reach only a few thousand hits.

Yes, you must try to do everything. But I cannot take pictures like Conrad [Bornman] or Felix [Dlangamandla]<sup>43</sup> – *that* is on another level. ... And I think in a time where the economy is tight, and there is little money, and circulation falls... I understand you have to make a profit, but you are going to compromise on quality. You are just going to. There is no way around it. And you burn people out.

Elsje Waldeck, who has worked as newspaper and multimedia journalist in Bloemfontein, adds:

I wish the people who make the decisions can come and stand in our shoes for a little while and also get a story with all the complete information, with good photos, with video that has been edited, with tweets you send out. You know that is four people's jobs that are now reliant on one person.

Journalist Tarryn-Lee Habelgaarn from Johannesburg similarly feels that “a lot is expected of you”:

I do not think everyone always realises how things are in the field now when they are sitting here in the office. I mean, they were all field journalists, but times change; stuff gets harder; times change. So we now have to do fifty million things.

Despite such misgivings and concerns about the ability to and need for multi-tasking, it is clear – especially when I visit the newsrooms in 2017 – that there is no way journalists can avoid this responsibility. For them to be part of the Netwerk24 newswork network they *have* to (successfully) associate with non-human actors, such as digital media technologies. Jo-Ann Floris, deputy editor of Netwerk24, emphasises that a journalist has to be able to “juggle” and that “the time of one singular task at a time is gone”.

During these final visits it appears, at least in general, as though journalists have indeed started to adapt their mind-set to adopt a multi-skilled, digital-first approach. In Cape Town, for instance, journalist Carryn-Ann Nel tells me that she does not think “the journalists still write with the idea in their heads that they must service the newspapers too”:

If you saw your story on Netwerk[24] the previous day, there is not a big chance that you will go search for it in the newspaper. Unless you had a

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<sup>43</sup> Conrad Bornman and Felix Dlangamandla are two award-winning photojournalists.

phenomenal lead story or a beautiful page with graphics and visual elements in the newspaper. But not usually when you have read your story already.

Similarly, Vicus Bürger, who by September 2017 had taken up the position of news editor in Johannesburg, says he believes that in general everyone in this newsroom is “attuned to working digitally”. It is noteworthy, however, that Bürger adds that he has

... also realised that as soon as people are put under pressure, they go back to their default mode. So if you have been working for a newspaper for decades, and you are suddenly under pressure, you will fall back on that.

Esmaré Weideman, CEO of Media24, tells me she likes to tell people that “in the good old days” when she started her career as a journalist one had to be able to write – and “they at least taught us how to take photos”:

Today’s journalists need a totally different skill-set. I am sorry for them, because the editorial teams are becoming smaller, but their work is increasing. They work under immense pressure; we are very aware of that.

It would follow that the introduction of digital media technologies, such as social media, has the potential to invoke changes to newsroom routines – *and* add to additional pressure on newswork. Yet, as shown from the journalists’ own perspectives above, these changes do not necessarily translate to them relinquishing their ingrained understanding of what it means to be a good journalist. As Bürger says, journalists tend to fall back into “default mode” when experiencing pressure. Whether the journalists actually manage to adhere to their own expressed standards of good journalism, and thus *practise* good journalism, would need further exploration.

## 7.4 Newsroom culture

As discussed at length in Chapter 4, I am aware that “culture” is a contested term. Within the context of this dissertation – through the use of ethnography as research design and professional journalistic habitus as part of the theoretical framework – I would argue that context and a shared identity are key aspects of culture. Or as Fetterman (2009:545) explains: “However defined, the concept of culture helps the ethnographer search for a logical, cohesive pattern in the myriad, often ritualistic behaviors and ideas that characterize a group.”

The individual offices of Netwerk24 across the country apparently all have their own character. Notwithstanding these regional differences, certain issues permeate the majority of discussions on what it is like to work at Netwerk24. During my first visits to the newsroom throughout 2016 it is evident that not all the journalists – and especially not those who had just moved out of the newspaper newsrooms – find it easy to self-identify as Netwerk24 journalists. Most of the journalists still use the paper titles to identify themselves in telephone conversations, for instance. There are also uncertainty and uneasiness amongst journalists about where they and their colleagues fit in at Netwerk24 – often ascribed to a lack of open and clear communication. Furthermore, there are a number of challenges to their newswork that also seemingly influence staff morale in the newsroom. In this section I describe Netwerk24’s general newsroom culture as I observed it, and in the words of the journalists themselves.

#### **7.4.1 Feeling part of the Netwerk24 team**

As discussed in Chapter 6, it is obvious from my first visits to the newsroom offices in Johannesburg and Cape Town that there had been a division between the so-called first Netwerk24 team and the journalists who remained at the newspapers. George Germishuys, a Cape Town-based journalist who refers to himself as one of the Netwerk24 “originals”, tells me that “there was definitely a feeling of being a team” when they worked with Adriaan Basson, as editor, and Pieter du Toit, as head of news: “We were not a lot of people, but we were a specific group of people with a dedicated boss.” For Germishuys small things, like the fact that this group went away for a weekend to do some brainstorming, created the feeling that they were a team “driving this thing”. Journalist Rozanne Els says the merger with the newspapers made her feel as though they “went back in time” and that it is “incredibly frustrating” after they – as the first Netwerk24 team – had worked for months to build something “in which no-one else, except for the people who had applied for those jobs, believed in”. Marida Fitzpatrick, who joined the first Netwerk24 team as editor of opinion, features and analysis, agrees that they had “a wonderful spirit” in that team:

It was an entrepreneurial spirit. It was the feeling that we were starting something new. We felt like a start-up... Everyone was self-driven, everyone was self-motivated. It did not feel like a bureaucracy. We were fast, we were nimble. We were like digital is supposed to be, and we lost a lot of that when we came back to the newspaper environment – if not all of it.

On the other side of the spectrum, Maygene de Wee, who remained a newspaper journalist in Cape Town, says “there was a feeling of us being a bunch of *Burger* journalists, and these were Netwerk[24] journalists. There was a thing of them and us, us and them.” Journalist Marelize Barnard, also from Cape Town, concurs that “naturally before we merged there was a bit of an us and them feeling”. However, adds Barnard, “I think we are all good-natured people; we do not have issues with each other.” This shows that journalists, amidst the apparent chaos and far-reaching changes to their newsroom, still seem to find ways to stabilise their newswork network – even if it just means getting along with other actors in the newsroom.

While admitting that the merger and change-over “was not seamless”, Jo van Eeden (then editor) tells me in July 2016 that she is

...incredibly impressed with the team’s resilience. ... the willingness, and the buy-in, and the realisation that there is a space for me. It is my responsibility to sustain that role or build on it.

In a somewhat different vein, and more than a year later, Henriëtte Loubser (editor at the time of writing) tells me in October 2017 that she realises

... people are traumatised by all the moves, and that there is still a measure of negativity that needs to be overcome. I hope that there will come a point, or that there will be enough people in the system who are absolutely inspired so that it will overpower the negative energy.

The culture in the newsroom is arguably also influenced by the extent to which journalists feel they can identify with the brand and what it stands for. During my observations throughout 2016 – in all the newsroom offices I visit – it is clear that the majority of the journalists still rely on the newspaper brands when interacting with sources. Which at first could appear to be resistance to the Netwerk24 brand, turns out to be, at least for the most part, purely a practical consideration. André Damons from Bloemfontein, for instance, is already eager to make the switch to Netwerk24 in May 2016, but adds that he “will first say *Volksblad* so that they [his sources] can gradually get used to it”. Kaydene Davids, also from Bloemfontein, says she still refers to herself as a *Volksblad* journalist, because it is “probably something that I still have to unlearn, since I was used to saying I am from *Volksblad* for four, five years”. At first news managers also do not seem prescriptive about the use of the Netwerk24 brand, as Tasha<sup>44</sup> explains:

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<sup>44</sup> Tasha is the pseudonym for a journalist in her 20s.

We asked Jo [van Eeden, editor] once if we should say to people that we work for *Die Burger* or Netwerk24. She told us to use the brand. If it is older people, they will not necessarily know what Netwerk[24] is. So if you know *Die Burger* will get you in, or give you a better chance of getting the story, then you say *Die Burger*.

Not all journalists appear to be happy with this approach. In July 2016 Rozanne Els, a Cape Town-based journalist, says it is a “habit” with journalists to refer to themselves in connection with the print brand. Els also confirms that Jo van Eeden told the journalists that it was okay to mention the print brands:

She told them to recognise the newspaper’s identity. You cannot recognise your newspaper identity if you are trying to make digital your job.

I would argue that this is another example of how the professional habitus can be transformed by new experiences; in this case the concerted efforts by the editorial leadership and journalists of the first Netwerk24 team to nurture a digital-first “start-up” culture around a specific brand. With the merger of the editorial team of Netwerk24 and the print newsrooms in May 2016 there arguably developed what could be described as a clash of cultures due to the differences in the two groups’ professional journalistic habitus.

Tarryn-Lee Habelgaarn, a journalist from Johannesburg, confirms Rozanne Els’s impression that newspaper journalists struggle with this new identity when she says: “It is strange to me that I kind of moved over to Netwerk[24] so quickly. Old habits die hard.” Elsabé Brits, a journalist from Cape Town, believes the necessary mind-shift “is not about how you do the stories”. As journalist with more than 20 years’ experience, she believes that the adjustment to working digital-first would be “okay”. She is more concerned about the mind-shift she has to make in terms of the brand for which she works.

Despite Rozanne Els and other journalists being adamant about self-identifying as Netwerk24 journalists, building the brand does not appear to be an easy feat for everyone. In August 2017 Jeanelle Greyling, a journalist who joined Netwerk24 in Johannesburg directly out of university, explains:

You always have to say you are from Netwerk24 and *Beeld*. But you also try to just say you are from Netwerk24 because you want it to stand on its own feet. When you say Netwerk24, and insist on it, people will say: ‘Oh, Media24.’ Then we have to say: ‘No, we fall under Media24, but we are an

Afrikaans online website’, and such. Then they would say: ‘News24, and we have to say ‘No’ again.

When keeping in mind the print brands have been established for decades – and in the case of *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* more than a century – it would be reasonable to assume that falling back on these brands might make the journalists’ quests for information somewhat easier. However, by September 2017 most journalists seem to have made a mental switch and introduce themselves as Netwerk24 journalists, even though they often still have to include Media24 or the newspaper brands as explanation. In my field notes of Tuesday 5 September 2017 in Cape Town, for instance, I note that journalist Maygene de Wee starts a call saying she is “from *Die Burger*, an Afrikaans newspaper in Cape Town, South Africa, and Netwerk24, a news website”. In the same week Nadia Honiball, national head of news, also tells someone in a telephone conversation that *Die Burger* does not have journalists anymore, but that Netwerk24 delivers a service to the newspaper.

Honiball tells me in a September 2017 interview that journalists are not “allowed” to say they are from *Die Burger* anymore. Both Honiball and editor Henriëtte Loubser make it clear to me that they are committed to the success of Netwerk24 as brand. As Loubser says in October 2017:

I think both Nadia and I are absolutely committed to making a success of this. We left the biggest, most successful publication in the group<sup>45</sup> to come here. And I hope that this should already tell them something.

Loubser’s emphasis on her personal motivation for building the Netwerk24 brand arguably confirms my contention (see section 7.4.3) that actors with a lot of capital can have a telling influence on the formation of a newswork network. In other words: people whose views hold a lot of sway within the newsroom can transform or distort the way other actors experience their newsroom environment and the culture within that newsroom.

#### **7.4.2 Sharing the vision: internal communication**

One of the most contentious issues I am confronted with during my time in the newsroom centres on communication. Journalists seem quite divided on whether the nature and extent of internal communication is constructive, on the one hand, or unclear on the other hand. The news managers and

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<sup>45</sup> Loubser was editor, and Honiball news editor of *Huisgenoot*, the top-performing weekly magazine in the Media24 stable.

editors also differ on the success, or failure, of communication strategies. As Le Roux Schoeman, multimedia editor, says in September 2016: “The biggest frustration people have is that they do not feel heard. ... that they think their contributions are not worthwhile.”

When I speak with Adriaan Basson around a year after he vacated his position as editor of Netwerk24, he is adamant about the fact that his mandate from company management was clear:

It was to get a small, very strong team, with the best reporters in the group together in the three provinces.<sup>46</sup> To work with the newspapers, and you know, make sure that the news breaks online; that we establish an online culture in Afrikaans newsrooms.

Jo van Eeden, who succeeded Basson as editor, however, prefers not to use the term “mandate”. While still editor in July 2016, Van Eeden talks about the initial “strategy” for establishing Netwerk24, which was built on two pillars:

To build Netwerk24, on the one hand, while on the other had to keep, or extend, the commercial sustainability of the newspapers. Which means, let us start moving resources to digital, but we do not cut everything off immediately... because you sit with the biggest part of your audience online, but you sit with the biggest part of your income in print. And how do you balance those two things?

Esmaré Weideman, CEO of Media24, tells me in a November 2017 interview:

The motive was to establish a national news brand on the digital side, while we try to protect the brands – that are actually good regional newspapers – in the print world. So that was the decision.

Based on the way Basson, Van Eeden and Weideman talk about the initial launch of Netwerk24, there seem to be slight differences in how these managers view the relationship between print and digital, for instance. While these differences are certainly nuanced, I would argue that this is an indication that the nature and extent of internal messaging can contribute to divergent approaches to newswork – even on a very senior editorial level.

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<sup>46</sup> Basson here refers to Gauteng, the Western Cape and the Free State.

During her time as editor Van Eeden says she believes the strategy has become building Netwerk24 “to be the preferred digital news website for Afrikaans speakers, who are willing to pay for it”. Her view seems to echo the words of Weideman, CEO of Media24, in an internal company memo on 6 April 2016 to announce the merger of the print and digital newsrooms coming 1 May that year:

We will rally behind a single Afrikaans news team that will support our multi-platform publishing strategy and our future in digital and data-driven journalism. Netwerk24 is already the biggest paid-for news platform in South Africa. This move will further strengthen the brand through excellent journalism that is fast, original and relevant.

Despite this type of communication, not all journalists appear confident in the knowledge that they know, or share, the vision and strategy for Netwerk24. Reza van Rooyen, first national day editor of Netwerk24, for instance, says

... none of us saw it coming that Adriaan [Basson] was going to move.<sup>47</sup> So naturally it was a big surprise, in addition to the uncertainty of what we were going to do now.

As part of the first Netwerk24 team, Van Rooyen also shares the view of some of her colleagues that instead of a clear digital strategy there was actually a “move back to the newspapers... in terms of our work method and such”. Pieter du Toit, head of news under the editorship of Basson and (briefly) under the editorship of Van Eeden, contends that

[a]fter the change in editorship, there was not one opportunity where the editor got the Netwerk[24] people together and said: ‘This is the route we are now going to take; this is the vision.’ That never happened. The company also did not really say what was happening.

It is also noteworthy that despite his criticism of the nature of the internal communication during the “change-over” in May 2016, Du Toit emphasises that:

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<sup>47</sup> Basson moved from Netwerk24 to become the editor of its sister publication News24.

Routines and processes can always be fine-tuned and bettered. The most important thing is, however, the culture and unity around the vision for the future.

Du Toit's assertion reinforces my view that a shared newsroom culture is one of the key factors in creating either order, or disorder, in the newsroom – even if just implicitly. It would appear as though communication, especially around the vision for the future, can also be considered one of the key non-human actors in the Netwerk24 newswork network.

Tarryn-Lee Habelgaarn, a Johannesburg-based journalist, says the “one big problem” she and a lot of her colleagues have is: “We never know what is going on here. Things are just changed. And there is no sense of job security.” Habelgaarn, who was moved to Netwerk24 with the rest of the newspaper journalists in May 2016, says she “personally feels it is a big career-changing move that they made, without informing you about it”. She adds that “all the stress” of having to work as a multi-skilled, digital-first journalist was placed on them, despite it being “a job you did not want to do, because you did not want to be digital-first; print was perfectly fine for you”. In a similar vein, journalist Marelize Barnard from Cape Town says one of the most important things that makes one feel “safe in your career” is the feeling that you are part of your own career choices, rather than it being forced on you – “even if it is sugar-coated”. Du Toit agrees that “people are not against change, but they are tired of the uncertainty”.

Journalist Hannes Kruger, who shares an office with Habelgaarn but was part of the initial Netwerk24 team, agrees that the “communication of policies and the mandate is not necessarily so strong”. Kruger believes that there was “clear communication about what the digital strategy is going to be”, but only “when the newspaper people came over initially”. According to him, “it was not necessarily drilled in”. Journalist Rozanne Els from Cape Town similarly believes that the “communication and the way things were rolled out” in May 2016 had an influence on journalists’ understanding of what working digital-first means:

You cannot just tell someone in the middle of April that you are part of Netwerk[24] from the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. Because it took us [the first Netwerk24 team] a long time to adapt. And we applied for positions; we wanted to be there; we chose to be there. So I completely understand the opposition, or not the opposition, the bit of resistance. I totally get that.

Marelize Barnard, a Cape Town-based (former) newspaper journalist who was part of this 1 May move, tells me that while they are all “in this thing together”, she thinks that the journalists who remained at *Die Burger* do not know all the “jargon” yet:

We have never been told how things work and what the jargon is. You have to figure it out yourself. It is a bit of a patchwork system. You have to just learn a bit here and a bit there. We are flying blind.

Other journalists refer to the proverbial “grapevine” when asked how changes to the newsroom are communicated to them. This is especially true when it comes to the resignation of key staff members. Maxine<sup>48</sup>, for instance, recounts how she and a colleague heard head of news Pieter du Toit mention his resignation letter to a secretary:

It was not communicated to us properly. Nor was it communicated properly that the other people resigned. You hear it through the grapevine, and then you ask them if it is true, and they say: ‘Yes’ and that is it. So I have started to accept that if you hear gossip, it is true.

Maygene de Wee, a Cape-Town based journalist, agrees that hearing “stuff via the grapevine” is “just how Media24 works”. In the same vein journalist Elsabé Brits, also from Cape Town, says the communication around what is expected of Netwerk24 is communicated “as good as a media company can”. Brits says what frustrates her is that there are practical things, like how the digital content management system works, that was not properly communicated to them and of which she was ignorant at first.

Even in August 2017, more than a year after Netwerk24 had, in the words of Media24 CEO Esmaré Weideman’s internal memo, become established as the company’s “most important Afrikaans news asset”, there was still some traces of uncertainty among staff members. Jo-Ann Floris, deputy editor of Netwerk24, tells me that even senior editorial staff “never know when the big announcements are coming”, and that they often only see them on the internal company newsletter. According to Floris, it then “feels horrible” to say to journalists that she does not have the answers – “especially when there are things that can have a big impact on people”. Floris believes that her response could be interpreted as “you do not want to tell me, or you are lying, or how could you *not* have known”.

Not all journalists, however, hold the view that there is a lack of internal communication at Netwerk24 – although they are certainly a minority. Referring to internal company memos and

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<sup>48</sup> Maxine is the pseudonym for a journalist in her 20s.

announcements, Jeanne-Marié Versluis, a journalist in Pretoria, tells me in August 2017 that the communication around staff changes “is generally good”. Other journalists believe that having a good relationship with your “bosses” is the key to feeling comfortable to speak up about any uncertainties you might have, as Charné Kemp, a journalist in the Kimberley office, explains.

There also seems to have been a slight shift in opinion after Henriëtte Loubser is appointed as editor. Hannes Kruger, a journalist in Johannesburg, says it is “fantastic” that Loubser and Nadia Honiball (as national head of news) communicated in the different regions – in person – “where we are now and where we have to be and how we will get there”. He tells me in August 2017 that it gave him a “sense of security” to have an indication of where they are going. Carryn-Ann Nel confirms that Loubser “made it clear that there are targets that she needs to meet and that she needs our input”.

Despite the obvious gaps in communication, and some misunderstandings, I would argue that Jo van Eeden is justified when she says (in July 2016) that as editor she finds it interesting,

... also in terms of change management, that you can give ten people exactly the same message, and they will hear eleven different things. Everyone listens to something different. So it is very important to continuously emphasise the message at every opportunity that you have.

Almost a year later, a few months before Loubser takes over as editor, Van Eeden further tells me that she believes a shared culture is being fostered at Netwerk24:

But it is not as though we call everyone together every morning to sing “Kumbaya”<sup>49</sup> and to remind them that is how we work with each other. It is the invisible glue that keep colleagues together.

The “invisible glue” Van Eeden refers to here could be seen as an alternative interpretation of the professional journalistic habitus, or the shared “history turned into nature” of the Netwerk24 journalists. As argued above, however, not all journalists necessarily at all times feel they are informed enough, or even socialised well enough, to be able to enjoy a shared newsroom culture.

When I speak to Loubser in October 2017 she similarly says she uses “every possible article and situation” to bring a certain message “home to someone” – in addition to communicating things “on a

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<sup>49</sup> “Kumbaya” is a folk song that “has come to evoke peace and harmony – sometimes mockingly” (Eligon, 2018).

bigger scale”. As is confirmed by the journalists, Loubser says she had told them exactly what the target is:

I also told them if they do not want to be here, then they should rather not be here. Because only if you want to be here, you will be able to keep up with the pace and handle the pressure.

Loubser adds that she thinks her job is to present the vision to the journalists and “to make them excited about the vision, because if they are excited about it, then they can live with a lot of things”. For Loubser this means that she needs to be surrounded “by people who have also bought into this vision, and who are willing to walk the extra mile to implement it”. Later in the same year Media24 CEO Esmaré Weideman tells me that she has

... a lot of sympathy with people who have a sense of loss and who have a sense of loss of belonging. I have incredible sympathy with it. And if that is something that still has a strong presence in our newsrooms, then I will give a lot of attention to ensuring that we communicate better... and to ensure that we really go through the trouble of making those people feel like that is their home.

Creating a “home” for journalists could also be interpreted as aiming to foster a shared newsroom culture.

### **7.4.3 Newswork personalities and roles**

Closely related to the issue of internal communication is the expressed need of journalists to know where they and their colleagues fit into the broader Netwerk24 newswork network. During my observations and conversations with journalists it soon becomes apparent that the role of individual personalities is key to the establishment of a specific newsroom culture. As argued throughout this section, news managers and journalists with a lot of capital – mostly of a symbolic and journalistic kind – can have a telling influence on how the newsroom functions. Willig (2012:380) explains (as cited in section 3.4.2) that journalistic capital is “closely connected to the concept of peer recognition” and that having a lot of journalistic capital means “having a lot of respect from journalistic colleagues” and a “good position internally in the journalists’ hierarchy”.

In this regard, journalist Maygene de Wee from Cape Town, for instance, says the most challenging part of working at Netwerk24 is the “personalities”. Hannes Kruger, a journalist in Johannesburg, tells me in August 2017 that having new people in senior positions on a regular basis is a “big adjustment”, because “you have to start to prove yourself again if the person does not know you or you have to get used to that person’s way of doing things”.

Another simple example of this observation comes in the words of Ügen Vos, a Johannesburg-based journalist, who tells me in August 2017 that “when you get along with your colleagues, it just helps to create a better environment”. Or as journalist Charlea Sieberhagen from Johannesburg says about her newsroom: “It is really fun, but it is fun because of the people.” In Cape Town Tasha<sup>50</sup> says something similar in July 2016 when emphasising that everything is “still new” after the merge between the digital team and the newspaper staff:

We only started early last month, and we are doing fine, because we know each other. We are not strangers to each other. It is just the work environment that we will have to adapt to.

Once again, there is a stark difference between how journalists who worked under the editorship of Adriaan Basson experienced their first six months working at Netwerk24 and they felt in the newsroom after the 1 May 2016 merger. Based on the journalists’ own descriptions, this difference can be ascribed to a loss of key staff members – especially on a senior level. It is therefore noteworthy that of the 16 journalists and news managers from the first Netwerk24 team whom I interview, only four<sup>51</sup> are still working for Netwerk24 by the time I exit the newsroom in November 2017 and started writing up my findings.

Pieter du Toit, who left Netwerk24 and his role as head of news a month or so after the newspapers joined the original Netwerk24, tells me that “naturally, personalities play a role” in the newsroom. Speaking about his time at Netwerk24 *before* the merger, Du Toit says he thinks they were “immensely privileged to have the dynamics” they had. He adds that the editor and news editor thought the same about news, and the journalists were “very skilled and very dynamic”: “So the stars pretty much aligned, I think.”

When asked about the newsroom culture a few months after the newspaper journalists joined Netwerk24 (in July 2016), Cape Town journalist George Germishuys tells me that he can only talk about “how the culture was”; immediately referencing specific newsroom personalities, including

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<sup>50</sup> Tasha is a pseudonym for a journalist in her 20s.

<sup>51</sup> This number is not set in stone, as it was sometimes difficult to establish exactly when a journalist resigned and/or left Netwerk24.

Adriaan Basson as editor, Pieter du Toit as head of news and Reza van Rooyen as day editor on the production side. According to Germishuys,

... there was a lot of encouragement – with Le Roux [Schoeman, multimedia editor] too – to kind of try to be cutting edge. To do something creative, something new and fresh. Because we are digital and we have the opportunity.

Charlea Sieberhagen, a journalist in Johannesburg, also tells me soon after the newspaper staff officially join the Netwerk24 team that the urgency from news managers to produce digital-first is not there anymore: “Not that I am saying we should be checked-up on, but it is about the energy of the people in the office. That is extremely important.” In other words, the way actors associate with each other or, more specifically, the way actors with a lot of capital interact with other actors can influence whether a newswork network embraces a digital-first culture. It would follow that a newsroom network where a digital-first strategy is clearly communicated and driven could create a sense of cohesion, or order, that might be absent from a newsroom where the relationship between print and digital is not clearly formulated.

Pieter Redelinghuys, a seasoned digital journalist who worked as content and home page editor at Netwerk24 in Cape Town on a freelance basis during 2016, tells me that the general culture in the newsroom “has changed a lot” over the years:

I think it also has to do with the fact that the *younger* news managers become, the less comfortable they are to drive the hard story hard. And I think it is very easy to start bandying about words like micromanage if people start to say you should speed things up.

Notwithstanding such changes in the newsroom, Sieberhagen adds that “overall” the culture in the newsroom is “very nice”:

I just think there is a lot of confusion at this stage. People do not know where they fit in and they do not know where everything is going. I think it also causes some people to start to lose interest a little and to not be so motivated, unfortunately.

Marelize Barnard, a journalist at *Die Burger* in Cape Town before the 1 May 2016 merger, echoes Sieberhagen’s words when she tells me in July 2016:

I think in the first place we need an organisational chart with pictures and [telephone] extensions. We sit in different places. So just to say: ‘Okay, here is the head; that is what she looks like.’ Or this is the person who is going to sub my work.

The importance of a confident and approachable news editor also comes to the fore during my time in the newsroom. As Jo-Ann Floris, deputy editor, tells me in August 2017 when I ask her whether it has made a difference to the Johannesburg newsroom office now that key editorial staff, such as the editor and head of news, are based in Cape Town:

I think it comes down to having the reassurance that there is still a news editor to whom you can go and who looks after you. So if you want to bitch and moan a bit about something that you are not happy about, there is someone who will listen.

Jeanelle Greyling, a Johannesburg-based journalist, confirms that Vicus Bürger fulfils that role as news editor in Johannesburg. Greyling says Bürger is “attuned” to how people in the newsroom feel and whether they are experiencing any uncertainties: “So it was not really necessary for me to say how unhappy I am about something yet.”

When I speak to Bürger himself in August 2017 he confirms that he is very “hands-on”: “Perhaps people say I am a bit loud or whatever, but I also try to keep the energy up so that we can keep going. I want them to get excited about their stories.” My own observations also indicate that Bürger often leaves his desk to move to where the journalists are sitting to follow up on the progress of their stories. Adding to the change in newsroom culture in Johannesburg is the presence of Floris as deputy editor. She believes that one should remember and tell people that the management team know they are going through a tough time: “We can never stop providing [tender loving care]. We have to nurture and cherish people.”

In Cape Town a similar change takes place when Henriëtte Loubser and Nadia Honiball join Netwerk24. As Ilse Schoombee, morning editor of Netwerk24 who is based in Cape Town, tells me in September 2017:

I told Henriëtte [Loubser] that since they have been here there has been a huge difference, because Nadia [Honiball] speaks loudly. Le Roux

[Schoeman, multimedia editor] and I spoke about it, and he said it was weird: you only need that one person to change the vibe<sup>52</sup>.

Vicus Bürger urges me to remember that

... when Henriëtte [Loubser] took over, she also brought a new vision – and with good reason. That does not mean that the previous vision was wrong, but we have to adapt the whole time. And since it is new terrain, one has to experiment with new things to see what works and what does not work.

As I have discussed before (in section 6.2.2), I also observe a marked difference to the newsroom atmosphere and culture when I return to the Cape Town newsroom office for the third time (in September 2017). Carryn-Ann Nel<sup>53</sup> tells me one of the things she now enjoys about working for Netwerk24 is the fact that Nadia Honiball and Henriëtte Loubser

... definitely come with a different style and different requirements. I am really learning a lot from them – especially from Nadia [Honiball] with whom I work a bit closer ... I think the feeling of breaking news and getting stories out first is at an all-time high – more than ever before. So I enjoy being part of that.

When I speak to Esmaré Weideman, CEO of Media24, in November 2017 she agrees that it is

... incredibly important to get the correct people in the correct positions. I always say that you have to have the correct people on the right seats in the bus, otherwise the bus will not get anywhere... I think if you are dealing with such dramatic changes, it is incredibly important that you have people who can communicate very well; people who really understand the vision; and who have the ability to take people along with them on the journey. So for me the leadership part is just as important as the technical ability to be a news editor or editor.

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<sup>52</sup> Many journalists use, or respond more clearly, to the use of the word “vibe” when talking, both during interviews and informal conversations, about newsroom culture.

<sup>53</sup> Carryn-Ann Nel is in the unique position of being able to take a long-term view of the changes at Netwerk24: she worked as journalist in Johannesburg under Adriaan Basson’s editorship and (briefly) as Cape Town news editor under Jo van Eeden, before returning to the position of senior journalist in Cape Town under the editorship of Henriëtte Loubser.

As researcher I have to acknowledge that I am sometimes challenged – especially from an ethical vantage point – about how to record what could be described as personality clashes in the newsroom. While there are very few open confrontations during my time in the newsroom, it is evident that not everyone – especially not on a senior level – always see eye to eye. While I do not find it necessary to describe such instances in detail – nor ascribe the conflict to specific personalities – it is definitely noteworthy that disagreements between people in the newsroom can influence the newsroom culture and staff morale.

Pieter du Toit, who resigned as national head of news shortly after the merge, for instance says after the newspaper journalists joined Netwerk24 both sides were suspicious of each other. Du Toit is also emphatic about the fact that the newspaper editors were “visibly set against the digital-first approach”:

They contributed to the creation of a hostile attitude towards Netwerk24, which led to inefficient news management and defective cooperation. My experience was that the newspaper editors actively created a culture of suspicion around the original Netwerk24 team. A newspaper editor told one of Netwerk24’s original journalists that if he decided to rather go work there: ‘You’ll never eat lunch in this town again.’

When I ask editor Jo van Eeden in July 2016 whether it bothers her that I am in the newsroom busy with observations and conversations that – by implication – could result in such responses, she says there is

... nothing here that I feel we have to hide from anyone. So I am completely comfortable with you being here, and sitting amongst us. And if there are interactions on the news floor, or the normal office politics that one gets, and you experience that, it is part of the mirror you see.

I believe my understanding of the fact that I also became an actor in the Netwerk24 newswork network – even just by observing it – is reflected in Chapter 5.

#### **7.4.4 Challenges to newswork**

In this section I discuss some of the most prominent factors that have the potential to negatively influence the newswork of journalists, and as a result the morale and culture in the newsroom. These include the lack of dedicated photographers, the high staff turnover, the (initial) resistance to working

in shifts and, finally, the lack of context-specific training and mentorship. Noteworthy here is the fact that my analysis of observational and interview data has *not* shown digital media technologies to be a clear stumbling block in the professional lives of the Netwerk24 journalists. I would, however, argue that shift rosters, training and additional workloads because of the retrenchment of photographers could also be viewed as disruptive non-human actors.

From my very first day in the Netwerk24 newsroom (on Monday 16 May 2016) it is obvious that the loss of, and subsequent lack of, photographers<sup>54</sup> have had a telling influence on newswork. In the first diary meeting I attend in Johannesburg, then news editor Liezel de Lange mentions a few times how “thinly spread” the photographers are. As discussed in section 5.4, I soon learn that all the Media24 news photographers have recently gone through the so-called “189 process”<sup>55</sup> and that many of them have left the company. Around a year later (in April 2017), editor Jo van Eeden tells me that they took the “very painful decision” to put the photographers through this process again – for the second time in seven months. By that time there is only one photographer in each of the main regions left. Van Eeden adds that websites are “very visually driven”, but that Netwerk24 gets its photos “from all over”: “So we only have the need for that one specialist person.”

The journalists seem to feel the loss of photographers more keenly, especially since many of them – at least during my first few visits in 2016 – are still aware of their efforts as represented in the printed newspapers. Elsabé Brits, a Cape Town-based journalist, says while she often takes photographs for her stories herself, the loss of photographers is “massive” and “disastrous”: “There are certain photos that I would not be able to do myself.” Alet Janse van Rensburg, another journalist from Cape Town, agrees that they were “sort of flabbergasted” when the photographers were retrenched:

Because everyone knows that people are more visually attuned. People want to look at the photographs and videos. They want to see what is going on there. Everyone knows that. And then they let the photographers go, so now we only have a bunch of cell phone photos.

Janse van Rensburg does admit, however, that the requirements for the website is different, because – as is the case with video material – one does not need such high-quality photos.

In August 2017 Sarel van der Walt, a journalist from Pretoria, says another reason why the loss of photographers has an influence on newswork is because “journalists and photographers work

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<sup>54</sup> My study focuses on the views and experiences of news journalists. I therefore did not speak to photographers directly, but instead want to illustrate how the loss of photographers influences the experience *journalists* have of changes to their newswork network.

<sup>55</sup> As discussed in footnote 19, this process deals with dismissals, or retrenchments, based on the “employer’s operational requirements” (Republic of South Africa, 2002).

together”. He explains that the photographer might pick up something that the journalist missed: “It is a team effort.” Similarly, explains Simon Sonnekus, a journalist from Johannesburg:

A photographer did not only take photos, you always knew that when you had a photographer with you that you had a sounding board.

Now, adds Sonnekus, there is an expectation that journalists have to do so much more. Sonnekus and his newsroom colleagues thus make it clear that for them the photographers are, or rather were, key actors in the newswork network. It would follow that the majority of these journalists were socialised into newsrooms where photographers played a big role (in this case mostly print newsrooms). As suggested by Bourdieu, the professional journalistic habitus of the majority of Netwerk24 journalists thus shows signs of a “collective history” which guides their thinking, understanding and patterns of perception (Bourdieu & Chartier, 2015:52).

While still news editor in Cape Town, Carryn-Ann Nel also says having only one photographer is really difficult “from a news management perspective” since you “constantly have to make plans *and* mistakes” when it comes to decisions on where to send that one photographer for the day.

In addition to the loss of photographers, many journalists – and news managers – appear concerned about the high staff turnover and shrinking newsroom at Netwerk24 in general. Claudi Mailovich, a Johannesburg-based journalist, tells me in April 2017 that she thinks

... one has to give a lot, a lot, a lot of credit for people who are working under very difficult circumstances. It is not easy when you sit with a newsroom of two, three people... It is Tuesday, and we are like three people in the office.

When I ask Jo van Eeden in July 2016 what her biggest challenge as editor is, she says she is “busy losing personnel”. Van Eeden calls Netwerk24 the “digital incubator for talent”, explaining that people are recruited out of this newsroom to other Media24 titles – and beyond the company – when it becomes clear what skill-set they have.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Based on a cursory overview of the career paths of some of the journalists who left Netwerk24 between May 2016 and November 2017, Van Eeden’s view seem to hold water. Reza van Rooyen, for instance, joined the ATKV, an Afrikaans cultural organisation, to become its head of digital media, and Alet Janse van Rensburg became opinions editor at News24.

When I point out to Adriaan Basson – after he had left Netwerk24 – that many of the journalists who had worked under his editorship<sup>57</sup> have also resigned, he says he is sorry that there are people “who feel that they could not stay there when I left”. He adds, however, that he is also “very proud” of what these journalists have achieved and where they have moved to:

And hopefully their experience of Netwerk[24], the culture, the kind of open culture that we had there, but also the digital knowledge that they gained there, will help them in the future.

When I speak to Van Eeden in April 2017, she says she now believes the turnover rate has “stabilised” somewhat. She adds that she does not believe that this trend is unique to Netwerk24, but rather “in line with the industry”.

Later in 2017 in my conversation with Henriëtte Loubser, as new editor, she concedes that the high staff turnover “must be incredibly disruptive for an editorial team”, due in part to the fact that “each new editor and head of news bring a new style”. Loubser adds that she tries to tell them that “there is a specific direction that we are heading – hopefully for several years”. Furthermore, while she cannot be sure that specific individuals will remain in their current positions, she hopes that there will be a sense of stability.

It would thus appear that the journalists themselves crave, and aim, for a sense of order in the newsroom. Yet, they seem to have made peace with the fact that the introduction, or loss, of actors in the newsroom can destabilise the network because of the influence such actors might have had on the construction of newsroom culture.

Journalists also seem somewhat unsure – especially during my first visits – about their role in constantly updating the Netwerk24 website. Based on my observations and interactions with the journalists, it appears as though the need to work in shifts to maintain Netwerk24 as a 24/7 news website was the biggest stumbling block in this instance. The first diary meeting I attend in May 2016 already attests to this fact when Liezel de Lange, as news editor in Johannesburg, talks about the “unhappiness” there has been around the shift roster. On the following day, journalist Tarryn-Lee Habelgaarn comes in to work the night shift (between 12:00 and 20:00). Habelgaarn tells me in an informal conversation that this is a “weird shift”, because when news breaks in the evening, you have to stay later.

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<sup>57</sup> As discussed above, the majority of the so-called first Netwerk24 team left within a year after Basson moved to News24.

Some journalists, however, seem to understand that there needs to be “a lot of experiments” around newswork, which includes changes to working hours, as George Germishuys tells me in Cape Town:

There are constantly things that they change to adapt to the spikes; to have a news supply by the time people go online, so that hundred thousand people do not come online at eight o’clock to realise the same things as last night are still on the website.

On the other hand, Marelize Barnard, a journalist from Cape Town, tells me in July 2016 that she does not think that “the people who take the decisions know what will get hits”:

It is a bit like trusting your luck... I do not think there is a style guide, and there is not something that tells you: Okay, we have experienced that when we put this type of story up at two o’clock it will get this type of attention, or that amount of hits or whatever.

Many journalists also do not understand why they are being rushed to produce stories to tight deadlines when their stories are not immediately uploaded on the website. Tasha<sup>58</sup>, while admitting that the newsroom and website are still in a “baby phase”, tells me in July 2016 that

... here and there we mutter amongst ourselves about things like, you know, the deadlines are so early, but then the stuff does not go online. You will hear such comments. People who say that the subs want our work now, but then two hours later it is still not on the web, so why did I have to file it now?

A few months later Alet Janse van Rensburg, a journalist from Cape Town who also substitutes as news editor, confirms to me that not all journalists understand the process of digital-first news production:

I do not think everyone necessarily comprehends how the production process works. Because when we say: ‘File now,’ it means that we want to be able to publish the story in half an hour or an hour. Because if you only

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<sup>58</sup> Tasha is a pseudonym for a journalist in her 20s.

file in an hour, it will only be online in two hours. So I do not think there is a proper understanding of this.

I would argue that the divergent views illustrated here is another indication that the lack of clear communication, in this case around the role of user analytics, can have a detrimental effect on the newswork network. Journalists who do not understand their role in the news production process might become demotivated, which makes them less likely to perform optimally and thus contribute to a constructive newsroom culture.

When I return to the Johannesburg office for the third time in August 2017, not all the kinks in the shift system have seemingly been straightened out. I observe, for instance, a conversation between Vicus Bürger as news editor and Hannes Kruger, one of the journalists, in this regard. There seems to be a disagreement about when Kruger has days off for working the weekend shift, with Bürger referring to the shift roster and Kruger to how things have been done in the past (presumably before Bürger took over as news editor). Jo-Ann Floris, deputy editor, tells me in the same month:

There was a lot of resistance against the national shift system. But it comes down to the same principle: if we are not going to change our mind-sets, how will we ever be able to change the mind-sets of our readers?

There also seem to be journalists who are not yet sure how digital-first news production happens in practice. Marga Ley, who works as day or night editor from the Pretoria office, says journalists do not, for instance, understand that you cannot upload all your strong stories to the website at the same time – even if they as journalists were pushed by their news managers to finish a story. She adds that the judgment of the home page editor and the real-time user analytics determine how the website is managed from an editorial vantage point. Ley adds that

... every person to whom I explained [the process] did not know about it all. So I think there is still a complete chasm between the journalists and the people who work on the [content management system]. The journalists still have the newspaper in mind. And they do not understand why they should hurry up if something is not necessarily uploaded immediately.

These types of misunderstandings, or mere ignorance, of processes and practices arguably strengthen the call by some journalists and news managers for more training and mentorship. Editor Jo van Eeden tells me in July 2016 that “the more skills you can give your people, the better” – especially in the current newswork environment.

Journalists are divided about whether the training for digital-first newswork they had already received, for instance to understand how the digital content management system worked or how to shoot video, had been successful and whether they need this type of formal training at all. Elsabé Brits, a senior journalist from Cape Town, says in July 2016 that she would like to have the skill to work with the digital content management system:

But that training was, firstly, far too short. I think it was three days' worth of training where you just sit and play around. But it is a bit disturbing to me, because we are going to be left behind, and I want to have those skills.

Justine<sup>59</sup> tells me that they were also not shown how to do live updates or how to embed videos in their stories: “Someone showed me yesterday, but just because I had to do it.” Johannesburg-based journalist Hannes Kruger agrees that they did not receive a lot of “formal” training for doing digital newswork – specifically at Netwerk24. He believes, however, that one can teach oneself by looking at the changes sub editors make to a story, for instance. According to Kruger, some news managers communicate with journalists about style issues, but for the rest you just “use your own logic”. Claudi Mailovich, another Johannesburg-based journalist, agrees that “journalism in general is something that you learn practically while you work”. These statements confirm the generally accepted view that journalists are socialised into the profession by learning and adopting “the routines and unwritten rules of newsgathering and production” (Paulussen, 2016:328).

Based on the journalists' impressions of training, it is not surprising that very few journalists feel that they are being mentored – or do any mentorship themselves. Maxine<sup>60</sup>, for instance, feels that people “keep to themselves” too much in the newsroom: “When you come in here, you are on your own. No-one here is going to help you.” Kruger agrees that “when you start work here, you figure everything out for yourself”. Carryn-Ann Nel says when she walked into the Cape Town newsroom office as news editor she did not receive any training: “I just did what I saw my news editor do with me. So there was no official handover.” However, Jeanelle Greyling, a journalist from Johannesburg, while acknowledging that she sometimes feels she does not receive a lot of guidance, adds that

... perhaps it is up to us to decide: Okay, I am going to ask Jo-Ann [Floris, deputy editor] some questions, because she is always willing to help. I have realised that the older people want to help us, and give us guidance. We should just not act as though we know everything.

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<sup>59</sup> Justine is the pseudonym for a journalist in her 20s.

<sup>60</sup> Maxine is the pseudonym for a journalist in her 20s.

Like many other journalists, Jeanne-Marié Versluis from Pretoria believes that the potential for mentorship is undermined by the lack of time in the newsroom. According to Versluis, mentorship might happen “to some extent”, but that when she started as a journalist (more than 20 years ago) she was assigned a specific mentor: “Things are happening too fast for that type of structured mentorship. That is why we do not even have [diary] meetings here.”

Henriëtte Loubser, editor, agrees that mentorship “sometimes lags behind because everything happens so quickly”. But, similar to Jeanelle Greyling, she believes journalists should also take responsibility to follow up how their stories were changed during the rest of the production process:

I think it is a two-way street. People must realise that in the end you are the owner of your own career. There are more than enough opportunities to learn; people that you can approach. Here are many wise, highly experienced journalists on the staff.

Claudi Mailovich, a Johannesburg-based journalist, raises the issue of continuity when talking about the guidance and mentorship people need in the newsroom. According to Mailovich, practices and processes – such as how to file breaking news stories – need to be communicated very clearly; perhaps in a style guide:

It does not help a lot if people build a product, and know where the pitfalls are, and then they leave – and someone has to learn how to navigate the pitfalls again.

Mailovich’s call to retain institutional knowledge is another indication of the deciding role people with a lot of journalistic capital can play in the newsroom. I would argue that such capable journalists would be key mediators in the network, while at the same time contributing to structuring the practices of journalists based on their existing knowledge of digital-first news production.

## **7.5 Holding on to traditional conceptualisations of newswork**

In Chapter 5 (section 5.4) I reflected on the lack of observation in my field notes about traditional journalistic values and role conceptualisations during my first visits to the newsroom. My argument is that such traditional conceptualisations of newswork is often assumed, rather than overtly discussed, in the newsroom. I therefore make a point of asking journalists during interviews about their understanding of “non-negotiable” journalistic requirements – especially during my last round of

newsroom visits in 2017. The main themes that emerge here can be summarised as the need to retain the quality of reporting despite the digital-first nature of the newswork, the enduring importance of so-called traditional journalistic values, and the need to adhere to the basic tenets of what is considered newsworthy.

Claudi Mailovich, a Johannesburg-based journalist, emphasises that “it does not help if you get the highest number of clicks on earth but you do not have quality”. For most of the journalists accuracy is the most important measure of quality reporting. Simon Sonnekus, another journalist from Johannesburg, tells me that credibility of sources and correct facts are what distinguish the work Netwerk24 journalists do from so-called fake news.

The need for fairness, often in lieu of the elusive objectivity, is also highlighted by journalists. Jeanelle Greyling, a journalist from Johannesburg, says “we feel this is what distinguishes Netwerk24 from other publications: the fact that we try to maintain that balance, and that we really try to produce quality news”. In Cape Town journalist Carryn Ann-Nel agrees that the non-negotiables of quality journalism include getting “comment from everyone involved; to remain objective; to report accurately; to not choose sides; and to get the important story of the day out there as soon as possible”.

There are, however, some journalists who feel that the need to produce news reports to tighter deadlines sometimes has a negative influence on the quality of their reporting. Various news managers also confirm to me that they are concerned about the quality of news reports – in terms of depth and context, as well as language use and style. Marga Ley, home page editor in Pretoria, says “the young people’s writing is sometimes just frightening”. Nadia Honiball, national head of news, says she does not think the quality of news “depends on the platform”. She is seemingly more concerned about the training, or lack thereof, of some of the journalists.

It is noteworthy that most of the journalists, news managers and editors agree with Honiball that the enduring journalistic values are not platform-specific. Alet Janse van Rensburg, a journalist from Cape Town, for instance, says

... the old journalistic principles still count: that you often have to process dense and difficult information or package it for your reader – the layman out there – to understand. It is still basic [Journalism] 101; you just have to do it much faster now.

Ügen Vos, a Johannesburg-based journalist, says “everything has changed, but everything remains the same” because the process of digital-first news production is “very similar” to how news was produced in the past. Arlene Prinsloo, web editor, agrees:

Things have changed drastically, but the more things change, the more they stay the same. Those things that we learned all those years ago about making sure you get the story right; to ask the questions and to make sure you spell the name right – those things are as important as ever.

Tasha<sup>61</sup> agrees that she does not really experience working at Netwerk24 as different from working at *Die Burger*. According to her, there is just

... a difference in the writing style. I think there is also a difference in what is now important. Our readership has changed, so that is a bit of an adjustment. ... Your job is not really different. You still go and search for news. Newsworthiness still counts.

George Germishuys, a journalist in Cape Town, agrees that the “standard principles still count”, but adds that

... it is a case of constantly experimenting; constantly [gaining] new skills; constantly finding new ways to do things. ... Things change the whole time, and you have to be willing to learn, otherwise you are going to be left behind.

It is thus apparent that journalists, despite holding on to traditional conceptualisations of journalism, are painfully aware of the instability that has become the new norm in their newswork network (as discussed in more detail in section 8.4).

Cape Town-based journalist Carryn-Ann Nel highlights the importance of serving, as well as challenging, the reader as another traditional journalistic principle. According to her, it remains important for Netwerk24 as news website to not just “copy what is out there already”. She says they need to produce unique content first, adding that

... we still have to challenge our readers without alienating them. Because I think to find that balance is our job... I think as much as we should listen to

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<sup>61</sup> Tasha is a pseudonym for a journalist in her 20s.

our readers who tell us what they want to read and what stories they enjoy, we should also be taking them out of their comfort zone by giving them more difficult things to read.

The need to cling to these and other traditional conceptualisations of journalism supports the notion that journalists' current practices are influenced by their historical sensibilities, as captured by the professional journalistic habitus. Journalists might feel constantly disrupted and forced to act in new ways in order to adhere to the requirements of digital-first news production. Yet, their actions and decision-making processes are often grounded in the "durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1990:53) that structure them as actors in the newswork network.

## 7.6 Summary

This chapter opened with a brief overview of the Netwerk24 journalists' educational backgrounds and other demographical detail. I also discussed journalists' perceptions of what it means to be a good multi-skilled journalist who is able to work in a digital-first environment. These definitions indicate – to varying degrees – that journalists concur that speed and accuracy are key to being a good digital-first journalist. Many journalists find it difficult to adhere to all the expectations of digital-first newswork.

The bulk of the chapter was dedicated to a discussion of newsroom culture at Netwerk24. According to my analysis, the culture in this national newsroom hinges on four main aspects: whether journalists feel part of the Netwerk24 team; how well they are informed of the vision for Netwerk24; the influence of specific newsroom personalities; and, finally, the challenges to their newswork that journalists face.

The chapter concluded with an overview of what journalists view as traditional, yet enduring, journalistic role conceptualisations and values.

In the next chapter, I discuss journalists' understanding of the future of newswork, and the continued disruptions that accompany that future.

## Chapter 8: Continued disruptions and the future of newswork

### 8.1 Introduction

The discussion of findings in the previous two chapters focused on the “how” and “why” of newswork at Netwerk24. I explored the practical aspects of daily newswork routines and practices, followed by an exploration of what I would argue could be considered the motivations behind some of these actions.

In this chapter I focus on how journalists experience and deal with continual changes to their newswork network, and how they view and feel about the future of professional journalism. Firstly, however, I address the important and evolving relationship between the various print titles and Netwerk24 as digital-first newsroom and news platform.

### 8.2 Where print and digital meet

As discussed in previous chapters, my visits to the Netwerk24 newsroom commenced in May 2016 – the same month in which former print-only journalists joined the Netwerk24 team. It is therefore understandable that journalists – on both sides of the spectrum – still had a number of insecurities about the relationship between the print and digital brands. Esmaré Weideman, CEO of Media24, tells me in November 2017 that she understands where the culture clashes and friction<sup>62</sup> between the so-called first Netwerk24 team and the newspapers came from:

The internet works on that Google phenomenon, the Google campus where you have to create this wonderful living environment for people. And I probably allowed it for too long. Because the people, who probably also work that hard, but who have to cope with more change that has more of an emotional impact on them, and who still deliver eighty percent of our company’s income and profit, are treated like stepchildren. That was a mistake.

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<sup>62</sup> A few Johannesburg-based journalists, for instance, mention how much tension developed about small things such as the coffee machine that was bought for the Netwerk24 team when they moved out of the newspaper office.

These references to the physical layout of an office, in this case as inspired by the Google campus idea<sup>63</sup>, support the notion that material “stuff” – as suggested by actor-network theory – can have a deciding influence on the atmosphere, or culture, in a newsroom. It would follow that even small changes, such as where journalists sit in an office, could destabilise the newswork network and create a sense of uncertainty.

While many of the uncertainties are addressed over the next year and a half of my newsroom visits, some challenges remain. In this section I discuss some of the key aspects of the relationship between the three daily<sup>64</sup> print titles and Netwerk24.

In an internal memo Weideman sends in April 2016 to announce the merger, it is explained that

... all the content producers – including news editors and journalists – currently at *Beeld*, *Die Burger* and *Volksblad* will move to Netwerk24 (as part of 24.com) to create a round-the-clock digital news flow... We will transform our newspapers into streamlined publication hubs that will pull content from Netwerk24.

Journalists who had been part of the digital-only team at first remained sceptical about the success of the merger. Many of them feel that it was a move backwards, instead of into a digital-first future.

Marida Fitzpatrick, editor of opinion, features and analysis, tells me in July 2016:

At this stage it feels to me as though we are a newspaper operation that also happens to be digital; not digital-first. It’s not a case of we’re digital second, our first priority is certainly not the newspapers. But it is almost as though we are doing both in equal measure. We are straddling two horses.

Her impression, which is shared by many of her colleagues, could arguably be traced back to the approach Adriaan Basson followed as editor between September 2015 and April 2016. From my observations and conversations with journalists – especially during the first half of 2016 – it becomes apparent that some of the practices enacted by Basson and his senior editorial staff, such as head of news Pieter du Toit, had a deciding influence on the dispositions of the journalists who had joined this team.

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<sup>63</sup> See also section 6.2.2 in which editor Adriaan Basson refers to the Cape Town offices of 24.com as “something out of Google”.

<sup>64</sup> According to an internal memo sent by Esmaré Weideman, CEO of Media24, shortly before the merge the Afrikaans Sunday newspaper *Rapport* was “not part of the new set-up but will continue to ‘take over’ Netwerk24 on weekends”.

Basson tells me – after he had left Netwerk24 – that he wanted to create a “start-up culture” and move out of the newspaper offices. His explanation of why such an approach is necessary, centres on the “incredible pull”, “legacy” and “gravitas” of the print brands:

You know, here comes Netwerk[24], a new brand, while *Beeld*<sup>65</sup> wants to use a specific story. Naturally *Beeld* will win. It is not something that you can really explain logically. But in that environment *Beeld* will always win the argument.

According to Basson, they needed to create an online culture in the Afrikaans newsrooms:

Because your whole day at a newspaper is shaped around the time that the printing presses start rolling in the evening. Everything that happens during a workday at a newspaper – the times that we meet, the times that people come to work, the page plans – everything is determined by that nine o’clock deadline when the printing press starts rolling. All of that falls away immediately [in a digital newsroom]. There are no printing presses. You publish continuously, and you publish specifically for your spikes: the morning spike, the afternoon spike and the late evening spike.

In apparent contrast to Basson, Jo van Eeden, who took over from Basson as editor in April 2016, makes it clear that to her mind the strategy was rather to

... let Netwerk[24] and the newspapers run almost like the two tracks of a train... so that they do not work against each other; that they do not work away from each other.

Van Eeden says during the time apart, so to speak, there was a “tension” that had to be managed between the print titles and Netwerk24, and that she thinks “there were also suspicions about who is holding what back from whom”. Shortly after the merger, Charles Smith, a senior member of the *Volksblad* editorial team in Bloemfontein, tells me that “we bought into this thing of digital-first”. He adds that as newspaper, therefore, “we cannot drive our own agenda in a secret room and tomorrow it is a surprise for everyone”. Pieter Redelinghuys, who works as home page editor in Cape Town, similarly says journalists have to realise that they cannot be “precious” about their stories anymore. According to Redelinghuys, journalists used to only give “a certain part” of a story to Netwerk24 and

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<sup>65</sup> Basson generally uses *Beeld* as example, since he was editor of this daily before he became the editor of Netwerk24.

then kept the rest for use in the newspaper. When I talk to him in September 2016, he says the “us and them” situation has become less pronounced.

Notwithstanding the obvious evolution of the relationship between the print titles and Netwerk24, some journalists and news managers still have some questions and concerns around it during my final round of newsroom visits in 2017. Editor Jo van Eeden admits that she has become “painfully aware” of the newspaper legacy and that you need people on your team who do not carry such a legacy. In Pretoria Marga Ley, a home page editor, tells me that this relationship is not necessarily “very friendly”. She explains that editors were “chief amongst many” and that they had “a lot of power”, but that that power has been taken away. Vicus Bürger, news editor in Johannesburg, agrees that the relationship is “good, but tense”. According to him, while some of the needs of the newspapers and Netwerk24 overlap, “there are still things that are very important to them but that are not necessarily so important to us – and *vice versa*”.

Other news managers are concerned about the lines of communication and how and by whom assignments are communicated to journalists. For some journalists it is difficult to negotiate the tension that develops when they interact with senior editorial staff at a newspaper – especially if they as journalists had been socialised to view the role of editors as key to the newswork network. Jo-Ann Floris, deputy editor at Netwerk24 in Johannesburg, says:

I still pick up that people from the newspapers go to the journalists to tell them that they want this and this for the newspaper. People who do not yet understand that they should not be giving out instructions. They can ask... [someone from the newspaper] do not walk over to a journalist and tell them that this is what they must do, because then [the journalist] receives instructions from three sides and what the hell are they supposed to do then?

Her view is supported by journalists such as Hannes Kruger, Jeanelle Greyling and Simon Sonnekus; the latter says it is “a bit irritating”, because for him it feels as though there is always “a second boss”. Bürger, however, says this relationship can be managed through “a lot of maturity and a lot of hard work” and that communication is necessary to “keep that relationship intact”. Charné Kemp, a Kimberley-based journalist, says she can deduce that

... there are still issues around authority; who gives assignments to whom. The newspapers use our news, but must request special stories, and not give assignments. Luckily, human relationships trump the official divisions, and we work together well. There are so few of us, so it is vital that we work together.

Van Eeden makes it clear, during our last conversation in April 2017, that all the newspaper editors understand that

... although Netwerk24 is the service provider of content, they are not passive receivers. Since they represent their communities and their newspapers, they have to give input from their side, about news tips and the stories that they want follow-ups on.

Editor Henriëtte Loubser similarly tells me in October 2017 that she experiences the newspaper editors as “incredibly cooperating”:

Naturally, there are still hiccups in the system. ... Over the past two weeks there have been a lot of emails about the fact that the correct workflow needs to be followed, otherwise things fall through the cracks... I think the most important thing is that the communication channels have to remain open.

My conversations with the three newspaper editors<sup>66</sup> seem to support Loubser’s view. I speak to Gert Coetzee (*Volksblad*) in May 2016, Barnard Beukman (*Beeld*) in August 2017 and Willem Jordaan (*Die Burger*) in September 2017.

Coetzee tells me, in the same month as the merger, that while the reporting lines have changed to Netwerk24, the “communication channels” stay open and that everyone is “very much on the same page” about how the production process has changed. As discussed in section 6.2.3, Coetzee sees Netwerk24 as a “news agency” that fulfils the needs of *Volksblad* as its client. Coetzee says he is “positive” and “excited” about this relationship. He adds that he told Netwerk24 editor Jo van Eeden that “as far as I see it there will – at least in the foreseeable future – be a need for a printed product such as *Volksblad*, in tandem with Netwerk24”.

Beukman appears adamant that removing the newspapers as brands from Netwerk24, as he believes was the case under Adriaan Basson’s editorship, was a “complete miscalculation” and a “fatal strategic mistake”. For Beukman the print brands are still important, because Netwerk24’s subscribers “come from that environment”: “My viewpoint is that the newspaper brands are important bridges to

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<sup>66</sup> Upon reflection about the themes that emerged from the analysis of findings for this study, I realised that it would skew the findings if I included the views of the newspaper editors throughout the presentation of findings in its entirety. Within the broader context of the study it, therefore, makes more sense to selectively refer to these editors’ views - especially in this section on the relationship between the print and digital titles, as well as the following section on the future of journalism. The analytical capabilities of ATLAS.ti made this distinction possible.

Netwerk[24].” He adds that “naturally there are some frustrations with such a working relationship”. Beukman makes it clear that these problems cannot be ascribed to the fact that Netwerk24 is an online publication:

We sit with challenges: juniorisation of the editorial environment and a lack of institutional memory. There has been a lot of staff cuts, so we sit with small, inexperienced editorial teams. ... As editor I have less and less of an ability to say: ‘Follow up on that’ ... But this is related to the shrinking of the whole media environment. I do not think it is specific to our relationship.

Jordaan confirms Basson’s explanation that a newspaper “runs on a different rhythm than a website like Netwerk24”, which he says asks for “calculated and efficient management – also on an *ad hoc* basis”. According to Jordaan, he sees Nadia Honiball, national head of news at Netwerk24, as a news editor at *Die Burger*: “I give my requests to her, and they are usually handled with utmost professionalism.” Similar to Beukman, Jordaan adds that while he sees things that concern him in the newsroom, “these are phenomena that were also present in the traditional newsroom”. He explains that journalists, for instance, nowadays rely too much on internet and social media to gather information, but that similar concerns were raised about so-called “telephone journalism” decades ago: “So it is actually just an old problem in a new format.”

This widely held view that the more things change, the more they stay the same, is a recurring theme of my observations and conversations with journalists. It is clear that, as traditional conceptualisations of journalism remain, so too does the perception that there will always be similar issues and actors that contribute to a sense of disorder in the newsroom. One example of this is the oft-cited view that the use of social media as newsgathering tools is equal to the introduction of so-called telephone journalism to replace old-fashioned shoe-leather reporting.

All three newspaper editors in essence agree with Van Eeden, who says “a large part of our readership who are at the newspapers are, of course, people whom we want to migrate to Netwerk[24]”. Jordaan at *Die Burger* explains:

The division between print and digital has long since disappeared. Everyone is fully aware of the project of building a sustainable home for quality journalism in Afrikaans. So one should use the newspapers.

As editor-in-chief of the daily newspapers, in addition to her role as editor at Netwerk24, Jo van Eeden explains in July 2016 that the challenge face is that

... we cannot migrate [readers] to something that is not recognisable to them; something that makes them angry. We cannot migrate them to something that is unfamiliar to them; or something that offends them. It has to be a familiar environment.

Ilse Schoombee, morning editor in Cape Town, similarly says (in September 2017) that the strength of Netwerk24 – and the reason why people would be willing to pay for accessing the website – can be ascribed to the “credibility” of the print brands. She believes people understand that these newspapers have credibility, because they use “a traditional way of gathering news. It is not just people who do a story for the internet without following any rules.”

Esmaré Weideman, CEO of Media24, tells me they all know that “at some stage the print brands will disappear... whether it will be in five or fifty years, it will happen”. She agrees with the newspaper editors that there are a “big bunch of readers” that whom have to take with them “across that bridge” between the print titles and Netwerk24: “I think the individual brands contribute to that a lot.”

### **8.3 Looking to the future**

Reza van Rooyen, first day editor at Netwerk24, rightly says in the journalism industry “you can never rest on your laurels and be comfortable, because you do not know who is going to have the next brainwave”. She says no-one at the newspapers thought about what would happen with the arrival of social media such as Facebook “and then it came and changed everything”. This view supports the notion that non-human actors, such as digital media technologies, could have a telling influence on the way newsroom actors, both human and non-human, associate with each other in the newsroom. While these technologies soon become naturalised in the newsroom, as is argued throughout this dissertation, their initial introduction into the network still cause disruption; the kind of disruption that could have a lasting effect on the future of the newswork network and the way journalists are socialised into the newsroom culture.

Some journalists seem pessimistic about the future of newswork in general. André Damons, a journalist from Bloemfontein, for instance, says he wants to dissuade his younger brother from studying towards the same career as him. While I am busy observing him at work in Johannesburg, then head of news Pieter du Toit also asks me directly how many journalism students we are training,

adding that he does not know where they are supposed to get jobs. His view is supported by the fact that many journalists feel that they do not have a sense of job security. Maxine<sup>67</sup> says she feels that

... everyone is just putting their heads down and trying to carry on. Because since things are not going well in the industry at the moment, you just have to be happy that you are not part of that group that is begin retrenched.

Jeanne-Marié Versluis, a journalist from the Pretoria office, says she believes that all journalists, not just those at Netwerk24, are working on a “Plan B” in terms of their own careers because of this uncertainty about the future.

Other journalists believe that professional journalism will always have a place in society. Elsabé Brits, a journalist from Cape Town, says it is not true that anyone can be a journalist these days: “The skill is still whether you can write, and whether you can write *well*.” Editor Henriëtte Loubser adds that she thinks journalism has a future because

... at the end of the day there should still be someone who separated the wheat from the chaff. People have such an absolute overload of information that I think there will come a point where they want things to be simplified and a place where they can go for that.

Similarly, Barnard Beukman, editor at *Beeld*, says he thinks it is “critical that independent journalism survives”. He believes that this independence “is under attack”. According to Beukman, the watchdog role of the media must survive, and companies must keep on investing in it. Beukman adds that for him it is noteworthy that the survival of independent journalism “does not depend on a specific format”, and that it is irrelevant whether this future lies in online or print. This is another confirmation of the fact that journalists hold on to traditional conceptualisations of journalism amidst changes to their newswork network; also in as far as their understanding of what the audience wants.

Celinda Marais, audience development manager at Netwerk24 in Cape Town, also agrees that “the reality is that print will not last forever”, adding that “the guys who loved the telegram were probably really crazy about the telegram”, but that everyone needs to learn how to adapt. Similarly, Jeanelle Greyling, a journalist in Johannesburg, says while one should really start to believe the reality that “newspapers are dying” she believes that it is a positive thing that at Netwerk24

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<sup>67</sup> Maxine is the pseudonym for a journalist in her 20s.

... they experiment the whole time and when they see that something is not working they stop it. They learn the whole time. And the fact that you have help with the analytics and stuff, means that [Netwerk24's] survival is kind of guaranteed.

However, the fact that Netwerk24 has a paywall seems to be of some concern. Vicus Bürger, news editor in Johannesburg, says he thinks journalism is “extremely important” in a country like South Africa, and that he hopes the majority of news users realise that, “because our existence depends on them”. Cape Town-based journalist Marelize Barnard says it is “actually understandable that the news industry is struggling”, because people do not see news as a commodity that should be paid for. Journalist Jeanne-Marie Versluis says she is worried about the “sustainability” of Netwerk24, “because we are working for a product that is not making money”.

It is noteworthy here that Jo van Eeden, while still editor at Netwerk24 in April 2017, tells me that she has to manage the Netwerk24 salary budget “downwards”. She also tells me that Netwerk24 suffered substantial losses in the financial year that preceded our conversation. For Van Eeden it is therefore important that journalists be aware of and focused on which stories users try to subscribe for, since widening the subscription base of Netwerk24 is one of the key factors determining its success. Henriëtte Loubser, as new editor, confirms this to me when we speak in October 2017 when she says “naturally” there should be enough traffic to the website, but

... the big thing, the ultimate thing, that we will be measured on, and that overshadows everything else, is how many subscribers we get.

In a similar vein, Willem Jordaan, editor at *Die Burger*, says the future of journalism, in their context, relies on journalists producing a “quality product for which people will be willing to pay”, adding that he thinks

... our readers also need to be educated to make them understand that the gathering of news, quality news, is an expensive process. And for them to understand that the survival of that type of journalism in Afrikaans is something worth paying for; it cannot be judged in the same way as the oversupply of free news that you can get elsewhere on the web.

Esmaré Weideman, CEO of Media24, says they want to “get two things right” with the future of Netwerk24: “We want to migrate our readers with us, and we want to create the habit of people paying for quality content in Afrikaans.” She adds that her dream and her vision for Netwerk24

... is that we increase our subscriber base; that we create a sustainable bridge to the future; that we can convince our advertisers that this is a very valuable market segment; and that we can personalise our service in such a way that it is really a good reader experience.

Cape Town-based journalist Carryn-Ann Nel believes they should be “patient” in their attempts to make Netwerk24 more successful, “because it will not happen overnight” and that they have to remember “that we serve a niche market”. Her experience, she says, is that Netwerk24 is certainly the future of Afrikaans journalism: “I have absolutely no doubt that this is the right place to be”.

The role of Netwerk24 as digital home for *Afrikaans* news specifically, is thus raised by various participants in the study. Jana Marx, a journalist in Johannesburg, says “as long as there are Afrikaans people, Afrikaans news will be in demand”.<sup>68</sup> Arlene Prinsloo, web editor, says she thinks Netwerk24 will be the “go-to place” for news for Afrikaans-speaking people. Ilse Schoombee, morning editor in Cape Town, thinks that “if Afrikaans journalism needs to be protected somewhere”, it should be at Netwerk24. Nadia Honiball, head of news, adds that “when you produce Afrikaans news in this country, there are still people who believe in it”, which means that “people are not going to give up on Netwerk24”. Esmaré Weideman, CEO of Media24, emphasises this view when she says:

It is incredibly important to us that quality Afrikaans journalism lives on: for our language, our democracy, for our readers and for our company.

## 8.4 Change is the only constant

Henriëtte Loubser, editor at Netwerk24, emphasises that having a feeling of uncertainty is not unique to Media24 or Netwerk24. According to her, not even the journalists at the *New York Times* have work security, adding that

... the quicker that everyone throws their weight behind [the strategy for Netwerk24], or the quicker that we help to grow our subscriptions, and the quicker that people make the digital mind-shift and realise that they have an actual contribution to make to help subscribers grow, the quicker there will

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<sup>68</sup> According to the latest national census results, as released in 2011, 13.5% of South Africans list Afrikaans as their first language (Statistics South Africa, n.d). This amounts to around 7 million out of a total population of around 51.7 million (Statistics South Africa, n.d).

be work security. But as long as we do not make enough money, it will not disappear completely.

Similarly, Le Roux Schoeman, multimedia editor, believes that a “pastoral approach” of telling everyone that there is a place for them and that they will be okay “is not honest or necessary”, because he really does not think they can say that “everyone will be okay”. In the same vein, Vicus Bürger tells me in May 2016, while still news editor in Bloemfontein, that he does not think “we are ever going to be comfortable in our industry again”, because things keep on changing. The majority of the journalists are aware of the fact that change and instability are the new normal in the newsroom. As Tasha<sup>69</sup> says: “The job of a journalist is to adapt or die, and we adapt very quickly”. Similarly, Selloane Khalane, a journalist in Bloemfontein, says “the media space is changing dramatically” and that they should “all keep up”.

Esmaré Weideman, CEO of Media24, acknowledges that Netwerk24 has “naturally been through various iterations”:

That is just the way it is. You will not know today what will be wrong in two years. I think that is why your people have to be future fit; that they must be able to move quickly in terms of change. It is very important, so that people do not tell you – and I hear rumblings every now and then – that you said this two years ago, and now we are doing something different again. Yes, that was two years ago, and we are doing something different now. So you iterate based on what you have.

Instances of instability, and perhaps even a sense of chaos, have thus become the new norm in this newswork network. It is therefore important to not only look at the way the newswork network is transformed through the introduction of new actors (or experimentation), but also at how such changes can influence the professional habitus of the journalists, and the way they act in the future.

Not all journalists find it so easy to adapt to change. Claudi Mailovich, a journalist in Johannesburg, for instance, tells me in April 2017 that she “sucks” at change and that

... over the past year we have been clobbered with change. You basically try to cope, because there are these waves of changes coming. When you blink

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<sup>69</sup> Tasha is a pseudonym for a journalist in her 20s.

you have a new news editor, and when you blink again, you have a new head of news, or you see that more people have been laid off.

Jeanne-Marié Versluis, a journalist from Pretoria, says while others might disagree with her, over the past three years she has experienced “growing concern”, because “it feels to me as though I am treading water; it feels like a halfway house”. She adds that she does not “feel safe”; also because of the “restructuring processes”<sup>70</sup> that are continually happening around them. Journalist Carryn-Ann Nel in Cape Town agrees that these restructuring processes make her feel as though there is not a lot of stability, because it is “always at the back of your mind that it can happen to me too. I hope it does not, but it can”. Sarel van der Walt, another journalist from Pretoria, agrees that the “build-up and development” of Netwerk24

... unfortunately had a very detrimental effect on people and caused uncertainty. It resulted in us losing many senior people who were experts in their fields... They never gave it as their official reason, but when you spoke to them, they told you that the uncertainty was killing them, and if they got another opportunity they would be gone.

Jo-Ann Floris, deputy editor, tells me that Netwerk24 is still “a business in transit” and a “work in progress”. She acknowledges that the restructuring processes cause “uncertainty and fear” and make people “very jittery”. According to her, the people they have lost through resignations did not even “leave for a lot of money”, but “because they felt safer somewhere else”.

It is thus noteworthy that Henriëtte Loubser, as editor, says if she appoints a new journalist now, she would be looking for “someone who can live with change” and who has “incredible work ethic”:

Let me put it like this: I am going to search for someone who is passionate about their career; who does not only see this as an eight to five job, but an opportunity to fulfil themselves, and who will invest in it. Not just someone who wants to do it from eight to five, and earn their salary – even if they deliver good work between eight and five. You are looking for those people who are willing to walk the extra mile, and who has initiative, and who would not mind change. Because there are still a lot of changes to come.

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<sup>70</sup> This restructuring refers to the retrenchment of editorial staff via the so-called 189 process referenced in footnote 19. Over my almost 18 months in the newsroom the restructuring had directly affected the photographers, the sub editors and the political reporters in parliament.

Loubser tells me she now hopes for more stability “with line managers and such”, because it has been “a stormy period” with a lot of experimentation. She believes the strategy for Netwerk24 that everyone (including parent company Naspers) has bought into “will also bring stability”. Vicus Bürger, news editor in Johannesburg, agrees that one of the big problems is that journalists have to report to different people the whole time, so if you

... at least have one constant in the news editor that already helps a lot. ...  
The more you get used to everything that is new, the easier it becomes to know what is expected of you... you know what the line of communication is and you develop a sense of understanding – especially if it is a bit of a volatile environment... So I think in the chaos, there is order.

In my final interview, with Esmaré Weideman, CEO of Media24, she says she thinks that during

... periods of such incredibly change... communication is actually most important. And I have a suspicion that we are all so busy – with so many balls in the air – that we do not do enough in this regard. We should probably communicate more.

## 8.5 Summary

This final chapter (of three) to present my findings opened with a discussion on how journalists and editors – including the editors of the print titles – view and describe the evolving relationship between the print titles and Netwerk24 as digital brand. It is clear from these findings that the relationship is often fraught with challenges and that not all the journalists are completely clear on what the *status quo* is.

Secondly, this chapter discusses the study participants’ views on the future of journalism in general – and Netwerk24 specifically. While many journalists feel unsure about the way forward, others are more confident that professional journalism, and specifically journalism in Afrikaans at Netwerk24, will survive.

The final section in the presentation of my findings served to highlight the fact that, to refer back to Brock (2013:107) as cited in Chapter 1, “periods of stability are the exception and not the rule”.

The final chapter of the study summarises key aspects of the study in order to answer the general and specific research questions, as well as make recommendations to both the management of Netwerk24, as well as future journalism studies researchers.

## Chapter 9: Conclusion

### 9.1 Introduction

This study set out to explore and describe newswork at Netwerk24 during a time of disruption and transition. It thus aimed to look at the everyday routines, practices and cultures at Netwerk24 as they are influenced by changes to the newswork network. These changes are related to, but not exclusively determined by, the use of digital media technologies. Newsroom culture and traditional conceptualisations of newswork are also key determinants of how journalists experience and describe such changes to their network.

In this chapter I firstly summarise the research project. Thereafter I set out the contributions the study makes on an empirical, theoretical and methodological level. As part of the discussion on the empirical contribution I respond to the four specific research questions as set out in Chapter 1. These specific questions are: i) How are Netwerk24 journalists socialised into the professional cultures and practices of their newsroom network?; ii) What is Netwerk24 journalists' understanding of the role digital media technologies play within their newswork and network?; iii) What strategies do Netwerk24 journalists use to deal with changes to their newswork network?; and, iv) How do Netwerk24 journalists view the future of the cultures and practices within the professional network they are a part of?

The general research question is answered in the section that presents the overall conclusions of the study. This general research question of this study is: How do journalists as actors within a network in transition experience newswork at Netwerk24?

This chapter also serves to acknowledge certain limitations the study has, before making recommendations for both Netwerk24 and future journalism studies projects.

### 9.2 Summary of research project

As background to the study, **Chapter 1** discussed the motivation for the study as a combination of my own interest in the research phenomenon, as well as the need to address disruptions to newswork due to the appropriation of digital media technologies. It was made clear, however, that a deterministic view of technology does not account for cultural factors that influence how journalists experience and respond to changes to their newswork.

To situate my study within the context of the broader research problem, I described the precarious state of journalism as industry and profession – on both an international and local level. It was also established that questions remain about journalists' perceptions of the disruptions to their newswork network – precisely because newsroom-based, ethnographic studies are still quite rare. Such studies are especially limited within the South African, and arguably the African, context.

This chapter also introduced the theoretical assumptions and methodological approach of the study, as elaborated on in Chapters 3 and 4. I also introduced the problem statement and research questions that are addressed in this chapter. It was also important to define some of the key terms used in this study, which include “newswork”, “digital media technologies”, the concept of the “network” and “habitus”.

**Chapter 2** provided an overview of the literature relevant to this study. I indicated that this study would fill a gap in existing literature since Netwerk24 is an under-researched site, but also because there is an apparent dearth of qualitative studies from *within* the newsroom within the South African context. It was made clear that the need to study the adoption of digital media technologies in the newsroom has made way for a more specific focus on how journalists experience the appropriation and normalisation of such technologies and the resultant changes to their newswork network.

In reviewing the literature I explored the roots of journalism studies as a multi-disciplinary field of enquiry. Despite its wide-ranging origins, it is apparent that journalism studies has over the past few decades been established as an academic research field in its own right. I explained that my study is not intended to serve as a comparative media studies project, but rather focuses on empirical and sociological aspects of journalism studies, as highlighted by Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009a).

This chapter again warned against a deterministic stance towards the introduction of technology in the newsroom. Notwithstanding this cautionary note, in order to explore disruptions and transitions in the newsroom it remains necessary to describe how digital media technologies have been adopted, and, more importantly, described by journalists. It was evident from the literature reviewed that both journalists and journalism studies researchers seem to take either a positive or more cautionary approach to the introduction and influence of any new technology in the newsroom.

The origin and evolution of newsroom ethnography were also discussed in Chapter 2. The so-called classical newsroom studies from the 1970s and 1980s established this methodology as relevant to opening the “black boxes” of newswork. The oft-quoted view of Cottle (2000) that there is a need for a “second wave” of newsroom studies that account for the influence of technology was analysed. In addition, I discussed some of the early studies on the adoption of various new technologies during journalistic routines and practices. Attention was also paid to how journalists experience and talk

about such disruptions to their newswork and some of the key themes that emerge from the abundance of studies that have to date explored such experiences.

As introduction to Netwerk24 as website and newsroom, Chapter 2 concluded with an overview of the origins of Netwerk24 – within the broader Naspers and Media24 context.

In **Chapter 3** the theoretical underpinning of this study was presented as a combination of habitus and actor-network theory. I explained the central theoretical departure point of this study thus: Netwerk24 journalists share certain professional dispositions that influence, and are influenced by, their roles within the newswork network where they interact and associate with each other and the digital media technologies they use.

The combination of habitus and actor-network theory to describe and analyse newswork at Netwerk24 is, as far as my review of literature indicated, a novel approach. I acknowledged that the combination of these two concepts could be criticised because of their underlying ontological and epistemological differences. I am confident, however, that Chapter 3 has indicated that there are enough ways in which habitus and actor-network theory can complement each other to make this approach relevant to my study.

The three key areas for analysis that were unlocked by the combination of habitus and actor-network theory was summarised as: i) helping to understand how journalists are professionally socialised into their newsroom network, which includes digital media technologies, and how they consequently structure their newsroom because of such socialisation processes; ii) aiding in an understanding of how human and non-human actors associate in the newsroom and to what extent such associations originate from, and lead to, both order and disorder; and, iii) allowing for the opening of the “black box” of newswork at Netwerk24 through an exploration and description of the dispositions and associations form *inside* this black box.

My application of ethnography as research design was discussed in **Chapter 4**. I defined ethnography as applied to journalism studies and discussed the way I employed this methodology to my own study in detail. Key aspects of ethnography, and how they were relevant to my own approach, were highlighted. These include some of the challenges around access to newsrooms, which in my case was mitigated by my knowledge of both the newsroom environment, as well as my previous relationships with key participants in the study. Another issue that could potentially create stumbling blocks to an ethnographic study centres on the ethical considerations. I made it clear that I followed strict ethical clearance processes through a formal application to Stellenbosch University’s ethics committee, as well as clear informed consent from all participants in the study. The final challenges highlighted in Chapter 4 were very practical: the necessary limitations, mostly in terms of time management, caused

by my position as lecturer at the Department of Journalism at Stellenbosch University; the costs involved in travelling to the various newsrooms; and, the large amount of data I gathered – and had to translate from Afrikaans to English.

The rest of Chapter 4 was dedicated to outlining how I gathered and analysed the data for this study. I introduced the concepts of experiencing (observations), enquiring (interviews) and examining (document analysis). The use of qualitative data analysis software, specifically ATLAS.ti (version 7), to dissect my data was also discussed.

Following Bourdieu's suggestion of reflexivity, **Chapter 5** presented my personal reflections on the research process. I explained the reasons why my position as so-called hackademic influenced my approach – on both a positive and more negative level. The way I used my field notes to guide my interviews and follow-up visits to the newsroom was also described. As was the case in previous chapters, I acknowledged some of the apparent stumbling blocks I encountered and what I did to mitigate such challenges.

In the next three chapters I presented my research findings according to the three broad focus areas that emerged from my analysis of data through ATLAS.ti: **Chapter 6** looked at the very practical elements of newswork at Netwerk24, including the apparent influence of key digital media technologies; **Chapter 7** explored what could be considered the motivations behind journalists' everyday routines and practices, which include definitions of digital-first journalism, various aspects of newsroom culture, and traditional conceptualisations of newswork; and, **Chapter 8** discussed various aspects of the future of traditional journalism, specifically at Netwerk24, from the vantage point of the participants in the study.

This chapter, **Chapter 9**, concludes the study by discussing the contributions this study makes, answering the research questions, as well as making some recommendations for the future.

### 9.3 Contributions of study

This section analyses the contribution of my study on three levels: empirical, theoretical and methodological. My description of the empirical contribution of the study answers the specific research questions, and can thus also be seen as an analysis of the research findings presented in the preceding three chapters – which includes contextualising the findings from a theoretical vantage point. It then follows that I can thereafter summarise my general theoretical contribution based on the use of habitus and actor-network theory to analyse newswork at Netwerk24. Finally, this section also presents my contribution on a methodological level through the use of newsroom ethnography.

### 9.3.1 Empirical contribution

An extensive literature review has shown that at the time of writing there have not been any journalism studies research projects that explore newswork at Netwerk24. However, just basing my empirical contribution on the fact that to date no-one has looked at Netwerk24 from a journalism studies perspective, is certainly not sufficient. I would argue that my response to the four specific research questions posed in Chapter 1 will indicate that this study makes a clear and focused contribution to the study of professional journalism, specifically at Netwerk24. Incorporating the tenets of a novel theoretical framework during these responses will add further value to this contribution.

#### 9.3.1.1 Response to first specific research question

*How are Netwerk24 journalists socialised into the professional cultures and practices of their newsroom network?*

It is noteworthy that while all journalists enter the newsroom with their own personal background, education and career experience, this personal habitus is to my mind less important when it comes to the socialisation of journalists into the newsroom. Of greater importance are the experiences that journalists undergo when they enter and move through the newsroom, encapsulated in this study as the professional journalistic habitus.

According to the findings of this study, the nature of the professional journalistic habitus is dependent on the individual characters of the different geographical newsroom offices; journalists' ability to identify with Netwerk24 as brand; their experience of internal communication specifically as it relates to the way the vision for the brand is communicated; the roles and influences of specific newsroom personalities; the extent to which journalists experience challenges to their daily newswork; and, the enduring journalistic values that still hold true for journalists. It must be noted that not all these elements contribute to a *shared* journalistic habitus, and that in some cases they can be quite divisive.

I would argue that the individual characters of the different geographical newsroom offices where journalists are stationed influence how journalists associate with each other and the broader network they are a part of. With Johannesburg and Cape Town being the sites – at different stages – where the controlling editorial power is situated, the journalists and news managers in these two newsroom offices arguably hold more symbolic and journalistic capital, for instance. This conclusion is also based on the fact that the journalists in Johannesburg and Cape Town seemingly experience changes at Netwerk24 more intensely.

One example of how the journalists are socialised differently at these sites can be found in the physical move of the so-called first Netwerk24 journalists out of the newspaper newsrooms in Johannesburg and Cape Town and the friction it caused between the digital and print brands. Even more importantly was the move *back* to the print newsrooms in May 2016. My observations and conversations with journalists soon after the merger between the first Netwerk24 team and the newspaper teams, confirm that these two groupings of journalists viewed each other – and the respective editorial managers – with some suspicion. This division can be traced back to the divergent environments in which the various journalists had worked for the six months prior to the merger. My findings have shown that, even in such a time, the dispositions of the first Netwerk24 team had been structured in a way that made them comfortable working a digital-first environment. Many of these journalists felt that they had moved “backwards” when they had to join the print journalists in the newsroom again.

When I returned to the newsroom close to the end of 2017 most of the relationships were restored, or, for lack of a better phrase, replaced by new ones.<sup>71</sup> As discussed in previous chapters, the editorial power balance had also shifted from Johannesburg to Cape Town. It is therefore possible to trace the development of Netwerk24 through an exploration of how the physical, as well as the more philosophical, make-up of the different newsrooms have changed over time.

The ability and willingness to identify with Netwerk24 as brand also arguably contribute to a feeling of solidarity amongst journalists. Not all journalists found it easy to identify with Netwerk24 – especially not when I visited the newsroom in 2016. Journalists from the first Netwerk24 team, who worked under the editorship of Adriaan Basson, used phrases such as “entrepreneurial spirit” and “start-up culture” to describe their experience of being part of this dedicated digital-first team. On the other side of the spectrum, were the newspaper journalists – some of whom felt forced to work for Netwerk24 because of the company-mandated merger. This led them to believe that they had no control over their own careers.

The majority of the journalists also still used the print brands, i.e. *Beeld*, *Die Burger* or *Volksblad*, to identify themselves in conversations with sources. Based on my observations and interviews it was clear that most of the editorial managers did not make a point of correcting journalists, or encouraging them to identify themselves as Netwerk24 journalists. It appeared as though traditional newswork practices, such as getting all the information for a story and connecting with a specific audience, enjoyed preference above building Netwerk24 as brand. The establishment of a new editorial structure in 2017, and the resultant changes in the newsroom, seemingly shifted this approach somewhat – without detracting from the traditional newsgathering needs of the newsroom. Nadia Honiball, as head

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<sup>71</sup> As discussed throughout this dissertation the staff turnover at Netwerk24 was quite high during the period of observation.

of news, for instance told me that journalists were not “allowed” to only use the print brands as identifiers any more. My observations also showed that even former print-only journalists explained to sources that they worked at Netwerk24.

Nevertheless, and as discussed in Chapter 8, the print brands are still considered to be important bridges to Netwerk24 – especially in relation to the migration of the audience. Finding a balance between forging ahead with Netwerk24 as independent, digital-first brand, without severing the relationship with the newspapers, did not seem to be an easy feat. For some journalists, and editorial managers like Adriaan Basson and Pieter du Toit who were part of the first Netwerk24 team, a clean and clear break was necessary to properly establish Netwerk24. Others believed that such a break was and would be a fatal mistake. Analysing these divergent views on the identity of Netwerk24 as brand against the theoretical assumption of this study once again showed that associations between different actors cannot be forcibly stabilised, but rather just described from the perspective of the actors themselves.

The apparent lack of clear communication on the vision for Netwerk24, especially before and after the May 2016 merger, caused a lot of uncertainty amongst the journalists. I would argue that this led to an initial culture of fear and mistrust. For journalists not to know what their role was in building Netwerk24 or, perhaps more importantly, where the company aimed to take Netwerk24 in the future, undermined attempts to create a shared culture. Instead of fostering a professional journalistic habitus unique to the Netwerk24 newsroom, more divisions were arguably created. As discussed in Chapter 3, the habitus concept encapsulates more than just people’s actions, but also the social environment that inspires, and is inspired by, these actions and practices. In the case of Netwerk24, the merger saw journalists who had already made the mind-shift to working digital-first return to newsrooms that were focused on print deadlines and practices. It is, therefore, understandable that there was a clash of cultures, as well as divergent approaches to newswork routines and practices.

As highlighted in Chapter 3, this study also aims to describe how actors are transformed, and transform, in order to become or stay part of the Netwerk24 newswork network, as suggested by actor-network theory. The fact that journalists experienced a breakdown in communication, despite attempts by management to keep communication channels open, suggests that many such transformations rather served to alienate journalists from Netwerk24. I would further argue that the resultant lack of stability could have been a contributing factor to the majority of the first Netwerk24 team leaving this newsroom within a year after the merger.

It must, again, be noted that there were fewer traces of what could be described as destructive transformations during my visits to Johannesburg and Cape Town in 2017. Once again, the introduction of new actors, both in editorial management positions and as regular journalists,

transformed the network as a whole, and seemingly provided more stability. I am not suggesting that the new editorial structures and actors transformed the newsroom overnight into a more collaborative environment. Both Nadia Honiball, as head of news, and Henriëtte Loubser, as editor, acknowledged to me that there were still journalists in the newsroom who, for instance, have not managed to make the mind-shift to digital-first newswork. However, it appeared as though journalists feel more comfortable about what their roles in the broader newswork network are – due in part to clearer communication on the targets for Netwerk24.

This leads me to another key aspect of professional socialisation in the Netwerk24 newsroom: the role that individual actors play in instilling a specific culture and transforming the newswork network. It was clear throughout the almost 18 months I, intermittently, spent in the Netwerk24 newsroom that newsroom personalities who hold a lot of capital can change the way the rest of the journalists view and approach their newswork routines and practices. The names of specific editorial managers, for instance, permeated the conversations I had with journalists about the culture in the newsroom. As discussed in Chapter 7, it was sometimes challenging from an ethical standpoint to distinguish which of these references to specific personalities would contribute constructively to achieving the goals of this study. My belief is that in this regard the general trend highlighted here is more important than individual interactions. Notwithstanding my hesitance to pinpoint specific people, the presentation of findings did highlight some instances where the actions of key actors seemingly transformed the whole newsroom network.

Other actors that transform, but more often distort, the Netwerk24 network can be found in journalists' descriptions of challenges to their newswork. One of the key tenets of actor-network theory calls for the acknowledgment of the role of non-human actors as mediators during the development of a network. This usually means that material “stuff”, such as digital media technologies, should form part of the analysis of the associations in the network. In my experience at Netwerk24 it is, however, not just technology that helps shape the newswork network. The “stuff” that can contribute to a sense and experience of chaos in the network also include the presence, or absence, of key contributors, be they human or non-human, to the network. Photographers, and their contributions to newswork, are one of the most important challenges in this regard. I would argue that, based on my findings, the large-scale retrenchment of photographers caused more disruption than just the loss of the photographers themselves; it also contributed to further uncertainty about the evolving nature of the journalists' responsibilities in the network. Journalists' impressions that they lacked the necessary skills needed to fully contribute to a digital-first approach can also be seen as a mediating factor that detracts from attempts to stabilise the network.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, traditional conceptualisations of newswork and journalism also have a deciding influence on the way journalists were, are and probably will be socialised into their

professional newswork network. Despite the move to working digital-first, which some experienced as disruptive, journalists maintain that the basic values of so-called “traditional” reporting must remain intact. In other words, no matter how chaotic and unstable the network might appear – from both inside and outside the “black box” of newswork – journalists still concur that the quality of reporting is paramount. Accuracy, fairness and newsworthiness are some of the oft-cited measurements of quality. A few journalists emphasised that the more things change, the more they stay the same, because these values are not platform-specific. Whether these journalists actually manage to realise the ideal of quality reporting amidst the pressures of digital-first journalism warrants further exploration.

From the vantage point of field theory, and more specifically, the habitus concept, this study concludes that the socialisation of journalists into the Netwerk24 newsroom network hinges to a large extent on the fostering of a shared newsroom culture. Within an actor-network framework I would similarly argue that associations between the actors in this newswork network can be traced by analysing the establishment and evolution of the culture in the newsroom. As broadly argued by Ryfe (2018:221), both field theory and actor-network theory suggest that actors who share a field, or network, are socialised to share a “common purpose” that serves as “social glue” that, in the final instance, “gives society a veneer of order and stability”. It is not my task as researcher to try and find ways to create such order through my descriptions. This ordering, which often can also mean a description of disorder (or chaos), should be left to the participants of the study themselves, in this case the journalists at Netwerk24.

I acknowledge that the daily routines and practices of newswork are also gradually evolving, as discussed in Chapter 6. However, based on the discussion above, my overall observation is that *why* things happen as they do in the newsroom seems to be of greater concern to the journalists than *what* actually happens. I also found that the fine balance between chaos and order in the newsroom, as suggested through the combination of habitus and actor-network theory in Chapter 3, can be traced and described by exploring how a shared culture develops or, on the other hand, is undermined. In this case, therefore, opening the “black box” of newswork at Netwerk24 means delving deeper into the motivations and experiences of the journalists, rather than discussing the actual routines and practices of daily newswork.

### **9.3.1.2 Response to second specific research question**

*What is Netwerk24 journalists’ understanding of the role digital media technologies play within their newswork and network?*

It was established in the introduction to this study that digital media technologies have become naturalised in most newsrooms. This study has confirmed that this is also the case at Netwerk24. In both my direct observations of journalists at work, as well as in my interviews with them, it was clear that journalists consider the use of such technologies a regular part of their daily newswork. It is also evident, especially during the interviews, that journalists rarely reflect on the potentially significant and mediating role such technologies play in their routines and practices. This could be considered proof that journalists view digital media technologies, in actor-network terms, as intermediaries, rather than mediators. In other words, Netwerk24 journalists arguably believe that digital media technologies just *transfer* meaning, such as traditional conceptualisations of newswork, without *transforming* other actors in the network, including the journalists themselves.

I acknowledge that the argument above could be seen as counter-intuitive given my use of actor-network theory to highlight and advocate for a so-called material sensibility towards journalism studies (as set out in Chapter 3). Furthermore, the background to the study and literature review has shown that technology can indeed have a determining effect on the routines and practices of newswork.

I would, however, return to my earlier call for viewing technology as shaped by the social context in which it is used. In other words, journalists, who are inculcated with a specific journalistic habitus through the way they are professionally socialised into the newsroom, interact with technology. These interactions, or associations, between both human and non-human actors do have the potential to shape and transform the newsroom culture. Instead of a deterministic, technocentric view of technology, this study sought to understand *why* journalists use and talk about digital media technologies in a certain way; thus further exploring how a specific culture around technology use is fostered in the newsroom.

In the case of the Netwerk24 newsroom, I would argue that journalists have been socialised to view digital media technologies as a natural part of their newswork network to such an extent that these technologies have ceased to carry any meaning beyond their practical application to enact traditional journalistic practices, such as contacting sources or interacting with colleagues. This is further proof that the professional journalistic habitus, as informed by past experiences and a shared culture, helps journalists to act with what can be considered “common sense” in a specific context. In the case of the Netwerk24 newsroom it would certainly be considered common sense that journalists need digital media technologies to successfully complete their newswork. In fact, some journalists whom I interviewed found my questions with regards to digital media technologies and newswork somewhat superfluous.

Based on my observations and conversations the most prominent digital media technologies in the Netwerk24 newsroom are the social network platform Facebook and the messaging application WhatsApp. The other digital newswork tool that has gained increasing prominence in the newsroom since the inception of Netwerk24 relates to the measurement of audience analytics, through the use of platforms such as Google Analytics and Cxense. I would admit that, in contrast to Facebook and WhatsApp, the role of analytics in newsroom routines and practices is not yet completely clear. Various editors and news managers told me that analytics were indispensable to the management of both Netwerk24 as website as well as Netwerk24 as national newsroom. They did, however, not seem sure yet how to successfully incorporate such real-time analytical results into the management of the journalists. Many journalists also told me, especially in 2016, that they rarely paid attention to the analytics or feedback from audiences.

This study thus concludes that the majority of digital media technologies, while key to the daily routines and practices in the Netwerk24 newsroom, have ceased to be viewed as disruptive to newswork. Rather, they are seen as complementary, and indeed indispensable, to what might be considered more traditional newswork routines and practices. My conclusion that digital media technologies have become naturalised parts of newswork also suggests that journalists are not, and perhaps do not need to be, trained in using the most prominent of these technologies. Most journalists enter the newsroom with existing knowledge of digital tools such as Facebook and WhatsApp; they just repurpose these technologies for use during newswork.

Removing some of these key technologies, especially WhatsApp or Facebook, could, however, have a detrimental effect on the network, and result in what could safely be described as instability, or even chaos, in the newsroom. I acknowledge that the latter statement might seem somewhat contradictory in light of my central conclusion to this research question: that digital media technologies are *not* disruptive to newswork. However, this study has as its goal a description of newswork from *within* the newsroom, and in the words of the journalists themselves. This would lead to my conclusion that journalists experience digital media technologies as normalised, despite the additional, or even somewhat contrasting, conclusions that an observer like myself might come to.

To further complicate matters, I would argue that opening the “black box” of newswork at Netwerk24 has shown that the majority of digital media technologies can, in actor-network terms, be “black boxed” and need not be further problematised – at least not from the journalists’ perspective. As mentioned above, audience analytics could be viewed as an exception to this argument. It would thus be useful to further unpack the application of analytics at Netwerk24, and journalists’ responses to the use of analytics in news management.

### 9.3.1.3 Response to third specific research question

*What strategies do Netwerk24 journalists use to deal with changes to their newswork network?*

There is no room for journalists who are afraid of change – not just at Netwerk24, but in the journalism industry in general. A young journalist told me that one really has to “adapt or die”. Journalists themselves might not like nor be comfortable with continued disruptions to the newswork network. Nevertheless, they accept the inevitability thereof. This often means that they, for want of a better phrase, keep their heads down and carry on with their newswork despite changes to the newsroom. This does, however, not translate to the journalists having job satisfaction, or feeling at home within the current dispensation.

The strategies journalists use to cope with such changes are closely related to the way they are professionally socialised into the newsroom, as discussed in response to the first specific research question. Journalists’ understanding of what good journalism looks like, based on traditional conceptualisations of the field, helps them to make sense of their role within an unstable news network. This argument is supported by the way the majority of journalists define what a good *digital* journalist is. Journalists understand that working digital-first has to do with working faster and being multi-skilled, but they are not willing to compromise on quality. I would thus argue, along with the notion of a professional journalistic habitus, that journalists’ understanding of what it means to *be* a journalist is an embodiment of both historical sensibilities and current experiences.

The issue of upholding a certain standard of reporting is somewhat contentious, since many of the news managers do indeed believe that the quality of news reporting is lacking and needs to be addressed. I would argue that this view, however, is not only related to the use of digital media technologies, but also to other disruptions to the newsroom network, such as the general shrinking of editorial teams, the oft-touted arguments around the juniorisation of newsrooms, and the lack of time for proper mentorship.

My description of everyday digital-first newswork in Chapter 6 served to illustrate that many of the more traditional routines and practices of newswork have remained: journalists still have to come up with story ideas, discuss them with their news managers, do research and produce news reports based on this research. The *methods* and *tools* used during newswork have just evolved over time. For instance, where journalists used to pitch their stories during an early-morning diary meeting attended by all the general news reporters, they now have to update the online news diary themselves – albeit with input from news managers. And where journalists still need to contact sources to gather information, they nowadays have such interactions with sources in the digital space, which includes conversations on Facebook and WhatsApp.

A further enduring element of newswork is the need for constant reprioritisation as the news day progresses. News managers tell me that they always have to be aware of which news events are more prominent and newsworthy in order to properly distribute resources, especially of the human kind, in the newsroom. Despite this process being sped up because of the rolling deadlines that come with a 24/7 news cycle, the need to reprioritise news has always been a feature of newswork: news editors would tell a journalist to stop working on a story if more important news broke.

What I have set out above is, of course, an oversimplification of what happens every day in the newsroom, but it does support the notion that digital media technologies only enhance existing newsroom practices, instead of significantly disrupting it – as concluded in response to the second specific research question. The presence of such enduring journalistic values and routines in the digital-first newsrooms further supports the notion that the professional journalistic habitus, while not static, is indeed durable. This could also mean that journalists unconsciously manage change by falling back on what they know, so to speak.

Notwithstanding most journalists' ability to carry on with their newswork despite disruptions, the uncertainty caused by continual change has had a detrimental effect on the Netwerk24 newswork network. It would seem that a series of retrenchments that took place over the period of my observations compounded this uncertainty. One journalist told me that you never knew if you might be next.

Another journalist told me that it did not help to talk about the “good old days”, because they were gone forever. To me it did appear, however, as though journalists – even those who had worked on the first Netwerk24 team – tried to make sense of the changes to their current newsroom network by comparing it with the way they had been socialised in the past.

This study thus concludes that Netwerk24 journalists cope with changes and transitions by unconsciously reaffirming their existing professional journalistic habitus. They might therefore have changed their mind-set to work digital-first, but as the saying goes, old habits die hard. To make sense of the myriad of changes to their network, and in an attempt to stabilise the associations in this network, even just fleetingly, journalists aim to maintain the values and standards that have accompanied them from their print-based newsrooms, or in some cases their recent journalism training.

### 9.3.1.4 Response to fourth specific research question

*How do Netwerk24 journalists view the future of the cultures and practices within the professional network they are a part of?*

The CEO of Media24, Esmaré Weideman, says a company, and indeed Netwerk24, can never be exactly where you *planned* on being two years ago; there are simply too many variables. That is why, in Weideman's words, journalists have to be "future fit". Journalists themselves are painfully aware of the fact that the future of journalism is uncertain. Not only are they not sure about the future of professional journalism in general, many of them are also not convinced about the future of and plan for Netwerk24. I would trace such impressions back to the lack of clear internal communication as suggested in my response to the first specific research question.

Any attempt to find stability in the newswork network – whether by the journalists themselves or managers at Netwerk24 – would arguably therefore be futile. This provides another reason for the application of actor-network theory, in combination with the professional journalistic habitus. As explained in Chapter 3, habitus can be a tool to describe continuity, while actor-network theory affords the researcher tools to describe instances of instability in the newswork network. In other words, the habitus explains why journalists keep on acting as they have in the past – despite changes to their newswork network. Through an actor-network lens, however, the search for order and continuity is less important than allowing the journalists to explain what they view as mediating factors in their current and future circumstances.

Some journalists talked about their fears for the future of journalism through suggestions that studying to become a journalist was not a worthwhile endeavour anymore. Head of news Pieter du Toit, for instance, implied that as journalism educators, we were training students to have very few career prospects. Others suggested that there were so many other career options that students could pursue; why would they choose journalism?

Yet there were journalists who highlighted the mediating role that journalism, as profession, plays in the broader societal network. Weideman's assurance during the centenary celebrations of *Die Burger*, that Media24 remained committed to "telling the stories that shape the world South Africans live in" (as cited in Chapter 1) seemed to also echo in the newsroom. A young journalist, for instance, told me that a key aspect of journalism was to tell stories that mattered to the community you were a part of. Enabling the audience to separate so-called "fake news" from credible, well-sourced stories, also seemed to be a goal for journalists who are less concerned about the future of professional journalism.

This belief that journalism still holds value in society reinforces this study's conclusion that the professional journalistic habitus into which journalists are socialised as they travel through the

newsroom has enduring value. This habitus can certainly adapt to accommodate new entrants into the field, such as digital media technologies. Yet historical sensibilities around journalism, which can include practical, as well as more philosophical understandings thereof, remain – and are transferred to new human entrants into the field. So no matter how unstable and chaotic this newswork network might appear – from both inside the “black box” and from a distance – there are certain enduring values that help to shape the way journalists associate with each other – and the non-human actors that play a part in their network.

Central to the perceived future success of Netwerk24 seems to be the fact that it is a niche publication that is specifically aimed at an Afrikaans-speaking audience. Since most of the journalists have built careers in the Afrikaans media, the way these journalists engage with and cater for this specific audience has arguably been inculcated in them long before the advent of Netwerk24. It is therefore not surprising that some journalists feel the financial stability of Netwerk24, given that it has a paywall, hinges on the support of the Afrikaans community. Journalists are also encouraged to write about not only what is necessarily broadly newsworthy but also what is of unique interest to the Afrikaans community.

This study concludes that journalists experience the current state of their newswork network, and by all accounts its future as well, as somewhat unstable. Yet my 2017 observations seem to indicate that journalists have made peace with this instability insofar as it was, and is being, caused by the move to work digital-first. Many of the traces of animosity and uncertainty that were visible during 2016 seemed to have been addressed and journalists are arguably more confident about where they would fit into future plans at Netwerk24. I am aware that such a statement could be criticised as being a gross generalisation, but I would still argue that this a prominent, and observable, trend.

Once again, I must emphasise that it is not the aim of this study to search for ways in which to artificially stabilise this network in order to draw neatly packaged conclusions about the future of Netwerk24. As ethnography, this study of newswork was done during a period of change and transition at Netwerk24 that is far from over.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, I am confident that by opening the “black box” of newswork, it is also possible to describe how journalists describe the future of the network they are a part of.

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<sup>72</sup> This was already evident at the end of my field work when the plans to incorporate some Media24 magazine titles into Netwerk24 (in November 2017) were announced.

### 9.3.2 Theoretical contribution

This study combined the concept of a professional journalistic habitus with the basic tenets of actor-network theory. The aim of combining these two theoretical frameworks was to broaden the understanding of newswork at Netwerk24 during a time of transition. This aim was achieved by exploring how journalists are professionally socialised and how these socialisation processes influence the way they associate with each other, and other non-human actors, to form a broader newswork network. This study thus confirms the continued relevance of field theory, and specifically habitus, to the study of journalism. Through the inclusion of elements of actor-network theory, it further heeded the call to develop field theory into a more “comprehensive and nuanced media theory” (Willig et al., 2015:2).

In suggesting that there are points of agreement between habitus and actor-network theory as theoretical constructs, this study opens the door for future analyses of newswork that account for the influence of both historical sensibilities and current associations in the newsrooms. While this study has shown that digital media technologies are not the main disruptors in the Netwerk24 newsroom, it remains necessary to trace the influence of non-human actors on newswork. In addition, one cannot trace such associations without taking cognisance of where they originated, i.e. what the professional habitus of the human actors is.

My theoretical contribution thus hinges on the application of habitus and actor-network theory to the study of newswork in transition, but more importantly on the *combination* of these two frameworks to enrich the understanding of what happens inside the “black box” of newswork. I am confident that this is a novel approach to the study of journalism within South Africa, and arguably beyond its borders.

### 9.3.3 Methodological contribution

I have made a point of emphasising the enduring value of newsroom ethnography to study newswork. My contention is that this study has shown that extended periods of observation in the newsroom help to create a feeling of trust and understanding between the researcher and the participants in the study. The mere fact that the researcher goes through the trouble of *being* there the whole time enhances the opportunity for frank and open conversations with journalists. This, in turn, provides rich data on journalists’ experiences – in their own words.

Despite being newsroom-centric, this study thus adds to the growing body of scholarship based on a revived interest in the sociology of newswork. By showing that ethnographic studies of newswork are

indeed feasible, and relevant, within the South African context, this study provides a solid foundation for future local newsroom studies.

## 9.4 General conclusions of the study

*How do journalists as actors within a network in transition experience newswork at Netwerk24?*

The general conclusion of this study is that journalists have accepted digital media technologies as normalised in the newsroom to such an extent that these technologies have become part of their professional journalistic habitus or their “history turned into nature” (Bourdieu, 1977:78). Journalists might not be able to do their newswork effectively *without* technologies such as WhatsApp and Facebook, but they rarely reflect on these technologies beyond how they enhance more traditional journalistic practices. While non-human actors, and specifically digital media technologies, are therefore key mediators in the newswork network, they have, in actor-network terms, been “black-boxed” by the journalists.

The study further concludes that, despite the adoption of digital media technologies, many traditional newswork practices and routines are still entrenched in the Netwerk24 newsroom. In the experience of journalists, the requirements of digital-first newswork centre mainly on the ability to work quickly and to multi-task (also through the use of a variety of such digital media technologies).

Notwithstanding the additional pressure this puts on journalists, they seemingly still try to adhere to the guidelines for quality journalism that have been instilled in them as they were, and still are, socialised into their professional newswork network. It would follow, more than 60 years after Breed (1955:328) came to the conclusion that journalists learnt what was expected of them “by osmosis”, that journalists still know what is the right thing to do in the newsroom – without necessarily having to be told explicitly. Naturally, many Netwerk24 journalists have been educated as journalists, and they also receive regular editorial guidance, but a lot of what they do appear to them merely as common sense.

Of more importance in the newsroom is journalists’ need, both expressed and inferred, for a shared newsroom culture. Journalists understand that it is too much to ask for stability. Nevertheless, they want to be able to see and experience a sense of order amidst the inevitable chaos. Knowing what is expected of them and feeling as though they have agency when it comes to their own career trajectories will contribute to creating order, if somewhat temporarily or even superficially. It is also clear that journalists rely on each other, and their editorial managers, to make sense of the changes around them. When newsroom actors with a lot of capital make firm, unambiguous and transparent decisions or communicate clearly, it creates a feeling of solidarity and aids in erasing a lot of

uncertainty. My observations have shown that journalists who do not feel they can see themselves in the current dispensation at Netwerk24 often search for other employment and thus cease to have any influence in the network.

Finally, the overall conclusion of this study is that the Netwerk24 newswork network is indeed in transition, and will probably, in this sense, remain unstable because of continuous experimentation that leads to iteration upon new iteration – often at short notice. How journalists experience and cope with this instability does not rely on how well-equipped they feel to use the most recent digital media technologies. Rather, it depends on whether they feel they are making a contribution useful enough to ensure that they can be considered mediators, instead of just spectators (or intermediaries), in the network. In other words, most journalists want to be active actors who help to transform and build the future of Netwerk24. This conclusion reaffirms the need for open and clear communication on the side of editorial managers at Netwerk24, and Media24 as a whole.

## 9.5 Limitations of the study

I would be the first to acknowledge that the very nature of an ethnographic study opens the door for criticism of the validity and reliability of its findings. This expected criticism can in the main be ascribed to the subjective nature of a study that hinges on the observations and interpretations of an individual researcher; not least because researchers, like journalists, carry within them both a personal and professional habitus. However, the use of ATLAS.ti as sophisticated qualitative data analysis tool enabled me to confirm and cross-check my findings and conclusions – from both the observations and the interviews. To further counter any criticism, I would refer to eight criteria for “quality in qualitative research”, as formulated by Tracy (2010:840), and which I believe this study in the main adheres to:

- **Worthy topic:** As discussed above, this study is “relevant, timely, significant and interesting” on an empirical, theoretical and methodological level.
- **Rich rigour:** By spending more than 250 hours in the field, doing interviews and situating the study within a novel theoretical framework, I believe that this study follows “sufficient, abundant, appropriate and complex” methods.
- **Sincerity:** I have used Chapter 5 for careful “self-reflexivity” and I am confident that I have been transparent about my “methods and challenges”.
- **Credibility:** In the three chapters where I present my findings I made a concerted effort to “show” rather than “tell” by using the words of the journalists themselves.

- **Resonance:** Meeting this criterion might be more challenging to prove, since it requires that the research “influences, affects, or moves” the readers of the study in a variety of ways. My argument is that this would only be measurable after publication of the findings.
- **Significant contribution:** Here I would repeat that the study makes a contribution on various levels, which include “theoretically, practically and methodologically”.
- **Ethical:** Chapter 4 set out in detail the rigorous ethical clearance procedures I followed before embarking on this study, and I also reflected on ethical challenges along the way.
- **Meaningful coherence:** I would argue that this conclusion (Chapter 9) proves that this study “achieves what it purports to be about” and “meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other”.

## 9.6 Recommendations

### 9.6.1 Recommendations for Netwerk24

People in managerial positions of news organisations rarely have the time to critically and thoroughly analyse what happens on a daily basis on newsroom level. This makes the need for newsroom ethnography that much more pressing. In making the following suggestions to the Netwerk24 team, I am not saying that these issues have never been discussed. I am merely pointing out the most salient issues that I observed during my time amongst the journalists on the newsroom floor. They are:

- Journalists crave proper communication – especially around changes that affect them personally.
- Individual personalities who clearly have a telling influence in the newsroom should be encouraged to not only share their knowledge but also contribute to a constructive culture in the newsroom.
- More effort should be made to retain institutional knowledge, not just in the form of seasoned journalists, but also by encouraging journalists to share their expertise and mentor less experienced journalists.
- The relevance of various newswork roles needs to be explained in a way that enables journalists to know whom they should consult about which quandary.
- Technology should not be seen as the only determinant of disruption, and the resultant uncertainty in the newsroom. This means that more attention should be paid to the culture in the newsroom and how the socialisation of journalists into this culture affects them and their willingness to adapt to change.

- While changes cannot be avoided, it must be made clear to journalists what their roles are in achieving the goals and realising the vision of Netwerk24. This can only be achieved if there is indeed a carefully formulated plan for Netwerk24 – even just in the short-term.

### 9.6.2 Recommendations for further study

My belief is that this study has laid the groundwork for similar studies – not just at Netwerk24, but within the broader South African media landscape. Some suggestions for further study include:

- A more detailed exploration of the digital communications that happen in the newsroom. My impression is that such an exploration would only really be possible by gaining access to internal communication platforms, such as WhatsApp groups.
- A thorough investigation of the role analytics play in newsroom management, as well as newsrooms' approaches to audience engagement.
- An analysis of the incorporation of the magazine titles into the Netwerk24 website, and the potential influence this change has had on the Netwerk24 newsroom. Such an analysis would arguably be more focused on media management than on the sociology of newswork.
- A comparison of digital-first newswork between Netwerk24 and its sister publication News24 which has been functioning without a newspaper legacy or responsibility to provide print publications with content.
- Other comparative studies that explore the disruptions in South African newsrooms *vis-à-vis* other newsrooms, especially on the rest of the African continent.

## 9.7 A few final thoughts

At the end of my master's thesis on social media use at *Rapport* and the *Mail & Guardian*, I cited Berkowitz (1989) who, after a newsroom study of two months, concluded that:

I'll never be sure that I saw everything I should have seen, heard everything I should have heard, or even if I understood anything correctly.

After more than 250 hours in the Netwerk24 newsroom, and no fewer than 60 participant interviews, I would still come to the same conclusion. I am confident that I have opened the black box that is newswork at Netwerk24 and thus allowed some light to shine on the journalists' experiences of the

field and network they are part of. Nevertheless, there will always be nooks and crannies of this black box that remain a mystery – even for those who live their daily professional lives in this proverbial box. And perhaps that is the beauty of newswork, and one of the reasons why journalists hold on to this career despite the myriad of challenges they face every day: there will always be more to explore.

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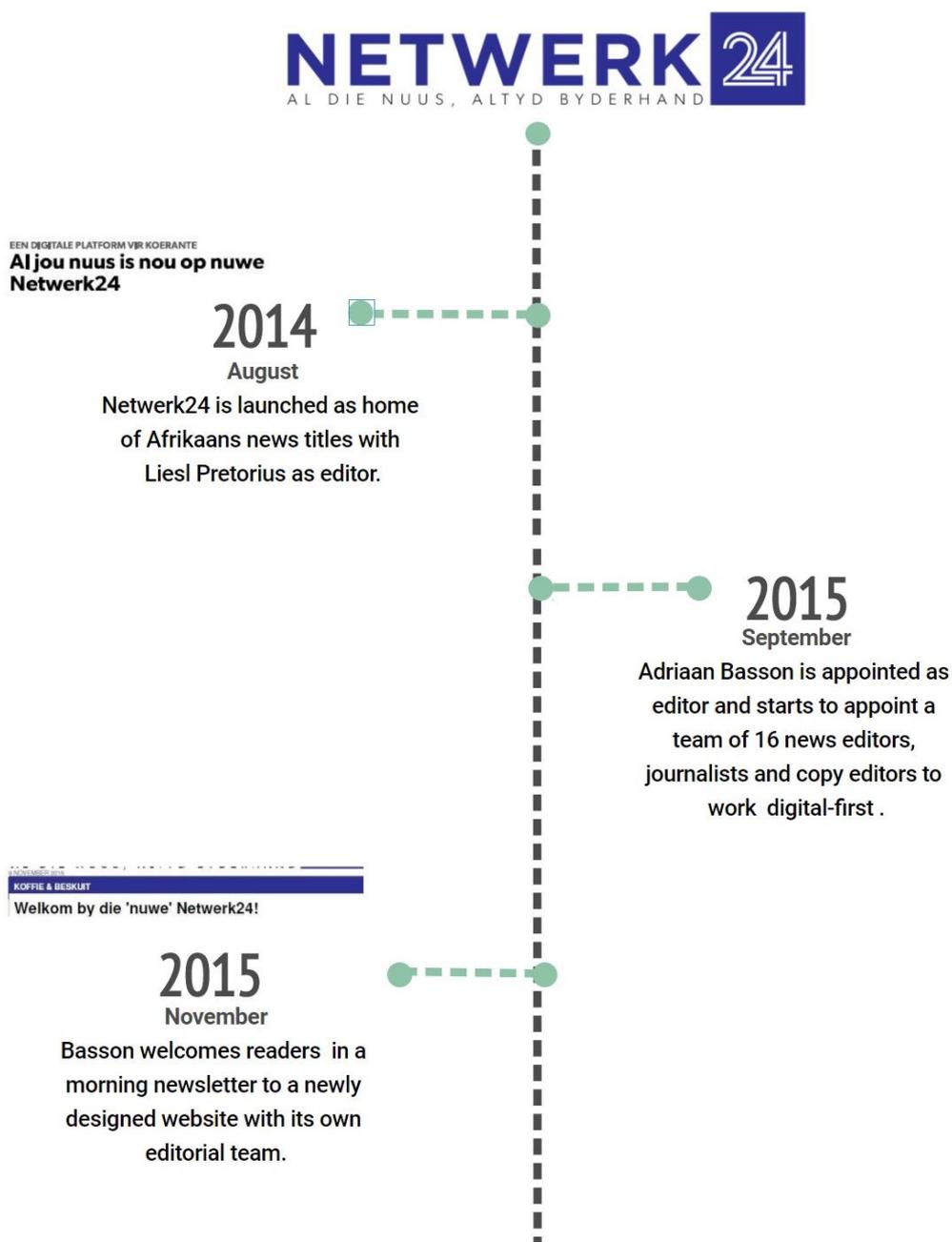
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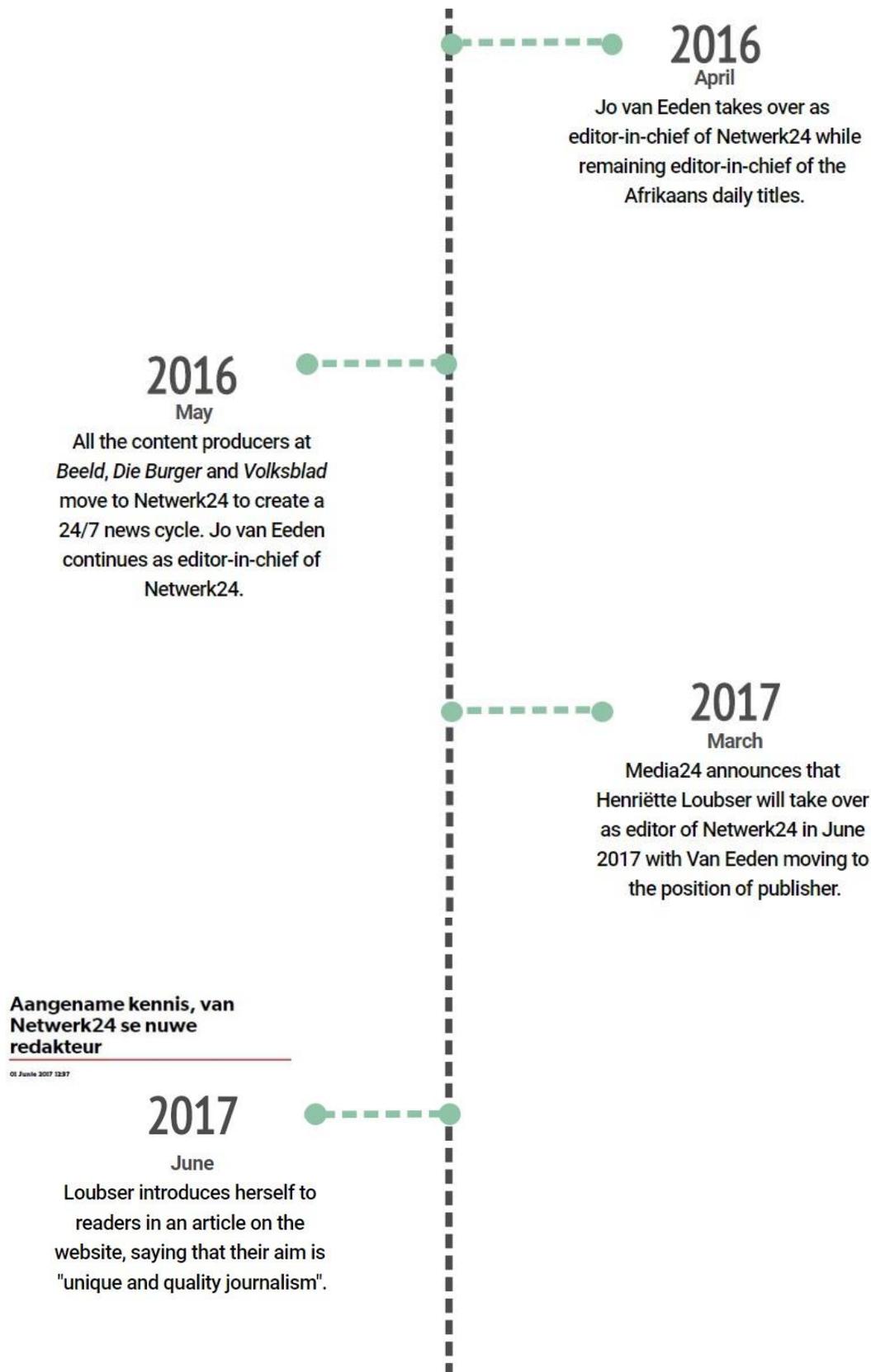
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## Addenda

### Addendum A: Time line of Netwerk24's evolution







*Following field work for research project*



**2017**

October

Loubser announces in an article that the content from a variety of Afrikaans magazines (including their digital versions) has become part of the website.

**NETWORK24**



## Addendum B: Institutional permission for research

**Jordaan, M, Me <[marenet@sun.ac.za](mailto:marenet@sun.ac.za)>**

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**From:** Esmare Weideman <[eweidema@media24.com](mailto:eweidema@media24.com)>  
**Sent:** 12 April 2015 12:48 AM  
**To:** Jordaan, M, Me <[marenet@sun.ac.za](mailto:marenet@sun.ac.za)>  
**Subject:** Fwd: Versoek vir navorsingstoegang vir PhD

Beste Marenet

Dit klink interessant. Ek gee hiermee goedkeuring.

Dit sal goed wees as jy dalk jou navorsing met ons kan deel, as jy klaar is?

Groete

Esmare

Esmaré Weideman  
CEO/Uitvoerende Hoof: Media24  
Tel: +27 21 406 3598

*Ek wil graag die volgende versoek aan Esmaré rig:*

Ek is besig met voorbereidings vir my PhD (Joernalistiek) aan die Stellenbosch Universiteit. Vantevore was ek 'n joernalis by *Die Burger* en *Rapport*.

My studie handel oor Netwerk24 en joernaliste wat inhoud vir dié platform skep se ervarings en aksies. Ek het reeds met Liesl Pretorius, redakteur van Netwerk24, kontak gemaak oor die praktiese aspekte van my studie.

Ek glo dat die navorsing vir Media24 van waarde kan wees, aangesien dit 'n aanduiding behoort te gee van hoe digitale veranderinge tot verandering in optrede en uitsette lei.

Ek beoog om as waarnemer tyd in die nuuskantore te spandeer en met joernaliste te praat (oor ses maande aan die einde van 2016).

As deel van my etiese klaringsproses, benodig ek asseblief formele toestemming vir die navorsing van Media24 (as eienaar van Netwerk24).

Sodanige toestemming kan bloot per e-pos/brief bevestig word.

Indien daar enige navrae oor my studie is, kontak my gerus by 083 3177528.

My studieleier, Dr Gawie Botma, kan ook meer inligting verskaf ([gbotma@sun.ac.za](mailto:gbotma@sun.ac.za) of 021 8083487)

**Jordaan, M, Me <marenet@sun.ac.za>**

---

**From:** Adriaan Basson <adriaan.basson@netwerk24.com>  
**Sent:** 31 August 2015 01:41 PM  
**To:** Jordaan, M, Me <marenet@sun.ac.za>  
**Subject:** RE: Versoek vir navorsingstoegang vir PhD

Hi Marenet

Dankie vir die goeie wense!

Dis alles reg so. Gaan Oktober/November afskop met my nuwe span joernaliste, so gee ons 'n paar maande om op dreef te kom.

Groete,  
Adriaan

---

**From:** Jordaan, M, Me <marenet@sun.ac.za> [mailto:marenet@sun.ac.za]  
**Sent:** 31 August 2015 01:20 PM  
**To:** Adriaan Basson  
**Subject:** Versoek vir navorsingstoegang vir PhD

**Jordaan, M, Me <marenet@sun.ac.za>**

---

**From:** Jo Van Eeden <jvaneeden@volksblad.com>  
**Sent:** 31 August 2015 01:22 PM  
**To:** Jordaan, M, Me <marenet@sun.ac.za>  
**Subject:** RE: Versoek vir navorsingstoegang vir PhD

Hallo Marenet,  
Baie dankie!

Ek is so opgewonde oor jou navorsing en hoop dat jy ons daardeur kan help om by sinvolle antwoorde (of kritiese vrae) uit te kom. Ek gaan uit Johannesburg werk en sal graag met jou gesels oor jou studies. Laat weet gerus wanneer jy wil gesels (ek sal van 14 September af in Johannesburg wees) en of ons liever iets moet vasmaak wanneer ek weer in Kaapstad is.

Groete,  
Jo

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**From:** Jordaan, M, Me <marenet@sun.ac.za> [mailto:marenet@sun.ac.za]  
**Sent:** 31 August 2015 01:16 PM  
**To:** Jo Van Eeden  
**Subject:** Versoek vir navorsingstoegang vir PhD

Beste Jo,

Hoop dit gaan goed.

Weereens geluk met jou nuwe aanstelling! Mag dit vir jou net opwindende uitdagings en avonture inhou.

Soos onder aangedui uit korrespondensie met Esmaré, het ek toestemming om my volgende jaar my veldwerk vir my PhD-navorsing by Media24 te doen. Om op te som: dit handel oor die verhouding tussen die (hoofsaaklik koerant)-joernaliste en die digitale media tegnologieë wat hulle inspan wanneer hulle inhoud vir Netwerk24 lewer. Ek wil net graag met jou ook bevestig dat dit in orde is as ek volgende jaar tyd in die verskillende nuuskantore deurbring?

**Jordaan, M, Me <marenet@sun.ac.za>**

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**From:** Henriette Loubser <henriette.loubser@huisgenoot.com>  
**Sent:** 09 April 2017 09:41 AM  
**To:** Jordaan, M, Me <marenet@sun.ac.za>  
**Subject:** RE: PhD navorsing by Netwerk24

Hallo Marenet

Baie dankie dat jy laat weet het! Dit klink uiters interessant en als in orde met my.  
Ons gesels dan verder sodra ek by Netwerk24 begin het.

Groete  
Henriëtte

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**From:** Jordaan, M, Me <marenet@sun.ac.za> [mailto:marenet@sun.ac.za]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 05 April 2017 11:48 AM  
**To:** Henriette Loubser <henriette.loubser@huisgenoot.com>  
**Subject:** PhD navorsing by Netwerk24

Beste Henriëtte,

Hoop dit gaan goed.

Ek het jou kontakbesonderhede by Johannes gekry. Nou wil ek sommer byvoorbaat myself aan jou voorstel.

Ek is 'n dosent in joernalistiek by Stellenbosch Universiteit. Die eintlike rede waarom ek so voor op die wa is om jou direk te kontak, is omdat ek tans besig is met my doktorsale navorsing oor Netwerk24.  
Daarom sien ek daarna uit om jou te ontmoet en te gesels wanneer jy by Netwerk24 aangesluit het.

Die studie se werkstitel is: *Newswork in transition: An ethnographic study of Netwerk24*. Ongelukkig moet ek in Engels skryf.

In breë trekke, kyk ek na die joernaliste se werksroetines, gebruik van tegnologie en ervaring van digitaal-eerste. Dit beteken dat ek 'n week op 'n slag in die verskillende nuuskantore spandeer, al die relevante vergaderings bywoon en onderhoude voer.

Esmaré het destyds ingestem dat ek hierdie benadering mag volg. Ek het ook etiese klaring van die universiteit verkry.

Ek het in 2016 reeds vyf weke (onderbroke) in die nuuskantore van Johannesburg, Kaapstad en Bloemfontein deurgebring.

Ek hoop om nog ten minste een keer vanjaar na die groot kantore te reis.

Voor ek dus weer net een dag opdaag by 'n Netwerk24-kantoor, wou ek net seker maak jy is bewus van my en wat ek daar doen.

Natuurlik sal ek ook baie graag met jou wil gesels wanneer jy eers ingeskud is.

Ek hoop om my tesis teen die einde van volgende jaar finaal te voltooi. Dit is mos maar 'n lang proses.

Laat weet asseblief as daar enige onduidelikhede of kommer is.

Ek sien uit daarna om hierdie studie verder te voer.

Byvoorbaat dankie!

## Addendum C: Informed consent form



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jou kennisvenoot • your knowledge partner

### STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

#### **Newsroom habitus and disruptive digital media technologies: An ethnographic study of the cultures and practices of Netwerk24 journalists**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Marnet Jordaan, a PhD candidate in the Department of Journalism at Stellenbosch University.

The findings of this study will contribute to the completion of the researcher's doctoral thesis in Journalism and will be stored to be available for publication in scientific and popular articles.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a journalist who produce content for the Afrikaans news platform Netwerk24.

#### **1. Purpose of the study**

This study aims to explore the role of socialisation in journalists' understanding of digital media technologies and the role they as journalists play in society. It is important to explore how these journalists' motivations – consciously and unconsciously – drive their actions. Such an exploration will provide insight into the news work and societal role of Netwerk24 as a new phenomenon within the South African media landscape.

#### **2. Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

- Be willing for the researcher to be present in the newsroom where you work
- Accept the researcher as an observer of news routines
- Understand that the researcher will not interfere with daily tasks and routines
- Make yourself available for personal interviews with the researcher. These interviews would be between half an hour and an hour long at a time – depending on your availability and work schedule
- Potentially complete a short survey. This should not take up more than 10 minutes of your time

#### **3. Potential risks and discomforts**

This study is designed not to cause any risk or discomfort to the research participants.

#### **4. Potential benefits to subjects and/or to society**

This study is not designed to bring any direct benefit to the participants. It will, however, contribute to a better understanding of how journalists work. This could in turn be beneficial to the news institution studied, as well as to journalism studies as an academic field.

#### **5. Payment for participation**

Participants in this study will not receive payment.

## 6. Confidentiality

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of a password-protected computer that only the researcher has access to.

Interviews and news conferences might be audio and/or videotaped. You will have the right to review, but not edit such recordings. These recordings will not be used for any purpose that falls without the scope of this study.

The researcher will publish the results of the study in a doctoral thesis (followed by potential scientific and popular articles). Research subjects will remain anonymous if they so choose to be and their responses will not ascribed to them in person.

## 7. Participation and withdrawal

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

## 8. Identification of investigators

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

**Researcher:** Marenet Jordaan  
[marenet@sun.ac.za](mailto:marenet@sun.ac.za) / 021 808 2625 / 083 3177528

**Thesis supervisor:** Dr Gabriël Botma  
[gbotma@sun.ac.za](mailto:gbotma@sun.ac.za) / 021 808 3487

## 9. Rights of research subjects

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [[mfouche@sun.ac.za](mailto:mfouche@sun.ac.za); 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

The information above was described to the research participant by Marenet Jordaan in Afrikaans / English. I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

I hereby give permission that my name may be used.

Yes

No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR**

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to \_\_\_\_\_  
He/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and no translator was used.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Addendum D: Approval letter from Research Ethics Committee



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### Approval Notice Progress Report

24-Apr-2017

Jordaan, Marenet M

Proposal #: HS1190/2015

Title: Newsroom habitus and disruptive digital media technologies: An ethnographic study of the cultures and practices of Netwerk24 journalists

Dear Ms. Marenet Jordaan,

Your Progress Report received on 03-Apr-2017, was reviewed by members of the Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities) via Expedited review procedures on 21-Apr-2017 and was approved.

Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: 21-Apr-2017 -20-Apr-2018

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

Please remember to use your proposal number (HS1190/2015) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 218089183.

**Addendum E: List of field visits to the newsroom**

<i>Field site</i>	<i>Date of visit</i>
Johannesburg	Monday, 16 May 2016
Johannesburg	Tuesday, 17 May 2016
Johannesburg	Wednesday, 18 May 2016
Johannesburg	Thursday, 19 May 2016
Johannesburg	Friday, 20 May 2016
Bloemfontein	Monday, 23 May 2016
Bloemfontein	Tuesday, 24 May 2016
Bloemfontein	Wednesday, 25 May 2016
Bloemfontein	Thursday, 26 May 2016
Bloemfontein	Friday, 27 May 2016
Cape Town	Monday, 4 July 2016
Cape Town	Tuesday, 5 July 2016
Cape Town	Wednesday, 6 July 2016
Cape Town	Thursday, 7 July 2016
Cape Town	Friday, 8 July 2016
Johannesburg	Monday, 18 July 2016
Johannesburg	Tuesday, 19 July 2016
Johannesburg	Wednesday, 20 July 2016
Johannesburg	Thursday, 21 July 2016
Johannesburg	Friday, 22 July 2016
Cape Town	Monday, 5 September 2016
Cape Town	Tuesday, 6 September 2016
Cape Town	Wednesday, 7 September 2016
Cape Town	Thursday, 8 September 2016
Cape Town	Friday, 9 September 2016
Pretoria	Monday, 14 August 2017
Pretoria	Tuesday, 15 August 2017
Pretoria	Wednesday, 16 August 2017
Pretoria	Thursday, 17 August 2017
Pretoria	Friday, 18 August 2017
Johannesburg	Monday, 21 August 2017
Johannesburg	Tuesday, 22 August 2017
Johannesburg	Wednesday, 23 August 2017
Johannesburg	Thursday, 24 August 2017
Johannesburg	Friday, 24 August 2017
Cape Town	Monday, 4 September 2017
Cape Town	Tuesday, 5 September 2017
Cape Town	Wednesday, 6 September 2017
Cape Town	Thursday, 7 September 2017
Cape Town	Friday, 8 September 2017

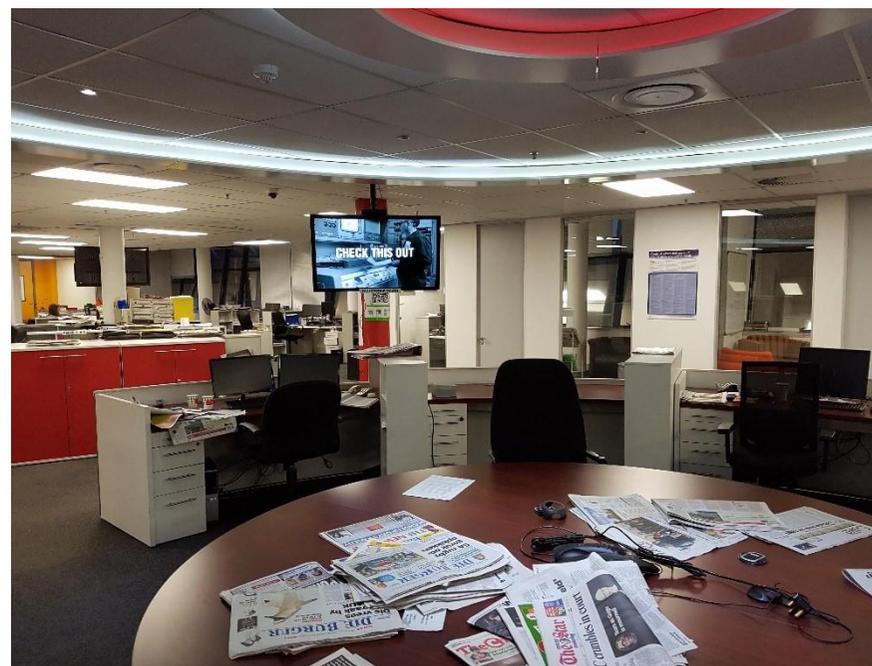
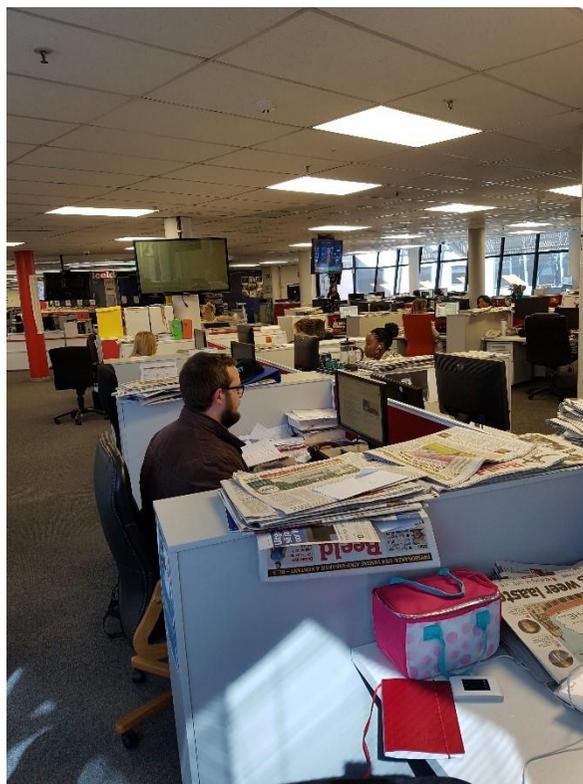
## Addendum F: List of interviews

<i>Job title</i>	<i>Name of interviewee</i>	<i>Field site</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age group</i>	<i>Tertiary education/journalism training</i>
CEO of Media24	Esmaré Weideman	Cape Town	Female	=>40 years	Honours in Journalism
Netwerk24 Editor	Henriëtte Loubser	Cape Town	Female	=>40 years	Honours in Communication Science
Netwerk24 Editor	Adriaan Basson	Cape Town	Male	30=>40 years	Honours in African Politics
Netwerk24 Editor	Jo van Eeden	Johannesburg	Female	=>40 years	Undergraduate in Organisational Communication
Journalist	Alzane Narrain	Bloemfontein	Female	25=>30 years	Honours in Media Studies
Journalist	Selloane Khalane	Bloemfontein	Female	30=>40 years	Undergraduate in Law
Journalist	Kaydene Davids	Bloemfontein	Female	30=>40 years	Undergraduate in Media Studies
Journalist	André Damons	Bloemfontein	Male	30=>40 years	Undergraduate in Communication Science
Journalist	Ruan Bruwer	Bloemfontein	Male	30=>40 years	Diploma in Journalism
Journalist	Justine*	Cape Town	Female	<25 years	<i>hidden for ethical reasons</i>
Journalist	Maygene de Wee	Cape Town	Female	=>40 years	National Diploma in Journalism
Journalist	Elsabé Brits	Cape Town	Female	=>40 years	National Diploma in Journalism
Journalist	Marelize Barnard	Cape Town	Female	=>40 years	Master's in Political Transformation
Journalist	Tasha*	Cape Town	Female	25=>30 years	<i>hidden for ethical reasons</i>
Journalist	Alet Janse van Rensburg	Cape Town	Female	25=>30 years	Doctorate in Media Studies
Journalist	George Germishuys	Cape Town	Male	25=>30 years	Honours in Journalism
Journalist	Rozanne Els	Cape Town	Female	30=>40 years	Master's in Journalism
Journalist	Tarryn-Lee Habelgaarn	Johannesburg	Female	<25 years	National Diploma in Journalism
Journalist	Maxine*	Johannesburg	Female	<25 years	<i>hidden for ethical reasons</i>
Journalist	Jeanelle Greyling	Johannesburg	Female	<25 years	Honours in Afrikaans and Dutch
Journalist	Reneilwe Dlhudhlu	Johannesburg	Female	<25 years	Diploma in Journalism
Journalist	Hannes Kruger	Johannesburg	Male	<25 years	Honours in Journalism
Journalist	Simon Sonnekus	Johannesburg	Male	<25 years	Honours in Journalism
Journalist	Charlea Sieberhagen	Johannesburg	Female	25=>30 years	Master's in Journalism
Journalist	Claudi Mailovich	Johannesburg	Female	25=>30 years	Undergraduate in Journalism
Journalist	Jana Marx	Johannesburg	Female	25=>30 years	Undergraduate in Theology
Journalist	Ügen Vos	Johannesburg	Male	30=>40 years	Undergraduate in Journalism
Journalist	Simvuyele Mageza	Pretoria	Female	<25 years	National Diploma in Journalism
Journalist	Jeanne-Marié Versluis	Pretoria	Female	=>40 years	Honours in Communication Science
Journalist	Sarel van der Walt	Pretoria	Male	=>40 years	Honours in Developmental Studies
Journalist	Alet van der Walt	Regional office: Free State	Female	=>40 years	In-service training at <i>Transvaler</i>
Journalist	Charmé Kemp	Regional office: Kimberley	Female	=>40 years	Undergraduate in Communication

Journalist	Odette Parfitt	Regional office: Port Elizabeth	Female	25=>30 years	Honours in Media Studies
Journalist	Susan Cilliers	Regional office: Potchefstroom	Female	=>40 years	Honours in Journalism
News manager	Charles Smith	Bloemfontein	Male	=>40 years	In-service training at <i>Volksblad</i>
News manager	Vicus Bürger	Bloemfontein	Male	30=>40 years	Undergraduate in Media Studies
News manager	Ilse Schoombee	Cape Town	Female	=>40 years	National Diploma in Journalism
News manager	Nadia Honiball	Cape Town	Female	=>40 years	Honours in Journalism
News manager	Pieter Redelinghuys	Cape Town	Male	=>40 years	Honours in Journalism
News manager	Carryn-Ann Nel	Cape Town	Female	30=>40 years	National Diploma in Journalism
News manager	Jo-Ann Floris	Johannesburg	Female	=>40 years	National Diploma in Journalism
News manager	Reza van Rooyen	Johannesburg	Female	30=>40 years	Honours in Media Studies
News manager	Marida Fitzpatrick	Johannesburg	Female	30=>40 years	Honours in Journalism
News manager	Pieter du Toit	Johannesburg	Male	30=>40 years	Undergraduate in Political Sciences
News manager	Marga Ley	Pretoria	Female	=>40 years	In-service training at <i>Potch Herald</i> and <i>Beeld</i>
Web editor	Arlene Prinsloo	Cape Town	Female	=>40 years	Honours in Journalism
Multimedia editor	Le Roux Schoeman	Cape Town	Male	30=>40 years	Honours in Journalism
Multimedia journalist	Elsje Waldeck	Bloemfontein	Female	25=>30 years	Honours in Journalism
Multimedia journalist	Ineke Coetzee	Cape Town	Female	<25 years	Honours in Journalism
Multimedia journalist	Sharlene Roodt	Johannesburg	Female	25=>30 years	Undergraduate in Journalism
Audience Development Specialist	Celinda Marais	Cape Town	Female	25=>30 years	Undergraduate in Journalism
Social media manager	Christiaan Boonzaier	Cape Town	Male	30=>40 years	Master's in Journalism
Social media manager	Nadine Theron	Johannesburg	Female	25=>30 years	Honours in Journalism
Newspaper editor (Volksblad)	Gert Coetzee	Bloemfontein	Male	=>40 years	Honours in English
Newspaper editor (Beeld)	Barnard Beukman	Johannesburg	Male	=>40 years	Undergraduate in Political Science
Newspaper editor (Die Burger)	Willem Jordaan	Cape Town	Male	=>40 years	Master's in Journalism
Editor: NetNuus	MJ Lourens	Cape Town	Male	25=>30 years	Undergraduate in Marketing Communication

## Addendum G: Selected photographs from the newsroom

### Johannesburg newsroom office



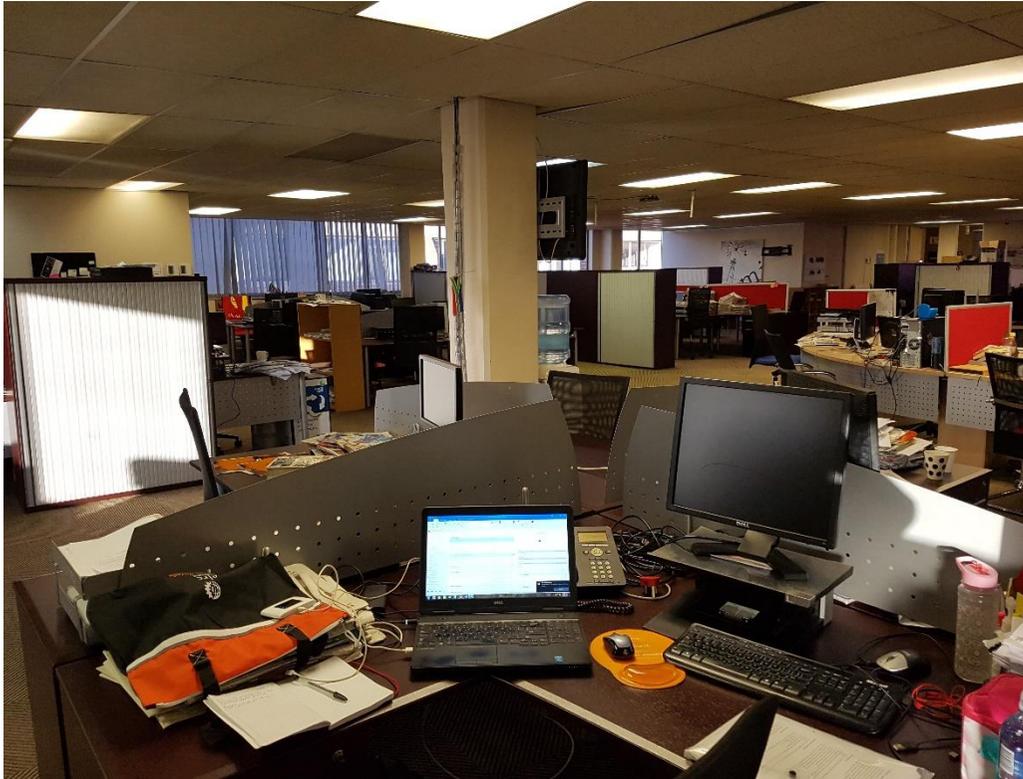
## Cape Town newsroom office



## Bloemfontein newsroom office



**Pretoria newsroom office**



**Addendum H: Selected photographs of journalists working outside the newsroom**

